Building for the Future:
A Historical Narrative of the Regionalization and
Construction of a New High School in
Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts

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
August, 2016
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Abstract

This study seeks to provide a historical narrative of the regionalization of the towns of Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts for the purpose of building an $82.5 million high school. With a focus on persuasion theory, this study shows how carefully targeted communication, with an emphasis on transparency of information, was the primary reason why this school district was able to accomplish the goals necessary to get the project funded and completed.

The major findings of this study come from interviews with primary stakeholders in the process. Central themes that arose from looking at the narratives of five participants found that there are key factors that school districts should keep in mind before embarking on a regionalization project connected to the construction of a new facility project. For the towns of Somerset and Berkley, the driving motivator for regionalization was the building of a new state-of-the-art facility. Participants noted that having a tangible motivator for the process had a positive effect on the completion of regionalization in a timely manner. They further stated that having key people in leadership positions and allowing them to become the experts on parts of the project kept the townspeople focused and listening to one person, rather than acquiring information in a random, haphazard manner. Participants also stressed the importance of providing accurate, data-driven information at every stage to combat negativity and misinformation and to keep the process moving forward. From the perspective of all participants, the outcome of the new facility and the promise for future generations of students was worth the hard work and difficulties encountered at various points.
While it can be argued that some of the successes, as well as the issues, that faced these two communities are unique to the towns themselves, key themes and findings from this study are ones that would be encountered by any community embarking on similar regionalization and infrastructure endeavors.

Keywords: Regionalization, School Consolidation, New High School Facility, Persuasion Theory, Narrative Research
Acknowledgements

I offer my sincere gratitude and thanks to Dr. Lynda Beltz who acted not only as my advisor, but also as my constant cheerleader, confidant, friend and champion. Her years of suggestions, readings, research and morale building were one of the main reasons I was able to accomplish this goal. I thank Dr. Kristal Clemons for her readings, suggestions and support with regard to the findings and analysis of my study. Finally, I share my appreciation and thanks to Dr. Edward Doucette. His suggestions, particularly with his attention to the finer details of my research were invaluable to the outcome of this project. Furthermore, his encouragement and support will not ever be forgotten.

I extend thanks to the present and past members of the Somerset Berkley Regional School District for their support of this investigation, in particular, Thomas Lynch, David Lanczycki, Jeffrey Schoonover, and members of the School and Building Committees. Other members deserved of gratitude include Dr. Jahmal Mosley, Julie-Ramos Gagliardi, Kim DoCouto and the faculty and staff of Somerset Berkley Regional High School for their constant support and dedication to the district.

I would also like to acknowledge Shana Jones, friend and editor, for her assistance in preparing my dissertation and thesis defense.

Finally, I thank my husband and cheerleader, David Foehr II, my son David, and my family (the Brelsfords, Burns & Foehrs) for their support, encouragement (babysitting), sacrifices, and commitment to my pursuit of education. Without them, I would not have been able to devote the time, energy and attention to this process and their assistance, love and dedication is appreciated today and always. I love them all more than words can say.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Richard and Cathy Brelsford. My parents are high school graduates who valued and instilled in their three children the importance of education, fulfilling one’s dreams, and completing goals, even when at times, they seem unattainable. While “only” high school graduates, they built a multi-generational small business so successful that my brother, Richard, sister, Lori, and I were encouraged and able to attend the college and degree of our choice without financial worry or burden. Their only insistence was that we pursue our education and our passion in employment, and life in general. This upbringing led to all of us being the successes we are today. I would not be where I am today without my family. Without their love, support and guidance of my parents, I, certainly, would not have been able to complete this degree. I truly owe every aspect of my education—from nursery school to today—to my parents and their belief in its importance.

This project is also dedicated to my son, David Foehr III, and my daughter, who, will enter this world in November, 2016 and has yet to be named. As they read this (someday in the distant future), I hope that they understand the value and importance of education. Once you have it, it can never be taken away from you and it is of vital importance. I also hope that this dissertation serves as a reminder that nothing is unattainable with hard work and dedication. Always follow your dreams, your heart and do not let anyone, especially yourself, tell you that something is impossible. I love you both to the moon and back and will always be your biggest champion in all you wish to achieve in this world.
Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

"I never teach my pupils. I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn."

--Albert Einstein

This research project examines the regionalization process of and new high school facility built for the suburban, middle-class towns of Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts. The goals of regionalization were to obtain a better quality of education for the students of these two communities and solve the problem of a severely deteriorated school building. The original Somerset High School was built in 1885 and looked like the traditional schoolhouses of the time period. It was built on Pierce’s Bluff off South Street in Somerset. In 1935, a fire burned down the original structure and in 1936 a new facility was erected. The Class of 1938 was the first to both attend and graduate from the school. In 1989, Berkley students began attending Somerset High School on a tuition basis. Being a small farming community, the town of Berkley could not afford its own high school and surrounding towns (Freetown, Taunton, Dighton) were not interested in inviting them into the district. With, on average, approximately 500 students, Somerset was willing to accept these students into a building that could accommodate almost 1,000 students on a tuition basis.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the building facility gradually fell into disrepair. While necessary facility maintenance were budgeted and planned, costs for renovation and updating were not a priority. Small groups of concerned faculty and community members commented in school committee meetings that something needed to be done about the condition of the facility. However, budgeting was not done by the central
administration. This became a significant issue in 2009, when five classrooms and bathrooms needed to be shut down due to deterioration in beams, joists, and concrete piers that supported the first-floor framing. This prompted Somerset school officials to take an aggressive approach toward an attempt to get the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) to address concerns. The MSBA oversees the state’s program to subsidize school districts by reimbursing districts for a portion of the construction and renovation costs. The MSBA partners with Massachusetts communities to support the design and construction of educationally appropriate, flexible, sustainable, and cost-effective public school facilities. Though not mandatory, in today’s economic climate, this is a mechanism used by communities throughout Massachusetts to help fund large capital infrastructure projects.

In order for the MSBA to fund a new high school, the communities of Somerset and Berkley consolidated, or regionalized, into one school district. Regionalization allowed these two towns to meet the minimum number of students required (1,000) in a school district for consideration for funding. This plan led to the building of an $82.5 million facility with 21st-century, state-of-the-art technologies and infrastructure. In 2014, it was considered by Skanska project managers, Daniel Tavares and Mike Morrison, to have the most technologically advanced infrastructure of any school in Massachusetts.

This case study was undertaken with the hope that, in addition to becoming part of the institutional history of the two towns, it can serve as a model for other school districts contending with the need for a new facility in the tough economic times facing today’s suburban middle-class school districts.
**Somerset, Massachusetts**

Somerset was the fifteenth town formed in Bristol County, Massachusetts. Originally, called the Showamet Purchase, it was part of Swansea, Massachusetts, from which it was set off on February 20, 1790. The town elected Jerathmcl Bowers as the moderator of the first town meeting. At that time, he asked that the new town be named Somerset to honor his wife, Mary Shelburne Bowers, who was born in Somerset Square in Boston. By 1815, Somerset Potters Works had opened and was one of nine potters to operate in the town between 1705 and 1918. This gave rise to Pottersville, which, to this day, is an area of town known to locals for its park and businesses. In 1835, the one-room Avon Street School opened. It is the oldest school building still currently in Somerset, although the school system does not utilize the building.

Comprising only 7.9 square miles, Somerset is a suburb of Fall River, Massachusetts. It can be found in Southeastern Massachusetts, a little under an hour from the beginning of Cape Cod. In the 18th century, people traveled to and from Somerset and Fall River by a ferry system that ran across the Taunton River. This ferry system ended in 1876. Today, the city of Fall River is connected to Somerset by two bridges for easy travel and commuting purposes. In the 2010 US Census, Somerset’s total population was 18,165, with 19.3% under the age of 18 years old. Approximately 97% of the total population is white with African American, American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, Hispanic or Latino, and individuals of two or more races each making up 1% or less of the total population. With a predominantly Portuguese American population, approximately 15% of the town speaks a language other than English. The median income for a family in Somerset is $73,053. This is $6,285 more than the state median income of $66,768.
Berkley, Massachusetts

Berkley was originally settled in 1638 as part of Taunton and Dighton, Massachusetts and was incorporated as its own town in 1735. It was named in honor of George Berkeley, a philosopher and bishop who lived in Newport, Rhode Island, from 1728 to 1731. Berkley, Massachusetts, is 17.4 square miles and is located between Dighton, Lakeville, Freetown, and Taunton, Massachusetts. Dighton borders both Berkley and Somerset to the west, while Somerset is south of Berkley. It is located in Southeastern Massachusetts in between Boston and Cape Cod, about 45 minutes from each. In the 2010 U.S. Census, Berkley’s total population was 6,411, with approximately 32% under the age of 20. Ninety-nine percent of the population consider themselves white. According to the 2010 US Census, the median income for a family in Berkley was $87,648, which is $20,880 more than the State of Massachusetts median income of $66,768.

Statement of the Problem

The study seeks to provide a historical narrative of the regionalization and new building processes for the towns of Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts. This goals of this study are to: 1.) provide the towns of Somerset and Berkley with a historical document which narrates the details of the regionalization and new building projects and 2.) to serve as a model for communities facing similar regionalization and new infrastructure needs with recommendations that they can use if they chose to embark on similar endeavors.

Unlike other states, where individual school districts operate more like separate government entities with independent taxing authority, school districts in Massachusetts rely on the towns and cities they serve for their revenue. In colonial times, districts were
established by a group of families willing to support a school. By the 1800s, there were 2,250 school districts statewide. In 1882, the state passed a law that forced districts to consolidate by giving authority only to municipalities to fund and manage school districts. This was only after almost all towns had already voted and consolidation was well under way. The law was simply passed as “clean-up” legislation to force the remaining holdouts into a town-wide system (Fischel, 2010). With 351 towns and cities in the state, local control allows for a large number of districts relative to the state’s student population, including very small districts in less-populated areas (Carleton, Lynch & O’Donnell, 2009).

20th Century Regionalization of Schools

The 1949 Regional Schools Act (Chapter 71) allowed a regional district to act as an independent entity in order to encourage small towns to form regionalized school districts with a single school committee for member towns. Massachusetts expected that this act would reduce the number of school districts, however, the opposite occurred. The number of school districts increased from 355 to 390 as small towns regionalized at the secondary level but kept local control of their elementary school programs. Real progress did not occur until Chapter 71, sections 14-16, or the regional school laws, were changed to expand financial incentives for districts to fully regionalize K-12.

Chapter 71 allocated guidelines for the establishment of a regional school district; procedures; how to form regional school committees; powers and duties of officers; lease and sale of property to regional school districts; apportionment of expenses; excess and deficiency funds, school transportation; and aid from the state. Massachusetts General
Law Chapter 71, Section 14 stated “any town, either by a majority vote of its board of selectman and a majority vote of the school committee or by vote in town meeting...may create a special unpaid committee to be known as a regional school district committee.” The responsibilities of the planning board were to study the fiscal and educational advisability of establishing a regional district including such areas as operation costs, construction and maintenance of school(s), methods of financing, and to submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the selectman of any town participating. The regional planning board is also charged with proposing agreements for the following: 1.) the number, composition, selection and terms of office of the members of the regional school committee; 2.) town(s) where the school(s) are to be located; 3.) types of school(s) (i.e. vocational schools); 4.) method of apportioning the expenses of the district, and the costs of school construction; 5.) method by which school transportation will be provided and incurred expenses will be paid; 6.) terms by which towns can be admitted or removed from the regional district; 7.) method by which agreements may be amended; 8.) detailed procedure for preparation and adoption of the budget; and 9.) any other matters deemed advisable by the regional planning board (MGL c. 71 § 14 B).

To finance the district, “the annual regional school district budget as adopted by a two-thirds vote of the regional school district committee shall require the approval of two-thirds of the local appropriating authorities of the member municipalities. The regional school district budget so approved shall be apportioned between or among the member municipalities and paid in accordance with the terms of the agreement” (MGL c. 71 § 16B).
The settled budget, once passed, can be reduced but cannot be increased after agreement by all constituents.

Today, out of nearly 300 total academic school districts, there are 32 K-12 regional school districts and 20 regional districts for secondary schools (Larocque, 2013).

School Consolidation as a Cost-Effective Measure

The price of education is ever increasing. Effective measures for cost savings are always being investigated. School officials across the state and nation are strategically planning for the future and finding methods for sound economic savings. Consolidating schools is one method that can help save costs for the school district and the Massachusetts taxpayer (Streifel, Foldesy, & Holman, 1991; Carleton, Lynch, & O’Donnell, 2009). The opponents of regionalization argue that it leads to larger class sizes, which further leads to an increase in dropout rates (Young, 1994, p. 34).

Somerset Berkley Regional High School

In the towns of Somerset and Berkley, students had already been attending Somerset High School on a tuition basis for over 25 years. Not having the facility or the student population at the high school level, Berkley public schools had been operating as a K-8 district and paid the town of Somerset tuition per pupil for each student that entered Somerset High School.

In March 2010, a review by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) stated that the physical condition of the high school building “does not adequately support” educational programs and support services. NEASC evaluates
schools throughout New England on a ten-year basis and awards accreditation based on mission, instruction, curriculum, assessment, leadership and school and community goals. NEASC cited Somerset High School in the year 2000 for problems with its facility, and in 2010 the report generated from this evaluation cited the same concerns. NEASC recommended improvements including replacement of the roof, repair of water damage in the ceiling, repair and/or replacement of heating systems, and installation of fire sprinklers. Furthermore, the facility was not handicapped accessible and many fire and ventilation concerns were noted. This put Somerset High School on warning for losing accreditation and prompted school officials to reignite a push for a new facility. Losing accreditation meant that students of the towns would not be attending an accredited school, which is noted on college applications. Parents, students, and the community were concerned about losing this distinction.

In order to regionalize, a Regional Planning Board was created in 2009. Led by Somerset townsperson Julie Ramos-Gagliardi, this six person board established its overarching goal, which stated that “students from both towns would benefit from a lasting regional school district that works to optimize the financial resources of each community, in addition to the academic talent and other qualities that students from both towns provide” (Larocque, 2013).

**The Road to Regionalization**

On May 20, 2010, Julie M. Ramos-Gagliardi sent a unanimous recommendation to the selectmen of the towns of Somerset and Berkley for a regional 9-12 school district serving two towns. The recommendation was “entered into pursuant to Chapter 71 of the
General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts between the towns of Somerset and Berkley...Acceptance of this agreement is contingent upon Berkley’s approval of a Proposition 2 ½ (Prop 2 ½) Ballot Override to fund its share of the operating costs upon its inception” (Ramos-Gagliardi, 2010). The agreement reviewed the composition of the Regional School Committee, the location and leasing of school facilities, apportionment and payment of costs, and budget and transportation specifics.

Proposition 2 ½ is a Massachusetts statute that limits property tax assessments by Massachusetts municipalities. The name of the initiative refers to the 2.5% ceiling on total property tax revenues annually as well as a 2.5% limit on property tax increases. In order for a town to raise the taxes more than 2.5%, an override vote must be taken by the townspeople to agree on the increase and subsequent usage of the money.

**Opposition to Regionalization**

During this time, the superintendent, Richard Medeiros, as well as the Somerset School Committee, were in direct opposition to regionalization. Stating that the town of Somerset would not be able to afford the tax increases that they would be saddled with, they publically opposed the work of the regional planning board.

Knowing this, the regional planning board looked at data of how surrounding towns funded their budgets and developed their own formula for budget allocation between the towns of Somerset and Berkley. According to Julie Ramos-Gagliardi, chairperson of the regional planning board, Somerset Berkley Regional School District is the only district in the Commonwealth to use their unique formula. Developed largely in part by regional planning board member Joseph Quinn, who is a commissioner for the Southeastern
Regional Planning and Economic Development District, the board took the foundation budget and subtracted the local budget. That equaled the Chapter 70 money. Since the SBRSD budget is over and above the foundation budget allocated by the state, the board took the money above the budget and split that per pupil for each town. According to Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi, “for us, it came as close as we could to having a moving target.”

In June 2010, town voting to approve regionalization commenced. Berkley voters passed regionalization by a vote of 374 to 64 on June 7, 2010. They would later need a Proposition 2 ½ override in order to accommodate regionalization. Proposition 2 ½ (Prop 2 ½) is a Massachusetts statute that limits property tax assessments and puts a 2.5% cap on property tax increases in a year. Taxpayers must vote approval and override any increase that occurs over this 2.5% increase. The Prop 2 ½ override would be necessary only if Somerset voted in agreement to proceed with regionalizing the high school.

On June 14, 2010, Somerset residents gathered at Somerset High School in such great numbers that an overflow of people from the auditorium gathered in the gymnasium and cafeteria. This meeting was suspended after an audio link between the auditorium and the other two areas of the building could not be established. Police were asked to investigate a possible cut coaxial cable that may have been purposefully cut to stop the proceedings. The meeting was pushed to June 21, 2010. Richard Medeiros, who had served as Somerset School District Superintendent for nine years, was publically opposed to regionalization from the onset of discussion. At the June 21 meeting he publically stated that “such an important decision should not be driven by a building” (Dion, 2010). Voters did not agree and regionalization passed in Somerset by a vote of 996 to 646. On June 26, 2010, Berkley voted 670 to 526 in favor of a proposition 2 ½ override.
Regionalization Approval

In August 2010, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester announced official approval of a regional school agreement between Somerset and Berkley. Chester stated, "The formation of this regional school district agreement serves to recognize and formalize your long term partnership in serving high school students within your member towns" (Welker, 2010). An Interim Regional School Committee was established consisting of two members chosen from the Somerset School Committee (Ann Correira and Elizabeth White), two from the Berkley School Committee (David Patrick and Cris Ghilarducci), two members from Berkley (John Gallagher and Jennifer Nawrocki) who did not serve on the School Committee and two members from Somerset (Richard Pierce and Michael McDonald) who did not serve on the School Committee. The functions of this committee were largely to create policies, appoint a 22 person building committee, negotiate union contracts, and to develop a strategic plan. This committee was also charged with naming a regional superintendent, as had to be completed, since there would now be a Somerset K-8 district and a regional 9-12 district (Dion, 2010). By September 2010, seven applicants had applied for interim superintendent. The interim superintendent would serve until the end of June 2011 or until a permanent superintendent was named. Somerset superintendent Richard Medeiros applied for the interim position and made it known that he would accept the job on an interim basis, but he also wanted the position to become permanent.

At this time, the Interim Regional School Committee considered a stipulation that whoever was named to the interim post would not be eligible for the permanent position, but they subsequently reconsidered this stipulation (Welker, 2010, Sept. 25). There was
also concern regarding whether Mr. Medeiros should pick up the additional duty in view of his past opposition to the regionalization of the two districts (Welker, 2010, Oct. 2). On October 12, 2010, Dr. Stephen Hemman, who had assisted on the regional planning committee, was hired as the interim superintendent to help with the transition work required for Somerset and Berkley to establish a regional school district. Specifically, Dr. Hemmen offered guidance in developing the regional school district agreement and policies. Hemmen was considered a good choice by many because, in addition to serving on the regional planning committee, he was also the executive director of the Massachusetts Association of Regional Schools and had served eight years as superintendent of the Narragansett Regional School District, in central Massachusetts, prior to being appointed interim superintendent (Austin, 2010).

During the 2010-2011 school year, the final year the school would be known as Somerset High School, the administrative team was also in flux. Longtime principal Robert Pineault announced that he would retire at the end of the school year, but would continue to serve on the building committee. Pineault, a long time teacher, administrator and resident of the district would complete his final day on June 30, 2011. Assistant Principal Kyle Alves resigned in the fall of 2010. Having served as assistant principal for six years and English teacher for eight years, he would take a position as a middle school principal in Western Massachusetts. In November 2010, interim assistant principal, Barbara Jaryna, replaced him but made it known that she would not continue in the position past June 2011. Mrs. Jaryna had come out of retirement to take the interim position as a favor to the district. She had previously worked as a assistant principal and business teacher at Somerset High School, prior to retirement. David Lanczycki, assistant principal, would
be the only member of the school-based administrative team to continue in his position. Beginning his career at Somerset High School in 2000, as a math teacher, he held positions as Math Content Coordinator and Assistant Principal and would be the only member of the school-based administration with institutional knowledge of the school system.

Search committees were put into place to find replacements for the two administrators. In April 2011, Dr. Jahmal Mosley, former assistant principal of Brattleboro Union High School in Vermont, was hired as the first principal of the newly formed Somerset Berkley Regional High School. Susan Brelsford, former teacher and science curriculum leader at Apponequet Regional High School in Lakeville, Massachusetts, was hired as the new assistant principal. Both Dr. Mosley and Ms. Brelsford would begin their tenure at Somerset Berkley Regional High School on July 1, 2011. Also on this day, the high school took the new name of Somerset Berkley Regional High School (SBRHS) and transitioned to a regional high school with both towns having ownership of the facility and district.

**Building a New Facility**

In July 2011, the state of Massachusetts agreed to cover 66% of reimbursable costs for the newly shared $82.5 million high school planned to open for the 2014-2015 school year. This prompted the twenty-two member Regional School Building Committee, chaired by Richard Fenstemaker, a life-long Somerset resident and businessman and parent to two Somerset graduates, to unanimously choose a traditional brick design for the new facility, modeled after the Whitman-Hanson model school design. This design
held to the aesthetic of the former Somerset High School building. In speaking with the townspeople of Somerset, keeping with the Somerset High School traditional building appearance, rather than opting for a more modern design, was paramount. Therefore, it was a relative easy decision for the committee members to agree. Ai3 was chosen as the school’s architect, and Skanska was chosen as the Owners Project Management Service. Finally, Agostini and Bacon Construction Company were chosen to construct the 222,826 square foot masonry and steel building. The Building Committee chose these companies after vetting various companies used by MSBA model schools in the past.

Skanska provided Owners Project Management Services for the entire project. The project manager for this project would be Daniel Tavares and Michael Morrison. They would work closely with the building committee to solidify the specifics of the school design and construction. Ai3 was the architect firm chosen whose focus is on designing educational facilities. Troy L. Randall led the design team and oversees sustainable design aspects of Ai3’s projects. Finally, Agostini and Bacon Construction was chosen to build the facility adjacent to the existing Somerset High School. Once the new building was complete, they would also be responsible for abating and demolishing the old facility to make room for new soccer fields. This company had been involved in school building and renovation since 2004. These companies were chosen in large part because they promised to finish the project on time and on intended budget, once the towns finalized the budget.

By September 2011, the projected cost of the new facility was at $82,817,243. Of this estimate, $8,166,670.00 accounted for parts of the building that the MSBA would not reimburse. Some of those costs included an artificial football field, stadium and track,
concession stand, and outdoor maintenance facility and irrigation (Austin, 2011). These costs would not be reimbursed for one of two reasons. First, some of the project ideas were not part of the model school plans created by the MSBA. However, they were parts that the Building Committee and SBRHS students and school community desired or considered necessary. An example of this would be the classroom space needed for the robust fine arts department. SBRHS would have a fine arts wing, not included in the reimbursed price, but important to townspeople as well as School Committee members such as Elizabeth White, who campaigned for the fine arts wing, which had a dedicated gallery to her father, James White. SBRHS would have space for a ceramics, jewelry, and drawing classrooms (six classrooms in all). This space was not included as part of the plan, and changes to the plan were not part of the reimbursed cost. At the completion of the project, SBRHS would have one of the largest spaces in a Massachusetts public school dedicated to art classrooms. Another reason the MSBA would not reimburse was because some areas did not serve the purposes of the students and were considered additional non-academic space that the association deemed unnecessary. As such, office space was reduced so that more space in the building could be devoted to academic use by the students of the two towns.

By October 2011, however, the budget submitted to the state totaled $82.8 million, an increase of over $4.2 million more than what taxpayers were promised (Austin, 2011). The new total cost was approved by the Somerset Berkley School Building Committee, however, as they were reluctant to cut from areas such as technology or athletics. As Berkley Superintendent Thomas Lynch surmised, “To think about reducing the technology budget for a brand-new school, I think, is absurd” (Welker, October 15,
2011). This budget was only an estimate as, in 2011, the Building Committee and associated planners could only estimate what construction companies would bid for the school based on market conditions and predictions. The markup left Somerset with $24.6 million of the entire bill and Berkley with $8.2 million. The difference was based on the population of students attending the school (approximately 75% Somerset students and 25% Berkley students). The Building Committee organized multiple public forums for both communities to hear the details of the project.

Building Approval

On November 16, 2011, the MSBA announced that the Board of Directors voted to approve funding to build Somerset Berkley Regional High School. The school would be designed for a population of 1,000 students serving grades 9-12 as this was the figure, calculated by the MSBA of the proper number of students to house in a 21st century high school building. The MSBA would contribute up to 67.48% ($50,068,817) toward this energy-efficient “model” school. “The MSBA’s Model School Program effectively adapts and re-uses design elements from successful, recently constructed schools, simplifying the design process, reducing the amount of time projects are in the design phase, and lowering design fees...The MSBA strives to find the right-sized, most fiscally-responsible, and educationally-appropriate solutions to create safe and sound learning environments” (Savings through Innovation, 2011).

Groundbreaking

The groundbreaking for the new $82.8 million facility began on June 28, 2012. Among the dignitaries invited was Beatrice Parrott, a member of the Somerset High School Class
of 1938. Lucas Machamer, a 2012 graduate of SBRHS, and Ms. Parrott heaved the first shovels of dirt to represent the past and the future of the school district. With Mrs. Parrott as a member of the first class of Somerset High School and Mr. Machamer as a future member of the first class of Somerset Berkley Regional High School, it was thought that they would symbolically bring together the past and the future of education in these towns.

Construction

Phase I of the project consisted of construction of the new school building, construction of the new tennis courts (July-November 2012), and the new track and field (December 2012-August 2013), installation of a new water line connection to County Street at the front of the building and construction of a temporary access and bus circulation road (July 2012-August 2012) as well as construction of a new south parking lot and roadway (July 2013-August 2013). Phase II (August 2013-August 2014) consisted of construction of the new school building, the north parking lot, new baseball and softball fields, and phased roadway in front of the new school. Phase III (August 2014-August 2015) consisted of demolition of the existing building and construction of a new east parking lot as well as a new roadway to County Street, new soccer fields, and a boulevard in front of the new school building. The Phase III timeline was delayed due to the discovery of asbestos in the old facility. Once asbestos was located, the State of Massachusetts had to approve an asbestos-removal plan. Therefore, demolition of the old facility was delayed by a few months (Holtzman, 2014). By the end of January 2015, the building was completely torn down. This delayed the planting of grass and completion of the soccer fields to be built upon this land. Full field readiness is anticipated for the fall of 2018.
after three complete growing seasons have taken place for the grass on the field.

*Opening the Doors*

On Monday, August 25, 2014, a ribbon-cutting ceremony attended by almost 1,000 people was held to open the new facility. “We built a beautiful facility…Everyone likes to hear that, that we’re on time and on budget,” Robert Anctil, vice chairman of the Building Committee commented. “We are so proud how we, as a committee, have promised to complete this project on time and within the budget, and we kept to that promise to stay within the budget,” said Anctil (Dion, 2014).

The doors to the new Somerset Berkley Regional High School facility opened on September 2, 2014. It is anticipated that the completion of the project, including all sports fields, will be in 2018.

*Purpose of the Study*

The study seeks to provide a historical narrative of the regionalization and new building processes for the towns of Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts. This study will provide answers to the following questions in order to provide not only the towns with a historical document but also communities facing similar regionalization and new infrastructure needs with a model and recommendations that they can use if they chose to embark on similar endeavors:
Research Questions

1. How can Somerset Berkley Regional High School’s regionalization and new facility creation serve as a model for other communities in Massachusetts facing similar dilemmas?

2. Why did the communities of Somerset and Berkley decide to regionalize?
   a. Who was responsible for organizing this effort?
   b. How was this effort organized?
   c. Why were other options, such as remodeling the old facility, not feasible?

3. How did community, political, and school leaders organize to complete the regionalization and new facilities projects?
   a. Who were the principal individuals who organized the effort?
   b. What was the motivation for these individuals to get involved?

Summary

The purpose of this study is to provide a historical narrative of the regionalization and new building process for the towns of Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts. Participants in this study discussed their role in the processes of regionalization and building of the $82.5 million facility, as well as their perceptions on the successes and pitfalls that occurred during the two projects. By analyzing these perceptions, it is hoped that this study can provide a context and a plausible model for other schools in the Commonwealth to follow if they, too, embark on a regionalization and/or new building project.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Due to difficult economic times and the continuing increase of the cost of education, Massachusetts school systems need to be efficient in the ways they fund their schools. In this chapter, the process of school consolidation will be examined as well as the benefits and drawbacks of school consolidation. This chapter will also address the history of school consolidation, the creation of school facilities, and the importance of facility on the climate and culture of a school community.

History of School Consolidation

School consolidation occurs when two or more schools combine to form a single school district or when a school closes and sends students from the closed facility to other schools (or builds a new and larger school facility). Currently, Massachusetts schools, as well as schools throughout the United States, have great variability with respect to their configuration of school districts. Some states maintain separate elementary and high school districts. Hawaii operates one school district while Texas operates over 1,000 districts. Many states maintain districts based on population size. New Jersey, for example, is geographically small with a high population and therefore maintains over 600 districts. The ways in which states organize their school districts are fluid, varying based on population dispersion, geography (deserts, islands, etc.) and the outcomes of professional or political struggles (Strang, 1987).

Historically, it was believed that consolidation provided a more cost effective way to educate America’s students. Originally the colonies had no public education system. Schools were established and governed by local entities. In 1789, the Constitution’s
de facto delegation for educational responsibility to the states began the systematication of a public enterprise.

The first calls for district reorganization were sounded in New England in the mid-1800’s. Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education and Horace Easton, state superintendent in Vermont, sought to make the township the fundamental unit of educational administration by consolidating neighborhood districts. Their arguments anticipated those made a century later, referring to the fiscal inefficiencies, unprofessional leadership, unequally distributed resources, and backward educational practice of small districts. (Strang, 1987, pp. 354-355)

From 1930 to 1980, the number of school districts in the United States declined from 120,000 to 15,000 due in part to school consolidation. This resulted in the number of schools in the United States decreasing from over 260,000 to less than 100,000 (Flynn-Trace, 2011). Between 1930 and 1960, tens of thousands of one-teacher schools (and one-school districts) were systematically closed (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1960). As of the 2008-2009 school year, the U.S. public school system operated 13,879 districts (86,470 schools), serving a much larger student population (e.g., 49 million public school students in 2005 as compared to about 26 million in 1929) (Howley, Johnson, & Petrie, 2011, p. 9).

According to Howley, Johnson and Petrie (2011), perhaps the major event that may have “enable[d] the systemic transformation of American schools, and the associated consolidation of districts, was the arrival of the automobile” (p.10). Improved roads and transportation enabled children and their families to move to more widely distributed
suburbs and, particularly after the conclusion of World War II, larger schools began to be built to support the children living in these suburbs (p.10).

In cities, school district consolidation began during the middle of the 19th century. Then, just like today, the largest districts operated the largest schools. In 2011, the 500 largest school districts were so large that they enrolled 43% of public school students nationwide. The remaining districts (over 15,000 districts in total) enrolled the remainder (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

County-level consolidation was first proposed in the 1920s in rural areas where one-teacher schools were most common. Today, the more impoverished and oppressed a rural region, the greater the likelihood of county-level consolidation. For example, although Ohio has hundreds of township-sized districts, county-level consolidations are common in its Appalachian region (Howley et al., 2011, p. 10).

By the end of the twentieth century, researched benefits to consolidation included single-grade classes (age-grading), specialized subject-matter teachers more intense professional supervision and leadership, and, increasingly, free transportation for students (Howley et al., 2011).

Massachusetts School Consolidation

In November 2009, Carleton, Lynch and O’Donnell did a historical study of school district consolidation in Massachusetts. Carleton and O’Donnell are policy analysts in the Office of Strategic Planning, Research, and Evaluation for the State of Massachusetts and Lynch is the director of school governance for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In colonial times, districts were established by
any group of families interested in the education of their students. By the early 1800's 2,250 school districts existed in the state. In 1882, a law was passed that authorized only municipalities with the ability to fund and manage a school district. This resulted in the state's first school consolidation. The 1949 Regional Schools Act (Chapter 71) authorized regional districts to act as independent legal entities in an attempt to push towns toward consolidation. However, over the next 20 years, the number of districts increased as towns created regional high schools while holding on to their town-funded elementary schools.

When Chapter 71 was amended in 1974, progress was made toward school districts opting for regionalization. The amendments to Chapter 71 changed the state financial aid formula for school districts to be based on school enrollment. After 1974, the number of school districts declined to the current level of 329 (not including charter schools). In the early 1990s, "regional school aid was phased out with the passage of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act and the amount that existing districts had been receiving up [to] that point was included in the district's Chapter 70 aid" (Carleton, Lynch & O'Donnell, 2009). Since the passing of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act, only 13 new K-12 districts have been established, with most of them resulting from the consolidation of regional secondary districts and their town-controlled elementary schools into one K-12 district.

In 2009, 329 school districts, excluding charter schools, served 351 cities and towns in the Commonwealth. One hundred seventy-seven districts were still municipal K-12 districts serving a single town or city. These districts ranged in size from 170 to 55,900 students. Thirty-one K-12 regional districts served two to seven towns each (92 total
towns) and were legal entities with statutory governance structures and rights and obligations for member towns. Member towns paid annual assessments to the regional school district based on state regulations, the district regional agreement, and town budget decisions (Carleton et al., 2009).

At that time, small districts were not moving toward regionalization. However, according to Carleton et al., regionalization provides “a way for districts to respond to shifting student demographics; improve long-term fiscal stability; address facility needs; react to a shrinking pool of qualified administrators; better articulate curriculum K-12; and increase district capacity to serve the academic needs of the students” (p. 7). The facility needs were the reasons that many school districts, including Harwich and Chatham, Ayer and Shirley, and Somerset and Berkley, focused on regionalization during the 2000s.

In 2003, the MSBA implemented specific regulations for criteria that school districts needed to meet in order to receive reimbursement. One important change was the addition of a rating scale for evaluating school proposals that are part of a regionalization plan. This was intended as an incentive for school districts to look into regionalizing. In order to receive assistance from the MSBA Somerset and Berkley investigated regionalization as a means to acquire a new facility.

The State of Massachusetts developed guidelines for developing a regional school system. Detailing a three-year process, the guidelines cover the planning and implementation of regionalization. The first year of the plan is devoted to discussion, data collection and planning so that all town stakeholders can have full understanding of
why regionalization is occurring. The second year focuses on scheduling and securing votes as well as establishing a Regional Planning Board so that a formal study of regionalization can occur. During this phase, the Planning Board develops a regional agreement and long-range plan. The third year is recommended, though not required. The state recommends that a transition period be established for a six-to twelve-month period. During this time, member districts retain their own school committees while the regional district elects its own school committee and superintendent. These two entities work together so that, by the conclusion of the transition period, the regional committee and superintendent are ready to take full control. The state believes strongly in this process and, under 603 CMR 41/03(5), passed a law allowing for this to occur throughout Massachusetts.

School Consolidation Benefits

In Alvarez, Loucagos, and Rashid’s study (2010), the benefits of consolidation or regionalization were found to include the reduction of expenditures, more money to spend on highly qualified teaching staff, and the ability to offer an expanded curriculum:
Table 1: Benefits of Regionalization/Non-Regionalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of Regionalizing District</th>
<th>Benefits of Not Regionalizing District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer classes are dropped due to low enrollment</td>
<td>Communities keep their sense of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of curriculum/activities</td>
<td>Smaller student-to-teacher ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures are reduced because:</td>
<td>More opportunities for relationships to be created between students and teachers, and between faculty members and administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• maintaining duplicate facilities becomes unnecessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• fewer teachers need to be hired</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• fewer administrators are required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More money to spend on highly qualified teachers</td>
<td>Higher administrative productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher test scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower per-pupil spending</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

States promote district consolidation for a variety of incentives, disincentives, and direct policy interventions (Buchanan, 2004). State funds to build new facilities for districts and/or schools that agree to consolidate have been a popular incentive in states such as Kentucky, West Virginia, and Ohio, where smaller school districts have limited fiscal capacity and must depend on state monies for capital construction projects in some circumstances (Hughes, 2003). Other states, including Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, and New York, have offered direct financial inducement for consolidating districts by giving a one-time incentive grant or multi-year commitment, for the sole purpose of covering the cost of consolidation (Howley et al., 2011).
Policy disincentives that make the operation of smaller, community-based schools and districts difficult have also caused consolidation of districts across the country. In states such as Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia, facility construction policies mandate a minimum enrollment for capital improvement and/or disallow renovations on existing structures (Lawrence, 2001). In California, New York and Texas, unfunded mandates relating to staffing, curricular offerings, and/or graduation requirements that regulate additional, specialized staffing, make smaller districts unable to financially support their smaller schools (Boulut, 2010).

In a more direct approach in 2004, Arkansas enacted and enforced legislation that eliminated all districts with enrollments below an arbitrary number (350 students), forcing voluntary mergers or closings (Office for Education Policy, 2010). However, in 2015, House Bill 1263 was signed by Governor Asa Hutchinson to allow schools with dwindling student enrollment numbers to apply for a waiver to this law if they were in good fiscal, academic and facility standing (Jordan, 2015).

**School Consolidation Concerns**

As implied in Table 1, negative impacts of school consolidation may include reduced parent-teacher involvement, reduced closeness of faculty-administrator relationships, and more effort spent on disciplinary issues (Alvarez, Loucagos, & Rashid, 2010). Furthermore, while having larger class sizes can be an advantage of a larger, consolidated school, particularly with regard to resources and budget, it can also be a disadvantage. A school that consolidates to have an average class size of 20 students is clearly more attractive from a fiscal standpoint and does not hinder academic progress. However,
when class sizes begin to creep toward and above 30, school officials need to question if school consolidation is a good idea from an educational standpoint (Newberry, 2005). According to David C. Thompson, a Kansas State University professor of educational leadership, residents can see a loss of community identity if a child’s school is absorbed by another school, as well as a personal loss of history if a parent or other family members also attended the school (ibid.).

According to the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Reference Desk (2011), recent research finds that school consolidation is not necessarily cost-effective nor does it always reap the intended benefits that schools expect when making the decision to consolidate. The major findings from their research include:

- consolidation does not automatically lead to cost savings;
- empirical studies of consolidation yield that overall estimates of cost savings are relatively modest, with the largest percentage of savings accruing from consolidating very small districts; and
- consolidation may increase costs in some areas for more than a decade

**Creating Consolidated School Districts**

School consolidation between two school districts is a difficult task. Lewin (1943) developed a three-step strategy for these types of changes based on “force field analysis.” First, the organization, or “force field,” surrounding the issue must be broken. Once the organization is exposed, it is possible to introduce change to that organization. The final step is to “refreeze” the organization to ensure long-range retention of the change (Owens, 1991, p. 315). In a school system, it is necessary to create a culture in which
parties feel comfortable expressing feelings, having open communication and dialogue, valuing the right to question and challenge opinions, and examining and dealing with concerns regarding resistance. Owens (1991) states that if these cultural changes occur, it is likely that unforeseen consequences of proposed actions would be brought into the school consolidation planning process and, more importantly, the level of resistance to change will be diminished.

Dissenters to the notion of school consolidation are primarily found in towns that have “built the cultures of their communities around traditional one-room schoolhouses, [because] the building stood as a reflection of the community that called the school its own, and was the axis upon which the vitality of the area revolved” (Sell, Leistritz, & Thompson, 1994, p. 17). Peshkin (1978) described schools as symbols of community independence and strength. Schools allow for community and cultural traditions to take place and for residents of the community to develop a personal and community identity (Flynn-Trace, 2011).

Working to create new traditions, rituals and cultures can be a stressful and challenging task, but it is paramount in a functional consolidated school.

Discussions about school improvement can get expressed in purely economic terms, leaving out powerful cultural considerations. By separating schools from communities, consolidation may be contributing to the social problems that concern parents and educators, creating a reluctance to consolidate. The sound development of children is closely linked to the well being of communities, consolidating schools often destroys those links” (Fanning, 1995, p. 5).
In many towns, schools serve as a political and social community center as well as the place where children go to receive an education. According to Jolly & Doloney (1993), “the critical importance of a sense of community and the consistent concerns about loss of local control and community cohesion, more than any other factors, are reason to question consolidation as a simple answer to education problems” (p. 19). Community members and students may identify with a particular mascot (i.e. Bulldogs) or a town nickname such as “Red Devil Nation.” The attachment to such cultural idioms that revolve around the school can create a fear of losing an individual community identity and therefore, a culture, as a result of consolidation.

**Should a School Consolidate?**

School location can be a factor when determining whether school districts should consolidate. “The existence of a school, the physical features of the school and campus, and the academic and extracurricular programs give the district certain appeal which, in turn, greatly impact the value of the homes in the community and determines desirability of the real estate in that district” (Flynn-Trace, 2011). According to Peshkin (1978) and Oravitz (2009), consolidating school districts can create community fears, uncertainty, and confusion that cause people to want to maintain the “status quo” rather than push for change.

The closing or restructuring of schools can become an emotional loss for townspeople. Nevertheless, although the historical culture of the two school districts will inevitably be lost, “a new culture, inclusive of all those involved with the school district, will be formed. The me versus you relationship that often is created through the process of
questioning the feasibility of a merger and the implementation thereof makes resolution of the issues much more difficult” (Flynn-Trace, 2011, p. 29). A solution that benefits both districts must be found in order to create a long-lasting and effective school consolidation (Weeks, 1992; Oravitz, 2009).

Local control over education is also a factor to consider when deciding if a school district should consolidate. Towns want to have a say in the educational programming offered to their students. Communities want to control and influence district finances, personnel matters, and curriculum decisions (Flynn-Trace, 2011). The concept of a school committee made of local elected residents “stems from a desire by the community to decide how, what, and by whom its children would be educated” (Flynn-Trace, 2011, pp. 29-30). The school committee is expected to represent the community’s interests and opinions when making decisions. Merging districts necessitates working with multiple communities with potential differing values and/or priorities (Oravitz, 2009). Concerns can arise that central administration and school committee representatives from multiple towns may not be as responsive to individual town interests (Oravitz, 2009; Rooney & Augenblick, 2009).

**Dissatisfaction Theory**

Developed by Frank W. Lutz and Laurence Iannaccone (1994), Dissatisfaction Theory can be used to explain how town members can largely influence how the students in their town are educated (Flynn-Trace, 2011, p. 30). Community members can influence who will run for a school committee, campaign and cause superintendent turnover, initiate policy change, create open forum participation at school committee meetings, cause
incumbent defeat and increase voting at the polls. “This is the grassroots model of democracy; people realize they can get what they want and then they get it” (Scribner & Layton, 1995, p. 43). When the policies of a school committee or leadership of a superintendent no longer satisfy the voters, they will show dissonance at school committee meetings. “When disagreements of a serious nature arise, voters will become motivated enough to act to realign school governance with local citizen demands. When functioning properly, this system is the embodiment of democracy” (Scribner & Layton, 1995, p. 43).

The Dissatisfaction Theory states that if townspeople within a school district become sufficiently dissatisfied or displeased, they will act. This theory is “the voice of the community that can be used to gauge how consistently and how successfully a board of education is reflecting the needs and wants of the community members” (Flynn-Trace, 2011, p. 31). Lutz and Iannaccone (1994) write that the dissatisfaction theory could explain what occurs when a school district is in turmoil or during a period of extreme change. It explains how a school committee will respond to the concerns of the community through policy and/or personnel change. The actions of a school committee based on the concerns of its community allow townspeople to maintain local control of their school district (Scribner & Layton, 1995).

Finances are often the impetus to initiate community discussions on school consolidation. Grant, incentive and/or school facility building monies offered to school districts by state agencies makes consolidation enticing. According to Flynn-Trace (2011), “consolidating schools with another community can provide incentive aid for academic programs as well as construction projects that may not have been possible otherwise (p. 5). Consolidation
can alleviate school district fiscal constraints by increasing funds that are available in larger school districts for building and operation aid from the state and by creating a larger tax base to support the school district (Strang, 1987; Young & Green, 2005). In a 1998 study regarding the restructuring of schools in Nebraska, community members were more supportive of school consolidation if their household’s taxes would decrease (Allen, Filkins, Cordes & Jarecki, 1998, p. 13).

Regardless of the financial gain, the goal of school consolidation should always be to provide a superior education to students (Young & Green, 2005). According to Epstein et al. (2002), the success of a consolidated school district depends on partnerships between the school, community, and family that can improve programming and school climate, communication with families, increase parental skills and leadership, assist teachers with professional development and make connections between families and the community. In order for a successful school consolidation, all stakeholders must commit to working toward successful consolidation and excellence in education for all students.

**Historical Context of Building a School**

Between the months of September and June, about 20% of Americans spend between 30 and 40 hours in a school building (Schneider, 2002). At the inception of the public education system in the United States, the common architectural belief was that if basic size, acoustics, lighting and heating standards were met, the teaching and learning process would automatically be achieved (Connors, 1982). An early model for the standard academic classroom was drawn up by Horace Mann and called for standard rows of desks with windows on two sides of the room. This movement, known as the
Common School Movement, popularized the idea of free public education paid for by local property taxes. The Kalamazoo Decision of 1874 determined that it was legal for public education to be paid for by local taxes. This decision allowed for the vast expansion of public school buildings during the 1800s (Baker, 2012). Coupled with this, cities and towns were facing increased enrollment and responsibility for the education of students as child labor laws became more commonplace, the Civil War ended, and the nation moved rapidly toward the Industrial Revolution (ibid.). This meant that more children would be attending schools, especially in cities, and schools were being built and renovated in a factory-like manner. As Tanner and Lackney (2005) stated, “[f]actories created to produce things led to factories to produce learning (Tanner & Lackney, 2005; Weisser, 2006). By the end of the 19th century and through the beginning of the 20th century, schools were built to be standardized, “utilitarian spaces…designed to house as many students as possible, maximizing classroom space” (Baker, 2012, p.4).

From the end of World War II through 1964, $20 billion was spent on new educational facilities (National Council on Schoolhouse Construction, 1964). As described by Tanner and Lackney (2005), “this period was the beginning of a new age of innovation in educational architecture, although many school boards missed the opportunity to create better school facilities as they struggled to cope with ever-increasing enrollments” (p. 12). Fresh air, light, and amenities such as air conditioning were added to school designs for the first time (ibid.).

However, in the middle of the 20th century, architects began to design schools based on curriculum and best-learning strategies. This time period, from the 1960s to the 1980s was known as the “Impulsive Period” (Hansen & Hanssen, 2002). At this time, school
populations were shrinking. However, desegregation was also occurring and this caused cultural concern about equity issues in school facilities, especially in urban areas (Hille, 2011). As Tanner and Lackney (2005) note, the social unrest that was occurring throughout the United States also led to the development of experimental school-building design, which came along with a healthy dose of criticism regarding the state of educational facilities and education in general. Tanner and Lackney note that “criticism was especially centered on urban cities where large neighborhood comprehensive schools were not providing adequate education in meeting the needs of minority, disadvantaged and low-income youths...and also focused on the perception that public schools were stifling to creativity and destroying children’s natural love of learning and self-expression” (p. 17).

During this time, the notion that schools needed to be designed to accommodate educational programming also came to the forefront of architectural design (Castaldi, 1987). This is because the physical plant and the educational process cannot be separate issues and must instead be intertwined (Taylor & Gousie, 1988). This concept was reiterated by Christopher (1988), who found that the physical plant should be designed to accommodate the teaching and learning processes. According to Honeyman and Sayles (1995), in order to ascertain the educational preparedness of a school building, seven components must be addressed:

1. School site: Must have central location to support school-based and community activity.

2. Structural and mechanical features: Must meet local and state codes and address energy conservation concerns.
3. Maintainability: Facility must be relatively easy to maintain.

4. Safety: Staff and student safety must be paramount in any and all school decisions.

5. Instructional adequacy: Are room sizes, locations, storage and work areas conducive to the learning process?

6. Educational environment: Are the color, attractiveness, temperature, landscaping, and overall look of the building suitable for education? Also, to what degree do students, staff, and community members utilize the facility for non-instructional activities?

7. Compliance with all applicable regulations: Does the facility adhere to American with Disabilities Act stipulations and guidelines?

Honeyman and Sayles argue that once these questions are answered, the determination of the need for new construction and/or renovation can be determined.

By the mid-1980s, investments in school facilities dropped dramatically. Smaller projects to keep aging facilities “up and running” became the norm. As Hille (2011) notes, “the conservative social and political mood of the 1980’s resulted in a basic reconsideration of the educational experimentation of the 1960’s and 1970’s, and a renewed emphasis on basic academic subjects like math, science, and the humanities, preferably taught in more traditional educational venues” (p. 203). As enrollment in schools declined during this time and little investment in school facilities was available, the “pace of new school construction slowed dramatically” (ibid.). Construction that did occur focused on the removal of asbestos, compliance with the Americans with
Disabilities Act (ADA), and recently discovered problems with lead in the water supply (Baker, 2012).

The emergence of the “green” building, or high-performance building movement was also seen during this time. As described by Baker (2012), this movement “promoted the responsible use of energy and natural resources while providing healthy indoor environmental conditions in buildings” (p. 21). These standards, adopted in 1998, are largely acknowledged to be one of the most significant influences on school design and construction in recent years (Taylor, 2008; US Green Building Council, 2007).

Today’s school facility design planning and building is an “exercise in visionary thinking” (Baker, 2012). The focus of 21st-century school buildings is not only on academics but also “community centers, flexible and ergonomic furniture, distance learning, mobile classrooms, cell phones as learning tools, libraries without books, and schools that look like ‘Panera Bread’ (presumably the restaurant, not the bread itself)” (ibid., p. 24).

Twenty-first-century school facilities must focus on innovation, information technology and infrastructure to support this technology. Schools must also pay particular attention to safety and security features in the post-Columbine/ post-Sandy Hook world in which all students, teachers, parents, and communities reside. Merging the desire for schools to be open to the public while paying attention to the safety and security of our most fragile population, our children, is a struggle facing all who attempt to design and manage school facilities in the 21st century.
Designing a School Building

The building of a school’s physical plant is a marriage of several professions: education, architecture, engineering, and construction. The success of a building project depends on the cooperation of these groups that are not familiar with each other’s backgrounds, tempos, careers or values (Daniel, 2011). O’Brien (2007) warned that a recurring theme “is echoed across school construction projects: Educational leaders’ expertise is in education, not in construction, and without proper guidance, construction can lead to serious and costly problems” (p. 2). However, few researchers are willing to address this topic as it bridges several disciplines.

Tanner (2010) observed that few universities offer courses in educational facilities planning, design, or construction. The process of designing and constructing school buildings is absent from the formal education of school administrators; therefore, this aspect of education is employed by architects and construction managers. Tanner thus concluded that professionals who know little to nothing about educating children drive the process of building schools in the United States.

In 1994, Flora Ida Ortiz conducted an academic study called *Schoolhousing*, a descriptive examination of California’s school construction program. Examining the process of building school facilities in California in the 1990s, Ortiz provides a framework for understanding the design and construction of schools within a governmental context (Daniel, 2011, p. 25). She writes that building a school is the largest, most complex expenditure that a school district can encounter. She cites that educational administrators have little to no background on the subject of constructing school buildings. Therefore,
all school districts must rely on a staff of consultants and technical support to execute such a project (Carey, 2010).

Examining the California school construction program of the 1990s, Ortiz (1994) addressed the symbolic role of a school building within its community. She described that some are built as “an enduring symbol of a community’s faith in the leadership of educators and policy makers—a ‘temple’ filled with artifacts of their time. Other schools are ‘utility building,’ housing classroom operations; their design is frequently driven by rapid enrollment increases or new cost-saving building technologies” (Daniel, 2011, p. 25).

Fredrick Withum III (2006), a middle school principal, examined the process of designing school buildings in Pennsylvania. Withum’s study represents a theoretical construct for “professionals and educators to understand the complex cause-effect relationship that occurs when educational facilities are designed and constructed” (Daniel, 2011, p. 26). Withum proposed a System Model for Planning of Educational Facilities that has three essential goals: 1.) Identify and describe complicated social, cultural, economic and political mechanisms at work when public schools are designed and constructed in a pluralistic democratic society; 2.) Examine the relationships between the aforementioned mechanisms and educational facility planning; and 3.) Understand the linkages between these mechanisms, facility planning and the educational facility itself.

Todd Kraft (2009) also examined the facilities planning process. Focusing on a school district in Missouri, Kraft examined the roles of the superintendent and school leadership
in the facility design and construction of a new school building. He noted that strong school-based leadership guides stakeholders through the social and political ramifications of the entire process of planning for a school. This process begins with the initial vision for the new building. Kraft wrote, “First, the leader engaged key stakeholders to create a collaborative and meaningful planning process. Second, the effective actions of the leader contributed to a meaningful planning process. Third, the leader successfully shaped the context of the planning process” (p. x).

Thus, commitment and cooperation between and among all stakeholders is paramount in designing and constructing a new school building facility.

**Summary**

This chapter examined the historical context of school consolidation in the United States and the researched benefits and drawbacks of regionalizing or consolidating schools. Furthermore, the changes in the building of schools were also discussed and how these changes occurred with respect to the beliefs, circumstances and, sometimes, economy of the decades in which the schools were built. Finally, the facility planning process was discussed as well as how the layout of a facility affects the climate and culture of a school district.
Chapter Three: Research Design

This chapter includes the research questions for this study, a description of the research design, the participants in the study, sampling procedures, instrumentation, procedures used for data collection, expected respondent rate, and the method in which data was reported.

Methodology

This study does not offer choice in what methodology to use. In order to examine the decision-making process behind the regionalization and eventual creation of a new high school facility for the towns of Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts, a quantitative research design was necessary. According to Josselson (2006), narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that involves acquiring narratives (i.e., written, oral, and/or visual) that focus on the meanings people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide “insight that [benefits] the complexity of human lives” (p.4). Taylor and Bogdan (1998) contend that qualitative research seeks to utilize participants’ own recollections to describe an event, experience, or phenomenon. It seeks to delineate the composition of the story, for whom and why the experience occurred, as well as the cultural discourses that occurred because of the experiences.

According to Hesse-Biber, Nagy, and Leavy (2004):

Qualitative methods give researchers a broad range of choices, and they make clear that researchers bring to research assumptions that will eventually impact its process and results. Because of all of the ontological, epistemological and methodological options available to researchers, qualitative research is an exciting terrain. (p. 13)
This study’s focus is on the perceptions, successes, and pitfalls a district encountered during a pivotal time in its history. It relies on oral history, personal memory, and individual opinion on the history of events at the time in question. No single methodology can master all the intricate and selective differences in human perceptions and experiences. This study’s intent is to represent the voices of important stakeholders in the regionalization and new building projects, qualitative research allows for the stories of these individuals to be authentically portrayed. The qualitative approach allows for opinions to be expressed and personal experiences to be recognized.

**Research Paradigm**

The Interpretivist Paradigm is used for this study because the intention of this type of research is to understand “the world of human experience” (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36). The interpretivist approach relies on the participants’ views of the situation being studied and recognizes the impact of the research on the participants’ own backgrounds, experiences, and opinions. Unlike other paradigms, this approach does not begin with a theory, but rather the theory and pattern of meanings develop as the research progresses (Creswell, 2003). The qualitative findings of this type of research involve “closer attention to the interpretive nature of the inquiry and situating the study within the political, social, and cultural context of the researchers, and the reflexivity or ‘presence’ of the researchers in the accounts they present” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). By discovering the factors that contributed to the decision to regionalize and, eventually, build a new high school facility, future communities seeking to accomplish similar tasks can look at the beliefs, values and experiences of the towns of Somerset and Berkley to determine if such a model will work in their community.
Role of the Researcher

In order to collect accurate and meaningful data, the researcher plays a vital role in this qualitative study. During the interview process, the participants’ voices must be the focus in the development of the data collection tool and one must be mindful not to inject personal bias or tone into the finished product. In order to authentically convey the personal accounts of the participants, a high level of trust is needed between the interviewer and participants. Kvale (1996) explains that an interview “is not a conversation between equal partners because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The topic is introduced by the researcher who also critically follows up on the subject’s answers to his [her] questions” (p. 6). Miller and Crabtree (2004) state:

The interview is better conceptualized as a special type of partnership and communicative performance or event. It is not political oratory, storytelling, rap, a lecture, a small group seminar or a clinical encounter. Rather, it is a conversational research journey with its own rules of the road. (p. 187)

Carspecken (1996) believes interviews must be conducted in such a way that participants are comfortably able to convey their own subjective experiences. Freebody (2003) argues that it then becomes the researcher’s responsibility to “develop a rigorous way of documenting these accounts while staying close to the actual raw material of the interview transcripts” (p. 155).

Statement of Positionality

The nature of qualitative research sets the researcher as the collector of data. In this instance, most data collection consisted of interviews of participants in the
regionalization and new building processes. According to Bourke (2014), “it is reasonable to expect that the researcher’s beliefs…are important variables that may affect the research process. Just as the participant’s experiences are framed in social-cultural contexts, so too are those of the researcher” (p. 2). The research questions posed for this study were shaped by the relationships previously held between the participant and the interviewer. Conversations, comments, events occurring in the work environment, and people who were instrumental in the development of the new facility were all taken into account when developing interview questions. Throughout the interview and data collection process, questions were kept general and careful attention was made to ensure that participants were not led into answering with a particular bias.

While bias and reactivity to participants could put validity of the study at risk, one’s positionality cannot be entirely eliminated from this qualitative study. With this in mind, the following beliefs were held during the research process:

- Students take more pride in an education delivered in state-of-the-art school facilities.
- People who work in and for education want to do the right thing to benefit the children for whom they work.
- The purpose of education is to prepare students to be college and career ready and, ultimately, to be productive members of society.

It is imperative to note that these attitudes and beliefs may or may not be present or identifiable in the participants of this study. With regards to the study, objectivity must be maintained for all subjects, regardless of if they may or may not hold these views or
principles. Impartiality must also be preserved and subjects must be selected based solely on position and importance to the process and not personal bias. Throughout this study, there was also cognizance of reflexivity or "self-scrutiny" on the part of the researcher. While conducting interviews, there was a constant awareness of the relationship between the researcher and the participant (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Pillow, 2003 as stated in Bourke, 2014).

**Narrative Inquiry Design**

According to Kamlar (1998), narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology provides "a framework for understanding the construction of knowledge in relation to lived experiences...[S]tories do not tell single truths, but rather represent a truth, a perspective, a particular way of seeing experience and naming it. Stories are partial, they are located rather than universal, they are a representation of experience rather than the same thing as experience itself" (p. 3). Narrative inquiry emphasizes that what is learned from past experiences extends beyond formalized scientific method forms of research and attempts to broaden research findings from a place of simply knowing information to one of understanding the reasons behind a story or decision-making process (Holroy, 2007). To determine if a study requires a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, the intended purpose of the research must be part of the decision. According to Glesne (1997), "researchers need to be aware of many ways to re-present data and to experiment with them to learn about their data, themselves in relation to the data, and about their skills and abilities to communicate inquiry in different ways (pp. 218-219). Furthermore, narrative inquiry seeks to determine the why and how of the facts and why people made the decisions that were made at the time of the "story":
The term narrative carries many meanings and is used in a variety of ways by different disciplines, often synonymously with story...[T]he narrative scholar [pays] analytic attention to how the facts got assembled that way. For whom was this story constructed, how was it made and for what purpose? What cultural discourses does it draw on—take for granted? What does it accomplish? (Reissman & Speedy, 2007)

In narrative inquiry research, interviews are conducted and “stories” are generated so as to learn from the facts of what happened rather than simply telling the story:

Making stories from one’s lived history is a process by which ordinarily we revise the past retroactively, and when we do we are engaged in processes of languaging and describing that modify the past. What we see as true today may not have been true at the time the actions we are describing were performed. Thus we need to resist the temptation to attribute intentions and meaning to events that they did not have at the time they were experienced. (Bochner, 2007)

Narrative inquiry is sensitive to social and cultural differences. What is beneficial to one society or culture may or may not work for a different society or culture based on the people, ideas, and standards of that culture. “Narrative inquiry embraces narrative as both the methods and the phenomena of study” (Pinnegar & Danes, 2007, p. 4).

**Characteristics of Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry focuses on the experience of one or a few participants rather than that of a larger group. According to Creswell (2008), one goal of narrative inquiry is to give voice to those whose stories have been previously unheard in educational research. It is used as a method of retelling a story around the chronology of events and seeks to
describe the individual’s past, present, and future experiences within the context of the entire story. Pinnegard and Daynes (2007) describe narrative inquiry as a process that emphasizes relationships of collaboration between the researcher and others. It can be used as a form of persuasion because the stories generated from this type of research can be written in an engaging, literary manner that allows the reader to feel like part of the story (Creswell, 2008).

The expectation of narrative inquiry research is that it will create an engaging sense of community with the participants of the research. One must be able to draw a connection from all participants. When the final product is delivered, participants should feel that “stories are important and that they are heard” (Creswell, 2008, p. 511). It should make readers feel a connection to the story and provoke them to have possible changes in viewpoint, ask questions, or take similar (or opposite) action due to the outcome of the research (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p. 102; Richardson, 2000, p. 937).

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Persuasion Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model are used to narrate and analyze this study. Throughout this study, participants will reiterate the notion that communication and branding a message were key ingredients in the positive outcomes that resulted in the towns of Somerset and Berkley.

**Persuasion Theory**

Developed in the 1940s and 1950s, the concept of persuasion deals with sending messages to intended target audiences in order to change their opinion. In order for a message to be effectively communicated and an audience persuaded, the credibility and
reputation of the communicator, the order and completeness of the statements, and the announcement of conclusions must all be taken into account. If an audience perceives the delivery of information to be credible, if the order of statements is easily understood and detailed in approach, and if the announcement of conclusions can be seen implicitly by the stakeholders, the audience will be persuaded to believe a message. Conversely, if the target audience does not find the delivery of information to be from a credible source, if the order and completeness of statements is confusing and vague, and/or if the intended outcomes cannot be easily seen or understood but must instead be proven to the audience, a targeted individual will not succumb to persuasion.

Persuasion only works if the purpose is realistic and takes into account the audience’s values, beliefs, motives, and attitudes. Persuasion can be effective in achieving the following main purposes (McGaan, 2009): 1.) creating uncertainty; 2.) reducing resistance; 3.) changing attitude; 4.) amplifying attitude; and 5.) gaining behavior.

Depending on the situation and audience, a persuader will attempt the art of persuasion in one of the five aforementioned ways. For example, if an audience is in strong opposition to a viewpoint, the delivery of information that should seek to make the audience member question themselves. Audience members need to feel uncomfortable and uncertain with their current belief system. If an audience is moderately opposed to the viewpoint being presented, the persuader should attempt to move the audience toward neutrality. This presupposes that the audience is tolerant of viewpoints other than the one held before persuasion occurs. A persuader would look to change attitude if he or she were faced with an audience that had no opinion or was not strongly committed to the topics. The delivery of information would attempt to amplify attitude if the target audience members
were already moderately favorable to the topic. The goal is to sustain the current attitude and strive to change the opinions of any dissenters. Finally, the persuader would attempt to gain behavior with an audience that is already accepting of the topic. The goal, then, is to get people to take action in line with this shared attitude.

*Elaboration Likelihood Model*

Researchers have consistently found that once an individual is presented with a decision, it is how the individual processes the information that determines if persuasion will be long-lasting. Cook and Flay (1978) found that people who purposefully considered a message’s content demonstrated a longer-lasting attitude toward the change, while people who had little motivation and/or were given little time to interpret a message were typically not persuaded. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) developed the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion that is based on how much mental process, or elaboration, on a topic is given to a participant. They deduce that there are two roads to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route results “from a person’s careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of an advocacy. The other type of persuasion [peripheral], however, was that which more likely occurred as a result of some simple cue in the persuasion context (e.g. an attractive source) that induced change without necessitating scrutiny of the true merits of the information presented” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 125). Bator and Cialdini (2010) believe that the central route is better for more lasting change. Persuasion will likely result from a person’s careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of an advocacy (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984).
There are four main conclusions of ELM (Kruglanski & Van Lange, 2012):

1. When people encounter the ideas of thought, they process information with varying levels of thinking, ranging from low elaboration to high elaboration.

2. Some psychological processes of change occur from a person’s careful consideration and thoughtfulness regarding all information (central route), while other changes occur from lower processes that require very little thought.

3. The degree of thought used in a persuasion context determines how consequential the resultant attitude becomes. Attitudes involving a higher degree of thought will have longer-lasting effects.

4. Any given variable can have multiple roles in persuasion, including acting as a cue to judgment or as an influence on the direction of thought about a message.

**Participant Recruitment and Access**

Kvale (1996) provides specific desirable characteristics to look for when deciding upon an interview candidate:

They give concise and precise answers to the interviewer’s questions, they provide coherent accounts and do not continually contradict themselves, they stick to the interview topic and do not repeatedly wander off. Good subjects can give long and lively descriptions of their life situation, they tell capturing stories well suited for reporting. (p. 146)
Kvale (1996) also details potential pitfalls to the interview process:

Recognising that some people may be harder to interview than others, it remains the task of the interviewer to motivate and facilitate the subjects’ accounts and to obtain interviews rich in knowledge from virtually every subject. (p.147)

Participants were selected with the following criteria in mind. All were stakeholders in the regionalization and new building project. The six individuals had leadership positions within the district at the time of the regionalization and/or new building project and five of the six participants maintained leadership positions throughout the two processes of regionalization and creation of the new facility. The six interviewees were willing to talk about their role and subsequent beliefs regarding the processes and were willing to be reflective about their role in the district at this time. Each participant was sent a letter of request to participate in this study and given the option of a phone or face-to-face interview. Only one participant requested a phone interview; all other interviews were conducted face-to-face.

Finally, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was submitted to Northeastern University and consent was granted (See Appendix A).

Participants

The participants in the final study were selected for the following reasons:

Richard Peirce is the current chairperson of the Somerset Berkley Regional School Committee. He has held this position since the region’s inception in 2011. A lawyer by profession, he is a life-long resident of the town of Somerset and a graduate of Somerset
High School. Mr. Peirce was instrumental in overseeing the new building project and advocated strongly for the regionalization of the towns of Somerset and Berkley.

Julie Ramos-Gagliardi chaired the Regionalization Planning Committee. This committee researched the pros and cons of regionalization and presented findings to the towns of Somerset and Berkley. Currently, Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi is the Vice Chairperson of the Regional School Committee and lives in Somerset with her husband and two sons, who both attend Somerset Berkley Regional High School.

Mr. Thomas Lynch was interim superintendent of the Somerset Berkley Regional School District (SBRSD) from the fall of 2012 to June 2015. He has also been the superintendent for the Berkley Public School System for fifteen years and continues to hold this position today. Mr. Lynch was an active member of the Regionalization Planning Committee and the building committee. As superintendent of the Berkley School District (a K-8 district), his district is a feeder program for the high school, so he still maintains an active role as a stakeholder for the SBRSD.

David Lanczycki is the current principal of Somerset Berkley Regional High School. He has held this position since July 1, 2014. Formerly the assistant principal of the school, Mr. Lanczycki is the only administrator employed by both Somerset and Somerset Berkley Regional School Districts for the entire regionalization and new building project. He has been employed by the districts since 2001.

Jahmal Mosley was the principal of Somerset Berkley Regional School District from its inception in July 2011 until June 2014. He oversaw the majority of the new building project and dealt with the effects of the new regionalization plan.
Data Collection

All participants received a letter and a phone call explaining the research. The letter included information regarding the purpose of the study, Northeastern ethical standards, and information pertaining to interview questions. The participants also received a consent form. The subjects agreed to participate in a one-hour interview, either at the in Somerset Berkley Regional High School or on the phone.

The participants were informed of the purpose and procedure of the interviews. They signed a written agreement consenting to participate in the study and giving permission to use the interviews for the doctoral thesis. Participants also received a release of confidentiality, as participant names are used in the study.

Interview questions focused on discussions pertaining to the subject’s position at the time of regionalization, the subject’s opinion of the regionalization process, a timeline of the regionalization process, connection of regionalization to the new facility project, strengths of the regionalization process, and weaknesses of the process and perceptions of education at the high school level before, during, and after the regionalization process (See Appendix B). Before the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on the past five years and determine the greatest accomplishments and greatest failures of the regionalization and new building project. Discussions were guided by this question. At the commencement of each interview, the ethical principles of research were discussed and each interviewee was asked to sign a consent form.
Data Storage

Creswell’s (2013) “Data Collection Circle” was the collection device for this study. Data collection is a compilation of connected events with the purpose of gathering accurate information to answer emerging research questions (see Figure 1).

![Data Collection Circle](image)

Figure 1: Data Collection Circle (Creswell, 2013)

The researcher was responsible for collecting data and incorporating strategies for validation (Creswell, 2013). Methods of data collection for this narrative inquiry included a series of one-hour interviews with six primary stakeholders of the regionalization and new facility projects. The interviews were approximately one hour in length. Questions were designed to gather an oral history of the regionalization and new facility projects and to determine the strengths and pitfalls of the process followed by the
towns of Somerset and Berkley. The interviews took place at Somerset Berkley Regional High School or by phone. The interviews were recorded using an MP3 player. The data recording (MP3s) and the final interview transcriptions were stored on an encrypted online storage drive that is owned by the student researcher and password protected. The transcriber signed an agreement of confidentiality prior to transcribing the interviews. Files exchanged via email were transferred to the encrypted storage drive and emails were then deleted. All data collection strategies were accessible only to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The data analysis followed Creswell's (2013) process of providing an initial “detailed description of each case and themes with the cases” (p. 101). Following this description, a thematic examination of the interviews was conducted and connections and meanings were drawn from the narratives. Initially, the researcher reviewed each audio and written transcription and labeled files. The data from all sources was sorted by theme. Themes were then delineated into narratives based on emerging trends from the data.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to give the towns of Somerset and Berkley a historical document that narrates the journey of regionalization and culminates with the creation of the new facility. It also serves as guidelines and suggestions for other schools in the state of Massachusetts facing similar economic hardships and looking to regionalize and/or create a new facility. Much can be learned from the paths trail blazed by others and it is hoped that participants will share the successes as well as the challenges and deterrents to the regionalization and new building project.
Chapter Four: Narratives

For this study, five key figures in the regionalization and new building project were interviewed. This chapter attempts to discern their interpretations of the timeline of events during the two processes, their perceptions regarding the successes that Somerset and Berkley achieved during the regionalization and new building projects as well as the pitfalls and deterrences to both activities.

Richard Peirce

You can’t have a comprehensive high school in this era with 300 students. You can’t provide breadth of courses to deal with the global economy they will be living and working in... It was educationally imperative to regionalize... It was the educationally sound thing to do.

Introduction

Richard Peirce has practiced law in Providence, Rhode Island for over forty years. Living in Somerset his entire life, he attended Somerset High School and has a vested interest in town and community. From 1990-1996, he was the Town Moderator. In this position he presides over town meetings. During this time, he was a member of the advisory and finance committees and always remained interested in town affairs. When the issue of regionalization and building a new high school was first proposed, he viewed a new high school as the largest capital project that Somerset (or Berkley) had ever undertaken and felt that he could contribute to the process.
The regionalization process started without his formal participation. He did attend many public meetings regarding the process and followed it closely through the media and the public hearings. At public forums, he gave his input believing that the town should differentiate operating assessment from capital assessment. When the regionalization agreement was approved in 2010, an Interim School Committee was formed. Mr. Peirce volunteered to be a member of this team and was appointed to a one year term. During 2010-2011, the planning for the construction of the high school began. This Interim School Committee appointed the school building committee and Mr. Peirce serves on that committee as well. The Building Committee is still in existence and Mr. Peirce is one of the original members still sitting on this board, making final fiscal decisions regarding the completion of the building project. Although not a formal member of the Construction Subcommittee, Mr. Peirce also attends those meetings to keep abreast of the latest building concerns of the architect, builders and subcontractors.

At this time, the current high school facility, as well as operations of the new facility continued to fall under the Somerset School Committee and Superintendent Richard Medeiros. Concurrently, Dr. Stephen Hemman was also acting as an Interim Superintendent, but his only role was to assist in the transition to a regional school district. He had no direct responsibility for overseeing operations of the high school.

At the conclusion of Mr. Peirce’s one year term, he ran for election to the Somerset Berkley Regional School Committee and has been serving as its Chairman for the past five years.
Regionalization

Establishing a new region was a daunting task. According to Mr. Peirce, “It was a significant undertaking to establish administration of a new district. We would try to maintain a shared administration but there were two separate budgets. Certain expenses had to be separated out. We also had to make decisions about personnel.”

In some ways Somerset and Berkley had an easier transition than other communities. Before the votes on regionalization took place, Berkley had been attending Somerset High School for twenty-five years. Though there were tough roads ahead, Mr. Peirce could see the benefits of regionalization from a historic perspective between the two towns:

> It wasn’t a matter of integrating students. Faculty and administration didn’t need to be integrated. We didn’t have statutory agreements or collective bargaining agreements that had to be integrated.

> Two communities with separate high schools would have faced those issues. Issues that we did face, though, were the Somerset School Committee and Superintendent [Medeiros] were adamantly opposed to regionalization so the interim school committee had to deal with a hostile school committee and superintendent. It was rather unusual for regionalization to occur under strong opposition of the School Committee and Superintendent.

Mr. Peirce states that his position on regionalization grew stronger as he learned more about it, however, he was never opposed to the idea. He states, “losing twenty-five
percent of our students would have programmatic impacts. I cannot say I was ever opposed [to regionalization] but as I learned more I became a stronger supporter based on the conclusion that it was important to have an alliance between the two communities. It would serve the students of both towns.” Mr. Peirce referenced the historic strength of the commercial tax base in Somerset and stated that Berkley was getting tuitioned into Somerset at a bargain rate. The people of Somerset did not concern themselves with this because taxes remained steady. However, with the closing of the Power Plant, which contributed a large amount of tax revenue to the towns prior to closing, pressure on the citizens of Somerset and concern over Berkley student tuition rates grew. At the same time, Berkley was looking for a permanent home for their students, promising their townspeople that tuition for educating their high schoolers was going to stop. As Mr. Peirce stated, Berkley students “were an integral part of the programs and maintained enrollment at around 1,000 students. They have made significant contributions to the high school and continue to do so. “

He recognizes that, if asked, most residents of Somerset and Berkley would cite the new building as the main reason regionalization occurred:

The idea of the new high school was bandied around for two decades.

Everyone acknowledged that the high school was in need of repair.

Could it be reconstructed or replaced? It became clear that renovation can be more expensive than new construction. The school was allowed to deteriorate to the point of beyond repair. We needed to build a new high
school and no community can undertake that type of project without the MSBA. MSBA indicated that if they were to fund a new high school, they considered Somerset and Berkley regionalization a prerequisite. Berkley had land to build their own high school. That would not have been a wise thing to do with a student population under 300 [students]. You can’t provide breadth of courses to deal with the global economy they will be living and working in. Many people felt the need to appease the MSBA was the driving force for regionalization.

But his reasons for regionalization span much farther than the new facility. He states, “As I looked at it more closely, it was educationally imperative to regionalize…The cynical side of me says that it was the MSBA funding that drove [regionalization]. From my perspective the educational importance was the driving force.”

The transition to a regionalized district was a smooth process, according to Mr. Peirce:

Despite the opposition from the School Committee and Superintendent [Medeiros], there was strong support in Berkley. In addition, we were fortunate to have a regional planning committee. I can’t say enough of Mrs. [Julie] Gagliardi’s leadership for that study. People from Berkley and Somerset who served were extremely hard working and committed and came up with the best agreement they could. Communication was important. [They] worked hard to get the information out. It was an interesting process. The Superintendent insisted upon speaking at the town meeting
against regionalization as did the school committee members.

The regional agreement was [still] approved at town meeting by an overwhelming majority.

Mr. Peirce did have advice for a town looking to regionalize. He cited having a strong, stable administration is a benefit to the process:

It is important to have the support of the superintendent and his administration, as well as the high school administration, in accomplishing [regionalization]. It was known that they [Superintendent and Central Office staff] weren’t enthusiastic from the start but they let the process go forward knowing the MSBA process was contingent on that. Once the committee had completed its work, and had an agreement, then the opposition became strong and public. The school committee had people on it who were educators in other communities and had served for some time...One member spoke in opposition at town meeting and suggested we sue the MSBA if they were not willing to support just Somerset. As an attorney, I saw astronomical cost with virtually zero likelihood.

After a year of Superintendent Medeiros being at the controls of the new region, the regional School Committee voted to appoint an interim Superintendent, Thomas Lynch, to run the district. Mr. Lynch was the Berkley K-8 superintendent and had been a strong advocate for the regionalization process. Once this change took place, relationships
between the School Committee and administration improved. According to Mr. Peirce, having this stable relationship, with everyone committed to the same goal, would have greatly assisted the transition process to the new region.

New Building Project

The cost of renovating the new building well exceeded the price of building new construction. The process would have also been longer, estimated at over six years, and cause disruption to the students and staff of the high school as relocation would need to occur in order to renovate. These were the major reasons why Mr. Peirce was an advocate to build a new facility, once regionalization passed. He recalls, “I would say, at first, I thought that renovating the existing building was a better way to go, in part, because of the historical character of the 1936 building. As I heard more about it, the cost and disruption were very negative components to the idea of renovating. The site also permitted to constructing the new facility while the old building continued to function.”

As was the case with the regionalization process, having an administration in place that was against the regionalization, and subsequent new facility, projects was a deterrent to the process. “We had a superintendent who was not really fully engaged in the design process and a brand new principal [Dr. Jahmal Mosley] who became responsible. Having an administration in place for a while who knows the school, curriculum, strategic plan, and knows what they want for the next five, ten, fifteen years is in the best position to design a new high school. I think we did very well under the circumstances.”
Mr. Peirce cites getting the debt exclusion vote to pass was the biggest challenge to the process. Several public meetings were held to discuss funding the new $82.5 million facility. The Building Committee was committed to being transparent with regard to showing what would be reimbursable by the MSBA and what would need to be funded by the two towns. One portion of the budget that would not be reimbursable was the athletic facilities. Mr. Peirce remembers, "We tried to make it clear that they were important to include but wouldn't be reimbursable. It was possible that the community would not be supportive, but they did [support the athletic facilities]." There were also town concerns that needed to be addressed. Mr. Peirce named two main areas of concern were interest costs of the bond process and competition for space inside the facility:

> It was difficult to project what interest costs of the bond process would be. At the time we were doing this, interest rates were very low. Concern that interest rates would jump up during the construction process [were legitimate]. When we made presentations, we made conservative estimates in the three to four percent range. Interest rates have continued to remain below historical averages so we have been fortunate that we have been able to issue interest rates very favorable. We are actually $5 million less than our guesstimates. That's not a reduction in cost of the project but a savings in interest cost over 20-25 years.

The second issue, space dedication within the facility, was dealt with through multiple groups. A subcommittee was established to deal with space allocation; however,
consensus could not always be reached within the subcommittee. “There were strong advocates for the art program seeking to ensure they got their fair share of space,” commented Mr. Peirce. There have also been issues with subcontractor performance. “Nothing that impacts quality of work but it created bumps in the road,” stated Mr. Peirce. For example, he commented that the turf field was delivered late and tile installation did not occur within the prescribed time. When dealing with the MSBA, bidding occurred and the lowest amount bid has to be awarded with any subcontracts over a certain amount. “All [issues] have been covered or time has passed or been compensated but in certain limited areas, things could have gone more smoothly,” said Mr. Peirce.

As of May, 2016, the project is nearing completion, with only athletic fields at the front of the building still needing attention. Mr. Peirce is pleased with the final results of the building:

*It is a great educational resource and a resource to the community.*

*I am pleased with the outcome. As far as regionalization, I have no second thoughts that regionalization was the best approach from an educational view. I think we have an excellent Superintendent [Jeffrey Schoonover] and a good high school administration. Everything is coming together.*

He believes that other communities that are looking to build a new facility can learn from the experiences of the Somerset Berkley Regional School District. He warns that schools should be selective when deciding who belongs on their building committee:
People should not be there as honorary positions. [Having people
on the committee] who bring knowledge and experience in the realm
of construction, and contract negotiation is important. We've had
people on the committee who work in the construction industry
and they were an invaluable source of information. I would
discourage having people there just by virtue of longstanding
members of the community or School Committee who just want
to be there to have their name on the committee.

Looking to the future, Mr. Peirce was visibly excited by the possibilities that are available
to the students of Somerset and Berkley because of the new facility:

I'm hoping we can begin to focus on really innovative things.

Implementing stronger Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM
programs, higher participation in Advanced Placement (AP) classes (particularly
the sciences), we need to bring a much greater level of sophisticated technology
into the curriculum like computer software and coding. I would also like to see us
enhance our foreign language offerings. I think students need to be made aware
that they are living in a much more global economy. These are things we should
be thinking about while doing everything else we do.
Julie Ramos-Gagliardi

Regionalization was a no brainer, primarily because of education. We had a building that was no longer serving its purposes. Berkley clearly stated publically that they wanted ownership with our schools. [Without regionalization] we wouldn’t offer the rich programs we do for our students.

Introduction

Julie Ramos-Gagliardi is a stay-at-home mother of two sons. She resides in the town of Somerset with her husband, Nick. With a background in public relations, she joined the PTO in the mid-2000’s when her sons were in elementary school. When regionalization first started being discussed, she was a member of the Somerset Advisory Council. In 2008, the Somerset School Committee announced that it was putting a regional planning board together to investigate regionalizing at the high school level. There was a town meeting held to establish the board. It was decided that the planning board would consist of six members, three residents of Somerset and three residents of Berkley. A letter of interest would need to be submitted to the Town of Somerset by anyone interested in participating. Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi submitted her letter and was selected to participate.

The first meeting of the regional planning board was held in August 2009. At that meeting, the six members reviewed roles and course of action and Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi was elected chairperson of the committee. Joseph Quinn, of Somerset, was elected vice chairman and Jennifer Nawrocki, of Berkley, was elected secretary. This board worked closely with the Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (DESE) as well as the Massachusetts Association for Regional Schools to look at all the
financial aspects pertaining to regionalization at the high school level. As chair, Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi set meeting agendas and acted as the go between for DESE and the towns of Somerset and Berkley. Dr. Stephen Hemmen, the director of regional schools for the State of Massachusetts, acted as advisor to the group and provided samples of regional agreements for the board’s review.

Regionalization

With Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi’s background in public relations, she knew the importance of communicating with the towns of Somerset and Berkley and keeping the process transparent. She stated, “We wanted feedback from the two communities. We wanted to hear what the concerns were. We held a series of forums in Somerset and Berkley. We also went to the schools, the Council on Aging, and the two Boards of Selectmen to give an overview of our findings, gather feedback and draft our initial plan.”

In 2010, immediately after the vote to establish the region, the interim regional school committee was formed. One of the main goals of this committee was to establish the building committee and focus on the new building. The interim school committee requested a letter of interest, for anyone interested in serving on the building committee. Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi submitted her name to be a part of this committee and was approved. Richard Fenstemaker, of Somerset, was elected chairman of this committee. Robert Anetil, of Berkley, was selected vice-chairman of the committee. As the Somerset School Committee and Superintendent Medeiros had not expressed support for regionalization or the new building, the building committee was unsure how much support they would get to post and hold meetings. Therefore, Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi was
elected as temporary secretary. Six years later, she still holds this position. She also chaired the Communications Subcommittee for the new building.

Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi described the process to regionalization from a clinical perspective. By 2008, the town desperately needed a new school. Berkley was also writing a proposal to the MSBA for its own junior/senior high school. This meant that Somerset stood to lose twenty-five percent of its student population. She recalled:

\[ \text{From attending school committee meetings, my belief was that} \]
\[ \text{Somerset School Committee already had a preconceived notion} \]
\[ \text{that regionalization didn't make sense. Prior to our board even} \]
\[ \text{getting on its feet, they [school committee] went out and hired outside consultants} \]
\[ \text{to do financial analysis for different models of regionalization.} \]
\[ \text{They were negative. We had a lot of outcry from the Somerset School Committee} \]
\[ \text{because they were banking on the fact that the money wasn't} \]
\[ \text{going to work. [On the regional planning board], we looked} \]
\[ \text{at data and crunched numbers. We are the only region in the} \]
\[ \text{State that developed our own formula. Joe Quinn gets a lot of the credit for this} \]
\[ \text{formula. We took the foundation budget and subtracted local budget. That gives you Chapter 70 money. Our budget is over and above foundation budget so we took what is above the budget and split that per pupil. For us, it} \]
\[ \text{came as close as we could to having a moving target.} \]

She commends the hard work of many individuals for why regionalization passed despite the opposition from the School Committee. “George Kelley, of Berkley, Joe Quinn and I
did a lot of crunching of numbers. Jackie Machamer headed the Berkley Education Association and got the word out for people to learn about the process and help pass it with the two towns.” She states that many of the townspeople of Somerset had to get over preconceived notions of what they thought regionalization meant and, instead, look at the data and reality of the situation. Persistency was also a key factor in getting regionalization to pass. She recalled, “groups of residents campaigned against [regionalization] with misinformation in both towns. Every time we heard the negative, we campaigned against it. We’d get feedback and we would respond.”

Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi remained steadfast in her belief that regionalization was the only plausible solution for the two towns to acquire their desired goal—namely a high school that belonged to both towns with state-of-the-art technologies and infrastructure. If she could go back in time, and do the process over again, she would increase the size of the regional planning board. She commented, “It was a lot of work for six people. I would get a clearer picture of what we were going to do from the start. I would also have hoped for more support from the Somerset School Committee and School Department.”

New Building Project

According to Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi, the only way to acquire a state-of-the-art facility was to build a new school. “MSBA would give no money to renovate. We would only get the level of reimbursement we would need if we went with the new model school. It allowed for the opportunity for the new building to build on this side. Therefore, the old building wouldn’t be a factor.” The most difficult part of the process was, from her perspective, the stance of the previous administration:
When we went to visit other schools, direction was provided by the superintendent. Initially, we had an interim superintendent [Dr. Hemmen] whose only goal was to start the process and leave. So building specs were laid out based on existing programs. It didn’t look to the future. We could have and should have looked to the future not focus on what was currently in place.

If she could do the process over again, she would start with the planning of the building committee:

There should have been a visioning process ahead of time with a long-term strategic plan. Teachers and administrators should have been involved and asked the question “We are going to build a building. What should we put in the building?” Someone on staff should be a key leader. There was a lack of vision and participation on district personnel. We had a new principal and a superintendent [Medeiros] who didn’t want to be there. People who were not directly in the school made decisions. That will have implications in the long run.

She cites the best part of the process occurring in the present time. She claims, “as much as it was a battle to get support, the community is happy.” She also commends her regional planning board and building committee members for their hard work and dedication to the process. She states, “working with Stephanie Field [building committee member], Richard Fenstermaker, John Gallagher [building committee member] and Nick Romano [building committee] was a wonderful experience and we accomplished so much. It was an A list committee.”
Thomas Lynch

The best part of the process for me was everyone working together and seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. They knew it had to be done and just pulled together. I enjoyed being superintendent because of that. Staff and administration were exceptional. And the kids were too. With every brick they saw getting laid; they saw the new school and the future going up. The teachers, administrators and kids kept plugging along. It was remarkable.

Introduction

Mr. Lynch was hired as the Interim Superintendent for the Somerset Berkley Regional School District after the district decided to not renew Superintendent Richard Medeiros’ contract in 2011. He participated in the regionalization planning process as superintendent of Berkley K-8 School District and was superintendent throughout most of the new building project.

Mr. Lynch grew up in a family of educators. His father and grandfather were both superintendents—in Middleborough and Norwood, respectively. He has two brothers who also hold school leadership positions in the state of Massachusetts.

Prior to being hired as Interim Superintendent for the Somerset Berkley Regional School District, he was an Assistant Principal, Associate Principal and Principal in the Wrentham School District for almost two decades. In the mid-2000’s he was hired as the Berkley K-8 superintendent. At this time, he was charged by the members of that town to find a permanent home for the secondary students of the town. Although all neighboring towns were willing to tuition, at the time, none were willing to regionalize. A feasibility
committee was formed to research the ability of Berkley to build their own school. At the end of this study, a statement of interest for a junior/senior Berkley secondary school was written to the MSBA. The MSBA ruled that Berkley should complete a regionalization assessment. Meetings were established with the Somerset Superintendent, however, the idea of regionalization was not well-received by the superintendent nor the Somerset School Committee. According to Mr. Lynch, “the MSBA said to both towns you won’t get your new high school without [regionalizing]. They held us both hostages, so to speak. The MSBA said that an ideal high school was for around 1,000 students and the two towns together represented that number.”

Regionalization

At the onset of the regionalization process, Mr. Lynch was superintendent of the K-8 Berkley School District and his students tuitioned into, then, Somerset High School. He recalls, “I was for regionalizing. Mr. Medeiros was not for it and was quite vocal. As time progressed, as we moved along, it came down to a vote. Both towns supported it, except a few vocal members from Somerset and Mr. Medeiros.”

Mr. Lynch saw the two towns benefitting from regionalization but for different reasons:

To Somerset, they wanted a new high school. The existing school was in disrepair. Systems were breaking down and some sections of the building were corroding. For Berkley, regionalization gave them a high school of their own and gave them a voice on the school committee. These are things they had never had at the high school level. From my perspective, it was in the best interest of Berkley
and their students to have their own high school as a sense of pride and belonging. I heard from a number of parents, at the time, that they felt their kids were treated as outsiders. Since regionalization, that has lessened.

However, Mr. Lynch was also cognizant of the potential challenges to regionalization. He notes that Berkley was aware from the beginning that their taxes would increase significantly with the establishment of a new facility. He also commented that Somerset faced their separate challenge to regionalization, “They [Somerset] were used to having all of the control. With regionalization they would lose some of that. When the regionalization agreement was formed, it had to be done, based on the population of the towns. That is why there are five Somerset School Committee members and two Berkley members.” Though mandated through the state, Mr. Lynch believes that Berkley should have even more say on the School Committee:

*If I could give advice to a town looking to regionalize, I would say try to give as much equal say on the school committees, regardless of population. Each town has a stake. I don’t believe it should be based on populations of towns or students. But that would have to be agreed upon by DESE, which is difficult. As it stands, the smaller towns still feel like the poor stepchild as far as having a voice and the larger town still wants to control everything.*
New Building Project

Mr. Lynch was a proponent of the new building facility from the beginning of the regionalization process. "No one influenced me about having a new high school. I'm all for new and improved, especially with 21st technology skills students need and staff need to teach correctly and effectively. I was all for the new school, especially with the state giving 66% reimbursement. They weren't giving us anything to renovate." He specified clear areas of disrepair and corrosion in the old building as reasons why it needed to be demolished. The old facility did not have the capabilities to handle 21st century technology. The boiler system did not function properly resulting in some parts of the building being cold, while other parts of the building were over eighty degrees on the same day. Air quality systems were also broken and water leaked into the building, particularly in the gymnasium. He added that there were also parts of the building that were completely condemned and falling down. Renovation, he claimed, would be very costly, if not impossible.

As the Superintendent in Berkley, as well as Somerset-Berkley, throughout the process, his commitment to his students and this community is evident in all his decision-making. He cites the strongest reason to acquire a new building for Berkley was to have a school to call their own. Although the regionalization acquired a state-of-the-art high school, he is mindful of the fact that it negatively impacts funding at the K-8 level. Funding is taken away in both communities at this level. But in his opinion, "the facility was worth it," and both communities have to work to maintain levels of service at all academic levels.
His comments on the process are all positive and, he admits, he would not do anything differently.

*Everyone was outstanding. Skanska and Owner Project Manager, Dan Tavares, did a magnificent job. Mr. Fenstemaker was an extremely effective building committee chairman. The library, cafeteria, classrooms, band rooms, auditorium are spectacular. I wouldn’t change the process at all. Having a building committee of twenty-three people can bog things down.*

*But other than a few minor issues, they were effective and cooperative with each other. [The building] was built with people with good things in mind. No one had a hidden agenda with what they wanted in the building. There were people from different avenues involved: educators, blue collar workers who knew about building, engineers, plumbers that were able to look at documents and give viewpoints that I wouldn’t have had as an educator.*

His only advice to a community looking to regionalize would be to find a site for the new facility away from the existing facility. The distraction and noise pollution caused by the creation of the new facility steps away from the old one, and then conversely, the demolition of the old building could be avoided if the land were in two different areas of town. As Superintendent of Berkley, he is proud to have been an integral part in a building project that will provide a 21st century, state-of-the-art education to the current and future students he sends to the Somerset Berkley Regional School District each year.
David Lanczycki

It’s all about the students. Providing opportunities for dreams to come true. Inspiration, building skills, becomes the leaders and members of society that we all want to see. The building allows us the opportunity to get there but it takes the people to truly get there. Trust in the expertise of our faculty. The possibilities are endless.

Introduction

David Lanczycki is the current principal of Somerset Berkley Regional High School having held the position for the past two years. Hired by Mr. Lynch, Interim Superintendent of Schools, he took on the role as principal during the summer of transition for the school community and has been the only principal to serve in the new facility. However, prior to this role, he has been a member of the Somerset and Somerset Berkley School Districts, in some capacity, since 2000. A graduate of Somerset High School, Class of 1993, he taught in Attleboro High School for two years before becoming a math teacher at Somerset High School in 2000. Since 2000, he has transitioned from teacher, to math Content Coordinator, overseeing the Math Department, Assistant Principal and, in July 2014 was named principal of Somerset Berkley Regional High School.

Regionalization

As Assistant Principal, Mr. Lanczycki was not formally involved in the regionalization process. At this point, meetings were limited to the superintendent and principal. He does note that he did have an informal role, “I tended to be a liaison to the staff. There were a lot of questions, animosity, and fear on regionalization and what it would mean. I
was in a position to have a little more information. My role was to put the staff at ease and guide them through that time.” Once the former principal, Robert Pineault announced retirement, Mr. Lanczycki spent a great deal of time with Dr. Stephen Hemmen. Dr. Hemmen recognized that Mr. Lanczycki would be the only member of the school-based administration to remain with the district upon regionalization so many informal conversations regarding the process ensued. Mr. Lanczycki felt he was able to “pick his brain” regarding the pros and cons of regionalization. He was then able to take accurate information to staff that were being bombarded with information, some of which was true and some was not. For example, they would hear the negative costs of regionalization coming from the superintendent and School Committee but would then hear a different version of cost analysis from Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi and the regionalization committee. This was all being discussed in the local newspapers and informally in hallways. People were unsure of who to trust but Mr. Lanczycki felt he had a positive rapport with the staff and that they tended to listen to what he had to say.

From his perspective, regionalize was necessary well before it actually occurred based on the need for the new facility.

*The old building was in decrepit shape due to the lack of forethought of our forefathers and mothers. The building was reprehensible and this was the only way to get a new building.*

*The building stopped being safe for students and staff to be there years before we actually moved out of the facility. If there was another option to get a new building that would have been explored. But this was seen as the only option.*
Opposition to the new building came from a place of tradition rather than practicality. “Somerset had a harder time with the process [than Berkley],” he claims. To some townspeople, the old building was their history and they had a hard time giving up the past, even though most people had not since been back inside the building since their high school days. He explained, “some saw it as an opportunity to modernize and push our school forward. Some thought the bricks and mortar contained their memories and if they were no longer there, the memories wouldn’t be either. It became more of a fight between modern and traditional Somerset.” Mr. Lanczycki recalls that the only issue in Berkley was convincing the people that they would be able to afford the process and ultimately the new facility. This was relatively easy due to a lower upfront cost and higher long term cost. The long term costs are now beginning to hit the town in the form of real estate tax increases.

If a town was looking to regionalize, Mr. Lanczycki has a few things for them to keep in mind. First, he wishes that those leading the regionalization process had more trust and asked for more input from the staff. Asking staff to sit in on the regional planning committee and later the building committee would have allowed for their expertise and knowledge of what is happening inside the walls of the schools to be exposed, understood and kept at the forefront of decision-making. Explaining “what it meant to them, the truths rather than reading it in the newspapers, would have been better.” He recalls that this had a great deal to do with the fact that Central Office was against regionalization and was not cooperating with the process. Conversations being had with staff, via conversations with the superintendent of schools as well as the school committee, were that regionalization was “never going to pass.” Yet, each time it passed overwhelmingly.
“It solidified a notion that I have had for a long time which was the vocal members of the town were actually the minority. There is a silent majority who tend to see things in a different light and who supported regionalization, the new facility, and the schools.”

Next, he urges towns to take their emotional ties to the past out of the equation and concentrate on the facts. Somerset “had to give up a little of their possession [ultimately, part of the school], to get this done. Having to share a toy when they never had to before, but that was the deal. That was the penance for not doing what needed to be done to the building for the past thirty to forty years.”

He also commented that disseminating accurate information is paramount. During this process, inaccuracies were being spoken as truths and people were unsure who to believe. This led to a culture of fear that “five years later, we are still working to break free of as it is ingrained in some of our faculty and staff.” For example, when a comment is made by the administration at a faculty meeting regarding a change or concern, individuals will come to administrators for clarification and or assurance that the change is truly going to occur. “There is fear ingrained in these people and it will take quite some time to change this culture. We are starting to do this, but we have a long way to go.”

Finally, partly in jest, Mr. Lanczycki cited his best piece of advice for a school looking to regionalize, “Make sure you are getting an $83 million building. It’s a great conversation starter. It gets people talking about education and that is always a good thing!”
New Building Project

During the new building project, Mr. Lanczycki had many roles. He participated in a number of subcommittees, including the technology and communications subcommittees, attended multiple meetings for advisory purposes, helped plan the space summary and was present in many meetings to provide input. As the only member of the administrative team who had been in the district for more than five years, he had a distinct and important perspective with regard to where the district had been and expectations moving forward. As new administrators could incorporate new ideas to the district, Mr. Lanczycki was the only administrator who knew the people and could, in essence, make predictions, or in some cases provide evidence, as to why an idea would or would not work. In some circumstances, the idea had been tried and did not work. From an administrative perspective, he was the sole keeper of the history of Somerset High School as the new principal, Dr. Jahmal Mosley, assistant principal, Ms. Susan Brelsford, and Interim Superintendent Thomas Lynch, had not been working in the district prior to regionalization.

As he ties the new facility directly to the reasons for regionalization, most of his reasoning for why the towns needed the new building are the same as why they needed to regionalize. The old building was a safety hazard and well beyond repair. It was not ADA compliant and parts of the building were condemned. The infrastructure could not support technology and the cost to renovate was beyond the estimated cost of the new building. Mr. Lanczycki was a supporter of the new building, virtually, since he was a student at Somerset High School:
I was right on board. I didn’t care what needed to be done, we just needed a new building. I had grown up going through that poor facility. We were embarrassed bringing others in, knowing others were laughing at our leaking roof, our horrible building conditions.

He recalls the best part of the new building project as the last:

The best part of the process was watching the kids’ and staffs’ faces as they walked in on the first day. Watching the pride as they walked in with their chest out. Watching students when opposing teams/music groups come in, virtually in awe.

Watching naysayers from the town come in for a tour and have nothing but positive things to say. It was the reboot our school needed and it is what we are trying to building momentum off of. Before there were shoulders down and no one would wear shirts without school name on it because they were not proud. Now, students and staff hold their heads high. They want to wear clothing, hats, and visors with the “SB” logo on it. These are things that didn’t happen—not in years—not in decades.

Having worked inside the new facility for the past two years, Mr. Lanczycki now looks back at things that could have been done differently. He concludes that more people on the building committee needed to be educators who had a stake in the outcomes of the building they were creating. “There was a lot of oversight to things in the building that could have been avoided if people inside the building were on it. Decisions were not
always made on an educational basis.” For example, staff members were asked for input regarding the furniture that would be placed in the building. Staff voted on the types of desks and chairs they wanted in specific classrooms in the building. In the end, the building committee ignored the staff requests in an effort to save costs and ordered what they perceived as being adequate. Looking at the make-up of the twenty-two person building committee, Mr. Lanczycki also notes that none of the members are teachers that still work in the building.

He also does not take lightly the difficulties that transitioning from one building to another entailed. “We moved into the new facility in the middle of July and had to open the building by the end of August. To say the least, it was hectic,” he notes. He cites Dan Tavares, project manager, and his associates, as excellent partners who were always available to address concerns. Yet, as the project moved forward, subcontractors and some architects became more difficult to deal with. Arguments ensued regarding who was responsible for completing specific tasks as minute details had to be worked out and, ultimately paid for if the job was completed subpar or incorrectly. “The entire project was a lot more friendly in the beginning that at the end and, as we moved in, there were more and more flaws of subcontractors and decision makers that became more apparent.”

If Mr. Lanczycki could give advice to a community looking to build a new facility, and he has as school systems have contacted him on a regular basis throughout the past two years, he would separate his recommendations into three components. First be as transparent and open as possible. “Make sure you are letting everyone [teachers, students, families, taxpayers, administrators] understand the rationale behind why things are happening.” Next, he suggests schools create a building committee that includes a
majority of people from within the organization and supplement with experts from across fields, instead of vice versa. He notes that while there were plumbers and people who understood the inner workings of construction, contracts and the law on the committee, there was a lack of educators, specifically teachers, asked to participate on the committee. At one point, Mr. Lanczycki asked to become a member of the building committee and was denied being told that the principal was an adequate designee to speak for those in the school. According to Mr. Lanczycki, the principal was, in the end, the only member of the building committee who worked inside the facility on a daily basis.

Finally, Mr. Lanczycki’s last piece of advice is simply “Communicate, communicate, communicate.” Allowing all stakeholders to understand the rationale behind decisions, rather than muddy the waters with misinformation, is critical. This includes have stakeholders, from the top down, who are supportive and invested in the process. He states that this can be done via email, faculty meetings or voluntary meetings held after school for teachers and/or students and community members to ask questions and feel a part of the process.

As principal of Somerset Berkley Regional High School, Mr. Lanczycki hopes to be able to begin to concentrate less on what the walls of the new facility are made of and, instead, look to who is on the inside of the walls and working hard to allow them to achieve success. For him, true education falls in the hands of the teachers who touch the lives of their students on a regular basis. The building has provided the tools but the people inside the facility “are what motivate our students to achieve beyond their dreams.”
Jahmal Mosley

Success can be your downfall. Identify a leader and stick with that person to drives the successes, challenges and drawbacks.

Introduction

Dr. Jahmal Mosley became principal of Somerset Berkley Regional High School on July 1, 2010. He led the school throughout most of the new building project and left to become Assistant Superintendent in Sharon, Massachusetts in June, 2014. Before becoming principal, he was a Special Education teacher and then assistant principal in both an urban school and rural school setting. He came to Somerset Berkley from Brattleboro, Vermont. He recalls being the first principal of Somerset Berkley who was “an outsider coming into Somerset” who did not have loyalties to any townspeople or special interest groups in a town with strong political viewpoints.

Regionalization

Starting at the same time that region took effect, Dr. Mosley did not have any role or responsibilities during the road to regionalization. Hailing from Vermont, he also has little knowledge of the process as he did not live in the area at the time. He views this as a major reason why he was hired as the principal. He could run the school without political, “old boy network” ties that he feels others had trouble escaping. From an outsider’s perspective, Dr. Mosley saw the effects of regionalization on the two towns:

For Berkley, it was very practical. The new high school was a driving force. They had a longstanding relationship with
Somerset but this solidified the relationship. For Somerset, there were financial and practical pieces; Somerset couldn't house a school of 1,000 kids on their own. They needed Berkley. This was the only reason they regionalized. Somerset became Somerset Berkley. Some people didn't like that change. Berkley was an outsider and some townspeople wanted it to stay that way. To this day, Berkley does not use the high school the way Somerset does. This is based on location but also based on the expectations of the people of Somerset verses the people of Berkley. Berkley believes it is a school for the use of the students. Somerset believes it is their community building to utilize for multiple needs beyond the education of students.

Dr. Mosley's responsibilities during the new building project were vast and all encompassing. In addition to leading the faculty and student body of the new Somerset Berkley Regional High School, he was also put in charge of overseeing the new building, as the Superintendent [Medeiros] tended to take a back seat on attendance at meetings and input during the 2010-2011 school year. During this time he chaired the Furniture, Fixtures & Equipment (FF&E) and Technology Committees. He was a member of the Building Committee and attended weekly meetings around the project's progress. He was also the conduit between the Building Committee and the Content Coordinators at the building level. Content Coordinators oversee each academic department within the high school. He met with them and facilitated meetings with them and members of the FF&E to discuss their preferences for space within the new building. Content
Coordinators were encouraged by Dr. Mosley to look at the spaces inside the new facility and develop a plan that they would need to facilitate teaching and learning in the 21st century. Dr. Mosley encouraged the Content Coordinators to think big and “outside the box” and request what they needed to modernize their curriculum instead of what was necessarily dictated through the building plans. Unfortunately, Dr. Mosley and the Content Coordinators were often overridden by budgetary constraints, but, according to Dr. Mosley the conversations that were generated from this process stimulated each department to think and grow beyond where they were with their academic programming at the present time.

New Building Project

Dr. Mosley’s reasons for why the towns needed a new facility are very basic. According to him, the MSBA told the towns, “You’re going to get a reimbursement package if you guys can agree to work together. Somerset did not have the confidence in their Superintendent to get this done so the School Committee began working behind the scenes to do what needed to be done.” He credits the NEASC accreditation process as a driving force in the process. Somerset High School was on the verge of losing accreditation without updating their facility. This was fiscally the responsible way to get that done. In addition, according to Dr. Mosley, “the building was unsafe. It was not ADA approved. The programming at the school was dated and couldn’t go to the next level. A new building provided a conduit for the building to work more efficiently and for teachers to become innovators and move their teaching and assessment practices to the next level.”
Dr. Mosley enjoyed the process as he is always up for a good fight. “I love a good fight. I actually miss the fighting a little. I loved the criticisms and the debate. Sticking to one belief with people saying it wasn’t going to work, and then it does is always exciting. I love the challenge. I went through the process truly believing that Somerset Berkley could easily overtake all high schools in the Commonwealth. I believed in that and believed I could help make that happen.” He also praised the camaraderie and relationships formed during the process.

However great success can be accompanied by great strife and difficulty, according to Dr. Mosley. He does not shy away from the fact that there were many struggles and challenges along the way, particularly as the process progressed.

*The politics and costs would get in the way. People said it would cost too much. When you do something new in a community that didn’t start with a lot, it can be a detriment. Skeptics start coming on board saying, “the building isn’t big enough, it doesn’t have this or that.” People tried to put their own stamp on the building. People though they were the architects of success. Success breeds a sense of confidence and arrogance and that started to deteriorate things as time went on.*

He claims that as Somerset Berkley became a success, many people tried to jump on board and take responsibility for the successes.

*Success can be your downfall. When you have success you have to identify a lead singer and stick with that person to*
drive the successes, work on the challenges and deal with the drawbacks. We had success, we were a level one school. People from the outside started to think that what they did and said could tie into our successes. They didn’t pay attention to those of us in the school who were achieving the success. They didn’t give us credit. People started showing up to meetings and talking about things like technology based on what they read in a book or had their own vested interest in why we should acquire this or that technology. From my understanding, that still continues. Decisions for an organization should never be made based on individual benefits.

Recollecting on the entire process, Dr. Mosley has no regrets and would not change the process. Offering advice to other towns looking to build a new facility he suggests, “Find four or five people that know what they are doing and give them the freedom to do what they do. You have to have the right people doing the right things.” He credits Julie Ramos-Gagliardi with being “a great face” for the project. He commends her presence, her ability to fundraise and her communication skills as a great asset to the project. “She was the spokesperson and the project needed one person that people would listen to and believe.” He also credits Richard Peirce for his leadership and negotiating skills. According to Dr. Mosley, “Rick Peirce was able to stand up to criticism and navigate the waters in the beginning of the project. I’m not sure anyone else would have done what he did. And he liked a good fight. We didn’t always see eye to eye, but I think he enjoyed the arguments, the debates and was in it for the right reasons.”
Though Dr. Mosley has moved on, he looks back on his time at Somerset Berkley Regional High School with fondness. He also has a vested interest in the future of the school as he, his wife, and three children reside in the town. He has high expectations for the new facility that he helped build.

*I hoped that the school would be a flagship of the Commonwealth. I hoped that people would come to our district to do their research in terms of what innovation and effective technology integration looks like. I hoped that faculty members would never be content with mediocrity. And I hoped that people would be happy with the accomplishments of the new school and that the budget is done with fidelity. The needs of the school should be determined and the budget built around it, not the other way around.*

**Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to convey the thoughts and perceptions of five key participants in the regionalization and new building projects in Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts. Richard Peirce, Chairman of the Somerset Berkley Regional School Committee, Julie Ramos-Gagliardi, Chairperson of the regional planning board, building committee member as well as Vice-Chairperson of the School Committee during the building project and Thomas Lynch, interim superintendent of SBRSD during the new building project as well as superintendent of the Berkley K-8 district for the past fifteen years, provided insight to the regionalization and new building initiatives from a district and townsperson perspective. David Lanczycki, former Assistant Principal of SBRHS and Somerset High School during the two endeavors, and Jahmal Mosley, principal of
SBRHS during the new building project provided their perceptions on these two endeavors at the building level. In the next chapter, connections will be made between the narratives and themes will be established pertaining to regionalization and new building projects based on the perceptions and opinions of these key stakeholders.
Chapter Five: Implications & Recommendations

Introduction

Chapter Five presents the analysis and interpretation of the participant narratives, presented in Chapter Four, through a number of thematic conclusions. This research project examined the regionalization and construction of a new high school facility for the suburban, middle-class towns of Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how two communities came together to effect changes that resulted in a new state-of-the-art facility for the residents of the two towns. The research identifies ways in which other Massachusetts communities can unite and, if need be, regionalize to advocate for new facilities, especially in times of tight economic school budgets. In order to complete a historical narrative of the timeline of events that led to the regionalization and subsequent new $82.5 million building, and to ascertain the positive experiences and pitfalls perceived by contributors, the following research questions were posed:

1. How can Somerset Berkley Regional High School’s regionalization and new facility creation serve as a model for other communities in Massachusetts facing similar dilemmas?

2. Why did the communities of Somerset and Berkley decide to regionalize?
   a. Who was responsible for organizing this effort?
   b. How was this effort organized?
   c. Why were other options, such as remodeling the old facility, not feasible?
3. How did community, political, and school leaders organize to complete the regionalization and new facilities projects?
   a. Who were the principal individuals who organized the effort?
   b. What was the motivation for these individuals to get involved?

In Chapter One, a brief history of regionalization in the United States was presented, with a particular focus on the State of Massachusetts as well as a historical timeline of events for the regionalization process of the Somerset Berkley Regional School District and the subsequent new building project for Somerset Berkley Regional High School. In Chapter Two, a comprehensive review of the literature concerning the history of school consolidation and creation of new school facilities in the United States was discussed. Chapter Three summarized the interpretivist paradigm (Cohen & Manion, 1994), the role of narrative inquiry in this qualitative study (Kamler, 1998), theoretical frameworks, the participants of the study, sampling procedures, procedures used for data collection, expected respondent rate, and the method in which data was reported. Chapter Four detailed the narratives of five key figures in the regionalization and new building process: Richard Peirce, Chairman of the Somerset Berkley Regional School Committee; Julie Ramos-Gagliardi, Chairperson of the Regional Planning Committee; Thomas Lynch, Superintendent of the Somerset Berkley Regional School District during the new building project; David Lanczycki, current principal of Somerset Berkley Regional High School and Assistant Principal during the regionalization and new building project; and Jahmal Mosley, first principal of Somerset Berkley Regional High School during most of the new building project.
Chapter Five explores the findings of these narrative inquiries and place them within the context of literature on the regionalization and new facility processes. Implications of the study for educational research, practice, and policy are then presented. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research that could build on these findings.

**Meaning of the Findings**

Through the research questions posed in this study, an understanding of how Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts navigated a regionalization and new building facility project in less than a decade was investigated.

According to the literature, there are benefits and drawbacks to regionalization. In Alvarez, Loucagos, and Rashid’s study (2010), the benefits of consolidation or regionalization were found to include the reduction of expenditures, more money to spend on highly qualified teaching staff, and the ability to offer an expanded curriculum:
### Table 1: Benefits of Regionalization/Non-Regionalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits of Regionalizing District</th>
<th>Benefits of Not Regionalizing District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fewer classes are dropped due to low enrollment</td>
<td>Communities keep their sense of identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing of curriculum/activities</td>
<td>Smaller student-to-teacher ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures are reduced because:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- maintaining duplicate facilities becomes unnecessary</td>
<td>More opportunities for relationships to be created between students and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fewer teachers need to be hired</td>
<td>teachers, and between faculty members and administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- fewer administrators are required</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More money to spend on highly qualified teachers</td>
<td>Higher administrative productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher test scores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower per-pupil spending</td>
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</tbody>
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However, according to all but one participant, the negative drawbacks to regionalization were minimized, as Berkley had been a part of Somerset High School, on a tuitioned basis, for over twenty-five years. If anything, according to Mr. Lynch and Mr. Lanczycki, the community of Berkley was given a greater sense of identity by owning a piece of the high school and seats on the School Committee after the regionalization process commenced. This was a unique situation that these two communities faced. As Mr. Peirce stated, “It wasn’t a matter of integrating students. Faculty and administration didn’t need to be integrated. We didn’t have statutory agreements or collective bargaining agreements that had to be integrated. Two communities with separate high schools would have faced those issues.”
Focusing on Persuasion Theory (McGaan, 2009), it was discovered that over-communication, the belief in transparency of information and bringing people together for the sole purpose of creating a new facility were primary reasons why this school district was able to accomplish its goals, including acquiring backing from both towns to get the project funded and completed.

According to McGaan (2009), in order for a message to be effectively communicated and an audience persuaded, the credibility and reputation of the communicator, the order and completeness of the statements, and the announcement of conclusions must all be taken into account. If an audience perceives the delivery of information to be credible, if the order of statements is easily understood and detailed in approach, and if the announcement of conclusions can be seen implicitly by the stakeholders, the audience will be persuaded to believe a message. Conversely, if the target audience does not find the delivery of information to be from a credible source, if the order and completeness of statements is confusing and vague, and/or if the intended outcomes cannot be easily seen or understood but must instead be proven to the audience, a targeted individual will not succumb to persuasion.

Persuasion only works if the purpose is realistic and takes into account the audience’s values, beliefs, motives, and attitudes. Persuasion can be effective in achieving the following main purposes (McGaan, 2009): 1.) creating uncertainty; 2.) reducing resistance; 3.) changing attitude; 4.) amplifying attitude; and 5.) gaining behavior.

Spearheaded by Julie Ramos-Gagliardi, the regionalization and new building project were supported by the towns based partially on persuasion. The Somerset High School
facility, owned by the town of Somerset, but utilized by the town of Berkley on a tutitioned basis, was in disrepair. Walls were falling down, 21st century technologies could not be supported, ADA guidelines were not met, and the boiler system and roof were failing. This, according to all participants in this study, was the impetus for change. Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi and the regionalization committee, by her own admittance, changed attitude by providing information to the townspeople using the newspapers as well as town forums and meetings to convey their information and counteract misinformation being given by the superintendent and former school committee. Their constant communication and insistence on transparency which was followed up by the building committee following their lead and continuing communication whenever possible, led to the towns of Somerset and Berkley voting to accept regionalization and the new facility.

Cook and Flay (1978) found that people who purposefully considered a message’s content demonstrated a longer-lasting attitude toward the change, while people who had little motivation and/or were given little time to interpret a message were typically not persuaded. In 1981, Petty and Cacioppo developed the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion that is based on how much mental process, or elaboration, on a topic is given to a participant. They deduced that persuasion will likely result from a person’s careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of an advocacy. During the road to regionalization and new building construction for the towns of Somerset and Berkley a constant onslaught of information, conveyed by the Regional Planning and Building Committee, offset the negativity from the Somerset Superintendent and the Somerset School Committee. According to Mrs.
Ramos-Gagliardi, every time a dissenting voice gave an opinion or misrepresentation of facts, the Regional Planning Committee and, then the Building Committee, would counter with their own information, Chapter 71 formula and the data-driven truths behind the project. According to her, Mr. Lynch and Mr. Peirce, the committees decided, from the beginning of the process, to be as upfront and transparent to the communities as possible in order to convey a truthful message to the people of the two towns. A “vocal minority,” in the words of current principal, Mr. Lanczycki, sought to quell that message but the “truth” and necessity of the regionalization process won the day. The two towns overwhelmingly supported both the regionalization and new building endeavors and led to the $82.5 million state-of-the-art facility that is in use today.

Multiple themes arose from this historical narrative study. Though participants were interviewed separately without any known discussion amongst them, regarding the questions or topics that would be asked, many consistencies were found between their beliefs regarding the regionalization and new facility projects.

“The existing school was in disrepair. Systems were breaking down and some sections of the building were corroding.” (Lynch, 2016)

In the tough economic times of today, taking on a multi-million dollar capital expenditure project is difficult for any community. In the town of Somerset, where the local tax-base power plants were closing, being faced with a high school facility in need of complete transformation, or a new facility altogether was a daunting task. The MSBA had made it clear that, without regionalization, the State of Massachusetts would provide no funding for a new facility for either town. In addition, regardless of regionalization, no monies
would be provided by the state for a renovation of the current facility. All participants agree that the need for a new facility, coupled with the financial backing from the MSBA, were the driving forces behind the decision to regionalize Somerset and Berkley. In fact, most participants could not discuss the idea of regionalization without discussing the new building. In essence, regionalization caused the new facility project to occur and the two ideas truly went hand in hand for the two towns. In order for regionalization to occur, Somerset had to give up some control over their school system and school committee and Berkley had to take a more active financial role in the tax funding for the high school. In jest, when asked his advice for towns seeking to regionalize, current principal David Lanczycki remarked, “get an $83 million building [at the end of the process]. It’s a great conversation starter.” In actuality, the new building was the driving force behind the regionalization process and is a testament to the hard work and dedication of all the people, supporters and critics, who worked on this process over the past decade.

“I think students need to be made aware that they are living in a much more global economy. These are things we should be thinking about while doing everything else we do.” (Peirce, 2016)

All participants agreed that the outcome of a new $82.5 million building, with state-of-the-art technologies and resources was, ultimately, the greatest part of the process of regionalization and new building. For those individuals present in the building at the completion of the new facility, the faces of the true stakeholders of this project, the students of Somerset and Berkley, was the culmination of a decade of hard work and dedication to the process. As current principal, Mr. Lanczycki stated, “The best part of the process was watching the kids’ and staff’s’ faces as they walked in on the first day.
Watching the pride as they walked in with their chest out.” Mr. Lynch, interim superintendent during the building project and current superintendent of the Berkley K-8 district added, “From my perspective, it was in the best interest of Berkley and their students to have their own high school as a sense of pride and belonging. I heard from a number of parents, at the time, that they felt their kids were treated as outsiders. Since regionalization [and the new facility], that has lessened.”

Many participants in the survey hope to now utilize the facility to move the students and staff forward in terms of curriculum, instruction and assessment. The old facility could not support 21st century technologies while the new building comes equipped with state-of-the-art technology within each classroom. Mr. Peirce hopes to focus on innovative projects such as implementing a strong STEM program and higher participation in Advanced Placement courses, particularly in the areas of math and science. Mr. Lanczycki wants to focus on working with the teachers to “modernize” the curriculum and make updates utilizing technology as a tool in the classroom. Due to the old facility, teachers were not accustomed to incorporating technology into their instructional as assessment classes. Moving into the new facility, we have gone from “the Flintstones to the Jetsons” and Mr. Lanczycki seeks to utilize the tools that the new facility provides to “motivate our students to achieve beyond their dreams.” Though not still professionally affiliated with SBRHS, Dr. Mosley reiterated his hopes for the new building stating, “A new building provided a conduit for the building to work more efficiently and for teachers to become innovators and move their teaching and assessment practices to the next level. I hoped that faculty members would never be content with mediocrity. And I
hoped that people would be happy with the accomplishment of the new school and that the budget is done with fidelity.”

As the school has just completed its second year in the new facility, it cannot be accurately determined if it has had a positive impact on student achievement. School-based administrators all agree that more professional development is needed for teachers to learn how to incorporate the new technologies present in the facility into their instruction and assessment practices. There are also plans to incorporate a 1:1 initiative, in which each student will be provided their own laptop to be utilized in classes throughout the day by the 2017-2018 school year. This will require further professional development. The determination as to whether the new facility has had an impact on student achievement can not be made until the school has had more time to acquire data on academic success, graduation rates, standardized testing results, discipline and attendance.

“Find four or five people that know what they are doing and give them to freedom to do what they do. You have to have the right people doing the right things.”

(Mosley, 2016)

Throughout their interviews, all participants praised the hard work and dedication of the regional planning committee and the building committee for the success of the project. Mr. Peirce and Dr. Mosley praised the communication skills and leadership of Julie Ramos-Gagliardi as chairperson of the regional planning committee and member of the building committee. Mr. Peirce states, “I can’t say enough of Mrs. [Julie] Gagliardi’s leadership for that study. People from Berkley and Somerset who served were extremely
hard working and committed and came up with the best agreement they could.
Communication was important.” Dr. Mosley reiterated this stating, “She was the
spokesperson and the project needed one person that people would listen to and believe.”
Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi further praised the regional planning board stating that “George
Kelley, of Berkley, Joe Quinn, [Jennifer Nawrocki], and I did a lot of crunching
numbers” in order to provide Chapter 71 data that led to the passing of the regionalization
votes in the two towns.

Dr. Mosley further praised Mr. Peirce, as the Chairman of the School Committee stating,
“Rick Peirce was able to stand up to criticism and navigate the waters in the beginning of
the project. I’m not sure anyone else would have done what he did.”

Both Mr. Lynch and Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi commended the work of Jackie Machamer
and the Berkley Education Association for communicating with the people of Berkley
during the regionalization process. They both credit her and the association with playing
a huge role in the public relations campaign that led to the passing of the votes for
regionalization within the two towns.

Finally, all participants credit Richard Fensternaker, and the building committee, for
their dedication to the process. Mr. Peirce stated, “We’ve had people on the committee
who work in the construction industry and they were an invaluable source of
information.” Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi further commented, “working with Stephanie Field
[building committee member], Richard Fensternaker, John Gallagher [building
committee member] and Nick Romano [building committee], it was an A list committee.”
“Communicate, communicate, communicate.” (Lanczycki, 2016).

In conjunction with a dedicated team, all participants touched upon the importance of communicating to constituents throughout the process. “Making sure you are letting everyone understand the rationale behind why things are happening” is a critical part of the journey to regionalization and a new facility, according to Mr. Lanczycki. Though Mr. Lanczycki claimed that communication could have been internally better, with the teachers and staff within the walls of Somerset High School and, subsequently, SBRHS, he recognizes the impact that positive communication to the public had on the voting population. The “silent majority,” as he called those who voted for the regionalization of the two towns came through, as they always do, for the good of the schools. According to Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi, any time dissenters released information, or misinformation, regarding the processes or costs of regionalization and the new building, the regional planning committee and the building committee countered with information backed with research and data. This process was time consuming and, she advised, if she could repeat the process, she would create a larger regional planning committee to deal with the public relations and communication pieces of the process. “It was a lot for five people to take on.”
“There was a lack of vision and participation on district personnel. We had a new principal and a superintendent [Medeiros] who didn’t want to be there. People who were not directly in the school made decisions. That will have implications in the long run.” (Ramos-Gagliardi, 2016)

Almost all participants in this study cited a lack of support from the Somerset School Committee and former Superintendent Richard Medeiros as a major obstacle to the regionalization and new building projects. As Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi recollected:

_from attending school committee meetings, my belief was that Somerset School Committee already had a preconceived notion that regionalization didn’t make sense. Prior to [the regional planning] board even getting on its feet, they [school committee] went out and hired outside consultants to do financial analysis for different models of regionalization. They were negative._

Mr. Peirce affirmed Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi’s position, “We had a superintendent who was not really fully engaged in the design process and a brand new principal [Dr. Jahmal Mosley] who became responsible. Having an administration in place for a while who knows the school, curriculum, strategic plan, and knows what they want for the next five, ten, fifteen years is in the best position to design a new high school. I think we did very well under the circumstances.”

Having Berkley and their superintendent in support, also assisted the process, however, they did not have control of the School Committee or those commenting with misinformation to the local media. Mrs. Ramos-Gagliardi, assisted by Jackie Machamer
and the Berkley Education Association, launched their own campaign against what, she referred to, as “misinformation.” She recollected, “groups of residents campaigned against [regionalization] with misinformation in both towns. Every time we heard the negative, we campaigned against it. We’d get feedback and we would respond.”

Most participants referred to the negativity of the former superintendent and school committee as a major obstacle to the process. However, all seem optimistic about the current situation and their belief that the new regional district is moving forward. According to Mr. Peirce, “as far as regionalization, I have no second thoughts that regionalization was the best approach from an educational view. I think we have an excellent superintendent [Jeffrey Schoonover] and a good high school administration. Everything is coming together.”

**Recommendations Based on Findings**

Based on the interviews conducted, and coupled with the body of literature pertaining to school consolidation and regionalization, there is much that can be learned from the regionalization and new building processes of Somerset and Berkley, Massachusetts.

*Appreciation for Nostalgia*

It is important to note that the regionalization of Somerset and Berkley came with a unique set of circumstances and challenges that may not have occurred in other districts. For example research from Alvarez, Loucagos, and Rashid (2010) as well as David C. Thompson, a Kansas State University professor of educational leadership (Newberry, 2005), explain that community identity can be lost as well as a personal loss of history if a parent or other family members also attended the school. In the case of Somerset
Berkley Regional High School, residents of Berkley felt an increase in identity and connection to the school. Before regionalization, the town of Berkley was at the mercy of the decisions of the townspeople of Somerset, their school committee and its decision making for the education of their children. They did not have a direct say in the educational decision making for their high school students. After twenty-five years of students attending Somerset High School on a tuition basis, regionalization meant that students attended a school that had their town name incorporated into the name of the school. As part of the regional agreement, Berkley town residents hold two seats on the regional school committee and townspeople have a vote on school budgetary issues.

This did come at a loss for the town of Somerset, but the loss was one of personal feeling and identity. Somerset residents who attended Somerset High School and walked the hallways of the old facility felt a nostalgic tie to the facility and the old traditions of Somerset High School. Some felt that losing the old building, regardless of the infrastructure issues that plagued the facility, was akin to losing their identity, their memories and their high school experiences. Although this was difficult to understand for a non-graduate of Somerset High School or a teacher working in a building that was quite-literally falling down around him or her, these feelings had to be taken into consideration and addressed in order to move forward with the project. Incorporating events such as “Raiders Remember”, a one-night event held in the old facility in which alum were invited back to see the facility “one more time” before it was demolished, and asking alum to purchase bricks which were turned into a walkway at the foot of the flag pole in the front of the new facility, were ways to recognize the past while moving toward the future.
Inclusion of Stakeholders

Another unique circumstance for the communities of Somerset and Berkley was the limited experience within the school system possessed by the school administration at the onset of regionalization. Dr. Jahmal Mosley, principal, and Ms. Susan Brelsford, assistant principal, started their first day working in the district on the first day of regionalization. Only assistant principal, Mr. David Lanczycki, had been working in the district prior to this date. While the principal, by title, was invited to attend and sit on building committee meetings, the rest of the administration, as well as teachers and students, were not included in preliminary discussions regarding the building and, if asked, will concur that any commentary they did give was not necessarily listened to by the regional school committee and/or building committee. This was a point of frustration because many felt that those making decisions did not have an accurate picture of what was occurring on a day-to-day basis in classrooms from an educational perspective.

Establishment of a Vision

According to Julie Ramos-Gagliardi, more time should have been spent on a vision for where the school district is going from an educational perspective rather than just focus on building a school building. During the regionalization and new building processes, the school’s strategic plan and vision for the future was largely ignored. Subsequently, half a decade later, current administrators are attempting to design literacy, technology and STEAM plans as well as create a strategic plan for the future of the district. This comes after the creation of the school facility. Having a keen sense of the direction of the district could have played a key role in designing the layout and purposes of the spaces
within the building. For example, in 2016, a Future Ready Search meeting, involving parents, educators, community and business members came together to discuss the needs and expectations of students graduating from Somerset Berkley Regional High School. Conversations regarding the need for Advanced Placement Computer Science classes, internships and a focus on STEAM and STEAM related careers were at the forefront of discussions. Had these discussions taken place before the establishment of the current facility, perhaps space allocations could have been modified to meet the expectations and needs of the community.

In addition, educators and administrators could have been working on such plans while regionalization and building construction was occurring. As they were not directly involved in the building committee, a strategic planning committee, spearheaded by the school employees, may have been able to relay critical information to the building committee on the needs of the school in the years to come.

**Limitations**

A major limitation to this study was the relatively small number of participants that were interviewed. Of those participating, four currently remain in positions of leadership within the school district, which could contribute to guarded responses. Furthermore, one individual did not choose to participate in the study bringing the interview pool to five participants rather than the intended six participants.

A second limitation to this study was the concentration on one school district rather than multiple districts in an attempt to create a model for other school districts looking to regionalize and/or create a new facility. Somerset Berkley Regional School District had
a specific set of circumstances, unique to these two towns, which led to the successful completion of regionalization and a new facility. This is true of any community facing this situation. Looking at multiple districts, to ascertain their specific situations, and then, possibly triangulating that data to find similar themes, would be a benefit to this body of research and was a certain limitation to this study.

Another limitation in open-ended interviews is that though they create narratives in which quotes are acquired, responses can be difficult to code and aggregate (Stake, 1995). The findings of this study include generalizations that, while may be true of the towns of Somerset and Berkley, may not hold true for a different community.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In order to expand upon this research, from a historical narration perspective, more viewpoints (both in favor and against regionalization and the subsequent new facility project) could be investigated. Residents of both towns, with students taking advantage of the new facility, as well as those without personal stake in the new building, could be interviewed as well as current and former employees of the Somerset and Somerset Berkley Regional School Districts, including school committee members, superintendents, teachers and students.

The purpose of these interviews would be to garner a deeper perspective on the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the regionalization and new building endeavors and to seek a broader perspective of opinions and beliefs. Though some questions may need to be omitted based on interviewee, beliefs about the benefits and perceived pitfalls of these two processes could still be ascertained. An example would be a townsperson who was
not part of any committee work during either process, may not be privy or knowledgeable about the timeline of events during the regionalization or new building project, but may provide insight as to the information being provided to the public during these timeframes.

The secondary purpose of this study was for the towns of Somerset and Berkley to act as a model for other communities who may need to unite and, if need be, regionalize to advocate for new facilities in these times of tight economic school budgets. In order to enhance this research study in this area, it may be necessary to interview multiple communities who have regionalized over the past decade in Massachusetts, or perhaps the New England region, to discuss their perceived strengths and weaknesses of the processes. As Somerset and Berkley were in a unique position of having Berkley students attend Somerset High School on a tuitioned basis for twenty-five years before regionalization, other school districts may not have this luxury and, therefore, may benefit from a wider scope of research.

Summary

The goals of this study were to provide the towns of Somerset and Berkley with a historical narrative detailing their journey to regionalization as well as the creation of an $82.5 million state-of-the-art facility that serves as a cornerstone, uniting both towns together. It was also to allow the communities of Somerset and Berkley to serve as a model for other Massachusetts school districts facing similar economic and societal issues.
The goal of regionalization for these two communities was to obtain a better quality of education for the students of these two communities and solve the problem of a severely deteriorated school building. With the opening of the $82.5 million facility in September, 2014, these goals were recognized and a new era of education for the students of these two towns began.

Key themes that arose from looking at the five narratives of participating stakeholders found that school districts should keep in mind a few factors before embarking on a regionalization project connected to a new facility project. First, for the towns of Somerset and Berkley, the driving motivator of regionalization was the acquisition of a new state-of-the-art facility. Having a tangible motivator for the regionalization process had a positive effect on the completion of regionalization in a timely manner. Second, having key people in positions of influential leadership and allowing them to become the experts of that part of the project kept the townspeople focused and listening to one person, rather than acquiring information in a random, haphazard manner. Next, to use a timeless metaphor, “keep your eyes on the prize.” From the perspective of all participants, the outcome of the new facility and the promise for future generations of students is worth the hard work and difficulties encountered at various points throughout the projects. Participants also stressed over-communication of accurate, data-driven information as an important part of the process.

In any capital project involving taxpayer monies, there will also be local dissention. Communication of accurate information to combat negativity and misinformation played a key role in acquiring town votes and keeping the process moving forward. Finally, if possible, have an administration that is veteran, has ties to the project and advocates for
the regionalization and new building process from the start. The towns of Somerset and Berkley, eventually, established a Central Office and school-based administrative team who were all advocates of the process but this did not occur from the onset of the regionalization discussions and this led to difficulties throughout the projects, some long lasting even beyond completion of the new facility. Though each town and city is unique with its own set of circumstances and needs behind why they may need to regionalize or go through a capital expenditure project such as building a new facility, these lessons learned from the towns of Somerset and Berkley should be kept in mind if embarking on a costly, decade-long initiative, such as regionalization.
References


Ramos-Gagliardi, Julie M., (2010, May 20). Somerset Berkley Regional School District Agreement. Retrieved from https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbntiXZJrbGV5ZWR1Y2FoW9uYWxsaWFuY2V8Z3g6NmFjOGM2NzQ1NWJkNTkwYg&pli


Appendix A: IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: April 19, 2016
IRB #: CPS16-03-03

Principal Investigator(s): Lynda Beltz
Susan Brelsford

Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies

Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University

Title of Project: Building for the Future: A Historical Narrative of the
Regionalization and New Facility Project of Somerset and
Berkley, Massachusetts

Participating Sites: Superintendent permission in file

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: APRIL 18, 2017

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

Nina C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Attachment A: Recruitment Email

Dear (Participant),

As part of my research I'm conducting for my doctoral dissertation on the regionalization of the Somerset Berkley Regional School District and the subsequent new building project, I would like to interview you to discuss your role in the process as well as your interpretation of the strengths and pitfalls of the processes followed to accomplish the regionalization and new building projects. The ultimate goals of my research are for the communities of Somerset and Berkley to serve as a model for other Massachusetts school districts facing similar issues. I would also like this to serve as a document for the towns to utilize as a historical narrative of the regionalization and new building projects. Please note that Mr. Jeffrey Schoonover and the Somerset Berkley Regional School Committee are aware of this study and Mr. Schoonover has granted permission for this project to move forward.

This is what I am asking of you:

- participate in an audio-taped interview that will take approximately 45 minutes (Conducted via telephone or in person, depending on your wishes)

Participation in this study is, of course, entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to volunteer, I thank you for your time and consideration. I also thank you for your time and dedication to the students of Somerset and Berkley.

If you are interested in being a part of this process or have any questions, please contact me at 508-509-997 or at brelsford.s@husky.neu.edu

Sincerely,

Susan Brelsford
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 that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You are asked to participate because you hold a leadership position during the regionalization/new building process.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to gain insight into how two communities came together to effect changes that resulted in a new state-of-the-art facility for the residents of the two towns. The objective of this research is to identify ways in which other Massachusetts communities can unite and, if need be, regionalize to advocate for new facilities in these times of tight economic school budgets.

What will I be asked to do?
Participants will be asked to participate in a 45 minute interview. All interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes. In the event that an individual agrees to participate, but does not want to be recorded, the interview will be conducted with the researcher taking copious notes during the interview. Participants may be contacted at a later date if clarification about facts or additional information is needed, and they will receive a copy of the completed study.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
Forty-five minutes interviews will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient to the participants. Interviews will be conducted face-to-face, however, if the participant prefers, the interviews will be conducted through teleconferencing or over the phone.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for participants of this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?
Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and there are no direct benefits to the individual participant. The potential benefit will be for other school districts and communities to learn from the experiences of regionalization and new building project.

Who will see the information about me?

APPROVED
NU Ref: C944 03-05
Valid Through 04-14-05
Unless a participant asks for anonymity, the names and titles of the participants will be contained in this study. In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?
Participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time.

What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?
As this process of this research is interview-based, there is no cause to believe that any harm will come from this study.

Can I stop my participation in this study?
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact:

Susan Brelingford, Researcher: 508-509-9977 or brelingford.s@husky.neu.edu
Dr. Lynda Beltz, NEU Faculty Member: l.beltz@neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

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

Will it cost me anything to participate?
There will be no cost to participating in this study.

Is there anything else I need to know?

Thank you, in advance, for your help and consideration.
I agree to take part in this research.

Signature of person agreeing to take part  
Printed name of person above  

Date

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent  
Printed name of person above  

Date

APPROVED

NU IRB
VALID THROUGH
Appendix B

Interview Question

Background

1. Can you tell me a bit about your background? What was your role during the regionalization process? What was your role during the new building project?

2. How did you acquire this leadership position?

3. Were there others that had similar positions during this time?

4. What were your responsibilities during the regionalization process? What were your responsibilities during the new building project?

Information about Regionalization

5. From your perspective, why was regionalization important (or not) to the towns of Somerset and Berkley?

6. Was your stance on regionalization always the same or did others influence your position?

7. From your perspective, describe the road to the regionalization for these two towns. If possible, describe a detailed time-line of events in which you were directly involved or have direct knowledge.

8. What were the strongest reasons why regionalization passed in the towns of Somerset and Berkley?

9. What were the biggest challenges to getting regionalization to pass in each town?

10. If you had the opportunity to do the process over again, how would you change things?

11. What was the biggest deterrence to the process?

12. If you could give advice to a town looking to regionalize, what would it be?

New Building Project

13. From your perspective, why was acquiring a new building important (or not) to the towns of Somerset and Berkley? Why not simply renovate the old facility?

14. Was your stance on the creation of the $82.5 million facility always the same or did others influence your position?
15. From your perspective, how did the two towns acquire this new building? If possible, describe a detailed time-line of events in which you had direct involvement/knowledge.

16. What were the strongest reasons to acquire the new building?

17. What were the biggest challenges to acquiring the new building?

18. If you had the opportunity to do the process over again, how would you change things?

19. What was the biggest deterrence to the process?

20. What was the best part of the process?

21. If you could give advice to a town looking to build a new facility, what would it be?

22. Do you foresee K-12 regionalization?

23. What are your hopes for the new region/ new facility?