2018

A case study of high school students affected by school closure

Elizabeth Wolkowicz

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A Case Study of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure

by

Elizabeth Wolkowicz

Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
   Educational Leadership

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October 9, 2018
Ypsilanti, Michigan
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge those who have guided the way as I have completed my study. These people have provided inspiration, motivation, and support at times that have not only lifted up me as a person but have helped elevate this dissertation.

First, I would like to acknowledge my family. They have always provided encouragement and support in achieving my goals. I would like to especially acknowledge my father, Ron, who has made a way for me when I did not always see possibilities and has always made me feel I can do anything. I also want to acknowledge my sisters, Lindsey, Dillon, and my niece Maeve who provided long distance support. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to my first teacher mentor, my mother, Marianne, who modeled thinking about the whole child as a teacher from the beginning.

I would also like to acknowledge friends who have provided support, especially when times were tough. I especially want to acknowledge Dr. Rod Atkins, who aided in the process. His support in this research was a critical component in its successful completion.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge my dissertation chair, Dr. Ella Burton, and committee members. Their guidance and support through the completion of this study has moved it further than it would have been without their wisdom. They have shaped this project and my career in ways that are immeasurable.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the high school students who were generous enough to share their stories with me. Their trust and courage to share their personal experiences have provided a voice to students, which is often overlooked.
Abstract

Recent charter school closures in a Southeastern Michigan community have created an influx of displaced students from communities where families are not provided systematic support to make the unexpected transition. The study utilized focus group and individual interviews to collect data from high school students who have experienced their charter high school closing and have transitioned into a single charter high school. Data analyses were done concurrently with data collection, and the first- and second-level codes were presented in matrix displays. Four themes emerged from the interviews of these participants. These themes were: sense of belonging, fear of the unknown, being powerless, and student voice. Through the completion of the study, the researcher was able to contribute to the understanding of the experience of displaced high school students as they transitioned to their new school. This study contributed to the current literature of educational leadership with recommendations to support displaced students in making a transition, whether due to school closure or other circumstances.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

On a late afternoon in April, students and their families were navigating through a sea of long tables in a shabby school gymnasium. Passing by the tables with screen-printed tablecloths, they had a desperate look that can only be described as shell-shocked. These families passed by eager faces of school administrators, professional recruiters, and teachers who were ready to take their contact information and give them a glossy brochure, promises of door-to-door transportation, raffle prizes, gift bags filled to the brim, and assurances their school was the best option for enrollment. A toll of multiple sales pitches and guarantees were made and echoed off the walls as these families, who were mostly African American, Hispanic, and economically disadvantaged, moved through this bombardment of information. The goal of all of these perks and incentives was quite simple: A completed school application.

This scene was from a student recruitment event at a charter school in Southeastern Michigan where they had recently announced its closure. This event, which has now become commonplace in this community, appears to have a welcoming atmosphere, but there is a discomfort and hidden uneasiness under the surface signaled by the families who must abruptly search for a new school for their children. School closure, in combination with the highly competitive environment for student enrollment, in this and similar communities has created an environment where students are the prizes up for grabs.

Bewildered from the sudden news their beloved school was closing, these families were left to their own devices to find the next school. With so many charter schools
having inundated their communities and pushing out the traditional neighborhood schools, many of these families determined another charter was the only choice. Families looked for the best-performing school options; however, issues of convenience, and the needs for transportation and safety often have received precedence. This has been the case in some neighborhoods, where the options have academic performance results comparable to their now shuttered schools. With the choices being limited, there has been a concern that students may enroll in another school at risk for closure. Thus, began a process in which the students moved from school to school as their options diminished.

Through extensive interviews, the study examined the overlooked stories of these students who are the ones directly affected by policies that perpetuate school closure. It examined what happened to those left behind when the decision-makers had moved onto their next project.

**The Narrative of a Charter School District in Southeastern Michigan**

Academy A was a high school within a K-12 charter school district on the southwest edge of a community in Southeastern Michigan. The neighborhood has witnessed years of neglect, which was symbolized by a decrepit water tower of a burned-out factory left to decay for a decade. The neighborhood sits on the edge of the new development creeping out of the downtown revitalization efforts. Though the neighborhood has been one of the areas of the city with a larger population of school-aged children in comparison to other neighborhoods. With this fact, along with its proximity to downtown, Academy A’s surrounding area has been an arena of fierce competition among schools with new charter schools opening up with high frequency in the neighborhood.
Nestled within a shared five-mile radius with eight other charter schools and seven traditional public schools, Academy A has a history of operating in a highly competitive market. As 15 schools vie for students, a climate has been created in the area where some traditional public schools have been forced out due to low enrollment as students flocked to these new charter schools. For example, the traditional public school district has closed one elementary, one elementary-middle school, and one high school in the neighborhood. In the same time frame, six charter schools in the area have opened and then closed. This has put Academy A, along with other nearby schools in the area, in the position where they have faced the threat of enrollment challenges. Marketing, advertising, and student recruitment now have a place in this schools’ mindset all year and not just in the brief month-long open enrollment periods of other schools and districts in the area.

While other schools have fallen prey to the aggressive marketing tactics of schools in the area, Academy A’s charter school district has had consistent growth and maximized their marketing and student recruitment efforts. They began as a single K-5 elementary charter school in 1998 leasing a former parochial school building. Over the last two decades, the single school has now expanded to an elementary, middle, and high school on the same campus with a new state-of-the-art facility built in 2012. In an area where the majority of the schools have demographics of approximately 80% Hispanic, Academy A’s charter school district is far more diverse. Its demographics, as of the 2017-2018 school year, were 75% African American, 21% Hispanic, and the remaining 4% identifying as White or multiple ethnicities (Michigan Department of Education, 2017).
Academy A and its nearby competitors have some characteristics in common. They have a student population where over 90% receive free and reduced lunch with attendance rates of 90% or higher and their mobility rates have been 20% to 80% of students leaving throughout the school year.

In terms of academic performance, Academy A and its surrounding schools shared similar results. Academically, third through eighth grade students performed at a proficiency level of less than 20% on the state of Michigan Student Test of Educational Performance (M-STEP) 2016-2017 English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments. In 2015-2016, which was the most current year publicly reported, the high school had a 91.5% graduation rate. The high school had an average SAT composite score of 848.4 in 2016-2017. The K-12 campus had 53 teachers with a student-to-teacher ratio of 23:1. In 2015-2016, which is the last year Michigan released rankings, the elementary and middle schools were ranked in the 13th percentile of public schools in Michigan. The high school was ranked in the 10th percentile of public schools in Michigan at the time. It had dropped from the highest ranking of 39th percentile in 2011-2012 and has hovered between the 7th and 13th percentiles since 2012-2013 (Michigan Department of Education, 2017). Being one of three campuses offering kindergarten through high school in the area, with the other being a recently expanded K-10 charter school three blocks away, Academy A has performed at a typical level in comparison with surrounding schools in this competitive five-mile radius.

Having grown from 150 to currently enrolling 1,195 students, Academy A developed an effective plan for attracting new students. This was validated by the fact Academy A had a similar academic performance to the local competition yet continued to
grow in student enrollment. With a dedicated marketing and student recruitment team who has had the ability to be deployed year-round, they have the capacity to recruit students when opportunities arise, which has not always been possible for other schools where the recruitment efforts have been an additional responsibility of an already-burdened administrator.

With Academy A being one of three K-12 charter school districts in the area, it has put them in a unique position of being attractive to families who have children in multiple grades. With the added appeal of a new facility, available transportation, targeted marketing and recruitment campaigns, Academy A has enrolled groups of these displaced students from six closed charter schools over the last six years. Table 1 illustrates the number of students enrolled from these schools over the last four years in Grades K-12.

Table 1
*Amounts of Students Enrolled from Closed Charter Schools to Academy A from 2013-2017*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Enrolled</th>
<th>Number of Students Transferred to Academy A</th>
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<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2017</td>
<td>182</td>
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As Table 1 showed, Academy A’s charter school district has accommodated approximately 182 students from closed charter schools over the last four years. This information does not include any additional students newly enrolled due to other circumstances. It also does not include students who came from other closed schools with
less than 10 other members of the same former school. Finally, the amounts of students that transitioned and then subsequently left Academy A was not confirmed at the time of the study.

With bringing in students from closed schools, there have been some adaptations needed in order to meet the needs of these students. In acclimating these students, with their own unique profiles and make-ups, Academy A and the elementary school within the district have had to adjust. This has resulted in additions to the school program, along with the challenges that new transportation, instructional support programs, and additional teams can bring to the table.

Adaptations of Academy A

Academy A’s charter school district began their focus on recruitment and enrollment from closing schools in the 2013-2014 school year. With a new building that increased student capacity, they actively recruited from a charter school closing in a southern suburb that shared the same authorizer and management company. Academy A ended up enrolling over 76 of the displaced students from the closed charter. This marked the beginning of some adjustments to the school based on this marketing and recruitment initiative. These adjustments included the addition of a dedicated recruitment team, transportation accommodations, and an increase in the supports provided to students who were English language learners.

One adjustment to the organization came with the addition of a dedicated recruitment team. For the 2014-2015 school year, Academy A established a year-round recruitment team. This team has recruited throughout the year with the goal of ensuring strong enrollment. They allowed for the opportunity to pursue students who came from
schools in the area, especially those displaced due to school closure. The recruitment team was able to quickly mobilize at the time of school closure announcements and actively recruited these students for these upcoming school years. For the last four years, the recruitment and enrollment team have enrolled students from at least six closed schools. They achieved this through the tailored marketing materials, attendance of recruitment and community events, presentations at the schools in the year before closure, and door-to-door visits. By having a team of two to five people operating year-round, the school maximized enrollment opportunities.

The introduction of bus transportation to the charter school district was a change due to these increased recruitment efforts, which translated to enrollment of students from other neighborhoods and nearby communities. Since the 2013-2014 school year, Academy A has offered limited bus transportation to students. In the first year, this transportation was exclusively limited to routes serving the students in the southern suburb who had attended the closed charter school. These routes were expanded in the 2014-2015 school year to include students from other charters who had been heavily recruited north of the school. In 2016-2017, another route was designed for the about 40 students who came from a closed nearby charter school. These students were offered door-to-door pick up from their previous school and transportation was needed in order to attract these students. Academy A utilized multiple vendors to provide bus transportation, which resulted in a substantial increase in the budget under the line item of transportation. An increase in transportation brought the need for additional responsibilities for administration in coordinating the routes, maintaining the communications with the vendor, and handling student concerns in managing the routes.
Finally, Academy A saw a 10.5% increase in the number of students identified as English language learners (ELL) in the last two years. Fifteen and a half percent of students have been identified as English language learners in the 2016-2017 school year in comparison to less than 5% the previous year. This increase was due to the recruitment two years ago from two charter schools closed with more than an 80% English language learner population. Academy A responded by increasing the resources allocated in order to establish an English language learner program. It resulted in the hiring of a coordinator and two paraprofessionals with plans to hire additional teachers for elementary, middle, and high school levels. The school tried to formalize this support and, in the last four years, to increase the amount of Spanish speaking staff. The office manager, attendance clerk, and receptionists have been bilingual as well as many of the new teachers hired throughout the district. An emphasis on providing bilingual written communications and automatic call service has also been done in response to the increase in Spanish-speaking families.

These adjustments to the organization have been a result of the recruitment and enrollment of students from these closed charter schools. It resulted in some reallocation of resources to provide programming, transportation, and staffing who would address the new needs presented by these groups of students as they entered the district.

Charter Schools in Michigan

Michigan charter schools, which are publicly funded schools primarily managed by education service providers in lieu of a traditional district, have not proven to be the beacons of innovation and improvement in education as they were originally touted. According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2015) report, the state of
Michigan had 301 charter schools, which accounted for 10% of all public school students (p. 4). Though the overall percentage of charter schools in the state has not been overwhelming, Michigan held the distinction of having three of its cities, Detroit, Flint, and Grand Rapids, in the top 10 for charter school enrollment in the country according to the National Alliance for Public Charter School’s (2014) report (p. 4). In addition, Detroit ranks second, only to New Orleans, with 55% of students enrolled in charter schools, while Flint ranked third with 44% (p. 7). This makes the influence of charter schools in these communities unique in comparison to other areas where they are not so prevalent. In addition, both of these communities have been notable because they have a shared profile of high levels of poverty and traditional public school districts marred with highly publicized low academic performance and fiscal instability.

Unfortunately, the charter school movement has not proven to be the panacea for the academic performance challenges these struggling communities, and the state of Michigan as a whole, have been facing. In the era of federally mandated reforms, Michigan has fallen into the bottom 10 states in the four areas of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and last in terms of proficiency growth (Lewis, 2017). An Education Trust-Midwest (2016) study found the majority of Michigan charter schools were in the bottom half of the state’s rankings of K-12 educational institutions. These results have increased public pressure on the state-appointed authorizers of these schools for action.

**The Distinctiveness of Charter Schools and Closure**

While school closures have not been exclusively problematic for charter schools, there are some distinctive factors that play a part when this phenomenon affects these
independent public schools. The role of the authorizer in making the school closure decision and the highly competitive environment charter schools operate within have led to aggressive marketing and recruitment tactics. The combination of these factors has contributed to the limited choices for displaced students in some areas, with charters having been the only choice for some students and the lack of an overall system for coordinating these transfers at times has led to unequal distributions.

Price and Jankens (2017) have explained that charter school authorizing entities, such as universities, community colleges, and traditional districts, have been the ones given the prerogative to close these schools in Michigan. Being the oversight agent, authorizers have solely been the ones to evaluate and determine the fate of these charter schools. Price and Jankens (2017) stated:

For the most part, charter schools are closed when authorizers choose not to renew their contracts at the end of the term limit, usually because of poor school achievement and often for financial reasons. According to the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), more than 15.7% of charter contracts were up for renewal during the 2012-2013 school years (sic), and of those, 11.6% were denied. For charter schools outside their renewal period, the closure rate was 1.9% in that school year. (p. 47)

The increased likelihood of charters closing over traditional public schools may have been a part of the school choice paradigm. Paino, Boylan and Renzulli (2017) stated:

Whereas the earliest charter schools placed their emphasis on the benefits of increased autonomy rather than accountability through closure, it is really within the last two, with the rapid expansion of the charter school market and the
increased use of for-profit Educational Management Organizations (authors cited Bulkley, 2004), that closure has become emphasized as a mechanism for accountability. (p. 748)

Han et al. (2017) explained this mechanism of accountability perpetuated by the detrimental triad of low student performance, low enrollment, and financial instability, has led to increased pressure on authorizers in the state of Michigan to discontinue or not extend the charter agreement of many of these schools, which has resulted in increased closures. This has placed charter schools in the position to be closed at a higher rate than traditional public schools with comparable performance.

This authorizer-based oversight and accountability is in stark contrast with the rules for school closure for traditional public schools in the state of Michigan. According to the state of Michigan’s Revised School Code Act 451 of 1976, traditional public school closures have been able to occur only after three years of a school receiving a failing ranking. There have also been caveats put in place to prevent school closure. The Revised School Code Act 451 of 1976 states:

For a public school that is subject to closure under this section, the state school reform/redesign officer shall consider other public school options available to pupils in the grade levels offered by the public school who reside in the geographic area served by the public school. If the state school reform/redesign officer determines that closure of the public school would result in an unreasonable hardship to these pupils because there are insufficient other public school options reasonably available for these pupils, the state school reform/redesign officer may rescind the order subjecting the public school to
closure. If the state school reform/redesign officer rescinds an order subjecting a public school to closure, the state school reform/redesign officer shall do so before the end of the school year. If the state school reform/redesign officer rescinds an order subjecting a public school to closure, the state school reform/redesign officer shall require the public school to implement a school improvement plan that includes measures to increase pupil growth and improve pupil proficiency, with growth and proficiency measured by performance on state assessments. (p. 19)

This is notable because it demonstrates that the state has established rules in the school code providing the reform officer, who is assigned to a failing traditional public school, the authority to not close a school if it would cause too much hardship and if there are not enough transfer options available. In contrast, charter school authorizers have the authority to close schools at their own discretion, which means some of these schools have been closed before they would have qualified within the state process. Also, charter schools that have operated within streets of one another can have different criterion and be evaluated with different rules by different authorizers. This lack of uniformity with charter school governance has led to school closure decisions being made in isolation.

The competition for enrollment has been a factor for many nearby charter schools. As previously stated, charter schools have congregated in areas with traditionally low-performing school districts. This has led to many charter schools competing within these communities for student enrollment. Ironically, as the first generation of charter schools has presented less than stellar results, the state of Michigan removed the previously existing cap on charter authorization in 2011. Some communities who already had a large
share of these schools dealt with an increased level of competition for students who were school age. For example, Detroit currently has 30,000 more seats available in schools than they have school-aged children (Zernike, 2016). Combinations of charter schools and traditional public schools have competed for enrollment with a limited student population available, which led to charter schools having to attract students through marketing and recruitment tactics that have traditionally been left to private schools.

With the high level of competition amongst charter and public schools, school leaders have needed to attract students to make their budgetary requirements. When looking at their options, current literature found school leaders tended to choose marketing and recruitment strategies to deal with the pressure of competition (Jabbar, 2015; Lubienski & Lee, 2016). These strategies have become trademarks of many charter schools in communities with high competition. Zernike (2016) explained:

The competition to get students to school on count day—the days in October and February when the head count determines how much money the state sends each school—can resemble a political campaign. Schools buy radio ads and billboards, sponsor count day pizza parties and carnivals. They plant rows of lawn signs along city streets to recruit students, only to have other schools pull those up and stake their own. (p 6-7)

These aggressive tactics have made student enrollment often unstable in schools, which has led to concerns about schools being unable to gain traction on academic performance (Zernike, 2016).

As these circumstances have played out in similar communities in Michigan, the decision has been made more frequently to close schools. According to the Michigan
Department of Education (2016), 122 charter schools have been closed from 1999-2016. This has not just affected charter schools and their enrollment; for example, in response to a reduction in student enrollment, Detroit Public Schools Community District (2017) reported it closed 25 schools since 2009.

This has created neighborhoods where there are not any available schools or, as Huffman et al. (2017) termed in NAACP’s report on the status of education in urban centers, some neighborhoods have become “educational deserts.” These practices have created neighborhoods where there is not a traditional public school option. When a closed school has displaced students, the students’ closest options may be a charter school with offers of transportation and other lures to enroll. This has been exacerbated by not having an overarching system in place to help students transfer to a new school due to multiple authorizers supervising schools within the city. De la Torre, et.al (2015) explained how this lack of oversight has been different from a traditional public school districts, where the central office has coordinated these efforts.

**Statement of the Problem**

The state of Michigan has allowed a large number of charter schools to operate and these schools tend to congregate in traditionally low-performing districts. This policy has created a disproportionate amount of schools in these communities, which has caused challenges with low student performance, the threat of low enrollment, and financial instability. The result has been charter school authorizers and other officials have begun to close more of these schools at a higher rate and these students have subsequently found themselves transferring to nearby charter schools that are aggressively recruiting them for enrollment. The problem has been there is not enough
known about the impact of school closure on the students affected by this policy as they transition to a receiving school.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to conduct a single site case study on the experiences of high school students transitioning from a closed charter school to a single charter school in a Southeastern Michigan community. Data were obtained through interviews in order to identify possible common themes among the experiences and impacts of the school closure policy on these individuals.

**Significance of the Study**

School closure has become a part of public education, and it has never been pleasant no matter when or where it has occurred. When it has happened with high frequency, school closure can have a devastating effect on everyone involved. No one has been more vulnerable to the repercussions than the students displaced by this decision. The study contributes to understanding the impact this decision has on the students directly involved. This perspective provides educational leaders information to support the transition of these students with a focus of establishing a sense of belonging and strong social identity as members of the receiving school’s community.

Current literature found that students displaced due to school closure have lowered academic performances, especially during the year closure was announced (Engberg, 2012; Brummet, 2014). De la Torre and Gwynne (2009) and Stroub and Richards (2016) explained that while their scores rebound over the next few years, the displaced students have flatter learning trajectories than students who have not experienced their school closing. The students who were displaced due to school closure
did not ever experience the same level of academic growth as compared to students who were in similar schools without experiencing school closure.

Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni (2010) interviewed displaced students and discovered other issues as well. Concerns about safety, not understanding the expectations of the new school, and feeling stigmatized were some of the common feedback they received. These findings in the current literature identified some challenges for students as they have maneuvered through this change. The case study done by Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni (2010) was one of only a few case studies on the experiences of these displaced students. This study contributed to this limited literature on these experiences from a qualitative research perspective.

The students’ perspectives on school closure are not only critical in understanding the impact of this decision, but also in providing important information to educational leaders. An understanding of these students’ experiences aids educators in being able to effectively support displaced students as they transitioned into their receiving schools and districts, especially displacement that is unexpected like school closure.

A school closure is a traumatic event not only for the members of the school affected but also for the families and surrounding community as well. The impact can be felt long after the decision has been made though the aftermath does not receive the same amount of public attention. Understanding this traumatically stigmatizing event from the perspective of the students directly affected can inform educational leaders who find themselves in a similar circumstance.

In addition, understanding the experiences of these displaced students can add to the literature about the impact of student mobility in other circumstances beyond school
closure. Educational leaders may not need to address the effects of students displaced by school closure, but all will encounter student mobility in some form. This study has contributed to the literature on how educational leaders can support students going through any transition and especially one that is sudden and unplanned.

Research Questions

The research questions this study sought to answer focused on the experiences of the displaced students as they transitioned to a single charter high school in Southeastern Michigan. The questions included the following:

1. What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?
2. How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school?
3. What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?

Definitions of Terms

**Adaptation to a transition.** Schlossberg (1981) defines adaptation to a transition as “a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life” (p. 7).

**Authorizer.** Price and Jankens (2017) defines charter school authorizers as, “All charter schools in Michigan must receive their authorization (charter) from either the governing board of a local school district, an intermediate school district, a community college, or a state public university. Therefore, the chartering institution has primary
responsibility for monitoring the overall compliance and accountability for the operation of each school for which it has granted a charter contract” (p. 7).

**Charter Schools.** Charter schools will be the term used in this study for the schools that the state of Michigan categorizes as public school academies. Commonly known as charter schools, the state of Michigan Department of Education (2016) defines a public school academy as, “A state supported school under the state constitution, operating under a charter contract issued by a public authorizing body” (p. 1). These schools are tuition-free, open enrollment institutions that need to comply with the rules and regulations that the state and federal government have mandated for public schools.

**Displaced student.** A displaced student is a student who was enrolled in a school at the time that the school’s closure was announced and needs to transfer to a new school due to the closure.

**Fear of the unknown.** A fear of the unknown is a sense of fear experienced by the students based on concern of things they did not know about the new school.

**Lack of care and concern.** Lack of care and concern are times perceived that someone did not show care for their wellbeing or did not promote their success in working towards school-relevant goals.

**Receiving school.** A receiving school is one that has enrolled a cohort of students who have been displaced due to school closure or other causes of mobility.

**Sense of belonging.** Finn (1989) defines sense of belonging as, “An internalized conceptualization of belongingness-that they are discernibly part of the school environment and that school constitutes an important part of their own experience” (p. 123).
Social identity. Tajfel (1979) defines social identity as a person’s sense of which they are based on their membership in a group.

Student voice. Mitra (2004) defines student voice as “Young people share their opinion by collaborating with adults to improve education outcomes, including helping to ‘improve teaching, curriculum, and teacher-student relationships and leading to changes in student assessment and teacher training” (p. 652).

Transition. Schlossberg (1981) defines this term as, “A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change of assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5).

Summary

Michigan charter schools have been plagued by not systematically fulfilling the promises of high achievement with the autonomy and innovation of the movement. They have faced the challenges of low student performance and a highly competitive market, especially in the urban communities where they have congregated, such as the location of this study. The results have been charter schools have closed and those that have remained have used aggressive recruitment and marketing in order to take in these cohorts of displaced students. Without a universal system to oversee the charter school closures in the state of Michigan, there has not been a process in place to facilitate the transferring of the displaced students.

This study examined the experience of high school students who have transitioned from a closed charter school to a single charter high school in Southeastern Michigan. Through their stories, information has been gained on the impact the school closure
policies had on the participants and what factors affected their transition. This study has provided information for educational leaders who are in the position to support students transitioning due to school closure and other causes of mobility.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is organized to provide a comprehensive view of the research compiled in this case study. Chapter 1 provided an introduction and rationale for the study. Chapter 2 is a literature review of the concepts that have informed the study, which included current information about charter schools in Michigan, the effect of mobility on displaced students, and the theories that made the basis of the study’s conceptual framework. Chapter 3 outlined the research design and methodology of the study. Chapter 4 presented the findings from the study and an analysis of the themes. Finally, Chapter 5 shared conclusions made from the findings, which included implications on practice for school leadership, recommendations for future practice, and suggestions for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2009), the $4.35 billion federal grant program, Race to the Top, began in 2009 as the new genesis of the No Child Left Behind Act in an attempt to incentivize states in their school reform policies (p. 2). One of the criteria was that states needed to implement either a turnaround, restart, or transformation model. The other option was that states could establish a process for school closure (p. 10).

Dawsey (2017) explained Michigan was one of 13 states that adopted the option of a school closure policy for their lowest 5% of schools, including charter schools (p. 36). According to the Michigan Revised School Code Act 451 (1996), the authority to close charter schools was given to the authorizing entity and can be done for a variety of reasons, including not meeting the academic goals in the charter agreement (section 380.507). Conversely, U.S. Department of Education’s (2009) the Race to the Top program also influenced states to remove the cap on charter schools. Zernike (2016) reported that in 2011, Michigan lifted the cap on charter schools, which led to over 300 charters operating within the state. Most of these charter schools have been concentrated in urban communities with long histories of low performing traditional public school districts.

These communities with a saturation of charter schools have created enrollment concerns, since there are often more seats available than school-aged children available to fill them (Zernike, 2016). This has led to the development of too many schools operating, not enough children to fill the seats, and low academic performance for many of them.
This has led authorizers having pressure to close schools, which resulted in more students being displaced by school closures in these communities.

While the decision to close a school is highly publicized, there is little discussion about what has happened once the doors close for the last time and families are forced to find a new school for their children. With enrollment issues burdening the school choice driven paradigm, many of the neighboring schools have aggressively recruited these students to meet their own student enrollment requirements (Jabbar, 2016; Lubienski & Lee, 2016). This has led to large cohorts of students from these closed charter schools traveling together to receiving charter schools. While the decision-makers move onto the next decision, the displaced students and the receiving schools have been left to address the implications of this practice.

Han et al. (2017) found school closure has impacted the educational system of a community with an often abrupt and unexpected transition, especially charter schools that are at risk of more frequent closure. While looking at school closure, with an emphasis on charter schools in particular, there needed to be an examination of the impacts on the displaced students as well as the schools that receive them after the closure.

The phenomenon of closing schools with this higher frequency has been new. The current literature on the issues related to school closure has been limited, and there are mixed findings reported. There are some themes that have emerged from this literature, which have informed the study presented here. These themes included the higher frequency of charter school closure in comparison to traditional public schools, the initial negative impact on the displaced students’ academic performance, the disproportionality
of disadvantaged and minority students being impacted by school closure, and the cultural impact on receiving schools.

**Charter Schools and Closure**

Since their creation, charter schools have operated within a higher accountability paradigm in exchange for greater autonomy than traditional public schools. The irony is, while the model is designed around the idea of incentivizing school improvement, charter schools have a record of not getting the extraordinary results systematically that their proponents had originally predicted. Steiner (2012) explained:

> In theory, authorizer oversight and the threat of closure are supposed to create more incentives for charter schools to improve. At the same time, the operational flexibility afforded to charter schools should allow school leaders to make strategic changes---such as replacing principals and teachers---more quickly. If those changes do not pay off by the time the charter comes up for renewal, authorizers are supposed to shut the schools down. Additional incentive may come from the market dynamic, because low performance schools need to improve to attract families and those that do not will have difficulty keeping their enrollments high enough to remain financially viable. (p. 41)

This scenario assumed charter schools would routinely perform better than their traditional school district counterparts and they would have lower percentages of closure. While the design of the charter school movement would lend itself to these assumptions, the current literature presented a different reality. Steiner (2012) examined the success of turn-around efforts in low-performing charter schools and traditional public schools and found only one of the 2,025 schools (both traditional and charter) got out of their state’s
bottom 5% quartile and charter schools were no more successful than their traditional public school counterparts (p. 52). Steiner (2012) attributed this challenge to the fact persistently low-performing schools serve more students in poverty as demonstrated, “with a correlation of schools’ proficiency rate to their percent of Free and Reduced Lunch that ranged from 0.55 to 0.78 across the 10 states studied” (p. 52). This issue of charter schools not fulfilling the promises from their design has led them to be vulnerable to the same school closure policies.

These results showed charter schools have not been better or worse than traditional public schools at improving low performance, which led to the assumption both systems are equally at risk for closure. This proved inaccurate with current literature that demonstrated more charter schools are closed yearly in comparison to their traditional public school counterparts. Han et al. (2017) cited the Center for Research on Education Outcomes’ (CREDO) 2017 study on closing schools, which found 5.5% of low performing charter schools were closed in comparison to 3.2% of low-performing traditional public schools, with more low-performing charter schools being closed across all sectors (p. 38).

While charter schools are more likely to be closed due to low performance, Han et al. (2017) pointed out it is a small percentage of low-performing schools overall. The authors stated, “Responsible districts should never let chronically low-performing schools continuously erode student learning outcomes. In the charter sector, there should not be schools with very poor performance, particularly in the lowest state percentile, since the contract with authorizers obliges individual schools to meet certain individual goals” (p. 6). Han et al. (2017) called into question the implementation of the decision to close a
school and the non-academic factors that played a part. Han et al. (2017) stated, “Closures were tilted toward the most disadvantaged schools such as the ones with higher concentrations of students in poverty and higher shares of black and Hispanic students, which raises the issue of equity in the practice of closures” (p. 5). The study drew the conclusion there needed to be higher levels of accountability in the entire system, so that these policies are effectively applied.

The Impact on Displaced Students

While the results of the academic performance impact on displaced students have been mixed, there have been some common conclusions that emerged from the current literature. With less qualitative studies in the current literature on the experiences of displaced students, the narratives shared in those examples presented a common portrayal of negative effects on the students. In the same respect, there were common discussions of the need for further information in this area and some definitive gaps in the understanding of the impact on students.

The academic performance of displaced students has shown to be negatively impacted by the closure, though the results were most profound in the first year after the closure (Brummet, 2014; Engberg et.al, 2012; de la Torre and Gwynne, 2009; Stroub and Richards, 2016). For example, Engberg et.al (2012) explained there were initial decreases in math and reading performance for displaced students and math was negatively impacted for a longer period (p. 196). Engberg et al. (2012) also examined the attendance of the displaced students for the next few years at their receiving school and found a 13% spike in absenteeism in the first year of transition to the receiving school (p. 195).
While the results demonstrated the dip in performance was not long-term for the displaced students, De la Torre and Gwynne (2009) and Stroub and Richards (2016) determined the learning trajectory for these students was flatter in comparison to the students who were learning alongside them in the receiving school. The authors explained that the younger the student is at the time of closure, the flatter their achievement growth trajectory continued throughout their educational career. Stroub and Richards (2016) explained:

However, displaced students had flatter achievement trajectories after closure than their non-displaced peers. For example, between the first and second year after closure, the reading achievement slope of displaced students is just 87% as large as their non-displaced peers. As a result, displaced students under-performed relative to their non-displaced peers in the years after closure. (p. 7)

These results demonstrated no matter what succeeded the closure, displaced students did not achieve the same trajectory of academic growth as those who started at the receiving school. The performance of these displaced students was always lower than those already attending the receiving school, and the displaced students did not ever reach the same level as the students already attending the receiving school.

The current qualitative research literature focused on the perceptions of displaced students and presented a negative experience at the receiving schools. Kirshner et al. (2010) spoke with displaced high school students who felt their classes were more difficult and relationships were disrupted. The students expressed a feeling of being stereotyped by the receiving school’s staff due to the fact they were from the closed school (p 420-421). Similar results were found in the Kirshner and Pozzoboni’s (2011)
study in which displaced students spoke about their feelings about the closure of their high school. The findings showed the displaced students felt the receiving school blamed them for issues, such as low academic performance (p. 1653). The displaced students expressed that the closure was a traumatic experience, the students should have had input in the closure decision, and the determination would have been different if the closed school served more White students (p 1650-1652).

**Placement in Higher Performing Schools**

The current literature presented differing views on the long-term impact of school closure on the displaced students’ academic performance, but they all concluded the results are only positive if the students are placed in higher performing schools (De la Torre and Gwynne, 2009; Engberg et al., 2012; Bross, Harris and Liu, 2016; Stroub & Richards, 2016; Han et al., 2017). Han et al. (2017) reported on the impact of closing schools supported this finding by reporting displaced students who transitioned to higher performing schools ended up attaining the equivalent of 11 days or more of reading instruction and the difference in growth would equate to 40 days of additional math instruction. Conversely, the same study reported students transitioned to inferior schools could lose up to 108 days of learning (p. 22).

The issue has been a small percentage of displaced students ended up in a higher performing school. According to De la Torre and Gwynne (2009), only 6% of displaced students in their study ended up in higher performing schools and 40% of the students ended up in schools on academic probation (p. 2). In agreement with these results, Stroub and Richards (2016) stated:
While displaced students tend to attend slightly better schools than the ones that closed, they still transferred to relatively low-performing schools in an absolute sense. Indeed, 52% of displaced students transferred to schools in the bottom third of the district in math achievement, while 43% of displaced students transferred to schools in the bottom third of HISD [Houston Intermediate School District] in reading achievement. Conversely, just 21% of displaced students transferred to high-performing schools in the top third of the district in math achievement, while 18% transferred to schools with high reading achievement. (p. 4)

Circumstances have led displaced students to not transition to higher performing schools after the closure. De la Torre and Gwynne (2009) suggested issues of transportation, safety, and availability of schools near the students’ residences were barriers for enrollment in higher performing schools (p. 16).

The unavailability of high-performing schools can be a hindrance to the school closure policies having their espoused effect of improving student academic performance. Bross et al. (2016) also concurred school placement was critical. The authors explained:

In short, the key to making closures and takeovers work is to ensure that directly affected students end up in better schools after the intervention. If they do not, the results will be generally negative for students no matter what we call the intervention or what other redeeming qualities it might have. This means that decisions should be made on educational quality rather than politics or ancillary issues, and much thought should be given to what other schools will be available to future generations of students. Moreover, leaders should recognize the ways in which families choose schools and the unfortunate geography of poor
performance. The schools nearest to low-performing schools also tend to be low
performing, and these are the schools that directly affected students are most
likely to attend after the intervention. (p. 8)

The “unfortunate geography of low performance” explained by Bross et al. (2016)
alluded to a challenge for displaced students to be positively impacted by the school
closures as a route to school reform. Huffman et al. (2017) concurred with the findings in
the 2017 NAACP task force report on school closures and the consequences in urban
communities, such as New Orleans and Detroit. One of the interviewed participants in
this study explained this issue as creating “educational deserts” (p. 20). The issue of
closing schools to the point of eliminating choice in some neighborhoods has resulted in
limiting the choice for displaced students due to transportation needs and the lack of high
performing options in their neighborhoods (Huffman et al., 2017; Zernike, 2016).

Stroub and Richards (2016) also found a pattern of results where race played a
part in the schools where displaced students transferred to after the closure. The authors
explained:

In particular, white students were significantly more likely to transfer to high-
performing schools than black or Hispanic students…51% of displaced white
students transferred to schools that ranked in the top third of schools in terms of
achievement. By contrast, only 28% of Black students and 20% of Hispanic
students transferred to high-performing campuses. Conversely, while just 26% of
displaced white students transferred to low-achieving schools, 42% and 53% of
displaced black and Hispanic students, respectively, transferred to campuses in
the bottom third of Houston Intermediate School District (HISD) schools. (p. 5)
Lipman and Person (2007) and other current literature explained this inequity in school placement has been another example of an underlying theme of concern about the impacts of poverty and race in the implementation of school closure practices in terms of disproportionality of representation.

**The Disproportionality of School Closure**

The demographics of the displaced students not only affected where they went to school after the closure, but in the actual closure itself. Another common finding among some of the current literature were students affected by school closures tended to be disproportionately from disadvantaged families and also predominantly African American and Hispanic students. (Stroub and Richards, 2016; Han et al., 2017; Paino et al. 2017). Stroub and Richards (2016) provided the following support:

> Although HISD [Houston Intermediate School District] has a high school poverty rate overall, schools that were closed tended to be particularly poor: 91% of students in schools that were closed were economically disadvantaged, as compared to 80% in HISD as a whole. Moreover, although only 27% of HISD’s students are black, 43% of students affected by closures are black. (p. 4)

This example demonstrated the level of concern and disproportionality that exists in much of the current school literature pointed. De la Torre et al. (2015) found similar findings in their study of the Chicago school closures. The authors discovered:

> Compared to the average CPS K-7 student, students affected by school closures were more likely to receive free or reduced-price lunch, to receive special education services, and to be too old for their grade; they were less likely to have met the Illinois state standards on the ISAT math test. Their families were also
more likely to have changed residences in the year prior to the school closings announcements, which suggests that they had less stability in housing. One-third of the closed schools housed a cluster program for students with the most serious disabilities. In addition, the crime rate in the areas where the affected families lived was almost double the average for CPS students and a greater proportion of male adults were unemployed in these families’ neighborhoods. The vast majority of students affected by school closures were African Americans. (p. 15)

These findings alluded to some underlying issues of inequity and also confirmed the demographics of students who are included in the proposed study, which mirrored the national norm for displaced students impacted by school closure. Paino et al, (2017) stated, “If charter schools that educate a majority of black students close at a greater rate than charter schools that educate a majority of white students, then the policy is in fact not a race-neutral policy in its consequences” (p. 752). This led to questions of the implementation of school closure practices in terms of racial equity.

**Cultural Impact on Receiving Schools**

The schools that receive displaced students are a benefit to them; however, their overall academic performance is important. Brummet (2014) explained, “In addition, the estimated effects on receiving schools vary with respect to the performance level of the closed school. If students are displaced from low-performing schools, the spillover effects are larger in magnitude” (p. 109). The students who were displaced benefit from the transition, but it has impacted the receiving school’s academic performance.

The negative impact on receiving schools can offset any perceived improvement for the displaced students. Brummet (2014) stated, “However, a large-scale policy to
close low-performing schools will fail to improve average achievement district-wide because any gains from displaced students will be offset by achievement losses for students in receiving schools” (p. 109). The author contended the impact of school closure is context-dependent and the reasons for the adjustments in the scores vary between the different schools studied (p. 111).

Besides the effect on the receiving schools’ academic performances, Lipman and Person’s (2007) qualitative study of receiving schools in Chicago’s Mid-South neighborhood found impacts to the climate and culture. By interviewing school staff at these receiving schools, Lipman and Person (2007) discovered some effects due to welcoming these displaced students into the receiving school’s community. These included a stressful and demoralizing climate, negative impacts on classroom instruction, safety concerns, increase in discipline issues, lack of resources in dealing with new students’ needs, and a feeling that schools were being set up to fail (p 6-7).

Areas of Continuing Study

The current literature on the impact of school closures on displaced students has focused on academic performance after the transition in terms of assessment results. Brummet (2014) and Engberg et al. (2012) have identified a negative impact on displaced students’ academic performance. There has also been a concern that the trajectory of academic growth has been flatter for displaced students than those not impacted by this transition (De la Torre & Gwynne, 2009). Any positive effect to the academic performance has come only when displaced students find themselves placed in higher performing schools (Bross, et al., 2016). The placement of displaced students in higher performing schools has been low, as De la Torre and Gwynne (2009) found only 6% of
the students displaced in their study ended up in higher performing schools in their study (p 17).

Along with these concerns, a concern of inequity has been brought up by some of the current literature with the disproportionate number of students in poverty, African American students, and Hispanic students being impacted by school closure. They not only have experienced more school closures (Han et al., 2017) but have been placed more often in lower performing receiving schools (Stroub & Richards, 2016). These findings brought out issues of inequity and concerns of the availability of high-performing schools in cities who have experienced more school closures.

With the current literature focused on the academic performance of displaced students, there are other areas in need of further examination to fully understand the impact of the school closure policy. While there are references to the impact on the receiving schools, the current literature on the impact on receiving schools is limited. Some studies, such as Brummet (2014) found the academic performance of the receiving school was negatively affected by the transition of the displaced students. Lipman and Person (2007) as well as Kirshner et al (2010) found issues with the culture of the receiving school with concerns about safety, lack of resources, and the acclimation of the displaced students into the community.

These limited discussions in the current literature presented an important gap in the research of school closure policies in terms of the impact on stakeholders involved. This included the students displaced and those who are members of the schools receiving them afterward. There has been a need for further examination of the inequity occurring in not only charter and traditional public school closures but in the placement of the
displaced students. While there are findings on the negative impact on the receiving
schools (Lipman and Person, 2009; Kirshner et al., 2010), there have not been any studies
found focusing on receiving schools as an organization and particularly on the adjustment
made to the school culture due to this transition of displaced students. With all of these
groups coming together within a receiving school, it would be reasonable to expect an
impact to the organization as a whole.

There also has been a need for better understanding of the experience of school
closure through the lens of the students displaced and understanding their stories. A
school closure is a significant life transition and more information is needed on this
phenomenon. This information provided may contribute to the information for
educational leaders to support displaced students as they transition into the receiving
school communities.

Contributions to the Development of the Conceptual Framework

The current literature presented a dynamic view of the impact of school closure
policies that have been a part of the current synthesis of school reform. The results of
school closure have been negative impacts for the displaced students’ academic
performance as well as those who a part of the receiving school. This review has led to
questions concerning the experience of those displaced students who are making the
transition. There is a need to learn more about these experiences in order to support the
students as they develop a sense of belonging and begin to identify as a member of the
receiving school community.
Transition Theory

Transition theories are a critical component of the conceptual framework grounding this study. Schlossberg’s (1981) “A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition” considers the integration of the various characteristics involved in how people adjust after a life transition, whether it is changing jobs, a health crisis, or in the case of this study, transitioning to a new school after your previous school unexpectedly closed. This theory has focused on how an individual adjusts or adapts to life altering events, such as going from high school to college or the loss of a job or retirement.

Schlossberg (1981) stated, “The model described here views adaptation to transition (defined as an event or nonevent that alters the individual’s perception of self and of the world, demands a change in assumptions or behavior and may lead to either growth or to deterioration) as a dynamic process, a movement through the various stages of a particular transition” (p. 15). This theory has claimed three main factors contribute to the adaptation to the transition. These included the transition itself, the environment, and the individuals who have experienced the event.

Schlossberg (1981) contended, “A transition is not so much a matter of change as of the individual’s perception of change” (p. 7). The dynamics of the transition can make a difference based on some of the following: if there is a perceived gain or loss in role, the source of the change, whether or not it is coming at an expected time, if the onset is sudden or gradual, and its duration. Similarly, the characteristics of the individual involved in the transition can also make a difference. These included: the individual’s gender, age, health, ethnicity or race, socio-economic status, values, and previous experience with a similar change. Finally, the characteristics of the environment before
and after the transition can have an impact. The internal supports of the individual, the institutional supports, and the physical setting can all affect how the person adjusts. The theory is designed with the concept that all of these factors play a dynamic role in the adaptation to the new environment created by the transition and how the individual reacts depended on their own personal make-up of these characteristics.

Schlossberg (1981) explained the adaptation to a transition for individuals hinges on their perception of the environment before and after the transition. The author stated, “Ease of adaptation to a transition depends on one’s perceived and actual balance of resources to deficits in terms of the transition itself, the environment, and the individual’s sense of competency, well-being, and health” (p 7-8). The model explains a ratio between resources and perceived needs determined what type of results or adaptation will come out of the transition. Schlossberg (1981) explained, “Adaptation depends in part on the degree of similarity or difference in one’s assumptions about self and in one’s environment (especially the interpersonal support system network of relationships before and after the transition)” (p. 8). Simply put, the adaptation will be considered positive if there is a perception of more resources than deficits through the transition. In the same way, if the new situation has been seen as having more needs or deficits due to the transition, then it is negatively perceived.

When individuals go through the same transition, they invariably have had a different reaction to it. This has been due to the resources at an individual’s disposal to aid them in adjusting to the transition. Schlossberg (2011) categorized these resources into four categories. These categories include situation, self, supports, and strategies (p. 160). Situation refers to the status of your life during the transition and if there are other
stresses at play. Self is described as personal traits that help aid in coping with a transition, such as resiliency or optimism. Supports are explained as a network of people who have helped the individual in the transition. Finally, strategies referred to how an individual coped as they navigate the change.

Schlossberg’s transition theory (1981) helped develop the idea that displaced students have dynamic characteristics, which can contribute to the impact the transition has on all parties involved. The theory posits that there are different characteristics, including the perception of the school closure, the profile of the receiving school before and after the transition, and the characteristics of the stakeholders themselves. This theory contributed to the design of this study because it helped provide meaning to the stories of the displaced students as they transitioned from a closed school.

**Social Identity Theory**

As an individual or group makes a transition, there is a social impact that occurs and an inherent change in the way they see themselves. Our social identity, according to Tajfel and Turner (1986), can come from the groups in which we belong (p. 283). Tajfel and Turner (1986) defined a group as “a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and share some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and their membership in it” (p. 283). Tajfel (1982) explained, “There can be no intergroup behavior unless there is also some ‘outside’ consensus that the group exists” (p. 2). According to the social identity theory, individuals develop their self-image based on the social categories or groups they belong.
The theory proposes that every group is evaluated on being positive or negative, which directly influences the self-esteem of the members of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The standing of one group can be due to its comparison with another, thus creating an in-group and out-group. The competition between these groups can come into play when they attempted to differentiate themselves from one another. Tajfel and Turner (1986) explained, “The aim of differentiation is to maintain or achieve superiority over an out-group on some dimensions” (p. 284). The competition can be over an asset, such as winning a game, or it can be through self-evaluation (p. 284). The conflict occurs as these groups interact and the out-group attempts to become the in-group. As the individual or groups compete for resources, there tends to be more of a focus on group identity and the competition between the groups, which can intensify the out-group’s low self-esteem (p. 280). This focus of the allocation of resources between the groups can lead the out-group to attempt to develop a stronger sense of belonging. Tajfel and Turner (1986) explained:

An unequal distribution of objective resources promotes antagonism between dominant and subordinate groups, provided that the latter group rejects its previously accepted and consensually negative self-image, and with it the status quo, and starts working toward the development of a positive group identity. (p. 281)

The competition for resources can be the attempt of the out-group to become a member of the in-group, while they attempt to maintain their position as the dominant entity.
Social Identity Theory in Education

Applications of the social identity theory in education tend to focus on engagement and the alignment of the student’s values to school. One of these theories, Finn’s (1989) participation-identification model, explains a sense of belonging and identity for students coming from the level of participation exhibited with educational activities. Finn (1989) explained how identification is elicited from participation:

First, students who identify with school have an internalized conceptualization of belongingness---that they are discernibly part of the school environment and that school constitutes an important part of their own experience. And second, these individuals value success in school-relevant goals. (p. 123)

This model makes the claim students develop their social identity through their relationship with school. If they feel they are a part of school and belong, then it is positive. If the opposite is true, then alienation and disconnection can result.

Finn’s (1989) participation-identification model states there is a relationship between the student’s participation in school activities and their identification or sense of belonging at school. Finn (1989) claimed there are four levels of participation identified in this model including active participation in classroom learning, time engaged with the teacher, extracurricular activities, engagement in the school beyond the classroom, and students being involved in school decision-making (p 127-128). The relationship between participation and social identification in school can create a cyclical effect where the positive outcomes of participation leads to a greater sense of belonging and feeling valued. This greater sense of belonging can lead to the students participating more in school activities (Finn, 1989).
While ensuring this level of participation for positive school identification is critical at all school levels, the consequences become more serious as the students move into high school. Finn (1989) explained:

By high school, with the youngster’s greater autonomy, other factors contribute to the movement away from school. For one, extreme forms of withdrawal may come to constitute behavior problems, such as skipping classes, getting stoned, or being disruptive. The attention of school personnel must be directed to these concerns, perhaps in lieu of the student’s academic work. Also, the school may reject the student, either because of his behavior or grades, or both. (p. 131)

With these types of serious consequences involved with high school students’ sense of belonging, Finn (1989) recommended educational leaders review policies to ensure they are not making students part of an out-group.

In the end, Schlossberg’s transition theory, social identity theory, and Finn’s (1989) participation-identification model provide a theoretical framework to the proposed study. As the participants were displaced, their transition was not only about adapting to the change, it also included the development of a new social identity at school, which was determined by their sense of belonging developed through participation in the receiving school. In the end, the success of the transition was determined by whether the students moved from being the outsiders (out-group) of the receiving school, and if they now felt they were members of the school, or the in-group. According to these theories, this was achieved if the students were provided the opportunity and access to participate at all levels, including learning engagement, relationships with teachers and staff, and participation in activities beyond the classroom.
Immediacy Bias Theory

The displaced students’ perception of their experience both during the closure and the transition to the receiving school emerged during the data analysis. One of the factors in their perception was the time which had passed since they made the transition. For all participants, at least one school year has lapsed since they went through this experience. Van Boven and White’s (2011) immediacy bias theory explains the change in emotional perception over time. They explained, “People feel their immediate emotions, whereas they remember their previous emotions” (p. 368). This leads people to perceive recent experiences with more intense emotions (p. 369). Van Boven and White (2011) explained, “Immediate emotions are more salient than previous emotions. Immediate emotions capture and hold attention, and the direct experience of immediate emotion contrasts with the indirect experience of previous emotions” (p. 378). The emotions attached to any of the participants’ perceptions of the experiences will be less intense as time passes.

A “Change of Standard” Perspective

Along with immediacy bias playing a role in the perception of the displaced students who participate in the study, their personal standard upon which they made judgments may have changed. Higgins and Stangor (1988) explained that judgements change when their standards change. They claimed individuals make judgments based on the context they bring to the experience, which can develop a change of standard. Higgins and Stangor’s (1988) “change of standard” perspective places theory on the concept of perspectives changing over time.

When a displaced student changes judgment of an experience, it is due to their context standard changing. Higgins and Stangor (1988) claimed:
The change of standard perspective explicitly considers the role of standards in encoding and decoding judgments and includes as an additional factor whether a change of standard has or has not occurred from the moment of initial judgment to the moment of using that judgment in the reconstructive process. (p. 183)

This change of standard perspective explains how students change their view of experiences over time due to the adjustment of the standard they used for evaluation. In this study, participants changed their perspectives of experiences as they went through during the transition. These judgments adjusted based on the standard they were using to change their evaluation.

**Conceptual Framework**

These theories came together to aid in the understanding of study’s findings.
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework. This conceptual framework was utilized as the theoretical grounding in the study of high school students affected by school closure.

The conceptual framework of this study utilized Schlossberg’s transition theory to explain the process individuals go through as they deal with a life transition, such as a student dealing with their school being closed. Success was determined by the ability to establish a positive social identity. This was achieved through the level of participation the student engaged with the school. The more participation, the quicker the student moved from being a member of the out-group to transitioning to the in-group. All of these experiences are based on the perception of the displaced students. These perceptions changed based on the immediacy of their emotions to the experience and the standard they used to evaluate.

Sources: Schlossberg (1981, 2011); Tajfel and Turner (1986); Finn (1989); Van Boven and White (2011); Higgins and Stangor (1988)
Summary

Current literature revealed that struggling charter schools have an increased probability of closure. This has been the price of in autonomy for charter schools, which includes quicker repercussions for poor performance. The high penetration of charters in urban communities has created a highly competitive marketplace, which increases the threat of low enrollment. It also raised the question of disproportionally closing schools, whether charter or traditional, which serve disadvantaged and minority populations.

While the current literature has been limited, it is evident there are long-standing ramifications on school closure. The students have faced a dip in academic performance and a flatter learning trajectory due to going through this transition. Those displaced experience feelings of being stigmatized along with ambiguity of expectations. All of this led to a need for further understanding of these displaced high school student experiences. This study used a conceptual framework based on transition, social identity, and perception theories in order to better understand the perspectives of these displaced high school students who have transitioned to a single charter high school in a Southeastern Michigan community.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The research was completed in the tradition of qualitative methodology. It employed the single case study design to examine the experiences of high school students who transferred from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school. The information provided by the participants in one-on-one interviews were analyzed in order to identify common themes of the experiences and impacts of the school closure practices on these individuals.

Statement of the Problem

The state of Michigan has allowed a large number of charter schools to operate and these schools tend to congregate in traditionally low-performing urban districts. This policy has created a disproportionate amount of schools in these communities, which has created challenges with low student performance, the threat of low enrollment, and financial instability. As a result, charter school authorizers and other officials have begun to close more of these schools at a higher rate, and these students have subsequently found themselves transferring to nearby charter schools that are aggressively recruiting them for enrollment. The problem has been there is not enough known about the impact of school closure on the students affected by this policy as they transition to a receiving school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research was to conduct a single-site case study on the experiences of high school students transitioning from a closed charter school to a single charter school in a Southeastern Michigan community. Data were obtained through
interviews in order to identify possible common themes among the experiences and impacts of the school closure policy on these individuals.

**Research Questions**

The primary research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?
2. How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school?
3. What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?

**Research Design**

This single case study design utilized data from interviews to develop rich descriptions of the participants’ story. A case study design was used due to the study’s focus on how high school students experienced the transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school. Yin (2014) defined a case study by stating, “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16). This study provided an in-depth examination of the experiences of four high school students and how they were affected by school closure. While the case study occurred after the students experienced the transition, the interviews focused on these students’ reflections on how they moved through the process.
Case Study Site

This single site case study examined the experience of high school students transitioning from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school, which has recruited and enrolled students from many closed charter schools in the last five years. It was chosen due to the researcher working within the charter school district, which provided the necessary access to the high school students. This site presented an unusual, critical case for examining the impact of the closure on high school students. This is due to the school, with an enrollment of 1,150 students, having enrolled at least 182 students displaced from closed charter schools in the last four years.

Sampling

The researcher used a purposeful sampling approach to select participants for the study. Yin (2016) explained this deliberate manner of selecting the participants: “The goal or purpose for selecting the specific instances is to have those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data---in essence, information rich--- given your topic of study” (p. 93). This type of sampling has been done, especially in qualitative research, in order to work with participants who can give the most information on the topic and provided a range of variation in perspectives on the topic. This includes perspectives that may diverge from the theory and point of view of the researcher, which aids the researcher in being able to have as complete a view on the case as possible.

Academy A’s Director of Family and Community Relations identified high school students who had transferred from a closed charter school and who were able to provide the most relevant information for the study. These students were invited to a focus group, which was facilitated by the director, who was familiar with the students and had
experience leading these types of discussions. (See Appendix A) Students who were over the age of consent, which in Michigan is 18, provided written informed consent (See Appendix B). Students under the age of 18 provided written parental consent (See Appendix C) as well as their own written acknowledgment of being willing to participate (See Appendix D). In accordance with school policy, students who were over the age of consent but current students of the school also needed to obtain parental consent. The researcher served solely as an observer in order to gather detailed observations. These focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed later for data analysis purposes.

The candidates for interview participants came from the volunteers who participated in the focus group. These participants were invited based on a perceived willingness to share their experiences with the researcher and the relevance of the information they could provide. These volunteers were invited to participate by written invitation based on the criteria of being a current or former high school student within the last three years and having previously attended a closed charter school. Students who were over the age of consent were asked to provide written informed consent (See Appendix E). Students under the age of 18 needed written parental consent (See Appendix F) as well as written student assent to participate (See Appendix G). The researcher served solely as an observer in order to gather detailed observations.

**Data Collection**

The study was conducted in the qualitative tradition in order to obtain an understanding of the perspectives of high school students who experienced the transition from a closed charter school. An initial focus group interview with selected displaced students generated information to inform the study and simultaneously provided
candidates for the case study. The case study was conducted with the primary data sources being one-on-one interviews. These data collection methods were used to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experience of high school students as they transitioned to the receiving school. The use of the information collected from these various interviews provided multiple means of collecting evidence in order to allow for validation of the findings, which emerged based on common themes found among the sources.

Focus group interviews with a sample of students were used to not only identify those case study participants, but also to provide information on their experiences. A member of the receiving school staff who identified them as candidates meeting the criteria invited participants. Consent was obtained for participants. An experienced and trained facilitator who was familiar with the students led these sessions. The researcher was able to solely observe and take notes in these sessions in order to be able to identify candidates for the case study and trends in the conversation, which led to themes in the analysis. The focus group followed a protocol with established guiding questions, though additional questions emerged from the discussion in order to elicit more detail from responses. The sessions were audio-recorded for transcribing. The identities of those participants in the focus group were masked for privacy and confidentiality in the transcription.

One-on-one interviews were the primary vehicle for data collection. All interview participants over the age of consent provided consent and minor aged participants were required to have parental consent. An interview protocol was engaged (see Appendix H), inclusive of standard operating procedures, audio-recording the interviews for later
review, and a set of guiding questions that ensured consistency among the participants (see Appendix I). The guiding questions were used as the framing of the discussion, although follow-up questions were utilized in order to probe deeper into the discussion and elicit the thick descriptions needed for appropriate analysis (Creswell, 2014, p 244). The interviewer utilized a set of open-ended interview questions, which allowed the respondents to give detailed answers. The structure allowed flexibility for follow-up and exploration of ideas that emerged from the interviews. Multiple interview sessions were needed in order to get detailed descriptions of the participants’ perspectives on the phenomenon.

**Data Collection Safeguards**

The option to respond electronically was provided to all participants, including email and phone messaging. None of the participants chose to participate using these electronic means with all participation in face-to-face forums. The acquiring, recording and transcribing of data sources utilized electronic means. These files were password encrypted on devices and the electronic versions. All data, including recordings, transcripts and notes, have been stored for the next three years per the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

**Data Analysis**

The process for analyzing data collected from the interviews were deductive and inductive (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016, p. 160; Yin, 2014, p. 138). The researcher used a computer-based tool, NVivo 12, to organize data and assign codes based on themes, which emerged from commonalities or trends of responses. The deductive analysis took place through the exploration of the interview references that fit in the codes. These
included codes that were both predetermined from the conceptual framework and emerged during analysis. Themes that emerged as responses to questions included experiences during the announcement year of the school closure at the previous school, their experiences during the transition to the single charter high school, the establishment of their identity at the receiving school, sharing how the transition impacted them as an individual and student, and supports they perceived were provided or needed as they made the transition. These categories were connected to the conceptual framework organizing the study. The emerging themes were used to draw conclusions from data in order to provide understanding on the phenomenon being studied.

**Ethical Considerations**

**Researcher’s role.** In qualitative research, Creswell (2014) explained the researcher is a “key instrument” (p. 234) in data collection and analysis. Creswell (2014) stated:

> Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior or interviewing participants. They may use a protocol---an instrument for collecting data---but the researchers are the ones who actually gather the information. (p. 234)

Since all of the information for the study is directly collected through the interaction of the researcher with the participants, Creswell (2014) explained it is imperative to be transparent with the past experiences and interactions of the researcher with the participants and the research problem (p. 235). In addition, Creswell (2014) advised, “Be explicit…about how these experiences may shape the interpretations the
researchers make in the study” (p. 235). This transparency of the potential bias of the researcher is a critical ethical consideration.

In this study, the researcher’s professional affiliations need to be addressed to lessen potential bias. The researcher has worked in a variety of roles within the K-12 charter school district inclusive of Academy A. The researcher has been a teacher and administrator at the K-8 charter school, which occupies the same campus. At the time of the study, the researcher was a teacher for the affiliated middle school and did not supervise personnel or have any responsibilities that caused interaction with Academy A’s students or staff beyond a collegial manner.

The researcher had not worked with any of the study’s participants in any way other than as researcher. This eliminated any sense of power or influence the researcher would impose in interacting with the participants in order to maintain the integrity of the data collection. Finally, participants were identified and invited by the Director of Family and Community Engagement to participate in this study in order to reduce bias.

**Measures to ensure safety and confidentiality for human subjects.** In any qualitative study where participants share perspectives on a phenomenon, there are some safety and confidentiality guidelines that must be enforced. The researcher presented the proposal for the study to the administration in order to obtain consent for the school to be a research site. The study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the review of the ethical and security safeguards. The need for informed consent of all focus group and interview participants over the age of consent was critical in order to ensure that the limits and purpose of the study are clear. Participants under the age of consent,
which in Michigan is 18, were required to have written parental consent as well as provided written acknowledgment of their willingness to be included in the study.

The school site and participants also had their identities masked in data collection and reporting in order to protect their privacy and anonymity as much as possible. The interview data were acquired, recorded, and transcribed using digital means. The primary researcher provided the transcripts of the conversations to be reviewed by participants in order to identify anything they wanted excluded in the study.

**Inclusion of interview findings.** The study reduced risk and potential harm to participants by only including information obtained directly related to the boundaries of the study. In discussing schools, there were other potential topics emerging from the interviews not in relation to the transition of displaced students from closed schools. Data not related to the purpose of the study and the research questions were not included in the reporting in order to protect the privacy of not only the participants, but also the school site itself.

**Reliability and Validity**

Reliability of the findings was completed through processes to ensure the information was consistent and stable. The case study protocol, interview procedures, and interview questionnaire provided reliability of the information collected by providing a framework for the discussions consistent among the different participants. The transcripts from the interviews were checked for accuracy by the researcher. Similarly, coding of the data was reconciled to make sure the codes were consistently used. The use of Nvivo 12, a computer-assisted software for qualitative data, was utilized to ensure proper coding.
The validity, or trustworthiness, of the qualitative data was determined through the use of multiple strategies as described by Creswell (2014). The researcher provided rich descriptions of the findings, while accounting for bias. The multiple sources, through the use of focus groups and individual interviews, provided validation of the findings. By being able to corroborate the findings from the interviews and focused revisiting interviews, the construct validity was stronger (Yin, 2014, p. 121).

Limitations

Limitations to the study existed based on the qualitative research design. The main data collection method were interviews, which has some limitations as far as the information it can provide. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) explain:

Although interviews have inherent strengths, there are various limitations associated with interviewing. First, not all people are equally cooperative, articulate and perceptive. Second, interviews require researcher skill. Third, interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering; they are the result of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee and the context in which they take place (authors cited Fontana & Frey 2003; Rubin & Rubin 2012; Seidman, 2012). (p. 155)

As these authors point out, the data collection method of interviewing individuals had some inherent limitations. Their responses were personal to their own experiences and may not be reflective of others within this particular school site. With the data collection method involving interviews, the findings were impacted by the dynamics between the participant and the researcher during the interview sessions.
**Researcher as Instrument**

When completing qualitative research, it is impossible to fully extract the researcher’s personal bias and experience from the findings. These biases of the researcher have imposed limitations to the study. The researcher has worked as an administrator for the K-8 school site, which is part of the charter school district inclusive of Academy A. Though much bias was eliminated due to the researcher having not worked directly with the research school site, this experience and point of view of the researcher were not completely eliminated from the data collection and interpretation process.

**Delimitations**

Bryant (2004) explained, “Delimitations are the factors that prevent you from claiming that your findings are true for all people in all times and places” (p.57). By applying this definition, the delimitations of this study were centered on the fact circumstances of the studied receiving charter school were specific to this school. The experiences and information found at this particular site were specific to the participants and the factors involved unique to this charter school. One of the experiences that was taken into consideration is the research site has enrolled at least 182 students from six identified closed charter schools as well as other new students enrolled on their own from other charter and traditional schools.

**Summary**

This single case study examined the experiences of high school students who transferred from one of six identified closed charter schools to a receiving charter school in Southeastern Michigan. The study utilized focus groups and one-on-one interviews as
data collection methods in order to tell the story of their personal experiences with school closure. Chapter 4 is a presentation of the findings supporting four overarching themes and many interwoven subthemes.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of the case study was to examine the experiences of high school students who transitioned from a closed charter to a receiving charter school during a four-year time period. The study was designed to discover the experiences of this population through data collection and disaggregation, especially given the unique characteristics of this scenario of charter schools in this Southeastern Michigan community.

Since the inception of charter schools in the state of Michigan, school closures have become integrated with the movement (Michigan Department of Education, 2016 and 2017). Without support, families have been often left to make decisions on their own about the new school their child would attend. Many neighborhoods are also void of traditional public school options, and they are left to the mercy of the marketing of charter schools in this highly competitive landscape.

The current literature examining the effects of school closure has focused on the academic performance of displaced students by looking at their standardized test scores. Engberg (2012) and Brummet (2014) found that there was a temporary decline in reading and math test scores for students during the school closure announcement year and the next few years succeeding. There have also been findings that showed displaced students experience a flatter learning trajectory for the remainder of their academic career regardless of the status of the receiving school (De la Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Stroub & Richards, 2016).
Few studies have examined the experience of students during and post school closure. Kirshner et al. (2010) interviewed displaced students and receiving school staff in Chicago area public schools, where concerns about changes in the safety at the receiving school, displaced students feeling stigmatized, and difficulty in adjusting to changes in instructional expectations were among the findings. With the high density of charter schools and many closures over the last few years in their community, the students’ experiences provide a new point of view to add to the body of research of this phenomenon.

**Research Questions**

The primary research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?

2. How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school?

3. What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?

**Data Sources**

This qualitative study was a single case study designed to gather data about the experiences of high school students who have transitioned to a single charter high school after their former charter schools closed. A focus group was conducted to gather their experiences and identify candidates for the more in-depth individual interviews.

Individual interviews were conducted with participants who volunteered from the focus group discussion that had provided rich descriptions of their experiences. The data
from the focus group and interviews were analyzed for emerging patterns and themes. This analysis was then taken further by the convergence of the themes between the focus group and interview findings.

**Focus group.** The focus group was conducted with eight high school students who attended charter schools that closed and resulted in them having to transfer to a single charter high school. Table 2 presents the profile of the participants.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Current Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Graduated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The students who participated in the focus group discussion came from three closing charter school academies. Some of the participants knew each other from their former schools, while others met for the first time at the session. Ironically, Participant 2 attended two charter school academies, which had closed. Participant 5 was in eighth grade when his K-8 grade school had closed, which meant he was planning on transitioning to another school for high school regardless of the closure. Participants 1 and 8 had transitioned for their senior year of high school to the study site and graduated on time in 2017. Participant 2 was in her second year of twelfth grade at the study site having been in the position of not meeting graduation requirements in her first year after the transfer. The study site was the second school for Participants 4 and 7 since the closure. Participant 6 was in his second year at the study site, having moved up from the middle school of the K-12th grade campus. There were two sets of siblings in the focus group with Participants 4 and 7 and Participants 6 and 8, respectively.

A staff member who aided in identifying potential candidates for the study facilitated the focus group. His role at the study site was the district’s Director of Family and Community Relations, where one of his responsibilities included student recruitment and enrollment. He facilitated the discussion because he was familiar with the participants, which helped the students be more comfortable. He also had extensive experience in facilitating focus groups in an educational setting as well as in the corporate environment. This allowed the primary investigator to observe the discussion and provide
the facilitator with follow-up questions as needed due to the direction of the conversation. The conversation with the students lasted 90 minutes and focused on questions about their experiences with the transition to the school, which was serving as the study site.

**Interviews.** After the initial analysis of the focus group discussion, there were four candidates who were invited to participate in the individual interviews. These participants were chosen due to the richness of their responses in the focus group discussion and willingness to participate. All participants were informed of the procedural safeguards for confidentiality and informed consent was obtained from participants over the age of 18. If participants were under the age of 18, written parental consent was obtained. All participants who were currently students, regardless of age of consent, were required to obtain parent permission per the school’s guidelines. Interviews were conducted from May 7, 2018 to June 13, 2018. The interviews were conducted following an interview protocol with questions revised after the data analysis from the focus group session transcripts. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed by the primary investigator. Notes and memos were developed during the process.

Table 3 displays the profiles of the interview participants.
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Current Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant A</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant B</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant C</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Graduated in 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant D</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>10th Grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were from charter schools that had closed in the summer of 2016. Participants B and D were enrolled at the same K-12 charter school academy, and both had attended that school for 2 years. Participants A and C were siblings who attended another K-12 charter school academy for over eight years. Participant D was the only participant who had graduated from the study site in 2017 after attending the new school for one year. Participant B was a twelfth grader who was attending the study site for the second year. Participants A and C were completing their first year at the study site at the time of the interviews. Participants A and C also had attended another school the first year after the charter school closure. This made the study site the second school they had attended since their initial school had closed.

Data Analysis

Approval from the IRB at Eastern Michigan University was granted on April 25, 2018 (see Appendix J). The focus group and individual interviews were conducted from May 9, 2018, to June 13, 2018. Analysis occurred concurrently with the collection of focus group and interview data. An inductive approach to the analysis was utilized where the coding emerges from the process and is not pre-determined before analysis. Yin
(2014) explained, “The procedures assign various kinds of codes to the data, each code representing a concept or abstraction of potential interest” (p. 138). The focus group and interview sessions were audio-recorded with the participants’ permission and the primary investigator also took notes. The primary investigator for analysis transcribed the focus group and interview recordings. The transcripts, research notes, and memos produced during the coding process were compiled into a database using the Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. First- and second- level codes emerged from the analyses and these coded segments were then sorted and categories were developed. Themes were subsequently assigned to the categories (Durdella, 2018, p. 281). Using the software as a tool, Yin (2014) explains these data should be displayed by tabulating the frequency of codes appearing in the transcripts: matrices of emerging themes, evidence from the transcript, and other charts for examining data (p. 135).

Presentation of Themes from Focus Group Discussion

Analysis of the data from the focus group discussion resulted in the emergence of four themes. The themes emerged from the focus group discussion of how these high school students experienced the transition to a single charter high school after their previous schools had closed. The discussion was focused on the students sharing their transitional experiences to a single charter high school. The themes were as follows:

- Theme 1: Power of Relationships,
- Theme 2: Sense of Belonging,
- Theme 3: Fear of the Unknown, and
- Theme 4: Adjustment to Rules.
The themes were presented in descending order by the number of references coded from the focus group discussion’s transcript. Figure 2 illustrates the number of references coded for each of the themes.

![Figure 2. Focus group discussion themes. This figure illustrated the number of coded references for the themes of the focus group.](image)

As Figure 2 displays, the themes were: power of relationships, sense of belonging, fear of the unknown, and adjustment to rules. Thorough examination of the themes brought a better understanding of the students’ experience as they transitioned from their closed charter schools.

**Theme 1: Relationships**

Relationships were a prevalent part of the focus group’s comments with 33 coded references made during the discussion. Relationships were defined for this case study as a connection between two or more individuals. Specifically, relationships with teachers,
advisors, and friends were identified throughout the conversation as the key to the participants having a positive or negative perspective of the transition.

When the focus group participants discussed their reactions to the announcement of their former school closing, the loss of relationships dominated the responses. The words pain, fear, and sadness were used by three of the participants in describing the way they felt due to losing these relationships. Participant 5 explained, “I felt pain because it was the only school I went to, K-8.” Participant 3 commented she felt sadness because her friends and teachers were “breaking up.” Participant 1 added to her comments by explaining, “I will say the same thing she said… just knowing that the school was going to close, I was thinking that I was probably not going to see people I had gotten used to seeing every day and teachers.” These feelings of never seeing people again because of the closure dominated the discussion.

While the loss was difficult for these participants, relationships also played a large part in choosing the new school for many of the students. Participant 2 commented she made her decision because of a friend. She explained:

Uh, it’s kind of ironic. I followed my best friend here. The reason was since it was closing, she said her mom was going to transfer her here and she was like, ‘Hey, we don’t like people here, want to go somewhere no one else is.’ She said, ‘You come with me.’ And I was like ok; and so, we’re here now. And it’s obviously better, and I like it here, and she did say it was a bit of a strict school and I was like maybe they will challenge me more I guess.

Participant 2 chose the school due to this established relationship with her former classmate. Other participants also had made the choice of the study site due to friends and
siblings coming to the school with them. Participant 4 stated, “Most of my friends I knew before were transitioning here, so I knew I had their support and I was glad because going to high school, it was comfortable to be with people.”

When responding to feeling supported during the transition, many participants felt supported by the advisor and homeroom classmates at the current school. At the receiving school, the students were assigned a gender specific advisory class to attend first and last hour. The advisory class traveled through the high school together in order to foster relationships and provided continuity through the same advisor all four years. Participant 7 explained the support his advisor had provided by quickly:

When I first got here, I didn’t talk to anyone or anything like that. My adviser, before I even walked into the classroom, he saw me at my locker and he walked up to me and was like, hey you must be (states name) and I was like yeah, and he was like welcome to our advisory, you haven’t met everybody yet, but we’re pretty good and he was like, you may not know us, but we are your family now. The school is your family.

In a similar way, Participant 2 described the support she received from not only her advisor, but also the students who made up the advisory class as a whole. She stated:

A lot of the girls (in advisory) were really nice and they said hey, why don’t you talk, we don’t bite? So, uh, I got to know them better and they really supported me and like my future career of an artist, so you know they kind of helped me in the time that I mostly needed them.
The relationships established in the advisory class made the difference for both participants. The relationships with friends made the difference for most of the participants. Participant 4 explained:

My experience here has also been good because I had friends who I knew who were also coming here and then I linked up with some of my old friends that used to go to Academy B with and I like the teachers and how some of the high school run because the teachers are like supportive and they try to help and encourage you but at the same time they try to make you realize that you’ve got to be responsible for your actions and stuff, so they make you try to do better.

This example of teachers being supportive was echoed in several comments. In a similar way, teachers connecting with students on a personal level were also important to many participants. Participant 8 commented:

I can’t remember which teacher it was, I think it was our French teacher, she had made like an outside field trip. She took us to like her favorite museum because we had asked questions that she didn’t know the answer, so she didn’t know quite how to describe it to us, so we went to the museum and that’s how we got our answer. Most teachers will tell us to search it up later, like, so that was cool.

The participants were impacted by the teachers at the receiving school developed personal relationships with them and these interactions had made the difference.

The power of relationships with staff also had a negative impact. Participant 8 provided an example of an interaction with the principal being off-putting on the first day. Other participants commented about teachers not knowing their names, not being engaged in instruction and not being helpful as detractors to them feeling welcome. There
was no mention of school-wide initiatives or programs as a factor in making participants feel they were welcomed or belonged.

The power of relationships was exemplified by it being the main suggestion when participants were asked how school leadership could help with this transition. Comments included the importance of staff acclimating students by helping them get to know each other in order to establish relationships. Participant 2 made a point of how transitions can be easier if staff helps students find people with common interests. She shared:

I talked to you (referring to the facilitator) and I told you my interests and I instantly met your daughter who had the same interests and that kind of made me feel welcome because at least there was someone else that liked the same thing that I do. So, it made me believe that there is going to be more people and they are not going to judge me, and they make me feel welcome. And I found a lot of people that they liked my weirdness and they kind of liked being around me. So, I believe a school could try to get the student more, or the students, and tell them there are like certain people they might enjoy talking to and they are really friendly and such and it might make them feel welcomed more.

Participant 2’s comments brought to light the need that many students may have had in connecting to others as they make their transition into the receiving school.

**Theme 2: Sense of Belonging**

Finn (1989) defined sense of belonging as students having a feeling that they are, “discernibly part of the school environment and that school constitutes an important part of their own experience. And second, these individuals value success in school-relevant goals” (p. 123). Sense of belonging, along with its second-level code of lack of care and
concern, had a total of 19 coded references in the focus group discussion transcripts. Lack of care and concern was defined for this study as times when the participants perceived someone did not show care for their well-being or did not promote their success in working towards school-relevant goals. In the focus group discussion, participants discussed the process of feeling like they belonged and what prevented them from feeling they were a part of the new school.

The participants described the process of belonging as being aided by finding peers who shared common interests. Participant 2 explained:

So, when I first got here, the people were nice and everything, but I felt off, but then I got to some classes and I felt like oh I belong… they play video games, and they watch anime and I am like, I need to talk with these people…. I kind of felt like I belonged so after a couple of months being here, it felt kind of normal, I had been here for a while and not like I just transferred here.

This sense of belonging came for Participant 2 by connecting to fellow students through shared interests.

A sense of belonging also came from the help Participant 7 received from the basketball coach. He commented:

I didn’t feel like I would belong at the beginning... But then I talked to (names basketball coach) and he made me play for him, so I would have people to talk to... So, I basically waited for that opportunity and then up until that point I didn’t feel welcomed by anybody, but my advisory and then I eventually got switched into honors classes where I actually felt like I belonged.
Through the aid of the basketball coach, along with advisory and his honors classes, Participant 7 began to feel he belonged by connecting with peers who shared his interests.

Receiving school staff appeared to be the linchpin for whether or not students developed a sense of belonging.

Two of the participants mentioned how the school principal demonstrated a lack of care and concern for them. Participant 4 discussed how the principal had not interacted with the students unless it was to provide feedback, such as concerns about the school uniform. Participant 8 mentioned not only an interaction with the principal but also a substitute teacher. He explained:

The smiles that the principal did made me feel welcome, but him steady doing it made me feel like I didn’t belong in this environment, but there have been other situations where we had a sub and the sub did nothing…just sat there at the desk and it took 5 minutes for me to notice that the sub was even there and when I asked, and no one else wanted to ask, and the sub looked at me like his head was about to pop off, he just pointed at the board and he didn’t say anything to me. He just pointed to the board and went back to writing… what he was writing, it made me feel like; what are you even here for? You wonder why someone wants to be here… I could go to the park.

Having transferred as a senior, Participant 8 had limited time to feel a part of the school community. His interactions with the principal and a substitute teacher made a strong impression on him, which was visible due to Participant 8 using these examples more than once in the discussion. Other participants supported these comments with accounts
of teachers not knowing their name, not being greeted when entering the school, and other interactions with adults in the building.

The lack of care and concern, which tied into the discussion about a sense of belonging, included discussion of safety issues for the participants. The participants commented on there not being enough security guards at the receiving school. They also got into a discussion about the school having a procedure where students were ushered out of the building at dismissal and not allowed back inside regardless of the weather outside.

**Theme 3: Fear of the Unknown**

When asked about their feelings during the transition, the word fear was a part of the responses from participants. Fear of the unknown was a coded reference 16 times in the focus group discussion. Fear of the unknown was defined as a sense of fear experienced by the students based on concern of things they did not know about with the new school. Responses included discussions of fears about new systems, academic expectations, and the concern about carry-over from past experiences.

Most of the participants commented on being fearful of differences at the new school, while seeing the transition as an opportunity to start over. Participant 7 said, “One of my concerns was fitting in or having to learn new teachers’ personalities…and you see, seeing that I just got started with high school, trying to figure out myself, and how I want to be and how I want to go about my life.” Participant 7 worried about getting to learn new teachers and their personalities.

For other participants, the fear of the unknown came from being unfamiliar with the systems and processes at the new school. Participant 2 explained, “What worried me
was like how the whole system would be because many schools have everything different and especially how the people act here… so it was confusing at first, and when you do start, everything was kind of mixed up.” The structure of the school made Participant 2 fearful and uncomfortable and the unknown elements added strain to her transition.

Participant 4 expressed concern that she had not known academic expectations and the unknown from new relationships. She stated:

Um, to me it was like when I changed schools, it wasn’t like teachers, but in some schools, when they’re changing, you aren’t learning like what you got done learning in that grade. So, whatever you learned in that school before, you are learning over and it is hard. And this and that and it’s also hard with friends and it’s hard communicating with other people and stuff, especially when you grew up with those kids being at school with them for a long time.

The hesitancy and concern about not knowing anyone played a part in the fear Participant 4 expressed as she tried to adjust to the transition.

Some of the participants expressed concern that issues carried over from the former school. Participant 7 explained:

It was fearful because I already had a hard time fitting in because I got bullied from first grade to the time I left the school, but I was just starting to feel welcome and I had gained a lot of friends that year. That was a really rough year for me already so having to change schools and not informing, getting information that the school was going to close until the end… I was really fearful, and it was nerve-wracking because I didn’t know where I was going next and I didn’t really want to start over all over again.
This fear of the unknown and what would happen when they started over at the new school was prevalent with many of the comments of participants.

**Theme 4: Adjustment to Rules**

When discussing the transition, the participants repeatedly expressed the adjustment they had to make to the rules of the new school. The references included confusion about the rules, difficulty in understanding what to do to stay in good standing, and overall strains in adjusting to the rules from the student code of conduct. While they expressed the new school was better due in part to the structure of the rules, the participants all expressed learning the rules was a difficult part of the transition.

The behavior system at the receiving school, which operated with merits and demerits earned for breaches of rules, had been the most challenging part of the transition for many. Participant 4 commented:

So, to me, the worst thing about this school is the demerit system because it is just all of it, literally. Like what they said, about that and then at the beginning of the school year they said it’s one demerit for this, two demerits for that, but all I hear is (teachers) giving out four. No, like seriously. So, at the beginning of the school year, say you ate a piece of candy, that’s one demerit, now you eat a bite of the candy and that’s four demerits. And, like they don’t understand, like these are adding up and by the end of the school year, if you have too many detentions, like four demerits equals one detention. Come on now, and you’re giving it to us for biting a piece of candy, and at the end of the day, this all adds up and half the kids are flunking their grade because they bit a piece of candy.
This difficulty with the rules and the way they were enforced was a challenge for many of the students as they adjusted to the receiving school.

Even for participants who expressed they liked the strict nature of the school, there were frustrations with some aspects of the rules. Participant 1 shared:

Ok. I will say I like that the school is really strict. For example, you had to be in class right on time and things like that. One thing I didn’t like is that you had to call on someone, so they would take you to the bathroom. They would come 5 minutes later, 10 minutes later, you’re like, the floor is almost wet or something. That is one thing I didn’t like. I didn’t like that it was strict.

This dual perspective of liking the strict systems at the new school, while being critical of some parts, was prevalent in the responses where participants described their experience and what they thought about the new school.

Part of this difficulty with adjusting to the rules appeared to come from the inattentive of the way their former school had operated. The organizational protocols for behavior were very different in comparison. Participant 2 elaborated:

So, this school is way better in every possible way except for some of the rules. Um, at my old school, a lot of the kids just misbehaved. A lot of them didn’t want to go there to learn but a lot of the kids would skip classes, they would just like disrespect the teachers, even substitutes. It was just like a lot of times fighting would happen...So I like it here just because like the rules are enforced and sometimes some kids get away with it, but I like that it’s more rules and it’s actually more organized then my old school was and they had like the school has more of their stuff together and they actually provide more like after school
programs, more help, and they have like you know more advanced classes then my old one.

Participant 2 shared that the rules were providing the structure needed for the increased opportunities at the new school, which outweighed the challenges.

In a similar fashion, Participant 7 had also been willing to deal with the frustration of adjusting to the rules for the benefits of the new school. He explained:

Um, my experience so far has been pretty good. Um, through past stuff, and through past schools I’ve been through, and the stuff that has gone on at the school; it has been a safe place to go pretty much. But, you know, I am not a bad kid, but I find myself getting in trouble every once in a while, so the rules, I don’t mind them because I don’t break them, but sometimes I’m late for class and the demerits start to be higher and higher every week, which causes the tensions and it gets kind of irritating so sometimes.

Participant 7 expressed difficulty with complying with some procedures, but he appreciated the help he received from the teachers and other aspects of the school.

This difficulty with adjusting to the rules may have been due to the difference with how rules were enforced at their former schools. Participant 8 brought up this difference by stating, “So, like when he said (names closed school) didn’t have the same rules, but the rules they did have they weren’t like enforcing them; they were being like lazy towards it; here they stay on it, they don’t show any type of leniency; at the old school, you do the same thing wrong that you do here, there is a different outcome.”

In the discussion of adjusting to the rules, the participants all began to make comparisons to their former closed schools. Explanations indicated they were not used to
consistent enforcement of rules and the structure of the school was seen with mixed views. While the adjustment was a challenge, many of the participants expressed that the increased opportunities and instructional support made the adjustment bearable.

**Focus Group Summary**

The eight participants in the focus group discussion brought different perspectives to the experience of transitioning to a new charter high school due to closure. The four themes were relationships, sense of belonging, fear of the unknown, and adjustment to rules. The information provided by the participants helped determine the candidates for the individual interviews based on who provided a rich description and detail to their responses. It also aided in revising the individual interview questions so that they focused on diving deeper into these themes. The findings from those interviews led to some of the themes from the focus group interviews expanding to related but different themes from the responses of the interview participants. Due to a deeper exploration of the focus group themes, there was a need to re-categorize some of the themes as new details emerged from the interview participants’ responses. These new themes are discussed in the next section.

**Presentation of Themes from Individual Interviews**

Four high school students who had participated in the focus group discussions were invited to individual interviews. They were asked questions focused on their experience from the announcement of their former school closing through the transition to the single charter high school. During the data analysis of the interviews, themes emerged from the individual transcripts. Table 4 presented the themes that emerged in each participant’s interview.
Table 4  
*Themes in Individual Interviews*

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<tr>
<th>Participant A</th>
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<td>Rules Needed</td>
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As Table 4 presents, there were differences in the prevalent themes in the different interviews. Each interview participant presented a unique story, which provided insights valuable to present the individual interview analysis as well as the themes they all had in common.

**Themes from Participant A’s Interview**

Participant A was the youngest student to be individually interviewed. She was an African American, female, ninth grader who transitioned to the study site, Academy A, with her three siblings, one of which was also another interview participant.

Participant A’s former school, Academy B, was a K-12 charter school district that had been open for 17 years. The state of Michigan listed the cause of closure as “non-renewal of contract” (Michigan Department of Education, 2016) by the authorizer. In its final year, the school had 898 students enrolled with 91% identified as economically disadvantaged and 100% African American. The K-12 charter school had an 84.5% high school graduation rate. Academically, the school had less than 10% score proficient on
the 11th grade Michigan Student Test of Education Performance (M-Step). During the year of closure, the school district was ranked in the 2nd percentile. It had been ranked 13th and 27th in the two years previous.

She had been at Academy B from first grade to seventh grade and then left the school in its last year of operation. She had planned to come back to Academy B for high school, but it closed the year she was in the other school. She stated her father had moved her because he could see “the school was going downhill.” Unfortunately, he passed away in the year she was away from Academy B, and Participant A wanted to go back to the school for support. She explained:

I would have never wanted to leave; he had to pull us out. But I wanted to go back because it was like when I went to this new school it was like nobody knew me and stuff so it was like after my dad died, you all don’t understand how I am feeling and I had this friend at my old school who knows how I feel and I could see her every day and she could cheer me up and make me happy and stuff. And it wasn’t that they didn’t (care) I just didn’t have the bond that I had with her.

Participant A wanted to return to Academy B in order to have the emotional support she needed in her grief. Unfortunately, the school was closed before she could return to it. When speaking about her experience, Participant A’s responses focused on relationships, the need for student voice, developing a sense of belonging and adjusting to the rules as a part of the transition. While other themes showed up in the analysis, these four themes were coded with the most frequency in her story.

**Relationships.** When dealing with any change, Participant A explained she did not like change and she depended on her friends to help her adjust. The focus on her
relationships with friends and teachers were dominant themes in Participant A’s interview. These relationships presented in her discussion of not only the loss she felt from the closed school, but also key in her transition to the receiving school.

Relationships with friends were the driving force in Participant A’s desire not only goes back to Academy B, but also in her decision to go to Academy A. She chose to come to Academy A because she did not have relationships with friends at the first school she attended after the closure and a close friend was attending Academy A.

When asked about what helped with the transition, Participant A immediately responded with the relationship she had with a close friend from her previous school. Citing her friendships as the key to her successful transition, Participant A explained:

Well, the one (friend) from Academy A, I don’t really have any classes with her, but she encourages me. That’s the one that mainly makes me happy every time she sees me. The other one I do have like 3 classes with her and when she does have classes with me I get off topic really fast, so she is like, “A, get your work done. A.” You can tell they really care because they make sure I do well and stuff like that. And I do the same for them.

These friends had made the difference for Participant A in her transition to the new school, but also a difficulty. She explained:

I used to be really sad, but when I got my friends back from Academy A, because we split up when it closed, and we went to different schools… when we got back together I was really happy now, but I did lose some other friends from my old school. The ones I came here with, most of them I don’t hang with anymore because they don’t hang with my friend from Academy A. But she was like my
best friend, so I was like I can’t leave her; we can all be cool; but they just chose to distance themselves.

Choosing her close friend who came from Academy B has helped Participant A in the transition, but it also has meant separating from some friends.

For Participant A, relationships, especially those with peers, were key in her feeling comfortable in the new environment and how she managed a successful transition. When asked about advice she would give another displaced student, she went back to having relationships to aid in the transition. Participant A advised:

If you were not moving with them, make sure you take their number down and keep in touch. See where your friends are going to (a school) so they can help you through stuff, especially if you have a good bond with them. Look into the teachers and stuff like that and see if they are good teachers, see if they care and stuff like that. Make sure you pick a school you feel comfortable with.

Factors, such as how she has successfully handled change in the past, made Participant A’s relationships with friends a critical part of her transition. When asked about her most important relationships at the new school, Participant A listed peer relationships. She explained:

My relationship with my cousin, my best friend and my other best friend (are the most important relationships) … When someone is bothering me, they will holler at them and stuff. I would say those are my most important relationships and everyone knows that. So, yeah them three because I really care about them and I know they really care about me.
These peer relationships help Participant A feel comfortable and protected, which seems particularly important to her during the transition period.

In a similar way to her friends, relationships with teachers were a part of the loss she experienced and also important in her transition to the new school. Participant A spoke quite a bit about teachers being some of the important relationships she lost due to the transition. Participant A continued:

I feel like it’s the same because the teachers at Academy B, that’s what I was saying, they really cared, like I was saying the teachers really cared at Academy B, my behavior changed here at Academy A but at Academy B, all I used to do was talk. If I got in trouble, they would just say A didn’t do anything wrong. She just talks a lot. I know, but they would be saying she just talks a lot. I had good grades, like I had straight A’s.

Her relationships at the closed school helped Participant A to be successful because they knew and accepted her. These teachers and staff members also helped Participant A feel secure and safe at her former school. She elaborated:

I mean, the people there, I knew the lady in the office that sits at the front desk. I knew all of them since kindergarten, so I knew if the school was going on lock down, we used to practice lock down drills, and the school was big, and it seemed safe to me because when stuff happened like that, they took care of it. I still felt safe there because I knew these people, I was comfortable with these people and knew they cared so they wouldn’t let anything happen.

The teachers at her former school had provided Participant A with a comfortable environment because she felt they cared and trusted them. In transitioning to Academy A,
Participant A began to feel comfortable in her transition once she found teachers were demonstrating care for her. She stated:

Well, I asked the kids up there last year. I was like do you really learn something, are they really teaching? I think I get it from talking to the teachers because I feel I know if the teacher is telling the truth. Like some teachers are like, yeah, but I know it’s not really so I feel like I know when the teacher is telling the truth or I know teachers that really care about your education so some teachers are like, I teach all day and then they are like getting out of the class, but some teachers, I got a couple of teachers that really care and they will pull you to the side and be like A your grade is going down in my class and I am going to try to give you some extra credit work or see what can we do to make you do better. I like teachers like that because they really care about your education. So that’s what I look for.

Those relationships with teachers, which were critical to Participant A, came when teachers showed they cared about her as an individual. Just like the relationships with friends, the teachers helped Participant A’s transition and helped her be comfortable no matter where she was located. For Participant A, it was critical to get along with people at school, which she stated numerous times in the conversation. She said, “I get along with the teachers good; everybody likes me. I get along with the dean of the students and stuff. So, people like me and so I feel comfortable around here, like a second home, but I’m here every day.” Those relationships and people’s approval were important factors in Participant A being comfortable at school.
Student voice. Similar to the focus group discussion, student voice was a prevalent theme in the interview with Participant A. Mitra (2004) defined student voice as “young people [sharing] their opinion by collaborating with adults to improve education outcomes, including helping to ‘improve teaching, curriculum, and teacher-student relationships, and leading to changes in student assessment [development] and teacher training” (p. 652).

Using Mitra’s (2004) definition of student voice, Participant A felt it was important at the new school and was also a missing critical piece in the school closure decision. She explained the importance by stating, “Because the students are the school. So, without the students, there would be no school.” She felt students needed to have more of a say.

When asked if she had more of a voice at her former school that closed, Participant A stated, “Yeah. Well, not more of a say, but we had a say. I feel like the only time we didn’t have a say is when they were closing down the school. So, I feel we had no power to do anything about it.”

The theme of student voice truly emerged when she discussed the closure of Academy B. Participant A felt the students could have prevented the school from closing. She explained:

Yes, because we could have said how much… like if they had gotten the people that they were trying to get to sponsor the school…like got a student to speak about it to them, I think they would have understood and got our opinion more like yeah, this school really means a lot to these kids. Yeah and they’re not just
kids doing a bunch of bad stuff and stuff like that and I think they would have
sponsored our school.

Participant A strongly believed student voice could have persuaded the authorizer to keep
the school open because they could have convinced a management company to take over.

Participant A also felt student voice was important for universally improving
schools. When she responded to what would improve schools, she suggested students
play a role in governance with a role on the school board. She expounded:

I think they should have a few students on the board. So, students could help
make decisions because that would help make the school better all school year
and not just one decision. Because I was going to say, come with no uniform
because you would feel comfortable with what you were wearing, but I would say
having students on the board because they help make all of the decisions, but the
school would be better, and they would get a student opinion.

Participant A felt student voice was a critical part of schools, from the governance level
to school level decisions. Feeling it could have prevented her former school closing is
evidence of the importance of student voice.

**Sense of belonging.** Participant A had not reached the point where she felt fully
comfortable or a strong sense of belonging at the new school, yet still was connected to
her former closed school. Participant A expressed a strong feeling of belonging when she
discussed her previous school. She shared the sadness she felt with the connection being
gone from Academy B due to its closure. She expressed:

I was like really hurt and I wanted to go back there, and I had so many memories;
I knew a lot of the teachers and I was there since kindergarten so when I left in 6th
grade, I was like, I want to go back there. I really liked the school and it seemed like the teachers really cared. And I was like, you know, I was really comfortable with the school.

The relationships she had with former teachers and classmates helped Participant A have a sense of belonging at her former school.

When discussing the new school, Participant A had mixed emotions. She stated she felt comfortable at the new school and had a good transition. On the other hand, she did not trust people at the new school yet. She explained:

Oh, no. I mean I don’t know how they feel (her classmates from Academy B), but I know that I had a good transition. Even though my friends and I still look back and be like, dang, I miss Academy A, but I think it was a good transition because I like this school. So, it’s not like we can go to a school where it was like “Ugh, I wish I was back at Academy A because I do not like this school.” I mean, even though it is strict, and we are like, “Ugh, I don’t like this school.” We don’t mean it. We are just saying it because we don’t like what happened. But the school is a good school, so it doesn’t make it that hard of a transition because it’s a good school. So, it’s like Academy A, it’s a good school. We just want the people we had at Academy B.

The loss of those relationships for Participant A hindered her transition and development of a full sense of belonging at the receiving school.

Trust was an important part of a sense of belonging for Participant A. People earned her trust by, “showing that they care, showing concern. Making sure I am doing well, not just like whatever. Whatever happens; happens.” When asked about trusting the
staff at the new school, she was unsure after spending almost a year at the school. She explained:

I don’t know yet, because you have to build trust. And I was there for 7 years, so I built that trust. It wasn’t like as soon as I got there I was like, ok, now I trust all of you all. I barely knew anything to trust. Trust is built. I feel like I have come to trust the teachers and stuff. I am cool with the office manager and she works the front desk, so I am really cool with her. I think I trust her because she seems like she cares, and stuff and she won’t let anything happen, so I trust her. But I think I have to build a trust with the teachers. I trust my advisor. Trust has to be built; it’s earned.

While there were some people who she trusted at the new school, Participant A was cautious not to let her guard down. She wanted to present a sense of belonging and an amiable quality when interacting with staff and peers at the new school, but there was also a longing for the familiarity of her former school.

**Rules needed.** One of the areas Participant A came back to multiple times was the idea of the rules at the new school. She felt they were needed, and a part of her transition had been learning to adjust to the rules. The rules, from her point of view, helped qualify Academy A as a good school. She explained:

Uh, yeah, because it is a really good high school… I don’t like some of the rules, but I understand why they have them. You know what I am saying, I don’t like it, but I know that it’s right. They are doing it for a reason. So, it is a good school. I like the way they run the school.
Participant A felt the school was a good school and it was learning the rules, which helped her with the transition. She explained:

Well, I mean, I got used to it; that’s how I think that’s how because when I first got here I was like, we have to wear the shoes. I was like ugh, because I never had a school logo shirt and I was happy about the school logo shirt, but I liked the whole uniform. Well it wasn’t that I liked it, but I wore it this whole last year at my old school, but I just didn’t like the shoes, but I got used to it. You have to find comfortable black shoes; that’s what you had to find, so I just got used to how the school was ran because it was like if you know how to act or behave at school, you should have no problem.

Learning the rules, both spoken and unspoken, of the new school was a key to Participant A’s transition.

The discussion of rules also led to comparisons made between Academy A and her former school. While missing her former school, she felt Academy A was a stricter setting. She expressed:

So, I like Academy B better, but this is a stricter school, they were on themselves, because Academy B, we were supposed to wear black shoes, but everybody wore what they wanted. And they were halfway in uniform, like you were supposed to wear black pants and a red shirt, but they were wearing jeans and a red shirt. So, it was different because they didn’t wear what they were supposed to, so I would say this is a more well-set school, but I like that school because of the bonds.

Even though Participant A’s current school was a good school and was stricter than the closed former school, she still reverted back to liking Academy B for the bonds or
relationships. While Academy A was deemed a “more well-set school,” those relationships could not compete with her previous school.

Themes from Participant B’s Interview

Participant B came to the study site school after her former school had closed, which will be called Academy C in the study. Participant B was a 19-year-old Hispanic female 12th grader at the time of our interview. She had transitioned over with her middle school aged sister. She came into Academy A as a rising twelfth grader, and her first year at the new school was met with academic challenges.

Participant B’s former school, Academy C, was a K-11 charter school that was established in 2013 and closed in June 2016. The state of Michigan listed financial viability as the reason for closure (Michigan Department of Education, 2016). At the time of closure, the school had 338 students enrolled with 99.7% identified as economically disadvantaged. The racial demographics of the school were 64% Hispanic, 31% African American and the remaining 5% identified as White or multiracial. On the 2015-2016 M-Step assessment, less than 10% of third through eighth graders tested proficient in reading or math. The school was not ranked in its last year of operation, which was the first year they were eligible for ranking.

She did not graduate during her first year at the receiving school, so she was repeating twelfth grade at the time of her interview. Also, she had the notable distinction of having been at two schools that had closed. She was at another charter school whose closure had prompted her to transition to Academy C. She had been at Academy C for two years before her transition to Academy A in twelfth grade.
Participant B’s story was one of someone struggling who was aware of her challenges. She expressed her feelings about her previous school:

It wasn’t too much to experience. The culture was mostly Mexican students a lot of black, maybe some white. There wasn’t too much to experience. It was a quiet school, but it was on the ghetto side… if I can say that. A lot of the time we didn’t have teachers, so the learning experience was 50/50. I did learn some things like for what I want to go into for my major and stuff and I did learn about that, which I was good with that. The teachers were nice, the students not so much, you had your typical fights or stuff like that. Some things didn’t interest me, so I didn’t get included too much there.

While Participant B did not have affection for her former school, she was concerned about the transition. She explained:

I think a lot of the students were happy. They just didn’t care. The school didn’t offer much but it did have a little bit because we had gotten used to the people there even though a lot of stuff happened. But it was just kind of hard having to transfer somewhere else and do it all over again. And that’s what a lot of students didn’t like about it. They saw the school as kind of an easy school because you could get your grade up easily, you didn’t have homework half of the time. It was just a big old roller coaster situation.

This expressed sense of “a big old roller coaster situation” was found throughout her interview responses. Participant B’s story could be synthesized into the themes of key relationships with teachers and peers, fear of the unknown, sense of belonging, and anxiety in the transition.
Fear of the unknown. Participant B had a fear of the unknown when it came to the new people she met during the transition to the receiving school. She told about the first impression she had of the new school:

First, I stepped in the doors and there were a bunch of kids and I was like, oh no, I don’t know any students here, I didn’t know what was going on, and they reorganized my classes and I was like, ok, and my little sister was with me so I would just hold onto her like hey come here, I am kind of nervous and she would be like let me go you weirdo.

These first impressions were relieved when she encountered friendly teachers and saw familiar faces from her first school. She explained, “A lot of teachers I met that year were really nice, they were welcoming. I didn’t feel so nervous because there were some people here that I met in middle school. And I hadn’t seen them in a while and I was like surprised.” There were numerous examples Participant B shared where her initial anxieties ended up being unfounded at her current school.

When meeting new classmates, Participant B had a fear to reach out to her peers. She described those initial interactions: “It was mostly negative, but sometimes positive. It was more positive. It helped me just know that I should be careful with what I do around certain people. I don’t want to make them upset or anything, so I would try to keep that in mind when I come across.” She was uncertain how they would respond, and she was fearful they would not be accepting.

Key relationships. Participant B did not communicate having a lot of relationships at her previous schools or Academy B. The important ones she mentioned made the difference in her transition.
For Participant B, moving to Academy A was the result of a relationship with a key friend who also helped her make the transition successful. This friend was the one who recommended they come to Academy A together. Participant B explained the significance of this relationship:

Yeah, I think it has been 3 years that we have known each other, and we are going to graduate already and we’re happy about that. She has been the one that has been keeping me balanced; she’s helped me a lot; she’s telling me, oh you have to come to school; oh, you need some work, I can help you; the teachers have noticed what we have together.

This connection with a key friend, who is her main peer relationship at the school, has made the difference. Participant B said, “She has made this year a little bit less nerve-wracking. I didn’t feel so scared of being here at least I wasn’t alone, but then at least that’s when I started meeting more people and I started to feel safer. And feeling I could be myself in a lot of ways.” This friendship provided Participant B with the support and comfort needed to mitigate her fears and make the transition a little easier to navigate.

In the same way, there was a challenge of establishing teacher relationships. She spoke of the difficulty she had in communicating with teachers when she first arrived at Academy A:

For the first year I was here, they did not go away, it stayed for a while. Certain teachers, I don’t know, they looked really intimidating, so I would be scared to talk with them. Other teachers were nice; I would ask them for help. They would encourage me to talk with other teachers and I would be really scared about it. But it didn’t really help me but this year; it was really different. I was able to talk to
my teachers when I needed help and I got through it just fine. And even when I had some problems and I felt like I couldn’t talk to them, I would try to tell them slowly what I was trying to get across and they would, so I got used to talking to someone and got better at it.

The perseverance of her teachers helped her develop the ability to speak with them in order to get the assistance needed. She expounded on the way teachers motivated her:

A lot of them just pushed me to talk with them. A lot of them really pushed me to act social and a lot of them said if you don’t do it, how are you going to do it in college. You have to communicate with teachers somehow. An email is even fine. And I would be like, how do I send an email, what do I say? “Hi there, how’s your day?” you know? Do I make a joke? And they would push me and if it was really bad they would go with me, they would start a conversation and it would help me a lot more, but also talking to the students more and seeing how they interact with the teachers helped me more clearly know how to keep a conversation going and not feel so weird.

This coaching by the teachers helped Participant B in her transition by learning how to communicate in order to self-advocate.

In the end, there was a key teacher relationship that made the difference for Participant B. She shared:

When I first met her, she stood out to me because she was the happy and energetic one. She did her part too… she communicated with a lot of her students. She would keep them after class and she would talk to them about what they needed and so usually she would get a little bit mad if students took advantage or
something. But when I got to talk with her, she was really open, and she didn’t hide very much. And I told her I was having some issues and maybe I am just rethinking everything, and she just helped me through it a lot. You just need to talk to someone, you need to do this; she never pushed me away, she never really ignored me. She was there to help me out when I needed something.

This teacher’s persistence helped Participant B manage her fear of the unknown and successfully transition. Their relationship has developed into one of mentorship.

Participant B provided an example:

She is the one that I talk most to about a lot of my problems and she helps me out. She says maybe you should do this and when I ask her something personal, she says, ‘I think it’s time you take responsibility. You don’t let other people stop you from what you are trying to do.’ And I asked her, and she said you have to get a job. A job is going to help you be more social. It’s going to help you talk to people and you won’t be so nervous, and it will help you get out and you won’t be in your room all of the time. She tells me to be careful about what I pick as to go to in college or the people I talk to and I should be more open with myself and I shouldn’t be so negative, I should be more positive. She gives me a lot of good advice and it has helped me get through the year.

This teacher’s connection with Participant B is helping her with not only the transition to the new school but has morphed into assistance in her preparation to move into college.

Both of these key relationships were critical to Participant B when she discussed the transition to the current school. While she does not have many close relationships, these key ones provided the support needed.
**Sense of belonging.** Participant B was skeptical about being welcomed and accepted when she arrived at Academy A, and the response was a welcome surprise. She declared:

Yeah, yeah, I was surprised. They are really nice people, a lot of the students here, they exceeded my expectations of what I would get and uh, it really made me feel more welcome, I didn’t feel like I had to hide anything. Sometimes when they carry on a conversation I really am more how I act, and it really made me feel I wasn’t so nervous, and I didn’t feel like, oh I am going to miss my old school I felt like I was going to do really good here and it pushed me to my goals.

The reception of her peers, along with some key relationships, aided Participant B to develop a sense of belonging.

Participant B’s sense of belonging came from her letting her guard down and communicating with her peers. She expressed her thinking behind this transformation, which was aided with her key friendship:

When I got here, I was the really quiet person, not a lot of people noticed me. My friend did the same thing and we agreed let’s just not communicate that much, maybe if they talk to us: or something. Uh, we realized it just made us seem kind of like a-holes, just because you know maybe someone was talking to me and I wasn’t communicating back. It just made me look like a bad person. But the more people talked to me, they were really nice and welcoming here, and it made me come out more and it went back to who I am, and I was able to show them that I am a really open person depending on who they are. I am really outgoing, I am
really talkative, so I can keep a conversation going, so I didn’t really expect to change anything about it though maybe I just gained more confidence.

With the support of teachers and her friend, Participant B developed a sense of belonging as she began to reach out and communicate more with others.

The racial differences between the two schools also were original concerns for Participant B. With her former schools being predominantly Hispanic students, coming into Academy A, which has more diversity with approximately 65% African American and 30% Hispanic students, Participant B was unsure if the displaced students from her former school would be welcomed and belong. She expressed:

You know a lot of kids these days, you see someone who is a different ethnicity. You joke around or you are serious about it. They didn’t do that here: they welcomed us. We kind of felt a little on the outside because a lot of us were Mexican. Um, a lot of the kids would be like, hey guys, um, how are you doing today. This kid that graduated last year, came back recently, a lot of those students afterward were like hey did you graduate, how are you doing, they still welcomed him nice. They still talked with him, even though he is still not communicating with him. And I guess the students here; I guess they just did a really good job not being so difficult with them.

While Participant B felt welcomed, despite her concerns due to the racial differences between the majority of Academy A’s students and those from her former school, she may have anticipated difficulty from the issues that existed at Academy B. While not perfect at Academy A, Participant B was braced for the worst. She explained:
A lot of them didn’t talk English though and that’s what a lot of them thought was going to be a trouble thing, but they found out there were people here who also spoke Spanish and things to help them out and it’s took their worry away. We weren’t really worried about the gap in diversity since we had some African Americans and I would see it happen sometimes where they would make fun of them and they would say some things in Spanish and I was just like what was the whole point, is that person your friend. So, when I came here I was ready (for the worst), but it wasn’t that bad. I mean sometimes people would make jokes about ‘Oh my god, we are the only Mexicans here and we would have a little table,’ but we never got picked on though.

Participant B was prepared for teasing and bullying, but that did not occur from her point of view. It is worth noting that there appeared to be some separation between the ethnicities at Academy A, such as the separation in the cafeteria, but it was not a prevalent issue from Participant B’s point of view. In fact, the reaction of the student body at Academy A aided Participant B in her sense of belonging.

Anxiety. Much of Participant B’s story is colored with her perceived anxiety. Whether discussing establishing relationships, her fear of the unknown during the transition or developing a sense of belonging, Participant B spoke of anxiety throughout the discussion. When asked how she would describe herself and how she deals with change, Participant B said:

I mean, when I hear an average student, I think of a student who does their work, you know, has a couple of friends and do activities. Me, I do work, but I
procrastinate a lot. I miss a lot of days. I don’t go out as much with my friends; maybe visit one of them once in a while. I am usually more of an indoor person.

Participant B did not see herself as a typical student and her anxiety is a challenge she faces daily. When discussing how she reacted to the news of her former school closing, Participant B’s anxiety came to the forefront. “So, since I have a lot of anxiety, I felt weird, I just was like I didn’t want to go through it again, but I had my friend who was like, oh, you want to go with me. Like its cool, no one knows us there and they will treat us really strict, but it was a challenging school, but maybe that’s what we need to help us more in the future.” Her friend helped her cope with the transition by providing the option of Academy A for Participant B. She saw the structure of the school as a feature that may help her overcome her challenges.

These anxieties may have also provided a barrier to establishing other relationships. She spoke of communicating with others about sensitive topics as a challenge. She said, “It’s kind of both because sometimes I would get like that depending on the situation, but I’ve known a lot of people who were sensitive to certain topics and I don’t want them to think that I am that type of friend or that type of person. I want them to think, she is someone I can talk to if I ever need it.” Participant B had the desire to communicate with others, but her anxiety prevented initiating conversation.

When asked what advice she would give to leadership on helping students through a similar transition, the anxiety she battles came to the forefront again:

Being a student is not easy, as you know. I think a lot of people would know that, some people not because people tend to not go to school and they tend to not know the struggle. But I feel like when you are a student that is changing from
one school to another, it’s a big thing; it’s a big transition. I think that maybe people should not be so hard on that person. Maybe just help them out a bit; maybe they are going through something because sometimes it’s not so good being the new kid. And maybe its really hard and maybe they just need more support. And just try to settle down and just try to make everything right.

Being sensitive to student anxieties during the transition was her major takeaway for school leadership. With her propensity for anxiety looming throughout the interview, it would be safe to say it was a challenge for Participant B in the process of changing schools.

Themes from Participant C’s Interview

Participant C transferred from the same charter school as Participant B after its closure. At the time, he was an incoming twelfth grader who had been at the school for two years. Emigrating from Mexico on his own at 16, Academy C had been the only American school he had attended. Unfortunately, it was not a good first-time experience with public schooling in the United States for him. Participant C shared:

So, how was the school? It was…. um… it wasn’t a good school. It could have been better because we didn’t have enough teachers. We didn’t have enough resources, like books and stuff like that. The building was really old and it wasn’t clean or anything. It wasn’t in good conditions. There wasn’t enough control over the students. A lot of them would just walk out of class whenever they want, it happens in every school, but you know certain schools try to do something and you know, and that school; the students were like really free. They did everything that they wanted to do.
This perceived lack of consistency and discipline also translated into Participant C feeling he did not get the appropriate academic support at the previous school. While he was there, Participant C taught himself English with the help of a school paraprofessional. He recounted:

One of the teachers, what she would do, and she wasn’t a teacher, she was just there helping, she would give us 5 words in English every day and she wanted us to learn them from memory. Instead of studying them for one day, just learning them, I was like ok that was kind of helpful, but from that we didn’t do anything else. So, what I would do is take little books from the library. Books for kindergarten kids, just read them and books that were like, the dinosaur is big, and the dinosaur has its tail and the dinosaur is small and I started like that; reading those kinds of books. I had a phone, so I would use a translation application every day. So basically, I realized I didn’t have as much help or learning for English, so I found a way to do it by myself and a couple of times. I did feel frustrated because I shouldn’t be teaching myself. The school should be doing this, but still I saw it as opportunity for growth for me.

With his positive attitude, Participant C strived to achieve at his former school. This internal motivation to achieve his goals defined his experience there and carried over when he transitioned to the receiving school.

**Goal orientation.** Participant C’s main goal, which he reiterated time and time again, was attending college. Goal orientation was highly referenced in Participant C’s interview. In fact, he chose Academy A because he felt it would be a challenge and aid in
his preparedness for higher education, though not in ways that may be predicted. He expounded:

Because it was my last year, I knew I had to be ready for college and work harder than before and learn more English because college isn’t going to be easy, right? Writing papers and not knowing the language, that was like really difficult, so I wanted to come to a school that spoke mostly English.

He purposely chose the school because it was not a school that had a high English language learner population. With the impression college would not support learning English, Participant C wanted somewhere where he felt forced to communicate in his second language. With Academy A being one of the only schools in the area where the demographics was not predominantly Hispanic students, it was the right fit for this immersive experience he sought.

Participant C’s focus on the goal of college success impacted the relationships he formed and the connections made at the new school. He stated:

Yeah, and if you go to another school you are just going to be there for one more year and then you graduate. You are not going to even meet that many people, unless you develop relationships with everyone that quick, but still it’s just one year, focus on college and then you are out.

This disposition impacted the relationships Participant C initiated at his new school. He explained that his most important relationships were with the college advisor and other teachers he felt would help him move forward with his goals. When he discussed the relationships made at the school, Participant C did not reference any peer relationships. He made it clear he was there to graduate on time and get accepted to college. Anything
else was not a focus for him in his only year at the new school.

Participant C recommended to other students facing a similar situation to be strategic when forming relationships. He advised:

I would say, first of all, remember what your goal is. What is it that you are looking for and what is it that you want? And, according to that: Whom do you need to talk to? Those are the people you need to; who is going to help me. First of all, remember, what is it that you want, why are you here actually? You are not only here to sit down and do homework, but I mean, look forward, what is it that you are doing this for? And if they are like, well I am going to be an artist, well, develop relationships with the counselors that are going to help you with college but also develop a relationship with someone like an art teacher or something that is related to what you are interested in.

His emphasis on being purposeful with working on goals was prevalent in his responses throughout the discussion. Participant C was aware of the lack of support he had received at his former school but felt his focus on college helped him succeed. When discussing what teachers needed to do to help students in the same position, he expounded:

Always communication, deal with communication with their students and just have teachers that are there to teach, not only for pay. If they are interested in the students and...also just remind the students what they are there for. And kind of there provide the best of the best to one student and if that student doesn’t want to do anything, it wouldn’t be helpful, it wouldn’t be, and, in my case, I didn’t have much support, but I really knew what I wanted to do, I will figure out the way.
And if I have the tools, you know the resources; I will do even more. So same as the students: we want education, but then we should help them understand why the education.

Participant C passionately felt the American students he had encountered were missing a focus on setting goals for the future and this prevented many of his fellow students from his previous school to have a successful transition. He spoke of these classmates having given up on school due to the closure. He shared:

Yeah. I have some schoolmates that went to Academy B. They wanted to go to college and they wanted to study English and that. And then, when they closed the school they were like, I am not going to make it in another school. They just gave up and didn’t continue school. They are not even trying.

He felt this defeated disposition came from the students not having the intrinsic motivation to persevere.

**English language learner support.** One of the areas where Participant C was critical of both schools was their lack of support in helping him learn English. When asked what could be improved at the receiving school, he spoke about the need for more English language learner (ELL) support:

Yeah, something that needed to be improved. Accept the challenge and I like to give myself challenges so coming here, and without people that is going to help me with English was like; ok that’s better for me. I have to push myself and learn more. But for someone who does not have the same motivation and has actually not been helped by anything, that would be kind of hard to learn English.

Participant C had accepted that he would have to teach himself English based on his
experience at the previous school, but he knew he had the intrinsic motivation and ability
to do so for himself. He was concerned for the students who were not so personally
motivated. He advised:

   So, I met some students here that knew a little bit of English and they had been
more years in the United States than me. And they were like, what do you do?
And I was like study a lot; study a lot. But they would tell me how they didn’t get
enough support and I would say, well, maybe if they were just motivated by
something. If they were really focused, they would probably do something about
it; get a little bit more knowledge, learn more, but still you know, it’s the school’s
vocation and if English is what needs to be taught, then (do it).

During his first year at Academy A, they had begun to provide a paraprofessional to
provide tutoring and support. He felt this was a positive move in the right direction. He
explained:

   Yeah. And also, like they do have now with (names the ELL paraprofessional)
someone who can help them personally. And like in the class personally, but
where they are at and on their level. But also that would be helpful because
having someone teach you personally, that person would motivate you to do it
because if you are just in the class and just learning then you are never going to
learn; this teacher doesn’t pay attention to me; he’s always teaching everyone but
he doesn’t understand then ok, they probably have someone personally, during
advisory or something like that, that would help.

The focus on personalized support in order to make up for the lack of help in class was
something Participant C found helpful. In fact, he began an after-school club to provide
support for other students who were learning English as well. He described the experience:

So yeah, as I said there are some students that have come from Mexico or Guatemala who have been here before but did not know that much English. And so, I am like, man I have been in their shoes; in their situation, and I know they need help. I did it by myself, but I would have been so thankful if someone had helped me. So what I did; I talked with; I don’t remember who I talked with but I talked with someone; and I told them I wanted to do this and they were like, oh yeah, go ahead, and they were just going to speak to the principal and he authorized it and we were like we are going to be doing this; we want to help students after school and help them learn English; see where they are at and help them so they can be better in class. And they were like, ok, go ahead and do it. So, I just started to do after the class, twice a week after school we would meet, and it was just like tutoring and helping them with the homework; but also, like a class for teaching English; the basic how to make a sentence; how to pronounce those words and helping them with the basic English.

This support group was one he pursued on his own, even though he himself could have benefited from the additional help. It speaks to not only a need for tutoring in the language, but the isolation that occurred for the students who transitioned to the receiving school and were not native English speakers.

**Fear of the unknown and broken promises.** Participant C did discuss fear of the unknown, but his response was different from the other participants. While he had concerns over the change in the academic demands of the new receiving school, most of
the fears he shared came from his fellow classmates from Academy C who he felt were less prepared for the transition.

Participant C chose the new school because he felt it was rigorous and would fully prepare him for college. While he chose it due to his perception of how strict and challenging it would be, he was also nervous about the demands it would place on his schedule beyond the school day in order to keep up. He expressed:

I didn’t know how they teach here, how much homework that they give and the other school; I already have my schedule and everything. I knew what I had to do, like this class homework daily, but for this class... So, I already knew how much time I would spend on that. And I would fix that according to my schedule. I didn’t know if they were going to give me a lot more homework and I didn’t know if I had to leave some of the activities from the outside or change radically my schedule. That was one of my concerns.

Participant C was concerned about the possibility of not being able to meet the demands of a school, which he perceived as much more challenging than his previous. Since he was used to building time in to teach himself, he was concerned about meeting these demands.

Participant C had a unique response when asked about leaving his previous school or what relationships he was going to miss. In these responses, his resilience and focus on the goal of attending college persisted. He explained:

Yes, I would say I was going to feel kind of sad because I was not going to see the friends I had over there and also teachers that I had built a good relationship with and I wasn’t going to see them again. I was kind of sad; you know to leave the
school. But it was still going to happen when I graduate, if I graduated from there. So, I just accepted it and was like ok, well, life is about changes, so I was like, ok, let’s challenge myself again.

With his life experiences, such as emigrating from Mexico alone, Participant C was resilient to the anxiety of the transition in ways that were unique among the participants. He did, however, see the fear of the unknown in his fellow classmates who had to make the same transition. He shared:

No. It wasn’t hard for me. It was hard for them because the 11th year is the year that they are getting you ready for college, do your ACT/SAT, do this and that, make sure your essay is ready, think about what your career is; what career do you want, so they had all this pressure of thinking and they also had to think about what school they wanted to go and it’s a big decision. Do I go to this school that is going to help me or do I go with my friends?

Time and time again, Participant C expressed concern for his fellow classmates. He felt the closed school had broken promises to them about the support they would receive for college, which left a fear for all of them about the future beyond moving to a new school for their senior year. He expounded:

A lot of the students were sad because they lost all of their relationships; they would probably go to another school and don’t see their friends again. Others were mad because one of the things that the school promised was that they were going to support those that were going to college, support them with probably 2 years of scholarships. Now, knowing that the school was about to close they were
like, I came here because of the scholarships and now you are going to tell me that it is closing? So, a lot of them were pissed off.

These broken promises of support in college and scholarships, which are seen in many marketing materials for nearby charter high schools in particular, made many of Participant C’s classmates fearful of their future and unsure of preparing for it. While he discussed it in terms of his classmates, this fear of the unknown in terms of college preparation and support seemed to harken true for Participant C as well. He revealed:

Yeah, that was the way they got the students. I was also thinking about that because it is hard to get the money for college, so when they told me that I came to the school because of this and they were closing it and I wouldn’t be able to graduate because I wasn’t in the right grade, so just knowing the fact that I was going, I had to go to another school where I didn’t know anyone. Didn’t know the students, didn’t know the teachers, and just start again.

This sense of feeling deceived and left unsure of what to do in order to prepare for college permeated Participant C’s comments about his former school and also was a deciding factor in choosing Academy A.

**Facing the challenges.** Participant C had a mindset that he would take on whatever challenges were presented to him, which included moving from Academy C to the receiving school for his senior year. Having faced great challenges in his life, he took this challenge and made the best of it. He shared some of his past challenges to overcome:

One example is when I came here to the United States four years ago. So, I left my family in Mexico and I came here to a family I hadn’t been with, so I didn’t
know them. I didn’t have a job; I didn’t have an actual relationship with my family, with them. I had to learn about them and know them. I had to learn English, get a job, come to school and all these things and all my dreams and plans and that. So, it was difficult because it was like starting a whole new life and I am all by myself. And, one of the examples is that I didn’t know English, so everything was English because they spoke English in school, and the job, except my family, but everywhere else I needed to know English in order to get something. And if I wanted success or achieve something, I had to learn English because that was the way and that was kind of stressful and hard. And then when I went to school, I thought they were going to help me, for example, be more fluent in English and yes, they did but not as much as I thought they would. So, I had to teach myself English.

By seeing these changes in life as a challenge to overcome, Participant C found success for himself. He faced the transition to Academy A in the same way. He expounded:

Oh well, I thought another challenge, ok, and I like another challenge so let’s do this, let’s see what happens now. Just another opportunity to become a better student, get better grades; just change something that was bad, and I did wrong and just start again. But I saw in many students, many of my friends just thought, ‘oh it’s the end of the world,’ and I’m like, come on just accept it and do something about it.

Participant C felt that the challenges of the transition were something he could handle, especially with the things he had dealt with in the past. This history of facing challenges
helped him with the change in schools. He reflected on expecting it to be a challenge to transition:

Yeah, yeah… I was expecting that, so as I did before, when I had to learn English and they were not helping me, I was like, ok so I give myself the work. And when I was here, I was like, ok, they didn’t change that much of my schedule. I can turn in the homework; it doesn’t take me too much time. And it’s not a lot of compromise for me.

Participant C’s disposition to the challenges of the transition not only speaks to his perception of himself, but also his perspective of his fellow classmates who were making the same transition with him. In his comments, he expressed that he did not think many of his peers were ready to make the move to a new school and that it was not as easy for them to move onto a new challenge.

**Instructional adjustments.** One of the themes threaded through the discussion with Participant C was adjusting to the changes he perceived would come with instruction at Academy A. With the thought that there would be an increase in academic rigor, Participant C was focused on being able to rise to the occasion and meet the expectation. He explained his mindset:

I figured out how to be successful at Academy A by just doing the work. By just, if you are focused on just what you want: to be in class if you want to. For example, you have to be in class after 5 minutes and if you really want to be in class, learn, turn in your homework, you’ll be in class less than 5 minutes. And if you didn’t do your homework, you will be there earlier, so you can do that quickly. I mean, if you are focused on what you want.
Participant C’s strategies for learning the demands of his new school was not only meeting the expectations, but to also do extra work when needed. He shared multiple examples of putting in additional study, including taking Advanced Placement World History on his own at the new school. He shared:

So, they didn’t give me at Academy C Algebra 2 and I had to take it here and I had to take statistics. So, I was taking two math classes, but I wanted to take AP World History and they were like, no you have to take this class. I only had to take half a credit (of Algebra 2) of that first semester I took it, second semester I didn’t take it and the first semester what I did is I went and talked with (names world history teacher) and I wanted to take his class second semester and I wasn’t going to be able to take it this semester, but I wanted to take it next. So, I asked him if he could give me an AP book and I could just take it home and study. And I did. I was doing my nightly readings and I would call them my nightly readings or something. Yeah, so I would get home and get up at like eight or nine and do a couple of readings and then just go to sleep.

Moving to a new school in his senior year left Participant C with some graduation requirements to fulfill. Instead of letting it prevent him from taking AP World History, Participant C decided to take it as an independent study. Not only did he take the course on his own, he ended up being the only one to pass the advanced placement test at the end of the year.

Participant C’s fortitude led to a successful finish to his high school career, but it also speaks to the challenges that he and his fellow students faced in the transition. With making the move in his senior year, as well as the barriers of limited English proficiency,
these students who switched as upper classmen faced having limited time to transition and meet the requirements to graduate. Participant C had the disposition and independence, based on his life experiences, to do what was needed. But his comments also allude to the fact that it may not have been as successful a transition for his peers who made the move with him.

**Themes from Participant D’s Interview**

Participant D had come from Academy B with his younger siblings, including Participant A. He was an African American male who was in the tenth grade, which he was repeating. Participant D had experienced some struggles at the school that had closed, and he saw the transition as a way to change not only his high school, but also his identity. He explained:

> From like first grade to ninth I got bullied so that made me extremely quiet and then I switched schools, and everybody was like, well, he’s not talking and why and I was like, well, maybe I should start so I switched away. I was always funny, but I wouldn’t be funny, unless it was someone I knew my whole life or someone I was really close friends with, but I only had a few of those so they only saw how funny I was, but after I switched schools I was like maybe this is my chance to start over; create a name for myself other than what people said about me.

Participant D had tried to leave Academy B before it closed, but quickly returned when there was a violent incident at the new school.

The school closure was announced in July 2016 and Participant D had found out in August of that year when another charter high school, which happened to be managed by the same educational management organization (EMO), sent a letter explaining that he
was already enrolled at their school. He shared:

Right. Because we didn’t hear nothing from the school except see you at the semester. I mean, not the semester, see you in September. And then I got the letter because they are under the same management and it went, we heard that your school closed and I was like how did you hear that, I didn’t even hear my school closed, and I was like ok, I didn’t hear about the school until they sent letters so I didn’t even know this school exists. So, when they sent it, I was like, oh, ok? I took a little trip up to Academy B, and it used to be a church, so all of the banners were down that said Academy B, so I was like, oh, that’s awkward.

After more than nine years of attending Academy B, Participant D found out from a recruiting school, who had gotten his confidential student contact information, that his school was gone.

Participant D was shocked the school was closed but could see the decline over the last years he had attended. He discussed:

People had labeled the school as one of the worst schools in the city. So, Academy B was a school for, it was a family-based school, there were families inside the school, but there were also people who started stuff. There were gangs, not gangs in the school, but people who were a part of gangs going to the school, so if somebody got into a fight, the gang would come up to the school and we had police officers up there so stuff like that and then a lot of violence. Two people died within that school. So, one of them got stabbed in the school. Yeah, he had a seizure in the lobby right in front of my little brother, so that happened and then somebody else, not at the school, but due to violence in the school, someone else
got shot in the back of the head outside of school. So stuff like that happened so that was why people were like maybe they will close the school there is too much violence going on, maybe they would take it somewhere else or spread them out and it won’t be so much, but I never really thought they were going to close the school, but that wasn’t the reason they closed it; it was because of test scores.

Without time to search for a school, Participant D went to the school that had reached out and made the enrollment process simpler for him. That year was a struggle for him and as he saw things that reminded him of the decline of his previous school, Participant D decided to leave and move to Academy A. Since his performance at the intermediary school was poor, he was placed in tenth grade for a second time.

The dichotomy between missing his familiar school and seeing himself change for the better at the study site would be a theme that would permeate other topics throughout the discussion.

**Bonds lost.** Even though he faced challenges at the now closed school, Participant D had strong feelings about the decision. Most of his thoughts centered on losing the connection to his past and the bonds lost with classmates and teachers. He explained:

I was hurt. I was. Even though I was leaving, I realize it was a great school, it was. But I realized there were students there that probably don’t have anywhere else to go. Middle school students (sic.) who don’t have another middle school to go; elementary students who… because it was kindergarten through 12th grade, so all of those 1000 kids didn’t have nowhere else to go, so I was hurt by that. So, me personally, I was like this is where I have spent my entire life basically so seeing it close was hard for me, even though I was leaving. But then I, actually
wasn’t happy to see it close because I had teachers who I thought I would, every once in a while, come up there and see, but bonds broke over that. Participant D had planned to leave the school but was bothered that it would not be there for him to go back to and the connections with teachers would be lost. The finality of the closure was a struggle for him, even two years later. He commented:

> It didn’t make it necessarily harder, like it upset me that the school had closed because when I was going to a different high school, I was always expecting to have a place to call home. Or be able to come back to those people, not necessarily come back as a student, but come back as somebody who was like I went here. I know the people here, I know the teachers here, so I can come back and talk with them in case I am going through something or like that, you know talk to the people I felt comfortable around. So, it didn’t necessarily make it harder because I was like, wow, I was eventually going to have to move on anyway. The school was eventually going to have to close anyway. But it just sped up the process and I was like, wow, it hit me now instead of ten years later, I can’t, when I can’t talk to those people anymore. So, it just sped up the process and I was like, well, now it’s happened, and I can’t do anything to stop it, so I might as well get used to the fact that things are changing.

The relationship bonds Participant D felt were broken the most came from the teachers he lost contact with during the transition. He mentioned many teachers from various grade levels who had been a support to him and now he felt he would never see again. One example he provided was his first-grade teacher. He shared:
My first-grade teacher; So, I got there in the first grade so that was my first teacher, so she was my teacher, my little sister’s teacher, my other little sister’s teacher, so after I moved up I still saw her because I had to pick up my siblings. So, I would still come down and talk with her like she was still my teacher. She was one of my mother’s basically and um, that was the bond I really lost because I don’t know where she is now.

Bonds, like the one he had maintained with his first-grade teacher, were important to Participant D and the loss continued to impact him.

**Fear of the unknown.** Participant D brought his struggles to fit in with him as he transitioned to the new school. This fear of repeating the same patterns with peers was something he battled in his first transition to the other charter high school and he made a conscious decision to change it when he arrived at Academy A. He shared:

> You know, based on how I was nervous, so I didn’t know that, maybe because it was like this because you know from 1st through 9th; elementary, middle and the beginning of high school, I thought the bullying was going to continue. I thought I was going to have to stay and just finish my high school out as a student that never really talked, but it made me fear going to a new school and stuff like that. It really hurt me because I wasted almost a semester, yeah almost 2 quarters of the school year, not making friends, except for the kids I knew who came from Academy A over with me, so yeah. It really hurt me but then I was like hey, this is my chance to start over so… I might as well use it and I did.

The fear of repeating patterns was the impetus for him to transition to the study site school. When Participant D began to see that similar behaviors and issues were occurring
at the school he first moved to, he was prompted to leave and begin attending Academy A. He explained:

Well, at the time, during the summer, me and my girlfriend at the time, because she was at (the first school after the closure) before me and she was like, well I have been here long enough to know when things are changing and it’s not for the better, and I am like I am going to take your word for it and get out while I can.

Participant D was certain to not be somewhere that was on the decline, so he was ready to transfer at the first indication the school was not doing well: “I noticed how bad a school can get when things are depleting because they don’t deplete slowly, they deplete very rapidly and things start to go with it and its very chaotic and it’s hard to keep it up so I was like, well I don’t want to be around for that and no offense guys but I like my high school education, so…” Participant D was not going to sacrifice his high school experience to being in a declining school again, so he chose to transfer to Academy A as soon as possible.

**Sense of belonging.** When Participant D transitioned to Academy A, he found his sense of belonging through finding people who shared common interests. Being at the same school with his siblings, joining the basketball team, and being transferred into the honor’s classes helped Participant D feel he belonged at the new school.

After being the only sibling who remained at Academy B and then transitioning to the other charter high school alone, Participant D instantly felt better by coming to Academy A with his siblings. He explained:

My last year at Academy B, I was by myself. I had my older brother with me, but he was graduating, and he left like halfway through the year because in between
mid-terms and the first semester, my father passed, so we were already out of school. Then by the time we came back, the seniors were already gone so it was uncomfortable for me because my siblings were at another middle school. And I am just a high school freshman by myself, so it felt kind of weird and then when I came here, you know I had my siblings back with me, so I was like, hey this is fun… Now I went back to school with them. I felt more comfortable, so I see them every day again.

This instant comfort provided an anchor for Participant D as he got used to being at Academy A.

In the same way, Participant D began to feel he belonged by joining the varsity basketball team. He said, “I probably would have struggled more than I did. Because basketball wasn’t just basketball… it was about being a part of something bigger than a game. It was a team… you had to be a team on and off the court. And teams care about each other, so they were caring about my grades more than me touching a ball so, yeah.” Not only did being a part of the team help him adjust academically, but it also helped him with his peers. He shared:

At first, I didn’t speak out, but I tried to switch it up. And well, (names a fellow player), he is in my advisory, so, he was like, ‘Yo! This is D. We don’t want to treat him like he is an outsider and we are going to be on the same team for a good three to five months.’ So, he showed me he would stick with me during drills and stuff like that and it made me feel like if I can’t rely on anyone else on the team, I can rely on him. So, he made me feel like I was part of the team and part of their family. So, they made me feel welcome.
Being a part of the team brought him a sense of belonging that he did not have at other schools because Participant D felt he could be more outgoing.

In the same way, Participant D also found a sense of belonging by being in the honors classes. Transferring into these classes after a couple of weeks, Participant D felt he belonged in the school and pushed to do more rigorous work. He explained:

I had regular classes, I had English and Chemistry, just English and Chemistry regular classes and then they realized, you don’t belong in these classes, we can see that off of your test scores, 100s, 100s, 100s, so I’m going to switch you out to honors and it felt more comfortable because I didn’t realize I was this, capable with this type of work, but you are. So that made me feel welcome and I actually became really good friends with the kids in the honors classes, the chemistry honors and the English honors have pretty much the exact same students, so I see these kids twice a day and I’m like this is better than nothing. So that made me more comfortable and I started hanging with them outside of school.

With both the basketball team and honors classes, Participant D found peers in common. For the first time, he started to feel more comfortable at school and may have been more comfortable than he had ever felt at both of his previous schools.

**Key relationships.** Participant D always had felt comfortable with forming relationships with teachers. When asked about the relationships he missed from Academy B, all of his examples were teachers who had made an impression and provided a sense of security for him. This continued to ring true in the teacher relationships at the new school, but with a slight difference. These relationships were transformative for Participant D and helped him with his transition through explicit coaching.
One of the teacher relationships that helped Participant D was with his advisor. Being the first teacher who interacted with Participant D, his advisor took the opportunity to get him to participate and engage by making him be the one to deliver daily announcements. This made Participant D get used to speaking in class. He expounded on how that simple task translated into helping his transition:

It showed me that for a while, it was just advisory, that I tried to stand out in and then I was like people are staring at me in 3rd hour and I don’t like it, so I would talk to the other people, even the person sitting next to me. I would not have a conversation with, but I started talking, like hey how did you do on the test? Or whatever random conversation and it was like that turned into her, the next day, saying something to me instead of me starting the conversation, so I saw it the way people, not necessarily think of me, but the way people act towards me.

Giving him this task in advisory, the teacher helped Participant D get comfortable in speaking in class. Participant D commented on how it helped:

So, he pushed me to stand out and not be uncomfortable, but to be comfortable. You know to the point that you get comfortable. So, he basically was like, no one is going to talk to you if you don’t talk first, like people are going to stare, yeah, you are going to have some attention, just not the kind you want.

Being pushed to speak every day in class, Participant D learned to be comfortable in speaking to others. This relationship, with explicit coaching, helped him transition in the new school.

Teachers helping Participant D change at the new school came as a surprise for him. He commented:
But then I talked with this teacher and he was like speak up, show yourself that you are here you know, be seen and heard, not necessarily in a way that you would get in trouble but in a way that people know that your confidence is higher than you think it is. So that’s how it went, and I expected it to go the exact opposite. Like I expected to not be as broad as I am now. Just expected to stay in my own little bubble.

Participant D learned at his old school to be quiet and stay unnoticed, but these teachers pushed him to change his behavior. The result was Participant D learning to speak up and have a positive school experience through this transition.

**Facing the challenges.** Participant D had a very clear transformation as a result of going through this transition. Throughout his discussion, he came back to the positive changes he saw himself due to moving from the school where he spent most of his educational career to the receiving school. By finding peers who shared interests, social groups to bond with, and teachers who coached him to speak up and participate, Participant D had expressed seeing positive changes.

This new mindset translated into Participant D’s advice to students who would go through a transition after their school closed. He exclaimed:

For future students, who might go through stuff like this, or has been through stuff like this, try to be positive through it all because negativity is really not going to get you anywhere. Based off the experience that I know, it’s not going to get you anywhere. You know, in situations like mine, it wasn’t just the school closing that wanted me to leave. Bullying wanted me to leave, you know my father passing wanted me to leave, you know giant situations like those, as hard as it may be, try
to be positive you know you can’t move on so quickly in your life, but take your time.

While facing many challenges, Participant D perceived the transition as a positive experience that continues to benefit him.

Converging Themes in Focus Group and Individual Interview Findings

While various themes dominated the narratives of the individual experiences of the participants, there was an emergence of common threads. These themes were found by clustering the coded references, which appeared in both the individual interviews and focus group transcripts. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) defined clustering as, “the process of inductively forming categories and the iterative sorting of things—events, participants, settings and so on—into those categories. (p. 279)” Certain themes emerged during the analysis of the coded references in the participants’ transcripts. Table 5 presented the themes of these two data sources side by side.

Table 5
Themes from interviews and focus group data analysis.

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<th>Common Themes from Focus Group Data Analysis</th>
<th>Common Themes from Interview Analysis</th>
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<td>• Relationships</td>
<td>• Relationships</td>
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<td>• Sense of Belonging</td>
<td>• Fear of the Unknown</td>
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<td>• Fear of the Unknown</td>
<td>• Student Voice</td>
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<td>• Adjustment to the Rules</td>
<td>• Closed School Staying Open</td>
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<td>• Being Powerless</td>
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Factoring, as defined by Miles et al. (2014) is, “making patterns out of patterns or making categories out of categories” (p. 286) for qualitative data analysis. When factoring, Miles et al. (2014) explained, “We’re tightening up the data even further by making a smaller number of patterns from a larger number of patterns, or a smaller
number of categories from a larger number of categories” (p. 286). The themes or categories listed in Table 5 for both the interview and focus group data were clustered from the two sources in order to identify four common themes. These themes were sense of belonging, fear of the unknown, being powerless, and student voice. These were discussed in the next section to show how the focus group and individual interviews converged to develop the common themes.

**Sense of belonging.** In both the focus group and individual interviews, the themes of relationships and sense of belonging emerged from the analysis. Upon further examination of the participant responses coded under relationships, the responses were about relationships making the displaced students feel welcome and a sense of belonging. Relationships were the driving force behind the participants developing a sense of belonging. From the rationale for choosing the school to the importance in extracurricular activities, all of these responses were based on the relationships that had been established.

One participant explained how established relationships helped make the decision to come to the school. The participant explained, “The reason that I chose the school that I did was because in my school, a lot of the kids like to stick together, so when you hear like your friends are going there and you decide to go there, it becomes like your old school.” Knowing someone who was or had attended the school was something all of the participants shared as a reason for attending. This made them feel more comfortable and helped establish their sense of belonging. Another factor presented by participants was the relationships established with the school staff that aided them in the enrollment process. Four of the participants discussed part of their rationale was the rapport
established with those staff members who either came to a school fair to recruit students or who they met during orientation at the receiving school.

Establishing relationships with peers and staff members once they arrived at the school made the difference in the participants feeling welcome and that they belonged. They provided many different examples where teachers and other staff members helped them connect to other students based on shared interests, which made the difference in how they perceived their transition. Many of these participants made the connection through clubs and sports teams. The relationships formed by the participants’ feeling they were a part of something, such as the basketball team, and helped them deem their change of schools was successful. For the students who did not feel as welcome or were not as connected to the new school, they did not establish as many relationships. This especially held true for two of the focus group participants who were seniors when they came to Academy A. They both shared a focus on graduating and relationships established were based on that goal. They did not express a strong sense of feeling they belonged at the new school.

**Fear of the unknown.** All of the participants expressed some fear or concern of the unknown as they made their transition to the receiving school. The main concerns came from uncertainty of the student expectations, whether it was the rules to follow or the level of instructional demands that would be placed on them. There were concerns about whether or not to trust those at the school. The distrust they brought with them to the school exacerbated the concern over the unknowns.
Underlying all of those concerns was being unsure about whether or not to trust those at the school. The distrust was compounded by the concern over the unknowns, which would have plagued any new students. One of the participants explained:

I don’t know yet, because you have to build trust. And I was there for 7 years, so I built that trust. It wasn’t like as soon as I got there I was like, ok now I trust all of you all. I barely knew anything to trust. Trust is built.

This hesitancy to trust those at the new school was at the heart of many of the comments about things they were concerned about or unsure.

There was also a concern about adjusting to the new school culture. The rules or student code of conduct held a prominent position in the fearfulness and anxiety expressed. They felt rushed to adjust to the new rules and one participant expressed. “I would say at first make us more comfortable with the rules. Like you shouldn’t enforce the rules until like the second quarter because you are making it harder on us by putting more rules in the situation.” While it may not be realistic to postpone the enforcement of the rules, this comment presents the hesitancy they had with the new school. The fear of the unknown expressed for the participants a desire to be supported as they made the transition. One participant expounded:

Being a student is not easy, as you know. I think a lot of people would know that, some people not because people tend to not go to school and they tend to not know the struggle. But I feel like when you are a student that is changing from one school to another, it’s a big thing; it’s a big transition. I think that maybe people should not be so hard on that person. Maybe just help them out a bit; maybe they are going through something because sometimes it’s not so good
being the new kid. And maybe it’s really hard and maybe they just need more support. And just try to settle down and just try to make everything right.

This fear of the unknown was a way for the participants to explain they needed some help and understanding as they made this transition.

**Being powerless.** Through many of the comments from participants, there was a theme of being powerless threaded throughout the context. While it was implied in many of their comments, from discussion about the fear of the unknown and changes they had to face in the transition, it was never more explicit than when they discussed the closing of their former school. In all of the individual interviews, as well as in some focus group comments, there was the shared opinion their previous schools should have remained open. Upon further analysis into the theme of the closed school staying open, it presented that the participants felt they were powerless in the situation. Thus, the theme of the closed school staying open was clustered with being powerless.

All of the interview participants made comments about the fact they thought their previous school should have remained open, even though they all conceded that there were major concerns at their respective schools. Some participants even stated they were planning on leaving anyway but felt the school should remain open for students who it was the best option. One participant shared:

I mean for me, I don’t know because at the same time I didn’t want to leave that school, but at the same time I did want to move to another school that was going to help me more. But I would say for other students that really just had their relationships there, they already knew English and they were doing well in school,
so for them it would be … it probably would have been more beneficial (to keep
the school open).

This participant felt there were students who were in a better position at the previous
school and the closure had consequences for them that were beyond repair. This
participant explained:

Yeah. I have some schoolmates that went to Academy B. They wanted to go to
college and they wanted to study English and that. And then when they closed the
school they were like, I am not going to make it in another school. They just gave
up and didn’t continue school. They are not even trying.

These participants felt their peers were defeated by the closures and no one had asked
their thoughts.

Many of the participants felt the school should have stayed open and the students
could have kept the school open if they had been given the opportunity. One participant
expressed:

So, I wish they knew they had a student who could say, you know, this school is
really important to me. I learned a lot here and I built a bond with the teachers
where they helped me understand the work and that I built a bond with friends. I
learned a lot here, not just from the school but the dean. I am cool with
everybody, I am comfortable here and it’s really close to most of the kids’ houses
so it’s a walk from home, but if you catch the bus or something, all you have to do
is walk because it’s not that far so it’s like it’s comfortable and we are getting an
education, so it’s like that’s really all that’s supposed to matter.
The comfort of their previous school was critical to many participants. They felt they had no chance to help the schools, especially since most of them found out in the spring or summer their school was closing. Many of the participants also said they wanted to organize protests or fundraisers but had been told it was too late. One participant felt that if the students had been able to speak with the charter school authorizer or management company, who she referred to as the sponsor of the school, they might have made a different decision. They said, “Yes, because we could have said how much… like if they had gotten the people that they were trying to get to sponsor the school, like got a student to speak about it to them, I think they would have understood and got our opinion more like yeah, this school really means a lot to these kids.” At its core, this ultimate feeling of not being able to do anything or not having a say in their school’s closing was an expression of powerlessness for the students.

**Student Voice.** For high school students, the desire for a voice in decisions, or student voice, is not uncommon as a characteristic of adolescence. All of the participants spoke about wanting to have a voice, though it was debatable on the degree to which that voice was embraced at the new school. This theme emerged in the individual interviews as a result of digging deeper into the focus group theme of adjusting to the rules. When asked more about the adjustment to the rules, it became apparent that the concern with getting used to the rules came from a desire to have more of a student voice.

In the focus group discussion, student voice was seen as something lacking at the receiving school. There were comments about how student opinions were gathered, but there was inaction. Upon further examination in the individual interviews, the responses showed the participants had opportunities to express their opinion. Citing examples of a
student advisory council and surveys, the interview participants felt they were able to share their opinion and make decisions at the school. This disparity in perspective was explained by one of the interview participants:

Yeah, like a survey and they would ask stuff like how can we improve this? How can we improve that? And is there something else that you would like… but some students did, and some students did not even care about it, so they would later complain, oh, they didn’t do this, but they didn’t say anything about it. Sometimes teachers will ask and then they will just not take it in somehow, but once they are like, you never listen to us. Sometimes we had the opportunity to speak and we didn’t take it.

As the participants transitioned into the receiving school, they began to recognize there were opportunities for student voice. This was an example of how student voice was interwoven into the other common themes.

**Conclusion**

The findings from the focus group discussion and the interviews were used to find converging themes within this study. By utilizing the analytical methods of clustering and factoring (Miles et al, 2014), four themes emerged across the findings. These themes were sense of belonging, fear of the unknown, being powerless and student voice. Chapter 5 supports the findings from the data and outlines implementation at an organizational level as well as makes suggestions for practicing educational leaders who face school closure situations and other circumstances where they are transitioning displaced students to a receiving school.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of high school students who have transitioned to a charter school in Southeastern Michigan after their previous school was closed. The primary research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?
2. How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school?
3. What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?

Focus groups and individual interviews were the primary sources of data for the study. The focus group session was utilized to not only obtain information about the experience from participants, but to also identify candidates for the interviews. These candidates were chosen because of their richness in responses to the focus group questions as well as compelling nature of their experiences, which elicited interest in learning more information. Both provided transcripts of the participant’s responses that were coded and then analyzed for emergent themes within the focus groups and individual interviews. There were four common themes that came out of the analysis from these two sources. These themes were utilized to organize the discussion of findings and implications on practice in terms of how they supported the research questions.
Unique Set of Circumstances for a Typical Transition

Student mobility, in terms of transitioning to new schools, is a part of the educational experience for most students. Tradition times of transition in the United States include moving between the different levels of schooling, such as the transition from middle to high school and then high school to college. The themes from these findings could be reminiscent of those for students making typical transitions.

Student mobility, as defined by Rumberger (2015), is a non-promotional school change. Rumberger (2015) cites the data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Study of Youth, which found that 21.6% of 14-year-old students made at least one change in schools and 13.9% of 17-year-old students made a change (p. 4). Rumberger (2015) identified there can be voluntary causes of this mobility, such as opportunity transfers due to families moving for a job promotion, school choice opportunities, and students wanting to move to a new school. There can also be involuntary causes, such as changes in the family due to death or divorce, families moving due to eviction or job loss and school closure (p. 4). Many of the recommendations made for school leadership from the findings of this study reflect current literature’s recommendations for student mobility concerns (Rumberger, 2015).

While the findings and the recommendations in this study may agree with some of the current literature on student mobility, the intense nature of the mobility of students in this Southeastern Michigan community due to charter school closure raises the stakes on the experiences of these participants and highlights a concern within the charter school system in Michigan overall. For example, 182 displaced students have entered this study site’s K-12 district in the last four years. With the receiving charter district having an
enrollment on average of 1,130 students this means approximately 16% of former or current students in the last four years at this receiving school have been displaced due to closure. This example is indicative of the experience of many charter schools in this Southeastern Michigan community who are dealing with the impact of charter schools closing frequently and with sometimes little notice. As one of the participants shared, his charter high school had told him there would be school in September as he left for summer vacation. In August, he found out they closed by another school inviting him to attend their school. This haphazard notification is indicative of how these closures are routinely handled. It creates an abrupt and often disorganized transition that impacts these families the most. With many of these students being part of a vulnerable population due to accompanied factors, such as poverty level, the disruptive and often unplanned transitions due to closure adds difficulty.

This study was conducted within this Southeastern Michigan community that has experienced these sudden school closures over the last five years. This indicates that there are certain characteristics of the charter school system in Michigan, which may lend itself to these abrupt closure announcements. These findings, while they support current literature in the broader issue of student mobility, also bring to light a larger issue. If there are hundreds of students being displaced each year in this community, the impact of the shifting student populations in receiving schools may end up having long-term consequences.

**Discussion of Findings**

The finding from the responses of the focus group and interview participants provided insight into the experience of these high school students who have experienced
a transition to a single charter school due to their school closing in a Southeastern Michigan community. Four themes emerged from the accounts provided by participants, which added to the understanding of school closure. These themes were sense of belonging; fear of the unknown; being powerless, and student voice.

**Theme 1: Sense of belonging.** Sense of belonging dominated the participant responses, especially in terms of the role relationships played in the displaced students establishing their place at the school. Through relationships with both peers and staff members, they began to feel a part of the receiving school through displays of care and concern, connecting with others through extra-curricular activities, and receiving help with meeting peers who had common interests.

In support of the research questions, the following findings developed into Theme 1: Sense of Belonging.

*What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?* The participants developed a sense of belonging through the relationships they either brought with them to the receiving school or established once at the receiving school. Many of the displaced students came to the school with someone they knew or were familiar with the school because family had attended. All of the participants discussed relationships with staff members, whether they were teachers, advisors or coaches who made the most impact for their transition. For all but one of the interview participants, their sense of belonging was aided through sports, extra-curricular activities or finding people who shared common interests. While some participants had negative interactions with staff or peers at the receiving school, which
had made them feel unwelcome, the relationships they established at the school aided in their perception of a successful transition.

**How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school?** The findings supported Finn’s (1989) participation identification model with participants expressing a sense of belonging due to being helped to build relationships to increase their level of participation in school. When asked about what helped them feel they belonged, the participants gave examples of teachers showing personal concern for their success and wellbeing. They also shared that staff members connected them to students who liked the same activities or got them to join a team. These examples helped them get involved in the receiving school demonstrated their social identity evolved based on their involvement. In contrast, those participants who did not have a social identity closely tied with the school were those who had come to the school as seniors. With little time to establish relationships, they saw the receiving school as the place to fulfill their goal of graduation and college acceptance. These participants were not as engaged in school activities and relationships, which meant they did not perceive themselves with the same sense of belonging as students who were younger when they transitioned and would be at the receiving school for a longer period.

**What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?** The participants explained they needed help in establishing relationships. For example, one of the participants shared how the Director of Family and Community Engagement had introduced her to his daughter who also attended the school. The participant felt it made the difference by making her feel there were other students like her at the school. This example showed participants needed
support as they established relationships, and they also needed to participate at the receiving school in order to begin to feel they were welcomed and belonged.

**Theme 2: Fear of the unknown.** Fear of the unknown was another theme that appeared prevalent in the participants’ responses. The participants who experienced school closure expressed issues with trust. Using the expression “broken promises” and describing the closure announcement as unexpected, the participants displayed a disposition of distrust for those making decisions about their education.

*What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?* When the participants discussed the initial transition, they explained they were afraid or unsure of what to expect. Providing examples about not knowing the rules, being afraid of changes in instructional rigor, and being afraid former issues would follow them to the school, the participants expressed concern. Even though time had passed since the initial transition, the participants were hesitant to trust staff fully at the school. They expressed in the focus group issues with the receiving school being inconsistent with rules and not being sure of people’s motives, which alluded to distrust and fear of the unknown.

*How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school?* Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory explained that we develop our identity based on feeling we are a part of the in-group or the out-group. The fear of the unknown theme, which was present in all of the focus group and interview transcripts, presented there was a time in the transition when the participants did not know what to expect and felt they were part of the out-group.
What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition? The focus group discussion focused heavily on supports needed to eliminate the fear of the unknown. Orientation and acclimation activities were the highlights of the recommended supports needed to make sure displaced students knew what to expect. There were also examples of students benefiting from relationships with teachers in order to eliminate the fear of the unknown. One participant gave the example of his advisor explaining what he needed to do in order to be successful at the school. All of these activities helped eliminate the anxiety and fear associated with learning to fit in somewhere new.

Theme 3: Being powerless. Participants expressed being powerless, especially in terms of their former school closing. All of the participants of individual interviews referred to thinking the school should have stayed open, even though they also pointed out examples of the school being ineffective. Three of the participants also stated the students could have done something to keep the school open if they had been given the opportunity, such as fundraising or speaking with the authorizer. The participants expressed they felt they did not have the opportunity to advocate for themselves or the school.

What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school? The experience of having their school close, with little or no notice, left the participants feeling they were powerless. The participants perceived they could have done something to stop their school from closing if they had been given a chance.
How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school? This theme of being powerless extended into the displaced students’ development of a new social identity as they transitioned to the single charter high school. This was emphasized in comments about being wary of their receiving school and the need to have a say in the choices made. For example, one participant had attended another school before the study site. He quickly left the school for Academy A because he was concerned that it was declining in the same way as his previous school. In addition, the participants all expressed they felt they ended up belonging and feeling welcome at the receiving school, but there was a caveat: The participants had a different identity with the new school. For example, two of the participants discussed coming into the receiving school to achieve their goals. The relationships at Academy A had a different tone, which alluded to the perception they had identified with the receiving school in a different way than the closed school.

What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition? The findings from the interviews suggested the participants wanted to feel they had some decision-making influence at the receiving school in order to combat this feeling of being powerless. This was demonstrated with the emphasis on wanting a say in the rules and procedures, which was expressed frequently in the focus group discussion.

Theme 4: Student voice. Student voice was a theme present in all of the participants’ responses. While there were a variety of opinions on the forums provided by the receiving school, there was a shared opinion that schools needed to provide students with an outlet to participate in the decision-making. The participants expressed a desire to
be a part of current choices, but also their perception of student voice was linked to their sense of belonging, fear of the unknown, and being powerless.

**What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?** The participants had mixed views on the amount of student voice they had at not only their previous school, but also the receiving school. In the focus group discussion, participants discussed wanting more of a role in school decision-making. From wanting to make decisions about the lunch program to adjustments in the detention schedule, the focus group participants did not feel they had a voice in changes made at the school. When these issues were revisited in the individual interviews, the participants expressed a differing view. Three out of four of the individual interview participants stated they felt they had forums to express their opinions at the receiving school. The participants shared the use of surveys, discussions with their advisor and a student advisory council as opportunities to share their preferences. There were mixed views on how these opinions translated into the decisions at the school, but they did share examples of their feedback being gathered.

**How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school?** Participating in school decision-making, or student voice, is the highest level of student engagement according to Finn’s (1989) Participation-Identification Model. The participants experienced opportunities to provide feedback and informed some of the choices at the receiving school. This may have attributed to the participants expressing they felt they were in a better position at their receiving school.

**What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?** The participants in both the focus group and
individual interviews emphasized opportunities for more voice in the decision-making. The displaced students had the opportunity to express how school decisions impacted them, such as the example of changing the detention schedule. The receiving school helped the displaced students with becoming members of the community by taking their needs and opinions into consideration. This is critical for displaced students who may be coming into the receiving school feeling they had no voice in decisions that directly impacted them, such as the decision to close their previous school.

These common themes provided information to school leadership on the experiences of displaced students within the context of coming from a closed school, but could be expanded to other circumstances, such as school leaders who encounter displaced students in a variety of circumstances, such as children of migrant workers and military families. In addition, these findings also presented a perspective of student mobility, which is prevalent in communities with high rates of poverty.

**Implications on Practice**

There are implications on practice for school leadership, which were derived from the findings of the study. These are discussed in relation to the four main themes, which emerged from the data analysis. The implications are organized in terms of addressing the guiding questions of the study, which are as follows:

1. What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?
2. How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school?
3. What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?

The implications on practice are presented in Table 6 and followed by a more detailed discussion. In both instances, they are broken down by the experience of the participants, the impact on their social identity, and support needed for a successful transition.
Table 6

Implications on Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Social Identity</th>
<th>Required Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Sense of Belonging</td>
<td>Relationships with adult staff members of the school and relationships with peers who share common interests.</td>
<td>Student identity tied to their involvement with extra-curricular activities and teacher/staff connections.</td>
<td>Staff members helping connect students with others who have similar interests in both formal and informal contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Fear of the Unknown</td>
<td>Change itself presents a certain level of anxiety; this anxiety is accelerated when students experience broken promises that lead to trust issues.</td>
<td>The adjustment to the next school’s rules and academic expectations can make identifying with the new school a challenge.</td>
<td>Orientation and time to adjust to the culture; extra support in adjusting to the academic expectations of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Being Powerless</td>
<td>Expressing a desire to have their school stay open and feeling they could have done something to prevent closure.</td>
<td>Participants identify in a different way with the receiving school based on experiencing school closure. Sometimes a residual effect of guilt and/or inadequacy is felt.</td>
<td>Providing opportunities for students to participate in decision-making. Allowing students to see they have more resources with new school placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Student Voice</td>
<td>Feeling they want to participate in decision-making and their opinions are heard by school leadership.</td>
<td>The more participants felt they were a part of decision-making, the more they identify as a member of the school community.</td>
<td>Facilitate forums for students to express their opinions and participate in the decision-making process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme 1: Sense of belonging.** The development of the participants’ sense of belonging, as explained in interview responses, came from relationships with teachers, participation in extra-curricular activities, and being a part of decision-making at the
receiving school. This aligns with Finn’s (1989) participation identification model on student social identity, which states a sense of belonging is directly linked to the level of participation. As students have more positive outcomes based on their level of participation, their sense of belonging increases (p. 127-128). The participants’ responses supported Finn’s theory with examples of teachers demonstrating care and concern and connecting with peers through shared interests as factors that aided to establish a sense of belonging.

What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school? For the participants of the study, they expressed developing a sense of belonging in varying degrees. While some participants categorized their experience as transformative, they all looked to relationships as the key factor in establishing they were a part of the school. These relationships started before they enrolled due to all of them having made the transition with friends or knowing individuals who already attended the receiving school. Once attending the receiving school, participants found that relationships with staff members outside of the classroom made the difference for them. These staff members helped the participants connect with other students with common interests and adjust to the academic expectations of the receiving school. Finally, some of the participants credited extra-curricular activities or athletics. Whether through clubs, teams, or creating their own tutoring group, the participants who deemed they felt the strongest sense of belonging were doing things outside of the classroom.

How is a displaced student’s social identity impacted by the transition to a new receiving school? The receiving school had an influence on the participants’ social
identity in terms of their sense of belonging in many ways. They expressed feeling they belonged through the relationships with key members of the school community, whether it was their advisors, teachers, coaches or teammates. Some participants found this sense of belonging directly from participating on athletic teams, but all found it through the connections they made with peers who shared common interests. The participation in these activities and establishing relationships with teachers aided in making the participants feel they were part of the in-group instead of feeling they were an outsider at the receiving school, thus contributing to a positive social identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). These findings confirm what Tajfel and Turner (1986) explained with their social identity theory, which stated that people have a positive social identity when they perceive they are part of the in-group in an organization. This comes from the participants’ perception of having the resources they need, which the school participation and engagement provides (p.280).

**What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?** When developing a sense of belonging, the participants desired support in making connections with like-minded peers as well as support in meeting academic expectations. Schlossberg’s transitional theory (2011) explains, “The support available at the time of transition is critical to one’s own sense of well-being” (p. 160). The participants spoke of staff members helping them feel welcome and like they belonged by checking in frequently, encouraging participation in activities and providing explicit coaching on how to fit in and be successful at the receiving school. This type of support was described by all of the participants when asked about what helped make the transition better.
Theme 2: Fear of the unknown. The participants of the study all expressed some fear or anxiety about getting acclimated to the receiving school, such as scheduling, discipline procedures, and instructional rigor. While the areas of concern were commonplace, there was a level of distrust expressed or implied by many of the responses. Though most did not explicitly say trust, they all discussed some aspect of being unsure of the school and guarded about their involvement. One participant shared that he had quickly left the first school he had attended after the school closed, due to fearing the new school was on the decline.

Since the participants were coming from a situation where their previous school had been inconsistent, and they perceived the closure as a surprise, they came to the transition without trusting the educational system. The result was their fears of the unknown being exacerbated by distrust about what would happen at the school and a concern that it would happen again. This supports Schlossberg’s (2011) theory that the participants’ situation they were in at the time of the transition, such as coming from a school that closed without warning, put them in a position to approach the change with some hesitancy and distrust. It creates, as explained by Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory, a feeling that the displaced students are part of the out-group in the school due to feeling they are lacking resources and position. If not proactively addressed, these feelings of being the out-group could lead to alienation for the displaced students (p.280).

What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school? The participants all described the experience of their school closing as a surprise to them. Describing the disappointment as broken promises, the students had the common experience that they did not expect their school to
close. One student described finding out the school had closed by receiving a letter from another school inviting him to enroll. Going up to his former school, he described the scene of seeing the signage and banners gone and the building abandoned. Another student described his experience in terms of broken promises, having banked on his former school’s commitment of support to attend college. Still another participant expressed disappointment that she would not be graduating from the same high school as her older siblings. The abruptness in the unexpected transition, led to the students having an experience that emphasized fear of the unknown and a lack of trust. This is supported by Schlossberg’s “Model for Human Adaptation to Transition” (1981), which makes the claim that a transition is successful or unsuccessful due to the individual’s perception of resources being gained or lost due to the change (p.7).

As they transitioned, these fears appeared to dissipate through learning how things worked in their new school. Even though things improved with time, there was still an underlying distrust expressed in the difference in the way they navigated themselves with the school. For example, participants discussed relationships in terms of getting what they needed at the receiving school, while explained in more familial terms used from their previous school. In relation to Schlossberg’s(1981) transition theory, the participants were determining if they had more resources due to the change (p.7). This created a conflict for them, which manifested in comments about distrust, as they worked on moving from the out-group at their receiving school to the in-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

**How does a displaced student’s social identity impact the transition to a new receiving school?** The fears or anxieties described were alleviated as they began to
develop a sense of belonging. Schlossberg (2011) explained, “Transitions take time, and people’s reactions change—for better or worse—while they are underway. At first they think of nothing but being a new graduate, a new supervisor, a recent retiree. Then they begin to separate from the past and move towards the new role” (p. 160). Time had played its part for the participants in that none of them spoke about having the same fears they had at the beginning of the transition. As time passed, and they began to feel like more of the in-group at the receiving school, these fears appeared to dissipate.

In contrast, some participants stated they did not trust the receiving school staff. One participant explained trust was earned and it would take time. Speaking of wanting their former school to stay open gave indication that they were not fully identifying as members of the new school. This sense of distrust, which they brought with them from the circumstances surrounding the closure, was preventing them from fully integrating into the receiving school. This was expressed by participants in comments about not trusting staff, feeling academically behind other peers, and feeling they were solely there to graduate and move onto college. They identified with the receiving school, but it was in a different way than how they had identified with their previous school.

What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition? Stronger orientation practices and time to adjust to the new demands of the receiving school, from the student code of conduct to academic expectations, were the main supports described by study participants as needed to aid in the transition. Participants also made comments about the need for consistency in terms of implementing school expectations and rules, as well as getting their input when changes were made to those procedures. This support would also help in
developing a sense of trust with the displaced students because it would eliminate the unknown characteristic, which led to fear or anxiety from the perspective of the participants. These needs confirm the desire to ensure they had the resources needed to become part of the in-group of the school as explained in Tajfel and Turner’s (1986) social identity theory and Schlossberg’s (1981) transitional theory.

**Theme 3: Being powerless.** Participants expressed being powerless in the circumstances around their transition. This included the interview participants making statements about thinking their former school should have remained open and they could have done something to prevent the closure if they had known it was happening sooner. These comments were in conjunction to participants describing issues with their former school with three of the participants having already left or wanting to leave the former school at the time of closure. Though they explained things were better at their receiving schools, they had a desire to have their previous schools remain open.

An explanation for this reaction of nostalgia and longing for their previous schools, even though they would categorize them as poorly performing, can be supported by two theories presented in the literature review. These theories, known as the change of standard perspective (Higgins and Stangor, 1988) and immediacy bias (Van Boven and White, 2009), discuss the changes that take place over time for an individual in regard to their emotions and perspectives. Higgins and Stangor (1988) explain the standard we use to make a judgment on something, such as the quality of a school, adjusts over time based on an individual’s change of context and recall. This is reflected in the judgments made at the two points in time. Higgins and Stangor (1988) explain, “When the context of judgment and recall are different, a change of standard is likely to occur, which will
cause errors in reconstructing the original stimulus information” (p. 190).

This adjustment or difference in context and recall may be due to immediacy bias (Van Boven and White, 2009). They claim people perceive their current emotions as more intense than previous ones. For example, the time that has passed for the participants makes them remember the positive memories and relationships from their previous school, while taking the intensity out of more difficult recollections. They miss those experiences, while the intensity of the negative moments and issues of the previous school has dissipated.

These two theories come together to produce a conflict within the participants’ perspective of the closure. Their memory of the previous schools has them long for it and wish they were still there because the positive recollections are strongest. But on the other hand, they recognize they are in a better position by attending the receiving school. This is then described in terms of being powerless of their circumstances because they felt they had no say in what happened to their previous school and their role in the receiving school. Though all but one of the participants described being a part of choosing the receiving school, they all felt powerless in the events that made such a move necessary.

What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school? The participants expressed feeling they were powerless in the decision to close their previous school. They all referred to themselves or fellow former students thinking they could have done something to keep the school open. With ideas for protests and fundraising, they all experienced a sense of lost opportunities to make a difference in the decision. This situation was then a factor in their
transition, as explained by Schlossberg’s transition model (1981, 2011). This feeling of being powerless informed their transitional experience. This translates as a desire to have more of a student voice and demands for consistency by the receiving school staff as they implement procedures.

*How does a displaced student’s social identity impact the transition to a new receiving school?* The participants expressed varied opinions on having any power or influence at the receiving school. Some of the focus group participants, particularly the 9th graders, felt they did not have any influence on policies and procedures. This is indicative to feeling they were part of the out-group and not having a strong identity tied to their school involvement, which confirms Tajfel and Turner’s theory (1986) on social identity. Upon deeper investigation in the individual interviews, the participants felt there were forums where they could demonstrate some power at the receiving school. This may indicate that the sense of being powerless lessened as the students developed a stronger sense of identity through participating at the school per Finn’s “Participation-Identification Model” (1988).

*What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving school to have a successful transition?* Knowing they may feel powerless and distrusting of the system after experiencing their school closing, the receiving school should be explicit with helping the displaced students see there are benefits, or an increase in resources, due to the transition. This perception of increased resources aids in a positive transition, which is supported by Schlossberg’s (1981) “Model of Human Adaptation to Transition.” It is critical for school leadership to demonstrate to the students that they
have more resources based on the change of schools in order for the transition to be perceived as positive.

In addition, it may be helpful to incorporate rituals and elements of the closed school’s culture, especially for the upperclassmen whom had been invested in graduating from the former institution and have lost the promises and traditions that came from matriculating through the closed program. This feeling of being powerless can also be described as the participants feeling they are part of the out-group at the receiving school. By incorporating ways to participate that are familiar to them, the displaced students get to become part of the in-group (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

**Theme 4: Student Voice.** Participants focused on the need for student voice in school decision-making. This was referenced in relation to their previous schools closing and the lack of student voice in that decision. It was also referenced as a need for them in the receiving school. While the existence of voice and participation in decision-making varied among participants, all of them agreed that it was important. This ties into the fourth level of participation in establishing social identity for students according to Finn’s participation-identification model (1988) with the highest level being a participant in decision-making. For those participants who expressed feeling they had a strong sense of belonging and identity as a member of the receiving school, they had positive comments on the level of student voice at the school. For those participants who still felt they were on the outside, they expressed not feeling they had much of a voice in decision-making.

*What are the experiences of students as they transition from a closed charter school to a receiving charter school?* The participants all had different experiences with student voice at the receiving school. While some of the focus group participants felt they
were not offered an opportunity to express opinions on decisions like changes to the
detention schedule or dress code, all of the participants in the individual interviews felt
they were provided opportunities to give their opinions on school decisions. This
included a participant who was on the advisory council, which is the receiving school’s
version of student council. Other participants commented on being given the opportunity
to decide class trips and offer feedback on the school lunch program. While some did
comment on their opinions not always translating into the decisions being made, they all
indicated being given the opportunity to express it.

*How does a displaced student’s social identity impact the transition to a new*
*receiving school?* As explained in Finn’s “Participation-Identification Model” (1988),
student voice and participation in decision-making is tied to their social identity and
sense of belonging at school. It is key for school leadership to help displaced students
transition by providing them opportunities to express opinions and participate in school
decision-making. Having a voice in decision-making helps in the transition and develops
a sense of belonging, which leads to identifying as members of the receiving school.

*What support does a displaced student perceive they need from a receiving*
*school to have a successful transition?* Participants expressed the need to have a voice in
decisions impacting them at the receiving school. This may be particularly important for
displaced students who are coming to the new environment identifying as part of the out-
group. School leadership would benefit from providing forums for students to express
their opinions and to welcome new students into these forums in order to establish a
strong identity as a member of the receiving school. This will aid in preventing the
alienation, which occurs when students do not feel they identify as members of the school (Finn, p. 124).

Recommendations for School Leadership

From the themes emerging from the participants’ experiences, the researcher utilized the information to make recommendations for school leadership who are supporting displaced students in their transition as explained in Table 7.
Table 7
*Recommendations for School Leadership*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related Theme</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Theme 1: Sense of Belonging | • Provide opportunities for displaced students to connect with peers of similar interests early in the year. This can be through social events and connecting them to clubs and sports activities during orientation.  
• Provide professional learning for receiving school leadership and staff so they can coach displaced students through establishing relationships and becoming engaged. |
|                        | • Strong orientation programs at the beginning of the year to help eliminate unknown rules and procedures.  
• Provide professional learning with staff on welcoming displaced students into the classroom. |
| Theme 3: Being Powerless | • A review of the charter school structure in the state of Michigan to determine if oversight is needed so school closures do not occur in isolation.  
• Forums for displaced students to discuss their feelings about the school closure or other cause of transition |
| Theme 4: Student Voice  | • Regular forums for students to have an opportunity to voice opinions and participate in school decision-making where appropriate.  
• Transparency for school leaders in communicating with students about how their opinions translate into school decisions. |
Recommendations for school leadership, as outlined in Table 7, addressed the implications of the findings. These recommendations, while organized by theme in Table 7, fall under three main categories: student-centered activities, receiving staff-centered professional learning, and statewide charter school system review.

The recommendations, which have come out of the conclusions drawn from the findings, are focused on addressing the themes found in the participant responses of the study. School leaders need to ensure there are forums for displaced students to communicate about their feelings about the school closure or any other cause of the transition, but also have an opportunity to connect with like-minded peers and participate in school decision-making. Also, displaced students need to be provided opportunities to connect with staff members in the building, which was a common factor for all of the interview participants who perceived they had a successful transition. While none of the participants pointed to a formal mentorship program, these adult relationships were described as a key to success.

For these student-centered activities to be successful, professional learning is needed for the receiving school staff. The leadership is employed to ensure that the staff is prepared to receive the displaced students, whether the school is receiving one or hundreds. Staff members should be taught how to coach the students, so they can acclimate to the school’s culture and climate. Also, staff members need to be prepared to welcome the students by knowing who they are, having materials ready for them, and providing them with the information needed to succeed at the receiving school. While this may be a natural activity at the beginning of the year, the receiving staff should be
prepared to provide the same acclimation and orientation experience whether a student transitions at the beginning or mid-year.

Finally, the experiences shared by the study participants highlight that there may need to be a review of the charter school system in the state of Michigan and if its organizational structure aids in successful transitions. With school closures being decided by charter school authorizers in isolation, there is little consideration for how these decisions impact the school system in that community at large. This indicates there may be emerging structural issues within the system that need to be addressed, which may have implications on the state and local political interests.

At the time of publication of this study, there are not any guidelines for charter school authorizers on what needs to occur when a school closure decision is made. With the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (2018) identifying 45 authorizing entities operating within Michigan, there is nothing at the state level requiring certain elements to be included in a school closure plan in terms of students transitioning to a new school.

An example of a policy comes from the District of Columbia (District of Columbia Office of the Superintendent, 2016), which mandates charter schools submit a plan including management of student records, support of students with special needs, and assistance for students as they transition (see Appendix K). The superintendent of the District of Columbia provides policy implementation oversight over the charter school entities during this process. It is the recommendation that Michigan adopt similar guidelines with an oversight agent for the authorizers in order to prevent some of the
difficulties expressed by the participants and to ensure appropriate measures are in place to aid with a positive transition.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of the study opened up the possibilities for further research. In terms of the topic of this study, school closures in relation to charter schools, other questions have presented themselves in the work pertaining to this study. These included the following:

- The connection between school closure and high school dropout rate.
- The differences between other student mobility circumstances and school closure.
- The role of charter school authorizers plays in charter school closure.
- The impact of school closure on the neighborhood and community.
- The experiences of students who transition in communities that have policies for addressing charter school closure.

With Michigan’s charter school legislation and policies, the closure of these schools is a phenomenon that does not appear to be occurring in other states. While not generalizable due to the unique characteristics present in this state’s approach to charter schools, it does provide an interesting site for research on the decentralization of public schools and oversight in public school governance as well.

The stories of students, especially those going through transitions, are abundant with research opportunities in school leadership beyond charter schools. K-12 educators, no matter their structure or circumstance, would benefit from examining the experiences of students who have gone through a major transition, such as school closure. With closures occurring in traditional public schools and in settings other than urban, such as rural communities, there is a need to have a strong understanding of what students need
to make these transitions successful. Further examination of these experiences, through the qualitative research tradition, would provide valuable information to aid in the overall understanding.

Finally, further research is needed with telling the stories of students in terms of mobility in general. Rumberger and Larson (1998) explained that student mobility is an issue in many communities, but it impacts students from lower socioeconomic status more often (p. 3). They identified one of the impacts of school mobility is a higher rate of not completing high school (p. 30). Understanding the experience of students affected by mobility, whether it is due to school closure or other circumstances, will enable school leadership to be more proactive and better impact the related consequences.

**Conclusion**

The landscape of Michigan charter schools is one of the least regulated in the country (Scott, 2017) and this is reflected in three of its urban centers ranking in the top 10 of communities with the most charter schools per capita (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2015, p.4). With authorizers having the sole authority to close charter schools in conjunction with the competition for student enrollment, closures have increased in the last five years. Due to there being no oversight over these decisions beyond the independent authorizers in the state of Michigan, communities often face the effect of neighborhoods lacking public school options with displaced students not having many options and little support as they transition to a new school.

This study set out to explore the experiences of displaced high school students who came to a single charter high school in a Southeastern Michigan community. Through focus group and individual interviews, these displaced students shared their
transitional experiences. Participants described shared themes of a need for a sense of belonging, fear of the unknown, being powerless, and the desire for a voice in decision-making. Throughout these experiences, there was a need from the participants to establish relationships in order to transform their social identity from a displaced student to one that belonged within a school community, while a lingering sense of distrust hindered full membership.

A lack of trust in the system and a sense of being powerless to your own circumstances permeated the situation experienced by these participants. Their transition was different from one experienced by a family moving across town or making the choice on their own for better opportunities. Due to the abrupt nature of the closures of the participants’ schools, they transitioned to the receiving school with a distrust that was hard to overcome. They longed for the relationships they had left behind and the reparations of broken promises. This nostalgia for a time when they still believed in the system was expressed in a longing for their former school, even though they recognized they had more opportunities in their new placement.

As school leaders are faced with these types of circumstances, this study hopes to emphasize the impact of these decisions on the lives of the students involved beyond points. While the participants came out of the other side describing it in transformative and positive terms, they also spoke of some peers who had not made the transition successful. One participant explained that some of his former classmates dropped out of school at the time of the closure because they had been alienated by the system. In this modern culture of student achievement accountability, we must not forget these decisions may result in formidable results, which will not only impact the displaced students, but
the system itself. While not every community face charter schools closing at the rate of this Southeastern Michigan community, there are lessons to be learned in terms of displaced students and mobility that can translate across many scenarios. By understanding the experiences of those making major transitions, such as the ones discussed in this study, school leadership will be able to better meet the needs of all of their students.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Study Invitation for Participants Over the Age of 18

Dear (Stakeholder Name Here),

My name is Ms. Wolkowicz and I am working on completing my doctoral degree at Eastern Michigan University. As a part of my degree, I am completing a study interviewing high school students who have had their school close and had to transition to a new school. My purpose is to learn about that experience and share your story with others. I would like to interview you in order to learn about your experience. Your participation would include:

- Meeting with me at 1-2 times for an interview, which lasts about 30-45 minutes.
- Their privacy.
- Transcripts will be provided for your review so that you can approve or disapprove anything that you do not want included in the study.

Please sign the included form if you are willing to participate in the study. As a thank you for participation, your child will receive a $25 Amazon gift card.

If you have any questions about the research or are interested in participating, you can contact myself, Elizabeth Wolkowicz, at ewolkowi@emich.edu or by phone at 313-283-2299. You can also contact my adviser, Dr. Ella Burton, at eburton1@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-0255.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Wolkowicz
Appendix B: Focus Group Informed Consent for Participants Over the Age of 18

Study Title: A Case Study on the Experiences of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure
Primary Investigator (researcher): Elizabeth Wolkowicz
Research Advisor: Dr. Ella Burton
University Affiliated: Eastern Michigan University

Purpose of the Study: The researcher is studying the experiences of high school students who have gone through their charter school closing and have had to transition to a new school. The researcher will conduct focus group sessions with students to discuss their experiences moving from a closed school to the receiving school.

Your participation in the focus group will involve:

- Taking part in an interview with the researcher, in which they will be asked questions about your views on the transition from their former school to their current school.
- The researcher will audio-record your responses for the interview aspect of this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify your through your VOICE. If you agree to be audio recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form.
- During this interview, notes will be taken and the conversation will be recorded for later transcription. The interview will be made anonymous by taking out your name and other identifiable characteristics. The audio files will then be destroyed upon the completion of the study.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason.
- Your participation will be treated confidentially and all information will be stored anonymously and securely. All information in the final report will be anonymous. You will have the option of withdrawing information from the study up until the transcript has been made anonymous.
- The comments made by you in the focus group will be recorded confidentially. However, there is no way that the researcher can guarantee that what is said in the focus groups will not be said by other members of the group.
- Your participation will have minimal risk and there is no cost to participate.

You are welcome to ask questions at any time. You are also free to ask questions of Dr. Burton, the researcher’s faculty advisor. You are also free to speak with the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Research Committee at any time about any questions or concerns at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

I, __________________________________________ (please print name) consent to Elizabeth Wolkowicz (researcher) proceeding with this study with my child’s involvement. I agree to my child being audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________
Date: ____________________
Appendix C: Focus Group Parental Consent Form for Participants Under the Age of 18

Study Title: A Case Study on the Experiences of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure
Primary Investigator (researcher): Elizabeth Wolkowicz
Research Advisor: Dr. Ella Burton
University Affiliated: Eastern Michigan University

Purpose of the Study: The researcher is studying the experiences of high school students who have gone through their charter school closing and have had to transition to a new school. The researcher will conduct focus group sessions with students to discuss their experiences moving from a closed school to the receiving school.

My child’s participation in the focus group will involve:
- Taking part in an interview with the researcher, in which they will be asked questions about their views on the transition from their former school to their current school.
- The researcher will audio-record my child’s responses for the interview aspect of this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify your child through their VOICE. If you agree for them to be audio recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form.
- During this interview, notes will be taken and the conversation will be recorded for later transcription. The interview will be made anonymous by taking out my child’s name and other identifiable characteristics. The audio files will then be destroyed upon the completion of the study.
- My child’s participation is entirely voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason.
- My child’s participation will be treated confidentially and all information will be stored anonymously and securely. All information in the final report will be anonymous. My child will have the option of withdrawing their information from the study up until the transcript has been made anonymous.
- The comments made by your child in the focus group will be recorded confidentially. However, there is no way that the researcher can guarantee that what is said in the focus groups will not be said by other members of the group.
- My child’s participation will have minimal risk and there is no cost to participate.

You are welcome to ask questions at any time. You are also free to ask questions of Dr. Burton, the researcher’s faculty advisor. You are also free to speak with the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Research Committee at any time about any questions or concerns at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

I, _______________________(please print name) consent to Elizabeth Wolkowicz (researcher) proceeding with this study with my child’s involvement. I agree to my child being audio-recorded.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: ______________________Date: ____________________
Appendix D: Assent Form for Participants in Focus Groups Under the Age of 18

Study Title: A Case Study on the Experiences of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure
Primary Investigator: Elizabeth Wolkowicz
Research Advisor: Dr. Ella Burton
University Affiliated: Eastern Michigan University

I am doing a study to learn about the experiences of high school students when their charter school closes and they have transitioned to a new school. I am asking for your help because we do not have a lot of information about what that experience is like from a student point of view.

If you agree to be in my study, I am going to ask you some questions about what it was like when they announced your school was closing. I will also ask questions about what it was like to transition to your new high school.

You can ask questions about the study at any time. If you decide at any time not to finish, you can tell me at anytime.

The questions I ask you will be about what you think. There is no right or wrong answer because this is not a test.

I will be audio-recording your answers so I can transcribe them later. When I use your responses, I will not include your name or anything that would identify you. You will be anonymous. This makes very minimal risk for you to participate.

While I will be making sure that your responses are kept anonymous in my transcribing and reporting, there will be other students who will be in the focus group discussions. I cannot guarantee that what is said in the focus groups will be kept private by the other members.

If you sign this paper, it means you have read it and want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in this study, do not sign this paper. Being in the study is entirely up to you and no one will be upset if you decide to not do it or if you change your mind later.

Your Signature: ____________________________ Date: ________________
Your Printed Name: _________________________ Date: ________________

By signing here, you agree to be audio-recorded.
Your Signature: ____________________________ Date: ________________
Appendix E: Informed Consent for Participation in Study

Study Title: A Case Study on the Experiences of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure
Primary Investigator (researcher): Elizabeth Wolkowicz
Research Advisor: Dr. Ella Burton
University Affiliated: Eastern Michigan University

Purpose of the Study: The researcher is studying the experiences of high school students who have gone through their charter school closing and have had to transition to a new school. The researcher will be interviewing students in order to gain a better understanding of the experience.

My participation in this study will involve:

1. Taking part in an interview with the researcher, in which you will be asked questions about your views on the transition from the former school to the current school.
2. The researcher will audio-record my responses for the interview aspect of this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify you through your VOICE. If you agree to be audio recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form.
3. During this interview, notes will be taken and the conversation will be recorded for later transcription. The interview will be made anonymous by taking out my name and other identifiable characteristics. The audio files will then be destroyed upon the completion of the study.
4. My participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason.
5. My participation will be treated confidentially and all information will be stored anonymously and securely. All information in the final report will be anonymous. I will have the option of withdrawing their information from the study up until the transcript has been made anonymous.
6. There is minimal risk in your participation of the study. You can withdraw your participation at any time.

Please ask questions at any time. I am also free to ask questions of Dr. Burton, the researcher’s faculty advisor.

I understand that I am free to speak with the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Research Committee at any time about any questions or concerns at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

I, ________________________________ (please print name) consent to Elizabeth Wolkowicz (researcher) proceeding with this study with my child’s involvement.

By signing below, I agree to my responses being audio-recorded.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ____________________
Appendix F: Informed Parental Consent for Participants Under 18

Study Title: A Case Study on the Experiences of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure
Primary Investigator (researcher): Elizabeth Wolkowicz
Research Advisor: Dr. Ella Burton
University Affiliated: Eastern Michigan University

Purpose of the Study: The researcher is studying the experiences of high school students who have gone through their charter school closing and have had to transition to a new school. The researcher will be interviewing students in order to gain a better understanding of the experience.

My child’s participation in this study will involve:
- Taking part in an interview with the researcher, in which they will be asked questions about their views on the transition from their former school to their current school.
- The researcher will audio-record my child’s responses for the interview aspect of this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify your child through their VOICE. If you agree for them to be audio recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form.
- During this interview, notes will be taken and the conversation will be recorded for later transcription. The interview will be made anonymous by taking out my child’s name and other identifiable characteristics. The audio files will then be destroyed upon the completion of the study.
- My child’s participation is entirely voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason.
- My child’s participation will be treated confidentially and all information will be stored anonymously and securely. All information in the final report will be anonymous. My child will have the option of withdrawing their information from the study up until the transcript has been made anonymous.
- My child’s participation will have minimal risk and there is no cost to participate.

You are welcome to ask questions at any time. You are also free to ask questions of Dr. Burton, the researcher’s faculty advisor. You are also free to speak with the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Research Committee at any time about any questions or concerns at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

I, ________________________________ (please print name) consent to Elizabeth Wolkowicz (researcher) proceeding with this study with my child’s involvement. I agree to my child being audio-recorded.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: ________________________________
Date: __________________
Name of Child: ________________________________
Appendix G: Assent Form for Participants Under the Age of 18

Study Title: A Case Study on the Experiences of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure
Primary Investigator: Elizabeth Wolkowicz
Research Advisor: Dr. Ella Burton
University Affiliated: Eastern Michigan University

I am doing a study to learn about the experiences of high school students when their charter school closes and they have transitioned to a new school. I am asking for your help because we do not have a lot of information about what that experience is like from a student point of view.

If you agree to be in my study, I am going to ask you some questions about what it was like when they announced your school was closing. I will also ask questions about what it was like to transition to your new high school.

You can ask questions about the study at any time. If you decide at any time not to finish, you can tell me at anytime.

The questions I ask you will be about what you think. There is no right or wrong answer because this is not a test.

I will be audio-recording your answers so I can transcribe them later. When I use your responses, I will not include your name or anything that would identify you. You will be anonymous. This makes very minimal risk for you to participate.

If you sign this paper, it means you have read it and want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in this study, do not sign this paper. Being in the study is entirely up to you and no one will be upset if you decide to not do it or if you change your mind later.

By signing here, you agree to be audio-recorded.
Your Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________________

Your Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________________
Your Printed Name: ____________________________ Date: __________________
Appendix H: Interview Protocol

Title: A Case Study on the Experiences of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure

Location: ________________________________ Date/Time: ___________________
Participant Code: _________________ Researcher conducting session: ___________

Introduction

My name is Elizabeth Wolkowicz and I will be facilitating this interview. The goal of this project is to learn about your experience moving from your former school to <insert school name> due to <insert school name> closing. Ultimately, I want to learn about your experience in order to understand what the experience of having your school close is like and how to support students after that incident. The information you provide will be shared through the publication of the study so others can also learn from your experience.

You were selected as a volunteer from a group of students who also came to <insert school name> after experiencing their former school closing. There will be a total of four participants who will provide interviews for the study.

Prior to the interview, you were sent an invitation and consent form to sign and return. There is a copy of the consent form for your records provided. Our interview today will take approximately 45 minutes and will follow a designated interview protocol. As an incentive for your participation, you will receive a $25 gift card that will be given to you after the interview. There may be follow up interviews requested in order to gather additional information.

I will be audio-recording this interview. These recordings will not be shared with anyone and the interview will be transcribed for study with your name masked for confidentiality.

You will be provided the transcripts to review for accuracy and make sure that only what you want to share is included.

If there are no further questions, let’s begin.

(Begin recording conversation)

Interview Questions—Utilize Questions (see Appendix D)

Closing

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. I will be providing you the transcripts by <insert date> to check them for accuracy. Thank you again for your time and assistance. If you have any questions about the process, please feel free to contact those individuals listed on the consent form.
Appendix I: Interview Questions

Interview Protocol for Case Study of Students’ Experience with School Closure

Topics and Protocol Questions

(Illustrative Questions--- Variance may occur in individual interviews)

A. Experiences Pre-Transition

1. When did you find out XX was closing? What were your thoughts and feelings when you heard the news? How did your fellow classmates feel/respond to the news?
2. How was the closure of the school communicated? (Means of communications, written, verbal, internet, meetings, etc.)
3. If there was a change in the school’s climate, please describe the change?
4. Do you recall how teachers, administrators and other felt/responded to the closing announcements? Did the staff and students act differently after hearing the school closure announcement?
5. Was the ability of the students to focus impact by the news of closing? If so, please describe?

B. Experiences during the Transition

6. How did you determine which school you would go to next?
7. What were some of the feelings that your family experienced when going through the closure of your school?
8. How did the closure of the school impact your family?
9. Did you have concerns with changing schools? What were some of those concerns?
10. Can you describe the climate of the school during the time of closure?
11. What was your greatest challenge in transitioning from your former school to Academy A?
12. How would you describe experience in transitioning from the closed school to Academy A?

C. Experiences Post-Transition

13. If there were things that made the transition easy, please describe what were those things?
14. Were there things that made the transition difficult, if so, please describe?
15. Describe what the receiving school did to help make your transition smooth?
16. When you transferred to Academy A did you feel comfortable? Please tell why or why not?
17. Please describe what events, functions or activities made you feel a part of Academy A?
18. Do you feel the transition had any impact on your academic performance? Why or Why Not?
19. Do you feel the transition had any impact on your social life?

D. Reflections of the Whole Process

20. Who do you feel is accountable for the school’s closure?
21. Did you feel a sense of loss during this period? Please describe?
Appendix J: IRB Approval

IRB #: UHSRC-FY17-18-323
Title: A Case Study on the Experiences of High School Students Affected by Charter School Closure
Creation Date: 3-20-2018
End Date: 4-24-2019
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Elizabeth Wolkowicz
Review Board: University Human Subjects Review Committee
Sponsor:

Study History

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Key Study Contacts

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<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ewolkowi@emich.edu">ewolkowi@emich.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella Burton</td>
<td>Co-Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:eburton1@emich.edu">eburton1@emich.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Wolkowicz</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ewolkowi@emich.edu">ewolkowi@emich.edu</a></td>
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Appendix K: District of Columbia Office of the Superintendent Charter School Closing Policy
CHARTER SCHOOL CLOSURE POLICY

Date Issued: March 8, 2016

Introduction
The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is responsible for all state-level educational functions as the State Educational Agency (SEA) for the District of Columbia. The State Superintendent represents the District in all matters before the United States Department of Education and is responsible for establishing statewide policies within the functions of an SEA under federal and local law. (D.C. Official Code § 38-2601 et seq.)

The purpose of this policy is to establish procedures and provide guidance and technical assistance with regard to the state-level concerns related to the closure of a District of Columbia public charter school, also recognized as a Local Educational Agency (LEA) for federal funding purposes. (D.C. Official Code § 38-1802.10(a) & (c).)

A charter school may close for a variety of reasons including, for example, voluntary relinquishment of a charter, revocation of the charter, or nonrenewal of a charter by the authorizing authority. A charter school closure is governed by applicable laws and regulations, and appropriate procedures established by the charter authorizing authority, including the District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (PCSB). This policy also addresses consolidations or closures of one or more campuses within a public charter school LEA with multiple campuses, which may in some instances implicate the state-level concerns described in this policy.

This policy highlights the following state-level concerns:

I. Notification of Closure
II. Submission of Closure Plan
III. Student Records and Retention
IV. Students with Disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
V. Students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) Enrolled at a Nonpublic Special Education School
VI. Extended School-Year (ESY) Services for Students with IEPs
VII. Obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
VIII. Financial and Grants Closeout
IX. Dispersal of Unspent Federal and Local Grant Funds
X. Disposition of Assets
XI. Data Collection and Reporting

XII. Consolidations, Mergers and Acquisitions

XIII. UPSFF Payments and Remittance

XIV. Conclusion

I. Notification of Closure

A. Upon a final decision of PCSB to revoke, not renew, or acknowledge the relinquishment of a charter, the chartering authority will, in accordance with its established guidelines, notify the closing charter school in writing of required procedures, provide the name and number of an identified point of contact responsible for the school’s closure or consolidation process.

B. Within ten (10) calendar days of any official action taken by a chartering authority to revoke, not renew, or acknowledge the relinquishment of a charter, the closing charter school shall provide OSSE with written notification of the pending closure. In the event of a campus closure or the consolidation or two or more campuses into a single campus, the charter school shall provide OSSE with written notification within ten (10) calendar days of the official decision to close or consolidate. The notification and all other related correspondence should be sent to:

   Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
   Office of Enrollment and Residency
   810 First Street, NE, 9th Floor
   Washington, DC 20002
   Email: osse.charterclosure@dc.gov

   The Notice shall include the following information:

   1. Name of the public charter school or campus(es) that will be closing or consolidating;

   2. Names and contact information for the following persons:
      a) PCSB point of contact responsible for the school’s closure or consolidation process and student transition;
      b) Public charter school’s point of contact responsible for the school’s closure or consolidation process;
      c) All members and officers of the school’s governing body; and
      d) All persons in charge of communication among internal and external parties about the school’s closure or consolidation process.

   3. Effective date of the closure or consolidation;

   4. Address(es) of the public charter school facility (or facilities) impacted by the closure or consolidation;

   5. Information describing the school’s assets, including facility ownership, copies of leases, if any, and copies of any outstanding debt obligations including loans supported by OSSE’s Office of Public Charter School Financing and Support (OPCSFS).
6. Information describing the location of, and arrangements for storage, maintenance and transfer of student and personnel records; and

7. Detailed listing of all Federal and local grants and appropriations active in the current school year.

C. Within fourteen (14) calendar days of the official action taken by the charter authorizer to revoke, not renew, or acknowledge the relinquishment of the charter, the closing public charter school shall provide written notification of the impending closure or consolidation to the parents or guardians of all students affected by the termination of educational services. The notification shall:

1. Inform the parents or guardians of the date when educational services at the public charter school or campus will cease;

2. If the public charter school is closing, inform parents or guardians of their obligation, under District of Columbia law on compulsory school attendance, (D.C. Official Code § 38-202), to enroll the student in another LEA, including the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) or another public charter school;

3. Provide guidance, as appropriate, on available school options and instructions on how to enroll the student in another LEA;

4. Encourage the student’s parent or guardian to complete enrollment at another LEA as early as possible, and prior to the end of the school lottery period, in order to ensure a smooth transition and continuation of educational services, and

5. Provide parents or guardians the name and number of an identified point of contact with the charter authorizer who will address unresolved or new issues related to the student after the official closing of the public charter school or campus.

II. Submission of Closure Plan

A. Within twenty one (21) calendar days of any official action taken by the charter authorizer to revoke, not renew, or acknowledge the relinquishment of a charter, the closing charter school shall submit a closure plan to the charter authorizer. The closing charter school shall submit such articles of dissolution to the Mayor and notification to the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, as required pursuant to D.C. Official Code § 29-412.02.

The charter authorizer is expected to provide a charter closure plan template to the public charter school, upon any official action taken to revoke, not renew, or acknowledge the relinquishment of a charter. It is recommended that the closure plan template include the elements outlined in Section II(C). These are required elements in the case of closing public charter schools that are Priority and Focus schools, in accordance with the District of Columbia’s approved waiver under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended. OSSE shall review the charter closure plan in collaboration with the closing charter school and charter authorizer and establish a schedule for completion of all items required in the closure plan.
Closure procedures included in the charter school closure plan shall include the following components:

1. Transfer and maintenance of personnel records consistent with federal grants requirements;

2. Provision, storage and maintenance of student transcripts, including each student’s grade level and completed courses;

3. Transfer and maintenance of all other student records, including without limitation a student’s performance on annual state assessment tests;

4. Transfer and maintenance of all special education records;

5. Action plan that details the guidance and support the public charter school will provide to their outgoing students’ parents or guardians during the closure process, including assistance with transitioning students to other LEAs and facilitating contact between students’ parents or guardians and the charter authorizer;

6. Plan for notifying stakeholders (e.g. nonpublic special education schools, vendors and community based organizations) of the closure;

7. Plan for maintenance of student enrollment activity through updates of each student’s enrollment, due to OSSE on a bi-weekly basis until expiration of the charter;

8. Detailed list of all assets purchased with local and federal funds, liabilities, stakeholders, judgments and other legal matters, including but not limited to: due process complaints, letters of determination, compensatory services plans, and Hearing Officers Decisions pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 USC § 1401 et seq (IDEA); and

9. Plan for addressing all outstanding student-level findings of noncompliance with the IDEA that have been identified by OSSE through monitoring or other review. The plan shall include an up to date status report of all such findings.

B. In the case of a campus closure(s) within a public charter school LEA with multiple campuses, including consolidation of two or more campuses into a single campus, the public charter school LEA shall determine whether it has another campus that will serve the students affected at the same grade levels. If so, the public charter school does not need to submit or adhere to a closure plan. If the public charter school does not have another campus that will serve students at the same grade level, the LEA shall submit a closure plan and adhere to the terms of this policy, as appropriate, with respect to the closing campus. Upon receipt of written notification of a campus closure or consolidation, OSSE will confirm that the closing charter school is developing a closure plan.

C. In the case that PCSB provides official notice to OSSE that its members have voted to revoke or not renew the charter of a particular Priority or Focus school based on lack of progress toward improved student academic outcomes, or other significant issues cited by PCSB, PCSB will have thirty calendar (30) days from the decision to revoke or not renew the charter to submit to OSSE a closure plan to (a) ensure continuity of quality educational services prior to the school’s closing;
and (b) seek to arrange quality educational alternatives in the coming school year for students in the closing school.

The plan must minimally address the way in which the school will support smooth transition in two key areas: (1) transition support for staff; (2) transition support for families.

1. Supporting Transition for Staff

   *Suggested elements:*

   a) Communications strategy that provides frequent, clear updates on what to expect
   b) Contingency staffing plan to address anticipated attrition and increased turnover

   If the school will be operating for more than half of a 180-day school year (90 school days or 900 school hours), the plan shall include teacher support related to increased instructional/behavioral needs.

2. Supporting Transition for Families

   *Suggested elements:*

   a) Communications strategy that provides frequent, clear updates on what to expect
   b) Individualized communications to families outlining educational options and timelines
   c) Fact sheet on change process, typical reactions to stress, and how to talk about the transition with children and youth
   d) Distribution of resource sheet on counseling/support resources
   e) Direct support to search for and apply to an appropriate school for the following school year
   f) For 11th and 12th graders, individualized graduation plans to assure high school graduation

   Additionally, if the school will be operating for more than half of a 180-day school year (90 school days or 900 school hours), the plan shall include specific strategies in the plan for:

   - **Addressing the Academic Needs of All Students**
     *Suggested elements:*
     a) Targeted data support and review to coordinate individualized transition planning
     b) Academic interventions to ensure students remain on track and that gaps are identified, documented, and addressed

   - **Addressing the Social/Emotional Needs of All Students**
     *Suggested elements:*
     a) Enhanced counseling/behavior support
     b) Review and update of school crisis intervention plan
III. Student Records and Retention


IV. Students with Disabilities under the IDEA

OSSE is responsible for monitoring LEAs for compliance with the IDEA, and for ensuring that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education. With regard to special education services and funding, a closing public charter school that has elected the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) to serve as its LEA for purposes of the IDEA, 20 USC § 1400 et seq. shall contact DCPS to coordinate the closeout activities below regarding special education services. A closing public charter school that has not elected DCPS as its LEA for purposes of IDEA is directly responsible for completing the following closeout actions:

A. Within fourteen (14) calendar days of any official action taken by the charter authorizer to revoke, not renew, or acknowledge the relinquishment of a charter, the closing charter school shall provide written notification of the impending closure or consolidation to the parents or guardians of all students receiving special education services. The notification sent to the parents of students receiving special education services shall conform to the requirements of Section I(C) hereof, and shall also:

1. Include a copy of the IDEA Notice of Procedural Safeguards.

2. Inform families of how their child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be transitioned from the closing public charter school to the new LEA of the parents’ choosing. Sample language follows:

   a) What happens to my child’s IEP now? Until the date that education services at your child’s current LEA end or you enroll in another LEA, whichever occurs first, your child’s current LEA is required to ensure your child’s IEP is being implemented and is receiving a free and appropriate public education (FAPE).

   b) Does my child’s next school have to follow my child’s current IEP? If you enroll your child in a new public school in the District, the school is required to immediately provide your child with FAPE, including services comparable to those in your child’s IEP. These services need not be identical to the services in your child’s current IEP but shall be comparable enough to provide FAPE. Then, the school shall adopt and fully implement your child’s current IEP or convene an IEP team to develop and implement a new IEP.

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1 Title I, Section 101(d) of the Special Education Quality Improvement Amendment Act of 2014 (D.C. Law 20-194, as modified at D.C. Official Code § 38-1802.10(c) and (c-1)) changed the law regarding election of DCPS by charter schools for IDEA purposes. Under this law, newly approved public charter schools may no longer elect DCPS to be the LEA for purposes of IDEA, and by August 1, 2017, any existing public charter school that has made this election shall be treated as its own LEA for IDEA purposes.
c) **How will the next school know what is in my child's IEP?** If you enroll your child in a new public school in the District your child's new school will be able to access all of the electronic special education records the previous school entered in the citywide Special Education Data System (SEDS). In addition, the previous school shall provide you with a paper copy of your child's IEP for your records.

3. Provide guidance to parents of students who require Extended School Year (ESY) special education services on how to enroll their child in another LEA as soon as possible, but no later than the last day of the academic school year of the closing charter school, to ensure that the student's new LEA has an opportunity to provide ESY services over the summer.

4. Provide guidance to parents on how to inquire about the status of their child's IEP during the closure process, encouraging them to do so prior to the end of the academic school year.

5. Inform parents of 12th grade students who are receiving special education services (or such adult students where educational rights have transferred) of their right to continue their education in the public school system through the end of the first semester of their 22nd birthday if they are not graduating with a regular diploma.

Copies of all notices sent to parents of students who are receiving special education services shall be uploaded into the Special Education Data System (SEDS).

B. Ensure that all IEPs are updated (i.e., not expired or about to expire) and that all information is entered into SEDS by the end of the academic school year of the closing charter school. All charter schools are required to use and update SEDS regularly; however, if there are any other special education documents maintained in the student's hard copy file, they shall be faxed into SEDS using the appropriate SEDS fax cover sheet or the miscellaneous cover sheet found in SEDS. OSSE will schedule closeout monitoring activities of the closing school's SEDS records no less than thirty (30) calendar days before the end of the academic school year of the closing school. At a minimum, up-to-date SEDS files shall include:

1. Students' current IEPs, including Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs) if appropriate, entered into the SEDS interface (please note: a hard copy paper IEP faxed into the system is not sufficient);

2. IEP and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meeting notes;

3. IEP report cards/progress reports;

4. All evaluations completed within the past 3 years (including Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs), if appropriate), and

5. All service trackers.

C. Provide a copy of the student's file to his/her parent(s) to facilitate the transition of special education students to their new schools and allow the parents to furnish a physical copy of the file to the student's new school, documenting the services the child needs.
D. Establish a list of 12th graders or seniors in high school who are NOT graduating.

E. Notify all stakeholders (e.g., nonpublic schools, vendors and community based organizations) of the closure.

F. Address all outstanding student-level findings of noncompliance with IDEA that have been identified by OSSE through monitoring or other review, and provide an up-to-date status report of all such findings prior to the termination of educational services.

V. Students with IEPs Enrolled at a Nonpublic Special Education School

Students attending nonpublic schools shall be enrolled in an LEA at all times to maintain District funding and ensure appropriate oversight of the student’s educational placement. To ensure continuation of services upon the closing of a student’s LEA of record, the student shall re-enroll in a new LEA, either in DCPS or another public charter school. In accordance with federal and local law, the new LEA will review the student’s IEP to determine whether it can fully implement the student’s IEP in a less restrictive setting (i.e., a public school), and ensure that placement is made by “a group of persons” with knowledge of the child, including the parent. The new LEA can determine whether to reconsider placement, based on data available regarding the child.

VI. Extended School-Year (ESY) Services for Students with IEPs

When a student with an IEP containing extended school-year (ESY) services transfers to another LEA, that LEA shall provide ESY services to the student as a comparable service. While the determination of comparable services is made on an individual basis, the student’s new LEA may not arbitrarily decrease the level of services to be provided to the student as comparable services, regardless of the time of year of the transfer. In the interest of continuity of educational services, OSSE encourages agreements between the closing charter school and the LEA(s) which receive such student, to allow the closing charter school, where appropriate, to provide the ESY services. In such cases, however, the new LEA remains accountable for ensuring the delivery of ESY services to students enrolled in the new LEA. In addition, the new LEA is also responsible for coordinating transportation services with OSSE Division of Student Transportation, if applicable.

VII. Obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Closing charter school LEAs are reminded of their obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to ensure that students with Section 504 accommodation plans continue to receive their accommodations and services during the closure process. LEAs may wish to consider sending notices to parents of students with Section 504 plans of the school’s closure and the current status of the student’s accommodation plan. It is also advisable for the LEA to ensure that the student’s most recent Section 504 plan is up to date and included with the student’s other education records. Because the SEDS system does not include a module for Section 504 plans, the closing charter school LEA may wish to provide the parent with a copy of the student’s Section 504 plan. Note, however, the new LEA in which the parent enrolls the student has an independent obligation under Section 504 to ensure the provision of a free and appropriate public education, including review and implementation of an appropriate plan as the new LEA may determine. The new LEA has no obligation to implement the same Section 504 plan as the closing public charter school.
VIII. Financial and Grants Closeout

Upon receiving notification of the closure, OSSE will review the applicable grants and funding documents and notify the charter school and the charter authorizer of its findings with regard to liabilities, including unpaid loan funds, grants, credit enhancement, and/or other liabilities.

If OSSE determines that funds are owed to the District, the closing charter school shall promptly remit such funds by check to the Office of Grants Management and Compliance at OSSE, made payable to the District of Columbia Treasurer (DC Treasurer) and mailed to:

    Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)  
    Office of Enrollment and Residency  
    810 First Street, NE, 9th floor  
    Washington, DC 20002

OSSE shall invoice the school for any direct expenses incurred as a result of enforcing or complying with this policy.

Many public charter schools receive federal and local grants directly from OSSE. In order to ensure proper closeout of all grants, the closing charter school shall take the following steps:

A. Ensure that all applications for entitlement funds (e.g. Title I, Part A; IDEA, Part B) have been finalized and approved;

B. Submit reimbursement requests for all expenditures allowed under federal and local grants;

C. Provide supporting documentation with reimbursement requests for all grant funds;

D. Provide a spending plan to identify possible amount of funds that may lapse, and establish a timeline for submitting reimbursement requests; and

E. Prepare and submit any and all financial, performance, or other audits or reports required under the terms of the grant.

A charter school that is closing a campus or consolidating one or more campuses, without having another campus available to serve students at the same grade level, does not need to complete this financial and grants closeout. However, the charter school shall review all of its active grants to determine whether the loss of students at those grade levels requires amendment of their grant applications.

A charter school shall comply promptly with the respective federal or local grant award notices and regulations governing the methodology related to grants management. The OSSE Office of Grants Management and Compliance is available to provide technical assistance in this process and can be reached at osse.grantscompliance@dc.gov.

IX. Disposal of Unspent Federal and Local Grant Funds

Closing charter schools should follow the standard process for expediting expenditure of funds and reimbursement requests. Final reimbursement requests should be submitted within 45 calendar days after the final day of operation. Approved charter school staff and representatives should submit the program
reimbursement request in EGMS. All appropriate supporting documentation should be uploaded with the request. The request will be processed as follows:

A. A program specialist reviews the reimbursement request, follows up with the sub grantee if necessary, and indicates the amount of the request that is allowed and, if applicable, the amount that is disallowed; the program manager reviews the reimbursement request and, if applicable, validates the amount allowed;

B. The reimbursement moves from program approval to the accountant level for approval in the Office of Grants Management and Compliance. The accountant level will send it to OCFO, once approved;

C. OCFO reviews the reimbursement. Once approved, a payment for the allowed amount is sent to the subgrantee by ACH payment or check.

Reimbursement requests not received within 45 calendar days after the final day of operation will not be eligible for a grant reimbursement. Affected charter schools should allow for unforeseen circumstances and submit reimbursement requests as early and frequently as possible to prevent a lapse of funds.

X. Disposition of Assets

OSSE is responsible for monitoring federal grant recipients to ensure compliance with federal law and regulations regarding the disposition of assets purchased with federal funds. (See 2 CFR § 200.313(c) and former 34 CFR § 80.32, as applicable.) See also, City-Wide Grants Manual and Sourcebook. Accordingly, the charter school closure plan shall include the disposition plan for all liabilities and assets consistent with applicable federal laws and regulations.

The LEA should also ensure that it has reviewed and complied with local laws including the Nonprofit Corporation Act of 2010 and its provisions on dissolution of non-profit corporations (D.C. Official Code §§ 29-409.01 — 29-412.01.)

A. Facilities: Upon the closure of a public charter school, the disposition of public charter school facilities (school building) is governed by the terms and conditions of its acquisition. If the charter school purchases the school building, generally, there are multiple lenders—senior and subordinate. If public resources comprise part of the acquisition financing, that financing is facilitated pursuant to a Direct Loan Fund for Charter School Improvement, administered by the D.C. Office of Public Charter School Financing and Support (OPCSFS) (D.C. Official Code § 38-1833.02).

The disposition of a school building that is not owned outright by the school is determined by the terms and conditions of the loans that financed its acquisition. This process is governed pursuant to the loan agreements of each lender and an attendant Subordination and Inter-creditor Agreement by and between all lenders.

When a public charter school occupies a school building pursuant to a lease, the disposition of the building is governed pursuant to the terms and conditions of the lease agreement.

If the facility was purchased using federal grant funds, federal regulations mandate that the purchasing entity request disposition instructions from the federal awarding agency, the U.S. Department of Education. (See 2 CFR § 200.311(c) and former 34 CFR § 80.31(c), as applicable.)

B. Property.

Closing charter schools shall submit to OSSE a log of all equipment, as defined in 2 CFR § 200.33, purchased with federal grants. Additionally, this log shall include all supplies, as defined in 2 CFR § 200.94, considered small and attractive items that cost less than the equipment cost threshold, such as computing devices (i.e., laptops, desktop computers, tablets, smartboards, projectors, personal digital assistants (PDAs), cell phones, printers) and their accessories. Finally, the log shall also include equipment and supplies purchased with local funds. In determining what items of personal property purchased with local funds to include on the log, closing charter schools shall use the definitions of equipment and supplies found in 2 CFR § 200.33 and § 200.94, respectively. All of the aforementioned property shall remain property of OSSE, unless OSSE declares the property to be “excess” or designates it as “exempt property.”

Property purchased with federal or local funds cannot be liquidated and shall be transferred according to the following procedures:

1. The closing charter school shall submit a log of all equipment, and all supplies considered “small and attractive items” that cost less than the equipment cost threshold, purchased with federal grants.

2. OSSE shall send notice of availability of items to similar public charter schools with the same federal grant entitlements.

3. Notified LEAs have 48 hours from the time of publication of the list of property to request items.

4. Within ten (10) business days, OSSE shall determine the disbursement of equipment and supplies, based on identified need.

5. Other public charter schools shall be given the opportunity to claim undisbursed items.

6. In the event that no public charter schools claim the property, such property will be transferred to DCPS.

The charter school shall secure and store the property and any other assets that belong to others in order to protect these assets against theft, misappropriation, or deterioration. The charter school leadership and school governing authorities shall immediately take steps to secure all the building(s), furniture, fixtures, equipment, and supplies, and maintain daily security over those assets until disposed.

OSSE will review and verify the equipment/inventory log (sample below) in coordination with the charter authorizer and the charter school’s independent auditor; and will coordinate with the

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1 D.C. Official Code § 38-1802.13a(d)(2)(A)
charter authorizer about the proper procedure for liquidating the assets, consistent with federal regulations. The inventory log shall include:

1. Each item in excess of Federal equipment cost threshold;
2. Small and attractive items that cost less than the equipment cost threshold, such as computing devices and their accessories;
3. An identification number that corresponds to a tag on that item;
4. The cost of the item, purchase date, and grant source of funds;
5. The physical location of the item in the closing charter school; and
6. Name and contact information for person(s) handling liquidation.

Inventory Log sample:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description of Item</th>
<th>Funding Source (Local/Federal)</th>
<th>Location of Item in School</th>
<th>Identification Number</th>
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The Inventory Log shall be submitted to OSSE at least 45 calendar days prior to the effective date of closure. OSSE shall facilitate the transfer of inventory according to the following procedures:

1. Review of inventory log;
2. Visit school locations to audit items; and
3. Contact schools about inventory and/or post remaining inventory in PCSB newsletter.

XI. Data Collection and Reporting

The closing charter school shall complete its reporting obligations by providing OSSE with required state and federal data for the federal fiscal year in which the charter school is closing as well as the prior
federal fiscal year. This includes, without limitation, demographic, enrollment, and withdrawal information. Program related material may include information for students with disabilities in SEDS and related data systems, and records information related to transfer students.

OSSE requires collection of all school data points prior to closing. This requirement includes any data that was not submitted during the year, and all data with later due dates, such as the National Public Education Financial Survey (NPEFS). While the deadline for fulfilling the data requirements may be after the close of the school year, public charter schools shall address these data requirements and supply OSSE with data available to the school and mandated for reporting within the year in which the school is closing. A closing school is expected to fulfill their data requirements in advance of the normal due date, to ensure all appropriate data is provided to OSSE prior to departure of the school’s key personnel acquainted with and responsible for collecting and reporting this data to OSSE. There are five types of required data:

1. Student (including student-level discipline and assessment data);
2. Staff and teacher data;
3. School-specific data;
4. LEA-specific data; and
5. Fiscal (including meal claims for the Federal Free and Reduced Meals program).

Prior to the closing charter school’s Student Information System (SIS) closeout, if any student is not yet enrolled in another LEA, the closing charter school shall enter exit codes to change the student’s status to “site unknown.” This will avoid any interruption in the student’s eligibility to enroll in another LEA that might be caused by the creation of duplicate records.

XII. Acquisitions

If the closure of a charter school also involves a consolidation, merger, or acquisition as it relates to the school’s corporate status, OSSE will consider the federal grants implications and appropriate disposition of federal grant funds on a case-by-case basis. In such cases which directly involve grants, loans, and assets purchased with federal grant proceeds, subgranted by OSSE, a joint, formal amendment request by both the closing and receiving schools should be made to OSSE within five (5) calendar days of the school closure notification.

The charter school is required to request a formal amendment to grants that were awarded by OSSE when the following are anticipated: (i) revision of the scope or objectives of a program, including any associated budget revisions; or (ii) changes in key personnel. (See 2 C.F.R. § 200.308(c) and former 34 C.F.R. § 80.30(d), as applicable.) A charter school is also required to request termination of those grants, as appropriate. (See 2 C.F.R. § 200.339 and former 34 C.F.R. § 80.44, as applicable.) The terms and conditions of loans extended to a charter school typically will also include requirements for alteration or termination of the loan.

If the effects of a consolidation, merger, or acquisition begin prior to the end of the grant year, the contact person named in the Grant Award Notice and grant application will remain the responsible person that is accountable for all oversight and management of federal grants until a formal grant amendment is received and approved by OSSE.
Charter schools shall provide an amendment request that addresses grants for the current fiscal year and include Tydings carryover funds from previous fiscal years. Specifically, the request for amendment shall include the following:

1. Programmatic changes, including revisions to the scope of the program.

2. Changes in key personnel.

If the request is to transfer these funds to another local charter school, the receiving school shall be an authorized charter school in the District of Columbia (to operate at the same grades) and the amendment request shall include the signature of the responsible contact person at the receiving school. In no case shall a closing charter LEA and/or its successor organization(s) make determinations on the legal responsibility or liability of a closing charter LEA or successor organization under federal education programs that OSSE oversees.

Once OSSE receives either a request for an amendment or a termination, it will provide a decision to the LEA in writing. OSSE reserves the right to accept (in whole or in part) or deny the request. OSSE will review amendment applications from a review panel comprised of representatives from the Office of Enrollment and Residency, Division of Elementary, Secondary, and Specialized Education, General Counsel, Office of Data Management and Office of Public Charter School Financing. Amendment requests should be sent the OSSE Office of Enrollment and Residency at osse.charterclosure@dc.gov.

XIII. UPSFF Payments and Remittance

Annually, OSSE conducts an annual enrollment audit, which is the basis of the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) (D.C. Official Code § 38-1804.02). This funding provides the per-student base foundation funding, as well as weighting factors per grade level. The UPSFF assigns additional funds for special education categories, summer school, and English language learners through add-on weights. These payments are made quarterly and, in some instances, through supplemental funding opportunities (D.C. Official Code § 38-2906.02).

The closing charter school shall submit financial statements as requested by OSSE to ensure the correct return of unspent UPSFF funds to the District of Columbia. Once a closing charter school reconciles all financial debts and obligations at the dissolution and/or relinquishment of the charter, all remaining UPSFF funds shall be repaid to the DC Treasurer and may not be used or transferred for purposes outside of the operation and business of the closing charter school. Payments should be addressed to "DC Treasurer" and mailed to:

Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)
Office of Enrollment and Residency
810 First Street, NE, 9th floor
Washington, DC 20002

XIV. Conclusion

An orderly school closure is in the best interest of all affected parties. The school’s governing officials are responsible for implementing the school closure process consistent with local and federal laws and regulations; protecting school assets; maintaining corporate and student records; developing an inventory of property and other assets; ensuring appropriate disposition of the facility and other property and
compliance with state and federal funding. This policy highlights state level issues a closing charter school shall address in a short period of time to ensure a smooth transition and as little disruption as possible to their students' education.