

4-2021

## The Advantages and Disadvantages to Small Town School Districts and Their Communities After Athletics Consolidation

Kacey Lane  
kacey.moline@go.winona.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openriver.winona.edu/leadershipeducationcapstones>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Leadership Studies Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Lane, Kacey, "The Advantages and Disadvantages to Small Town School Districts and Their Communities After Athletics Consolidation" (2021). *Leadership Education Capstones*. 54.  
<https://openriver.winona.edu/leadershipeducationcapstones/54>

This Capstone Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Leadership Education - Graduate Studies at OpenRiver. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leadership Education Capstones by an authorized administrator of OpenRiver. For more information, please contact [klarson@winona.edu](mailto:klarson@winona.edu).

The Advantages and Disadvantages to Small Town School Districts and Their Communities

After Athletics Consolidation

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of the Department of Leadership Education

College of Education

of Winona State University

by

Kacey R. M. Lane

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Science

April 28, 2021

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Problem Statement</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Purpose of the Study</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Delimitations and Limitations</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Definition of Terms</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Review of the Literature</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>History of High School Sports Associations</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) Cooperative Teams Procedure</b> ..	<b>9</b>
<b>Advantages of Sports Programs Consolidation</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Disadvantages of Sports Programs Consolidation</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Theoretical Framework</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Research Methodology</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Research Design</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Sample</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Instruments</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>Data Collection Procedure</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Results</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Description of Sample</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Data Analysis</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<i>Research Question 1</i> .....	<b>22</b>
<i>Research Question 2</i> .....	<b>24</b>
<i>Research Question 3</i> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Discussion and Conclusions</b> .....	<b>27</b>

<b>Theoretical Connection .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Research Question 1 Discussion .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<i>Theme 1: Bonds, Friendships and Relationships .....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Theme 2: Competitive Advantage and Ability to Compete .....</i>	<i>29</i>
<b>Research Question 2 Discussion .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<i>Theme 1: Time and Travel.....</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Theme 2: Balance and Keeping Things Fair.....</i>	<i>31</i>
<b>Research Question 3 Discussion .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<i>Theme 1: Tradition, Identity and Rivalries .....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Theme 2: Communication .....</i>	<i>33</i>
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Leadership Implications.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Implications for Leadership Practice.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<i>Conclusion 1.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Implication: .....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Conclusion 2: .....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Implication: .....</i>	<i>36</i>
<b>Recommendations for Future Research .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Summary.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Appendix A.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Appendix B.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>40</b>

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

Nothing brings a small rural town together like high school sports. Unfortunately, when high school sports hit challenging times, support for programs and participation in programs decrease. When sports programs hit low numbers in participation they need to think about the program's future. Some schools consider eliminating the programs. Graves (2010) stated that communities often resist full school consolidation to be able to protect their sports teams. Graves (2010) believes that to lose a school and its colors would relinquish one's identity. Small communities thrive off the school districts and take pride in their academics and athletics. With the lack of student athlete numbers, it endangers the future of the athletic programs for many rural school districts. Full school consolidation might not be the answer for some rural schools but consolidating athletic programs have kept the dreams for small school districts alive.

In the year 1982, Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletics Association also known as the WIAA, approved an amendment to the Constitution, Bylaws and Rules of Eligibility permitting cooperative teams (Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, 2007). A cooperative program is defined as two or more member schools forming a single team in a sport (Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association, n.d.). This opportunity gives schools districts to stay separate entities in buildings and academics but can give opportunities to school districts to consolidate athletics to become one also known as a cooperative team. The change of turning two programs into one is often scary for all parties involved, but with the change obstacles, advantages and disadvantages emerge.

## **Problem Statement**

According to Author (2019), the second major factor in the decline in youth athletic participation is lack of players. He believes that there are simply not enough student athletes to continue a program. Author (2019) gave an example of a rural school district who has only 12 players on its 11-man football team. He states that out of the twelve athletes, nine will be graduating within the next two years, and there are not enough student athletes to replace these with the upcoming classes. With the lack of numbers of student athletes, it endangers the future of the athletic programs.

The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) found that students who participate in school programs, whether it is athletics or any other extracurricular activity, have less truancy, lower dropout rates, fewer disciplinary issues, and better grade point averages on average than their peers who have involvement. (Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, 2007).

Author (2019) suggests students who are denied the opportunity with athletics could be denied the opportunity to build essential transferable skills; communication, decision making, time management and self-esteem. This research study was designed to understand the obstacles, advantages, and disadvantages that rural schools and communities endured to keep their students' interscholastic activities available to students.

## **Background**

Wisconsin has a large classification of rural districts. Kemp (2018) suggests "4 percent of the school districts in Wisconsin are urban, while 19 percent are suburban. Most school districts in the state are classified as either towns at 22 percent or rural at 55 percent". (para.7) Kemp (2018) study found that an overall number of 60 percent of Wisconsin public school students

attend urban and suburban districts. Only 19 percent of children attend rural districts. In any district declining enrollment can affect any school district, but rural districts have had drastic decline. Kemp (2018) found that “59 percent of Wisconsin’s school districts experienced declining enrollment from 2012-13 to 2016-17”. (para.25)

Dolph (2008) discussed pros and cons in consolidation to school districts. He states that consolidation may not be the answer for every school district. Every case will need to be examined and potentially agreed upon what is best for the students. Having open communication among all parties is needed and necessary for any consolidation transition to happen. When looking at the positives of consolidation you can provide more enriched curricular offerings and flexibility for the students, ability to offer larger extracurricular offerings, and staffing which can improve overall well-being for students. (Dolph, 2008)

Dolph (2008) believed that community identity, passion and pride may be lost in sports only consolidation. He states a concern regarding larger school districts can only provide quality education instruction. Evidence does show that smaller school districts bring optimum student learning.

Small communities thrive off the school districts and take pride in their academics and athletics. Consolidations can also improve future students' education and athletics by providing new resources that can give them a jump to the real world. Smaller school districts have found ways to make it through the trying times and one way has been using their resources. Full school consolidation might not be the answer for some rural schools but consolidating athletic programs have kept the dreams for small school districts alive.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the advantages and disadvantages of four small-town schools to recognize if consolidating sports programs was the best option for the school districts who have separate buildings and academics. The study was to determine the effects of the transition of the consolidation in the eyes of the athletes and administration and prepare other small-town school districts with future athletic consolidation.

The research questions that guided the study are:

RQ1: What are the advantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

RQ2: What are the disadvantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

RQ3: What are the obstacles of athletic only consolidation?

This study will be useful for many Wisconsin high schools' athletic departments researching before they proceed in consolidating with another school athletics. The research will give background to the schools of the advantages and disadvantages of the transition that many have to endure with the change in small town high school athletic departments.

## **Delimitations and Limitations**

The researcher recognizes that issues could affect the results in this research. First, the small sample used in this study is not sufficient to generalize to other groups. Second, the time scope for the sample size is limited; hence the sample has been combined with the schools for only a few years.

## **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions will be applicable and used for the purposes of this study:

**Community:** This is an area of any size in which the people have common interests or interests. A community is a defined place or location where groups of people interact for mutual support (Smith, 2003).

**Community Members:** Residents of the geographic area comprising the school district. The residents may reside in the rural area or within the city limits of the towns within the school district (Smith, 2003).

**Consolidation:** Consolidation or reorganization is the combining of two or more districts to form a new school district as a new corporation under state laws (Anderson, 2009).

**Cooperative:** While often used interchangeably with consolidation or merger. A cooperative program is defined as two or more member schools forming a single team in a sport. (Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association, n.d.)

**Interscholastic Athletics:** Interscholastic athletics are an extension of the classroom that provide teaching and learning experiences for all involved. (Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Associations, 2015)

## **Summary**

Chapter one included an introduction to the study of the “The Advantages and Disadvantages to Small Town School Districts and Their Communities After Athletics Consolidation.” Chapter two presents a review of literature that is essential to this study. The topics that are included are the history of high school sports associations, Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) procedure on cooperating teams, and Advantages and Disadvantages of consolidation of schools.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate four small town schools to recognize the consolidation advantages, disadvantages, and obstacles for the four communities' sports programs.

### **History of High School Sports Associations**

Since 1920, The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) has led the development of education based interscholastic sports and activities that help students succeed in their lives.

The NFHS serves its 51-member state high school athletic/activity associations, plus the District of Columbia. The NFHS publishes playing rules in 16 sports for boys' and girls' competition and administers fine arts programs in speech, theater, debate and music. It provides a variety of program initiatives that reach the 19,500 high schools and over 12 million students involved in athletic and activity programs (NFHS, 2020).

Years before the National Federation of State High School Association was developed, the state of Wisconsin established the first high school athletic association. The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association known as the WIAA, goes back to late 1895 and early 1896 when meetings were held with individuals interested in promoting athletic competition between high schools. Wisconsin became a charter member in 1923 to the National Federation of State High School Association (Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, n.d.).

### **Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) Cooperative Teams Procedure**

In Wisconsin, before establishing a consolidation for a high school sport, the two or more schools need to follow a step-by-step process before being awarded the request of a cooperative agreement between school districts (Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, n.d.).

As follows is the WIAA procedure of approval of request:

In 1982, the WIAA membership approved an amendment to the Constitution, Bylaws and Rules of Eligibility permitting cooperative teams. The following language from the WIAA Official Handbook outlines rules governing the formation and approval process of cooperative teams. The WIAA contact person for cooperative team matters is Dorothy Sankey.

A. The Board of Control has authority to approve cooperative team sponsorship (one team in a given sport involving two or more member schools) under the following conditions:

- 1) The schools involved must be in the same geographical area.
- 2) The agreement for a cooperative team must specify two school years, but that agreement may be terminated by the Board of Control for documented extenuating circumstances.
- 3) Applications for initial approval, or renewal of approval of a cooperative team, must include a completed and signed Cooperative Team Request Form, reflecting:
  - a. Approval of involved schools.
  - b. Approval of involved Board(s) of Education or Governing Bodies.
  - c. Approval of conference in which the cooperative team will participate.
- 4) Total enrollment of schools involved in a cooperative team will determine classification of competition in the WIAA tournament series.
- 5) Requests, for approval or dissolution, must meet the following deadline dates to be considered for the subsequent school year:
  - Fall Sports - February 1
  - Winter Sports - April 1
  - Spring Sports and Summer Baseball - June 1 (Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, n.d.).

### **Advantages of Sports Programs Consolidation**

In the early 1900s, the main targets of school consolidation were rural school districts. Dolph (2008) stated that during this time there was a belief that the best approach to education was to have a centralized model. Meaning that all schools in every district would all look alike. Their thought was that large schools can only provide the best education and extra-curricular opportunities. Smaller school districts have found ways to make it through the trying times and one way has been using their resources with nearby school districts. When change with consolidation occurs advantages and disadvantages come forth.

Dolph (2008), stated advantages about whole school consolidation that can relate to extra-curricular consolidation. The first advantage Dolph (2008) explains, is that consolidation gives the opportunity to give enriched curricular offerings by combining districts resources with another school district. This can relate to an advantage for athletic only consolidation. Combining resources gives opportunities for school districts to be flexible. One resource that can be taken advantage of is facilities. Working with two separate districts gives athletic programs two facilities for practices and competitions.

Dolph (2008) believed the second advantage is staffing. Dolph (2008) states that it can be challenging for most school districts to staff in certain areas in education. School districts can agree that staffing in academics and athletics is difficult. Having multiple school districts and communities gives more access to staff athletic teams.

The third advantage Dolph (2008) brought forth is an opportunity for consolidated school districts to expand extra-curricular activities. With a limited student enrollment, smaller school districts cannot offer a variety of extra-curricular activities. This might mean having to cancel programs on a year-to-year basis depending on numbers for each program. Consolidating athletic programs between two or more districts provides a larger pool of athletes. A larger number of athletes gives the opportunity for teams to grow each year.

The fourth advantage of consolidation “is a more diversified student enrollment and increased opportunities for social stimulation.” (Dolph, 2008 p.27). Dolph (2008) suggested that daily interaction of students from different communities enriches the school environment, resulting in a more informed and culturally aware student body. Small communities thrive off the school districts and take pride in their academics and athletics.

## **Disadvantages of Sports Programs Consolidation**

Athletic consolidation can meet a lot of needs for districts that need to keep extra-curricular activities available for their students. Dolph (2008) reiterated that small rural communities are built around their school district. The pride and passion that communities show to their school districts also follows their athletic programs. The first advantage is school districts may fail to have the image and name that once was.

A second disadvantage, Dolph (2008) stated is that school consolidation perceives larger schools are better quality. Consolidating athletic programs between two or more districts give a larger pool of athletes. A larger pool of athletes can mean better quality of athletes, that will take away playing time from athletes. This may discourage athletes to participate in extra-curricular activities.

Dolph (2008) brought to perspective that smaller school districts lead to close staff – student relationships. A third disadvantage for staffing consolidation is potential for weak relationships between coaches-athletes. It will be a concern even if each school is being represented, and the student-athletes are coached by the host school. Dolph (2008) supports that smaller districts promote a larger social and emotional support for students. With athletics only consolidation, it gives coaches more students to look after and more emotional support potentially not being met.

## **Theoretical Framework**

For many rural schools, the size of the student body means that limited possibilities exist for extra-curricular athletic opportunities. Teams must have a minimum number of players; therefore, a small school may not be able to offer sports teams that a larger school can. This study will be useful for many Wisconsin high school's athletic departments researching before

they proceed in co-oping with another school. The research will give background to the schools of the obstacles and advantages that many must endure with the change in small town high school athletic departments.

School districts find ways to survive as they use their resources and implement change. In this research we can consider the school districts as an organization. Research by Amis and Aissaoui (2013) stated that institutional theory focuses more on adaptive aspects of social structure. Amis and Aissaoui (2013) emphasized that the process of social structure includes rules, norms and routines that are established by social behavior. For many school districts rules, norms and routines play a big role within their everyday procedures.

Burke (2017) stated that organizations change all the time, each and every day. School districts with a cooperative relationship will have to modify a once constant mission, strategy, leadership, and culture.

Amis and Aissaoui (2013) stated that institutional theory informs us that individuals are surrounded in a web of interactions that help them make decisions, shape their behaviors and thoughts. Amis and Aissaoui (2013) believed that an institutional perspective can help organizations understand and prepare for change readiness. When it comes to change you will find individuals within the school district that will show resistance to the change. Before making the change, schools must anticipate reaction from athletes, administration and the communities.

Consolidation with rural athletics is needed for different reasonings. Amis and Aissaoui (2013) stated the institutional approach will show the readiness of individual, group and organizations, and how they react through analysis. Burke (2017) believed that planned change will not happen without leadership. With a mission and culture change to a school district it all starts with leadership. All school districts need to be on the same page to have successful

change. Administration, staff and coaches must be motivated and committed to the new purpose. They will be creating the atmosphere for all current and future student-athletes. With this atmosphere student-athletes will have individual responses on how the change affected them and is able to bring to perspective their opinions of advantages, disadvantages and overcoming obstacles when faced head on with them.

### **Summary**

The second chapter, review of literature is provided for the history of sports associations, information for the process of co-oping of two or more high school sports programs. The third chapter will provide the methodology used during the research of the consolidation of athletics in small rural districts. Included in the third chapter you will find the sample, instruments used to provide the data, data collection procedure and data analysis.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate four small town schools to recognize the consolidation advantages, disadvantages, and obstacles for the four communities' sports programs.

#### **Research Design**

According to Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005), the strength of the qualitative research is to have the “human” side of an issue that has often conflicting behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005), believe an advantage to qualitative methods is that it gives the researcher the capacity to explore research and use open-ended questions. This gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words rather than answering with fixed responses. Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005), believed that open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher, rich, and explanatory in nature.

Another advantage of qualitative methods that Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) stated it allows the researcher to have flexibility to probe initial participant responses. The research study is designed to understand and analyze the experiences that past high school student-athletes and administrators went through in athletic only consolidations between four small town school districts. Qualitative research will allow the researcher to explore the advantages and flexibility consolidation has to offer for small-town school districts.

The research questions are:

1. What are the advantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?
2. What are the disadvantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

3. What are the obstacles of athletic only consolidation?

**Sample**

The participants of this study were a purposive sample of four high schools from four small towns in the state of Wisconsin. These participants participated in school sponsored athletics within the years 2014-2017, that were consolidated with another school district. The four high school districts being researched are from Elmwood, Plum City, Pepin and Alma, Wisconsin. Within the last decade, all four school districts found a need to combine resources and consolidate sports programs only when the programs were in need due to low numbers in their athletics.

Elmwood's population is 800, based on projections of the estimated 2020 census. (World Population Review, 2020) The school building is located in the heart of the town. The school district consists of Pre-kindergarten to the 12th grade in one building. The total number of students in the district is 318. Elmwood Area Schools is made up of 47 percent female and 53 percent males. (High-School.com, 2020) There are a total of 100 9-12th graders, an estimated total number of student athletes in the district is 55. Elmwood Area Schools offers football, volleyball, cross country, wrestling, basketball, softball, baseball, track, cheerleading, and dance. (Elmwood High School, 2020)

Plum City's population is 626, based on projections of the estimated 2020 census. (World Population Review, 2020). The school district has two separate buildings, grades Pre-K to 5th grade in one building and 6th to 12th grade in another building. The total number of students in the district is 264. Plum City Area Schools are made up of 44 percent female and 56 percent males. (High-School.com, 2020) There are a total of 92 9-12th graders an estimated total number of student-athletes in the district is 43. Plum City Area Schools offers football, volleyball, cross

country, basketball, softball, baseball, track, cheerleading, and dance. (School District of Plum City, 2020)

Pepin's population is 770, based on projections of the estimated 2020 census. (World Population Review, 2020) The school building is located in the heart of the town. The school district consists of Pre-kindergarten to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade in one building. The total number of students in the district is 226. Pepin Area Schools are made up of 43 percent female and 57 percent males. (High-School.com, 2020) There are a total of 70 9-12th graders, an estimated total number of student-athletes in the district is 62. Pepin Area Schools, offers football, volleyball, basketball, softball, baseball, track, golf, and dance. (Pepin Area Schools, 2020)

Alma's population is 756, based on projections of the estimated 2020 census. (World Population Review, 2020). The school building is located one mile north of the town. The school consists of Pre-kindergarten to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade in one building. The total number of students in the district is 242, and 70 of them are 9-12th graders. Alma Area Schools are made of 43 percent female and 57 percent male. (High-School.com, 2020) There are a total of 70 9-12th graders, estimated total number of student-athletes in the district is 48. Alma Area Schools athletic department offers football, volleyball, basketball, softball, baseball, track, golf, and dance. (Alma High School, 2020)

Elmwood and Plum City are fourteen miles apart. In 1998, they started the consolidation of the spring track program. Elmwood had a cooperative relationship with the Spring Valley School district and is active presently for their wrestling program. Elmwood and Plum City have gone back and forth for years on whether to consolidate programs or not. Through the years they have gone through the process as only if a program needs to be consolidated. In the Spring of 2012, they were approved to consolidate Elmwood and Plum City for the football, cheerleading,

and cross-country programs. In 2014-2015, the winter season for girls' and boys' basketball was approved. There was a need due to numbers in 2018 for the baseball program to consolidate, with a year later in 2019 they completed the consolidation with Softball and Volleyball. Today they are known as Elmwood-Plum City or EPC Wolves.

Pepin and Alma are fifteen miles apart from each other, following Wisconsin state highway 35. Starting in the spring of 2009, Pepin and Alma schools were approved for consolidation between schools for the fall 2009 football team, the 2009-2010 boys' and girls' basketball teams, and the 2009-2010 dance team. In the spring 2011 the approval for combining the spring sports; golf, track, baseball and softball were approved. In the spring of 2016, volleyball was the last athletic program to be consolidated and to this date all sports are known as Alma-Pepin or Pepin-Alma Eagles.

The sample group for this research are athletes and administration from each school districts that were a part of the athletic consolidation during the years of 2014-2017. These were the years that the schools' districts were in the process of consolidating all their programs or were in the process that it would be happening in the future. The age range of the athlete samples are 20-25 years of age. There are 150 athlete alumni who will receive the survey.

### **Instruments**

A survey was used to collect information about the advantages, disadvantages and obstacles that students and administrators endured during athletic teams' consolidation. Qualitative data were gathered from the sample of administration during 2014-2017. Twelve individuals that held an administration role were asked to provide a more detailed examination of the experiences and perceptions related to the research questions. The second sample group was

athletes from the four school districts during 2014-2017. Qualitative data was gathered from this sample.

A request was made to all administration who held a position as a superintendent, principal, or athletic director in the consolidation of sports in 2014-2017. Based on the request of the participant, the researcher attached the survey and the informed consent in an email communication. A follow-up request was made by phone and email one week after the initial request to encourage participation of individuals who did not respond to the initial request.

A request was made to all athletes who participated in consolidated sports in 2014-2017. Based on the request of the participant, the researcher attached the survey and the informed consent in an email communication. A follow-up request was made by an email one week after the initial request to encourage participation of individuals who did not respond to the initial request.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The research process for this study involved collecting information from subjects. The study was approved by the IRB and given an “Exempt” status. The IRB approval letter for this study can be found in Appendix B.

Survey research is the gathering of information from a sample of individuals. Surveys can be done a number of ways; within this research the survey was conducted using a web-based software called Qualtrics.

The survey with open-ended questions was emailed to the participants with a link to the survey. This gave participants the opportunity to respond in their own words rather than answering with fixed responses. A pilot study was conducted with the administrators of the school districts to have the opportunity for the researcher to have the capacity to explore the

research and have clarity on their responses. This gave the researcher control in the data-gathering process to ensure that the results would be useful and meaningful to the overall study.

The researcher worked with individuals from each school district to identify the sample of athletes in the years 2014-2017 who would be surveyed for the study. The athletes received an email that invited them to participate in the survey. Two weeks after the initial email, a reminder email to participate in the survey was sent. The emails were sent by the researcher but forwarded on to the participants by the school district employee.

### **Data Analysis**

According to Thorne (2000), qualitative analytic strategies rely on an approach called constant comparative analysis. Thorne (2000) stated, “In many qualitative studies whose purpose it is to generate knowledge about common patterns and themes within human experience, this process continues with the comparison of each new interview or account until all have been compared with each other.” (para. 9)

Qualitative data received through completion of the survey were analyzed in association with the research study questions. The researcher analyzed the data to determine specific words, phrases, themes or recurring trends within the participants responses. In the data analysis, it was the researcher’s responsibility to analyze all data equally and unbiased, so the results from the data are accurately represented from the participants experiences and perceptions.

### **Summary**

This chapter focused on the methodology for a brief overview of the research design and the sample in the study of small-town sports team’s only consolidation. Qualitative research methods using a survey are appropriate to the purpose and research questions of this study. It

described the survey instrument implemented to conduct the study. The fourth chapter will go in-depth with the sample and data analysis collected through the survey.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

This chapter reviewed the results and analysis of the qualitative data compiled from the survey. Data analysis included analyzing a total of 39 surveys and encoding themes and writing up the results. Thorne (2000) stated, “In many qualitative studies whose purpose it is to generate knowledge about common patterns and themes within human experience, this process continues with the comparison of each new interview or account until all have been compared with each other.” (para. 9) Comparison was used extract data until themes emerged.

This chapter presented the findings of the qualitative data that contain the results conducted to answer the research questions:

RQ1: What are the advantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

RQ2: What are the disadvantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

RQ3: What are the obstacles of athletic only consolidation?

### **Description of Sample**

Athletes and administration who were part of Alma-Pepin or Elmwood-Plum City cooperative athletic programs between 2014-2017 were distributed electronic surveys. The survey was given to 150 athletes and 12 administrators. Within the administration individuals that held or hold a role as Principal, Athletic Director, and Superintendent were given the survey, seven (58%) out of twelve administration, 58 percent responded to the survey. Out of 150 athletes 32 (21%) responded to the survey within the two-week timeframe.

### **Data Analysis**

#### ***Research Question 1***

To explore the advantages of small-school district athletic programs only consolidation, the following research question was proposed:

RQ1: What are the advantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

Interview question used to answer the research question was:

Interview Question 1(IQ1): What do you feel were the advantages of athletics being consolidated for your school?

In response to IQ1, “What do you feel were the advantages of athletics being consolidated for your school?”, four of the seven (57%) administrators and 21 of the 32 (66%) athletes believed that friendships and bonds were built.

Administrator Subject 3 stated,

“Once the co-op began, the player pool expanded. It also gave students to establish friendships with similar interests. In a small school, there may not be a lot students with similar interests in your class. Being in the co-op, students were able to reach out to in a nearby community for friends.”

Athlete Subject 31 stated,

“The best advantage was friendships! I gained so many more friends through combining sports. This leads me to the next point, I was a shy student, but because of the school combining sports, I had to break out of my shell.”

Also, in response to IQ1, six (86%) administrators and 28 (86%) athletes stated it gave them a competitive advantage by providing an opportunity to compete against other teams.

Administrator Subject 1 proclaimed,

“Allowed us to have athletes playing at the level that was appropriate. Did not force us to have use younger athletes that were not physically or mentally ready to play at the varsity level.”

Athlete Subject 5 declared,

“Without consolidating, neither school would have been competitive. We were able to have more depth on the bench and were able to do more at practices since we had more bodies. I never participated, but we were also able to have a c-team which allowed more participation led to more competitive teams over time.

## ***Research Question 2***

To investigate the disadvantages of small-school district athletic programs only consolidation, the following research question was proposed:

RQ2: What are the disadvantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

Interview question used to answer the research question was:

Interview Question 2 (IQ2): Through your years within the consolidation of athletics what did you feel were the disadvantages to the athletic consolidation?

In response to IQ2, “Through your years within the consolidation of athletics what did you feel were the disadvantages to the athletic consolidation?”, three of seven (43%) administrators and 20 of 32 (63%) athletes had concerns to time and travel. Athlete Subject 15 stated,

“The amount of bus ride between the two school districts for practice was a large negative. We also split conferences during that time and travel for conference games was frequently over two hours.”

10 (31%) athletes had apprehensions within coaching. Most felt that favoritism was present with players from a host school. A host school is known as the school district who is the contact school for Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association (WIAA) membership questions and concerns. In most cooperative athletics, coaches will come from each school, so athletes have a contact person. Athlete Subject 2 informed,

“If the head coach was not from your school, there often felt like there was a level of “favoritism” between players”.

Athlete Subject 17 voiced,

“Consolidation was difficult when one school would have most of the varsity players. It was hard to see the head coach choose players from their own school over good player from the other school”.

### ***Research Question 3***

To examine the obstacles of small-school district athletic programs only consolidation, the following research questions was proposed:

RQ3: What are the obstacles of athletic only consolidation?

Interview questions used to answer the research question were:

Interview Question 3 (IQ3): What did you feel were the obstacles to the athletic consolidation?

Interview Question 4 (IQ4): What is your advice for other school districts pursuing an athletic consolidation?

In response to IQ3, “What did you feel were the obstacles to the athletic consolidation?”, three of the seven (43%) administrators and 11 of the 32 (34%) suggested that an obstacle was the adults, parents and community from the consolidated school districts. Administrator Subject 4 specified,

“Getting the adults to work together and think like ways for the best of kids”.

Athlete Subject 5 passionately reported,

“Community and overall buy-in was the biggest barrier. I recall many of us girls from Elmwood and Plum City attending board meetings to advocate for the consolidation where we met parents and general community members against the consolidation. The desire to “be” your school was a hard allegiance to overcome”.

Responses from IQ4, “What is your advice for other school districts pursuing an athletic consolidation?”, six of seven (86%) administrators and 10 of 32 (31%) going through the obstacles thought that communication would help be successful for any pursuing schools needed to consolidate their athletic programs. Administrator Subject 3 informed,

“It is very important to work together. You are no longer two individual teams but one. 2 schools, 2 communities, and 1 team. Make sure you keep the communication open and

work together. You need to keep in mind what is in the best interest of the student-athletes”.

Athlete Subject 3 advised,

“I think the most beneficial thing for athletic consolidation was having our athletic directors and important coaches encouraging/describing the benefits of consolidation. Without my primary basketball coach explain his positive view of consolidation, I may not have been in favor of it myself. Getting all the adults on board is a great first in getting students on board.”

### **Summary**

Within the fourth chapter, the researcher gathered qualitative data as confirmation and supporting answers to the three research questions. The data provided the advantages, disadvantages and obstacles for small-town rural school districts to consolidate athletic teams only. Chapter five will summarize the discussions and conclusions through the research, provide leadership implications, and future research recommendations.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions**

The purpose of this was to evaluate four small town schools to recognize the consolidation advantages, disadvantages, and obstacles for the four communities' sports programs. Chapter five summarized the discussions and conclusions through the research, provide leadership implications, and future research recommendations.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The research questions that guided the study are:

RQ1: What are the advantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

RQ2: What are the disadvantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?

RQ3: What are the obstacles of athletic only consolidation?

Data collection was through a web-based survey emailed to the participants with a link to the survey through Qualtrics. Open-ended questions were given within the survey. The researcher used constant comparative analysis to find themes that emerged with the administration and athletes. Two themes emerged for RQ1: (1) bonds, friendships and relationships were built, and (2) competitive advantage and the ability to compete. Two themes emerged for RQ2: (1) time and travel and (2) balance and keeping things fair. Two themes emerged for RQ3: (1) tradition, identity, and rivalries and (2) communication.

### **Theoretical Connection**

Institutional change theory served as the theoretical framework for this qualitative study. Institutional theory can be the steppingstones for individuals and organizations going through change. Coccia (2018) stated that organizations can shape the nature of change on different levels over time and space. Amis and Aissaoui (2013) emphasized that the process of social structure includes rules, norms and routines that are established by social behavior. School

districts with a cooperative relationship will have to modify a once constant mission, strategy, leadership, and culture. Athletic only consolidation doesn't happen overnight, and it takes time to implement the new norms and routines for the athletic programs. School districts need to have adjust to new communication, traveling, and leadership relationships.

Aissaoui and Amis (2013) stated that institutional theory informs us that individuals are surrounded in a web of interactions that help them make decisions, shape their behaviors and thoughts. Burke (2017) believed that planned change will not happen without leadership. With a mission and culture change to a school district it all starts with leadership. All school districts need to be on the same page to have a successful change. Administration and leaders in the communities can support the opportunities with athletic only consolidation and assist the process forward.

Various participants in the study identified that the change in their norm was an obstacle and that it took time but was worth it. Burke (2017) stated that organizations change all the time, each and every day. For example, Administration Subject 3 discussed that communication between the school districts took time. They had to figure out new ways to communicate with athletes and parents, added transportation time to and from co-op schools, and scheduling. Athlete Subjects 1, 2 and 20 expressed that before schools decided to co-op that everyone (communities, parents, students, etc.) keep an open mind, communicate, and commit.

### **Research Question 1 Discussion**

Based on similarity of responses from administration and athletes, themes were identified for the three research questions. Two themes emerged for RQ1, "What are the advantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?": bonds, friendships and relationships were built and competitive advantage and the ability to compete.

### ***Theme 1: Bonds, Friendships and Relationships***

Dolph (2008) stated that consolidation can diversify social stimulation. Dolph (2008) believed that interaction with different communities can improve and develop culturally aware student body. Four (33%) administrators and 21(65%) athletes identified that an advantage to the athletic only consolidation was the friends and relationships that were built during their time.

Hurst and Wallace (2013) believed that little social interaction is taking place in many classrooms. High school is an important time to build relationships. As educators, you are trying to build well rounded intellectual students. When you are from a small school district you grow up with many of the same individuals from grades PreK to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Your circle of friends is limited, and social interaction can be overlooked to build students culture awareness. Within athletic only consolidation, athletes will have to interact and communicate with others that they do not see on a daily. Having the opportunity to build students verbal and non-verbal communication within extra-curriculars can build well rounded individuals to society.

A select response to this question includes:

Administration Subject 3:     Once the co-op began, the player pool expanded. It also gave students to establish friendships with similar interests. In a small school, there may not be a lot of students with similar interests in your class. Being in the co-op, students were able to reach out to others in a nearby community for friends.

### ***Theme 2: Competitive Advantage and Ability to Compete***

Burrack (2019) stated, that students in smaller schools are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities. According to Burrack (2019), with high levels of participations comes interest, and opportunity to enhance leadership and responsibility. Dolph (2008) believed that there is potential to improve quality and variety to competition that would result in a positive for

a school district when consolidating. Six (86%) administrators and 28 (88%) athletes identified that an advantage to the athletic only consolidation was the ability to compete.

As a teenager you already have a roller-coaster of emotions. Sports competition can be an emotional experience ranging from the thrill of victory to the crushing agony of defeat. No matter win or lose, the emotions always influence athletes on the sport. Some athletes are overwhelmed and choose not to overcome the challenges and leave the sport behind. This leaves high school teams with decrease in participation. With the decrease in participation can put teams in a predicament for a season not being able to compete at the level that is appropriate for the athletes.

A select response relevant to this question includes:

Administration Subject 4: We are able to put full teams on the floor that in most cases, can be competitive with our conference schools. In some cases, it allows us to have teams when we would not have had enough student-athletes to put a team on the field or floor. By having better overall numbers, it allows us to have teams that can compete in a safer scenario as well, upperclassmen play upperclassmen versus having to put freshmen that aren't ready physically or mentally compete against older students.

## **Research Question 2 Discussion**

Two themes emerged for RQ2, "What are the disadvantages of athletic consolidation for small school districts?": time and travel and balance and keeping things fair.

### ***Theme 1: Time and Travel***

With cooperative athletics, schools sharing facilities is common, so athletes will need to travel from one school district to another multiple times in a week for competitions or practices. Pepin and Alma are fifteen miles apart from each other, following Wisconsin state highway 35. Elmwood and Plum City are fourteen miles apart from each other and only rural roads to get to each other. Pashley (2014) research reported that high school athletes typically practice 10-12

hours per week. Now adding on travel to and from school districts can cause many different emotions for athletes. Three (43%) administrators and 19 (59%) athletes had identified that time and travel was a disadvantage for the athletic only consolidation.

Athletic only consolidation change comes with things that cannot be overlooked that need to happen. The importance to have the ability to create a little normalcy for students, is to let them practice or play games at their home venue. The school districts will have to communicate the scheduling, and travel will have to change drastically. Elmwood-Plum City and Alma-Pepin cooperative added more time on the athlete's everyday activities, as they agreed to a 50-50 relationship. This 50-50 relationship added 20-30 minutes one way to their daily routine to get transported to practices and games throughout the season. A change in travel takes away time that student-athletes will have to adjust to.

A select response relevant to this question includes:

Athlete Subject 15: The amount of bus ride time between the two school districts for practice was a large negative. We also split conferences during that time and travel for a conference games were frequently over two hours. Not a huge deal for Friday games but on school nights like Tuesday and Thursday it didn't give much time for homework.

### ***Theme 2: Balance and Keeping Things Fair***

Dolph (2008) informed, that having a merged staff can positively influence the quality of instruction to all students. Cellucci (2020) stated that coaches who have favorite players can lead to a divide in the team, a divide in the team could affect overall performance of athletes. Three (43%) administrators and eleven (34%) athletes believed that a disadvantage was trying to balance and keep things fair not only with scheduling but also with the coaches was evident within the athletic only consolidation.

Two school districts coming together to build one athletic team can have advantages; multiple facilities to use for practices and competitions and opportunity to have available coaches. Scheduling practices and games can be overwhelming, and it may not be equal for each school district. Having resources and coaches from each school district can be an advantage so they can share expertise's to improve the athletic programs. Meshing two different programs for a coach is a huge undertaking and can skewed as favoritism when coaches have a relationship at their home school.

A select response relevant to this question includes:

Athlete Subject 7: I feel that there was always an underlying feeling of jealousy/favoritism with the players, and I feel that some parents also thought that. If certain players got more playing time than others, people started to feel that it was because of the coach's favoritism and it was worse if said players and coaches were from the same school.

### **Research Question 3 Discussion**

Two themes emerged for RQ3, "What are the obstacles of athletic only consolidation?": tradition, identity, and rivalries; and communication.

#### ***Theme 1: Tradition, Identity and Rivalries***

Dolph (2008) stated that communities in rural small school districts are built around schools. Dolph (2008) believed that people throughout the community build friendships through the school and that the district is the glue that holds the community together. Dolph (2008) is convinced that consolidation not only affects school districts but also the community. Communities may lose that pride and passion that gives their town the identity. Three (43%) administrators and eleven (34%) athletes believe that an obstacle for an athletic only consolidation was breaking the barriers of traditions, identity, and rivals.

Traditions, and rivals are important to school districts and alumni. Portch (2017) stated that rivalry is an existing, past and future relationship that is expected to hold high stakes for schools. Portch (2017) stated that schools are motivated to compete against rivals opposed to non-rivals they don't share a history with. When athletic only consolidation happens for school districts, some rivals will change or be removed for districts because of a change of competition schedules. It is assumed that pride and tradition played a huge roll in the merging of Elmwood-Plum City and Alma-Pepin. These schools were once rivals that turn into teammates. That is a transition that would not be easy for anyone.

A select response relevant to this question includes:

Athlete Subject 26: Initially it was a pride thing. We didn't want to lose our hometown team and the tradition/history behind it, and I know there were the same kinds of feelings present at the other school as well. In years past, that other school was your biggest rival in sports, and now you're trying to bring those athletes together on the same team.

### ***Theme 2: Communication***

Burrack (2019) reported, communication was key to success in consolidation. Burrack (2019) shared that patience, respect, timing, and constant communication. Haagenson (2015) stated, when consolidating administration need to prepare a communication plan. Four (57%) administrators and fourteen (44%) athletes believed that communication was an obstacle within their athletic only consolidation.

Athletic only consolidation leads to a merging of another party into the communication pool. Developing new policies, merging coaches, and combing leadership roles is a big undertaking and it will take time to believe and support the new system. Communication impacted Elmwood-Plum City and Alma-Pepin due to the changes of the normal routine.

A select response relevant to this question includes:

Administration Subject 3: Communication. This took a while to get figured out, but things are posted in a timely manner, so parents and students know the weekly schedule. Schedules are always subject to change, but members know that they will receive a weekly schedule. This is the most current and up-to-date information. Transportation, there are a lot of things that need to be coordinate in order to make this work. We have busses going between the two schools frequently. This needs to be organized and everyone needs to know here they are going to be for the week.

## **Conclusions**

After conducting an online open-ended questions survey with 39 participants, reviewing the literature, and combining the findings in chapter four, the researcher draws the following conclusions from the study:

1. Athletic only consolidation is beneficial to be able to compete at level that is appropriate for their athlete's ability, gives programs an opportunity to grow, and ability to build friendships within different communities.
2. Athletic only consolidation needs to have constant communication between all parties for it to be successful presently and for the future of the programs. Administration needs to be open minded and communicate what is best for the student-athletes.

Athletic only consolidation has been utilized to help small rural schools keep the opportunity of extra-curricular activities for their students. Through communication and keeping the student-athletes' best interest in mind will be worth it. The consolidation relationship between Alma-Pepin and Elmwood-Plum City offered opportunities for student-athletes, administration, families, and the communities to grow.

## **Leadership Implications**

The results of this study clarify that even when challenges and obstacles come forth through the process of athletic only consolidation that it was worth the time to pursue it for

Alma-Pepin and Elmwood-Plum City. The results of this study are important to help other school districts who will be looking at pursuing an athletic only consolidation. The participants in this study showed first-hand the advantages, disadvantages, and the obstacles. Additionally, participants identified advice for other school districts pursuing an athletic consolidation.

### **Implications for Leadership Practice**

**Conclusion 1:** Athletic only consolidation is beneficial to be able to compete at level that is appropriate for their athlete's ability, gives programs an opportunity to grow, and ability to build friendships within different communities. Leaders of school districts must make decisions on what is best for their school district and the athletic programs. Decisions made within rural school districts not only affect the administration, teachers, and students, it will also affect the families, communities, and other school districts. Athletic only consolidation is a decision that many may not agree to. Through leadership of administration the important thing to look at is what is best for the student-athletes, so they grow as student-athletes and members of their communities.

**Implication:** Administration will need to evaluate the future of the athletic programs to make sure they are giving the student-athletes the opportunity to grow and compete within the athletic programs. They need recognize if programs need assistance to be able to compete at the level that is appropriate for the student-athletes. Administration will need to make tough decisions and calculate numbers for future programs. If there is a decrease in student-athlete participation, they must find ways to assist the programs to grow and be successful.

High school administration has a responsibility to keep the students at the forefront in all conversations on decisions that will affect them. Having awareness that many others are going to be affected in athletic only consolidation. Administration has a responsibility to the district to

evaluate their situation and have a decision that is backed up with research and time. Each school districts needs for an athletic consolidation is going to be different then the next. Administration will need to make the decision that is going to benefit the most people, and not consider what didn't work for another school district.

**Conclusion 2:** Athletic only consolidation needs to have constant communication between all parties for it to be successful presently and for the future of the programs. Administration needs to be open minded and communicate what is best for the student-athletes. The decision to change a school district athletic department is not an easy task. Administration will need to communicate, collaborate, and commit to the change. Having effective leadership is critical to a successful change. Leaders will need to focus on all the stakeholders and the process.

**Implication:** Successful leaders communicate the “what and whys” of decisions. School administration will need to explain the purpose of the change. Explaining the benefits of change can create a stronger buy-in. Bringing people together to plan and execute change is essential. When collaborating, include administration and student-athletes early-on in the decision-making process, this will strengthen all party's commitment. Administration will need to devote their time to the change and focus on the big picture, the students.

Administration also needs to keep an open mind, hearing others out. Ways to build communication during the athletic only consolidation is having an open forum that will give a chance for everyone to voice their opinion. The student-athletes are the voices to be heard, and administration needs to develop opportunities for them to speak.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

More research is needed to further explore the process of athletic only consolidation for rural school districts who want to keep separate buildings and academics but is in need to

combine extra-curriculars. Additional research is necessary with a larger sample size to present more findings on the obstacles of putting aside and/or starting new traditions, rivals, and identity when athletic only consolidation presents itself for two or more school districts. Additional research is necessary for time and travel between school districts and the costs that are added when school districts pursue athletic only consolidation.

### **Summary**

Nothing brings a small rural town together like high school sports. Unfortunately, when high school sports hit challenging times, support for programs and participation in programs decrease. Rural school districts have found ways to use resources with neighboring schools to mutually agree upon an athletic only consolidation. The purpose of this study was to evaluate four small town schools to recognize the consolidation advantages, disadvantages, and obstacles for the four communities' sports programs.

The researcher has concluded in the study of four rural school districts that athletic only consolidation is beneficial to be able to compete at the level that is appropriate for their athlete's ability, gives programs an opportunity to grow, and ability to build friendships within different communities. The second conclusion the researcher discovered that communication was an obstacle and constant communication is needed to have a successful consolidation.

## Appendix A

### Survey Questions

Sample: Alma High School, Elmwood High School, Pepin High School & Plum City High School

1. What do you feel were the advantages of athletics being consolidated for your school?
2. Through your years within the consolidation of athletics what did you feel were the disadvantages to the athletic consolidation?
3. What did you feel were the obstacles to the athletic consolidation?
4. What is your advice for other school districts pursuing an athletic consolidation?

## Appendix B



Winona State University Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Human Protections Administrator  
Maxwell 161  
Winona, MN 55987  
507.457.5519 or [bayers@winona.edu](mailto:bayers@winona.edu)

DATE: February 24, 2021

TO: Kacey Lane  
FROM: Winona State University IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1709099-2] The Advantages and Disadvantages to Small Town School Districts and Their Communities After Athletics Consolidation

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS  
REVIEW TYPE: Administrative Review

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this research study. The Primary Reviewer has determined this project is exempt from further review according to federal regulations and you may begin your research.

While your project is exempt from further review, you must report to the IRB any significant modifications in your protocol, consent form, and/or data collection tool(s). All serious and unexpected events, non-compliance, or complaints must also be reported to this office. Use the report form in IRBNet Forms and Templates and refer to the file reports section in the "How to" guidelines.

We will retain a copy of all your submitted materials and a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact the Human Protections Administrator at 507.457.5519 or [bayers@winona.edu](mailto:bayers@winona.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within the Winona State University IRB records.

## References

- Aissaoui, R. & Amis, J. (2013). Readiness for change: An institutional perspective. *Journal of Change Management*, 13(1), 69–95.
- Alma High School. (2020). Dairyland conference schedules.  
<https://www.dairylandconference.org/public/genie/621/school/1/>
- Anderson, G. (2009). *Advocacy leadership toward a post-reform agenda in education*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group
- Author, G. (2019, June 17). *The decline of youth sport participation in rural America*. Life as a Human. <https://lifeasahuman.com/2019/health-fitness/sports/the-decline-of-youth-sport-participation-in-rural-america/>
- Burrack, S. E. (2019). *School consolidation: A qualitative case study on the importance of identity in a rural environment* [Doctoral dissertation].  
[https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/17653/?utm\\_source=lib.dr.iastate.edu%2Fetd%2F17653&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/17653/?utm_source=lib.dr.iastate.edu%2Fetd%2F17653&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)
- Burke, W. W. (2017). *Organization change: Theory and practice* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Cellucci, G. (2020). *What to do if coaches play favorites*. Uloop, Inc., 28, April 2020.
- Coccia, M. (2018). An introduction to the theories of institutional change. *Journal of Economics*, 5(4), 337-344.
- Dolph, D. A. (2008). *Coming together: The pros and cons of school consolidation*. eCommons.  
[https://ecommons.udayton.edu/eda\\_fac\\_pub/209/?utm\\_source=ecommons.udayton.edu%2Feda\\_fac\\_pub%2F209&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/eda_fac_pub/209/?utm_source=ecommons.udayton.edu%2Feda_fac_pub%2F209&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)

- Elmwood High School. (2020). Dunn-st croix conference schedules. <https://dunn-stcroixconference.org/public/genie/161/school/4/>
- Graves, B. (2010). *The collision of athletics & consolidation*. The School Superintendents Association. <https://aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=13226>
- Haagenson, L. A. (2015). *Minnesota public school consolidation: Factors most influential when voting in favor of consolidation* [Doctoral dissertation]. [https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=edad\\_etds&httpsredir=1&referer=#:~:text=The%20study%20found%20that%20declining,favor%20of%20school%20district%20consolidation](https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=edad_etds&httpsredir=1&referer=#:~:text=The%20study%20found%20that%20declining,favor%20of%20school%20district%20consolidation)
- High-School.com. (2020). *Alma high school in Alma, WI*. High Schools - public high schools and private high schools list. Retrieved January 16, 2021, from <https://high-schools.com/directory/wi/cities/alma/alma-high-school/550018000018/>
- High-School.com. (2020). *Elmwood high school in elmwood, WI*. High Schools - public high schools and private high schools list. Retrieved January 16, 2021, from <https://high-schools.com/directory/wi/cities/elmwood/elmwood-high-school/550435000471/>
- High-School.com. (2020). *Pepin high school in Pepin, WI*. High Schools - public high schools and private high schools list. Retrieved January 16, 2021, from <https://high-schools.com/directory/wi/cities/pepin/pepin-high-school/551158001532/#section-3>
- High-School.com. (2020). *Plum city high school in plum city, WI*. High Schools - public high schools and private high schools list. Retrieved January 16, 2021, from <https://high-schools.com/directory/wi/cities/plum-city/plum-city-high-school/551188001557/#section-3>

- Hurst, B., & Wallace, R. (2013). The impact of social interaction on student learning. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 52(4), 375–398.  
[https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3105&context=reading\\_horizons](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3105&context=reading_horizons)
- Kemp, S. (2018, December 7). *Wisconsin's rural schools are getting squeezed by student loss*. WisContext. <https://www.wiscontext.org/wisconsins-rural-schools-are-getting-squeezed-student-loss>
- Lee, A. N. (2004). Benefits of high school athletic participation. *The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 75(7), 10.
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K., Guest, G., & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative research methods: A data collector's Field guide*. Family Health International.  
<https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Qualitative%20Research%20Methods%20-%20A%20Data%20Collector's%20Field%20Guide.pdf>
- Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association. (2015, December). *Why education-based athletics*. [https://miaa.net/gen/miaa\\_generated\\_bin/documents/basic\\_module/POSITIONPAPEREducationalAthletics.pdf](https://miaa.net/gen/miaa_generated_bin/documents/basic_module/POSITIONPAPEREducationalAthletics.pdf)
- National Federation of State High School Associations. (2020). *AboutUs*. Retrieved November 8, 2020, from <https://www.nfhs.org/who-we-are/aboutus>
- Pashley, J. (2014, October 6). *How often we practice*. Skyd Magazine.  
<https://skydmagazine.com/2014/10/often-practice/#:%7E:text=High%20school%20and%20college%20athletes,6%2D7.5%20hours%20per%20week>

Pepin Area Schools. (2020). *Welcome to eagle middle/high athletics*.

<https://www.pepin.k12.wi.us/activities/athletics.cfm>

Portch, J. (2017, October 10). *Why a rival can push teams and athletes to greater heights*.

Leaders. <https://leadersinsport.com/performance/rival-can-push-teams-athletes-greater-heights/>

School District of Plum City. (2020). *EPC home*.

[https://www.plumcity.k12.wi.us/index.php?pageID=301107\\_2](https://www.plumcity.k12.wi.us/index.php?pageID=301107_2)

Smith, M. K. (2013, March 28). *What is community*. <https://infed.org/community/>

Spector, B. (2010). *Implementing organizational change: Theory into practice* (2nd ed.). New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association. (n.d.). *2020-2021 approved cooperative programs*. <https://portal.tssaa.org/common/directory/coop.cfm>

Thorne, S. (2000). Data analysis in qualitative research. *BMJ Journals*, 3(3).

<https://ebn.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/ebn.3.3.68>

Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association. (n.d.). *Membership/co-op teams*.

<https://www.wiaawi.org/Schools/Membership-Co-op-Teams>

World Population Review. (2020) *Alma, Wisconsin population 2020*.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/alma-wi-population>

World Population Review. (2020) *Elmwood, Wisconsin Population 2020*

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/elmwood-wi-population>

World Population Review. (2020) *Pepin, Wisconsin Population 2020*.

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/pepin-wi-population>

World Population Review. (2020) *Plum City, Wisconsin Population 2020*

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/plumcity-wi-population>