Rightsizing a School District Experiencing Enrollment Decline

by

Misty Linn Slavic

Bachelor of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 1999

Master of Education, University of Phoenix, 2007

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

the School of Education in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

University of Pittsburgh

2019

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

This dissertation was presented

by

Misty L. Slavic

It was defended on

April 12, 2019

and approved by

Dr. Charlene Trovato, Associate Professor and Associate Chair, Administrative and Policy

Studies

Dr. Jennifer Russell, Assistant Professor, Learning Sciences and Policy

Dr. Jacquelyn Removcik, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Hampton Area School

District

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Diane L. Kirk, Associate Professor, Administrative and Policy

Studies

Rightsizing a School District Experiencing Enrollment Decline

Misty L. Slavic, EdD

University of Pittsburgh, 2019

With qualitative and quantitative methods, this dissertation provides a study on Frederick Wayne School District's ongoing enrollment decline and includes the application of rightsizing strategies to guide the district as decisions are being made to support ongoing sustainability. The most significant findings of this research include the contradiction between stakeholder priorities for improving the district academic programs and the financial stability of the district. As stakeholders prioritize adding staffing and varied academic programming, the district continues to experience ongoing decreases in enrollment, which leads to financial deficits. The outcome of this study illustrates the need for ongoing communication with stakeholders about the financial stability of the district and for the district to continue to identify strategies to increase academic program options while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

The name of the school district and related demographic area names have been changed to ensure confidentiality of participants in this study.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Preface

This research and dissertation would not be possible without the support and encouragement of my family, friends, and colleagues. To my father, although he was not here to see me complete this goal, he was there at the beginning pushing me to continue my education. His unwavering belief that I would always overcome any challenge was what kept me in the doctorate program. His voice was always present when I felt like I could go no further, picking me up and forcing me forward. To my mother, you are the heart of our family. You taught me to believe in myself and to ignore anyone who doubted that I could accomplish this goal. Thank you for being a role model who demonstrates daily that kindness and hard work will make you a success in life.

To my husband, thank you for always being there to encourage me to continue. Thank you for knowing when I needed a hug, a positive word, or even just a bowl of ice cream to keep me going. Thank you for showing our children how a husband and father should support his family, through love and compassion. You are a remarkable man, and I am so grateful for all that you have done for our family. This degree is just as much yours as it is mine because of all the love and support that you have given, including all the sacrifices that you have had to make to help me along the way. I love you for all of this, and for so much more.

To my children, you are, and will always be, the reason why I continue to work so hard to obtain all my goals. I wanted you to see firsthand that you can achieve all that you dream, that you can, and will, accomplish all that you set out to do, if you do it with integrity and passion. Always remember that you are loved and that without any hesitation, I will always be here to support you to achieve your own goals.

To my friends and colleagues – Ryan, Joe, Emily, and Bill. Thank you for being such a fantastic support system. You are by far the most talented and passionate educators I have ever met. Your advice, humor, and encouragement have enabled me to get through many difficult days. I will forever be grateful for your friendship and for the honor of working with you to help our students find their places in the world.

To Dr. Fuller and the School Board of Directors, thank you for trusting me to complete this valuable research. Thank you for answering my many questions, being open to my suggestions and opinions, and always being supportive. I hope this research will assist the district in moving forward in a positive and informed manner.

To Dr. Kirk, Dr. Russell, and Dr. Removcik, thank you for pushing me to make this research a success. Your support, knowledge, and commitment throughout the process enabled me to learn and grow as a professional.

1.0   Introduction

Public schools in Pennsylvania are experiencing decreases in enrollment, which is forcing districts to evaluate their ability to meet academic demands while still maintaining fiscal responsibility and sustainability. Frederick Wayne School District, a rural district located in Fisher County, western Pennsylvania, is a district that is experiencing an ongoing trend toward decreases in enrollment. Students transition between three school buildings: the Frederick Wayne Area Elementary School (grades K-4), Frederick Wayne Area Middle School (grades 5-8), and the Frederick Wayne Area High School (grades 9-12). The District encompasses approximately 35 square miles of rural roads and small communities. This descriptive study provides an overview of Frederick Wayne School District's demographics, including an overview of enrollment, academic, and fiscal history, as well as stakeholder input, to identify a rightsizing guide that will support the District's ongoing success.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education enrollment reports, Pennsylvania public schools lost 2.3 percent of student enrollments from 2012-2017 (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017). In western Pennsylvania from 2012-2017, districts experienced a decrease of 6.6 percent in student enrollments. Moreover, in Fisher County, where Frederick Wayne School District resides, districts have lost 13,998 students. Frederick Wayne School District has also experienced a decline in enrollment, with the loss of 15 percent of its students each year since 2012. Such a loss in enrollment has a significant impact on a school district's demographics and funding. As Frederick Wayne School District loses enrollment, the student population that stays

has increasing needs that require additional funding for adequate academic and mental health supports.

In the Frederick Wayne School District, free and reduced lunch counts have followed the same trend by increasing 7.6 percent between the 2012-2013 and 2017-2018 school years. Frederick Wayne's free and reduced lunch rate at the end of the 2017-2018 school year was 47.4 percent, with the elementary school reporting a 60 percent free and reduced lunch rate. With this high percentage of free and reduced lunch rates, as well as declining enrollment, the District is experiencing a higher need for academic supports for students.

Numerous studies on the impact of socioeconomic status on academic achievement show overwhelmingly that "children from lower socioeconomic status families perform worse in school than children from more privileged backgrounds" (von Stumm, 2016, p.1). The enrollment data clearly show a significant increase in poverty levels for Frederick Wayne School District. With these increases in poverty come an increased need for special education services to support students who have significant achievement gaps.

1.1   Student Demographics

As Frederick Wayne School District's enrollment decreases, the number of students who need special education is increasing, with over 18 percent of students qualifying for special education services (Pennsylvania Department of Education Special Education Data Reporting, 2017). More students need supplemental supports and services, which also creates a financial impact. Examples of supplemental supports and services can include supports to address environmental needs, increased levels of staff support, additional planning time for staff

collaboration, specialized equipment needs, alternative presentation of subject matter, assistive technology, training, and any other supports that assist a student so that she can access the curriculum. Although special education programs generally focus on students who need academic supports, administrators in Frederick Wayne School District have noticed that a large percentage of students are also experiencing significant mental health concerns that can impact learning.

The Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a Pennsylvania Department of Education supported program that assists in identifying and supporting students who are struggling with alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health issues that pose barriers to students' success (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2018). Frederick Wayne School District has seen an increased need for interventions with a jump from 13 percent referrals to SAP in 2012 to 18 percent referrals in 2018 (Frederick Wayne School District SAP Referrals, 2018).

As students struggle with mental health concerns, as well as poverty, academic performance suffers. Standardized assessments in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science are used to evaluate student success in Pennsylvania. English Language Arts and Mathematics progress are evaluated by the use of the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) in grades 3 through 8. Students are assessed with the Science PSSA in grades 4 and 8, and, finally, students are evaluated using the Keystone Assessment once they complete Algebra 1, high school literature, and biology.

Frederick Wayne School District students are not showing success on these standardized assessments. According to data taken from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's 2018 standardized testing data reporting, student success on all of the standardized assessments is decreasing. With the ongoing decreases in enrollment and student academic performance, and

increases in special education and mental health services, Frederick Wayne School District needs a strong rightsizing plan to make adjustments to its operations.

1.2   Employee Demographics

The decline in enrollment in Frederick Wayne School District has also had an impact on the number of teachers employed by the district. Staffing over the last eight years has hovered around 100 teachers a year since 2012. As the District experienced an enrollment decline, staffing has decreased by 5 percent over the last eight years.

With over nine million dollars of the District budget spent on salaries and over three million dollars spent on retirement, the District needs to take a close look at the types of academic programming offered. Additionally, Frederick Wayne School District must review the student to teacher ratios and how the cost of supporting these programs with staff impacts the budget, while still maintaining or increasing academic achievement. This process aligns with the strategies used in rightsizing.

1.3   Financial Status

Frederick Wayne School District revenues come from federal, state, and local funding. Over the last six years, income revenues have slowly increased, with the 2018-2019 estimated total revenues to include $23,251,826, an increase of $3,435,543 since 2013. An increase in revenues occurred in the 2016-2017 school year when an increase of 3.6 millage (mil) was attributed. The

millage rate for a school district is "the amount per $1,000 of property value that is used to calculate local property taxes, with an assigned millage rate multiplied by the total taxable value of the property in order to arrive at the total property taxes" (Kagan, 2019). The District applied for exceptions of $349,099, which equates to 2.5283 mils of additional real estate taxes. Pennsylvania allows for a certain percentage of increase on school taxes; in order to exceed that percentage, schools must apply for exceptions beyond the tax index. By applying this exception, the district was able to move forward without a deficit in the overall general budget for the 2018-2019 school year.

1.3.1 Expenditures

While revenues in the Frederick Wayne School District slowly rise, expenses are also growing. With an average increase of 3 percent in spending since the 2015-2016 school year, the District has had to make cuts to professional development funding and supplies. However, with the ongoing increases in needs for special education services, these cuts may not be enough to sustain the District.

One area of concern for all state public schools is retirement funding. The Pennsylvania Public School Employees Retirement Act (PSERS) established a retirement and disability benefit system for public school employees in 1917. The PSERS system is a governmental cost-sharing, multi-employer defined benefit pension plan funded through three sources: contributions from employees, contributions from employers, and contributions from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. For Frederick Wayne School District, and all public schools across the state of Pennsylvania, pension obligations are the highest increasing mandated costs in their budgets. Since the 2012 school year, Frederick Wayne School District has had a cumulative increase in

PSERS contributions of 209.17 percent (Frederick Wayne School District Budget Book, 2018). While many districts in the state are struggling to maintain this ongoing increase, Frederick Wayne School District has been able to pull funding from the Fund Balance, or committed funds designated to pay for healthcare, to cover the significant cost increases.

Table 1. History of Employer Contribution Rates to PSERS

Fiscal Year	Total Employer Contribution Rate %
2012-2013	12.3%
2013-2014	16.93%
2014-2015	21.40%
2015-2016	25.84%
2016-2017	30.03%
2017-2018	32.57%

Table 2. Projected Employer Contribution Rates and Total Employer Contributions to PSERS

Fiscal Year	Total Employer Contribution Rate %
2018-2019	33.4%
2019-2020	34.79%
2020-2021	35.26%
2021-2022	35.68%
2022-2023	36.32%

Note. Tables adapted from the Pennsylvania School Employees' Retirement System

The 2018-2019 budget included the elimination of three faculty positions and eight paraprofessional positions. The District also eliminated the academic coaching program, which

included three full-time academic coaches who provided professional development training to all teachers in grades K-12. The academic coaches were placed back into regular teaching positions. The reduction of these positions offset the retirement contribution increases to 2.9 percent, and the 2018-2019 increase of 6 percent for health insurance was reduced to 0.88 percent, while also further aligning with the reduction in student enrollment (Frederick Wayne School District Budget Book, 2018).

Another area of concern for the Frederick Wayne School District is the impact on enrollment from cyber and charter schools. Enrollment decline from charter school enrollments has hit the highest amount to date, with $942,000 spent on tuition in the 2017-2018 school year (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2018). With the significant decline in overall enrollment over the last eight years, Frederick Wayne's economic and academic future needs to be adjusted, or the District is in danger of budget deficits that impact the success of Frederick Wayne School District.

1.4 Problem Area

Frederick Wayne School District is experiencing ongoing declining enrollment and does not have a plan to make the needed adjustments to keep the District sustainable both academically and financially. A rightsizing plan must be created to ensure that the District can adjust to the growing needs of its students, while also maintaining fiscal responsibility; essentially, the goal is to "mold the company properly to achieve maximum profit" (Khanduja & Mishra, 2012). In the case of a school district, maximum profit equates to academic progress and financial sustainability.

By following the strategies outlined in the rightsizing process (Figure 1), reviewing data, and gathering information from stakeholders (Lolli, 2018), the Frederick Wayne School District can create a rightsizing plan that will fit the needs of all stakeholders. A review of the District's academic, demographic, and facility data can create a clear picture of where the District's strengths and needs are and can provide the information to stakeholders such as parents, community members, students, and staff.

Figure 1. Rightsizing Process

Note. Adapted from the Dayton Public Schools rightsizing overview.

1.5   Inquiry Questions and Design

Sustainability of a school district, while maintaining or increasing academic programming and fiscal responsibility, is essential for school district survival. The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions: What academic programming needs to be offered to meet the needs of the current student population, while also aligning to the future needs of a declining population of students who are experiencing increasing needs for academic and behavioral supports? How can the District restructure to support the academic programming that is being put into place? By answering these questions, the Frederick Wayne School District will be able to

create a rightsizing guide that will keep the District intact and progressing towards positive academic and fiscal outcomes.

Academic expectations changed through the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, which is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's education law for the equal educational opportunity for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). ESSA requires school districts to focus on career readiness standards, innovation, and equality. School districts are held accountable through a system of evaluation, called the Future Ready Index, which measures a district's ability to meet specific indicators of growth (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2018). Through the rightsizing process, Frederick Wayne School District academic progress will be reviewed to identify the alignment between how students are progressing in comparison to the expectations of the ESSA requirements. This data review will enable the District to analyze and reflect on specific academic programs that need to be reevaluated, changed, or updated.

After identifying the academic needs of the District, the next step is to analyze the specific demographics of the students in order to identify the needed supports to ensure that students receive academic and mental health interventions or strategies that will enhance their paths to academic achievement. Barriers to academic success, such as mental health issues and the need for academic learning supports, can be addressed with appropriate services and programming that will create opportunities for students to prevail over previous academic challenges. The review of student needs will ensure that academic programming and supports for students will be included in the rightsizing plan and correlate directly to the number of staff and facility structures needed to lead to academic successes.

The goal of this study is to provide a rightsizing guide to Frederick Wayne School District administration and school board officials that will support the restructuring of the District to ensure ongoing sustainability, while also maintaining academic success and fiscal responsibility. Due to the rightsizing process of reviewing data and obtaining stakeholder feedback, this study will utilize a mixed methods approach with qualitative data (focus groups) and quantitative data (district data) to make recommendations for rightsizing planning. Internal data will be reviewed and analyzed to determine the needs of the Frederick Wayne School District, and focus group feedback will be gathered not only to identify stakeholder expectations, but also to further the buy-in, commitment, and ownership of rightsizing plans moving forward.

2.0   Literature Review

The following literature review includes research on rightsizing as a strategy to restructure businesses and schools, the systemic problems with enrollment declines across the United States, and how rightsizing is being used in school districts. Additionally, this research will illustrate the application of rightsizing strategies, and the impact of these strategies on the institutions that have applied the concepts in the workplace. The purpose of this review is to provide the research behind rightsizing in order to illustrate the need for this strategy to be used in Frederick Wayne School District, while also clearly defining the problem with increasing enrollment declines and the impact upon public schools. The documents that were utilized all came from school district reporting through websites, newspapers, and journal entries, while the research regarding rightsizing was found through practical applications by corporations and businesses as well as school districts. Although the focus of this research is on a school district, rightsizing strategies or similar strategies have been reported in businesses since the early 1980s, if not earlier (Hitt, Keats, Harback, & Nixon, 1994). The commonalities between businesses and school districts form the basis of rightsizing: "Rightsizing is an integrated, internally consistent and externally legitimated configuration of organizational processes, products, and people" (Hitt, Keats, Harback, & Nixon, 1994). Although school districts are indpendent entities separate from business, schools run with the same basic premise: financial stability that equates to a desirable product, or, in a school district's case, successful academic programming that creates successful graduates.

2.1   Enrollment Decline

One of the most consistent reasons for schools to rightsize is the ongoing enrollment decline that public schools across the country are experiencing. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 2014 and 2026, "The top 10 states with the largest percentage decline in enrollment are Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Michigan, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Ohio, New Jersey and Illinois" (Hussar & Casey, 2018). The reasons for this decline in enrollment are numerous, including low fertility rates in some areas or transient families moving for employment. The motivation behind the decrease in enrollments is still unclear, but the impact on school districts is tremendous (Rado, 2018).

Declining enrollment has a direct impact on school district funding since state and federal revenues are determined by student enrollments. Declining enrollment can cause significant challenges for schools and districts. Jimerson (2006) describes enrollment decline and the impact on the school system:

Persistent declining enrollment can cause significant challenges for schools and districts. When the enrollment decline is chronic, it generates serious financial distress because of the loss of per-pupil state revenue. This financial hemorrhage usually results in deeps cuts in programs, staff, and resources. Small rural schools are especially vulnerable to these problems since they have proportionally less leeway in finding cost-saving areas. Eventually, declining enrollment can lead to their closure in spite of their value to rural communities and students. (p. 1)

In New York, the school population is on a clear decline, with the 2018-2019 enrollment in state schools reported as the lowest in 30 years (New York Post, 2018). Despite this enrollment decrease, per-student spending continues to rise in New York schools; with a 24 percent increase

since 2007, New York per-student costs are double the national average (New York Post, 2018). With decreasing enrollment and increasing per-student costs, budget constraints present issues that are not easy to resolve (schoolmint.com, 2018).

In a 2017 qualitative study analyzing northern New England school districts, declining enrollment was a problem that caused the district administration to respond by reducing positions and programs, and increasing taxes (St. Cyr, 2017). Between 2004 and 2014, enrollment had dropped by 350 students, with further declines in enrollment projected to decrease enrollment by another 10 percent between 2014-2022; the overall enrollment decrease since 2004 is over 55 percent (St. Cyr, 2017).

Northern New England school districts are not alone in their struggle to overcome enrollment declines. In the Burlington School District, located in Iowa, an enrollment decline of 500 fewer students has occurred in the last four years, with 154 fewer students for the 2018-2019 school year (Niehaus, 2018). With declining enrollment continuing to plague Burlington School District, the school board of directors and superintendent began the rightsizing process by offering community forums to review the current financial, academic, and facility planning of the district. Similarly, San Antonio Independent School District also experienced the largest-ever enrollment drop in the 2017-2018 school year, with a loss of over 1,000 students, a decline that causes a decrease in state funding that is allocated based upon average daily attendance (Malik, 2018).

School districts are being forced to make difficult decisions that affect not only student academic program offerings but also the careers and lives of staff. In Akron, Ohio, the Akron Board of Education approved the reduction of 93 staff positions for the 2017-2018 school year (Akron Public Schools, 2017). These cuts amount to a savings of $6.7 million and are the outcome of the board directing the superintendent to rightsize the district in the most efficient way possible

(Conn, 2017). The district believes that the reduction in staff will also lead to no school tax increases for the community, a goal that all districts hope to achieve.

Dayton Public Schools, located in Dayton, Ohio, began the process of rightsizing in the 2017-2018 school year. The administration and school board, led by the acting superintendent, Dr. Elizabeth Lolli, followed a process that included an internal data review of building maintenance assessments, enrollment reports, withdrawal trends, student discipline data, human resource reports, and survey results to identify key trends and patterns regarding the school district's current and predicted status (Lolli, 2018). After the internal review of data, information was gathered from various groups including parents, community members, a 20-member task force, and external academic reporting sources (Lolli, 2018). Through all of this review, key decision considerations were organized into categories such as academics, students, community, cost, and curriculum that were used as pillars for making rightsizing recommendations (Lolli, 2018). These recommendations were outlined in a three-year plan that included combining elementary buildings, closing buildings, adding staff, adding after-school programming, monitoring enrollment changes to determine any further building closures, and updating curriculum (Lolli, 2018). Although these recommendations worked for Dayton Public Schools, Frederick Wayne School District only has three school buildings and cannot close any; thus, saving money through consolidation is not feasible.

Shaler Area School District, located in Glenshaw, Pennsylvania, just 30 miles south of Frederick Wayne School District, is following in the footsteps of Dayton public schools. Shaler has experienced a decrease of 1,100 students since 2002. With the challenges of ongoing delays in the Pennsylvania State budget and increasing costs of education, Shaler has utilized the rightsizing process to modify programs, such as reducing non-student food and professional development

travel expenses, which reduced the purchase of supplies and resources and refinanced the district's existing debt (Shaler Area School District Website, 2015).

School districts across the United States have implemented the concepts of rightsizing to ensure that districts can sustain productivity. In Kansas City, Missouri, more than 70 percent of its schools had student proficiency levels below 25 percent on state assessments, while student enrollment had dropped from 30,000 in 2000 to over 17,000 in 2010. With a projected deficit of 8.5 million, the District had to look at rightsizing as the only option for success (Esselman, 2012). The District took a close look at expenditures, including physical space usage, vendor contracts, position cuts, performance outcomes, and reductions in operations; all of these areas impacted the goals of the District. Through the rightsizing process, Kansas City Schools were able to restructure the entire organization while still focusing on creating positive educational change within their fiscal ability. Kansas City Schools committed to a zero-sum mandate, while also continuing to examine all district programming, revenue, and expenditures as the student population changes, thus confirming the idea that rightsizing is an ongoing process that must continually evolve to be effective (Esselman, 2012).

2.2   Cyber, Charter, and Non-Public School Impact

According to the 2018 State of Education Report, there are 165 brick-and mortar charter schools and 14 cyber charter schools. With over 133,000 students enrolled in charter schools, students in Pennsylvania are choosing to attend schools other than their neighborhood public schools (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 2018). Frederick Wayne School District is also facing the economic impact of charter, cyber, and non-public schools. Since the 2015-2016 school

year, Frederick Wayne School District has experienced a $180,000 increase in expenditures for charter, cyber, and non-public schools (Frederick Wayne School District Budget Books, 2016-2018).

With over 17 million dollars spent on charter school tuition by Pennsylvania public schools, budgets are cut dramatically (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2018). In a 2018 Pennsylvania School Board Association survey of school superintendents in Pennsylvania, 52 percent of the superintendents stated that the biggest source of budget pressure facing their schools was charter school tuition payments. Not only are students choosing to attend charter schools, but the financial implications for public schools are exponential.

2.3   Rightsizing Defined

With decreases in enrollment in public schools across Western Pennsylvania, including Fisher County, where Frederick Wayne School District resides, and increases in expenditures combined with decreases in revenue, public schools are facing the challenge of restructuring to maintain fiscal responsibility while also creating academic programming that supports student academic achievement. By utilizing rightsizing strategies, a school district will undergo an ongoing review of organizational structures, and make decisions about academic programming and staffing that will ensure positive outcomes for both financial and academic needs.

The focus of rightsizing is on the future, what is sustainable and where the organization is headed; rightsizing is a continuous proactive configuring of the organization (Hitt, Keats, Harback, & Nixon, 1994). School districts must recognize that what they used to be, or what they are today, is not necessarily what they will be in the future. According to Ambler's article about the

differences in rightsizing versus downsizing (2018), "Rightsizing is a creative, constantly exciting process of adjusting one's organization to be the most efficient, effective, competitive, and profitable it can possibly be," or, in a school district's case, the most profitable equating to positive academic achievement (Ambler, 2018).

One of the most common misconceptions of rightsizing involves the difference between downsizing and rightsizing. Downsizing is the specific action of laying off employees to cut costs, which comes from a company's reaction to economic downfalls (Kokemuller, 2018). The hope for downsizing is to "improve efficiency, reduce costs, increase profits by reducing overhead costs, or respond to a decline in demand for the company's products or services" (Market Business News, 2018) while also utilizing a strategically driven process to create the "right" size of a functioning organization (Hill, Keats, Harback, & Nixon, 1994).

While the focus of downsizing is on improvement in costs and revenues, rightsizing is focused on the future of the organization, or restructuring to align with organizational goals and strategies (Kokemuller, 2018). As an organization shifts its goals or focus, so should the structure of staff and product. For school districts, as the academic needs of the student population change, so must the academic staffing programming.

2.4   Stakeholder Involvement

In direct correlation to the data review of a school district's enrollment, demographics, academics, and economic sustainability, a key factor in the success of rightsizing is gaining support from stakeholders. The research completed in this study utilizes feedback taken from focus groups made up of Frederick Wayne School District community members and staff. One of the faults

identified in rightsizing is assuming a reactive stance when making changes to an organization's structure (Hill, Keats, Harback, & Nixon, 1994). In order to avoid administrative oversight of key needs for the District, or "engaging in denial of the problem or affixing blame to a person, department, or external force" (Hill, Keats, Harback, & Nixon, 1994), stakeholder input will be an invaluable asset to the success of the final implementation of the rightsizing guide.

Key stakeholders are defined as "those who are having a vested interest in the success of the organization. They include employees, unions, customers, vendors, shareholders, and those who depend upon the organization" (Posey, n.d.). Each of these stakeholders has ideas or beliefs about what it would take for a school district to be successful. Stakeholder engagement in the rightsizing process ensures that there is good faith in dialogue and transparency, which ensures that stakeholders are supportive and knowledgeable of proposed changes created through the rightsizing process (Dawkins, 2014).

Including stakeholders in the process creates a higher degree of ownership and commitment to making the needed changes to the District (Posey, n.d.). Therefore, focus groups were created to obtain feedback from community members and teachers. The district website had a request for community volunteers to participate in focus groups. The focus group goal was to gather valuable insights, perceptions, concerns, and ideas on future programming in the Frederick Wayne School District and to present a summary of these discussions to the Frederick Wayne School District School Board of Directors before they make rightsizing decisions. Additionally, a third focus group composed of Frederick Wayne School District teachers answered the same questions. The information taken from the teacher focus group was be summarized and will be provided to the school board.

According to Ewy (2009), the success of a school district depends on the willingness of stakeholders to continue to support the district; this willingness directly correlates with how well students are learning. As Frederick Wayne School District continues to struggle to meet the academic expectations of the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA), the willingness to make changes to the district and trust of the stakeholders continues to come in to question. Stakeholder input should identify what stakeholders require and expect of students in the district as well as determine the priorities of the stakeholders: "What drives successful school districts is the desire to achieve results that are aligned with stakeholder expectations" (Ewy, 2009, p. 7).

2.5   Conclusion

The research illustrates the problem of declining enrollment, not only in Frederick Wayne School District but also across the country. Although this problem of practice is specific to one school district, the declining enrollment of public schools is turning into a crisis that will create a need for districts to utilize the strategies found in the rightsizing process. The literature provided also defines rightsizing, as well as the strategies already used by school districts. While data must be analyzed through additional research, the need for stakeholder involvement is highlighted in the literature. For rightsizing to prove successful, stakeholders must have a voice as well as a commitment to change.

Rightsizing school districts to ensure sustainability is a responsible action that ensures that academic success will continue to be evaluated and adapted to align with the needs of the community while fiscal responsibility is also in place. Consolidation of schools is one strategy utilized by many districts, as well as staff cuts, but these strategies must align to the needs of the

district as a whole, and the decision to act on these strategies is only made after a thorough evaluation of district needs.

3.0   Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology utilized to create a rightsizing outcome, including the data collection procedures and analysis used during the study. Descriptions of the methods, participants, instruments, validity, data collection, and analysis are provided. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the current sustainability of the Frederick Wayne School District as the District continues to experience declining enrollment.

3.1   Statement of the Problem

This inquiry focuses on the impact of enrollment decreases on academic programming at Frederick Wayne School District and, with qualitative and quantitative methods, the data gathered led to the creation of a rightsizing guide that will assist district decision makers in making recommendations. The Frederick Wayne School District is a small rural public school district located in Fisher County. Students from three boroughs (Frederick Wayne, Jones, and the township of Gormic) attend one of three buildings: Frederick Wayne Area High School with approximately 426 students, Frederick Wayne Area Middle School with approximately 438 students, and Frederick Wayne Area Elementary School with approximately 510 students (School Performance Profile, 2017). The enrollment ethnicity includes 94.1 percent white (non-Hispanic), 4.2 percent multiracial (not Hispanic), and fewer than 1 from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Economically disadvantaged students comprise 49.28 percent of enrollment, with students who

qualify for special education services equaling 15 percent of the enrollment (School Performance Profile, 2017).

The overall income per capita in the Frederick Wayne School District is 40 percent lower than the national average, with the unemployment rate being 9 percent higher than the national average (Eidex, 2018). These statistics illustrate an ongoing trend for the district: an overall decrease in enrollment in a community with increasing economic challenges. There are no large employers in the District, and access to public water is not available for residents in Gormic Township, which makes it difficult to build new homes or businesses. With employment difficult to obtain, and housing options minimal, the population has become highly transient, with families moving in and out of the district.

This study included individuals affected by changes in academic programming in the Frederick Wayne School District. Currently, 99 teachers are employed by Frederick Wayne School District, along with three principals, one assistant high school principal, a Dean of Students for elementary and middle schools, a Director of Curriculum and Instruction/Special Education, and a Superintendent. These staff members, as well as the School Board of Directors, students, and community members, work collaboratively to identify the needed updates and changes that must occur through the rightsizing process.

3.2   Research Questions

A mixed method study including qualitative and quantitative descriptive research about Frederick Wayne School District was utilized for this research. The District's current academic programming, demographics, and funding were analyzed and evaluated through focus groups and

document review to determine rightsizing strategies that would align with the District's vision and goals for education. The following inquiry questions were used for this problem of practice and were investigated to determine the rightsizing outcome:

1. What academic programming needs to be offered to meet the needs of the student population that is currently in place, while also aligning to the future needs of a declining population of students who are experiencing increasing academic and behavioral supports?

2. How can the District restructure to support the academic programming that is put into place?

3.3   Data Collection

3.3.1   Focus Groups

Including stakeholders in the process creates a higher degree of ownership and commitment to making the needed changes to the District (Posey, n.d.). Therefore, focus groups were created to obtain feedback from community members and teachers. The district website included a request for community volunteers to participate in focus groups. The focus group goal was to gather insights, perceptions, concerns, and ideas on future programming in the Frederick Wayne School District and to present a summary of these discussions to the Frederick Wayne School District School Board of Directors to analyze before making rightsizing decisions. Additionally, a third focus group composed of Frederick Wayne School District teachers was created to answer the same questions. The information taken from the teacher focus group was summarized and provided to the school board.

Three focus groups of 10 representatives each were organized; the first two were composed of parents and community members, and the third was composed of teachers. The focus groups answered questions about district demographics, academic progress, fiscal areas and concerns, ideas, and overall concerns to determine sustainability and feasibility of future plans for the District as well as provided feedback on what stakeholders believe the rightsizing focus should look like for Frederick Wayne School District. After answering the questions independently and anonymously on an online platform called Padlet, the participants discussed the responses as a group and came up with a final summary for each question in order to illustrate overall concerns in the specific areas. These three focus groups allowed for similar types of participants to identify trends and patterns in perceptions, or, in this case, common ideas for rightsizing a school district (Krueger and Casey, 2015). The focus groups were created by gathering volunteer representatives from committees in the Frederick Wayne School District: the Frederick Wayne Area High School Scheduling Committee, the Frederick Wayne Area Middle School School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Committee, and the Frederick Wayne Area Elementary School Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports Committee. All committees were composed of teacher representatives, administration, parents, and school board members, all of which have various experiences with and knowledge of the District.

The focus groups analyzed and discussed data taken from historical academic data, enrollment numbers, student and staff demographics, academic course offerings, Pennsylvania Department of Education requirements, and fiscal summaries. These focus groups met once and answered identical questions from the facilitator (Table 3-1: Focus Group Framework), the author of this research project. After each focus group, the outcomes of each of these meetings were summarized and then analyzed to identify patterns regarding recommendations or plans that could

be implemented to rightsize the District. The focus group questions were adapted from a similar rightsizing study done by Dayton Public Schools in March 2018.

Table 3. Focus Group Framework

Opening Question	• Tell us your name, what your role is in the District, and one thing you love about Frederick Wayne School District.
Introductory Information	• Overview of current District demographics from the District State of the Union presentation from 2018 which includes academic progress, student needs, staff numbers, and current fiscal status. • The group will be asked to respond to one take away from the District State of the Union.
Key Questions	• What priorities do you have for your child's school? • What would an ideal school look like? What changes do you recommend for the district to make it look closer to your ideal school? • As a district, how could we make this transition as smooth as possible for your family?
Ending Questions	• Of all of the areas discussed today, which one is most important to you? • Is there anything you believe we should add to our final summaries?

3.3.2   Document Collection

In addition to focus groups, a document collection and review was completed to compile specific data that describes Frederick Wayne School District's demographics, financial status, and academics. Documents on attendance, free and reduced lunch rates, special education reporting, academic performance, and financial history were taken from the Pennsylvania Department of Education website's data and reporting section (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2018). Also, information was gathered regarding mental health referrals, historical staffing information,

and financial records from Frederick Wayne School District budget handbooks, which can be accessed through the District website. The documents were taken from the last five years, or from the 2012-2013 school year until the school year of 2017-2018.

All of the data from the focus groups was analyzed to identify common themes among stakeholder concerns and ideas for the District. The responses from the focus groups were tagged to align with 10 category codes: curriculum and instruction, buildings and grounds, academic achievement, administration, teachers, students, school board, resources, support staff, and other categories. These categories are subcategories that fit within the district's budget function codes: 1) Instruction, 2) Support Services, 3) Operation of Non-Instructional Services, 4) Facilities Acquisitions, Construction, and Improvement Services, and 5) Other Financing Uses. By coding the focus group responses with the budget function codes, the administration and school board will have a better understanding of the core needs expressed by the stakeholders, and the impact of these needs on specific budget areas. Thus, when making rightsizing decisions, all stakeholders will be able to see the correlation between decisions and funding needed to support those decisions. With the combination of the document collection data and focus group data, a rightsizing plan can be created to align with stakeholder concerns, while also focusing on a systemic rightsizing plan for ongoing improvement.

3.4   Data Analysis

By analyzing the data utilizing a mixture of quantitative and qualitative strategies, the rightsizing plan will be informed by deductive analysis of the patterns of feedback, which will help to generate theories about stakeholder beliefs as well as generate precise data to support the next

steps in the rightsizing planning. Qualitative research is used to summarize narratives and create intersections and connections between ideas (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). The intersection of what the stakeholders want for and believe about the District, with the actual data showing what needs to change, will inform a rightsizing guide that will engage in the ongoing improvement and stability of Frederick Wayne School District.

4.0   Enrollment and Demographics

4.1   Student Demographics

Frederick Wayne School District's need for rightsizing strategies is a direct result of the ongoing decline in enrollment. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's 2018 enrollment reports, Frederick Wayne School District is experiencing yearly drops in enrollment. The largest decrease in enrollment can be seen in the last six years, with enrollment dropping from 1,514 students in the 2012-2013 school year to 1,357 students in the 2017-2018 school year. This loss of 157 students equates to an entire graduating class of students. The following chart illustrates the district enrollment for the past six years.
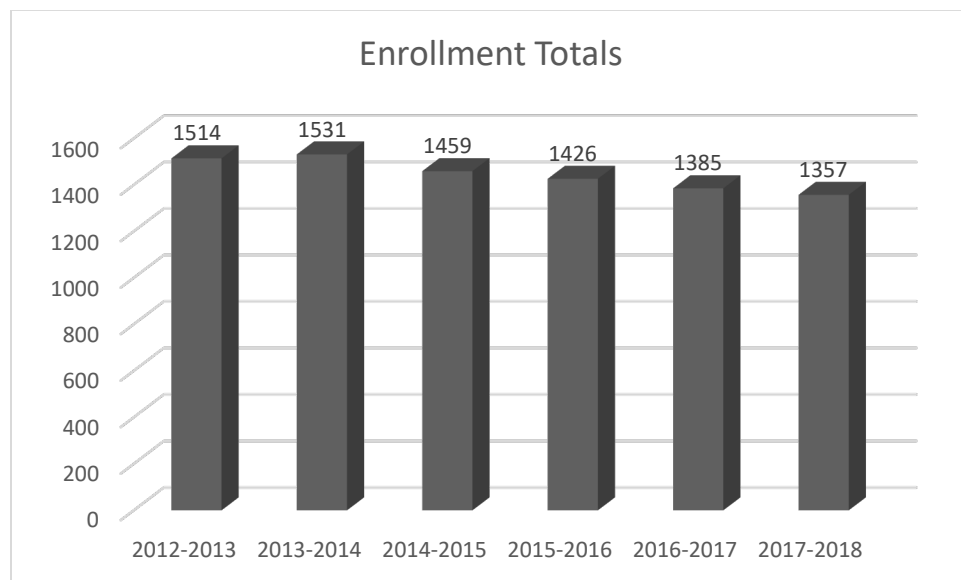

Figure 2. Frederick Wayne School District Six-Year Historical Enrollment

As enrollment numbers continue to decline in the District, the student population has also experienced demographic changes. There are fewer students enrolling in the District, while the students who are enrolled are coming from higher levels of poverty, as well as experiencing increased amounts of academic and mental health needs. The enrollment declines, but the costs per student continually increase. Although the Pennsylvania Department of Education releases expenditures per student two years behind the current school year, a clear trend in increases can be seen in the following chart.
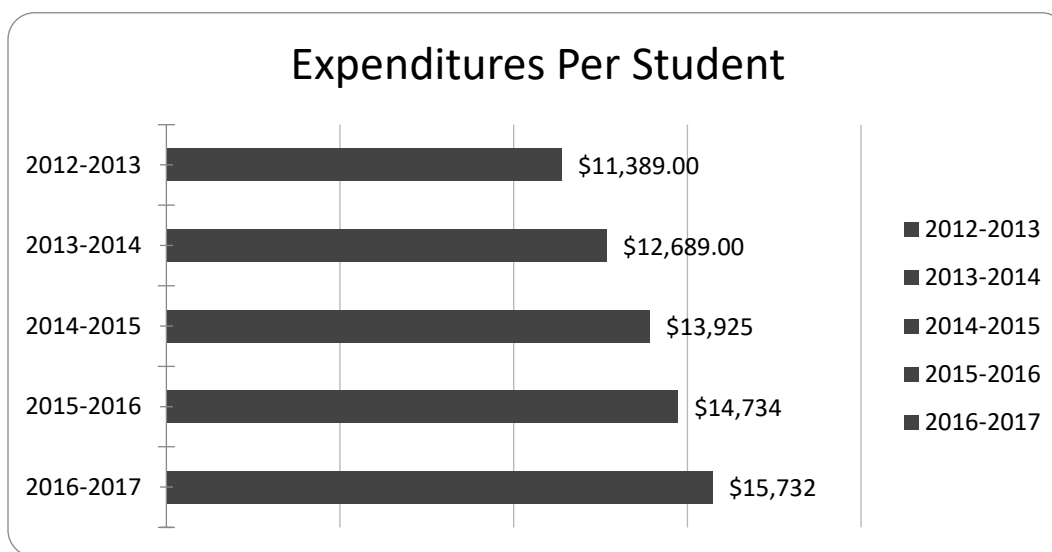
Figure 3. District Expenditures Per Student, 2012-2017

4.1.1 Free and Reduced Lunch Rates

Free and reduced lunches are provided to students whose families qualify under the federally funded National School Lunch Program. Every year the federal government sets eligibility guidelines that determine what income level, in relationship to family size, would qualify students for free or reduced meals at school. See Table 1 for the free and reduced lunch

percentages for the Frederick Wayne School District in the past six years. Children from families who are at or below the poverty level qualify for either free or reduced lunch. This data is also used to determine federally funded grant programs that are awarded to school districts.
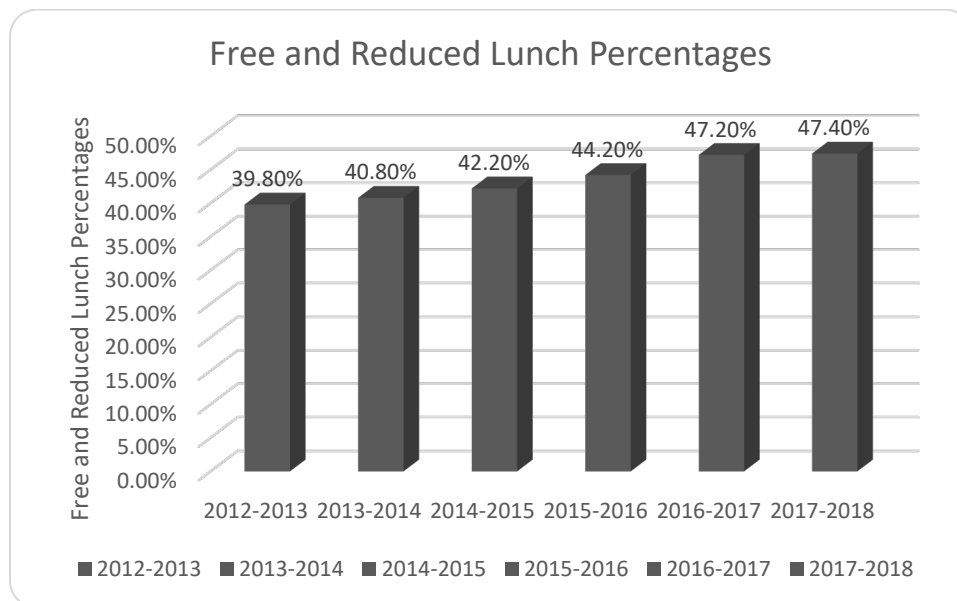
Figure 4. District Students Who Qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch

Frederick Wayne School District's free and reduced lunch counts are on the rise, with an increase from 39 percent of students qualifying in 2012-2013 to 47 percent of students qualifying in 2017-2018. These percentages equate to an average family of four making a combined income of less than $46,435 a year to qualify (United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition, 2018). According to the American Psychological Association (2019), poverty is a consistent and reliable predictor of outcomes including physical and psychological health as well as lower educational achievement, poverty, and poor health (American Psychological Association, 2019). More powerful evidence that Frederick Wayne School District's low socioeconomic status is impacting student achievement can be found in studies done by Homes-Smith (2006): "A student's achievement is predicted not just by their own SES [socio economic status] but additionally, and

more powerfully, by the average SES of their school" (Holmes-Smith, 2006). With the 2017-2018 free and reduced lunch percentages at almost 50 percent of the student population, the impact of individual student academic needs is also impacting the district as a whole. A comparison of enrollment decline and increased free and reduced lunch percentages can be seen in Figure 5.
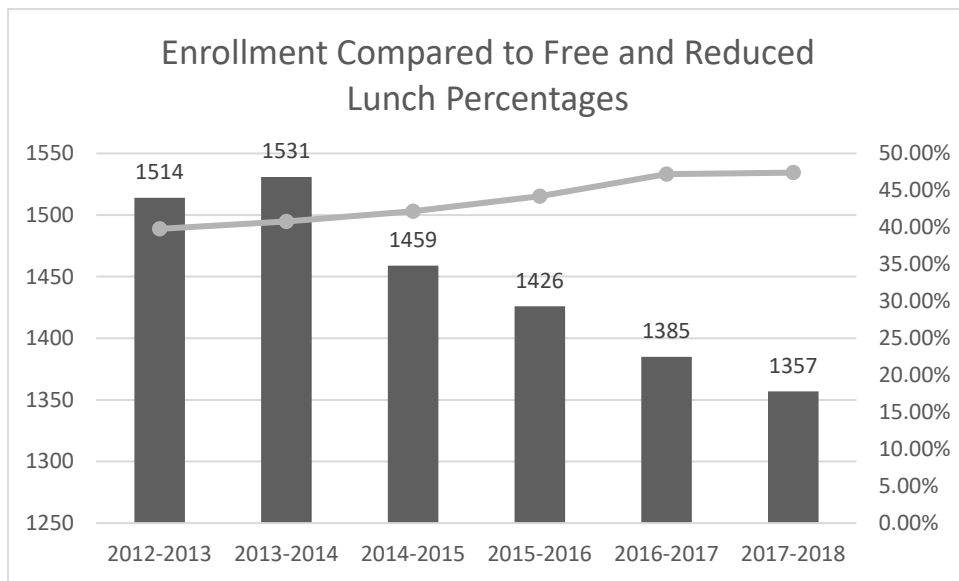
Figure 5. District Enrollment and Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility

4.1.2 Special Education

In 2004, Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which ensures that eligible children with disabilities are provided with a free appropriate public education that includes special education and related services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). In order to qualify for special education services, a child must be evaluated to determine if he or she meets one of 13 qualifications that adversely affect school performance: specific learning disability, other health impairment, autism spectrum disorder, emotional

disturbance, speech or language impairment, visual impairment, deafness, hearing impaired, deaf-blindness, orthopedic impairment, intellectual disability, traumatic brain injury, or multiple disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004).

Pennsylvania's population of students who qualify for special education programming increased from 15 percent in 2012 to 17 percent in 2018. As Pennsylvania's percentages have increased, Fisher County has also experienced an increase from 13 percent in 2012 to 16 percent in 2018. This increase has also greatly impacted Frederick Wayne School District, which has gone from 13 percent in 2012 to 18 percent in 2018 (Pennsylvania Department of Education Special Education Data Reporting, 2017). The following chart compares Pennsylvania, Fisher County, and Frederick Wayne School District special education percentages. The percentages show a steady increase in special education students over the past six years. While Frederick Wayne's enrollment continues to decline, it is important to note that declining enrollment does not mean decreasing costs; rather, with an increasing special education population, the District is experiencing an increase in expenditures for supplementary aids and services, placements, staff training, and more.

State % of Students in Special Education Compared to Frederick Wayne SD % and County % of Students in Special Education
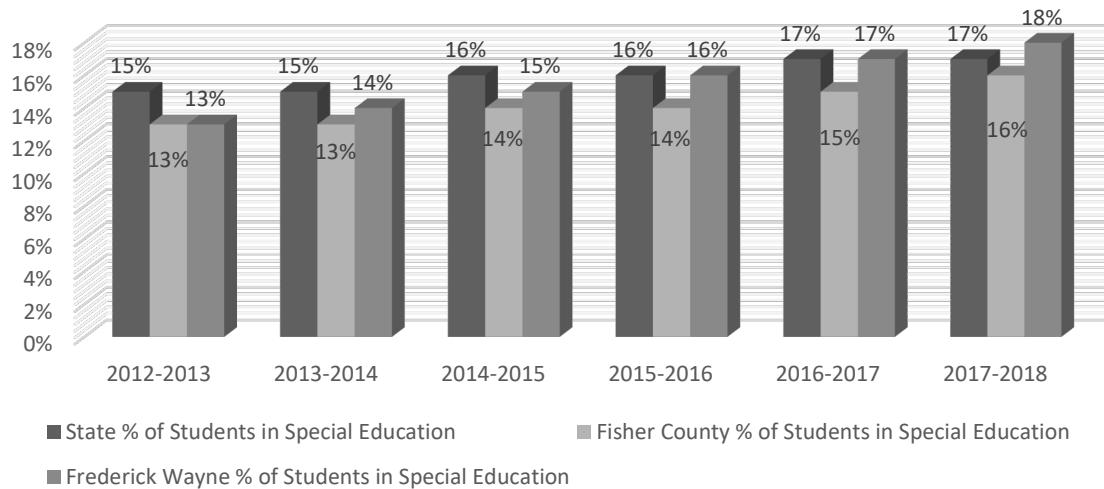
Figure 6. Special Education Enrollment in Pennsylvania, Fisher County, and Frederick Wayne School District

4.1.3 Mental Health

Mental health disorders are defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) as "serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, causing distress and problems getting through the day" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Student Assistance Programs (SAP) provide students with services to assist in overcoming alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health issues that cause a barrier to student success (PA Network for Student Assistance Services, 2019). Frederick Wayne's SAP referrals have increased from 9 percent in 2012 to 17 percent in 2018. See Figure 7: SAP Referrals.
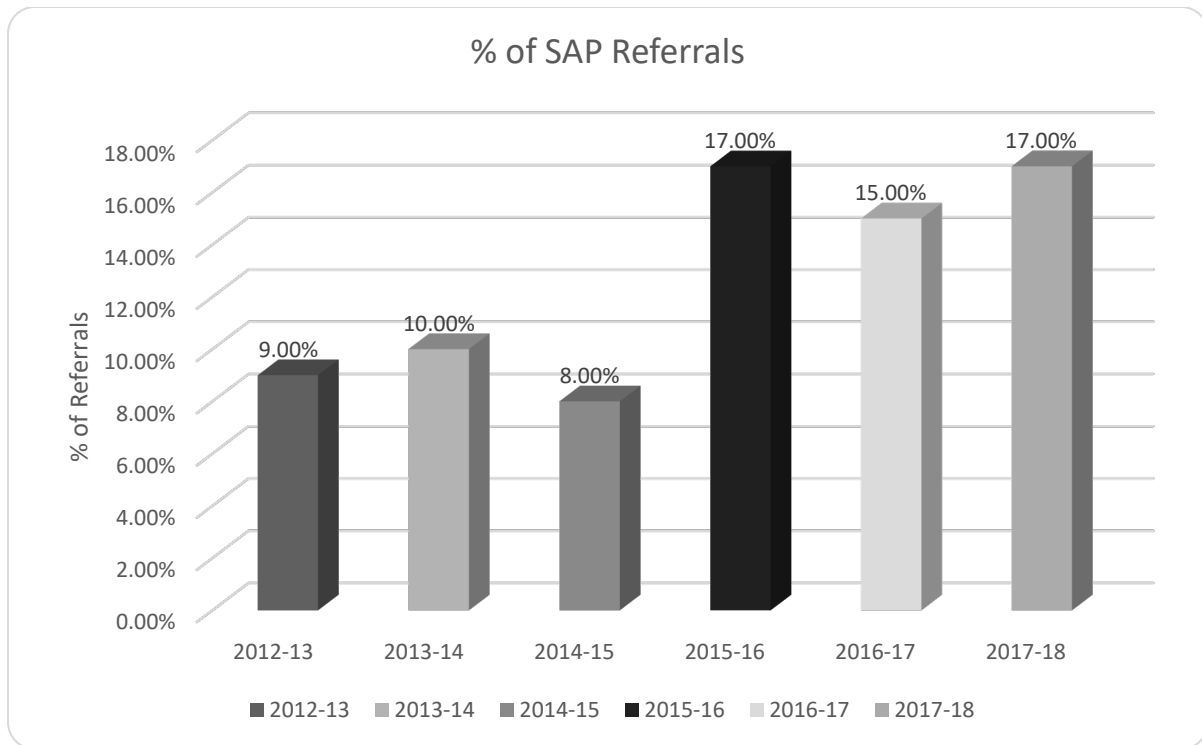
Figure 7. SAP Referrals[1]

Based on this increase in SAP referrals, the student population has experienced a drastic increase in mental health needs. With the students who are currently enrolled in Frederick Wayne School District experiencing significant increases in learning disabilities and mental health concerns, Frederick Wayne has a population of students whose academic achievement is profoundly impacted.

---

[1] Chart created from historical Student Assistance Program data reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

4.1.4 Academic Achievement

The following tables illustrate student proficiency on the required Pennsylvania standardized assessments; students are rated as Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, or Advanced. Proficiency levels are the minimum achievement for which schools are rated, and each school's proficiency number is determined every school year by a committee of the Pennsylvania Department of Education representatives as well as educators across the state. In September 2013, Pennsylvania adopted the PA Core Standards, thus changing the academic expectations on the state assessments beginning in academic year 2014-2015. Due to this significant change in standards and curriculum, the following tables only reflect assessment scores from the 2013-2014 school year through the 2017-2018 school year. A comparison of academic scores between the previous standards and the current approved standards would be inaccurate. See Tables 4 through 6 for standardized test results.[2]

Table 4. Math PSSA Score Results

Grade Level	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	*2017-2018	17-18 State Avg. Prof./Adv
3rd	50%	51%	59%	49%	54%
4th	41%	41%	43%	36%	46.6%
5th	36%	45%	43%	39.6%	43.7%
6th	36%	39%	49%	47.2%	40.2%
7th	27%	40%	31%	40.5%	37.8%
8th	19%	5%	22%	17.4%	32.5%

---

[2] Adapted from the Pennsylvania Department of Education Data and Reporting website.

Table 5. English Language Arts PSSA Results

Grade Level	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	*2017-2018	17-18 State Avg. Prof./Adv
3rd	63%	56%	71%	61%	64.7%
4th	55%	55%	62%	56%	61%
5th	56%	61%	54%	58.9%	59.6%
6th	60%	72%	73%	62%	63.6%
7th	58%	53%	52%	58%	59.4%
8th	61%	53%	55%	52%	58.8%

Table 6. Science PSSA Results

Grade Level	2014-2015	*2015-2016	2016-2017	*2017-2018	17-18 State Avg. Prof./Adv
4th	79%	76%	71%	77.2%	74.6%
8th	53%	53%	37%	39.4%	52.7%

Table 7. 2017-2018 Keystone Exam Results

Content Area	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	17-18 State Avg. Prof./Adv
Algebra 1	25.4%	29.4%	25.3%	30.0%	65.6%
Literature	54.0%	54.9%	51.8%	52.5%	72.7%
Biology	39.1%	35.6%	33.8%	34.2%	63.4%

As illustrated in the academic achievement charts, Frederick Wayne School District is experiencing an ongoing decline in academic achievement. With the increase in low SES student population, or students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, and increasing mental health concerns, overall academic performance in the district will continue to face challenges.

Although district enrollment is on a steady decline, staffing has had minimal changes. Frederick Wayne is composed of five groups of employees: Independent contracts (Superintendent, Business Manager, Director of Buildings and Grounds, Director of Technology,

and Director of Food Services); Act 93 employees (Director of Curriculum and Instruction/Special Education, School Psychologist, Elementary Principal, Middle School Principal, High School Principal, Assistant High School Principal); professional employees (teachers); and educational support staff (maintenance, custodial, and cafeteria) and paraprofessional/ secretaries).

In the past six years, the only groups to see changes in total employee numbers are the teachers and paraprofessionals. The paraprofessional numbers fluctuate yearly due to the supports needed for specific students. If a student has specific medical or educational needs as dictated in his or her IEP, 504, or medical plan, then the district must provide a paraprofessional to provide daily supports. The teacher numbers have remained between 104 and the current total of 100 in the past six years. Decreases were made to the total number of teachers through a furlough of an elementary position and a furlough of a music position. Additionally, when it has been possible to realign academic schedules and staff, the district has chosen not to fill positions when retirements occur. The following table provides the breakdown of total staff for each of the five staffing categories.

Table 8. Staffing Categories and Numbers

Staffing Category	Total Number	Descriptor
1. Independent Contracts	5	Superintendent, Business Manager/Transportation Director, Director of Buildings and Grounds, Director of Technology, Director of Food Services
2. Act 93	6	Director of Curriculum and Instruction/Special Education, four principals, School Psychologist
3. Professional Employees	100	Teachers

Table 8 continued

4. Educational Support Staff	46	Food Services, Maintenance, and Custodial
5. Paraprofessional/Secretary	32	Paraprofessionals and Secretaries, inclusive of nurse aides and security monitors
Total Employees=	189	*Numbers taken from the 2017-2018 school year*

With 189 total employees, the Frederick Wayne School District must budget for a large portion of funding to be utilized in salaries and benefits. With revenues minimally increasing, the district needs to take a closer look at the historical financial status of the district to determine how rightsizing data would impact the district economically.

<p style="text-align:center">**4.2   Financial Status**</p>

The budget reflects the allocation of revenues and expenditures to achieve the district's goals, as well as to work towards supporting the District's mission statement: *Provide a Positive, Comprehensive Educational Experience for Success in a Global Society.*

4.2.1   Historical Budget Summary Information

In 2015, the district completed construction on a new primary center. The primary center was built as an addition to the current middle school. This construction enabled the district to close two elementary schools and bring all students, K-12, to one campus. There were significant savings in closing the elementary buildings; these savings offset the annual debt service payments of $380,000. Those consolidation savings included:

- Nursing Services - $98,000

- Contracted Prevention Services - $16,000

- Elementary Teaching Position - $75,000 (position added back during the year due to kindergarten enrollment)

- Maintenance and Custodial Positions - $107,000

- Building Utilities and Supplies - $104,000

- Special Education Position - $43,000 (position retained for one year due to unexpected retirement)

By bringing the school buildings onto one campus, the district has been able to share services between buildings and increase opportunities for students to take advantage of additional course offerings, shared school programming, and an increase in overall interactions between all students and staff in the district.

4.2.2 Expenditures

When preparing for the budgeting process, the administrative team and the school board of directors compare historical revenues and expenditures for an average of six to seven years. Expenditures that are consistent and can be accounted for easily are salaries and benefits, which are determined by the District collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) with teachers, administration, and other staff groupings. These CBAs can be accounted for through the length of time of the agreements, which can range from three to five years. Benefits include social security and retirement (which is set by PSERS annually) and are based on total salaries. All health insurance rates can also be predicted because the district is part of a countywide health insurance consortium with annual rates determined before a school year begins. Additional funding tied to salaries and benefits includes worker compensation rates, which are determined annually by

Modification (MOD) rate. The debt service payments are on a schedule determined by an agreement between the District and lending institutions. Debt service payments are fixed and are available in schedules provided at the closing of the agreements. Lastly, professional services can be determined in advance due to contracts issued for items like waste disposal and utilities.

Discretionary expenditures are budgeted yearly and include items such as supplies and professional development. Administration is provided with funds to be used at their discretion, which have been determined by what is available after required funding has been allocated.

Expenditures that are not fixed include special education increases in placements, staffing, and student needs, all of which are required under federal and state law; the state budget, which fluctuates yearly; and federal supports, which also fluctuate yearly. Averages of these amounts are determined by reviewing historical data as well as through ongoing budget updates by government budget releases.

As District enrollment continues to decline, the district has continued to identify ways to reassign staff to share services within the district, which eliminates the need to hire additional staff. With 68.9 percent of the annual budget used for salaries and benefits, staff counts have the most impact on the district budget. The following chart illustrates the expenditures by object summary for the 2017-2018 school year.
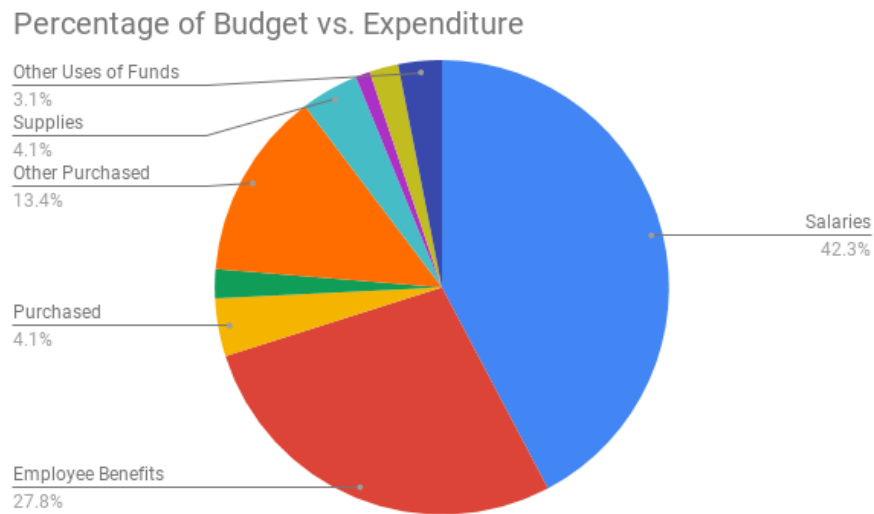
Figure 8. Expenditures for 2017-2018 School Year

4.2.3 Revenues

District revenues are generated by local taxes, other local revenues, state subsidies, and reimbursements, as well as federal revenues. The following table from the Frederick Wayne Annual Budget Book shows a six-year historical look at revenues. The increases in local revenues for the 2017-2018 school year are attributed to a 1.9 millage increase in real estate tax.
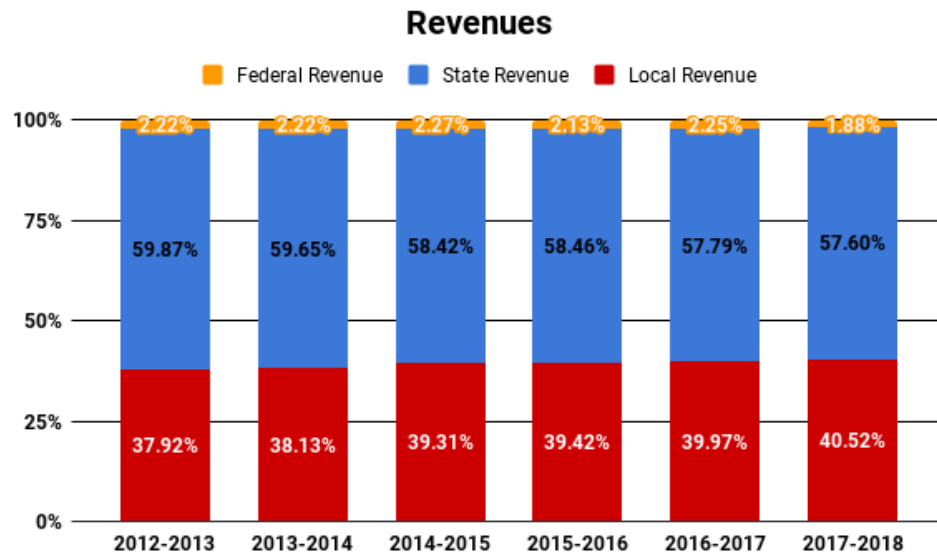
Figure 9. District Revenues 2012-2018

Federal revenues are distributed in the form of Title programming and additional grants provided through federal allocations that are based on free and reduced lunch counts or competitive grants. This amount fluctuates yearly and can be difficult to account for due to annual changes in educational focus and variations on the attributions of funding to academic programming. State revenues account for an average of 58 percent of the total revenues in the budget, with the remaining funds coming from local revenues. With ongoing decreases in federal and state funding, the Frederick Wayne School District depends more on local funding in the form of taxes.

4.2.3.1 Local Tax Base Demographics

Frederick Wayne School District draws 40 percent of its revenue from local taxes. These funds are provided through the district's population of an estimated 11,118 community member from the Frederick Wayne, Gormic, and Fisher towns that feed into the school district (Pennsylvania Census, 2010). Although 80 percent of the population are homeowners, in 2016-

2017 alone, there was a total of $453,180 in delinquent taxes (Frederick Wayne School District Budget Book, 2018). With the median income of $44,086, which is under the poverty level standard as defined by the Unites States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service's 2018-2019 guidelines, the district's anticipated tax funds in future years cannot provide its sole revenue (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

4.3 Summary

As the district experiences an ongoing decrease in enrollment, the needs of the students have significantly increased. Students are coming into the district facing hardships such as poverty and mental health challenges, areas that impede student progress towards academic growth. Teachers in the district are serving in multiple capacities: as educators, therapists, and behavior specialists. As students enter classrooms with worries about what they will eat, where they will sleep, and how they are going to get through the day, teachers are spending more time providing both academic and behavior interventions. This time cannot be categorized into a specific funding area, but with student mental health issues continuing to rise, an estimate would be exponentially useful.

While the students and teachers work diligently to overcome obstacles that are out of their control, the district continues to face financial concerns that do not appear to have immediate answers. Local revenues have become the primary resource for the district, yet the community that these revenues flow from is also facing challenges of low tax rates and increased median poverty rates for the citizens. As the district faces the obstacles presented by the needs of the students, as well as financial instability, the school board of directors and administration need to

take a close look at how the stakeholders of the Frederick Wayne School District perceive the needs of the district. The leadership of this district must take into account the priorities of the constituents and how these priorities impact the future of the district, information that can be obtained through the use of focus groups.

5.0   Focus Groups

Focus groups allow for similar types of participants to identify trends and patterns in perceptions – in this case, common ideas for rightsizing a school district (Krueger and Casey, 2015). By utilizing participants who have common investments in the district's successes, such as students who currently attend the district, or parents of students who recently graduated, the focus group results are aligned to the overall goal of improvement. In order to compare and contrast data and identify the range of stakeholder opinions in Frederick Wayne School District, three focus groups were created; the first two were composed of parents and community members, and the third was composed of teacher representatives from each of the three buildings in the school district. The community focus group participants were found through an advertisement on the school district website, which requested participants from the community who met the qualifications of being over 18 years old and not a current student in the district, and who currently live within the boundaries of the school district (see Appendix B1 for the advertisement). Twenty people volunteered, and all were accepted into the study due to the common characteristic of being connected to the school district in some capacity. The 20 participants were split into two focus groups of 10 members each. The division of the participants was not based on any specific attribute other than their availability for either of the two dates. When a participant did not have a preference on a specific date, he or she was assigned to a group that would result in the groups having equal numbers; thus, each group had 10 participants.

Community focus group number one was composed of parents who currently had students enrolled in the district at the time of the study. Community focus group number two was composed of parents with current students in the district, as well as two community members who did not

have current students in the district but who had active roles in the district through various volunteer work with the clubs and activities. The community focus group participants were familiar with one another through either district activities or by neighborhood connections.

Focus group number three was composed of teachers employed with the district at the time of the study. Due to the possibility of teachers being wary of taking part in a focus group that is focused on opinion of current district climate, culture, and programming, a meeting with the Frederick Wayne School District teachers union president was held prior to asking for volunteers. During this meeting, this research study, a study on rightsizing a school district experiencing enrollment decline, was explained in detail with the purpose of the focus group feedback being used to inform district leadership and decision makers of the current concerns and ideas regarding school improvement. At the conclusion of this discussion, the union president volunteered to email the teachers in the district to inform them of the research being completed and the purpose of the focus group feedback. After the union president sent the email, an email was sent out to all district teachers requesting volunteers to take part in the focus group. Of the 99 teachers in the district, 13 volunteered to take part; however, due to illness, a total of nine teachers participated in the focus group. The nine teachers represented each of the three buildings in the district, with three representatives from each building taking part.

5.1   Focus Group Framework

Prior to the focus group meetings, a state of the district presentation that included district data on enrollment, demographics, and current economic status was provided for participants to review (see Appendix A1). By providing this information before the meeting, participants were able to acquire a foundational knowledge of what the district looks like demographically, academically, and financially.

Each of the focus groups met once for approximately one and one-half hours to two hours. Although the meetings were originally scheduled to occur for one and one-half hours, participants were highly engaged in the conversations and stayed longer. The three focus groups were provided with the same process for each of the meetings (see Appendix A2 for the presentation provided to the focus groups): introductions, overview of the process, independent answering of questions, and group discussion following each of the question responses.

5.1.1   Introductions and Overview

Prior to the start of the focus group discussions, participants were asked to sign a consent to record release form and informed of the study's rewards and risks, as well as given a letter explaining that the study was purely voluntary and responses would remain confidential (Appendix B4) (Krueger and Casey, 2015). Once the focus group members were all seated, and the permission to record paperwork completed, introductions occurred and a brief review of why the study and research were being conducted was presented.

The purpose of the introductions was to create a setting that was comfortable and to emphasize that each member of the focus group had commonalities that included a love for the

district and need for ongoing improvement of district programming (Krueger and Casey, 2015). Participants were asked to introduce themselves and give their role in the district and one thing they love about Frederick Wayne School District. A reminder was given that the focus groups were being recorded but all responses would be transcribed as anonymous. The data taken from the audio recording and independent, anonymous answers from the Padlet would be provided to the school board, administrators, and the community.

Immediately following the introductions, the facilitator, who is also the researcher of this study, explained her role in the focus group conversations. As facilitator, the goal was not to exhibit power or influence; the goal of the facilitator was to encourage comments of all types, both positive and negative (Krueger and Casey, 2015). The facilitator went on to explain that she would not share her personal beliefs and would refrain from making personal judgements about the responses (Krueger and Casey, 2015).

The focus groups independently answered questions about district demographics, academic progress, fiscal areas, concerns, ideas, and overall comments to determine sustainability and feasibility of future plans for the District as well as to provide feedback on what stakeholders believe rightsizing should look like for Frederick Wayne School District. After answering the questions independently and anonymously on an online platform called Padlet (Appendix A4), the participants discussed the responses as a group and came up with a final summary for each question that illustrated the overall concerns taken from each of the questions. Each question correlated with research questions in this study (see Table 9).

Table 9. Correlations with Research Questions

Research Questions	Focus Group Question Correlation
What academic programming needs to be offered to meet the needs of the student population that is currently in place, while also aligning to the future needs of a declining population of students who are experiencing increasing academic and behavioral supports?	• After reviewing the district information (state of the district/academic progress) sent to you, what was one area that stuck out to you? • What would an ideal school look like? • What changes do you recommend for the district to make it look closer to your ideal school? • What priorities do you have for your child's school?
How can the District restructure to support the academic programming that is being put into place?	• What changes do you recommend for the district to make it look closer to your ideal school? • As a district, how could we make changes as smooth as possible for your family?

By utilizing the online discussion tool Padlet, participants were provided with a single question and then were asked to respond anonymously to the question with their personal beliefs. Each participant could read the entire group's responses as they were entered. After all participants answered the question posed, the entire group would discuss the responses and summarize the group's overall concerns and comments. This process allowed for participation without judgement by each participant, thus creating an atmosphere of full inclusion and teamwork. After discussion of the individual question and the summary of responses was created, the question responses were saved into a PDF for future review by participants, the school board of directors, administration, and community. This process continued for each of the questions. At the conclusion of the questions and discussion, participants were asked to respond to a six-question feedback survey.

The information from the feedback survey could be used to schedule future focus group meetings that may assist in school improvement.

5.1.2 Data Results

All of the Padlet responses and transcribed audio files were separated by focus groups 1 through 3. Each of these results was then analyzed to identify the areas that the participants felt were most important, or those they stressed and discussed most often during the focus group sessions. These areas were then tagged to align to 10 category codes: curriculum and instruction, buildings and grounds, academic achievement, administration, teachers, students, school board, resources, support staff, and a category listed as other that was used to place recurring topics that did not fit into the first nine categories. Each tagged focus group area was then compared to the other focus group responses and summarized under the summary tag column, which indicates the overall consistent theme, or areas of concern and improvement, for each category. The summarized tags were then categorized by the budget codes that would be impacted: (1) Instruction, (2) Support Services, (3) Operation of Non-Instructional Services, (4) Facilities Acquisitions, Construction, and Improvement Services, and (5) Other Financing Uses. This data was organized into a Focus Group Data Matrix (found in Appendix A5) that illustrates the data breakdown and comparisons. The following example, curriculum and instruction, illustrates how this data was broken down into the various tags and aligned to budget codes. The full Focus Group Data Matrix can be found in Appendix A5.

Table 10. Focus Group Data Matrix Example

Category Code	Focus Group 1: Ten parents of students currently enrolled in the district	Focus Group 2: A mixed group of ten parents who have children currently enrolled and community members who do not have students enrolled in the district	Teacher Focus Group: Nine teachers, three from each of the three buildings in the district	Summary Tags	Budget Codes Impacted
Curriculum/ Instruction	• Meaningful Learning Experiences • Project-based learning • No homework • Teaching to the test • Students have A's in class but cannot pass the Keystone • Need more challenging courses • More course options • Life skills classes • A wide range of career tracks	• More class options • Declining test scores • Teaching to the test • Middle school math is the worst • Basic life skills needs to be offered • Put less stress on testing • Variety in classes • Increase in course offerings • Focus on the student, not the statistics and averages • Add newer	• Add transitional grade between K and 1 • Increase in remediation • Create benchmarks prior to entry into a grade level so you know where the students are academically • Create a retention policy • Better use of professional development time	• More class options: Challenging, variety, remediation • Life Skills classes • Career Readiness focus • Focus less on testing	1. Instruction

Table 10 continued

	• Different methods of learning • Give students more opportunities to find out what inspires them • Meaningful transitions between high school and life • Teach critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication	technology and software • Continually work towards making the special education program the premiere program in the county			

Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL)- Economically disadvantaged students

5.1.3   Data Interpretation

After reviewing the summary tags for each category, and aligning these summaries to budget codes, the recommendations of all focus groups were apparent: increase in courses, increase in supports for students, updating building heating and cooling, and improving communication. All of these suggestions impact the budget by increasing specific areas of instruction, support services, and facilities. The two areas that were consistently discussed at each of the three focus group meetings included an increase in staff to provide instructional remediation and enrichment and an increase in support services for students. With a majority of current staff providing instruction to the maximum allowable in their contract, minimal additions could be made to teacher schedules to increase course offerings. Therefore, these courses all require an increase in salary and benefits if the district is to hire more staff to provide instruction in the newly created courses. Additionally, all courses that would be added would require resources such as textbooks or software, as well as professional development and curriculum writing time for each of the teachers. In addition to adding courses and teachers, the focus group participants shared their concerns that additional mental health services were needed. Ideas such as adding counselors, behavior specialists, and sensory rooms for older students all came to the forefront of the discussion as areas that require increases in salary, benefits, and resources.

Another area discussed in the focus group meetings was the idea of updating the heating and cooling systems in the three school buildings, which would dramatically impact the facilities acquisitions, construction, and improvement services budget lines of the district. Currently the high school does not have air conditioning, and the heating is unpredictable, partly due to systems being approximately 19 years old. The middle school does have consistent heating and cooling;

however, there has been an increase in reports of mold, which requires ongoing adjustments to the building temperature in order to stop the creation of an environment that is conducive to mold growth. The only way to fix the issue of mold growth is to update the entire heating and cooling system in the middle school. The elementary school heating and cooling system was built in 2015, so very minimal concerns are reported with the temperature of the building. In order to replace the heating and cooling systems in the high school and middle school, estimated costs are in the millions.

Based on the results of the data matrix, a common theme across all of the focus groups was a need for increased, consistent communication. Although communication and positive climate and culture are necessary for success, the numerical value or budgetary impact is difficult to measure. This particular area of need does provide valuable insight into the impact of any district-level decision on the future of Frederick Wayne School District. The stakeholders clearly cited an increase in communication as key to successful change in the district, so any future decisions must be clearly articulated to all stakeholder groups in a timely manner that includes input and engagement from the community, parents, teachers, and students. Also described as high importance throughout the focus group feedback was the idea of prioritizing a positive culture and climate for staff, parents, community, and the public as a whole. While this area does not necessarily impact budgetary concerns, this recurring theme reinforces the need for better relationships among and between all stakeholders. If drastic changes need to be made during the rightsizing process, based upon the focus group feedback, the most successful implementation of change is to ensure that the stakeholders are involved and clearly understand the district vision and impact of all decisions.

6.0   Summary and Conclusions

This chapter includes a summary of the research study completed on rightsizing a school district that is experiencing declining enrollment. As part of this summary, interpretations of the findings, discussion, and suggestions for future application of rightsizing strategies are included.

6.1   Summary

The purpose of this descriptive research study was to apply rightsizing strategies to one school district in order to create a guide that school district decision-makers would be able to utilize in making future decisions for the district. By utilizing this rightsizing study, districts who are also experiencing similar enrollment declines, or significant changes in district operations, can apply the same approach to answer related research questions, such as those used in this study:

1. What academic programming needs to be offered to meet the needs of the student population that is currently in place, while also aligning to the future needs of a declining population of students who are experiencing increasing academic and behavioral supports?

2. How can the District restructure to support the academic programming that is being put into place?

The first question focuses on what types of academic programming are needed based on the current demographics of Frederick Wayne School District students. Through the document review, Frederick Wayne School District was described as a district with increasing needs in mental health and special education services and supports. The focus groups were asked what they

believed were the biggest needs in the district, with all three groups sharing concerns regarding the increased needs of students, both academically and emotionally.

Although neither the document review nor the focus group outcomes provided a specific answer to the second question, the data gathered from each will provide the district administration and school board with valuable information that will assist in making informed decisions regarding the future structures for staffing, scheduling, and overall academic programming. With the knowledge that the increasing social-emotional and academic needs of the students is growing exponentially, the district will need to create a plan for how they can accommodate and support the current demographic of students.

6.2   Interpretation of Findings

6.2.1   Rightsizing Strategies Applied

Based on the first two rightsizing strategies, reviewing internal data and gathering information from stakeholders, the Frederick Wayne School District will be able to utilize common data concerns to identify specific areas that should be addressed when making a rightsizing plan. By comparing the focus group concerns and then comparing the overlap between the focus group data and the district data from the document review, common themes are evident.
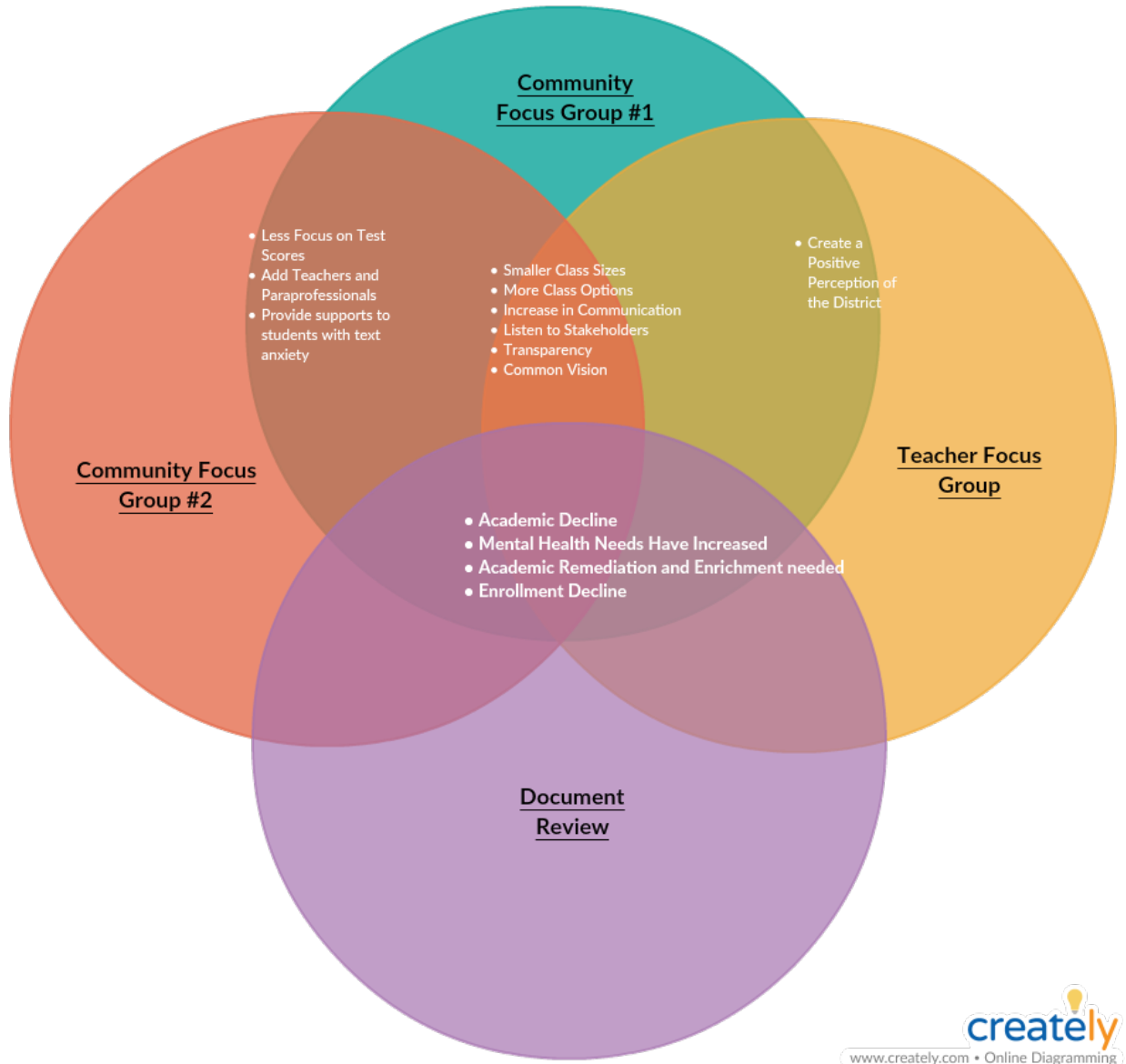
Figure 10. Venn Diagram of Focus Group and District Data

The four colored circles represent the four different data sources that were used to gather information about the district, or the data sources that were used from the rightsizing strategies. As seen in the Venn Diagram, Community Focus Group #1, or the green circle, and Community Focus Group #2, the orange circle, had overlap in their concerns about standardized testing focus and the need for more staff to provide supports for the district. Community Focus Group #1 and

the Teacher Focus Group had similar concerns about improving the overall perception of the district in order to entice people to move into the district and increase enrollment numbers. All three focus groups shared the belief that the district needs to have smaller class sizes, more class options, an increase in communication, more input from stakeholders, transparency in decision making, and one common vision for the future of the district.

When comparing the focus group concerns with the document review data, a clear picture emerged to show overlapping needs focusing on correcting the academic decline, providing support for mental health needs, adding additional courses for remediation and enrichment, and changing the declining enrollment. This outcome is the focus of the rightsizing framework, with all of the data and focus group outcomes combined to focus on specific priorities for the district.

While these priorities are evident in all of the data and focus group responses, all four areas are difficult to overcome. As students face the many obstacles that coincide with mental health challenges, academics become a secondary concern. Before a student can focus on the Pennsylvania Department of Education academic expectations, the student must first be mentally prepared to face the challenges of a rigorous curriculum. In order to provide additional mental health supports to students experiencing mental health challenges, the district would have to hire more school guidance counselors, school psychologists, and behavior specialists. However, with the current financial constraints, hiring additional staff would be detrimental to the overall budget. Thus, student academic achievement and supports for mental health are difficult to overcome, especially since they are so intertwined.

Another challenge with the priorities listed from the outcomes of the rightsizing framework is the idea of creating more class options, specifically with remediation and enrichment courses. The creation of a course requires additional professional development for a teacher, possible

resource acquisitions, and teacher stipends for curriculum writing. Additionally, even if the district could provide funding to support the creation of courses to provide enrichment, remediation, or course flexibility, the current teacher schedules do not allow time for additional courses. The only way to add courses to teacher schedules would be to remove the courses that offer credit towards graduation, which is not possible.

As for changing the declining enrollment, this priority, if addressed, would result in a dramatic change to the local revenues coming into the district, as well as the need to add more teachers to provide instruction for more classes. The district would have to hire additional staff, which could assist with the other priorities of adding courses, adding mental health services, and increasing academic achievement. However, the reasons behind declining enrollment are still unknown, and the decrease continues to occur each school year. If the district can identify ways to bring students into the district, or back from placement schools, the other priorities would be easier to achieve.

6.3   Limitations

As with most studies, there are limitations to the application of rightsizing strategies. This research was conducted in one rural school district with specific characteristics that other districts, despite similar demographics, may not include. The culture and climate of a district can in itself create bias in the perception of the needs of the district. School climate is based upon stakeholder personnel experiences with school life and reflects the values, relationships, instruction, learning, and overall structures of schools (Cohen, 2010).

6.3.1 Bias

The three focus groups were composed of two groups of community members and one group of teachers. Focus group members brought their own educational experiences and expectations with them when they entered the focus groups. These experiences could have been tainted by emotion, and at times, participants might not have been aware of the emotions that drove their answers (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In some cases, when a question asked in the focus group connected to a specific emotion that a participant had had in his or her own educational experience, the participant may have refrained from responding accurately or honestly.

Focus group participants may also have been asked a question that they did not have any experience with and could not answer; however, an answer could have been provided to avoid the embarrassment of not having an answer when everyone else in the room responded. Participants could have created reasonable answers that fit with the collective ideas of the group in order to appear to have had similar experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

All of the focus groups were facilitated by an administrator in the district; thus, responses from participants could have been filtered to avoid offense, or meaningfully stated in order to offend. Although the facilitator does not have direct evaluative responsibilities with the teacher participants, the authority to place a teacher on an improvement plan or to provide consequences for behavior or actions is still a part of the facilitator's position as an administrator in the Frederick Wayne School District.

The focus group participants were all volunteers who responded to a post on the district website that asked for volunteers over the age of 18 and who lived in the district. Participants in each of the two community focus groups included parents of students who were currently enrolled in the district; however, the second focus group also included participants who do not currently

have students enrolled in the district. While all of the participants were able to add specific comments and concerns regarding district programming, the participants who did not have current students enrolled in the district were unable to respond to current district programming; their responses were limited to their experiences five or 10 years ago. Therefore, the second focus group did struggle to stay on task during the question and discussion period, and time was lost during the session as the facilitator and parents of currently enrolled students had to explain many of the questions.

As facilitator, with the added component of being a current administrator in the district, another layer of possible limitation is the facilitator's experience in moderating a focus group. A facilitator must have a natural ability to navigate the varied personalities in the group to avoid one outspoken participant from taking over the conversation, and the facilitator must be able to quickly refocus a conversation to maintain order while also ensuring that the participants feel respected (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Although the facilitator of the focus groups for this research study is comfortable speaking in front of groups and has experience navigating group conversations to stay focused, comfort and overall participation may have been limited by the facilitator's overall lack of experience in this research role.

Additionally, the outcome of the entire rightsizing study was presented to the current school board of directors. With four of the seven members currently facing a reelection, many of the responses, and ultimately, the decisions that could be made from this research have not resulted in immediate action by the school board. Difficult decisions must be made, but the current board is concerned that unfavorable actions may affect the reelection of specific members of the school board.

6.3.2   Data Accuracy

The documents that were reviewed were obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of Education website or Frederick Wayne School District school board approved budget publications. Data was obtained from the 2012-2013 school year through the 2017-2018 school year. The data that is reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Education by a district is taken from the school district's records at specific points during the school year. For example, the student enrollment report is sent to the Pennsylvania Department of Education in October of every school year. Any new enrollments or withdrawals are not updated immediately. Therefore, the data obtained in this research may not provide an accurate account of the overall enrollment in a given school year. Although fluctuations in enrollment are minimal between reporting snapshots, or under an average of 30 students moving in or out of the district at any time, an average of 30 students equates to an entire classroom of students, or an additional teacher, which could impact the rightsizing decision made by the district to add or eliminate staffing positions (Frederick Wayne School District, 2018).

6.4   Discussion

The rightsizing strategies utilized in this research were successful in providing the data needed to make informed decisions regarding the future of Frederick Wayne School District. Specifically, stakeholder voice and factual data can be combined to create focused areas of concern for administration and the school board to address. Rightsizing strategies are used as a framework by which to uncover valuable insights, data, and information, but these same strategy outcomes are specific to the institutions that are applying the strategies. Although the answers to the

questions of how to move forward with decisions that will impact the district and community are not provided through rightsizing strategies, the information is clearly available and can be interpreted in order to create a plan to assist decision makers in moving forward. Rightsizing is a process that, when applied to a school district, can support administration and school board members to create strategic change in a positive and meaningful way.

While some districts such as Dayton Public Schools have applied rightsizing strategies to assist in district planning, the outcome of each district's process will look different. Dayton Public Schools used the data that they received through rightsizing to make the decisions to close schools, move students to different schools, add administrators, add transition activities, add preschool space, add counselors, and improve curriculum (Lolli, 2018). While Dayton has the capacity, both financially and with physical space, to make these changes, Frederick Wayne School District is constrained by financial deficits and only three buildings in the entire district. The decisions made by each of these districts is controlled by what is feasible within the boundaries of district compositions.

This study provided Frederick Wayne School District with the data needed to determine what types of academic programming should be provided in the future and why, as well as the limitations of enrollment and finances that impact the decisions regarding the academic programming. Through the focus group sessions, the stakeholders were also provided with valuable information regarding the current status of the district, which creates a more informed community that now has a voice in the decision making. While the district is facing difficult decisions, these decisions are being made with full transparency and factual data, which will impact all stakeholders by making them understand the problems, even if they disagree with the solutions.

6.5   Implications

Enrollment decline is evident across Pennsylvania. The need for districts to reorganize priorities and make difficult decisions based upon financial feasibility is a reality that more and more school districts must face. By applying rightsizing strategies, school districts will create an open dialogue among all stakeholders. The educational world of yesterday is not the same as that of tomorrow. In order to survive increased mental health needs, the overwhelming needs for academic supports, and fiscal challenges, districts must make rightsizing a part of the process of managing their organizations (Ambler, n.d.).

Appendix A

Focus Group Data

This section of the appendix includes the documentation taken from the focus group research. Included in this section are the documents used to provide information to the focus group participants, volunteer request documents, and the audio permission form, as well as the research guidelines that were shared with the groups. The presentation used to set the data foundation for participants in the focus groups is also provided. In addition, documentation is included of the exact responses provided by the focus groups through the Padlet platform. Lastly, the entire Focus Group Data Matrix is provided to illustrate all nine categories that were used to tag the data responses.
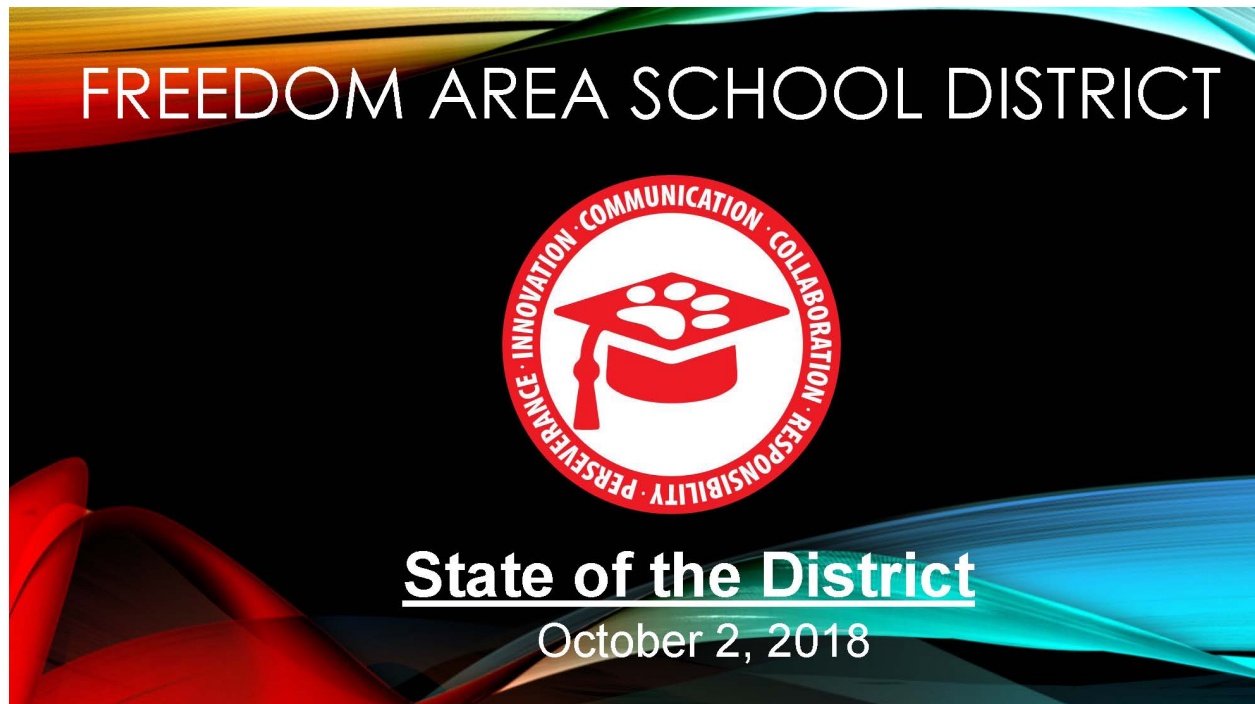
MISSION & VISION

- Freedom Area School District strives to be an educational leader through our model of academic rigor in a safe, caring learning environment.

- Our students will be motivated critical thinkers who demonstrate communication, collaboration, innovation, perseverance, and responsibility to become leaders In their chosen fields and in society.

Comprehensive Plan Focus

Goal 1: **Establish a district system that fully ensures consistent implementation of standards aligned curricula across all schools for all students.**

 Strategy: Create an online curriculum database

Goal 2: **Establish a district system that fully ensures professional development is focused, comprehensive and implemented with fidelity.**
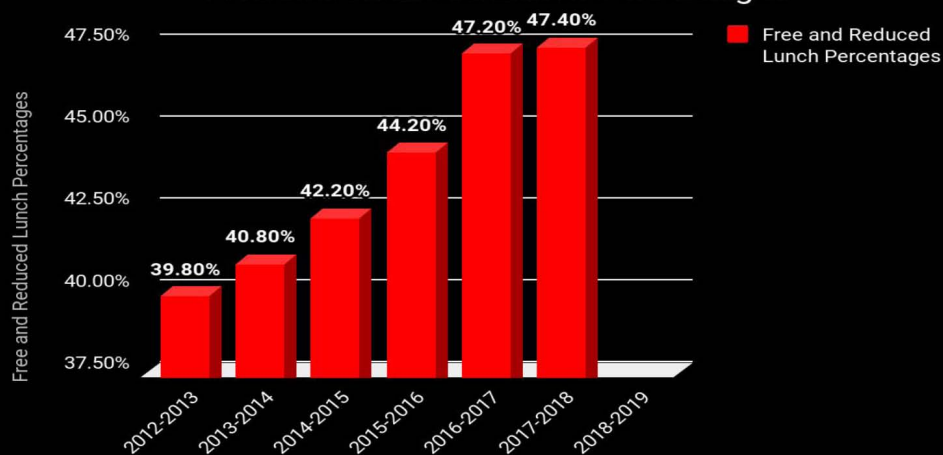
 Strategy: Profile of a Bulldog

Historical Demographic Overview

FASD Historical Enrollment
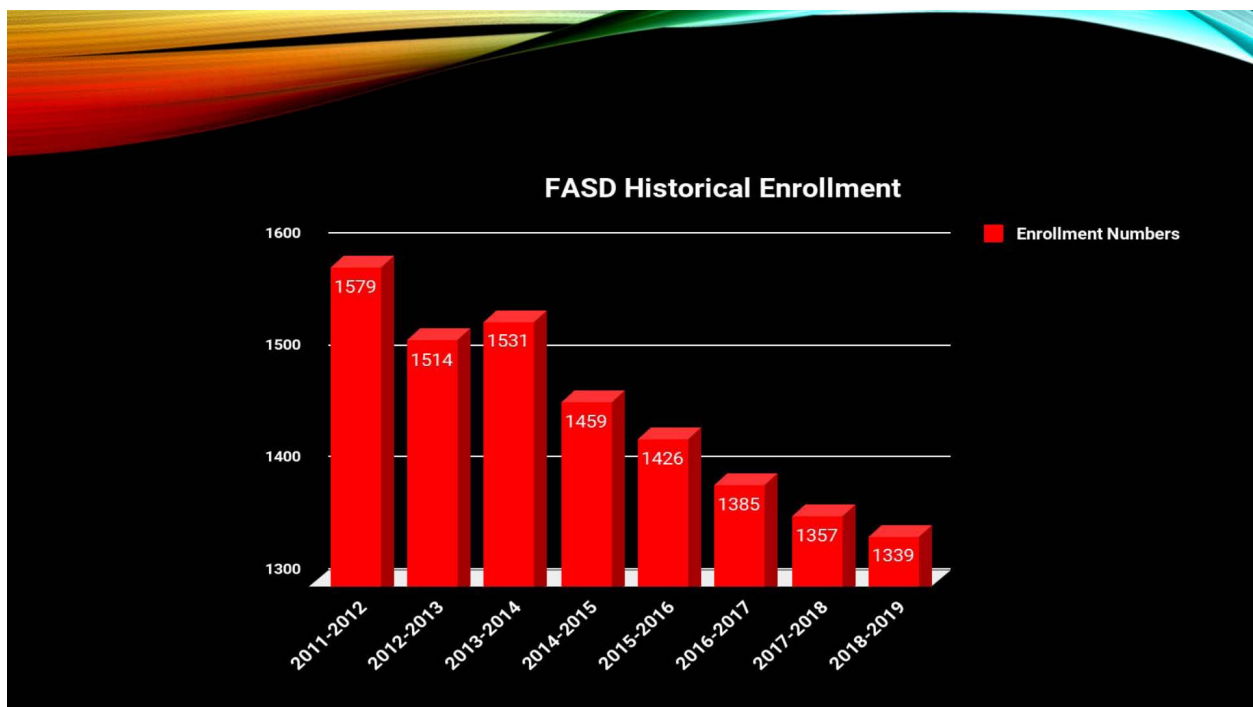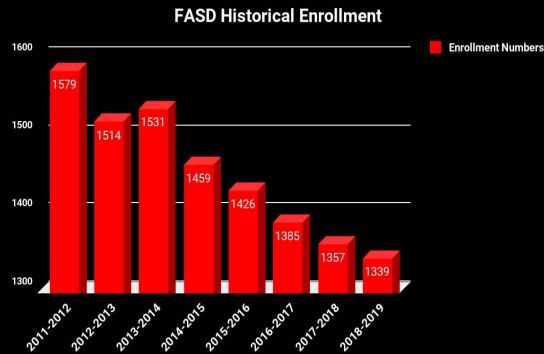
Free and Reduced Lunch

INCOME ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES
Effective July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019
Annual Income

Family Size	Free Meals or Milk (130% of Poverty Guidelines)	Reduced Price Meals (185% of Poverty Guidelines)	Not Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals or Milk
One	$0 to $15,782	$15,783 to $22,459	$22,460 and up
Two	$0 to $21,398	$21,399 to $30,451	$30,452 and up
Three	$0 to $27,014	$27,015 to $38,443	$38,444 and up
Four	$0 to $32,630	$32,631 to $46,435	$46,436 and up
Five	$0 to $38,246	$38,247 to $54,427	$54,428 and up
Six	$0 to $43,862	$43,863 to $62,419	$62,420 and up
Seven	$0 to $49,478	$49,479 to $70,411	$70,412 and up
Eight	$0 to $55,094	$55,095 to $78,403	$78,404 and up
For Each Additional Family Member Add:	+$5,616	+$7,992	+$7,993

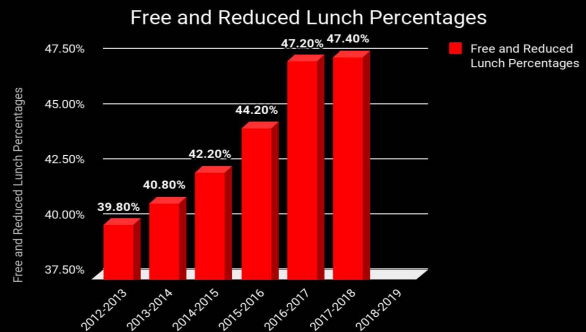## Free and Reduced Lunch Percentages

Free and Reduced Lunch Percentages

Year	Percentage
2012-2013	39.80%
2013-2014	40.80%
2014-2015	42.20%
2015-2016	44.20%
2016-2017	47.20%
2017-2018	47.40%
2018-2019	

Enrollment Comparison to Free and Reduced Lunch Counts

Enrollment

FASD Historical Enrollment

■ Enrollment Numbers

1579, 1514, 1531, 1459, 1426, 1385, 1357, 1339

(2011-2012, 2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019)

Free and Reduced Lunch %

Free and Reduced Lunch Percentages

■ Free and Reduced Lunch Percentages

39.80%, 40.80%, 42.20%, 44.20%, 47.20%, 47.40%

(2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019)

State % of Students in Special Education and Freedom % of Students in Special Education

■ State % of Students in Special Education
■ Beaver County % of Students in Special Education
■ Freedom % of Students in Special Education

Year	State %	Beaver County %	Freedom %
2012-2013	15.00%	13%	13.00%
2013-2014	15.00%	13%	14.00%
2014-2015	16.00%	14%	15.00%
2015-2016	16.00%	14%	16.00%
2016-2017	17.00%	15%	17.00%
2017-2018	17.00%	16%	18.00%
2018-2019		16%	18.29%

Faculty History

Enrollment Comparison to Faculty History

FASD Historical Enrollment

Faculty History

Student Health and Well-Being

Mental Health Interventions

1. Guidance Counselor Intervention

2. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

5. FBR

4. Prevention Specialists

3. Student Assistance Program (SAP)
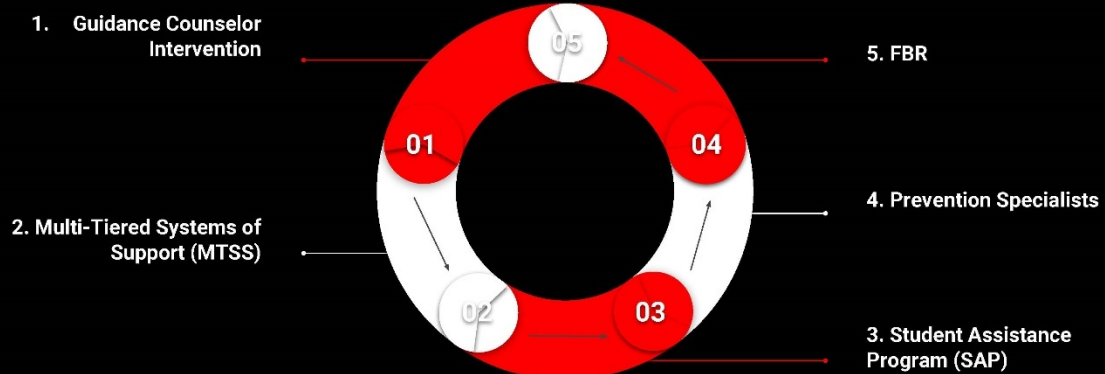
*Crisis Referrals, Agency or Court Ordered Placements Intermittent
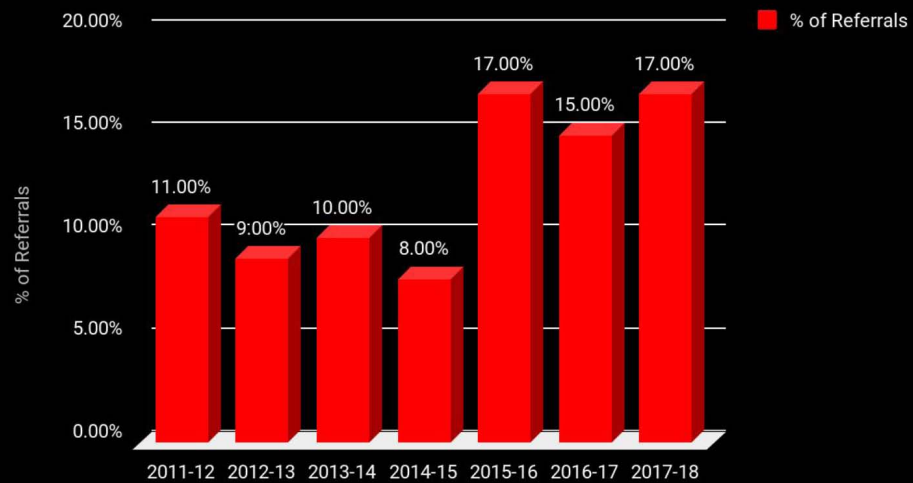
Student Intervention Terms Defined

Student Assistance Program (SAP): Identification and support for students who are identified with alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health issues which pose a barrier to a student's success. (http://www.dhs.pa.gov/provider/studentassistanceprogram/)
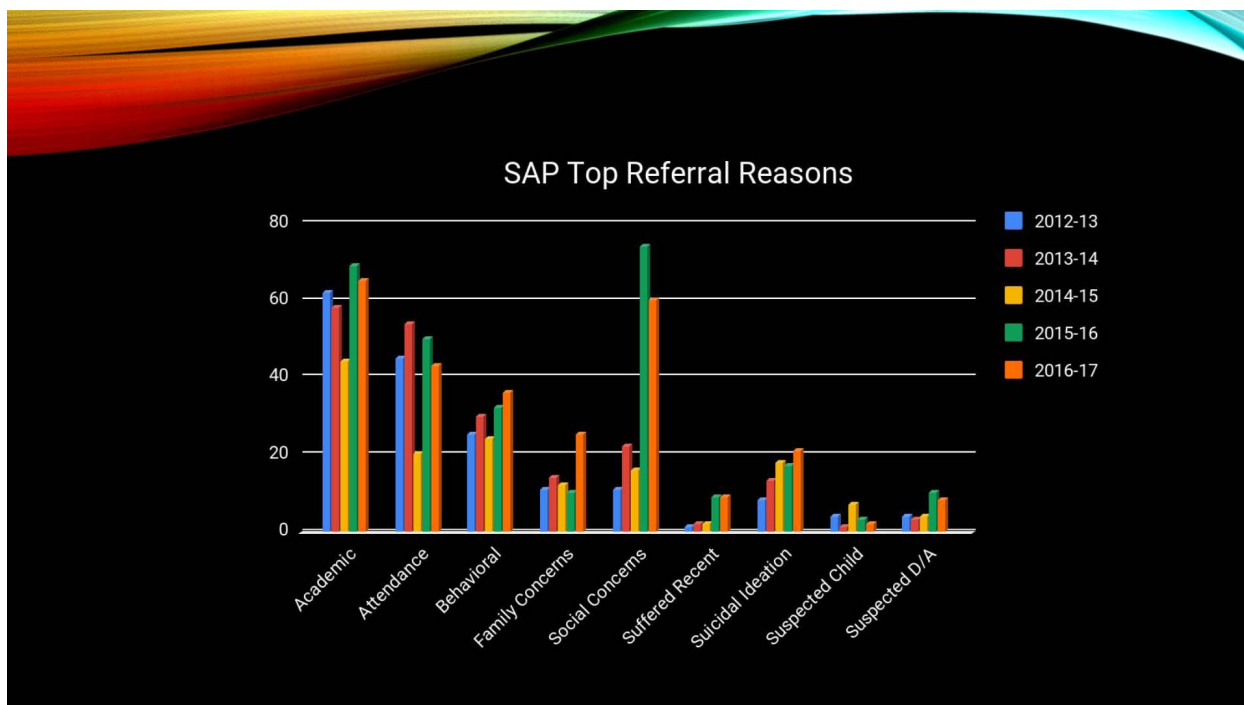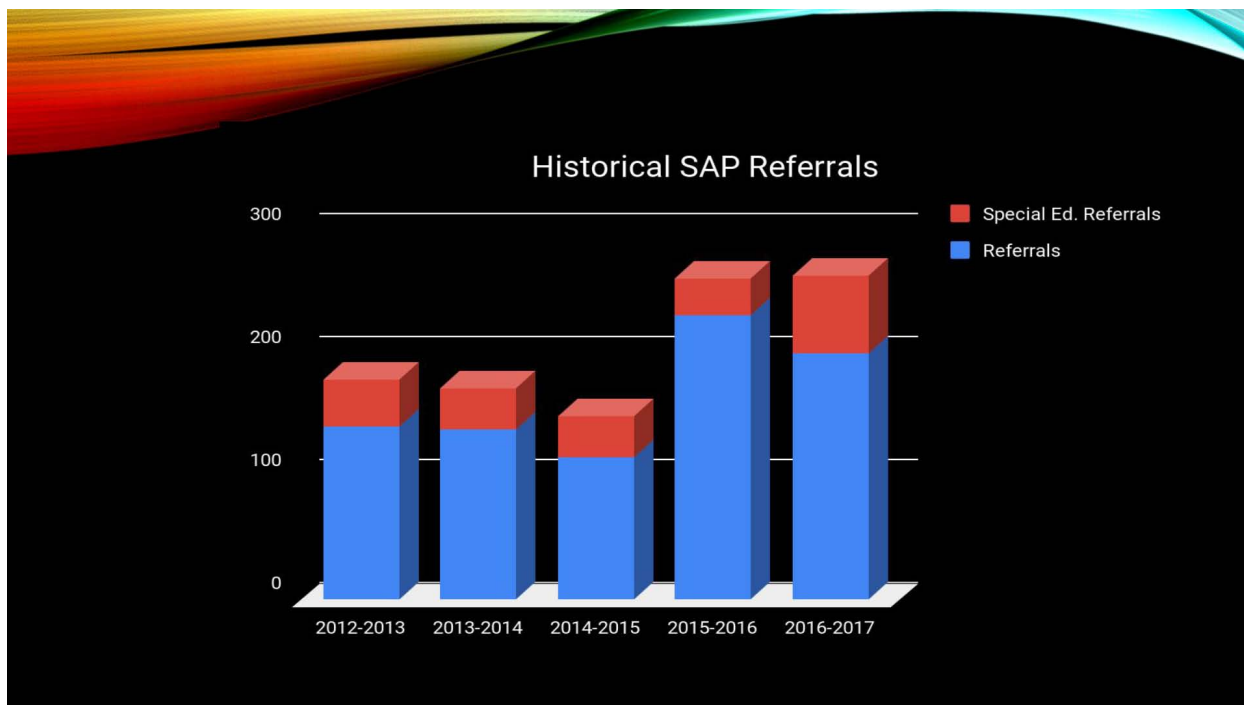
Send to Crisis: Students are at risk for suicide or a major mental health issue that needs to be addressed immediately they are sent to a hospital or mental health institution for an evaluation.

- Suicidal ideation
- Plan
- Means for plan
- Timeframe

Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI): A trained and certified team of FASD staff members are called to deescalate a volatile situation. CPI teams may restrain students in these circumstances.

% of SAP Referrals

Year	% of Referrals
2011-12	11.00%
2012-13	9.00%
2013-14	10.00%
2014-15	8.00%
2015-16	17.00%
2016-17	15.00%
2017-18	17.00%

Additional Data

2017-2018

- 76 Referrals to Family Behavior Resources (FBR)

- 32 Students were sent to Crisis

As of October 2, 2018

- 6 Students have had CPI Team Intervention

- 10 Students have been sent to Crisis

Academic Progress

Building Level Course Guides
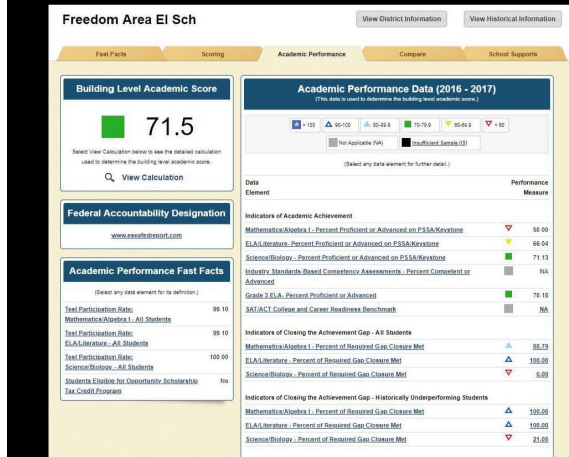
- High School Course Information

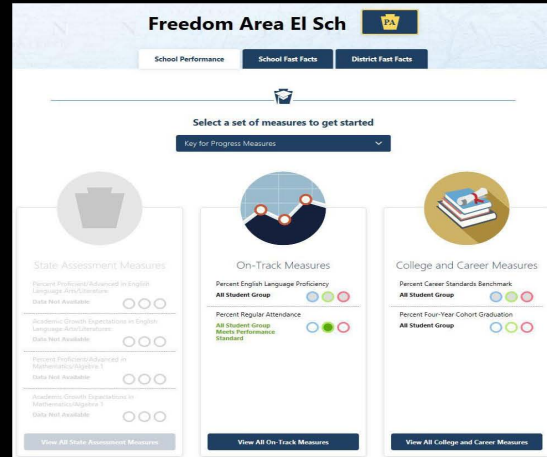- Middle School Information

- Elementary School Information

Historical Assessment Results:
PSSA and Keystones

Future Ready Index (FRI)and
School Performance Profile (SPP)

SPP

FRI

Financial History

Revenues

	Federal Revenue	State Revenue	Local Revenue

	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Federal Revenue	2.22%	2.22%	2.27%	2.13%	2.25%	1.88%	2.04%
State Revenue	59.87%	59.65%	58.42%	58.46%	57.79%	57.60%	57.05%
Local Revenue	37.92%	38.13%	39.31%	39.42%	39.97%	40.52%	40.91%

Expenditures

Debt Service
Capital Outlay
Student Activities
Support Services
Instructional Services

2012-2013 2013-2014 2013-2015 2013-2016 2013-2017 2013-2018 2013-2019

Retirement as a Percentage of Salary

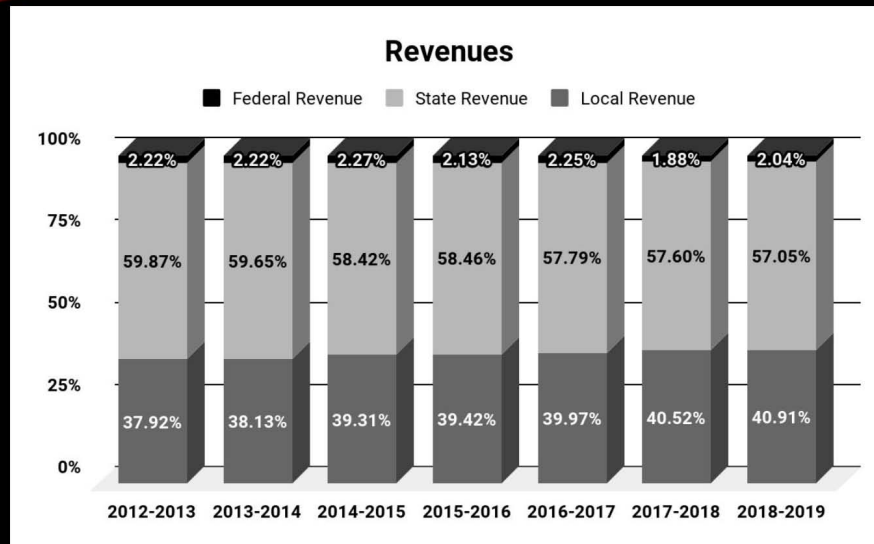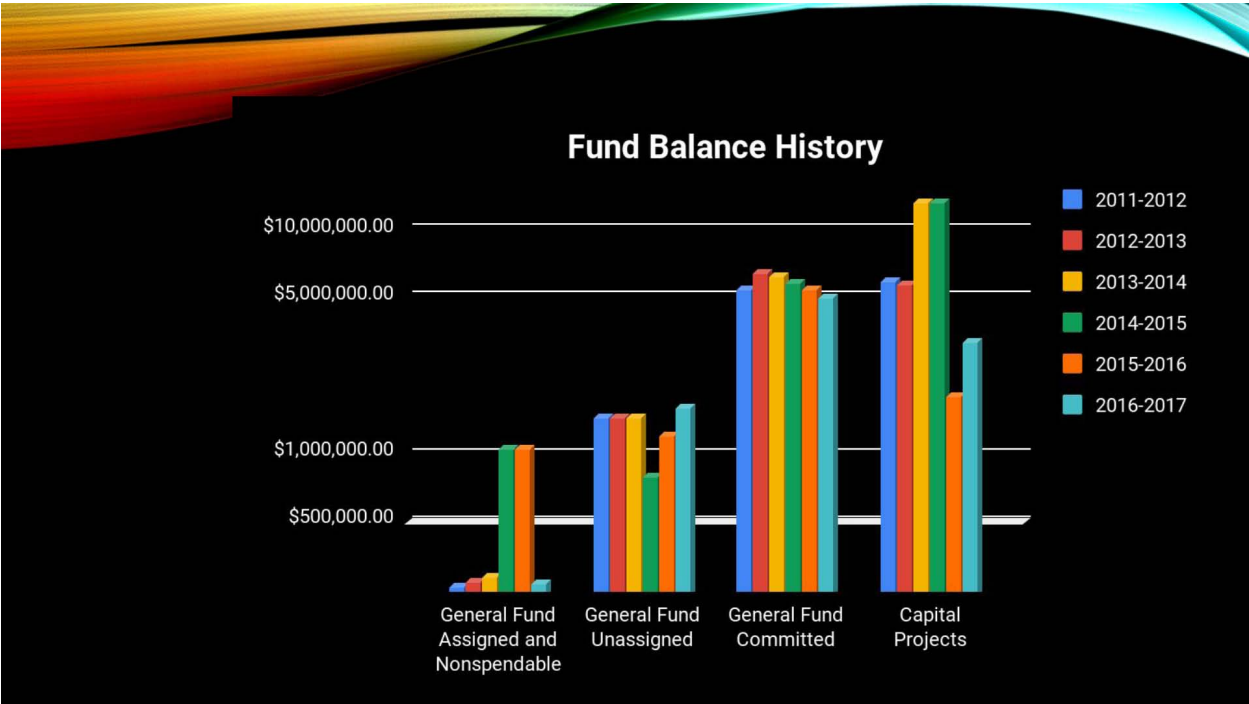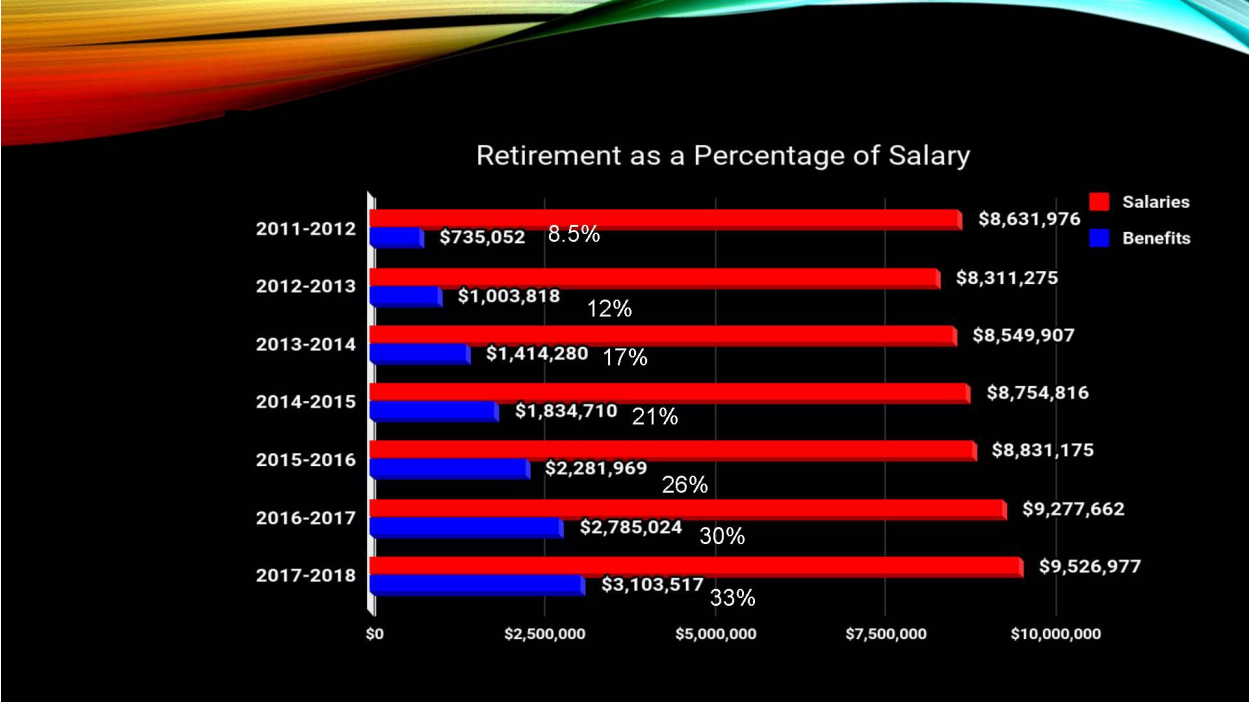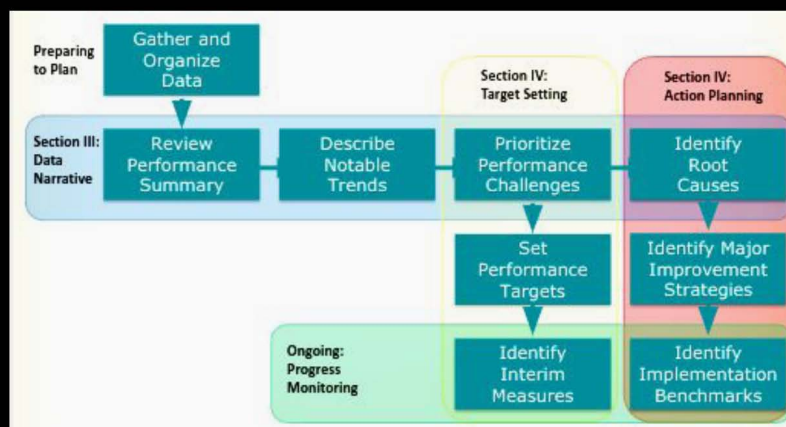| Year	Salaries	Benefits	Percentage
2011-2012	$8,631,976	$735,052	8.5%
2012-2013	$8,311,275	$1,003,818	12%
2013-2014	$8,549,907	$1,414,280	17%
2014-2015	$8,754,816	$1,834,710	21%
2015-2016	$8,831,175	$2,281,969	26%
2016-2017	$9,277,662	$2,785,024	30%
2017-2018	$9,526,977	$3,103,517	33%

Fund Balance History

Improvement Planning

How will we move forward?

Next Steps

Immediate Intervention
October 8, 2018 In-Service

Tested Subject Areas

- **Review curriculum and make adjustments in correlation to assessment data (PSSAs, Keystones, CDT, Guided Reading, NWEA)**

Focus Group

- Purpose
  - Identifying strategies for improvement
  - Helping an organization meet its goals
  - Develop criteria and process steps of benchmarking
  - Improve working conditions
  - Yield valuable insights from stakeholders

Ground Rules!

- RESPECT
  - We are here to work together, not against one another
  - Take turns
  - It is okay to disagree!
  - Treat each other how you would want someone to treat the person you love the most in the world.

Audio Recording

- Form clarifies purpose of audio recording
  - Anonymous responses
  - Names not used
  - No pictures will be taken
  - Data provided to the school board, administrators, and community
  - Data may be used in a research study on school improvement

Why are we here?

- Research shows that stakeholder input is key in the decision making process for organizations

- **Focus Groups: The purpose of conducting a focus group is to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, idea, product, or service. Focus groups are used to gather opinions (Krueger and Casey, 2015).**

- Provide feedback to the school board and administration on the beliefs, concerns, and needs of the stakeholders (who wants to volunteer??)

- Your opinions, or the data, will be presented at a school board meeting in January or February and can be used to support research done on school improvement and the role of stakeholder input

Why aren't school board members or administrators present?

- They were asked not to attend!
- Focus group responses need to be as unbiased as possible
  - I am serving as a facilitator, so I will not share my personal beliefs with you, this could sway your opinion or make you feel the need to convince me otherwise
  - The use of Padlet, an online response website, provides you with the opportunity to answer anonymously, and for every single participant to be heard!

We want to hear what YOU have to say!

Padlet

https://padlet.com/mls248/FASDFG1

A.3   Research Letter and Audio Permission

Research Letter

The purpose of this research study is to identify stakeholder beliefs, goals, and overall opinions about the*****Area School District. Three focus groups will be created, with two focus groups being composed of volunteers from the***** Area School District community, and one group composed of ***** Area School District teachers. The focus groups will each meet one time for approximately one to two hours to discuss a group of questions relating to ***** Area School District. Each focus group will conclude with a final summary of the focus group meeting being reviewed and then provided to the ***** Area School District School Board of Directors who can then utilize this information to guide decision making.

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project, nor are there any direct benefits to you. No payment will be made to participants for their participation.

Confidentiality of the participants will be maintained through the use of a transcript being created from the audio recorded focus group sessions. All sessions will be audio recorded and then transcribed into a script that will have all names removed. The original audio recordings will be stored on the researcher's computer in a password protected file.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time. This study is being conducted by Misty L. Slavic, who can be reached at **********, if you have any questions.

Audio Permission

Consent & Recording Release Form

I agree to participate in the study conducted and recorded by Misty L. Slavic.

I understand and consent to the use and release of the recording by Misty L. Slavic to the Freedom Area School District and for use in gathering data for a research study. I understand that the information and recording is for research purposes only and that my name and image will not be used.

I understand that participation in this focus group is voluntary and I agree to immediately raise any concerns or areas of discomfort during the focus group sessions with the study facilitator.

Please sign below to indicate that you have read and you understand the information on this form and that any questions you might have about the session have been answered.

Date:_____

Please print your name: _____

Please sign your name: _____

Thank you!

We appreciate your participation.

A.4　Padlet Results

See the following pages for Focus Group 1 Padlet Responses.

FASD: Community Focus Group #1

January 7, 2018

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

A totally integrated K to 12 experience with as many teachers and teacher aides as we can afford. We must create a supportive learning environment for our teachers and our students to allow for maximal fruition.

I want learning k-12 to focus on teaching critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication through projects that allow students to learn through trial and error, by taking risks, problem solving, and exploring student interests not necessarily what is on the test.

A school that was open to change, even if the administrators didn't agree with the idea, to see if new ideas would work.

I recommend that the school has more transparency with their decisions, that they are made with more dialog with the community during meetings. Have another session at the end of board meetings for further comments/ questions. Give more recognition to student academic achievement than just athletics -- have a monthly report on what Freedom students have accomplished scholastically like the AD does.

An ideal school would put more emphasis on different methods of learning and give the students more opportunities to find out what inspires them.

A school district that is PASSIONATE about its students success both in the classroom and out of the classroom. Ideally, a place where teachers and administration are working together, collaborating and hearing each other with respect and consideration with the students best interest in mind. A school focused on meaningful learning and transitions to life beyond high school.

I recommend honest conversations between administration and teachers about how to get the PASSION for teaching back into all of our educators. I recommend that our administration put a greater trust into our teachers opinions and abilities and give them the opportunity to do what they were hired to do in the way that they bet think our students will succeed.

Small classes / engaged teachers. Variety of class offerings to suit students of all abilities & over a wide range of possible career tracks. School board that openly discusses issues and takes community concerns into consideration. Achieve this by retaining/hiring needed personnel - look to creative ways to supplement using community support. Cut costs anywhere needed outside core functions (look for efficiencies) and if needed raise taxes.

I would love to see a school with reasonable class sizes, especially for the younger grades. Also, I would love to see more emphasis or opportunities placed on classes for different interests/abilities that may not be a "typical" tested subject for all grades.

Small class sizes (20 to 1), Choices at HS level (different types of Engligh/literature. arts, life skills, etc)

I would like to see 3rd and 4th grade class ratios back to 20 to 1. I would like to see teachers have the materials they need to teach classes whether it be new texts or sharing resources with other schools. I would make sure there were choices for students.

students graduating with life skills and a solid foundation in education.
Collaboration of faculty/administration and community with open communication and collaboration that know what is going on in the district

What would an ideal school like like? What changes do you recommend for the district to make it look closer to your ideal school?

******

90

FASD: Community Focus Group #1

January 7, 2018

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

Smaller classes and more choices in subjects

meaningful learning that prepares students for life after high school - college, career , military or trade school

More course offerings backed by meaningful learning.

Small class sizes w/ engaged teachers

Variety & diversity of class offerings (HS specifically - opportunities to try different things)

Class sizes.

Classes that are challenging and also those that will give them skills to succeed once they are out of school

What priorities do you have for your child's school?

Low teacher to student ratio to appropriate eduacation for all learning levels — ANONYMOUS

more teacher assistance

(elementary)
more mental health

Increase the number of teachers or add teacher aides to each grade.

more challenging courses

✵✵✵✵✵

FASD: Community Focus Group #1

January 7, 2018

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

Communication is key. Have more meetings with the opportunity for all in attendance to voice their thoughts. Make the district more aware.

Transparent communication!

Open communication...listening and taking into account the opinions of community members, parents, teachers, etc. (This is a wonderful step in that direction by the way) All change is hard and there will always be opposition...but there will be much more support with open communication and transparency.

As a parent, I feel The district has a habit of making changes without considering all the consequences first. To make changes, ideally, the district and school board would discuss problems and the possible solutions with the community before decisions are made and let us know that we are being heard.

Communication!

Make sure that all members of the community know what is going on, even those that don't have kids in school.

Communication

Clear, regular communications ---- keep surprises to a minimum --- Open, thorough discussion of especially major changes well before decisions are finalized.

First you must get the changes out to the community in ways other than hidden somewhere on the website. People are open to change that they know about. (transparency) Second, it can't be done quickly. It must be systematic, well organized and done on appropriate time schedules allowing students, teachers and community to adjust

Be open and HONEST about what changes are being considered. In the past, decisions were made without parent knowledge or input. Examples include: all day kindergarten, closing the pool, putting 3rd and 4th grades in the middle school . . . .

OPEN COMMUNICATION. The district will have to use groups to spread awareness, blast social media (have a parent do it) . People want to feel like they are a part of change and they want to know it is happening. I would make sure that everyone is aware that changes are coming. You can never please 100% of the people 100% of the time but you can have open lines of communication

As a district, how could we make changes as smooth as possible for your family?

See the following pages for Focus Group 2 Padlet Responses.

FASD: Community Focus Group #2

January 8, 2019

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

The decline in enrollment coupled with the lack of movement of test scores and increase in lunch programs.

i noticed the increase in special needs children and free and reduced lunch amounts.... i also seemed to conclude that the high school keystone test results were considerably lower than stat e averages

Declining enrollment while increasing of number of free or reduced meals and special education.

While reviewing the District data, there are a few areas that really concern me. I am very concerned of the decrease of enrollment. Although testing is not everything, what is the reasoning for our poor test scores? How can we start getting better success on these tests, specifically the math scores. Also, the amount of student in the learning support program seems to have increased. Concern of the amount of special education teachers lost in the high school concerns me if we are increasing our numbers. Alarming rate of SAP referrals and the alarming rate under the October crisis.

Decline is a concern but not uncommon in the

*****

FASD: Community Focus Group #2

January 8, 2019

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

academic achievement

feeling of being worthwile
stable mental growth
secure feeling
motivating to llearn

Being a positive adult role model to students and encouraging them to be the best individuals they can be while maintaining positive rapport with staff, fellow parents, etc.

Choices. Many times empowerment for a child is to have a voice. As well as teacher voices being heard and their opinions.

Class size: I prefer a smaller class size.

Classes offered: I look for programs that enrich the arts, and advance learning.

Parent/Teacher relationships: I want to be able to know my kids teachers and have them know me.

I prioritize the education of my children above all else. The school should be preparing the children - all children - to be ready to enter their next phase of life, be it more schooling or entering the work force.

Safe, quality education with teachers that care and go the extra mile so that no child is left behind. Teaching to the kid's strengths and not just 1 way.

Follow through - if teacher/admin/etc says they are going to do something it is actually done instead of just being said to appease the situation.

Special Education Services

Rapport with teachers, parents, and administration

More classes offered for our students

More transparent school board

Students classes NOT to be determined by their testing scores!

Education
Teachers who know their students and make school a positive environment.
A no bullying policy that is realistic and enforceable.
Extra-curricular activities.

Question #2

What priorities do you have for your child's school?

To have an array of of classes. To have the best special education program in the county. Engagement of the school board. To have more open dialogue with the school board. — ANONYMOUS

health (mental health and physical safety), quality education with lots of different learning opportunities, teaching kids how to be good human beings! — ANONYMOUS

✳✳✳✳✳✳

FASD: Community Focus Group #2

January 8, 2019

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

Supporting all students' decided academic paths by offering more technical and business courses. Small class sizes would enable more academic choices without dropping the classes

More practical classes for high school preparing them for their future. Helping the kids to be more well rounded individuals.

Small class sizes

More class offerings

Great Rapport with teachers, students, and administration

As for changes, smarter choices in the lay out of the district. Making sure we are not wasting unnecessary money (like lead to learn) and losing teachers due to this

Does there have to be so much testing? CDT, PSSA, Keystones? Does 8th grade have to be hit so heavy? Talk about mentally draining

Acceptable class sizes, enough rooms in building to house students, hallways designed to move effectively, classes that are offered that make sense in the world today. Honors classes offered earlier

small class classes with a positive attitude; new technology to put the kids ahead of the game when they move to the next level

Base the class sizes off of what we need, the size of our class rooms, and our student body NOT statistics and averages.

Small class size, more advance programs/classes offered at a younger age. A wider selection of classes offered at the high school level.

empowerment of staff

positive atmosph
ere
happy , contributing students
strong leadership
clear expectations

i think a lot of good things are happening at Freedom and we need to shout it from the rooftops.

positivity breeds more...
a way to communicate the good to those who dont have technology

Small class size.
Varying course offerings - language, life skills, music at a younger age.
Teachers/staff/ admins who love their jobs and can have a positive impact on the children.

Question #3

What would an ideal school look like? What changes do you recommend for the district to make it look closer to your school?

Continued small classes. Varying courses to choose. Possible reallocation of funds to the programs deemed most important.
— ANONYMOUS

good leadership, good communication, KINDNESS, increased parent/community involvement, small classes with great educators, before and after school care offered *— ANONYMOUS*

FASD: Community Focus Group #2

January 8, 2019

MLS248 DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

Communication and following through with the transition plans that are proposed.

Informative meetings to let parents know more of what is happening to make everything clear and not hearing the information by word of mouth.

Better research of what is being proposed and the affects it would have on our students.

Communication. Advance notice of changes and reason for the changes. A chance to be heard on the changes.

Completely Open Communication

Need to take the time to completely research and gather all facts before making major decisions that affect so many lives.

open communication

informative meetings
school website

Communication.
Communicate prior to big changes being made and decisions finalized. Allow the community to voice their opinions and really listen to what they say.
When changes are decided. Don't just discuss at the school board meeting, post to the website and/or social media.

Communication is KEY.

Be clear, concise and committed. Although everyone may or may not like the change that is coming state why the change is being made, be truthful and honest and state how it will help. And stick with it, don't give up after one semester, it may take more than one to see results. Hopping from idea to idea is not going to help anyone, just like when you open a business you have to invest money before you can make money. Invest in Freedom and the kids, it is all for the kids! They are our future!

COMMUNICATION!!

As a district, how can we make changes a smooth as possible for your family?

Once again communication is critical. — ANONYMOUS

Communication and more advance notice before changes made or events happen — ANONYMOUS

※※※※※

See the following pages for Teacher Focus Group Responses.

FASD: Teacher Focus Group

January 8, 2019

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

many of our students are coming in to school with emotional needs that need to be addressed

The correlation between test scores and socioeconomics.

After all the focus on Standardized testing the district has continued to be stagnant in performance.

I was surprised by the students receiving special education services and the numbers of free and reduced lunch. The correlation between the two.

The increase of emotional needs in our district.

The significant increase in the percentage of students who are qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The change in our family dynamics in the district is significant. The correlation

between tests scores and socioeconomic backgrounds is significant and is obviously impacting our district as a whole

One area that stuck out to me was the fact that our student demographics (high need, low income) do not reflect the successes of these students — ANONYMOUS

Question #1

After reviewing the district information (state of the district/academic progress) sent to you, what was one area that stuck out to you?

The general lack of understanding of the decision makers about the effect of their decisions on the outcomes for our students. — ANONYMOUS

I thought that is was the first time that the board had a true idea on what teachers deal with everyday. All of these indicators play a part in everyday teaching — ANONYMOUS

✶✶✶✶✶

FASD: Teacher Focus Group

January 8, 2019

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

Teachers teach teachers from attending professional development workshops. All teachers get to attend workshops each year; a rotating schedule

Technology would be implemented and utilized for learning and research, not playing games or watching movies.

Professional learning communities where teacher collaborate and plan using best practices. The then engage with students to create meaningful learning activities.

Faculty are valued, can trust the administration and are not afraid of furloughs

Students would be able to choose a schedule based on their interests versus fitting into the cookie cutter courses that all need to take. Tracking

A transparent environment where the school's goals are aligned with the teachers and student progress

A trustworthy environment where people are not afraid to lose their jobs

I think we need to have more resources for the severe emotional need students that are disrupting the general classes due to not having their needs met. I feel we need to explore a "cool down or refocus room." We also need to have an emotional support classroom and/or teacher.

Our students have motivational issues in large part because they have little say in their education. They are passengers on a 4 year ride. The need to have more invested. We need to allow them to make choices and take ownership of their learning. Dr. Wargo's science conference is this idea in practice.

The ideal school would have resources available to students. Not only academic resources, but social and emotional resources. Since the physical make up of some of the classrooms make it very hard to manage, the ideal district would allow class sizes to be managable, provide necessary interventions when needed, and have a school board realistic to the needs.

More interventions in the primary grades.
Smaller class sizes
More available resources - a primary ELA curriculumn.
Social and Emotional classrooms in ALL buildings.
Less Testing - CTDs

Students are excited about learning and come ready to learn everyday.

Staff is positive and works together to ensure student success
Common goals across all members of the school community
Administration, board members and community members visit classrooms on a regular basis
Students receive the support and are challenged when they need it
Mental health support/counselors available for students and parents
Open communication
Less focus on standardized assessments and more on actual day to day student growth

An ideal school should be a positive, energized facility where anyone who walks into the building feels the "good vibes" of all faculty, students , admin, support staff, maintenance..... This positive attitude can be the first steps in creating and working towards the district we know we can be...and the state wants.

Changes should start small and build over time, initiatives and programs should be well thought out with sustainability and continued growth as the first and most important priority.

Changes must include an attitude of cooperation that is obvious and genuine among all faculty and other steakholders. Proactive intervention for learning, behavior, and emotional needs.

An ideal school would have students who are excited to learn and supportive parents and administrators
Students would have resources available to assist with emotional, behavioral and academic needs
Faculty would work in a team like fashion....this is already happening in many areas of the district
Faculty would be valued as the assets they truly are

An ideal school would have enough resources and staff to meet the needs (academic, social, emotional) of our students.

It would be lovely to have those that make the decisions that adversely affect us truly understand what we do all day to help our students soar. Positive energy goes a long way to making everyone feel that they can do hard things.

A collaborative environment where you have a focus group of teachers and administrators that work together on the goals of the school

An ideal school would seek input from all stakeholders, communicate openly and across all levels, value its teachers and their contributions, recognize and celebrate extra effort, and hold everyone accountable. Our district all too often seems to operate top down with little or no transparency, the reward for teachers who go the extra mile is often more work and little or no recognition, our voices are silenced at board meetings, and punitive solutions to limited problems are applied wholesale. I believe this all could be solved collaboratively; however, that all begins with trust, which is/will be a long process to earn based on recent history.

What would an ideal school look like? What changes do you recommend for the district to make look closer to your ideal school?

✸✸✸✸✸✸

FASD: Teacher Focus Group

January 9, 2019

MLS248 DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

A person who feels valued will always work harder to perform their best

Inform us of the challenges that the district is facing and ask us for our input to create a common plan

Listen to us and do not make decisions that have no background other than money

Allow a voice from all invested in the changes. Build relationships so progress can be made. Have regular reflections. The district culture should be---reflection, reflection, reflection to make us stronger and better.

Work together to implement common goals

Possibly, create focus groups of teachers who are positive leaders in their buildings. who buy into these positive changes, and encourage all others to take part in positive initiatives. Enthusiasm is contagious. When enthusiasm is sparked it , can create great outcomes for our students.

Collaborative approaches to change with stakeholder input can go a long way to creating buy in for new initiatives . When people feel their opinions have been considered in the process they are much more likely to accept the changes especially if they trust the process.

Right now, I believe that teachers need to be valued and listened too. This isn't one thing that seems to be working. It's not because of lack of trying. Teachers are hitting brick walls daily with lack of resources. Something added or changed that would not be placed on a classroom teacher as an additional responsibility would be huge. The additional paper work, programs that are being added without appropriate resources has to change. Communication of the needs to the school

board, and their understanding is a must. Smooth change will happen when everyone has a common goal.

Straight forward communication - be open and honest about what is happening and why

We need to implement changes and programs district wide (such as PAWS) so that we as colleagues can collaborate on what is working and what needs improvement. We need to have time to talk to our colleagues and get their feedback and ideas on what is working and what is not, on a consistent basis. We also need time to implement any programs and those programs need to stay the course not drift in and out after a year. We need time to talk to each other about what we need in a manner that is not going to come back and bite us for being honest.

Changes happen smoothly when all parties work together to make decisions that impact the district

Bring us to the table, hear us out, and make sure that all are part of the solution. Nobody knows better than what it looks like inside the classroom than the teacher. Changes should be gradual and incremental to address gradual and incremental issues, not systematic and sweeping. They should also certainly be based on actual research (when applicable) and/or test groups. We also can't be afraid to admit when something falls short and try another method. Doubling down is not usually the answer.

Question #4

As a district, how could we make changes as smooth as possible for you and your colleagues?

FASD: Teacher Focus Group

January 8, 2019

MLS248   DEC 18, 2018 08:46PM

entrance exams to attempt to bridge the gap in learning between schools. perhaps a refresher course/boot camp course prior to the start of the school year

workshops that have to deal with classroom performance, engagement and differentiation.

Better communication at all levels...admin/teacher with a collaborative approach. Encourage bottom up leadership.

My priorities include providing the best education to my students as physically possible, to create a learning centered classroom that is both supportive and disciplined. To help every child to experience success and be motivated to continue to be successful.

To create a safe learning environment.
To have each child to work to his/her potential.
To provide an environment that students can learn in without disruption.
To have necessary support and resources available.
To be able to effectively run a classroom, and watch students grow.
To have a supportitive staff and admin. that have common goals.

So many -
to start providing the lower performing student bracket with additional resources. Providing their teachers with different ways to teach and engage since the tests are so important

Course offerings that engage students. More collaboration and connected learning. Students taking ownership of learning.

Structured support for students in need...Early and often. Deeper learning opportunities. Elimination of bubble testing everywhere.

Student engagement

support level for students that reflects their needs
inclusive environment
mental health support
staff collaboration

Small class sizes so that I am able to better meet the needs of my students
Additional counselors - return prevention specialist to the elementary full time
Increase in number of teachers providing remediation - TItle I faculty
Increase in aides available for special education

Increase in morale, which stems from a whole host of things I believe we can do to be better: stronger communication, increased transparency, true collaboration for which the stakeholders' voices are heard and taken into consideration, efforts made to push Freedom forward and pave the way for 21st century education (and not reverting to stale methods), accountability, and celebrating successes/teacher recognition. In short, I want my school to be a place people want to work, grow, and learn.

My priority is to create a safe, welcoming environment that allows for differentiation within a smaller class size so that I can meet the needs of all of my students. I wish that growth was not necessarily measured just with a standardized test. I also believe we need the return of our prevention specialist, at least one aide per grade level that we can share on a rotating basis, and a transitional first grade for our friends that are not ready to move on.

What priorities do you have for your specific school?

My priorities include hopes in a creation of a system of growth. Like our system of the 5Rs. Relationship-Relevance-RIgor-Refection-Revision a great foundation to move our district to growth. I feel we — ANONYMOUS

※※※※※※

Community Volunteer Request Documentation

The **** Area School District is looking for volunteers from the community to serve on focus groups. The goal of these groups is to gather valuable insights, perceptions, concerns, and ideas on future programming in the **** Area School District. If you are interested, please click on the following link to sign up. Focus groups are limited to 5-10 members, so please sign up quickly! Please contact Misty Slavic at mslavic@**** if you have any questions regarding this information.

UPDATE: Please be aware that these focus groups are for community members who are not currently students in the * Area School District. There will be separate focus groups for teachers/employees, as well as a student focus group.**

Click HERE to sign up!

Teacher Email Request for Volunteers

From:	MISTY SLAVIC <mslavic@
Sent:	Wednesday, December 19, 2018 10:13 AM
To:	elementaryteachers@ ; middleschoolteachers@ highschoolteachers@
Subject:	Volunteers Needed

Dear Teachers,

Good morning, I hope that everyone is hanging in there during the prelude to the holiday break. It seems that the excitement of time off, combined with a ton of sugar, equals a lot of extremely excited students, and sometimes staff too!

As you are all aware ___ has been experiencing an ongoing trend for declining enrollment. Not only does our enrollment continue to decline, but our student population that remains continues to increase in need for mental health services and academic interventions. This combination creates quite the dilemma for our schools and it makes decision making twice as critical as in the past.

While working on my dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh, I originally began research on transition plans for special education students returning to public schools, but I realized in the midst of this research that although this research was valuable, it was not going to help as many students and staff as I would like. When the school board had to make some difficult decisions, decisions that I know we did not all agree with, it made me wonder how other districts dealt with similar scenarios. While sometimes ___ ems like the only place in the world to me, I couldn't imagine that other districts had not gone through similar situations. I began to research this very topic, and while doing so, I discovered that in fact, public schools across the United States are losing enrollment, and keeping with the theme, the students that they do have are suffering from increased mental health concerns and academic need, and the districts are losing funds due to the ongoing decreases in enrollment.

The common strategy used in overcoming these obstacles was the concept of rightsizing, "Rightsizing is a proactive approach to managing an organization based on economic needs, trends, and new ideas (Kokemuller, 2018)." Almost all of the districts that I researched utilized this strategy for making decisions. The strategies that were used included a review of the current status of the district, both economically and demographically, and obtaining feedback from the community and staff of the district on what they believe is most important when making decisions for the district. This information is then shared with the school board of directors and administration to take into consideration when making decisions.

I am looking for volunteers to work together to become the voice of our staff and to share what they believe the school board and administration should keep as the focus for moving forward. As our enrollment continues to change, and the community we serve continues to change with it, we must also accept change. The difference is that I am asking for you to have a voice in how we move forward with these decisions.

If you are interested in being a participant in these focus groups, please go to the sign-up link at the bottom of this email. If you have specific questions regarding the focus groups, please email me (I am out of the district). Important things to know about the focus groups:

1. I can only take between 5-10 participants, and they must be as close to equal representation from each building as possible.

2. Your responses will be entirely anonymous. I will be recording the sessions and then sending them to a third party to have them transcribed so that no one will know who made each statement. Each participant will

1

106

receive a copy of the transcription prior to the information being shared with the school board and administration.

2. Mr. ____, has graciously volunteered to work with me throughout this process to ensure that everything stays transparent.

3. Focus group members are encouraged to attend the school board meeting in February where the outcome of the meetings will be shared.

4. Community focus groups will also be taking place. The groups will be asked almost identical questions as the teacher focus groups and this information will also be shared at the school board meeting.

Thank you for hanging in there to read this very long email. I sincerely hope that all of you have a very relaxing and joyful holiday break.

Sign-up Link: _____

Thank you,

Misty L. Slavic
Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Director of Special Education

A.5   Focus Group Data Matrix

Table 11. Focus Group Data Matrix

Category Code	Focus Group 1: Ten parents of students currently enrolled in the district	Focus Group 2: A mixed group of ten parents who have children currently enrolled and community members who do not have students enrolled in the district	Teacher Focus Group: Nine teachers, three from each of the three buildings in the district	Summary Tags	Budget Codes Impacted
Curriculum/ Instruction	• Meaningful Learning Experiences • Project-based learning • No homework • Teaching to the test • Students have A's in class but cannot pass the Keystone • Need more challenging courses • More course options	• More class options • Declining test scores • Teaching to the test • Middle school math is the worst • Basic life skills needs to be offered • Put less stress on testing • Variety in classes • Increase in course offerings • Focus on the	• Add transitional grade between K and 1 • Increase in remediation • Create benchmarks prior to entry into a grade level so you know where the students are academically • Create a retention policy	• More class options: Challenging, variety, remediation • Life Skills classes • Career Readiness focus • Focus less on testing	1. Instruction

Table 11 continued

	• Life skills classes • A wide range of career tracks • Different methods of learning • Give students more opportunities to find out what inspires them • Meaningful transitions between high school and life • Teach critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication	student, not the statistics and averages • Add newer technology and software • Continually work towards making the special . Ed. program the Premiere program in the county	• Better use of professional development time		
Buildings and Grounds		• Safe environment • Fix the heating and cooling issues in all buildings • Fix the bell situation in the ¾ wing		• Update school buildings to meet temperature needs	5. Facilities Acquisitions, Construction, and Improvement Services

Table 11 continued

Academic Achievement				
• Test scores declining • Inconsistent test scores • Need a lack of focus on test scores • Other districts with similar demographics doing well, but we are not • Need for test-taking strategies • Above average students not being challenged	• Stop focusing on test scores	• Students are behind academically due to the increase in mental health needs and outside responsibilities • Lack of parent engagement in the education process • Gaps in learning due to transience • Student attendance causing gaps in learning • Growth isn't always seen by a test score • Movement of test scores is going to be minimal until the socioeconomic issues are dealt with • We are told to differentiate all	• Standardized test scores are declining • Student needs, both academically and behaviorally or increasing, which impacts learning • Standardized testing preparation is needed	1. Instruction 2. Support Services

Table 11 continued

			day long, but the state assessment does not differentiate ● Need for more remediation to close gaps ● Need for focused opportunities to grow "lesson studies" ● Same academic concerns happen year after year, but never resolved ● Need to know student's strengths and weaknesses before they come in the door		
Administration	● Be willing to see if new ideas work ● More transparency with decisions ● Teachers and	● Follow-through ● Increase in communication ● Show appreciation for what teachers do ● Empower staff	● Administrative turnover creates issues for the direction of the district ● Be consistent	● Transparency with decision making ● Working collaboratively with all groups ● Consistent	Not Applicable

111

Table 11 continued

	admin. Working collaboratively, respectfully, and with consideration of student needs first ● Need to put greater trust into our teacher's opinions and abilities ● Open communication	● Create a positive atmosphere ● Good, strong leadership ● State why a change is being made, be truthful and honest ● Stick with decisions and don't give up after one semester	and follow through ● Have a consistent vision ● Make teachers feel valued ● Consistency with administration ● Open communication and transparency ● Teachers need to feel that the administrators in the building level are going to communicate to central admin. Effectively, who are then going to communicate to the board effectively ● Implement programs and initiatives as a district, not	vision and follow-through ● Improve morale with teachers ● Open and trustworthy communication in a timely manner	

Table 11 continued

			• like dominoes • Have teachers involved in the decision making • Know everyone's strengths and use them • Communicate with staff before word gets out into the community and gossip takes over		
Teachers	• More Special Education Teachers (FRD) • Pressure for students to achieve due to evaluations • Large class sizes make it hard to control student behaviors • Engaged teachers • Increase the number of teachers per grade	• Better rapport with admin • Follow-through with what you say you are going to do • Better student/teacher relationships • Better communication between schools	• Teachers are dealing with a lot more outside issues than they had to deal with in the last 10-15 year • A feeling of hopelessness, how can they educate students who are coming in with so many problems?	• Better communication between schools • Increase positive relationships among students/staff, administration/ staff, staff/staff • Improve teacher morale	Not Applicable

Table 11 continued

	• More collaboration needed horizontally and vertically • Better communication between grade levels • The huge gap between 8th and 9th-grade expectations • Need more passion from teachers • Provide incentives for teachers to learn different skills		• Teachers are being asked to do more with less • Continually decreasing staff is slowly deteriorating their ability to provide education • Socioeconomics should not impact teacher evaluations • Most consistent thing in the district is teachers		
Support Staff	• Additional paraprofessionals (spec. Ed. Students) • Remediation (free reduced lunch impact)	• More support for students • More special education staff	• Increase in support for special education • Increase in staff to address emotional needs, social needs • More counselors	• Increase the number of special education teachers • Add counselors or behavior specialists	1. Instruction 2. Support Services

Table 11 continued

			● More remediation teachers		
Resources	● Mental health supports (FRD) ● Nutritional (FRD) ● Parent Training (FRD) ● Teacher resources available ● Share resources with other districts		● Push resources down to help the elementary so that by the time they get to MS or HS they have the tools that they need ● Need more tutoring ● Emotional support students need a cool down room or program ● Sensory area or cool down room for secondary students ● Emotional support students are increasing, but	● Increase mental health supports ● Provide training to staff and parents on how to help students who are economically disadvantaged ● Increase teachers that can provide remediation ● Add resources (i.e. sensory room for teens), or other tools so support students	1. Instruction 2. Support Services

Table 11 continued

■			resources are decreasing at the district level		
Students	• Declining Enrollment • Test exhaustion • Not caring about the test • Test anxiety • Students in crisis • Student disruptive behavior increases • Average students slipping through the cracks • Above average students are bored • Middle school students just killing time until high school • MS ⅝ elementary, but ⅞ has the secondary mindset, too much disparity, but ⅞ still feel	• Increase in special needs • Increase in FRL • Student test anxiety, or poor test takers • Student responsibilities outside of the school are increasing	• Student learning is more difficult due to outside factors out of their control • Kindergarten is not ready when they come in • Students need more attention and love • Students need to drive their own education	• Student text anxiety is impacting student standardized test results • FRL population has obligations and stressors outside of the school day, work with community to find solutions • Increase student intrinsic motivation • Align instruction to ALL student needs, not only the students who are scoring poorly • Consistent	1. Instruction 2. Support Services

Table 11 continued

	babied ● Huge gap in expectations from ⅞ to high school ● Make students aware of activities shared by districts in the county			expectations across the district	
School Board	● Open Communication ● Cut costs anywhere needed outside of core functions ● Raise taxes if needed ● More dialogue with the community during meetings ● Additional sessions for dialogue ● More recognition of academics and less emphasis on athletics ● Fix sound	● Transparency ● Better relationships with admin, teachers, and community ● Follow-through ● Real and honest communication ● Respectful representation, or engagement ● Consistency with procedures ● Make decisions that are best for everyone, not just one or ten, everyone ● Do research before making decisions ● Get feedback	● Make teachers feel appreciated and heard ● Need common and consistent goals ● Open communication and transparency ● Respectful interactions ● See the community how it really is NOW, not twenty years ago ● Be more open-minded and trusting	● Open communication ● Positive interactions with stakeholders	Not Applicable

Table 11 continued

		from the community	- Invest in education and don't always look at the bottom line - Have teachers involved in the decision making - Decisions should be based on things other than money - Create opportunities for buy-in - Find a way to communicate important topics that will be voted on prior to the vote		
Other	- Changing the perception of the district - Parent volunteer opportunities need to increase - Smaller class sizes	- Declining enrollment - How can we attract more people into coming to the district - Need for	- Lack of parent involvement - Raise taxes ongoing not a huge jump all at once that will hurt community	- Create a positive perception of the district - Increase parent involvement - Create	2.Support Services

Table 11 continued

	● A school that is open to change ● Take community support opportunities ● District passionate about sharing student success in and out of the classroom ● Create a supportive learning environment for our teacher and student	increasing community awareness about the good things happening in the district ● Need before and after school care ● Find ways to bring kids back from cyber or deter them from leaving ● Drug and suicide concerns ● Work as a village, not in isolation ● Be open to more community volunteers ● Community working collaboratively to support the district ● Separation by different elementary schools still apparent ● Smaller class sizes ● Add a nurse	already stressed financially ● Smaller class sizes ● We need a consistent system throughout the district to lean on, follow, and evaluate. ● Common goals ● Increase in morale ● Need time to work together to help the success of everyone ● Everyone needs to collaborate towards the same goal ● Every stakeholder group, even sometimes within the groups, are working independently,	common goals and vision for the district	

Table 11 continued

		- Make the entire district a safety zone so that families can come here at all times and know their kids are safe - Create the best atmosphere for students	not together High school needs a schoolwide behavior plan		

Bibliography

About IDEA | Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/

Ambler, A. (n.d.). Rightsizing vs. downsizing? Big difference! *Ambler*. Retrieved from http://ambler.com/article-library/rightsizing-vs-downsizing-big-difference/

American Psychological Association, 2019. Education and socioeconomic status. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/education

Child Accounting. (2017). Retrieved from https://www.education.pa.gov/Teachers%20-%20Administrators/Child%20Accounting/Pages/default.aspx

Cohen, J., Elias, M. (2010). *School climate: Building safe, supportive and engaging classrooms and schools*. Naples, Florida: National Professional Resources.

Conn, J. (2017, June 28). Akron public schools cut 93 positions, save $6.7 million, mostly because of mergers. Retrieved from https://www.cleveland.com/akron/index.ssf/2017/06/akron_board_of_education_elimi.html

Dawkins, C. E. (2014). The principle of good faith: Toward substantive stakeholder engagement. *Journal of Business Ethics, 121*(2), 283-295.

Esselman, M., Lee-Gwin, R., & Rounds, M. (2012). Rightsizing a school district: A dramatic self-examination led the Kansas City, Mo., public schools to close schools and cut $68 million from its annual budget. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *93*(6), 56-62.

Ewy, R. W. (2009). *Stakeholder-Driven Strategic Planning in Education: A Practical Guide for Developing and Deploying Successful Long-Range Plans*. Milwaukee, WI: ASQ Quality Press.

Glesne, C., Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction.* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Hitt, M. A., Keats, B. W., Harback, H. F., & Nixon, R. D. (1994). Rightsizing: building and maintaining strategic leadership and long-term competitiveness. *Organizational Dynamics*, *23*(2), 18-33.

Holmes-Smith, P. (2006). S*ocioeconomic density and its effect on school performance*. Sydney, AU: New South Wales Department of Education and Training.

Hussar, W. J., & Bailey, T. M. (n.d.). *Projections of education statistics to 2026*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018019.pdf

Jimmerson, L. (n.d.) How school districts are overcoming declining enrollment trends. Retrieved from https://www.schoolmint.com/moving-forward-when-enrollment-is-declining/

Lolli, E. (2018). *Rightsizing the Dayton Public Schools*. Retrieved from file:///Users/Misty/Desktop/Dayton Public Schoolsrightsizing-presentation.pdf

Kokemuller, N. "What Is Organizational Rightsizing?" Small Business - Chron.com, Retrieved from https://smallbusiness.chron.com/organizational-rightsizing-78217.html.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Malik, A. (2018, May 10). Facing enrollment decline, SAISD begins teacher layoffs. Retrieved from https://www.mysanantonio.com/news/education/article/Facing-enrollment-decline-SAISD-begins-teacher-12901420.php

Niehaus, M. (2018, October 21). Burlington schools host "right-sizing" sessions. Retrieved November 24, 2018, from https://www.thehawkeye.com/news/20181021/burlington-schools-host-right-sizing-sessions

PA Network for Student Assistance Services (2019). *What is SAP?* Retrieved from pnsas.org/About-SAP/General-SAP-in-PA

PA School Board Association. (2018). *Pennsylvania State of Education 2018 State of Education Report | Pennsylvania*. Retrieved from www.psba.org

Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2018). Test Scores. Retrieved from https://www.education.pa.gov/DataAndReporting/Pages/Test-Scores.aspx

Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2016). Enrollment reports and projections. Retrieved from https://www.education.pa.gov/Data-and-Statistics/Pages/Enrollment Reports and Projections.aspx

Posey, P. A. (n.d.). *Stakeholder engagement for strategic planning*. Retrieved from http://www.everettcc.edu/ccec/enewsletters/stakeholder-engagement-strategic-planning

Rado, D. (2018, April 19). Top 10 states expecting drops in public school enrollment. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/sites/dianerado/2018/04/19/top-10-states-expecting-drops-in-public-school-enrollment/#2123758a7014

SEDR Reports. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://penndata.hbg.psu.edu/PublicReporting/SEDRReports/tabid/2528/Default.aspx

St. Cyr, R. (2017). *Decision Making Process and Declining Enrollments in Northern New England* (Doctoral dissertation, Southern New Hampshire University) (pp. 1-165). Proquest Dissertation Publishing. Retrieved from https://search-proquest-com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/docview/1884296831?pq-origsite=summon

Stumm, S. V. (2017). Socioeconomic status amplifies the achievement gap throughout compulsory education independent of intelligence. *Intelligence, 60*, 57-62. doi:10.1016/j.intell.2016.11.006

Thomson, S., & De Bortoli, L. (2010). *Challenges for Australian education: Results from PISA 2009*. Melbourne, AU: ACER.

United States Census Bureau (2010). *Data tools and apps*. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov

United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition (2018). *Income eligibility guidelines*. Retrieved rom https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines

What is downsizing? Reasons why companies downsize. (n.d.) Retrieved from https://marketbusinessnews.com/financial-glossary/downsizing/