

A STUDY OF THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE  
GOESSEL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, USD 411

A Dissertation by

John A. Fast

MS, Wichita State University, 1991

BS, Bethel College, 1983

BA, Bethel College, 1981

Submitted to the College of Education  
and the faculty of the Graduate School of  
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GOESSEL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT, USD 411

I have examined the final copy of this Dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Administration.

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Dr. Ray Calabrese, Chairperson

---

Dr. Randy Ellsworth

---

Dr. Max Heim

---

Dr. Dennis Kear

---

Dr. Jean Patterson

Accepted by the College of Education

---

Dr. Jon Engelhardt, Dean

Accepted for the Graduate School

---

Dr. Susan Kovar, Dean

## DEDICATION

To my loving wife Jenny, and my sons, Evan and Isaac, for their encouragement  
and support through my educational journey

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I am deeply grateful to Dr. Ray Calabrese for his personal commitment to assist me in making my aspirations a reality. His patient guidance, encouragement, and prompt feedback to this research have made this a memorable and truly enjoyable journey. His role as mentor, coach, and advisor has embodied the appreciative inquiry perspective of seeking the good and the positive in those around him in his professional dealings. My association with Dr. Calabrese has only deepened my joy and commitment to being a lifelong learner. Thanks are to be extended to my committee members, Dr. Randy Ellsworth, Dr. Max Heim, Dr. Dennis Kear, and Dr. Jean Patterson for their time and interest in this dissertation research. The personal journey of learning that I have experienced at Wichita State University has been outstanding and is due to the caring and dedicated professors in the Educational Leadership program. I have appreciated Ray, Jean, Dr. Ian Gibson, and Dr. Randy Turk for the specific skills and abilities they bring to this program and I am thankful for the academic challenges, intellectual growth, and reflective learning that I have experienced in these past three years.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of Goessel stakeholders for USD 411 and their community using an appreciative inquiry research perspective and the theoretical frameworks of social capital. An appreciative inquiry research perspective was used to drive a qualitative, embedded case study design. This research design was selected because it provided a detailed description of the aspirations of USD 411 stakeholders and community of Goessel stakeholders (Yin, 1994). The two embedded cases, USD 411 stakeholders and the community of Goessel stakeholders, contributed specific information endemic to the larger community. Data were collected from interviews, focus groups, left and right-hand column case method and document reviews.

The data revealed seven aspirations. 1) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to a unique and independent identity for USD 411. 2) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a unique and independent school system with high academic standards. 3) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders shared their aspirations to maintain their high degree of quality of life and sense of safety that they perceive to exist in the community. 4) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a positive relationship between USD 411 and the churches within the community. 5) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to embrace diversity. 6) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders have aspirations for community improvements. 7) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders hold a positive view toward meeting the

challenges they perceive to face the community of Goessel and USD 411.

The data also revealed three challenges. 1) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the challenges that exist in sustaining a small town atmosphere and are willing to work together to seek a viable community based solution. 2) The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the inherent challenges of sustaining high academic standards in USD 411 due to potential changes in the community's demographics if population growth is encouraged. 3) The Community of Goessel stakeholders provided evidence of social capital in the community as expressed through high levels of bonding capital and the need to generate more bridging capital.

The data revealed the aspirations that community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders hold for the community of Goessel and USD 411. The data also revealed inherent challenges facing the community of Goessel stakeholders for the community and USD 411. The findings suggested that community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders have great pride in their community and USD 411. They strongly aspire to sustain their community holding on to their deep rooted faith based traditions as well as keeping USD 411 independent with strong academic programs.

The findings also suggest that the community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders are willing to work cooperatively to overcome the challenges they face to sustain the community of Goessel and USD 411. Stakeholders aspire to create a more attractive community through community improvements. Stakeholders aspire to be accepting of diversity in a community that is predominately white and Mennonite.

Foremost, stakeholders seek to keep and maintain a strong and independent school district.

Social capital can be found throughout the community of Goessel and USD 411. The data revealed an abundance of bonding capital. The data also revealed evidence of bridging capital. Based on the research, the aspirations of stakeholders of the community of Goessel and USD 411 can be enhanced by increasing the amount of bridging capital in the community of Goessel. The community of Goessel and USD 411 need to establish connections to resources outside the community of Goessel to attract business and people. Establishing linkages and bridging capital to outside resources will help the community of Goessel stakeholders achieve their aspirations.

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## CHAPTER 1

### *Introduction*

Goessel Unified School District 411 (USD 411), located in Marion County, Kansas, has experienced consecutive years of declining enrollment since 1996. Many rural Kansas communities report a similar trend. The decline in enrollment in rural Kansas' school districts often leads to consolidation. According to Dale Dennis, Kansas Deputy Commissioner for Education, Kansas averages one rural school district consolidation per year (Ranney, 2004). The consolidations are the result of three primary concerns pressuring rural school districts: 1) the inadequacy of financing from the state for the district's general fund, 2) the inequity of the formula used to calculate the allotment going to each district, and 3) declining enrollment. Many rural communities are struggling to maintain an independent school district; they consider an independent school district essential to the community's sustainability.

The struggle of rural communities to survive, in many ways, is linked to the sustainability of their school districts (Howley, 2001). A sustainable school district is a school with adequate resources to sustain a quality education for all students (Howley & Eckman, 1997). As school enrollment and resources dwindle, some rural school districts can no longer provide an adequate educational program for students, as a result, the school district closes and the community's sustainability is threatened (Hassebrook, 2003).

### *Background of the Study*

Several background factors must be examined as they pertain to rural schools and particularly to Goessel's context as a predominately Mennonite farming community. This

section examines adequacy, equity, enrollment, and the historical context of Goessel.

### *Adequacy*

All school districts in the State of Kansas collect 20 mills from their community to be paid into the state education fund. A mil is 1/1,000 and is the rate of taxation on property value. Thus, property valued at \$50,000 raises \$50 in taxes ("Case No. 99-C-1738," 2003). Each district receives a base per pupil () state aid amount of \$3682 from the State of Kansas that is paid to the general fund of each school. A study authorized by the Kansas State Department of Education (Augenblick, Myers, & Silverstein, 2001) found this amount to be inadequate for appropriate levels of funding. Adequacy is defined as the level of funding that will ensure an appropriate level of educational opportunity for all students (Augenblick, Myers, & Anderson, 1997). Kansas's was set at \$3682 for the 2003 school year.

In 1999, six mid-sized schools in Kansas filed a class action lawsuit arguing that the school finance package was unfair to mid-size schools. The case went to the Kansas Supreme Court where Shawnee District Judge Bullock heard the case of Montoy vs. Kansas ("Case No. 99-C-1738," 2003). Judge Bullock found that the level of funding considered as adequate was not sufficient. He also ruled that the Kansas State Legislature failed to maintain sufficient levels for all schools and ordered the Kansas Legislature to develop a more equitable funding formula. Judge Bullock found that the funding for all schools at the present was inadequate and ordered schools closed until rectified. Judge Bullock stayed his order until April 12, 2005. The Kansas Supreme Court upheld Judge Bullock's decision and ordered the legislature to provide more funding for schools (Whiteman, 2005).

## *Equity*

The level of funding required to educate a student varies from district to district. Some factors affecting costs are population density, facilities, and property valuation. The Kansas State Department of Education added weights in the formula to adjust for these varying factors. There are a variety of weights used ("Case No. 99-C-1738," 2003): 1) the declining enrollment weighting adjusts for schools experiencing declining enrollment; 2) low enrollment weighting adjusts for smaller districts under 1,725 students; 3) correlation weighting adjusts for districts at or above 1,725 students; 4) transportation weighting adds funding for students being transported more than 2.5 miles from school; 5) vocational education weighting adjusts the funding amount according to the number of students enrolled in vocational education; 6) bilingual weighting adjusts for the number of bilingual students enrolled in the district; and 7) at-risk weighting adds an amount for students identified as at-risk.

Several factors affect equity including the local option budget (LOB) and the capital outlay fund. The LOB allows school districts to raise more monies by applying an additional local tax levy that is kept in the school district (Hays, 2003; "Case No. 99-C-1738," 2003). The maximum authorized LOB is the adjusted legal general legal fund multiplied by the AUTHORIZED LOB percent of each school district. The capital outlay fund is also financed through the local mill levy. The capital outlay fund does not have a cap; therefore, wealthy school districts can raise more money than poorer school districts for capital improvements. The wealthiest school district in the State of Kansas, for example, can generate \$461 on a single mil. The poorest school district can generate only \$16 on a single mil (Hays, 2004). Goessel generates \$37 on a mil. The state has yet to

define an equalizing formula that considers the LOB as part of its funding for education. Capital outlay funds building projects, major renovations, and large technology acquisitions ("Case No. 99-C-1738," 2003).

### *Enrollment*

Goessel's enrollment has been in steady decline like many other rural school districts in the State of Kansas (Floerchinger, 1992). From 1996 to 2003, Goessel's enrollment declined from 327 to 289, representing a decline of 11% (Hays, 2003). Due to declining enrollment, the district also experienced a decline in state funding. Consequently, Goessel reduced its budget by \$250,000 over the past eight years, resulting in the loss of three teaching positions, one building level administrator, and three classified positions. A demographic study for the State of Kansas predicted that enrollments will continue to decline in most rural areas with the exception of the southwest part of Kansas due to the increase in agricultural meat packing in that geographical area (Hays, 2003; Hodgkinson, 1997).

### *History and Settlement of Goessel*

The community of Goessel was settled in 1874 by Mennonite immigrants seeking to escape religious persecution (Haury, 1981). This group of Mennonite farmers left Germany in the 1700s and immigrated to Russia. Due to their successful farming methods while in Russia, they were offered land by the Santa Fe Railroad to resettle in central Kansas (Wedel, 1999).

The community of Alexanderwohl, in the Russian Ukraine, resettled in an area of Kansas in the United States that is now identified as Goessel. In a short time, the Mennonites transformed the prairie into highly productive croplands. The Mennonite

leaders and elders believed that maintaining their sense of spirituality and community were as important as their farming. Religious rigidity was a requirement and members who strayed from the teachings and beliefs were excommunicated (Wedel, 1999). The combination of fleeing persecution, fear of outsiders, and strict obedience to religious teachings, kept the Mennonite community insulated from broader society for many years (Haury, 1981).

### *Goessel*

Goessel is a rural town of 557 people, located 35 miles north of Wichita, Kansas (Webb, 2002). Although family farms at one point dominated the Goessel community, Goessel has gradually become more of a bedroom community for neighboring towns. The major employers include the school district, the farmers Cooperative, M.O.R.E. (a mail order shipping company), and Bethesda Home, a retirement community. Bethesda Home is the largest employer. There are three local churches, all of Mennonite faith. Most community members participate at one of the three churches.

Fifty-two percent of Goessel's population lives in the low to moderate-income level; the remaining 48% are just above the moderate bracket. Goessel's ethnic population is 98.8% Caucasian. The remaining population is shared equally between Hispanic and African-American. Community members aged 65 and older comprise 35.9% of the population. The Goessel population of 557 includes the Bethesda Retirement center. The 98 residents at the retirement center comprise nearly a fifth of the total population.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The community of Goessel is struggling to maintain its sustainability. Like similar

rural communities, the symptoms of erosion of sustainability are observed in declining enrollment. USD 411, like many other rural school districts across the United States, faces the difficult challenge of maintaining a strong, vibrant rural school district amid financial concerns, declining enrollment and the potential for consolidation (*Elementary schools consolidation and improvement plans*, 2004; Flora & Flora, 2004; Gillaspie, 2003).

A vibrant rural school district contributes beyond the local rural community. In addition to providing an identity for small communities, rural school districts connect the communities by establishing distance-learning agreements among geographically-connected school districts enabling a better use of resources for all communities (Salamon, 1991).

The linkages between these school districts allowed the resources of one school district to be shared with another when resources were limited. The resources currently available to USD 411 and its neighboring school districts are linked directly to student enrollment and state reimbursement. USD 411 and its four neighboring school districts, all located in Marion County, also face declining enrollment. Marion County's population declined from 20,539 in 1900 to 13,361 in 2000, a decrease of 35.4% (Hays, 2003). The decline in the school-aged population equated to fewer resources for all Marion County rural school districts. Since state allotments for a school's general fund are dependent on enrollment numbers, this will result in a budget shortfall for rural school districts (Flora & Flora, 2004).

In the face of budget shortfalls and declining enrollment, USD 411 and the community of Goessel face a threat to their sustainability. The greatest threats are

declining enrollment and financial shortfalls (Mohn, Morton, Sheppard, & Turk, 2004). Many communities respond in a reactionary manner and fail to focus on their strengths as primary means of increasing the chances for community sustainability. While Goessel's threat is incremental and ongoing, revitalization is possible. Rural communities such as Goessel have innate strengths that can serve as the foundation of a revitalization effort.

Revitalization in Goessel began with stakeholders who identified their aspirations for their community and their school district. The identification of aspirations was a vital step prior to the mobilization of resources; it was a link to the community-based visioning process (Gittell & Vidal, 1998). The study addressed this general question: What are the aspirations of the stakeholders of the community of Goessel for its community and school district in the face of both enrollment and financial challenges?

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of Goessel stakeholders for USD 411 and their community. The aspirations of the stakeholders of the community of Goessel were viewed through the theoretical framework of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and bonding and bridging (Flora & Flora, 2004). A qualitative, embedded, case study research design applied the research perspective of appreciative inquiry to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of the Goessel stakeholders for USD 411 and their community during the fall of 2004. The appreciative inquiry research perspective fits naturally with the focus of identifying aspirations as appreciative inquiry focuses on the positive, seeking what is right with the organization and working toward building the full capacity of the organization.

### *Research Questions*

1. What are the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for their community?
2. What are the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for USD 411?
3. How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for USD 411?
4. How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for their community?

### *Objectives*

Through the answers identified in the research questions, the following research objectives were achieved:

1. The study described the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for their community.
2. The study described the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for USD 411.
3. The study described the inherent challenges to achieving Goessel stakeholders' aspirations for USD 411.
4. The study described the inherent challenges to achieving Goessel stakeholders' aspirations for their community.

### *Significance of the Study*

The identification of aspirations may contribute to the sustainability and revitalization for USD 411 and the community of Goessel since stakeholders who

identified their aspirations of the community had a greater potential to thrive in a challenging environment (Luloff & Krannich, 2002). Communities that understood their challenges and commonly agreed on their aspirations overcame their difficulties. Mays (1968) found that in the rural community of Sublette, Kansas, there are continual forces of change versus stability. In Sublette, reliance on stability and not adapting to change placed the community at risk. Mays revealed that while the community may not wholeheartedly endorse the change process, being able to adapt to changes proved to be an effective strategy.

While numerous studies of rural communities have a problem-based focus, there appear to be few studies examining the aspirations of a school district and community. The appreciative inquiry research perspective identified Goessel stakeholders' aspirations for USD 411 and their community, and how these aspirations can assist them to meet the challenges of declining enrollment and dwindling financial resources. The stakeholders of Goessel were able to envision where they are going and begin a plan for achieving that goal once their aspirations are identified (Gundlach & Przeklasa, 2001). Identifying the aspirations may be critical for Goessel stakeholders as well as for stakeholders in other similar rural communities as they seek to discover a direction for the revitalization of their school district and community.

#### *Delimitations and Limitations*

This study had the following delimitations:

1. The study involved only those stakeholders who reside in USD 411.
2. The study applied an appreciative inquiry research perspective.

This study had the following limitations:

1. The researcher was concurrently employed as a district and building level administrator in the community of Goessel during the time of research.
2. Reactions to the researcher's participation in the study may have been affected by the researcher's roles as USD 411 superintendent and elementary school principal.
3. The perceptions of the subjects that were described in this study were the perceptions held at the time of participation in the study.

Study results were based on the data collected during the fall and winter of 2004.

### *Assumptions*

This study began with the assumption that the stakeholders in the community of Goessel have aspirations for both their community and USD 411.

### *Definition of Terms*

This study identified several terms as defined below:

*Appreciative Inquiry* – Appreciative inquiry is a form of methodology that focuses on the generative capacity of the organization to identify its dreams, aspirations, and assets (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003).

*Bonding Social Capital* – Bonding social capital consists of connections among individuals and groups with a similar background. Where bonding capital is high, people typically have ties to each other in multiple forms. Bonding capital can be exclusive of people who are seen as different. In this study, bonding social capital is simply referred to as bonding capital (Flora & Flora, 2004).

*Bridging Social Capital* - Bridging social capital connects diverse groups

within the community to each other and to groups outside the community. The ties that make up bridging social capital are usually single purpose. Bridging social capital fosters diversity of ideas and brings together diverse people. In this study, bridging social capital is simply referred to as bridging capital (Flora & Flora, 2004).

Community of Goessel – This term pertains to the town of Goessel and the rural residents who are tied to Goessel.

Community of Goessel Stakeholders – These stakeholders are community of Goessel residents who have a legitimate interest in and knowledge of the community of Goessel and USD 411 to contribute in a meaningful manner (Kelsy & Mariger, 2002).

Cradle Goesselites – Residents of the community of Goessel who were born and raised in the community are referred to as Cradle Goesselites.

Diversity – Diversity entails the recognition of the racial, religious, ethnic, gender, age or other differences between people. Recognizing diversity entails the treatment of all people of diversity with respect (Banks, 2001). For the purpose of this study diversity is defined as any person or group other than traditional Mennonite population of Goessel.

Non-cradle Goesselites – Residents not born in the community of Goessel and have moved into the community are referred to as Non-cradle Goesselites.

Social Capital - Social capital refers to connections among individuals, the social networks, and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that

connect people together. It is based on a dense network of reciprocal social relations (Putnam, 2000).

USD 411 Stakeholders – These stakeholders are Goessel residents and are differentiated from community of Goessel Stakeholders by the fact that they have a vested interest in the every day functioning of USD 411 either through employment, having a child enrolled in school, or serving as a volunteer for USD 411.

#### *Organization of Study*

The dissertation followed the traditional five-chapter organization. The study overview was presented in chapter 1, including the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, objectives, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 provides the literature review. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the study's design. Chapter 4 presents the study's findings. Lastly, Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings and provides recommendations for future practice and research.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Review of the Literature*

Rural school districts reflect a unique and varied culture. Rural schools exist from the Appalachian mining region to the open range land of Texas, from the wooded forests in Alaska to the corn belt of Iowa. The local culture in which these schools exist varies as much as the geography. These isolated areas still represent a significant portion of school-age children. Across the nation, one in six children attend a school in a community of less than 2,500 (Beeson & Strange, 2003). Residents of these rural communities depend on the school for preparing their children for life outside of the community or for preparing them for skills to sustain their community. For this reason, many stakeholders in rural communities have a strong personal identification with their schools that is exhibited in large-scale community interest focused on school activities.

Many school-related activities such as athletic events, plays, and concerts are community-wide events. In effect, there is a symbiotic relationship between the school and the community (Salamon, 1991). Community pride is closely associated with the school's success; successful schools enjoy more open communication with the community (Dickerson, 2000). Examining the relationship of the school to the community requires an understanding of the construct of social capital and its relationship to the rural school and its community.

Yin (1994) identified four broad theoretical traditions from which to select a theoretical framework: individual theory, group theory, organizational theory, and societal theory. Individual theory relates to individual development, cognitive behavior, personality, and other individual factors of interactions. Group theory examines theories

of family functioning, informal groups, work teams, and various other interpersonal networks. Organizational theory is concerned with bureaucracies, organizational structure and functions, and other inter-organizational relationships. Societal theory centers on international behavior, community development, marketplace functions and other societal level functions. The study focused on organizational and societal theories.

The organization of this literature review begins with a statement of the conceptual framework within which this case study was grounded and how that affected the selection of appreciative inquiry as the research perspective. It presents the primary competing theoretical perspective. The chapter also reviews the research process centering on social capital and particularly on the social concept of bonding and bridging. Relevant studies from these theoretical perspectives are summarized by the keywords used in the search.

### *Conceptual Framework*

Many case studies examine topics from the perspective of critical theory (Yin, 1994). Critical theory characteristically seeks to confront an injustice in society identifying problems and suggesting ways to eliminate those injustices (Cooperrider et al., 2003; Patton, 2002; Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). Critical theory presents a problem-based, deficit approach, identifying problems and needs (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001; Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000). An alternative to the problem-based, deficit approach is appreciative inquiry research perspective that focuses on the aspirations of stakeholders where the stakeholders' aspirations are their dreams and ambitions.

The positive nature of an appreciative inquiry approach was represented in this

study through its influence on the methodology. The central premise of appreciative inquiry is a focus on the generative capacity of the organization under study to define and envision the stakeholders' aspirations based on the community's inherent assets (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Generative capacity is defined as the ability of the subjects, not outside experts, to identify and mobilize resources from within the community of study (Hall & Hammond, 1998). Cooperrider and Watkins (2000) cited the results on medical patients who focused on generating positive mental images and thoughts. These patients made a faster recovery. Cooperrider and Watkins assert that focusing on the generative capacity of the subjects under study allows the subjects to feel empowered and to shape their future.

Cooperrider and Watkins (2000) found that bowlers who viewed a tape of themselves demonstrating correct techniques improved more in their overall scores than another group who viewed only those techniques that need to be improved. It appears that focusing on the positive and reinforcing correct techniques and methods had a far greater effect than identifying errors or wrong techniques. Focusing on what is right can have an impact on the time that stakeholders need to generate solutions to challenges. By focusing on what is right, stakeholders move more efficiently and effectively toward a solution.

Another core value of appreciative inquiry is the importance of reflective thinking (Hall & Hammond, 1998). The appreciative inquiry research perspective requires stakeholders to reflect on their core values, goals, and aspirations. In order to identify their goals, stakeholders have to reflect on the core values and beliefs that sustain the organization.

Appreciative inquiry seeks to resolve problems by concentrating on asking what

is right or identifying a time the organization was at its best. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) refer to this perspective as the unconditional positive question. Appreciative inquiry has a different focus than other research perspectives; the researcher approaches the study from a unique perspective that changes the types of questions that are investigated and the focus of methods. Regardless of the subject at hand, asset-based language, identifying positive attributes, and potential positive outcomes are central to the research. Study participants are asked to shift cognitive paradigms related to organizational issues and focus on the positive values and outcomes essential to organizational growth. Appreciative inquiry researchers posit that each member of the organization has a story that has a place in the discussion. The dialogue shifts from evaluation to valuation and brings a shift in the spirit, with significant increase of trust among participants. In reframing and developing dialogue, the focus centers on a community's 'positive core', listening to its stakeholders' highest aspirations and hopes, and empowering people to self-organize around their notions of critical issues.

Bushe (1995) and Cooperrider and Dutton (1999) agree that a key element of appreciative inquiry is to focus on a time when the organization was the most successful. In this manner, appreciative inquiry helps stakeholders reconstruct the elements that made that organization successful. This process of reflective analysis causes stakeholders to learn the causal factors of success the organization once experienced thereby making it easier to recreate in the future.

### *Search Criteria*

The literature search intended to identify, assimilate, summarize, and synthesize all relevant studies that report on the association between the theories of social capital

and its attributes of bonding and bridging, and the sustainability of rural communities. In addition, each of the searches listed below sought connections to the appreciative inquiry research perspective. An extended database search was conducted using author, title, and keywords.

An Internet Google search for landmark studies using the key words “rural communities” resulted in 1,380,000 hits. “Rural communities” was chosen as the first keyword search since that produced the broadest base of material from which to begin the search. From this large grouping, “appreciative inquiry” was used to narrow the search resulting in 325 hits. “Rural” was selected as the next keyword search to find as many rural studies as possible that utilized appreciative inquiry research perspective. The search was narrowed further by selecting the keyword “social capital” resulting in 65 hits. Social capital was the third level used in focusing the search to find others that used social capital as the lens to view the subjects. Within those 65 hits, the keyword “school” was applied, limiting the search to 48 hits. Next, the keyword “change” identified 44 hits. Finally, the keyword “Kansas” yielded six hits. The literature review that follows focuses on the relevant hits found within the last 44 hits.

Two additional searches were conducted: The ERIC silver platter and Infotrac databases were searched using similar keywords and search patterns as the Google search. Both databases yielded one hit. In addition, all works attributed to Putnam and Cooperrider were examined for relevance to this research topic.

In general, a panoply of studies focused on rural communities throughout the world in the following broad categories: rural health care, housing needs, agricultural topics, technology access, entrepreneurial economic base building efforts, and other less

clustered areas. The methodologies in these studies include qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method research designs. For the purposes of this study, the researcher chose to focus on rural community studies that were related to the development of social capital and education.

### *Rural Communities*

Defining a rural community has been a challenge for researchers and demographers, resulting in multiple definitions. For example, the Farmers Home Administration considers rural areas to be open country communities up to a 20,000 populace in non-metropolitan areas, and towns up to a 10,000 populace with a rural character in metropolitan areas. The Rural Highway Public Transportation Administration defines rural as areas with populations of 5,000 or less. The Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Social and Rehabilitative Services, and several agencies under the U.S. Department of Agriculture define rural as areas outside metropolitan statistical areas (Rios, 1988). Rural communities encompass more than agricultural land. These communities include mining areas, remote fishing communities, desert settlements, forested regions, and farming communities. As urban areas push further into the rural regions, increased competition occurs between the urban and rural regions (Sharp, Imerman, & Peters, 2002) resulting in increased economic and social stress on the rural community.

Deavers and Brown (1985) identified seven categories of rural areas based on social, demographic, and economic information. Economic categories included agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and government; social dimensions included persistent poverty and growth of retirement population; proportion of land in federal

ownership comprises the final category. Other researchers looked to indicators such as values, socioeconomic factors, political structure, locus of control and priorities for schools (Horn, 1985). Most researchers agree that a true definition of rural community must take a multidimensional approach and consider many factors.

Placing the word rural in front of education also requires a definition. Rural education can be defined by the strengths that are typically found in rural areas: lack of distinction between what belongs in school and what belongs in the community; an expectation exists that expects people to do whatever they are able without filling specialized roles or performing strictly age-graded functions; close and supportive ties between families and schools; a sense of comfort and cooperative spirit among school children; and rural independence and self-reliance translated into the school setting (Dunne, 1981). While institutions continue to quantify what it means to be rural and researchers work to describe rural, most residents have a clear perception of whether or not they are rural. The variety and uniqueness among remote areas such as rural Texas, rural Maine, rural Alaska, and other similar areas defy numerical description. Only a thick and rich description adequately describes these rural locations.

### *Appreciative Inquiry*

To locate studies of rural communities that paralleled the approach of this study, the keyword “appreciative inquiry” was applied. Appreciative inquiry research perspective fits well with identifying aspirations and identifying the strengths of a community (Cooperrider et al., 2003). Appreciative inquiry focuses on the generative capacity of the community to identify a time when they were at their best and to help them dream about their potential. Appreciative inquiry studies focus on what is right in

the setting. In appreciative inquiry terms, this is referred to as focusing on the unconditional positive question (Ludema et al., 2001). Chaffee (2001) speaks to the following specific research requirements for appreciative inquiry.

1. Regardless of the subject at hand, asset-based language, identifying positive attributes, and potential positive outcomes are central to the research.
2. Study participants are asked to shift cognitive paradigms related to organizational issues and focus on the positive values and outcomes essential to organizational growth.
3. Every member of the organization has a story that has a place in the discussion.
4. The dialogue shifts from evaluation to valuation and brings a shift in the spirit, with significant increase of trust among participants.

In reframing and developing dialogue, the focus is on a community's 'positive core', listening to its members' highest aspirations and hopes, and empowering people to self-organize around their notions of issues important to them. To researchers applying the appreciative inquiry research perspective, the focus is to empower the stakeholders through the process and outcomes of their research. As a result, increased international attention is being given to the appreciative inquiry research perspective. It is proving to be effective and more commonly used by researchers and applicable to the study of rural communities (Goodwin, 2002). Similar studies found that the appreciative inquiry research perspective to be effective in identifying assets and goals and building community (Kerka, 2003). Kerka discovered that appreciative inquiry could facilitate relationship building, develop a vision, and begin the process of leveraging internal and

external resources to support community aspirations.

A five year study/program in the rural Carolinas applying the appreciative inquiry research perspective recognized the importance of building social capital before fundamental policy changes could be implemented to improve the region (*Strengthening the rural Carolinas: A conceptual framework for the program of the rural Carolinas*, 2002). Once social capital was built, the entire community focused on assets to formulate locally determined solutions. It was also found that as social capital increased, the community became more patient in accepting changes that had a lasting impact.

Similar to the study/program in the Carolinas, a study/program in the Dakotas applied appreciative inquiry to transform the perspective of community from a “landscape of loss” to a “landscape of opportunity” (Northwest Venture Communities Inc., 2003). This program used the appreciative inquiry research perspective to ask the unconditional positive question to assist stakeholders in identifying resources to mobilize within their communities.

### *Social Capital*

The concept of social capital was first explored by Hanifan (1916) at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in studies of rural communities. Hanifan’s initial interest in rural communities was studying how good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse make up a social unit. The notion of social capital as a resource for taking action was examined by Coleman (1988) in a study of high school dropouts, community, and family structure. Coleman’s work laid the groundwork for Putnam’s (2000) seminal writing on civic involvement. Putnam examined the decline of social capital. Civic relations, trusting partnerships, neighborliness, and general community involvement and the concept of

social capital became a common concept in community research.

Social capital has been defined as the social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from these relationships (Putnam, 2000). Much of Putnam's work focused on the decline of social capital as evidenced in reduced civic participation. Putnam's work has been supported by others researching community involvement and social relations (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002; Ostrom & Ahn, 2001; Temkin & Rohe, 1998). Trust has been identified as the crucial element in social capital; it leads to reciprocity between and among members of a community. For rural communities, reciprocity is a part of the fabric of rural life that makes living in a rural community an experience of high social investment (Gittell & Thompson, 2001).

While the loss of social capital is often associated with the disintegration of the social fabric in poor communities, it has also been examined in the study of wealthy gated communities (Moobela, 2003). There is evidence that the breakdown in trusting social relations is occurring in all parts of society. Bonding and bridging are two ways of building social capital and avoiding the breakdown in social relations. Bonding and bridging are two attributes of social capital (Flora & Flora, 2004; Putnam, 2000).

Bonding refers to the relationships held within the group. The more connections the group has within its boundaries and exercises those relationships, the more tightly bonded members become. Bonding relationships strengthen links between people, facilitating forms of intragroup interaction and collective action. In a study of rural Andean Indians, it was found that bonding typically occurs within genders, kinship lines, and groups of similar status (Bebbington & Carroll, 2002). Bonding capital can occur to the level that excludes people who are not part of the group.

Bridging refers to social capital that connects stakeholders to those who are different (Flora & Flora, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Bridging capital is measured by the ties and connections to those outside the immediate group. Typically, bridging capital is necessary for bringing in outside resources and building connections within and beyond the immediate community. Research has been conducted at the national and local levels on the effects of social capital on depressed regions, whether rural or urban (Duncan, 2001; Gittel & Thompson, 2001). Duncan's examination of poor rural communities in Appalachia and the Mississippi River Delta revealed that bridging capital was critical for communities to adapt and adjust to change. Those regions with lower levels of social capital had higher crime rates, more health related issues, and depressed psychological states of its residents.

While many theorists consider social capital to be an individual asset, other researchers believe that the degree of social capital an individual may possess is also a societal asset, benefiting the public good. These researchers maintain that social capital is dependent on three things: the number of individuals in the network willing to help, the strength of the relationship, and the nature of the resources these individuals may provide (Burt, 1992; Dijkstra, Veenstra, & Peschar, 2004). Where social capital is high, no player has exclusive ownership rights to social capital. If a partner in a relationship withdraws, the connection, with whatever social capital it contained, dissolves. If a firm, for example, treats a cluster of customers poorly and they leave, the social capital represented by the firm-cluster relationship is lost. The returns from social capital are like the interest payments of an investment. Through investing social capital in colleagues, friends, and clients, opportunities to broaden ones' contacts and connections for

additional resources occur (Burt, 1992; Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001).

At the point of the urban-rural interface, which is the point at which urban and rural mix, it was discovered that developing high levels of social capital benefited both groups. Where farmers and non-farmers traditionally distrusted each other, the development of bridging capital led to economic connections and the exchange of farm products for cash in local farmer markets; it also led one stakeholder to state that they “had a neighbor when before they didn’t know they had one” (Sharp et al., 2002). The benefit of high levels of social capital among parties goes beyond the economic model of companies working collaboratively; it also applies to the community and societal model, having far reaching implications for schools.

Studies of the rural Amish communities in Eastern Pennsylvania revealed a high level of social capital within their community (Kraybill, 2001). The development of social capital in the Amish community keeps the community cohesive within and insulated from outside culture. Amish values of simplicity, humility, and austerity entail personal sacrifice. According to Kraybill, they provide the cultural capital to build commitment to community and mobilize social capital. Rejecting the automobile and keeping to horse-drawn carriages is not just a matter of religious beliefs, it keeps the society physically linked in close proximity to each other, aiding in the development of social capital. A typical Amish custom of a barn raising becomes an important means for members to come together and invest their time, physical, and emotional support. The activity strengthens the community and promotes bonding capital within the community.

*School*

Small schools generally denote high schools of less than 400 pupils and elementary schools of less than 200 pupils (Howley, 2001). Howley's research indicated that small schools in impoverished rural areas could establish a level of excellence. These schools are often isolated and seldom recognized for their degree of excellence when compared to large well-funded schools in urban areas that have greater resources. Many high performing rural schools have been found to have a high degree of trusting relationships between school personnel and community members resulting in a high level of trust equating to social capital (Gillaspie, 2003; Noguera, 2001).

The development of social capital is one way of leveraging resources from outside the community to improve achievement in schools (Duncan, (2001). Improving the quality of the public school is one way to meet the community's long-term needs. By applying the concept of bridging and building social capital in rural communities, stakeholders were able to access resources from outside the community to expand development of their community. There appears to be an inverse relationship between social capital and poverty; it also appears to reveal a direct relationship between social capital and community stability (Duncan, 2001).

Community stability appears to be correlated to school achievement. There are two essential components of social capital affecting neighborhoods and schools: the overall sense of attachment and loyalty among neighborhood residents, and the ability of residents to influence a strong socio-cultural milieu into effective collective action. The former can be thought of as the commitment that residents make to each other and their environs, and the latter as their capacity to act (Gittel & Vidal, 1998).

## *Change*

As rural communities experience emigration, they also experience dwindling human resources (Bollman, 1999). The lack of human resources makes adapting to change more difficult. For a community to remain vibrant and progressive, traditional boundaries in rural communities must be redefined so community members learn to work together to address the changing needs of their community (Holton, 2004). The community's changing needs also affect an individual's decision to remain or move away.

What the community has to offer can affect whether or not people make a decision to move into a community. People base their decision to move from one community to another community on a variety of personal and life situation factors that vary in importance (Thornbro, 1999). Ultimately, many people choose a community by how well they believe it meets personal and life situation needs. Thus, communities that desire to remain vibrant and progressive must develop plans for change that address an individual's evolving needs (Thornbro).

Change in rural community life can be challenging. Often a reluctance to change can be measured by the degree to which stakeholders hold on to the past. They believe a way of life has been lost, that people are somehow not what they used to be (Wuthnow, 1998). In many respects, they feel a sense of angst. Sometimes the sense of loss is observed in remarks made about newcomers or public officials. Wuthnow (1998) refers to this as loose connections. One could also refer to these loose connections as bonding capital gone awry.

## *Kansas*

A study of Kansas school districts found that there is a great degree of inequity in the resources among districts (Augenblick et al., 2001). This inequity is accentuated by the demographic changes in Kansas' rural communities. Wealthier districts generate more revenue from their tax structure and enact a higher local tax to support their school system. The generation of revenue and support for schools may be related to the degree of social capital that exists in these communities. As the out-migration continues for rural areas in Kansas, the suburban areas of Kansas are experiencing rapid growth (Hays, 2003).

Mays (1968) seminal work on rural communities found that the community of Sublette was forced to face major changes as the agricultural base began to change. Mays found Sublette stakeholders reluctantly adapting to changes in the community. In order for the community to embrace the changes, new patterns of relationships were established, resulting in different trust relationships. Community members found themselves having to place trust in new arrivals to their community.

The current demographic and economic climate in Kansas continues to change. As rural communities decline, a heavier burden is placed on those remaining to sustain the infrastructure (Ransom, 1999). This burden is particularly felt in the tax load that is transferred to the remaining community members. These remaining community members are left to fund their schools and many other community municipalities.

Kansas' current ongoing school funding dispute centers on the need to address this inequity. Of the 105 counties in Kansas, 58 have smaller populations than in 1890. Since 1980, 80 counties have lost population. Nearly 70% of all Kansans will live in nine

counties by the year 2030 (Ransom, 1999). While these predictions appear dire to many rural communities, there is hope if communities exhibit elements of strong social capital (Thornbro, 1999). Many of the characteristics Thornbro's subjects listed can be found in the descriptions of communities with a high level of social capital (Coleman, 1988).

Particularly relevant to Kansas is the relationship between faith-based organizations and extension work resulting in increases in social capital (Prins & Ewert, 2002). Prins and Ewert maintain that collaboration holds promise for extension and faith-based organizations. As community-based organizations and faith-based organizations are woven into the social fabric of local neighborhoods, many of their members understand community needs and are highly motivated to solve them. Intertwining the connections between faith-based organizations and extension work in rural communities could improve the social capital in the community and bridge connections beyond.

The tightly knit Amish communities of Eastern Pennsylvania are a good example of faith-based organizations developing social capital in rural communities, helping them to transition through change. As land has become more scarce and economic pressures build on the family farm, many Amish have adapted to a lifestyle that is less agrarian and more entrepreneurial (Kraybill & Nolt, 1995). Numerous Amish communities in Eastern Pennsylvania have witnessed a centuries old tradition of a livelihood by the plow being exchanged for an entrepreneurial spirit in other forms of business. Survival for these communities has meant adapting to changing economic and demographic demands while still clinging to a lifestyle that sets them apart from the larger society. The social capital that they have established has been a central element in sustaining their closeness and maintaining a shared identity.

## *Summary*

This literature review began with an introduction to the reader regarding the vast differences that exist in rural communities. Depending on the part of the country in which one lives, rural can describe many different settings. For this reason, a qualitative case study of a local rural region must acquaint the reader with a detailed description of the region under study. This study has been framed from the perspective of organizational and societal theory and grounded in the appreciative inquiry research perspective.

As presented in this chapter, a vast amount of literature and documentation exists regarding the study of rural communities. Combined, these studies portray the dynamic changes occurring through rural communities and, in particular, the Kansas heartland. Since this study is grounded in the appreciative inquiry research perspective, the literature review sought to find studies that paralleled this research perspective. As a community's aspirations were examined through the lens of social capital, it was important to recognize the constructs that were associated with the identification of the stakeholders' aspirations (Cooperrider et al., 2003).

According to this literature review when communities develop a healthy level of social capital, they have a greater ability to adapt to changes. Rural communities that seek to develop bonds beyond the immediate community appeared to have greater resources at their disposal for achieving their aspirations. Based on this literature review, a clear need existed to examine Goessel stakeholders' aspirations for USD 411 and their community. As the community of Goessel faces an uncertain demographic and economic future, it is increasingly important that the stakeholders identify aspirations for USD 411 and their community. Only by knowing and stating their aspirations first, will they be able to next

formulate a plan for achieving those aspirations. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for the study, and how the researcher selected a sample, gathered data, and analyzed the results.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Methodology*

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of Goessel stakeholders for USD 411 and their community. The aspirations of the Goessel stakeholders were viewed through the theoretical framework of social capital (Putnam, 2000), both bonding and bridging (Flora & Flora, 2004). A qualitative, embedded case study research design applying the appreciative inquiry research perspective was used to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of the Goessel stakeholders for USD 411 and their community during the late fall of 2004.

### *Research Questions*

What are the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for their community?

What are the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for USD 411?

How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for USD 411?

How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for their community?

### *Context*

The research site was a small rural community located in central Kansas that was founded in the late 1800's. The town's population was 557 in 2003 (*Kansas Statistical Abstract 2003, 2004*) and USD 411 enrollment is 282 for the 2004-2005 school year.

While there are fewer family farms than there were 20 years ago, the community's base is

still agricultural. The business district is small; it has a retirement/nursing home, grocery and farm supply store, bank, credit union, and a mail ordering business. Most households have one or more wage earners who commute to work outside of Goessel. USD 411's boundaries extend beyond Goessel proper; it has a population of approximately 1328 from which 284 students attend school in USD 411 (*Kansas Statistical Abstract 2003, 2004*).

### *Research Design*

A qualitative, embedded, case study research design applied the research perspective of appreciative inquiry to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of the Goessel stakeholders for USD 411 and their community during the fall of 2004. Within the case study were two embedded cases. One embedded case examined USD 411 stakeholders. The second embedded case examined the community of Goessel stakeholders.

An embedded case study is a device for focusing a case study (Yin, 1994). The larger case study examined the aspirations of the community of Goessel as a whole. Two embedded case studies examine units within the larger community and contribute specific information endemic to the larger community. The study was conducted within the boundaries of USD 411. A purposive sampling of community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders who resided within USD 411 was asked to participate in a focus group (Krueger, 1994), interviews (Patton, 2002), and a left-and right- hand column case method (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

The embedded case study was framed from the research perspective of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2003). The appreciative inquiry research

perspective fits well with asset development and identifying the strengths of a community (Cooperrider et al., 2003). It helps to identify what is right in the setting by referring to the unconditional positive question (Ludema et al., 2001).

The study included community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders. Nineteen stakeholders participated in the focus groups and 20 completed the Left- and right-hand column case method. Interviews were considered as an option, if necessary. After the completion of community stakeholders' and USD 411 stakeholders' focus groups and the Left- and right-hand column case method, there were still seven stakeholders, three Board of Education (BOE) members, and four city council members, who were not able to participate in the study. The open meeting rule and personal schedules made it impossible for the seven stakeholders to be involved in the focus groups or the Left- and right-hand column case method. The researcher made the decision to exercise the interview option and interviewed the seven remaining stakeholders.

### *Participants*

All study participants were vested stakeholders within USD 411 and the community of Goessel. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). A vested interest was defined as stakeholders being within one of the following categories: having a child attending school in USD 411, being an employee of USD 411, serving as a volunteer on a USD 411 school committee such as Board of Education (BOE), Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), School Site Council member (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). From this list, two levels of criteria were determined for the selection in the sampling. A level one priority was given to stakeholders holding formal or informal leadership positions in USD 411 or the

community of Goessel. This level sought to have an equal gender representation and equal representation of Mennonite and non-Mennonites, and proportional membership of farmers and non-farmers as possible. The study also sought to have equal representation of ‘Cradle Goesselites’ and ‘Non-cradle Goesselites’. A ‘Cradle Goesselite’ was defined as a person with family lineage rooted in the community. A ‘Non-cradle Goesselite’ was defined as a person who has moved into the community and does not trace his/her lineage back beyond a generation to the community of Goessel. Generally, for the community of Goessel, Cradle Goesselites are mostly Mennonites.

The second level of priority was given to those with the similar criteria in level one exempting the leadership positions. In addition, membership at level two included anyone with a relational tie to Goessel and participated as an observer of school activities but did not necessarily volunteer time to the school.

#### *Participant Sampling Profile*

There were 46 participants in the study. Of these 46 participants, seven participated in the interviews, 20 participated in the left- and right-hand column case method, 10 participated in the USD 411 focus group, and nine participated in the community focus group. This study was delimited to legitimate stakeholders within USD 411 who have a vested interest in USD 411 and the community of Goessel. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method (Erlandson et al., 1993). Those stakeholders residing within USD 411 and having a vested interest in USD 411 or the community of Goessel were considered for the sample. The number of Level I and Level II participants can be found in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Collection Methods

Collection Method	Level I	Level II
Focus Group- USD 411	10	
Focus Group- Community	9	
Left- and Right-Hand Column Case Method	14	6
Interviews	7	

The study sought to have an equal gender representation and equal representation of Mennonite and non-Mennonites, and proportional membership of town and rural residents as possible. The study also sought to have a representation of ‘Cradle Goesselites’ and ‘Non-cradle Goesselites’. A ‘Cradle Goesselite’ was defined as a person with family lineage rooted in the community and a ‘Non-cradle Goesselite’ was defined as a person who has moved into the community and does not trace his/her lineage back beyond a generation to the community of Goessel. Generally, for the community of Goessel, Cradle Goesselites are mostly Mennonites. The following four sections detail the profile of the participants in each of the data collection methods.

*BOE and City Council Participants*

All seven members of the BOE participated: two participated in the left- and right-hand column case method, one participated on the community focus group, one participated on the USD 411 focus group, and three were interviewed. These numbers are reflected in table 3.2. All seven of the city council members participated: one participated in the left- and right-hand column case method, two participated on the community focus group, and four were interviewed. In order not to violate open meetings rules, no more

than two council members or two board members could be convened at any one time.

Table 3.2

Participation of Decision Makers

Participants	USD 411 BOE	City Council
USD 411 Focus Group	2	0
Community Focus Group	1	2
LH RH CCM	1	1
Interviews	3	4

*Focus Group Participants*

Both focus groups were conducted in the evening between Christmas and New Year's. Each focus group was conducted in the elementary school library with an observer present for the school focus group. The protocol was the same for both groups. All participants willingly signed the consent form and agreed to allow the focus groups to be tape-recorded. A profile for both focus groups is listed in Table 3.3. Twelve participants were invited to each focus group. Two male non-Mennonites were not able to attend the USD 411 focus group and three female non-Mennonites were not able to attend the community focus group.

Most of the participants appeared eager and enthusiastic to be helping in a research project regarding either their school or community and were interested in knowing how the results would be shared. All appeared to be relaxed as the members of both groups engaged in friendly visiting with each other prior to the beginning of the protocol. Participants sat around a grouping of tables in a large circle so each participant could see and hear each other. The occupations and leadership positions that were represented on the community focus group included banking, contractor, business, health field, management, farming, maintenance, clerical, and design and production. The USD

411 focus group was composed of both certified and classified staff including teachers, bus driver, aide, and parents. The occupations of the parents on the focus group included an array of professional and nonprofessional positions.

Table 3.3

Participant Profile in Focus Groups

Participants	USD 411 Focus Group	Community Focus Group
Men	3	7
Women	7	2
Total: Men/Women	10	9
Town	5	5
Rural	5	4
Total: Town/Rural	10	9
Mennonite	8	7
Non-Mennonite	2	2
Total Mennonite/Non-Men.	10	9
Cradle Goesselite	2	4
Non-cradle Goesselite	8	5
Total Cradle/Non-cradle	10	9

*Left and Right-Hand Column Case Method Participants*

The left- and right-hand column case method was administered to 20 participants who represented community of Goessel and USD 411 stakeholders. Many of these participants maintained active involvement in both community and school functions, consequently, identifying them as primarily a community of Goessel or USD 411 stakeholder was not possible. The left- and right-hand column case method was administered on four separate occasions all located at the elementary library. The purpose of offering three separate time slots was to accommodate the conflicting work schedules of participants. Participants could choose from a Saturday morning, a weekday late

afternoon, or a weekday evening time. These three time slots garnered 16 participants out of 22 invitations. Five additional invitations were sent out and a fourth administration time was offered. Four of the five invitees attended, bringing the total to 20. Table 3.4 profiles the participants in this part of the data collection.

Table 3.4

Participant Profile in Left and Right-Hand Column Case Method

Participant	Male	Female	Town	Rural	Menn.*	Non-M**	Cradle***	Non-C****
1	X			X	X		X	
2	X			X	X			X
3		X		X	X		X	
4		X	X		X			X
5		X		X	X			X
6		X		X	X			X
7		X		X	X		X	
8	X		X		X			X
9		X	X		X		X	
10	X		X			X		X
11		X		X	X			X
12	X		X			X		X
13	X			X	X			X
14		X	X		X		X	
15		X	X			X		X
16	X			X	X		X	
17		X		X	X			X
18		X		X		X		X
19		X		X		X		X
20		X	X			X		X
Total	7	13	8	12	14	6	5	15

\*Mennonite \*\*Non-Mennonite \*\*\*Cradle Goesselite \*\*\*\*Non-cradle

Goesselite

All four administrations of the left- and right-hand column case method followed the protocol. Participants were welcomed to the library where they were offered some light refreshments. After all participants were present, the study was introduced. Members were told how they were selected and how the data would be used. The researcher assured them that their input would be confidential.

Participants were introduced to the left-and right-hand column case method. An example was given to the participants that did not refer in any way to Goessel, using a scenario at a restaurant. Participants were then allowed to ask questions. They were given pens and paper and allowed to go to another table in the library to privately write their conversation scenario. The directions required the participant to indicate whether the participant was a town or rural resident, Mennonite or non-Mennonite, and cradle Goesselite or non-cradle Goesselite. No other form of identification was required. Participants were informed that they were not required to indicate their religion if they did not desire to do so. All participants answered the profile questions. The length of time for the participants to write their conversation scenario varied from 15 minutes to 1 hour and 30 minutes with most taking 45 minutes to one hour.

#### *Interview Participants*

After the completion of the focus groups and the left and right-hand column case method, it was discovered there were three BOE members and four city council members who had not been sampled. Due to open meetings rule, only two invitations were allowed for each focus group, and individual schedules had not allowed some of them to attend the left and right-hand column case method writing session. Interviews were arranged, and the same questions were administered to the interviewees. All of the remaining seven decision makers participated in the interviews.

Due to severe weather conditions with ice, snow, and cold, the interviewees were offered the opportunity to be interviewed at school or in their home if going to the school was not convenient. All but two of these interviews were conducted at the elementary school office. The interviews were tape recorded with the permission of each participant

for later transcribing.

### *Data Collection Methods*

The following four research methods were used to collect data: focus groups (Krueger, 1994), interviews (Patton, 2002), the left and right-hand column case method (Argyris & Schon, 1996; Erlandson et al., 1993), and the collection of relevant documents and artifacts (Erlandson et al., 1993):

1. Two focus groups were used to collect data from USD 411 stakeholders and community of Goessel leaders. The USD 411 focus group consisted of 10 level I and level II participants: BOE members, certified and classified staff members, site council members, PTO members, and parents. Nine community of Goessel leaders participated in the community focus group: city council members, business leaders and owners, farmers, and church pastoral leaders.
2. The left- and right-hand column case method was given to 20 purposively selected community of Goessel stakeholders. Members of the BOE, city council, and leaders in the community of Goessel participated in the left- and right-hand column case method.
3. A collection of relevant documents was examined. The documents included BOE minutes, city council minutes, and other relevant publicly accessible documents.
4. Seven individual interviews were conducted with the remaining USD 411 members and Goessel City Council members who were not involved in either the focus groups or the left- and right-hand column case method.

The study was originally designed for the participation of 30 participants; however, 46 stakeholders participated in the study. The focus groups were enlarged to reach more people, the left- and right-hand column case method increased from 15 to 20 because more stakeholders wanted to be included in the study. The profile of the sampling reflects the population of the community of Goessel at large. The community of Goessel is predominately Mennonite and the sample reflects that population. The community of Goessel is balanced between town and rural numbers and the sample reflects that as well. The 46 participants reflect close to 10% of Goessel's population, or approximately 5% of the community population at large.

#### *Data Collection Methods*

Data was collected during the fall 2004 using the following data collection methods: focus groups, left- and right-hand column case method, interviews, and document review.

#### *Focus Groups*

The USD 411 focus group was comprised of 10 USD 411 stakeholders. These 10 stakeholders were comprised of farmers and non-farmers, Cradle Goesselites and non-Cradle Goesselites. They were selected primarily from level I criteria. As needed, additional participants were selected from level II criteria. The researcher described the purpose of the study, identified any potential risks to the participants, and solicited permission to participate.

The community of Goessel focus group consisted of nine community members. The nine members included city council members, business and service leaders, and pastoral leadership. These participants were selected primarily from level I criteria but

also represented participants from level II.

Questions were adapted from the Appreciative Inquiry Handbook (Cooperrider et al., 2003). Once the focus group was convened, consent forms and a description of the study were distributed. The participants were allowed to accept or decline participation. Both focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed. They were conducted during the evening hours on separate days in the library of the elementary school. Participants sat in a circle around tables during the process.

Each question was piloted prior to being used in the focus group with seven stakeholders representing the Goessel community and USD 411. The stakeholders who piloted the questions were not participants in the study. After the piloting sessions, the participants provided valuable feedback. Their feedback revealed that the questions were thoughtful, “conversation starters” and directed to the focus of the study. There were no changes to the original questions as a result of the piloting.

Questions for the focus groups were derived directly from the research questions. For example, the third research question asks ‘How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for USD 411?’ From this question, the focus group was asked to share a series of stories from a personal experience that reflects the best of the USD 411 and the community of Goessel. Focus group questions are included in Appendix A.

#### *Left- and Right-Hand Column Case Method*

Argyris and Schon (1978) developed the left- and right-hand column case method to identify the issues that members in an organization are reluctant to discuss. The left- and right-hand column case method has been demonstrated to identify tacit beliefs. In a

case study of teacher evaluation practices in a Midwest community, the left- and right-hand column case method assisted researchers investigating teachers and administrators tacit beliefs regarding the teacher summative evaluation process (Calabrese, Sherwood, Fast, & Womack, 2004).

The left- and right-hand column case method requires participants to write on the right hand side of a sheet of paper an imaginary conversation between themselves and a community member (See Appendix B). In this conversation, the members discuss their aspirations for the community in a realistic conversation with a community leader. In the left hand column, they write down those ideas, or feelings they do not feel free to discuss openly with the community leader. The left- and right-hand column case method was administered to a purposively selected sample of 20 participants.

The feelings and ideas that participants may be afraid to speak of on the left hand side of the paper are referred to as undiscussables (Argyris, 1999). The left- and right-hand column case method allows participants to reveal and reflect on what they would normally not reveal in a conversation.

### *Interviews*

Seven individual interviews were conducted with the remaining USD 411 BOE members and Goessel City Council members who were not involved in either the focus groups or the left- and right-hand column case method. The same questions were administered to all of the interviewees. Due to severe weather conditions with ice, snow, and cold, the interviewees were offered the opportunity to be interviewed at school or in their home if going to the school was not convenient. All but two of these interviews were conducted at the elementary school office. The interviews were tape recorded with

the permission of each participant for later transcribing and data storage (See Appendix A for the interview questions). Those interviewed were asked questions from the list of questions in Appendix A that pertained directly to their status.

#### *Relevant Documents*

Data collected from relevant documents were analyzed to assist in determining stakeholders' aspirations for the community of Goessel and USD 411. Relevant documents came from the BOE minutes, city council minutes, and other publicly accessible documents.

#### *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed by using the comparative analysis matrix method (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analyzed data included recorded transcripts of the focus groups, participants' responses to the left- and right-hand column case method, interviews, and relevant documents (See Appendix C for matrix templates).

(1) Data were initially sorted by whether the data suggested an aspiration or a challenge. The data were then sorted according to bridging capital or bonding capital. Responses that revealed a context of bridging capital and capacity building were categorized in the bridging category. Participants who revealed ties within the community and caution toward outside connections were categorized in the bonding category.

(2) Findings were sorted by their sources such as Mennonite or non-Mennonite, cradle or non-cradle Goesselites. Themes were identified and described. There were more Mennonite responses than non-Mennonite responses and more non-cradle Goesselites than cradle Goesselite responses.

(3) Data were arranged in a matrix by the aspirations or challenges it contained

for the community of Goessel and/or USD 411. Each section of each matrix was analyzed by using the content analysis method (Patton, 2002). Units of data and themes were compared and analyzed from the data collection sources (Babbie, 2004; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

### *Construct Validity*

Yin (1994) suggests there are three primary methods to verify validity. The first method is to use multiple sources of evidence to increase construct validity. The data from this research were collected from 46 participants. Data were also collected from six sub-populations identified in this study: Mennonite, non-Mennonite, rural and town residents, cradle Goesselites, and non-cradle Goesselites. The data were also collected from participants based on their leadership role in the community Goessel, both religious and secular leadership positions.

The second method to verify validity is to establish a chain of evidence. In this case, the chain of evidence encompasses the following four sources of data: documentation, archival records, interviews, and participant observation. For this study, all four evidence links are applied in establishing a chain of evidence.

The third method to verify validity is having the draft proposal reviewed by important informants. For this study, the draft was reviewed by the participants in the study; participants verified the data and facts (Yin, 1994).

### *External Validity*

This study contains rich and detailed descriptions that enhance the external validity of the study. Rich and detailed were collected from participants regarding their perceptions of their aspirations and challenges for the community of Goessel and USD

411(Merriam, 2001) .

### *Reliability*

The embedded case study protocols are described in the data collection process. The case study protocols include the rules and guidelines for the data gathering process (Yin, 1994).

Three methods were employed to maintain reliability. 1) The researcher recognized the potential for inherent bias as an employee and researcher in USD 411(Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). To control for this, the researcher's position was clearly stated to participants as both researcher and employee of USD 411. 2) Using the constant comparative method, the data were triangulated between collection methods, comparing data between and within themes. 3) A rich and detailed description of the methodology was recorded for an audit trail (Merriam, 2001). The study's reliability was further enhanced through consistency in the questions asked for all focus groups and interviews.

### *Summary*

Chapter 3 explained the qualitative methods that were employed in this research. The data collected reflected the views of the community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders in late fall of 2004. The four methods of data collection were the left- and right-hand column case method, focus groups, interviews, and relevant document reviews. Participants were selected by purposive sampling methods. Social capital and their attributes of bonding and bridging were employed as the theoretical frameworks for the study. Unique to the study was the appreciative inquiry research perspective that aligned itself to the application of the methods. Methods for validating the study's findings were examined as well. Chapter 4 will discuss the results based on

the responses to the research questions.

## CHAPTER 4

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of Goessel stakeholders for USD 411 and their community. The aspirations of the stakeholders of the community of Goessel were viewed through the theoretical framework of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and its attributes of bonding and bridging capital (Flora & Flora, 2004). A qualitative, embedded case study research design applying the research perspective of appreciative inquiry was used to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of the Goessel stakeholders for USD 411 and their community during the fall of 2004.

Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and findings for this study. The data were organized around the two central categories in the appreciative inquiry research perspective: aspirations and challenges. Nine major findings were grouped into aspirations or challenges categories. A tenth finding centered on data related to social capital and its attributes of bonding and bridging. These findings are then linked to the study's research questions.

### *Research Questions*

This study sought answers to the following four research questions:

1. What are the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for their community?
2. What are the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for USD 411?
3. How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for USD 411?

4. How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for their community?

### *Methodology*

An appreciative inquiry research perspective was used to drive a qualitative, embedded case study design. This research design was selected because it provided a detailed description of the aspirations of USD 411 stakeholders and community of Goessel stakeholders (Yin, 1994). The two embedded cases, USD 411 stakeholders and the community of Goessel stakeholders, contributed specific information endemic to the larger community.

The study was conducted within the boundaries of USD 411, a rural school district located in central Kansas with a distinct Mennonite culture. A purposive sampling of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders who resided within USD 411 were asked to participate in a focus group and a left- and right-hand column case method (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Follow-up interviews were conducted with community of Goessel stakeholders in leadership positions.

### *Research Participants*

This study was delimited to stakeholders within USD 411 who have a vested interest in USD 411 and the community of Goessel. There were 46 participants in the study. Of these 46 participants, seven participated in the interviews, 20 participated in the left- and right-hand column case method, 10 participated in the USD 411 focus group, and nine participated in the Goessel community focus group. The study had an equal gender representation, a proportional representation of Mennonites and non-Mennonites, and a proportional membership of town and rural residents.

### *Data Analysis*

Using the model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), the data were analyzed and arranged in matrices along themes that were embedded in the data. The matrices reflect both the sources of the data and the themes. The emergent design of the methodology allowed for the matrices to change shape as the different themes emerged and were identified. Some matrices were arranged to reflect the different responses of Mennonites or non-Mennonites. Still other matrices were arranged to reflect comments from cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites, as the data dictated. Within each matrix were data reflecting a representative sampling of responses. The number of similar responses in each theme were tabulated and compared. Within each theme, responses from Mennonite and non-Mennonite, cradle and non-cradle Goesselites were compared.

### *Summary of Findings*

This section briefly summarizes the findings of the study. The 10 findings are summarized according to aspirations, challenges, and social capital and its attributes of bonding and bridging.

1. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to a unique and independent identity for USD 411.
2. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a unique and independent school system with high academic standards.
3. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders shared their aspirations to maintain their high degree of quality of life and sense of safety that they perceive to exist in the community.

4. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a positive relationship between USD 411 and the churches within the community.
5. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to embrace diversity.
6. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders have aspirations for community improvements.
7. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders hold a positive view toward meeting the challenges they perceive to face the community of Goessel and USD 411.
8. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the challenges that exist in sustaining a small town atmosphere and are willing to work together to seek a viable community based solution.
9. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the inherent challenges of sustaining high academic standards in USD 411 due to potential changes in the community's demographics if population growth is encouraged.
10. The Community of Goessel stakeholders provided evidence of social capital in the community as expressed through the attributes of bonding capital and the need to generate more bridging capital.

There were variations in responses between Mennonites/non-Mennonites and cradle/non-cradle Mennonites; however, there were no identifiable differences in responses between town and rural residents. This chapter concludes with an analysis of

the social capital and its attributes of bonding and bridging found in the data.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 list the overall themes and categories under each theme. Table 4.1 focuses on the aspirations and table 4.2 focuses on the inherent challenges. Further, in this chapter, each theme concludes with a table. Tables 4.3 through 4.12 are arranged to show the variations in responses of Mennonites and non-Mennonite, cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites according to the aspirations, challenges, and social capital at the end of each theme. The order of the people listed and the number of quotes in the table reflect the salient quotes that are reflective for that particular group. The number of similar quotes is stated at the end. A discussion of each of these tables precedes the table.

Table 4.1

Aspirations

USD 411 - Aspirations	Common Aspirations	Community of Goessel - Aspirations
Finding 1: The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to a unique and independent identity for USD 411.		
	A Strong and Enduring School System Common identity Heritage	
Finding 2: The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a unique and independent school system with high academic standards.		
	Identification with USD 411 Caring and dedicated staff Academics Music Leadership Community support	
Finding 3: The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders shared their aspirations to maintain their high degree of quality of life and sense of safety that they perceive to exist in the community.		
	Quality of life Safety	
Finding 4 The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a positive relationship between USD411 and the churches within the community.		
	Values Communication	
Finding 5: The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to embrace diversity.		
	Religious diversity Ethnic diversity	

Table 4.1 continued

Aspirations

Finding 6: The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders have aspirations for community improvements.		
USD 411 - Aspirations	Common Aspirations	Community of Goessel - Aspirations
		Jobs and economic development Community Wellness center Paved streets Town gathering place Maintenance and growth of faith based values
Finding 7: The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders hold a positive view toward meeting the challenges they perceive to face the Community of Goessel and USD 411.		
School enrollment	Community development	

Table 4.2

Inherent Challenges

USD 411 – Challenges	Common Inherent Challenges	Community of Goessel – Challenges
<p>Finding 8: The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the challenges that exist in sustaining a small town atmosphere and are willing to work together to seek a viable community based solution.</p>		
	<p>Maintaining USD 411 as independent entity            Attracting young people            Housing            Meeting the needs of the elderly and the young            Community survival            Varied perceptions of urgency</p>	<p>City leaders initiative needs to be publicized.</p>
<p>Finding 9: The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the inherent challenges of sustaining high academic standards in USD 411 due to potential changes in community’s demographics if population growth is encouraged.</p>		
<p>Sustaining high standards versus declining standards</p>	<p>Small size and atmosphere versus growth</p>	
<p>Finding 10: The Community of Goessel stakeholders provided evidence of social capital in the community as expressed through bonding capital and the need to generate more bridging capital.</p>		
	<p>Bonding            Bridging</p>	

*Finding 1*

The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to a unique and independent identity for USD 411. They seek to maintain and sustain USD 411 as unique and strongly independent. The stakeholders also frequently referred to a common identity and the community’s heritage in validating their claim as unique and independent.

*USD 411: A strong and enduring school system.* Of the 46 participants, 44 spoke or wrote specifically regarding their desire to see the school system endure as a strong and independent institution. When the USD 411 focus group participants were asked what their aspirations are for USD 411, without hesitation, several responded, “Open!”,

and “Open for our grandchildren!” They were also concerned that the same qualities found in the small size of USD 411 would not be lost.

The majority of the participants stated that they wanted the school to grow, but they did not want it to grow so much that it would lose the inherent positive qualities of a small school. A participant stated, “For me the dream would be to stay good, remain small, but have just enough growth to sustain the programs and facilities it needs for the students.”

Another aspiration for the school system is to add the capacity of broadening the program offerings for students. A USD 411 stakeholder remarked that she wished “the school system could offer a tremendous variety of options to students to allow them to follow and develop their interests.” Many participants, both Mennonite and non-Mennonite, who responded to the left- and right-hand column case method commented on the right side that students could get involved in many activities being in a small school; however, on the left side, the participant lamented that there were not more options for those not interested in either music or sports. One participant remarked, “If you are not into music or sports, you might have difficulty finding your niche.” Another lamented on the left side, “The down side of a small school is the lack of choice in courses. If you don’t excel in academics, music, sports or vocational education, then what is there for you at Goessel?”

The community of Goessel holds strong aspirations to maintain a vibrant school system. The stakeholders were quick to acknowledge the survival of the school system is closely related to survival of the community. They recognized that the declining enrollment issue closely affects the district and the community and poses a challenge to

their dreams.

Some participants noted in their aspirations that choice in the curriculum is limited and aspired for more options for their students. A Mennonite stakeholder expressed her wish that the school could offer more electives, noting, “some other language classes besides Spanish or other science courses would be good.”

*Common identity.* While evidence exists that the community is gradually changing, there remains an aspiration to maintain a common identity that binds stakeholders together. As one Mennonite participant said, “While USD 411 is a public school, it comes about as close to being a private school as you can get.” Another noted, “Our community is changing, but it (USD 411) still has the Mennonite thumbprint all over it, and that is not all bad.” A non-Mennonite shared, “As a Goesselite, we are unique here; for example, look at our mascot, the Bluebird, not Wildcats or Trojans. That is just a little quirky, but okay!” Another stakeholder added, “There’s positive social fabric running in our community, throughout our community, people looking out for each other in appropriate ways. We all care about each other, that is just Goessel, that is just who we are.”

USD 411 stakeholders and community of Goessel stakeholders held firm to the belief that maintaining a strong and independent school district is a community priority. The common identity of the school system remains the common factor in a community that is gradually becoming less Mennonite and more diverse. The dream of maintaining a common identity that is unique is a common aspiration. Both stakeholder groups aspire to maintain a unique and independent identity.

*Heritage.* For many cradle Goesselites, sustaining the dream of a unique and

independent community is a legacy that they feel impelled to carry on and fulfills the previous generations' aspiration. For both community and USD 411 stakeholders, a strong sense of community heritage that can be traced back many centuries provides a unique and independent identity. Many participants identified themselves as having grown up in Goessel and shared stories of the school they attended and school events. One USD 411 stakeholder conveyed a memory of his father making sure the bus got through the snow on the way to school. "Dad was on the school board, and when the bus came to pick us up, Dad grabbed the shovel and hopped on with us. He was going to be sure the bus made it through the snow drifts to school!" He went on to lament that today school officials are quick to call off school because they have become more safety conscious. He commented:

In those days, people were willing to take risks; and we knew there would be no calling off of school. People were more determined and saw school as too important to call off for even a day. We were determined to have school no matter what.

Several long-time community of Goessel stakeholders relayed the story of early community leaders traveling to Topeka to lobby lawmakers for their school district when Kansas rural schools were being consolidated. They did not want USD 411 carved up and given to neighboring districts. One of the Mennonite stakeholders related, "Those early leaders, they were determined and forward thinking. We owe it to them to carry on the legacy they started and keep our unique and independent identity." Table 4.3 reflects stakeholders aspirations for a unique and independent identity.

Table 4.3

Aspire to a Unique and Independent Identity

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Cradle Goesselites	<p>“Open for our grandchildren!”</p> <p>“The school system could offer a tremendous variety of options to students to allow them to follow and develop their interests.”</p> <p>7 similar comments</p>	A strong and enduring school system
Non-cradle Goesselites	<p>“Open!”</p> <p>“For me the dream would be to stay good, remain small, but have just enough growth to sustain the programs and facilities it needs for the students.”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	A strong and enduring school system
Mennonite	<p>“While USD 411 is a public school, it comes about as close to being a private school as you can get.”</p> <p>“Our community is changing, but it (USD 411) still has the Mennonite thumbprint all over it, and that is not all bad.”</p> <p>3 similar comments</p>	Common identity
Non-Mennonite	<p>“As a Goesselite, we are unique here; for example, look at our mascot, the Bluebird, not the Wildcats or Trojans. That is just a little quirky, but okay!”</p> <p>“There’s positive social fabric in our community, throughout our community, people looking out for each other in appropriate ways. We all care about each other, that is just Goessel, that is just who we are.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Common identity
Mennonite	<p>“Those early leaders, they were determined and forward thinking. We owe it to them to carry on the legacy they started and keep our unique and independent identity.”</p> <p>“...People were more determined and saw school as too important to call off for even a day.”</p> <p>5 similar comments</p>	Heritage
Non-Mennonite	None	Heritage

### *Summary*

The Mennonite background is a foundational piece forming the common identity and heritage for the community and shapes many of both groups of the stakeholders' aspirations. This unique and independent identity of Goessel's original settlers remains alive among stakeholders as they still embrace the values and beliefs of the earliest settlers in the community. This unique and independent perception of the community continues to affect the decisions and processes for the community of Goessel and USD 411.

#### *Finding 2*

Both stakeholder groups aspire to maintain a unique and independent school system with high academic standards. The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders strongly agreed that USD 411 was a vital part of the community and aspired to maintain a unique and independent school system with high academic standards. As one stakeholder stated succinctly, "The school system is the heartbeat of the community. We intend to keep our heartbeat strong!" The community identified itself through the school and the high academic standards and other areas of excellence found in the school system. As a result, there was a strong sense of community pride.

Several participants stated they were part of a strong school music program when they attended, "[They] fully expected this tradition to continue for their children." It made no difference whether the participant was Mennonite or non-Mennonite, a cradle Goesselite or non-cradle Goesselite, all held a strong sense of pride in the school system. A non-Mennonite, non-cradle Goesselite commented, "We were not sure at first, but in a short while we knew that coming to Goessel was the right thing for our children. The

school system has been outstanding for them.”

Community pride was revealed in the academic achievements of students and the music program. A participant commented, “Just look at how many times our students have achieved the standard of excellence!” A review of Board of Education minutes revealed that Goessel students have achieved the standard of excellence each year in reading, writing, math, and science at multiple grade levels. Over the past four years, they achieved the standard of excellence in 4-6 categories each year.

When probed about the genesis of their pride in the school system, the following factors were identified:

1. Community of Goessel stakeholder identification with USD 411.
2. Strong academics and high standards.
3. Caring and dedicated staff of USD 411.
4. Excellent music program.
5. Strong school leadership.
6. Vibrant community support.

The following sections describe each of the six areas. Table 4.4 at the end of this section provides a summary of comments from participants. There were no distinguishable differences between Mennonite and non-Mennonite perceptions of the school system. The input from Mennonite participants, however, related a history regarding the community and USD 411.

*Community of Goessel stakeholder identification with USD 411.* Community members identified strongly with USD 411 and it did not appear to matter if they had children enrolled in school. This was revealed by comments such as “Well, we don’t have

students enrolled anymore, but we attend nearly all the school events,” and “When the school has the community barbeque and spring concert, nearly everyone shows up.” A sign placed strategically along the road as you approach Goessel proudly proclaims the state basketball championship won over 10 years ago. Another Mennonite relayed in the left- and right-hand column case method, “We just have a lot of pride in our schools, and it shows!”

*Caring and dedicated staff of USD 411.* The staff of USD 411 is defined as both the certified and classified members of the USD 411. Comments from stakeholders related to teachers and staff members, including bus drivers, cooks, custodians, and administration. Members of the community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders viewed the staff of USD 411 as caring and dedicated. One participant commented that the staff are “extremely caring, willing in most cases to go the extra mile to help a student.” Another cited the dedication of staff, saying, “I often see their cars at the school or their lights on in their rooms in the evening or on weekends.” One stakeholder affirmed the deep concern that faculty have for their students, saying, “I know that if my child is not performing to expectations that I’ll get a call or letter from the school.”

Many of the participants shared personal stories and reflected on a relationship with specific teachers, accounting how a particular teacher assisted their child over a difficult aspect in their learning. A stakeholder related, “My child has special needs; I know that he will be looked after and I can trust what goes on here.” Another reflected on the role of staff, commenting that staff members are “visible in all aspects of the community.” The stakeholder also related how students see staff members in church, at

the grocery store, service station, on the streets, virtually wherever they go in the community. A stakeholder commented, “When I see them [USD 411 staff] at the grocery store, gas station or church, my child knows there is constant communication with me and they can’t get away with anything!” The relationship between the stakeholders and staff appeared to have one common goal: the child’s welfare. During the USD 411 focus group, participants unanimously agreed that, “Everyone on staff goes out of their way to help students, even the classified workers.”

There appeared to be no variation between Mennonites and non-Mennonites, cradle Goesselites or non-cradle Goesselites regarding their views toward the strength of the staff (See Table 4.4). This theme had strong supportive data in the interviews, focus groups, and left- and right-hand column case method.

*Strong academics and high standards in USD 411.* Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspired to sustain the strength of USD 411 academics. Stakeholders cited the expectations that staff have of students for excellence and the standards they set for high achievement. A community stakeholder cited the number of times the students attained the standard of excellence in multiple subjects and different grade levels, “We achieve the standard of excellence, not just once every year, but multiple times, at different grade levels and in all subject areas.”

Another stakeholder expressed appreciation that academic achievement was measured by more than test scores; “Our students achieve in their vocational agriculture programs, too, not just paper and pencil tests.” A non-cradle Goesselite shared, “You know, it is cool at Goessel to excel; at other schools I attended growing up it wasn’t cool to do well, but here everyone appreciates it.” Another participant confirmed that

comment, saying, “Yeah, it is the cool kids who are excelling here.” Achieving excellence appears to be a cultural norm and a common aspiration of stakeholders for USD 411.

*Excellent music program.* The music program was defined as both the vocal and instrumental departments and the study’s findings refer to the entire department. When participants spoke regarding the strengths of the program, music was frequently mentioned. Both instrumental and vocal music were identified as strong components of the school. A participant remarked that when she shared with friends in Wichita that they were from Goessel, one of the first comments made was, “Oh, they have a remarkable music program up there, don’t they?” Another participant commented that she appreciated that music was given as much support and focus from school leadership and BOE as those courses typically considered core curriculum areas, commenting, “It is even important to the administration.”

Stories regarding music were shared by some of the longtime cradle Goesselites. A cradle Goesselite shared, “Not to take anything away from our present directors, but music has always been valued and the program has always excelled as far back as I remember in the late 40’s and early 50’s.” Another related that “Our homework on our instruments and vocal pieces were as important to Mom and Dad as our book work.” The data indicated that music was valued as a common aspiration even in the previous generation and a dream sustained in the present generation as an important curricular offering, requiring serious study and a high level of performance.

*Strong school leadership.* Stakeholders of both groups expressed their aspiration and confirmation of school leadership as an ongoing strength of USD 411. School

leadership focused on the formalized levels of leadership, such as the BOE and administration. Leadership, both elected and appointed, was a fourth area of school excellence that was frequently cited as a source of merit. One participant cited, “We have the right people in the right places making the right decisions.”

One stakeholder commented that USD 411 has always been fortunate to have administrators that demonstrate “value based leadership in our schools.” Other attributes that emerged from the data were that the leadership was “approachable, caring, and made every effort to make the best use of limited resources to support the programs.” Another cited the BOE, saying, “They aren’t there for any particular agenda; they are there for our kids.” Other participants described the BOE as “trusted, dedicated, and respected community people who care for kids.”

*Vibrant community support.* Both community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders held a common dream for the continued support of the community for USD 411. Community support encompassed the formal and non-formal ways that the community and school interacted. Participants commented that school events are well attended and followed closely by the community. A participant stated that the school is in a unique position “because it brings us all together, Mennonite and non-Mennonite, young and old.” Another stated rhetorically, “You show me just one school event that isn’t well attended!” A community stakeholder noted, “We don’t have a strong tax base here with wealthy businesses, but our community does all it can to make sure that the school is supplied with adequate resources.”

One school leader cited that the bond issue supported by the community in 1996 was passed “at over 80% approval rate, which at that time was a record approval rate for

bond passage in the State of Kansas.” Another school stakeholder stated that the community as a whole values education and this is “reflected in the support for the school.”

Table 4.4

Maintenance of a Unique and Independent School System with High Academic

Standards

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Mennonite	<p>“We just have a lot of pride in our schools, and it shows!”</p> <p>“Well, we don’t have students enrolled anymore, but we attend nearly all the school events.”</p> <p>18 similar comments</p>	Identification with USD 411
Non-Mennonite	<p>“When the school has the community barbeque and spring concert, nearly everyone shows up.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Identification with USD 411
Mennonite	<p>“...our staff, that is everyone, works at educating our youth as a team effort.”</p> <p>“There are outstanding people in both buildings.”</p> <p>9 similar comments</p>	Caring and Dedicated Staff
Mennonite	<p>“Just look how often our students achieve the standard of excellence on state assessments.”</p> <p>“I’m pleased that our students do well in all areas; just look at our Vo-Ag awards we have.”</p> <p>“Our staff makes it fun for the students to excel.”</p> <p>14 similar comments</p>	Strong Academics and High Standards
Non-Mennonite	<p>“...but here at Goessel, it is cool to excel.”</p> <p>“Our students struggled when we first came; the standards were so much higher. But now they like achieving those standards.”</p> <p>3 similar comments</p>	Strong Academics and High Standards
Mennonite	<p>“The music program is phenomenal.”</p> <p>“It is tradition that our music programs get a 1 or 1+ in competitions.”</p> <p>“This is what Goessel’s reputation is built on.”</p> <p>10 similar comments</p>	Music program

Table 4.4 continued

Maintenance of a Unique and Independent School System with High Academic

Standards

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Non-Mennonite	<p>“It is even important to the administration.”</p> <p>“I don’t think this community would stand for a mediocre music program.”</p> <p>“My husband and I were pleasantly surprised when we came here and heard the music.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Music program
Mennonite	<p>“Our leaders are approachable.”</p> <p>“I think our Board represents the interest of all the kids.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	School leadership
Non-Mennonite	<p>“We have the right leaders in the right positions.”</p> <p>“Our Board supports what is right for our students and they make the tough decisions.”</p> <p>“...value based leadership in our schools.”</p> <p>6 similar comments</p>	School leadership
Mennonite	<p>“The school system is the heartbeat of the community. We intend to keep our heartbeat strong!”</p> <p>“I think one reason our community supports the school so much is because so many have graduated from this school.”</p> <p>“You show me just one school event that isn’t well attended!”</p> <p>“They are achieving the standard of excellence so many times and we are proud of that!”</p> <p>7 similar comments</p>	Community support
Non-Mennonite	<p>“A student will have a greater chance to succeed here than elsewhere; there is simply so much support everywhere.”</p> <p>“Patron support is awesome.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Community support

### *Summary*

Stakeholders of USD 411 and the community of Goessel shared their aspirations of desiring to sustain USD 411 as a powerful community asset. In particular, the participants singled out six areas of the school that they regarded as strengths: identification with the school, staff, academics, music program, school leadership, and community support. These areas were strongly supported by Mennonites and non-Mennonites, cradle Goesselites and non-Goesselites, and the six themes appeared in both focus groups, the left- and right-hand column case method, and in the interviews. Table 4.4 summarizes these six areas. In the left column is a listing of people, Mennonite or non-Mennonite, cradle Goesselite or non-cradle Goesselite. The center column lists the salient quotes from the group listed and the third column lists the descriptor.

### *Finding 3*

Both community stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders shared their aspirations to maintain their high degree of quality of life and sense of safety that they perceive to exist in the community. This section relates the comments stakeholders shared specifically regarding the quality of life and safety.

*Quality of life.* Participants in the study wished to sustain a quality of life in the community that allowed for a more relaxed and intentional lifestyle. A Mennonite participant commented, “It is a relaxed pace of life here.” Another commented, “While sometimes the smallness of our community takes kidding, we all know we are surrounded by people, neighbors that care.” A non-cradle, non-Mennonite remarked, “We may not have all the choices you find in larger communities, but there is a wholesomeness about living here that you can’t put a price on.” A non-Mennonite remarked, “Our hope is that

the framework, the base of our quality of life, they have gained here will go with them [our children] everywhere.” There were many similar comments from all three data sources.

*Safety.* Stakeholders saw their aspirations for a safe community being fulfilled in the community of Goessel. A non-Mennonite, non-cradle Goesselite commented, “Moving here was a shock for me; I can leave my house and car unlocked and not worry about stuff getting stolen.” A Mennonite stated, “I can let my children play at the park and not worry about them being threatened by gangs.” Another shared, “The schools are safe, the streets are safe, and the public is maintained by law enforcement officers.” Table 4.5 reflects some of these comments.

Table 4.5

Quality of Life and Safety

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Mennonites	<p>“It is a relaxed pace of life here.”</p> <p>“While sometimes the smallness of our community takes kidding, we all know we are surrounded by people, neighbors that care.”</p> <p>“It is a quiet place to live.”</p> <p>10 similar comments</p>	Quality of life
Non-Mennonites	<p>“We may not have all the choices you find in larger communities, but there is a wholesomeness about living here that you can’t put a price on.”</p> <p>“Our hope is that the framework, the base of our quality of life, they have gained here will go with them (children) everywhere.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Quality of life
Mennonites	<p>“I can let my children play at the park and not worry about them being threatened by gangs.”</p> <p>“The schools are safe, the streets are safe, and the public is maintained by law enforcement officers.”</p> <p>11 similar comments</p>	Safety
Non-Mennonites	<p>“Moving here was a shock for me; I can leave my house and car unlocked and not worry about stuff getting stolen.”</p> <p>3 similar comments</p>	Safety

*Summary*

Residents of the community of Goessel perceive their dreams for fulfilling a high quality of life and public safety being fulfilled in the community of Goessel. A part of the quality of life is the intimacy of life that they share. The sense of safety they perceive contributes to their assessment of the quality of life in the community.

*Finding 4*

The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a positive relationship between USD 411 and the churches within the

community. Many Mennonites and non-Mennonites observed that the Goessel community has a unique relationship between the school district and churches. This relationship between the school and the churches is generally viewed as a positive relationship for the community. This relationship can best be described as two separate and distinct entities with separate missions, operating apart from each other, yet sharing a common aspiration in creating a future for the community youth. Two subcategories define this relationship: values and communication.

*Values.* Participants identified the faith-based values that underlie the community aspirations as a vital contributor toward school success. One Mennonite identified the values of hard work, strong moral character, and learning espoused by the Mennonite beliefs as building blocks for the community and education system. Another recognized these values as traits needed by staff members, “[to give whatever] extra effort it takes to deliver the programs and services to the students.” A non-Mennonite identified the faith-based values that underlie the community as a contributing factor toward school success, “This is what makes this community different from other places we have lived, and it makes the schools just so much stronger.” The faith-based values were identified as an element that makes USD 411 unique, “without which we would be like any other district” shared a Mennonite.

The faith-based values play an important role in contributing to school success. USD 411 stakeholders recognized these values as the foundation in the community, and witnessed their positive effects that were translated at school in achievement, commitment, and relationships to each other.

*Communication.* Both groups of stakeholders shared their aspirations for communication that allows USD 411 and the churches to stay focused on cooperating to provide activities and resources to the area youth. While USD 411 stakeholders acknowledge that USD 411 is a state-sponsored entity, they also stated that the character of the community is reflected in the school district. Parent participants observed that many staff members adjust homework assignments on Wednesday evenings, knowing that many youth are involved in Wednesday evening activities at church. A non-Mennonite parent acknowledged, “While we don’t attend a church in Goessel, it is appreciated that there are accommodations for student assignments on Wednesday nights.”

A document review revealed multiple examples of the communication between school and church as benefiting both institutions. During the first week of December 2004, a gas leak was discovered in the supply line leading to the elementary school. The gas supply was shut off for five working days. The superintendent and pastor of the town church made arrangements for Grades K-3 to be relocated to the town church by the end of the first day of the crisis. The relocation began the next day, even though specifics regarding use policy, rental costs, or other contractual agreements were not completed. Both parties recognized the relocation had to begin immediately, and in good faith, they determined that the details could be worked out during the process, indicating the existence of the social capital between the two community institutions.

In another example found in the document review, the situation was reversed. During the first week of January, an ice storm struck, leaving much of the town without electricity. One of the community churches was without electricity for Sunday morning.

Permission was granted for the church to use the elementary school prior to working out the agreement.

Choir groups, especially the select Elbiata Singers, frequently perform at the local churches and church events. Performances by these music groups are appreciated by community stakeholders. “The performances of our music groups in the Mennonite churches [and beyond] help to build and foster a trusting relationship between the Mennonite church and the school.” Another stakeholder stated, “I appreciate that our school recognizes the unique identity of our community and does not try to totally secularize the relationship.”

Table 4.6

Mennonite Church and School Relations

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Mennonite	<p>“The values and morals of the early Mennonite settlers had much to do with the climate that exists today between the church and school.”</p> <p>“Our school comes about as close to being a private school as one can come without being a private school.”</p> <p>“...without which (values) we would be like any other district”</p> <p>4 similar comments</p>	Values
Non-Mennonite	<p>“I don’t attend a Mennonite church, but the fact that the churches are so strong in this community has to have an impact on the school.”</p> <p>“Whether or not one is Mennonite, you have to acknowledge the positive impact of church values on the school.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Values
Mennonite	<p>“I appreciate that the school and church communicate about issues that are vital to the community.”</p> <p>“There are no extracurricular activities on Wednesday evenings.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Communication
Non-Mennonite	<p>“School leaders and church leaders seem to know each other well.”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	Communication

*Summary*

Community of Goessel and USD 411 and the Mennonite churches experience a unique relationship. USD 411 is a state-sponsored entity and respected as such. The churches are a private faith-based entity. Both institutions respect the aspirations each institution holds for the youth and community, and strive to maintain positive relations

with each other through recognizing common values and seeking strong channels of communication.

#### *Finding 5*

Both the USD 411 stakeholders and the community of Goessel stakeholders aspire to embrace diversity. They expressed a universal aspiration to be more accepting of people different from those found in their community. A frequent observation that emerged from this study was the discrepancy in stakeholder views they held. Participants discussed diversity as being both religious diversity and ethnic diversity. For this reason, this section presents data reflecting views on religious diversity and ethnic diversity. Most non-cradle Goesselites stated that they had good experience with the community and felt accepted.

*Religious diversity.* The community is mostly a homogeneous Mennonite community; however, the demographics are gradually changing. Several participants commented that they attended church in another community since the three churches in the community are all Mennonite. Several non-Mennonites commented about the lack of churches of other faiths in the community. Some Mennonites acknowledged that having only Mennonite churches in the community limited options for some community members. One non-Mennonite commented, “Oh yes, I had been invited and attended a Mennonite church in the area and experienced acceptance and warmth there.” While there were similar responses by non-Mennonites, there appeared to be a few who did not feel comfortable in the Mennonite faith. A non-Mennonite commented, “Oh, they are all warm and friendly, and if I needed help they would be here instantly, but I just don’t feel all that comfortable with all of their teachings.” In this regard, a few comments from

both Mennonite and non-Mennonite participants suggested that exploring a non-Mennonite church in the community could be advantageous for non-Mennonite stakeholders.

Comments from both non-Mennonites and Mennonites suggested that there could be an aspiration for a community church of a faith other than Mennonite. This appeared mainly in the left side of the left- and right-hand column case method. One cradle Goesselite participant stated, “The Mennonite churches are warm and friendly, but they can’t meet all the needs of everyone in the community.” Another participant stated that by having a non-Mennonite church, the faith-based values of the community could be spread to those that “The Mennonite churches do not reach.” Several commented that it was too bad they “had to travel to other communities to attend a non-Mennonite church.” Another non-Mennonite stated in the left hand side of the left- and right-hand column case method, “I like the Mennonites, the community and the Mennonite churches, but I wish I could attend a church of my faith here in this community.”

*Ethnic diversity.* Stakeholders of USD 411 and the community of Goessel aspire to be accepting of people of other ethnic background. Besides the religious differences of Mennonites, the Mennonites and non-Mennonites represent a 98% Caucasian community. A non-cradle Mennonite commented she wanted her “children to grow up appreciating and accepting other races, but this was a challenge to practice in the Goessel community.” A school stakeholder commented, “We work hard to teach diversity and acceptance of differences in school; I hope we have taught them what they need to know if they move to other communities.”

One Mennonite suggested that what some people interpreted to be religious

differences should be more properly identified as “cultural difference.” He stated that Mennonite beliefs are not far different from mainstream religions. “The culturally-laden habits of Mennonites and ways of interacting often project the feeling among non-Mennonites that they are standing on the outside looking in.” An example was shared by a non-Mennonite regarding community members playing the “Mennonite game” (participant’s term). The “Mennonite game” involved participants informally attempting to make connections through exploring their family lineage. One non-cradle Goesselite commented, “Oh, it is hard to be patient sometimes, especially when they play the Mennonite game. You just have to laugh sometimes.”

Another non-Mennonite participant cited the Mennonite pastors of the three Mennonite churches as making a concerted effort to reach out to those of non-Mennonite faith, stating “a couple of pastors came to visit us when we moved in.” A Mennonite observed, “I have seen our current Mennonite pastors work much harder than our past leaders to reach out and invite non-Mennonites who move into the community to visit our churches.” A Mennonite stated, “Our pastors are doing far more than their predecessors at reaching out to newcomers and helping Mennonite lay people to do the same.” These observations were shared equally by both Mennonite and non-Mennonites, cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites and is reflected in Table 4.6.

Mennonites as well as non-Mennonites recognized the critical link between the community’s future and the demographics of the community becoming more diverse. One Mennonite stated, “It is imperative we become more accepting towards diversity or we will die as a community.” A non-Mennonite recognized the importance between the link of the community’s future and diversity and acknowledged that it would not be easy

to overcome the community's historic homogeneity. "Incorporating diversity into school and community will be a challenge for our community." It was nearly unanimous, however, that all Mennonite and non-Mennonites saw diversity as being good for both school and community.

One source of strength in the community of Goessel is the tight bonds created by extended family relationships. It also appeared to have a non-intended associated weakness creating a sense of exclusion by those with no historical ties to the community. One non-Mennonite, non-cradle Goesselite participant reflected, "I go over that a lot, why do I feel like I'm on the outside?" He lamented that in his previous residence, he had frequent invitations from neighbors to visit, because they were all new and with no family connections. Another non-Mennonite, non-cradle Goesselite echoed that observation, saying, "I think that the people who live here have family networks and friend networks in place and for them it does not even occur to them to have others over because not everyone has that network in place."

Table 4.7

Views toward Diversity

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Cradle Goesselites	<p>“Our pastors are doing far more than their predecessors at reaching out to newcomers and helping Mennonite lay people to do the same.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p> <p>“The Mennonite churches are warm and friendly, but they can’t meet all the needs of everyone in the community.”</p> <p>“The Mennonite churches do not reach everyone” (regarding some community members the Mennonite churches do not reach)</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Religious diversity
Non-cradle Goesselites	<p>“Oh, they are all warm and friendly, and if I needed help they would be here instantly, but I just don’t feel all that comfortable with all of their teachings.”</p> <p>“I have found Mennonites to be very open to others, and there might be some problem as far as the older segment of community, but not from the younger ones. In fact the theology of Mennonites helps them to be more open.”</p> <p>5 similar comments</p> <p>“I like the Mennonites, the community and the Mennonite churches, but I wish I could attend a church of my faith here in this community.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Religious diversity
Cradle Goesselites	<p>“The culturally-laden habits of Mennonites and ways of interacting often project the feeling among non-Mennonites that they are standing on the outside looking in.”</p> <p>“I would like to see it open to diversity because as time progresses, this community is going to have to open up more to the people that are out there in order to survive.”</p> <p>“We work hard to teach diversity and acceptance of differences in school; I hope we have taught them what they need to know if they move to other communities.”</p> <p>3 similar comment</p>	Ethnic diversity

Table 4.7 continued

Views toward Diversity

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Non-cradle Goesselites	<p>“(there is a) lack of opportunity to practice those skills (interacting with those who are different).”</p> <p>“It is imperative we become more accepting towards diversity or we will die as a community.”</p> <p>“Well, they have never had to move or to make new friends, so how are they (cradle Goesselites) supposed to know what I experience or how that makes me feel to be new?”</p> <p>7 similar comments</p>	Ethnic diversity

*Summary*

The data revealed that Mennonites and non-Mennonites as well as cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites aspire to increase the community’s diversity as a way of sustaining the community of Goessel and USD 411. The perceptions of cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites differ regarding diversity. Cradle Goesselites perceive changes rapidly occurring in the community in both religious diversity and ethnic diversity. Non-cradle Goesselites perceive the community to be homogeneous and resistant to rapid change. Both cradle and non-cradle Goesselites tend to view broadening the diversity of the community as being a positive change for the community of Goessel and USD 411. Table 4.7 summarizes many of these comments.

*Finding 6*

The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders have aspirations for community improvements. This section summarizes the aspirations of community and USD 411 stakeholders as reported by the participants and is grouped by

the emerging themes. Mennonites and non-Mennonites and cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites identified similar aspirations. The findings reflected a high degree of passion for these aspirations. Whether participants wrote or spoke during the data collection process, the majority revealed a sense of dedication and focus towards the future for both the school and the community. Table 4.7 and table 4.8 reflect a sample of the statements that encapsulates the comments of participants regarding their aspirations. In the following sections, each aspiration is identified as being primarily a USD 411 or Goessel community aspiration.

*Jobs and economic development.* Next to a strong and enduring school system, the most frequently discussed aspiration was the development of jobs and economic opportunity in the community. A community leader stated, “Our location is good, but we just have a lack of jobs available here; we need to be more than just a bedroom community.” Another community member stated, “You know, I’d just love to see one good factory come into town, not a giant one, not a tiny one, just one to provide a decent number of good paying jobs for people.”

Several community leaders saw this as a crucial factor related to the need to encourage Goessel’s growth; however, they recognized that dedicating the land for that development is not easy. One noted, “Much of the land surrounding Goessel is in estates. Working with annexing can be complicated and it is understandable that families of an estate do not wish to take that risk.”

All of the participants, Mennonites and non-Mennonites, cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites expressed a desire to see some degree of growth in the community. In this regard, all participants were united in desiring a vibrant future to

sustain their dreams for both the community of Goessel and USD 411.

*Community wellness center.* Many community of Goessel and USD 411 stakeholders commented on the desire to have a community wellness center. One community stakeholder recalled the aspirations of a previous community leader, “Goessel would benefit from a community wellness center, all ages would.” Several participants recalled that a wellness center has been brought up several times, once when the school was passing a bond issue; however, it was dropped due to projected high costs. One participant said, “Whatever happened to those plans for a community wellness center?” Several community leaders stated that tremendous effort had been made to initiate this project but there were inadequate resources to make the project a reality. In general, participants desired a wellness center with a pool and exercise area and believed it would be “...so beneficial to the community.”

The community wellness center has been a topic for the community for a number of years and is recognized as an aspiration that community stakeholders have for the community. Some of the stakeholders expressed some frustration in not knowing what happened to early community plans for establishing a community center. Mennonites, non-Mennonites, cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites held similar aspirations for a community wellness center to be built for the community of Goessel sometime in the future.

*Community improvements.* Stakeholders identified aspirations for city improvements that focused on three main areas: paved streets, town beautification, and a gathering place such as a restaurant. Table 4.7 at the end of this section provides samples of the data collected from participants regarding community improvements.

Stakeholders who shared aspirations for paved streets did so either humorously or passionately. One non-cradle Goesselite related an experience of extended family visiting for the first time, recalling that family members joked how they had to “drive down a dirt street to get to her house.” She said that long-term residents are used to unpaved streets, but those coming to town for the first time may be surprised. Another stakeholder referred to living on his dirt street as “...rather quaint.”

Perceptions regarding the issue of paved streets differed from cradle Goesselites to non-cradle Goesselites. Cradle Goesselites’ comments were less urgent regarding the issue and non-cradle Goesselites’ comments border on frustration regarding the dusty streets. A non-cradle Goesselite stated, “You’ve grown up with dust all your life, I guess you just get used to it.”

Community stakeholders acknowledged the issue and expressed hope for change in the future. “I’m sure some type of paving will occur; whether or not it is all curbed and guttered, I can’t say, but I see it happening sometime.” Regarding the streets, a non-cradle Mennonite stated, “Whether they are sand or gravel, it is dust anyway, and I guess people have lived with it for so long.”

The issue of paved streets was either a serious concern or reflected in a casual way. Generally, the cradle Goesselites saw this as an expensive luxury the community could not presently afford, and non-cradle Goesselites saw this as a more urgent topic and a necessary factor to make the town more attractive for potential new residents and realizing their dream for growth. Table 4.8 reflects the perspective of cradle Goesselites and non-Cradle Goesselites toward paved streets

Town beautification was a shared aspiration in particular during the community of

Goessel focus group. Several participants strongly expressed their aspirations for ways to beautify the community. Numerous participants commended the city's efforts to clean up some of the less attractive properties in town. One person stated, "We are seeing some of the eye-sores removed." Another observed that places such as the old Bergen Blacksmithing Shop, Ratzlaff Garage, and Keith's Foods are examples of places that could become local attractions, "Do you realize how many people would enjoy seeing an old blacksmithing shop?"

Another topic of community beautification centered on the 'Barnstormer' property. This property is located at one of the main entrances to Goessel, where a restaurant was formerly operated before it was destroyed by fire. Today that piece of property is "an eye-sore" and an "awfully poor gateway into the town of Goessel" according some stakeholders. A number of community focus group members appeared to get excited about the idea of turning that corner into a gateway that would "symbolize the community's heritage with either a wheat sculpture or Mennonite pioneer." Several participants spoke at length about the possibility of seeing an artistic expression of an early Mennonite settler and the bringing of hard red winter wheat to the plains. One participant commented, "You know, that is what Mennonites are known for, bringing hard red winter wheat to Kansas."

Stakeholders of the community of Goessel want to see their community as an attractive and pleasant place to live and to visit. Community stakeholders particularly in the community focus group expressed many ideas on how to make the community more attractive and beautiful. Many of these stakeholders tie the process of making Goessel attractive to the original identity of the community and its origins.

Stakeholders for the community of Goessel expressed aspirations for a stable and inviting gathering place for local members and as an attraction for bringing visitors and tourists to the community. For community stakeholders with long enough residency to remember the 'Barnstormer', there was much lamenting at the loss of this establishment and what it brought to the community. For many this was "the gathering place." Stakeholders recalled how they would see many people with out-of-county license tags driving up to the restaurant to enjoy its "barn-like atmosphere and good wholesome food." Participants in all three data collection methods commented on the aspiration to have a restaurant that would be a drawing card for the community. One participant stated, "People are always looking for a unique place to eat. I don't think we are so isolated that we couldn't draw people here with a good restaurant."

Stakeholders aspired for a community restaurant similar to the original 'Barnstormer' restaurant. Mennonite, Non-Mennonite, cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites aspired for a community-gathering place to eat and socialize. Stakeholders dreamed of an establishment of high enough profile to draw visitors from outside the community.

Table 4.8

Community Improvements

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Cradle Goesselites	<p>“Our location is good, but we just have a lack of jobs available here; we need to be more than just a bedroom community.”</p> <p>“You know, I’d just love to see one good factory come into town, not a giant one, not a tiny one, just one to provide a decent number of good paying jobs for people.”</p> <p>“Much of the land surrounding Goessel is in estates. Working with annexing can be complicated and it is understandable that families of an estate do not wish to make that risk.”</p> <p>4 similar comments</p>	Jobs and economic development
Non-cradle Goesselites	<p>“You have to commute if you expect to live here.”</p> <p>“Most of the available jobs are in Newton, Hesston or all the way to Wichita.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Jobs and economic development
Cradle Goesselites	<p>“Goessel would benefit from a community wellness center, all ages would.”</p> <p>“Whatever happened to those plans for a community wellness center?”</p> <p>3 similar comments</p>	Community wellness center
Non-cradle Goesselites	<p>“...so beneficial to the community.”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	Community wellness center
Cradle Goesselites	<p>“Some type of paving will occur sometime.”</p> <p>“Paved streets? Well, that would be nice, but that is a huge tax burden.”</p> <p>“It would help our image, but we have lived with it for so long.”</p> <p>5 similar comments</p>	Paved streets

Table 4.8 continued

Community Improvements

People	Challenge	Descriptor
Non-cradle Goesselites	<p>“(We have to) drive down a dirt street to get to her house.”</p> <p>“(If) you’ve grown up with dust all your life, I guess you just get used to it.”</p> <p>“It is a shock for some visitors at first who are looking for housing.”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	Paved streets
Cradle Goesselites	<p>“I would like to see some of the older buildings in the community get money from somewhere to be restored.”</p> <p>“There is a lot we could do to make this town more attractive.”</p> <p>4 similar comments</p>	Town beautification
Non-cradle Goesselites	<p>“(a vacant lot is an) awfully poor gateway into the town of Goessel”.</p> <p>“Our corner (main and K-15) is just plain ugly.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Town beautification
Cradle Goesselites	<p>“People are always looking for a unique place to eat. I don’t think we are so isolated that we couldn’t draw people here with a good restaurant.”</p> <p>“(We miss the) barn-like atmosphere and good wholesome food.”</p> <p>8 similar comments</p>	A gathering place
Non-cradle Goesselites	<p>“Maybe you could move here and open a restaurant.”</p> <p>“The town needs a good restaurant; I mean it has a little café, but it needs something to draw people.”</p> <p>“A town needs a place for the locals and to draw visitors.”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	A gathering place

*Maintenance and growth of faith-based value system.* Many participants, whether they were Mennonite or non-Mennonite, cradle Goesselite or non-cradle Goesselite expressed a desire to see the faith-based values of the community deepened and extended as the community diversifies. In addition, many saw this as critical to maintaining a strong school system. A USD 411 stakeholder commented that the German Mennonite heritage built the community; however, this faith heritage “would need to expand to take in the growing diversity in the community.” Other participants echoed this sentiment. A non-Mennonite stated on the left side of the left- and right-hand column case method that she hoped that the Mennonite community would recognize the faith-based values their family brought, “even though they were not Mennonite.”

In essence, there was no desire by any group, Mennonite or non-Mennonite, to see the community become more secularized. A participant commented, “The values and faith of the early pioneers on the prairie is still captured in essence in Goessel.” This Mennonite participant elaborated, “Broadening the faith-based values beyond that of Mennonite will help the community and school system exist into the future.”

Participants sought to maintain and grow the faith-based values of the community. For some Mennonites, an interesting finding was the willingness to grow these faith-based values even if it meant growing these values outside the Mennonite Church. Many Mennonite stakeholders recognized that broadening the faith-based values and variety of faith-based churches as a vital way of encouraging the broadening the diversity of the community. Table 4.9 reflects the comments regarding maintenance and growth of faith-based values.

Table 4.9

Maintenance and Growth of Faith-Based Values

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Mennonite	<p>“The values and faith of the early pioneers on the prairie is still captured in essence in Goessel.”</p> <p>“Broadening the faith-based values beyond that of Mennonite will help the community and school system exist into the future.”</p> <p>“This (faith-based values) is a powerful asset that Goessel has to offer. It could be broadened.”</p> <p>8 similar sources</p>	Maintenance and growth of faith-based values
Non-Mennonite	<p>“...(faith-based heritage) would need to expand to take in the growing diversity in the community.”</p> <p>“The Mennonite churches try to reach out, but actually the options are limited here.”</p> <p>1 similar source</p>	Maintenance and growth of faith-based values

*Summary*

Stakeholders for USD 411 and the community of Goessel have many viable aspirations, such as maintaining a strong school system, developing jobs and prosperity, and developing many community amenities. Ultimately, stakeholders of the community are vitally interested in the future of the community and USD 411 and are they are willing to look at significant changes to insure the future survival of the community and USD 411.

*Finding 7*

The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders hold a positive view toward meeting the challenges they perceive to face the Community of Goessel and USD 411. Both stakeholder groups expressed a positive view toward meeting the challenges in the future. Despite financial concerns for USD 411 funding, the

present state of rural economics and a declining enrollment, stakeholders expressed optimism and a sense of confidence that their dreams and aspirations can be fulfilled. Comments such as the following from a Mennonite, “We have no idea how much our forefathers sacrificed and worked, leaving their homes and settling out here on the prairie with nothing around, our challenges pall in comparison” reveal a readiness for hard work and sacrifice. A non-Mennonite stated, “Since moving here, I’ve been impressed with the work ethic, the community spirit, and commitment to education. I’ve no doubt that we (community) will find a way to meet the challenges.”

During the community focus group, a sense of positive optimism was expressed when speaking of the future, said one Mennonite:

I know we face some big problems, but just look around the room here, look at this bunch of people sitting around the table here. We can really accomplish most anything we want if we set our hearts to it and work together.

This optimism was captured in the left- and right-hand column case method where a non-Mennonite wrote on the right side, “Our motto painted on the wall in town is ‘Small town, big heart’” and on the left hand side also wrote, “And I would add, ‘A can do attitude.’” Both stakeholder groups were positive about bringing their aspirations to reality for the community of Goessel and USD 411. Despite the challenges, stakeholders believe their dreams and aspirations will be fulfilled through hard work and cooperation. Table 4.10 reflects Mennonite and non-Mennonite aspirations for the future.

Table 4.10

Stakeholder Perceptions of Aspirations for the Future

People	Aspiration	Descriptor
Mennonite	<p>“I know we face some big problems, but just look around the room here, look at this bunch of people sitting around the table here. We can really accomplish most anything we want if we set our hearts to it and work together.”</p> <p>“We have no idea how much our forefathers sacrificed and worked, leaving their homes and settling out here on the prairie with nothing around, our challenges pall in comparison.”</p> <p>9 similar comments</p>	Positive view toward the future
Non-Mennonite	<p>“Our motto painted on the wall in town is ‘Small town, big heart’” and on the left hand side also wrote, “And I would add, ‘A can do attitude.’”</p> <p>“Since moving here, I’ve been impressed with the work ethic, the community spirit and commitment to education. I’ve no doubt that we (community) will find a way to meet the challenges.”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	Positive view toward the future

*Summary*

Community of Goessel stakeholders and the USD 411 stakeholders are very positive regarding their outlook for the future. Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders show willingness to work together to solve problems.

*Finding 8*

The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the challenges that exist in sustaining a small town atmosphere and are willing to work together to seek a viable community bases solution. This section describes the responses to the question: What are the inherent challenges to the community of Goessel and USD 411? Seven themes emerged from the data:

1. Maintaining USD 411 as an independent entity
2. Attracting young people to the community
3. Housing
4. Meeting the needs of the elderly and the young
5. Community survival
6. Varied perception of urgency
7. City leaders need to publicize actions

Stakeholders for both the community and USD 411 identified similar challenges. Table 4.10 is a representative summary of the participants' responses. There appeared to be no difference between Mennonite and non-Mennonite responses; however, there appeared to be a difference in the responses of cradle and non-cradle Goesselites. Non-cradle Goesselites described these issues as more urgent than cradle Goesselites.

*Maintaining USD 411 as an independent entity.* The most commonly expressed concern of stakeholders was the maintenance of USD 411 as a strong and independent entity. A participant wrote, "Our school is our source of community identity and pride; if that goes, who are we?" Many participants felt anxious because their school has experienced nine consecutive years of declining enrollment, and several stated, "How much longer can that go on without serious cuts in programs and services to students?" One participant wrote, "If the school closes, you know what will happen to your property values?" On the left- and right-hand column case method, participants seldom expressed anxiety on this issue; however, on the right hand side it was frequently listed.

A USD 411 stakeholder, observed, "You know, the bigger districts around us look

at our scores, look at our academics, our fine arts and see that if they could absorb us or part of our district, it would enhance their district.” This participant commented what might happen to the community of Goessel, “We would no longer have our present identity. Keeping our district is something we have to do at all costs.” Another Mennonite community member observed, “You know, if the community thought they might lose their school, I think they would support even high rates of taxation and do whatever was needed to keep it independent.”

Stakeholders perceive the maintenance of USD 411 as an independent district as a prime objective. Stakeholders whether Mennonite or non-Mennonite, cradle Goesselite or non-cradle Goesselite, appear to be committed to making major sacrifices to prevent consolidation.

*Attracting young people.* In all three methods of data collection, the data indicate that stakeholders identified the need to attract young people to the community as an important challenge. There were differing views on how to accomplish this task. During the community focus group, participants discussed how other nearby communities tried to attract young people. These efforts ranged from free land, tax incentives, slick advertisements, and building town amenities such as parks and pools to be attractive to young families. Participants of the community focus group were quite aware of activities in neighboring communities. Most agreed that attracting young families was directly related to increasing enrollment at USD 411. One Mennonite participant’s comments summarized the feelings of the group: “Marketing our quality of life here at Goessel is the key to attracting more young families.” Others commented that this challenge was closely connected to housing. “How can we attract young people when we don’t have

enough of the kind of housing young people are looking for?”

Community stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognized the importance of attracting more young families to the community. The main attractant most recognized was the quality of life offered in Goessel. Closely tied to attracting young families was the issue of suitable housing.

*Housing.* Adequate housing in Goessel appeared on the left- and right-hand column case method as the third most commonly identified challenge. Both Mennonites and non-Mennonites, cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites perceived this as a major challenge. One non-Mennonite participant suggested that the best way to locate an adequate house in town was not to go to a realtor but to a pastor, because “the pastors know who is retiring to Bethesda and when, and you have to get in with them because a good house sells before it ever hits the market.”

Several participants commended the city’s efforts to clean up town properties that are in disarray or condemn the properties. One participant stated, “It is good to see some of these ugly properties being razed, but where is the new house to take its place?” Others commented that most of the prime real estate on which to build a house is sold. The next most attractive property is still lacking utilities in the area. The participant questioned, “How do you take the risk of building there if the utilities aren’t there yet?”

A USD 411 stakeholder expressed concern regarding the low-rent options in town. “We want people to come, but the kind of housing we have is attracting people who come for a short time and then move on. We don’t have their children long enough to do anything significant with them.” Several other stakeholders expressed the observation on the left- and right-hand column case method that “there was housing

available, but the wrong kind, and it was bringing in the wrong kind, if you know what I mean.” The participant was referring to low quality homes that attracted families whom the participant feared might add social burdens to the community.

Participants perceived the need for the community to build more homes of good quality. Participants perceived that Goessel lacks good homes in the modest and affordable price range. Many homes on the market are presently considered in the range of a smaller home. Some participants noted that presently Goessel’s options for development of residential areas are limited by the lack of public services.

*Meeting the needs of the elderly and young.* Many participants commented on the growing numbers of senior citizens in the community. They perceived a challenge to the community in adequately meeting the needs of more seniors while providing more options for youth.. A Mennonite participant responded, “There is such a broad age span in our community. We have many elderly people in the community and we need to meet their needs, yet we need to reach the young and be attractive to them, too.” One stakeholder wrote, “We see Bethesda building one duplex after another, but where are the houses for the young families?” Another commented, “Threshing Days is great, but it is mostly for the older citizens who enjoy nostalgia. We are doing more for young people on that weekend but we need to do even more.”

The Goessel community is experiencing an increase in the aged population. Bethesda Home, AGAPE Senior Center, and the Mennonite churches seek to provide quality services to the elderly. Most of the youth travel to nearby communities for entertainment. The Mennonite church youth activities are well attended, but the town lacks amenities to keep the youth positively engaged on weekends.

*Community survival.* The data revealed comments that showed some anxiety over the community's ability to maintain and develop a growth base. One participant commented, "I really hate to see what would happen to our community if our school closed or had to consolidate." Another responded, "Yeah, the bottom would drop out." Others saw the concern as being "...survival at what level?" These participants saw Goessel surviving for many years to come, but Goessel "would maintain itself." Yet, others commented that kind of survival would not develop a strong, high quality of life in the community.

Discussion in the community focus group provided strong comments from stakeholders. One Mennonite stated, "Survive? There is no such thing as just maintaining; we are either growing or we are dying." The core elements to community survival that participants identified were an independent school system, better housing, attracting business, and maintaining a strong faith-based value system. Many stakeholders sensed that the community may be approaching a crossroad and needs to take a more active approach to ensure its survival. Non-cradle Goesselites were significantly more vocal and adamant on this necessity.

*Varied perception of urgency for change.* The data revealed some difference in perceptions regarding the need for change in the community. Non-cradle, non-Mennonites used words such as "it is urgent to attract young families" and "the school may close if we don't act promptly and decisively." Cradle Goesselites also perceived the need to act, but the words chosen by those participants did not reveal a sense of urgency. An example of these comments come from a Mennonite, cradle Goesselite regarding growth, "Yes, growth would be good, but we shouldn't go about this too fast, or without

a plan.” This difference in perception was captured in comments regarding school enrollment, housing, attracting young families, paved streets, and attracting business.

*City leaders’ initiative needs to be publicized.* There is a need for city leaders to communicate their proactive activities. Despite the City Council’s actions toward improvements in town, including a new water tower, improvements to infrastructure, sidewalks, city building, and efforts to market Goessel at places like the state fair, it became evident in the focus group and in the left- and right-hand column case method that many people were not fully aware of the Council’s proactive efforts. During the focus group, when a Council member shared the Council’s efforts, several focus group members appeared surprised at all the projects the Council initiated. A focus group member stated, “The council has done all that? How have I missed this information?”

Table 4.11

Challenges

People	Challenge	Descriptor
Mennonite	<p>“Our school is our source of community identity and pride; if that goes, who are we?”</p> <p>“You know, the bigger districts around us look at our scores, look at our academics, our fine arts and see that if they could absorb us or part of our district, it would enhance their district.”</p> <p>“You know, if the community thought they might lose their school, I think they would support even high rates of taxation and do whatever was needed to keep it independent as USD 411.”</p> <p>“Keeping our district is something we have to do at all costs.”</p> <p>5 similar comments</p>	Maintaining USD 411 as an independent entity
Non-Mennonite	<p>“If the school closes, you know what will happen to your property values?”</p> <p>“How much longer can that (declining enrollment) go on without serious cuts in programs and services to students?”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	Maintaining USD 411 as an independent entity
Mennonite	<p>“How can we attract young people when we don’t have enough of the kind of housing young people are looking for?”</p> <p>4 similar comments</p>	Attracting young people
Non-Mennonite	<p>“Marketing our quality of life here at Goessel is the key to attracting more young families.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Attracting young people
Mennonite	<p>“It is good to see some of these ugly properties being razed, but where is the new house to take its place?”</p> <p>“How do you take the risk of building there if the utilities aren’t there yet?”</p> <p>3 similar comments</p>	Housing

Table 4.11 continued

Challenges

People	Challenge	Descriptor
Non-Mennonite	<p>“The pastors know who is retiring to Bethesda and when, and you have to get in with them because a good house sells before it ever hits the market.”</p> <p>“How can we attract young people when we don’t have enough of the kind of housing young people are looking for?”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	Housing
Mennonite	<p>“There is such a broad age span in our community. We have many elderly people in the community and we need to meet their needs, yet we need to reach the young and be attractive to them, too.”</p> <p>“We see Bethesda building one duplex after another, but where are the houses for the young families?”</p> <p>4 similar comments</p>	Meeting the needs of young and old
Non-Mennonite	<p>“Our population is growing so much older here.”</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	Meeting the needs of young and old
Mennonite	<p>“Survive? There is no such thing as just maintaining; we are either growing or we are dying.”</p> <p>“I really hate to see what would happen to our community if our school closed or had to consolidate.”</p> <p>5 similar comments</p>	Community survival
Non-Mennonite	<p>“Yeah, the bottom would drop out.” (referring to property values)</p> <p>1 similar comment</p>	Community survival
Mennonite	<p>“Yes, growth would be good, but we shouldn’t go about this too fast, or without a plan.”</p> <p>4 similar comments</p>	Varied perception of urgency of change
Non-Mennonite	<p>“The school may close if we don’t act promptly and decisively.”</p> <p>“It is urgent to attract young families”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Varied perception of urgency of change

Table 4.11 continued

Challenges

People	Challenge	Descriptor
Mennonite	“The council has done all that? How have I missed this information?”  2 similar comments	City leaders initiative needs to be publicized.
Non-Mennonite	“What is the city councils plans?”  2 similar	City leaders initiative needs to be publicized.

*Summary*

Stakeholders of the community of Goessel and USD 411 perceive many of the same challenges facing other rural communities. Both Mennonite and non-Mennonite, cradle Goesselites and non-cradle Goesselites agreed on the challenges. All of the challenges identified by stakeholders were closely related to ultimately sustaining USD 411 as in independent entity and strengthening the quality of for the community of Goessel.

*Finding 9*

The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the inherent challenges of sustaining high academic standards in USD 411 due to potential changes in the community’s demographics if population growth is encouraged.

The data reveal several challenges facing community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders. Two sources of challenges are explored below affecting USD 411 and the community of Goessel. The first affects the community of Goessel and potential changes in demographics. The, second is the maintenance of high academic standards.

*Potential changing demographics.* The community of Goessel finds much of its unique identity in being small. Most participants recognized that maintaining some degree of growth is necessary for the enrollment to be maintained at USD 411. The unresolved question in the minds of stakeholders is, “How much growth can we have and still be small?” One Mennonite, non-cradle Goesselite stated, “We could triple our size and still be small and maintain our identity.” Still another stated, “Well, if we could get our population growth to a point that our school increased by two to five students each year, that would be good.” One participant said, “First, let’s get to a point where our enrollment isn’t dropping; we’ll have to grow to make that happen.” A non-Mennonite shared on the left side of the left- and hand -right hand column case method, “Goessel doesn’t need to worry about losing its smallness; that is just a state of mind anyway!”

*Maintenance of high standards.* USD 411 stakeholders identified a primary challenge as the maintenance of the high academic standards in USD 411. Many participants commented on the increasing challenges in the classroom with the potential of changing demographics. One Mennonite stated, “We want more families with kids, but some [families] are bringing such heavy burdens on our classrooms. This makes attaining the standard of excellence more challenging each year.” Another participant stated, “Yeah, our teaching jobs become more challenging, the students we often see are more challenging, but what are the consequences if we don’t get these children?”

Participants also recognized the effects of the potential impact of a declining enrollment. “The administration will have to make cuts that affect our programming,” stated a Mennonite USD 411 stakeholder. In essence, USD 411 stakeholders perceived challenges to its standards whether it grows or continues to decline. Maintaining the high

standards was perceived to be related to finding the right amount of growth and the right kind of growth.

Participants viewed the potential of changing demographics as a challenge to the maintenance of shared values and assumptions. One Mennonite and a cradle Goesselite stated, “Not everyone moving in has the same values the rest of us long-time residents have.” Others questioned the impact of more diversity, all agreeing it would be good but that it “might bring on increased pressures in the classroom.” Another stakeholder on the USD 411 focus group stated, “Yes, we are already seeing the impact of that in the classroom.” Several stakeholders concurred that maintaining high standards is a challenge for the teaching staff as there are more transient people in the community. Table 4.12 reflects the challenges for the community of Goessel.

Table 4.12

Small Size and Atmosphere versus Growth

People	Challenge	Descriptor
Mennonite	<p>“First, let’s get to a point our enrollment isn’t dropping; we’ll have to grow to make that happen.”</p> <p>“We could triple our size and still be small and maintain our identity.”</p> <p>“Well, if we could get our population growth to a point that our school increased by two to five students each year, that would be good.”</p> <p>“Goessel doesn’t need to worry about losing its smallness; that is just a state of mind anyway!”</p> <p>9 similar comments</p>	Small size and atmosphere versus growth
Non-Mennonite	<p>“I hope that the place won’t dry up and blow away!”</p> <p>“Do you realize what would happen to our property values if the school closed?”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Small size and atmosphere versus growth
Mennonite	<p>“We want more families with kids, but some are bringing such heavy burdens on our classrooms. This makes attaining the standard of excellence more challenging each year.”</p> <p>“Yeah, our teaching jobs become more challenging, the students we often see are more challenging, but what are the consequences if we don’t get these children?”</p> <p>5 similar comments</p>	Sustaining high standards versus declining standards
Non-Mennonite	<p>“The administration will have to make cuts that affect our programming.”</p> <p>1 similar comments</p>	Sustaining high standards versus declining standards

*Summary*

Stakeholders recognize the challenge of maintaining the qualities of smallness while balancing growth while sustaining high standards in an era of declining resources. The stakeholders indicated they were committed to working together to overcome the challenges.

### *Finding 10*

The Community of Goessel stakeholders provided evidence of social capital in the community as expressed through bonding and the need to generate more bridging capital.

Bonding capital appeared to be more prevalent than bridging capital. The following two sections recount the comments related to bonding capital and bridging capital. Table 4.13 groups these comments by bonding and bridging capital and source, whether by Mennonite or non-Mennonite and by cradle or non-cradle Goesselite.

*Bonding capital.* Comments gathered from all three data collection methods revealed strong bonding capital in the community. The strongest evidence of bonding capital exists among Mennonites and cradle Goesselites. There are strong extended family ties in the community and one way this bond is strengthened is through playing the “Mennonite Game,” which is a form of interacting where participants make links between one’s own extended family and that of another. As one non-Mennonite shared, “There are so many Mennonites who have extended families here, it is hard for me to keep track of who is related to whom.” Another wrote, “Just look at the phone book and see all the Schmidts and Voths that are listed. They all have so many family connections.” Those unable to make extended family connections in the community often felt left out of the bonding process. A non-Mennonite stated, “When they play that game, I’m left out every time because I don’t have the right last name.”

The degree of safety that stakeholders experience in the community is an indication of the bonding capital in the community. Since most people know each other, community members do not engage in acts of crime. One participant said, “Everyone

knows everyone, you can't do anything without everyone in the neighborhood knowing about it." Another participant observed, "It is safe here because we all know what is going on and we look out for each other." In this regard, bonding capital acts as an inhibitor to crime.

Bonding capital is reflected in the following statement from a Mennonite: "People here are invested in each other; they are more likely to work to solve problems or make improvements in their community." However, there still exists an apprehension of some newcomers if the newcomer is perceived to be very different. "Oh, they will talk about you but not to you if you are very different," said a non-Mennonite.

The relocation of the elementary classes to the town Mennonite church also indicated that bonding capital was a value for all stakeholders. The relocation began before all the details of the arrangement were finalized. One month later, documents reveal that one of the churches was allowed to use the school facility when the church was without electricity after an ice storm.

Many of the Mennonite participants referred to the unique identity of Goessel that has evolved through the years. This is another indication of the bonding capital that exists in the community. A Mennonite stakeholder who shared, "We owe it to our forefathers to keep our school system independent" captured the essence of the bondedness many Mennonites feel to each other and to their heritage.

*Bridging capital.* Evidence of bridging capital exists in comments from non-cradle Goesselites who have commented that they "have found acceptance in the community, even though I wasn't born here." Numerous other non-cradle Goesselites reflected on the willingness of community members to reach out to them. "When we

moved here, we had lots of help unloading and people bringing over meals for us,” said a non-Mennonite. Evidence of non-Mennonites feeling accepted and welcomed into the community is evidence of bridging capital as well. “Well, we are Catholic, but coming here has been good for us,” stated a non-Mennonite.

Evidence of bridging capital also appears in the reputation that USD 411 has established beyond its district borders. Stated one Mennonite participant, “Where I work in Wichita, when I say I am from Goessel, they respond and say, ‘Oh, yeah, they have an excellent music program there, don’t they?’” Other forms of evidence of bridging capital are revealed in documents that show the music program being invited to perform at the governor’s inauguration and other state events.

Evidence of bridging capital is found in the school system on several fronts. A school stakeholder said, “I think that our foreign student exchange program helps to break down barriers and stereotypes that our students have of other countries.” Another parent stakeholder commented regarding the exchange students, “Our daughter has established friends living now in foreign countries and writes to them frequently.” The necessary social skills to develop bridging capital for the youth are practiced with the exchange students.

The comments from community members relating that USD 411 is friendly and willing to work with home-schooled families, reveals bridging capital. The partnerships established with neighboring school systems, such as the partnership in wrestling, the Learning Consortium that allows classes to be taught on-line and Marion County Cooperative are all examples of bridging capital. A non-Mennonite, non-cradle Goesselite observed “the school was active in visiting with me and my family when we

moved in.”

Table 4.13

Social Capital

People	Social Capital	Descriptor
Mennonite	<p>“People here are invested in each other; they are more likely to work to solve problems or make improvements in their community.”</p> <p>“It is safe here because we all know what is going on and we look out for each other.”</p> <p>6 similar comments</p>	Bonding capital
Non-Mennonite	<p>“Oh, they will talk about you but not to you if you are very different.”</p> <p>“There are so many Mennonites who have extended families here, it is hard for me to keep track of who is related to whom.”</p> <p>“There are still a few of the old-timers who would not sell land to you if you are not from around here.”</p> <p>2 similar comments</p>	Bonding capital
Mennonite	<p>“Where I work in Wichita, when I say I am from Goessel, they respond and say, ‘Oh, yeah, they have an excellent music program there, don’t they?’”</p> <p>“I think that our foreign student exchange program helps to break down barriers and stereotypes that our student have of other countries”.</p> <p>“Our daughter has established friends living now in foreign countries and writes to them frequently.”</p> <p>4 similar comments</p>	Bridging capital
Non-Mennonite	<p>“The school was active in visiting with me and my family when we moved in.”</p> <p>“I have found acceptance in the community, even though I wasn’t born here.”</p> <p>“When we moved here, we had lots of help unloading and people bringing over meals for us,”</p> <p>“Well, we are Catholic, but coming here has been good for us,”</p> <p>3 similar comments</p>	Bridging capital

### *Summary*

The community of Goessel has evidence of a great deal of social capital in the community. There appears to be more evidence of bonding capital than bridging capital. The strongest forms of capital may be found in the extended family connections in the community. There is a strong desire to generate more bridging capital.

### *Chapter 4 Summary*

Chapter 4 reported the findings of the data collected from two focus groups. Ten stakeholders participated in the USD 411 focus group and nine stakeholders participated in the community of Goessel focus group. Twenty stakeholders participated on the left- and right-hand column case method and seven members of Board of Education and City Council were individually interviewed. The findings were grouped into 10 major findings, the first seven connected to aspirations. Findings eight and nine related to challenges. Finding 10 connected to the conceptual framework, social capital. Chapter 5 presents the summary and discussion of the findings.

## CHAPTER 5

The focus of this final chapter is to review with the reader the purpose of the study, research questions, the methodology, major findings emanating from the appreciative inquiry perspective, and discussion of the findings. Recommendations for both USD 411 and the community of Goessel are included. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future study and conclusions. The researcher views this chapter as a road map for the aspirations for the stakeholders of USD 411 and the community of Goessel.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of Goessel community stakeholders for their school district and community. The aspirations of the Goessel community were viewed through the theoretical framework of social capital (Putnam, 2000), both bonding and bridging (Flora & Flora, 2004). A qualitative, embedded, case study research design applying the principles of appreciative inquiry was used to identify, describe, and examine the aspirations of the Goessel community stakeholders for their school district and community during the fall semester of the 2004-05 school year. Appreciative inquiry fits naturally with the focus of identifying dreams and aspirations as appreciative inquiry focuses on the positive, seeking what is right with the organization and working toward the full capacity of the organization (Cooperrider et al., 2003).

### *Research Questions*

1. What are the Goessel community stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for their community?

2. What are the Goessel community stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for their school district?
3. How do Goessel community stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their felt aspirations for their school district?
4. How do Goessel community stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their felt aspirations for their community?

#### *Summary of the Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework was grounded in the research of social capital and viewed from the perspective of appreciative inquiry. It fit with the researcher's inherent belief in the goodness of people, and in the value-based traditions of the community being studied. As such, the theory related to social capital and its attributes of bonding and bridging provided the theoretical perspective for this study.

#### *Summary of the Literature Review*

The literature review found that appreciative inquiry is an action research perspective and is increasingly used to empower stakeholders to realize their dreams. It assists participants in capacity building, identifying strengths of the organization, and building on those strengths.

Studies focusing on rural communities using social capital as a framework have found that different types of social capital greatly affect the community's ability to survive. Most rural communities have a wealth of bonding, but lack in the development of bridging capital. Research has shown that survival of small isolated communities depend on their ability to develop bridging capital. The literature review did not reveal any studies in Kansas, using social capital as the conceptual framework and viewed

through the perspective of appreciative inquiry.

### *Summary of the Methodology*

A qualitative embedded case study design was used to describe the aspirations of USD 411 and the community of Goessel stakeholders for their school district and community. Within the case study were two embedded cases. One embedded case examined USD 411 stakeholders. The second embedded case examined the community of Goessel stakeholders. In all, 46 stakeholders participated, seven participants were interviewed, 10 USD 411 stakeholders participated in a focus group, nine community of Goessel stakeholders participated in a focus group, and 20 participants completed the left and right-hand column case method.

### *Summary of Findings*

Findings from this study identified, described, and examined the community of Goessel and USD 411 stakeholders many aspirations for their community and USD 411. The data also revealed inherent challenges toward achieving some aspirations. In addition, the data revealed the community of Goessel has an overabundance of bonding capital but could benefit from focusing on developing bridging capital.

### *Findings*

Ten major findings were identified from this study. These findings are:

1. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to a unique and independent identity for USD 411.
2. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a unique and independent school system with high academic standards.

3. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders shared their aspirations to maintain their high degree of quality of life and sense of safety that they perceive to exist in the community.
4. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a positive relationship between USD 411 and the churches within the community.
5. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to embrace diversity.
6. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders have aspirations for community improvements.
7. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders hold a positive view toward meeting the challenges they perceive to face the community of Goessel and USD 411.
8. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the challenges that exist in sustaining a small town atmosphere and are willing to work together to seek a viable community based solution.
9. The Community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the inherent challenges of sustaining high academic standards in USD 411 due to potential changes in the community's demographic if population growth is encouraged.
10. The Community of Goessel stakeholders provided evidence of social capital in the community as expressed through bonding capital and the need to generate more bridging capital.

### *Discussion of the Findings*

The findings are grouped into three sections. The first section discusses the stakeholders' aspirations. The second section discusses the challenges that the data revealed. Finally, the third section discusses social capital and its attributes of bonding and bridging.

#### *Aspirations*

The community of Goessel stakeholders aspires to a unique and independent identity for USD 411. The highest aspiration of both stakeholder groups is to maintain an independent school system that reflects the unique character of the community. The stakeholders are committed to maintaining their independent school district and are willing to make sacrifices to maintain its independence. Keeping the aspiration of an independent and healthy school district alive is directly tied to attracting more young families into the community.

One positive sign is that non-cradle Goesselites who move into the district appear to become as committed to the community of Goessel and USD 411 as the cradle Goesselites. Non-cradle Goesselites adopt the same aspirations as cradle Goesselites in most cases, desiring to maintain a healthy and vibrant school system. This would indicate that if the community of Goessel can attract more young families, there is clearly something in the quality of life in the community of Goessel and in the education offered by USD 411 that makes non-cradle Goesselites committed to the community. This offers hope to those aspiring to maintain USD 411 as an independent school district. Mennonites and cradle Goesselites will need to forge bridging capital with non-Mennonites and non-cradle Goesselites to create an environment that will be attractive to

non-Mennonites. In creating this environment, stakeholders can share the quality of life and quality of education that they have developed in the community of Goessel.

The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a unique and independent school system with high academic standards. Stakeholders of USD 411 and the community of Goessel hold the staff of USD 411 and the programs it has to offer in high regard. In return, USD 411 recognizes that it exists in a unique community where education is highly valued and consequently is the beneficiary of those values.

Stakeholders of USD 411 express a consensual aspiration of maintaining and improving the current high standards that they perceive to exist in the district. The source of much of the excellence in the programs and people can be traced to the social capital developed among the staff of USD 411 and community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders. In contrast with some public school districts in the United States, the community of Goessel has a high level of confidence in USD 411. USD 411 staff members make every effort in policy, programming, and public relations to maintain and build that confidence by maintaining high academic standards.

Academic excellence is a source of pride among stakeholders of USD 411. The continued maintenance of academic excellence is an aspiration of USD 411 stakeholders; however, maintaining high standards is a source of stress on the staff of USD 411 given dwindling resources and the corresponding reduction in staff. In this case, success creates its own inherent challenge.

Elected and appointed leadership was viewed as an outstanding element of USD 411. Historically, the leadership roles in USD 411 have been filled by people of the

Mennonite tradition or associated with the Mennonite churches in the community. As the demographics of community of Goessel evolve, it is possible that non-Mennonites will seek to hold more leadership positions. This should not concern stakeholders as long as the leadership maintains the faith-based values that have deep roots in the community and school district.

The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders shared their aspirations to maintain their high quality of life and sense of safety they perceive to exist in the community. Stakeholders of the community of Goessel almost universally acknowledged the quality of life and degree of safety they experience in the community of Goessel. Stakeholders aspire to maintain and build on this quality of life and safety. The greatest inherent challenge to this aspiration is a declining school age population. With a declining population come vacant properties, reduced services, and the potential for increased crime. People are needed to fill roles, contribute time, money, and expertise to the community of Goessel.

The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to maintain a positive relationship between USD 411 and the churches within the community. This relationship has grown looser over the years, according to participants. Both entities recognize and respect the aspirations they share to serve the community's youth. This relationship holds promise for being an example to other communities of how different organizations with overlapping missions can work together to serve the community. Moreover, USD 411 may find itself relating to a non-Mennonite church. Just as the social capital was revealed between the town church and USD 411 during the gas line crisis, other relationships could be explored to reveal additional social capital. A

partnership already exists between Bethesda and an elementary classroom to partner youth with elderly residents. It is possible Bethesda and USD 411 could explore a relationship to realize common aspirations.

The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders aspire to be more accepting of diversity in the community. For many years, the community of Goessel has been predominately Mennonite and generally resistant to the broader influences of society. This is gradually changing and is viewed as an opportunity by the majority of Mennonite stakeholders. Many Mennonite stakeholders see this as an opportunity for outreach and an opportunity to learn from others. The Mennonite majority's willingness to broaden the diversity of the community is an example of the bridging capital that is needed for the community to thrive. Mennonites have traditionally been welcoming people. They recognize that more non-Mennonites are moving into the community and are seeking ways to make them feel more welcomed.

The cultural uniqueness and distinctive ways that Mennonites interact can be a challenge for non-Mennonites. There needs to be a willingness to share and embrace others on the part of those whose roots are in the community. There has to be a willingness to learn about and gain respect for the community's traditions by those who are new to the community. Both stakeholder groups have an opportunity to fulfill their diversity aspirations for USD 411 and the community of Goessel.

The path to achieving this aspiration already exists within the theology of the Mennonite tradition. In it rests the basis for building bridging capital that will be vital for the community in the future. A core belief in brotherhood and service to one another is central to construction of bridging capital. Mennonites in the community will need to be

true to their espoused theory and tie it to a theory-in-use.

USD 411 also has a tradition to build bridging capital. It has a long-standing active foreign student exchange program. This program brings students of diverse ethnic and religious background into a community that is homogeneous in its ethnic and religious makeup. Continuing and supporting this program into the future is a vital component toward building the bridging capital the community needs. It is also a means, although limited, of increasing the full-time equivalent headcount of students for state reimbursement.

The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders have aspirations for community improvements. Stakeholders dream of a wellness center, paved streets, a gathering place or restaurant that will attract visitors, and of a town made beautiful by the efforts of town leaders, volunteers, and community members at large. These aspirations are achievable but will need planning, organization, and community support.

Initiatives by the city leaders need to be publicized. The researcher was surprised to observe how many people were unaware of city projects and plans. The community focus group revealed many stakeholders were not aware of on-going projects involving sewage treatment, flood control, and other measures both large and small. More publicity for the city leaders' initiatives could help champion the cause for community improvements.

Community members must realize that city leaders are operating with a limited tax base and financial resources. Many of the aspirations may only be met with the help of creative funding, grants, and donations. Involving the community in prioritizing these

aspirations and creatively generating additional resources may be of benefit to city leaders. The community of Goessel can benefit greatly by developing bridging capital to make the connections to external resources to make the dreams a reality. Attracting businesses and industry will require the bridging capital necessary to extend beyond the community. Bridging capital brings the opportunity of outside investment and development.

Both stakeholder groups hold strong beliefs that their aspirations are attainable. They stated continuously in focus groups, interviews, and the left and right-hand column case method that their aspirations are attainable by working together and striving toward common goals. In this regard, they are optimistic of the future.

Within the Mennonite and rural culture exists a powerful work ethic to achieve common goals. The inherent challenge is that attaining these types of goals are different from how they have typically responded as a community to disaster relief, cleaning out flooded houses, picking up after a tornado, or tilling the soil; it will require creative and spontaneous thinking in terms of economics and development. This is not a domain familiar to Mennonites in the community of Goessel. For this reason, cradle Goesselites need to look toward non-cradle Goesselites for help in thinking ‘outside the box’ for creative solutions. Again, bridging capital will be a critical component in achieving aspirations.

### *Inherent Challenges*

The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognize the challenges that exist in sustaining a small town atmosphere and are willing to work together to seek a viable community based solution. The challenges that were identified

are intertwined and need to be simultaneously addressed. They affect the sustainability of the community of Goessel and USD 411. This researcher believes that the inherent faith-based traditions of the stakeholders are a solid foundation to address these challenges.

The primary challenge was sustaining USD 411 as an independent school system. The dream of maintaining a unique and independent school district into the future may be threatened unless the declining enrollment issue is not addressed. Overcoming this challenge is directly related to the challenge of attracting young families to the community and retaining those who graduate from USD 411.

Most graduates of USD 411 move on into higher education and find jobs in other communities. The community of Goessel will need to find ways to attract young families to the community and make life in Goessel attractive so that those who leave to go to college will want to return and contribute to the stability and growth of the community. Marketing the quality of life, safety, and quality of education are all potential selling points to attract young families. As important as these attributes may be, young families will move to Goessel only if they are able to find adequate affordable housing. Providing adequate affordable housing is another challenge the community of Goessel and USD 411 stakeholders identified.

The community of Goessel identified the lack of adequate and affordable housing for young families as another inherent challenge. Although there are multiple inexpensive rentals in the town of Goessel, there are not sufficient affordable homes for young families that have the space that growing families need. The lack of affordable housing is tied directly to lack of land with appropriate services for housing development. The biggest challenge to meeting the housing needs will be in finding a developer willing to

make the initial investment in the infrastructure to begin development. Community leaders may need to creatively identify incentives that will entice a developer to take the risk to build affordable homes in the community. Some Kansas rural communities offer free homes to families who are willing to make a commitment to remain in the community. It is important for community leaders to be proactive and address issues related to the sustainability of USD 411 before enrollment figures reach a crisis level. Participants realized that growth is directly connected to survival. The community of Goessel could benefit from a long-range plan to achieve their aspirations and set goals to reach that point.

Stakeholders identified meeting the needs of the elderly and young as an important challenge. The community of Goessel, like many rural communities in Kansas, has an aging population. Bethesda, the retirement community in Goessel, is expanding to accommodate these demands. These needs will continue to place heavy demands on the sandwich generation, that generation between young and old.

Youths need activities and a location to go to on weekends instead of seeking entertainment in other communities. By providing a place for youth to congregate, the community of Goessel may benefit in the future in helping young people learn they do not need to go beyond Goessel to find entertainment.

The community of Goessel stakeholders and USD 411 stakeholders recognized the inherent challenges of sustaining high academic standards in USD 411 with potential changes in the community's demographics if population growth is encouraged. Both stakeholder groups recognize the demographics of the community are changing and may affect the standards the school holds for its students. Currently, USD 411 benefits from

supportive parents who value education and traditional family life. USD 411 stakeholders wonder if changing demographics may bring more students with basic social and physical needs into the community; they speculate that these students and their parents may bring with them challenges that are unfamiliar to the district and community.

If this scenario proves to be accurate, USD 411 will need to prepare itself to provide remedial and tutoring programs that address the needs of these students. This challenge is a double-edged sword and one recognized by the district and community leadership. On the one hand, there is the recognition of the potential problems that new students may bring. On the other hand, their presence is critical to the sustainability of the district. USD 411 must find ways to address the needs of the changing demographics and extend the achievement within reach of all students entering USD 411.

### *Social Capital*

The community of Goessel stakeholders provided evidence of social capital in the community as expressed through bonding and bridging capital. The community of Goessel has a wealth of social capital as is evidenced in its bonding capital. Like many other rural communities, the community of Goessel has an overabundance of bonding capital. Social capital is an asset for providing support to community members.

Stakeholders can rely on their neighbors to assist each other in times of need.

In particular, the data reveals a community immensely rich in bonding capital. Foremost in the development of bonding capital are the extended family connections. These extended family connections are a form of support for those with these connections. For those stakeholders without these connections, it can at times become a way to feel excluded from the inner circles of the community of Goessel.

The tightly bonded social capital plays a pivotal role in the safety and quality of life many stakeholders experience. The bonding capital also has a historical connection. Cradle Goesselites see their forefathers' legacy as a driving force in the decisions they make for today and for the future. Not all community stakeholders feel as closely bonded to this legacy. The non-cradle Goesselites who did not arrive with the original immigrants are not bonded to this legacy. It appears the community of Goessel may benefit from developing more bridging capital to make connections beyond the immediate community and attract businesses and families to make a commitment to the community.

The data also revealed that more potential exists to generate more bridging capital. The reputation of the music program extends far beyond the district's borders. The spring concert regularly attracts people from beyond USD 411 borders. In addition, the reputation for academic excellence is also recognized beyond the community's borders. College recruiters know about Goessel's reputation for excellence and regularly recruit its graduates. Bridging capital will have to be increased as the community of Goessel looks toward enhancing its attractiveness to potential new members of the community. On this front, the stakeholders seem to possess a willingness to welcome those from different backgrounds.

The community of Goessel and USD 411 will need to find ways to expand their bridging capital. Connecting with people, businesses, and resources outside the community will be essential to bringing in the necessary resources, both people and economic, to ensure its survival.

### *Recommendations*

This section of chapter five lists recommendations for the community of Goessel

and USD 411 as ways to consider to achieving their aspirations and surmounting their challenges. These recommendations do not represent the personal views of the researcher but are the interpretations of the researcher based on the data collected. This section also suggests recommendations for future research.

### *USD 411*

USD 411 is a community that values education. While it faces challenges particularly in enrollment and financial constraints, the stakeholders supporting USD 411 are deeply committed to its survival and future development. USD 411 needs to be adaptive to the changes it faces with the changing demographics. This will mean broadening their proactive role in the acceptance of diversity. The community of Goessel may benefit from the development of a 'Welcome Wagon' for new arrivals. USD 411 must particularly take a proactive role in integrating new youth into the student body. One way of adding to the diversity of USD 411 and the community of Goessel is for USD 411 to continue and expand the foreign exchange program.

USD 411 has many assets it can market. Looking into the future, it will need to take a stronger role to market these assets beyond its borders and in particular to its alumni. Attracting young people back to the community is an ability USD 411 is distinctly qualified to accomplish, as there is a mutual investment between USD 411 and its graduates. An alumnus letter may benefit both the community and USD 411.

Of particular importance is the need for greater dialogue between stakeholders of USD 411 and community of Goessel leaders. Communication between USD 411 and the City Council is an important link to maintaining the relationships of mutual support.

In addition, USD 411 will need to look beyond its borders in finding creative

partnerships with other learning institutions to continue to expand the choice and offerings it needs to bring to the students. Technology can play an important role in this process; USD 411 can take a proactive step in developing new linkages using technology. This will take the formation of creative partnerships. Promotion of the high academic standards, the fine arts, and particularly music can be marketed as a hidden treasure of the educational opportunities waiting at USD 411. Creating awareness of these treasures at USD 411 can help attract young families looking for a good quality of life and fine academic training.

### *Community of Goessel*

The community of Goessel is fortunate to have leaders who use limited resources to meet the needs and aspirations of the community of Goessel. Unfortunately, many people fail to recognize the good that community of Goessel leaders are doing for the community. Traditional Mennonite modesty may be hampering community of Goessel leaders from mentioning their accomplishments. Encouraging community members to attend town meetings may be one step in that direction. A monthly newsletter reporting the status of projects may be another aid in facilitating communication. The more effectively community of Goessel leaders communicate with stakeholders, the more the stakeholders may support the community of Goessel leaders.

The community of Goessel has many worthwhile aspirations. Setting priorities may be a critical step in helping stakeholders to achieve these aspirations. In addition, community involvement in this process also helps to focus stakeholders on achieving one goal before proceeding to another goal. Community of Goessel stakeholders must recognize that their aspirations will be attained when they work with community leaders

to collaboratively achieve these aspirations. This may mean participating in community activities such as volunteering, supporting, donating, and assisting community leaders in achieving their goals. Since bonding capital is already high in the community, community leaders may only have to make a public case for public involvement in this process.

The community of Goessel stakeholders recognizes that diversity in the community will continue to grow. The community of Goessel will need to be successful at integrating newcomers into the social capital to maintain and build a thriving community. Promoting the already established Mennonite Heritage complex and tying in Bed and Breakfast partnerships may be one possibility. The community of Goessel may also benefit from establishing partnerships with other small rural communities.

Monolithic rural communities exist throughout the United States. In many instances, they provide a link to the past and the waves of immigrants who settled the Great Plains. Over time, these communities have developed deep levels of bonding capital. Yet their insulation may be cause to become overly dependent upon their bonding capital. Their likeness can create a sense of cohesiveness that makes it difficult to integrate new comers. In an era of globalization, where people from many cultures are using technology to shrink cultural differences, communities such as Goessel will need to create bridging capital while maintaining its faith-based values. Technology may one way that Mennonites can share the inherent values in the faith-based tradition with other cultures. The community of Goessel, comprised primarily of Mennonites, will need to seek a balance between maintaining their unique heritage and that of focusing on making their community adaptive to change.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Further studies of rural communities are needed. Many rural communities in the State of Kansas are experiencing the same challenges as the community of Goessel. Each of these communities has commonalities; yet they have distinct qualities that invite a rich and detailed study. The common aspect that these communities have is social capital.

Social capital is the cornerstone to the existence of these communities. Many of these communities have differing degrees of bonding capital. Bridging capital may be the key factor a community must learn to develop for it to grow and tap into resources beyond its borders. Exactly how communities have been able to successfully develop and improve their bridging capital may be a particularly relevant study for communities like Goessel. Qualitative studies, rich in context and detail, may prove to be very helpful at unveiling the secrets for communities wishing to develop more bridging capital. The researcher recommends studies in the following areas:

1. An investigation of the collaborative efforts between rural school districts utilizing an appreciative inquiry format.
2. The investigation of partnerships between rural towns to foster economic and educational advantages.
3. The investigation of factors contributing to bridging capital in rural communities.

### *Contribution to the Profession*

This study has the capacity to add substantially to the body of knowledge concerning the relationships between rural communities and their school district. This study was unique because it identified, described, and examined the aspirations of a rural

community using an appreciative inquiry research perspective. Moreover, it employed the left and right-hand column case method. The data collected from this method in the study was particularly rich. The left and right-hand column case method revealed information that many participants would have felt uncomfortable to mention in a focus group format or an interview. By allowing participants to express their unspoken thoughts on paper in a non-threatening format, the researcher was able to more clearly identify what participants observed are the inherent challenges in the community. The left and right-hand column case method should be further utilized in studies where underlying thoughts are not easily expressed and where in Argyris' (1999) words, undiscussables are present.

#### *Contribution to Practice*

The rural landscape in Kansas is changing dramatically. The policies of school superintendents, boards of education, and legislators will have to reflect these changes. This study reveals a community rich in heritage and a rural quality of life that stakeholders aspire to preserve at all costs. The community of Goessel like many other rural communities in Kansas harbor aspirations for their future. Losing sight of one's aspirations is akin to losing hope. The researcher's hope is that this study will help the community of Goessel identify, focus on, and develop a plan toward achieving these aspirations. This study should also help rural communities understand the importance of developing bridging capital to preserve their community. Forging partnerships, developing cooperatives, and assisting the delivery of services between communities may become a necessary ability to maintain a thriving community.

#### *Limitations*

The researcher is a resident in the community of Goessel, a Mennonite, and an

employee of USD 411. As a result, the researcher enjoyed the trust and support of participants in this study. In the small community where bonding capital is strong, it was relatively easy to solicit potential participants for the study. Nearly all the participants were eager to participate in the study. In fact, numerous stakeholders volunteered their participation.

There were challenges that suggest limitations to this study. One particular challenge the researcher faced focused on the purposive sampling process designed for this study. The researcher realized that some stakeholders in legitimate leadership positions might be offended if they were not included in the study. The researcher sought to address this limitation, in part, by expanding the data gathering process and including interviews.

The small size of the community of Goessel created a limitation related to confidentiality. There are few, if any, secrets in a community the size of Goessel. The researcher had to rely on the innate trust he perceived to be evident among participants so that information shared in focus groups did not become part of the community gossip. Moreover, in this environment where the researcher was an employee, resident, community leader, friend, and family member, identifying and describing data that may be contrary to popular belief was a challenge. Being so completely immersed in the community of Goessel and USD 411 raised questions of objectivity. Objectivity was guarded by keeping all participants' input anonymous, to the degree possible, and by the guidance of an outside advisor from Wichita State University.

### *Conclusions*

Based on the results of this study, seven major aspirations have been identified for

the community of Goessel and USD 411. Both groups also face inherent challenges to some aspirations. The greatest asset the community of Goessel is the amount of social capital it has accumulated over the years. Bonding capital, in particular, is extremely strong in the community. The development of more bridging capital will be a critical necessity to ensure the independence of USD 411 and a thriving community.

Stakeholders of the community of Goessel and USD 411 must strive in policy and personal relations to strengthen and improve the bridging capital in the community and USD 411.

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## APPENDIXES

## Appendix A

### *Focus Group and Interview Questions*

1. What are the three best qualities of the community of Goessel?
2. What are the three best qualities of USD 411?
3. Imagine having a conversation with someone considering moving to the community of Goessel, what would you want them to know about the community of Goessel?
4. Imagine having a conversation with someone considering moving to the community of Goessel, what would you want them to know about USD 411?
5. What do you consider the most hopeful aspects for the future of the community of Goessel?
6. What do you consider the most hopeful aspects for the future of USD 411?
7. Where do you see the community of Goessel 10 years from now?
8. Where do you see USD 411 10 years from now?
9. What do you consider the community of Goessel's greatest assets?
10. What do you consider USD 411's greatest assets?

## Appendix B

### *Left- and Right-Hand Column Case Method*

You are being asked to participate in a research study covering the aspirations of the community of Goessel and USD 411. Imagine a conversation between you and a person who is considering moving to Goessel. In this conversation regarding the community of Goessel and USD 411, write down on the right what actually would occur in the conversation, and on the left, write down what you imagine might be omitted. First, complete the imaginary conversation on the right side. It may go on for several pages. After you have completed the conversation, come back to the left side and fill the undiscussables that neither you nor the imaginary person would say out loud. Below is a sample.

<b>Left Hand Column</b> What is Undiscussed	<b>Right Hand Column</b> What is Said
I really don't want to eat lunch by myself again today.	Self: Hi Joe! Are you ready to join us for supper? Where would you like to go?
	Joe: Hey, I've heard there is a new Mexican restaurant around the corner.
Shucks, I'm not really fond of Mexican.	Self: That sounds good to me, you lead the way.
	Joe: I read in the paper they have great fajitas.
But they also said there was a 45 minute wait every noon.	Self: Yeah, the paper had great reviews.

Appendix C

*Data Analysis Matrix*

*Matrix I: Bridging and Bonding Capital*

Bridging Capital	Bonding Capital

*Matrix II: Capacity building, policy, education and multi-disciplinary approaches*

	Capacity Building	Policy	Education and Multi-disciplinary approaches
Farmer			
Non-Farmer			
Mennonite			
Non-Mennonite			
Cradle Goesselite			
Non-Cradle Goesselite			

*Matrix III: Aspirations pertaining to the community of Goessel and USD 411*

Aspirations pertaining to the community of Goessel.	Aspiration pertaining to USD 411

Appendix D

*Letter of Consent for Focus Group*



Department of Administration, Counseling, Educational and School Psychology

Dear Community Member,

I am conducting research for my graduate studies at Wichita State University. The study involves researching the aspirations of the stakeholders of the community of Goessel for both the community of Goessel and USD 411.

Many rural communities are facing a declining school enrollment and tightening financial times. The community of Goessel is facing similar challenges. In light of these challenges, some communities have found it helpful to identify what their aspirations are for both the community and the school district. For this reason, you as a stakeholder in the community of Goessel and the school district have been identified for your input into this study. The results of this study help to identify aspirations stakeholders have for the community of Goessel and USD 411. Knowing these aspirations may help guide future decision-making. The results of this study may be shared in scholarly journals or presented at state or national education conferences.

Your responses to the questions will remain confidential and you will not be

identified in any way in the study. You will be given an opportunity to review a summary of findings to check for accuracy and given an additional time for feedback prior to the study's completion.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to have to participate. Should you decide not to participate; it will not affect your relations to the community, USD 411 or to WSU. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at 367-2428. If you have any concerns regarding your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

By signing one copy of this form, you are granting your permission to participate in the focus group. Please keep a copy of this form provided to you for your records. Your signature indicates you have read the information above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or fear of reprisal. Thank you for assisting me in this important study.

Sincerely,

John Fast

I agree to write to participate in a focus group for this research study.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E

*Letter of Consent-Conversation Scenario*



Department of Administration, Counseling, Educational and School Psychology

Dear Community Member,

I am conducting research for my graduate studies at Wichita State University. The study involves researching the aspirations of the stakeholders of the community of Goessel for both the community of Goessel and USD 411.

Many rural communities are facing a declining school enrollment and tightening financial times. The community of Goessel is facing similar challenges. In light of these challenges, some communities have found it helpful to identify what their aspirations are for both the community and the school district. For this reason, you as a stakeholder in the community of Goessel and the school district have been identified for your input into this study. The results of this study help to identify aspirations stakeholders have for the community of Goessel and USD 411. Knowing these aspirations may help guide future decision-making. The results of this study may be shared in scholarly journals or presented at state or national education conferences.

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identified in any way in the study. You will be given an opportunity to review a summary of findings to check for accuracy and given an additional time for feedback prior to the study's completion.

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By signing one copy of this form, you are granting your permission to participate in the conversation scenario. Please keep a copy of this form provided to you for your records. Your signature indicates you have read the information above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or fear of reprisal. Thank you for assisting me in this important study.

Sincerely,

John Fast

I agree to write a conversation scenario for this research study.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix F

*Wichita State University Institutional Review Board  
for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB)*



**Wichita State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
(IRB)**

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**APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

Please use a typewriter to complete this form.

Name of Principal Investigator(s): **Raymond Calabrese, Professor from the  
Administration, Counseling, Educational and School Psychology, Wichita State University,  
Wichita, KS 67260-0142**

---

(For a student project, Principal Investigator **must** be a WSU faculty member; student is listed as  
Co-Investigator.)

Departmental/Program

Affiliation:     **Educational Leadership**     Campus Box: **142**      Phone: **978-5329**

Name(s) of Co-

Investigator(s): **John Fast**

---

Co-Investigator(s) is/are:  Faculty Member     X Graduate Students   

Undergraduate Student

Type of Project:  Class Project     Capstone Project     X Thesis or

Dissertation

Funded Research     Unfunded Research

If student project, address of student: P.O. Box 455, Goessel, KS 67053

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Title of Project/Proposal: A Study of the Aspirations of the  
Goessel Unified School District, USD 411

Expected Completion Date: **April 30, 2005**                      Funding Agency (if  
applicable): Not applicable

*Please attach additional sheets, if necessary, with numbers of responses corresponding to those listed below.*

1. Describe the research in non-technical language:

This dissertation seeks to identify the aspiration of the stakeholders in the community of Goessel for both their school district and community. Goessel USD 411 is experiencing nine years of consecutive declining enrollment and this study seeks to identify the aspirations the stakeholders have for their future regarding the community and USD 411. This research will occur in the Community of Goessel during the fall of 2004. A qualitative embedded case study using an appreciative inquiry perspective will be utilized to identify the aspirations of stakeholders.

The research will answer four questions:

1. What are the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for their community?
  2. What are the Goessel stakeholders' perceptions of their aspirations for USD 411?
  3. How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for USD 411?
  4. How do Goessel stakeholders perceive the inherent challenges to achieving their aspirations for their community?
- 
2. Describe the benefits of the research to the human subjects, if any, and of the benefits to human or scientific knowledge:

This study is designed to benefit the community of Goessel and USD 411 by identifying the aspirations and inherent challenges. This information is critical for goal setting and identification of community assets.

The research goal is to provide both the community and USD 411 with critical knowledge necessary for sustaining and vibrant school system amid declining enrollment and financial challenges.

3. Describe the subjects, how the subjects are to be selected, how many are to be used, and indicate explicitly whether any are minors (under age 18 per Kansas law) or otherwise members of "vulnerable" populations, including, but not limited to, pregnant women, prisoners, psychiatric patients, etc.

Thirty participants will be purposively selected stakeholders in the community of Goessel. No minors or members of vulnerable populations will be asked to participate in the study. Stakeholders are defined as those having a legitimate interest in USD 411 and the community. These stakeholders will be selected from the board of education, City Council, employees of USD 411, parents of students, volunteers who serve on committees and regular attendees at events.

- A. One focus group will be conducted consisting of approximately 10 members from the purposively sampled selection of participants.
- B. Left- and Right-hand Column Case Method will be used with approximately 20 purposively selected stakeholders of the community of Goessel and USD 411.
- C. Interviews will be used as a follow up method where needed.

4. Describe each procedure step-by-step, including the frequency, duration, and location of each procedure.

Permission for data collection will be sought from the board of education in advance. The focus group will last approximately an hour and a half. The Left- and Right-hand Column Case Method will be explained to the stakeholders who are participating. There will be 20 stakeholders purposively selected for this portion of the data collection. These participants will be allowed to fill out the Left- and Right-hand Column Case Method at home after their consent has been granted. All of the consent forms will be both provided and collected before any data is collected. The confidentiality of participants will be protected and participants will be allowed to withdraw at anytime.

5. Describe any risks or discomforts (physical, psychological, or social) and how they will be minimized.

There are no known risks or discomforts anticipated for any of the participants.

6. Describe how the subjects' personal privacy is to be protected and confidentiality of information guaranteed (e.g. disposition of questionnaires, interview notes, recorded audio or videotapes, etc.).

Only the researcher will be able to identify data gathered from the participants. All data will be handled with confidentiality. Participants will be assured of complete confidentiality. All participation in this study will be voluntary; participants may

withdraw at any time without threat or consequence.

7. Describe the informed consent process and attach a copy of all consent and/or assent documents. These documents **must** be retained for three years beyond completion of the study. Any waiver of written informed consent must be justified.

A consent form will be signed by all participants to document their voluntary participation; this will be completed prior to any involvement in the study. Data produced by these participants will be available only to the researcher.

8. Attach all supporting material, including, but not limited to, questionnaire or survey forms and letters of approval from cooperating institutions.

The Principal Investigator agrees to abide by the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects and to retain consent forms for a minimum of three (3) years beyond the completion of the study. If the data collection or testing of subjects is to be performed by student assistants, the Principal Investigator will assume full responsibility for supervising the students to ensure that human subjects are adequately protected.

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Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

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Signature of Co-investigator (for student project)

Date

Appendix G

*Letter of Consent-Interview*



Department of Administration, Counseling, Educational and School Psychology

Dear Community Member,

I am conducting research for my graduate studies at Wichita State University. The study involves researching the aspirations of the stakeholders of the community of Goessel for both the community of Goessel and USD 411.

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Your interview responses to the questions will remain confidential and you will not be identified in any way in the study. You will be given an opportunity to review a

summary of findings to check for accuracy and given an additional time for feedback prior to the study's completion.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to have to participate. Should you decide not to participate; it will not affect your relations to the community, USD 411 or to WSU. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at 367-2428. If you have any concerns regarding your rights as a research subject, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

By signing one copy of this form, you are granting your permission to participate in the interview. Please keep a copy of this form provided to you for your records. Your signature indicates you have read the information above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You retain the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or fear of reprisal. Thank you for assisting me in this important study.

Sincerely,

John Fast

I agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_