

ENGAGING EXCLUSIONARY LINES OF COMMUNITY:  
PRINCIPALS' UNDERSTANDINGS, FROM  
THEORY TO PRACTICE

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

School-community partnerships have become one avenue for educators to invest in the child by partnering with sources beyond school walls. Yet, it has been argued that partnerships simply serve current interests and agendas (Anderson, 1998) and do little to offer authentic change (Auerbach, 2010; Popkewitz, 2004). Thus, school-community partnerships face the same fate as other reform efforts of reproducing the current system unless school leaders are willing to take the risk to critically examine those aspects of school and society that are so often seen as someone else's problem.

Through this exploratory qualitative study, I interviewed nine principals in the Southeast, from rural, urban, and suburban regions. I asked questions to help identify how principals perceive their schools' host communities and discover what school-community partnerships the principals pursued, supported, or desired to have implemented within their schools.

The study was conducted using a poststructuralist understanding of community as both "imagined" and existing within a discourse which excludes or devalues certain members (Anderson, 1983; Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1990). Data consisted of interviews of principals and parent-teacher organization (PTO) presidents, field notes, and archival data. Findings reveal principals occupy a precarious role in utilizing partnerships to improve their schools and communities for the students. The implications for this study underscore the need for a strong focus on self-evaluation of beliefs and understandings of community within principal preparation programs.

## **DEDICATION**

To Dusty,

We have grieved and missed you deeply  
because you were and are deeply loved.

Completing graduate school is bittersweet,  
as I will be leaving behind the last stage of life  
of which you were a part.

You will always be the example  
when I teach about sacrifice and service.

There are no words that express the sorrow with which I dedicate this project in honor of my brother, Charles Dustin Parrish, and two other exceptional men: Dr. Robert Milton Young, the husband of my longtime mentor and friend, and Nirmal Singh Gill, the father of my dear friend and “twin” in the program. All three men lived extraordinary lives, caring for people and investing in others in sacrificial ways, and they deserve to be honored and acknowledged as often as possible. May their service and kindness be remembered always, and may the women and children they left behind make them proud every day.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In the public imagination, public education is in crisis. Students are failing. Schools are failing.<sup>1</sup> And, according to the U.S. Department of Education, school districts are failing (see for example, Hu, 2008; Schemo, 2007; Turque, 2010). Advocates such as Jonathan Kozol (1991), Pauline Lipman (2004), and Jean Anyon (1997) have described the disparate circumstances many minority and low-income children experience at school—a profound reality of facilities in deplorable conditions and system-wide policies that are discriminatory in nature. Hence, opportunities that are to be afforded to all students simply are not (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Lipman, 2004; Tuzzolo & Hewitt, 2007). But these advocates do not end their analyses at the school doors. The local host communities of schools are often described as lacking resources, dilapidated, and consisting of a population plagued with disturbing high school dropout and unemployment rates. Moreover, historical patterns in city planning and trends in social mobility, or the lack thereof, indicate structural violence and segregation leading to the inequitable distribution of opportunities, particularly regarding education (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Wilson, 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Schools which do not meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) are considered failing. According to U.S. Department of Education, in 2003-2004, 25% of schools did not meet the requirements to earn AYP. The percentages of failing schools remained static between 2004 and 2007, although approximately 10% of schools met AYP one year and not the next, or vice versa, rendering a less favorable percentage of schools consistently passing. Also, the percentage of schools meeting AYP dropped noticeably in 2008-2009, when only approximately 66% of schools met AYP standards. Percentages among states vary, such as in 2003-2004 when 95% of schools in Wisconsin made AYP compared to only 23% of schools in Alabama.

However, many educators and school leaders share a common concern for students that extends beyond school walls. School-community partnerships have become one avenue for educators to invest in the child by partnering with outside sources. In her guide to developing and maintaining educational partnerships, Cox-Petersen (2011) explained that “one reason for the achievement gap is that we are trying more of the *same* thing rather than trying to do *things* different[ly],” suggesting that school-community partnerships provide a “fruitful place to start” (p. 13). Yet, others have argued that it is not only that we have been prone to “trying more of the same thing,” but that we have continued to think in the same ways. But do school-community partnerships propose a new way of thinking? Decker and Decker (2003) and Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), for example, pointed out that schools often take an approach toward addressing the local community in terms of the deficit model. While on the surface programs from a needs-based approach may seem the most practical, the approach resembles Freire’s (2000) notion of the oppressor taking on the role of charity, paving the way for the re-inscription of a demeaning binary of who can be successful and how. From patterns of deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) and blaming the victim (Ryan, 2004) to a lack of critical awareness (Greene, 1978) and criminalizing poverty (Wacquant, 2009), school-community partnerships face the same fate of reproducing the current system, with its inequitable structures and outcomes (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), unless school leaders are willing to take the risk of critically examining those aspects of school and society that are so often written off as someone else’s problem.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In recent reform efforts, school-community partnerships have been touted as a means for promoting student success (Decker, Decker, & Brown, 2007; Epstein, 2010) and meeting the needs of students (Hands, 2010). For instance, in 2001 the federal No Child Left Behind Act

emphasized the value of parental involvement in a child's education and school experience and required the documentation of outreach to parents from any school receiving federal funds.<sup>2</sup> Auerbach (2010) contended that partnerships offer a means for evoking "authentic" change and creating "respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups that value relationship building, dialogue, and power sharing" (p. 729). Along the same lines, shared governance can occur in partnerships, even to the extent that a school embodies the role of a community center (Blank, 2003; Dryfoos, 2003). Dryfoos (2003), for example, called for full-service community schools, in which schools partner with a local service agency in such a way that the agency shares some responsibility for the leadership of the school as a means for transforming schools "from a place where children once failed to a place where children succeed" (p. 35).

Yet, despite any accolades, the motives and results of school-community partnerships are contested. Gary Anderson (1998) pointed out that partnerships tend to be designed to graft members into prior objectives and goals instead of being designed in such a way as to facilitate staff in working together to redefine goals. Moreover, Anderson concluded that participatory/shared leadership efforts by school leaders typically maintain the status quo. Auerbach (2010) echoed Anderson's concern, suggesting that much of the literature regarding school partnerships focuses primarily on academic achievement while operating under "limited school agendas or mandates for collaboration" which do little to promote "socially just" schools (p. 729). And, schools are egregiously unjust.

Jean Anyon (1997), for instance, wrote extensively of schools in a district in New Jersey that provided a far less than adequate education for their students. Anyon offered a myriad of

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<sup>2</sup> Simply documenting attempts at parent outreach can be critiqued as flimsy and in no way indicates a serious intent to involve parents, yet this level of engagement may be all that is desired by school leaders.

reasons that “ghetto schooling” has become the education available for the students of the New Jersey school she observed, from a history of corrupt politics to a lack of teacher training and quality. But when parents and community members were invited to come into the school in a think-tank capacity, feelings of inferiority and distrust interfered with collaboration.

In light of her work in the district, Anyon (1997) went on to suggest several avenues to be pursued to improve the educational opportunities of students. Interestingly, she began her reform recommendations with the claim that the communities at large are in need of revitalization. Recognizing the reciprocal relationship of schools and communities, she noted that schools are a major source for community change while community change also has the potential to change the face of schooling. Anyon argued that “the aim is to create conditions for ghetto residents that will allow them to feel the sense of personal agency and self-determination that results from real economic and political possibilities—more common for middle-class and affluent families” (p. 170).

New Orleans is another place with a school district “riddled with a history of financial mismanagement, abysmal test scores, crumbling facilities, notorious incidents of school violence, blatant racial segregation and repeated media slams highlighting these issues” (Tuzzolo & Hewitt, 2007, p. 60). The authors reported that New Orleans, prior to Hurricane Katrina, was known for its weak school system. After the hurricane, the district was subjected to a state takeover, yet schools continued to lack physical resources, such as textbooks and desks, and support, such as counseling services for those who suffered from the experience of the natural disaster despite the transition to being state-run. The authors argued that the schools also occupy a role of moving students to the penal system instead of “providing support and facilitating

positive growth” (p. 60). The authors attributed the inequities to school district “policies and mechanisms” which cast students as criminals and deprive them of a quality education (p. 67).

Jonathan Kozol (1991), in *Savage Inequalities*, similarly wrote of corporation and political decisions that isolate and strand entire areas of low income people, predominantly African American, to sections of cities rife with unsanitary, dangerous, and economically underdeveloped conditions. These conditions were often interpreted as the fault of the residents; however, Kozol called attention to the harsh reality of the impact that local corporation policies and politics play on schools. For example, one school, although newly built, was not even able to be used by students because it was slowly sinking, a problem caused by sewage issues never addressed by the city leaders. Moreover, Kozol illuminated the stark contrast of funding spent on urban schools versus suburban schools, attributing this discrepancy to racialized tracking patterns within schools, a political mentality to shield suburban children from integration, and a stark disparity in the distribution of economic and educational resources. Kozol explained,

There is a deep-seated reverence for fair play in the United States, and in many areas of life we see the consequences in a genuine distaste for loaded dice; but this is not the case in education, health care, or inheritance of wealth. In these elemental areas we want the game to be unfair and we have made it so; and it will likely so remain. (p. 223)

Kozol’s (1991) musings represent how inequality and injustice thrive under the banners of equality and fairness. Culpable political patterns promote a society in which providing equal education opportunity seems like a “Robin Hood” philosophy instead of simple justice (Kozol, 1991, p. 228). Kozol explained that schools are seen as stealing from the rich in order to provide an education for the poor. Additionally, low income areas and residents are interpreted by others as criminals or potential criminals.

Wacquant (2009), in theorizing how the U.S. has exported a “hyperincarceration” mentality, indicted neoliberal politics for criminalizing poverty, a theorization which secures

“insecure work at the bottom of the class structure” (p. 2). Wacquant pointed out that forefront in the discussions of poverty today are terms such as “‘youth’ delinquency,” “urban violence,” “sensitive areas,” and “problem neighborhoods,” terms which indicate both “victims” and “perpetrators” and reveal the double knotted tie between poverty and crime within current thought (p. 7). Tracing political movements from the time of Reagan and the promotions of think tanks such as the Manhattan Institute, Wacquant concluded that the conservative right, along with a common, country-wide mentality of individualism and consumption, has brought forth a further victimization of the already victimized. Wacquant captured the rampant sentiment that “the enemy is the subproletariat that mars the scenery and menaces or annoys the consumers of public space” through his various depictions of city life and police patrol (p. 16). Moreover, the “zero-tolerance” polices of the US, argued Wacquant, which target specific populations (namely, lower class) and areas and which disallow for mercy in any context, reignite a residual distrust between police and African American youth remaining from the Civil Rights movement (2009, p. 26).

Wacquant’s argument is particularly poignant in considering trends in education practices and policies and how reform via community partnerships teeters on the edge of reinscribing the status quo and bringing about authentic and culturally relevant change and hope. In low-income communities with high crime rates and failing schools, students and their families are depicted as both victims and perpetrators, a dichotomy which binds them to reform designed to either rescue or punish them.

The mentality of both perpetrator and victim aligns with Kozol (1991) and Ryan’s (2004) admonition against blaming the victim, a component, according to Valencia (2010), of deficit thinking. Valencia argued that deficit thinking is the common mentality with regard to minority

and lower income students. He defined deficit thinking as an “explanation of school failure among individuals as linked to group membership (typically, the combination of racial minority status and economic disadvantage)” which “roots students’ poor schooling performance in their alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, and absolves institutional structures and inequitable schooling arrangements that exclude students from optimal learning” of blame or responsibility (p. 18). According to Valencia, deficit thinking also works to maintain oppressive circumstances. Furthermore, deficit thinking is rampant in research (which Valencia referred to as pseudoscience) as some researchers hold “deeply embedded negative biases toward people of color” (p. 18) and use flawed methodological procedures in research which they then advertise as science. Moreover, many reform efforts conjoin with a deficit thinking model, proposing changes “based on educability perceptions of low-SES students of color” (p. 18). School-community partnerships, thus, are at risk of being a vehicle for promulgating deficit thinking programs and reform efforts.

As sociologists such as Anyon, Kozol, and Wacquant have demonstrated, structural inequities and political policies exist that disadvantage low income, minority students and families; even a rhetoric for discrimination and resistance to providing equal educational opportunities has become (or perhaps remains) a driving discourse regarding educational reform. But undeniably, certain families and communities are “lacking” in resources and may or may not subscribe to valuing dominant notions of cultural capital. As reform movements continue to head in the direction of engaging the local community, it is imperative that school-community partnerships do not become (or remain) yet another way to maintain social stratification and inequitable educational opportunities.

Hoy and Miskel (2008) explained that schools, each as an organizational structure, are continually affected by their containing communities. Describing the local community and related impending external factors as the “environment,” Hoy and Miskel posited that while the encapsulating “social, legal, economic, political, demographic, and technological trends have a potentially powerful impact on schools,” this impact is difficult to delineate (p. 30). Furthermore, the local community “provides resources, values, technology, demands, and history” for each school in ways that “place constraints and opportunities on organizational action” (Hoy & Miskel, 2008, p. 30). Consequently, the authors suggested that it is necessary for school leaders to continually assess the local environment in order to structure and maintain the school program despite the possible changes and influences from external factors (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Thus, school leaders play a role in reproducing current school and societal structures, which arguably disadvantage a large proportion of children, as previously argued. And, as school-community partnerships continue to be implemented under the guise of change, many questions arise as to principals’ place in choosing, implementing, and/or promoting school-community partnerships.

Much research has been conducted to reveal that a principal’s leadership has the potential to affect a school’s overall climate and effectiveness (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Marks & Printy, 2003), as well as its involvement with the local community (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Auerbach (2010) classified leaders’ choices and support of partnerships on a continuum ranging from a stance of “preventing partnerships” to an open embrace of partnerships designed to be socially just (p. 749). Auerbach (2010) loosely tied a principal’s interactions with the local community and his or her leadership to the beliefs he or she holds about the local community and its members. And as school leaders are positioned in such a way as to link the school to the community, efforts for authentic and meaningful change and impact should begin with them.

Thus, in this study, I planned to explore how certain principals interpret marginalized segments of local school communities in order to establish a starting point for understanding school and community relationships as directed, encouraged, or avoided by school leaders. Moreover, I wanted to investigate how principals determine who and what constitutes the local school community, predicting that some community members may find themselves erased from the very concept of community.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Decker et al. (2007) argued that “a principal’s willingness and ability to engage in collaboration are essential to the success” of a school-community partnership (p. 124). But what factors affect a principal’s “willingness to engage?” Moreover, are there certain members of a community or certain communities with whom principals resist engaging? This study investigated how principals who are involved in community partnerships understand their schools’ communities and community members. The aim of this study was to foreground trends and patterns in how principals perceive their schools’ local communities with regard to when and why partnerships are implemented and maintained. However, the broader purpose was to work toward discovering how school-community partnerships can be an avenue for authentic reform—reform which avoids premises that support deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010), patronizing patterns (Paperson, 2010), subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999), and the criminalization of certain students (Wacquant, 2009) and instead supports multiculturalism, democratic education, and equal educational opportunities for all students.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were designed to frame and guide this study:

1. How do school leaders identify and understand their schools’ host communities?

2. How do these perceptions impact the decisions principals make regarding partnerships?

3. What school-community partnerships do the principals pursue, support or desire to have implemented within their schools?

These questions are designed for inquiry about how principals are framing and understanding the local communities surrounding their schools. Although deficit thinking has been predominant in much of educational literature, other scholars have proposed progressive models for understanding cultural and economic differences, and such mentalities may be present in how principals are conceptualizing the local community and its members. For example, Lisa Delpit (1988) encouraged educators to teach “the culture of power,” enabling students to navigate the tacit requirements of schooling (p. 212). She argued that explaining the rules of the dominant culture “game” to marginalized groups can help them in power plays that often occur (ironically, members of the dominant culture are often the least aware of the power struggle taking place).

Critical Race Theorist Tara Yosso (2006) challenged how Bourdieu’s widely-accepted notion of “cultural capital” is used within education as an explanation for why students from minority cultures are not succeeding in schools at the same level as their White peers (p. 174). Cultural capital is typically understood as the knowledge about cultural norms and expectations necessary for a person to be successful in a given society, a knowledge that works as a form of social currency within the society (Yosso, 2006). Historically, however, cultural capital has been defined in terms of the dominant culture (Yosso, 2006). Yosso posed the question, “whose culture has capital?” (p. 167), calling into question the tacit assumption that White, middle-class cultural values and norms are the only ones worthy of attention and/or attainment. Instead, Yosso

proposed “community cultural wealth,” which is locally determined. Yosso’s conceptualization of cultural capital included values related to family, political resistance, localized social capital, linguistic skills and experiences, and navigational capital (which “refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions”) (p. 178). Yosso and Delpit (1998) exhibited counter narratives that deflect deficit thinking tendencies prevalent in education. However, are these narratives present in how principals understand their schools’ local host communities, particularly when the host community has historically been marginalized and/or oppressed? And if so, how does this transform our understandings of school-community partnerships?

### **Overview of Research Methodology**

Investigating how principals are making sense of their schools’ local communities when community is itself is a contested word, particularly from the perspective of a graduate student, seemed like an impossible and daunting task. Many facets of thought governed this project, including qualitative inquiry and methodology, the primary philosophy undergirding the study, and my own position within the study.

### **Conducting a Qualitative Investigation**

Much as in the case of the classroom, where each student is likely to walk through the door with his or her own set of needs, concerns, learning styles, interests, and ambitions, this study was conducted as a qualitative inquiry, recognizing that there is a range of difference that is likely to exist between any given educational scenario. However, in order to investigate multiple perspectives from similar or overlapping community contexts, when possible participants were purposefully selected to represent schools with shared communities. In this way, three grade levels are reflected in the sample: elementary, middle, and high school. Three

distinct regions were chosen, varying in demographic classifications (urban, rural, and suburban).

Primary participants consisted of the lead principal in each school; secondary participants were presidents or active members of the parent-teacher organization (PTO) or an equivalent association at the schools. Both primary and secondary participants participated in interviews, providing the data for analysis in this study. The interview protocols were designed in such a way as to ask principals to address how they understand and make meaning of community. Emergent, reoccurring themes were considered both collectively and separately, with the hopes that the data illustrated principals' views of school-community partnerships and illuminated how the local communities of each school are being perceived by the principals.

### **Philosophy**

First, this study operated under Benedict Anderson's (1983) notion of the "imagined community," in which members identify within a group without having met other members of the group. Although Anderson's terminology more specifically referred to the implausibility of exactly defining a nation or nationality, the complexity of delineating a local community holds similar complications, such as who is considered a part of a community and who considers him or herself a member of a particular community. In this regard, community both generally and specifically was subjectively defined. However, it has been technically demarcated throughout academic literature and discussions.

McMillan and Chavis (1986), for example, explained that community has been conceptualized throughout research as territorial and geographically defined, understood by human relationships (see Gusfield, 1975), and/or constructed through common interests or skills (Durkheim, 1964). Even within these distinctions there is an overlap (McMillan & Chavis,

1986). Moreover, McMillan and Chavis's description of a sense of community—which entailed perceived membership and having a sense of belonging, a source of influence within the group, particular needs met by the group, and a shared history and/or experiences—leads one to question how to define a given community if a sense of community is absent as well as how community membership can be explained when a person may not identify him or herself as a member but might be identified by others as a part? Consequently, a school's local community, including membership, is used in this study as geographical, based on members' relationships with and to the school, in regard to common interests, and as fluid, with negotiable membership. Also, careful consideration was given to how certain definitions of community and claims at community membership may be impacted by dominant discourses and certain power groups, including those persons holding school leadership positions. A further discussion of community is provided in Chapter 2; principals' understandings of community are presented in Chapter 4 and discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.

Second, this study was undergirded with post-structuralist assumptions of a common discourse that directs and shapes people's perceptions, actions, and acceptance. Butler (1993) explained that regulatory norms (a Foucaultian concept) come into existence through “a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of a boundary” (p. 9). In other words, roles in society—and within this study, specifically within a given community—are often maintained and reproduced by widely-accepted ideas. Such boundaries are not fixed; however, they often appear as immovable truths because of the “sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice” of ongoing categorization and definition (Butler, 1993, p. 10). Consequently, norms and definitions of normality perpetuated through discourse are illusory but still have a tangible effect on individuals as well as particular social groups. Thus, within this project it is assumed

that accepted definitions and ideas held by the participants in the study inform how school leaders conceptualize the local community and subsequently tailor their behaviors in such a way as to predicate the types of community partnerships set into place and the success of these partnerships. These definitions and understandings of community are not held as static but are in a continuous and dynamic relationship with one another, once again illustrating the imaginative quality of community with its illusory boundaries.

Third, within this study, school leaders were viewed as individual subjects capable of impacting the educational opportunities for entire communities of students. However, the leader as an individual subject warrants much consideration. Foucault, as described by Besley (2007), problematized the concept of the individual subject, describing identity as socially constructed and mediated. As language is a constructing and constricting apparatus, engaging participants in a discussion about themselves, their roles within the school, or their perceptions of the local community supplied a complicated truth reflecting the impact of the dominant group in power. Consequently, in this study, common language and themes were analyzed in light of possible governing discourses prevalent among school leaders and within the local communities. Furthermore, exploring how and whom such discourses govern was pertinent to better understanding in what ways resistance among school leaders against oppressive community classifications has taken or could take form as well as considering the consequences of the absence of such resistance.

### **Positionality**

It is devastating to fail. But, “failing” is the most succinct description of my first year as a teacher. Many of my students failed math. And I have never shaken the concern that I failed them. It was a struggle to negotiate the readings of Delpit (1988) and Ladson-Billings (1995,

1997), the encouragement from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics *Principles and Standards* (2000) regarding quality and equitable teaching practices, the pressure to comply with the state- and district-determined curriculum and pacing guides, the gossip regarding students who were likely to end up in jail, and the normal adolescent angst and resistance to authority with my idealistic notions of changing the world one student at a time, through Algebra 1A. Despite trying progressive methods for constructivist instruction and utilizing technology as much as possible, I later learned that my former students were performing much better with traditional methods of lecture. In the end, like so many new teachers, I learned to navigate the current system to survive, offering little to challenge or change a system with obvious inequitable outcomes.

And now, in taking on the role of an instructor of new teachers, it seems criminal to send them to the field where they will become perpetrators of a system which functionally reproduces the current class stratification by offering starkly different educational opportunities varying from school to school. At the same time, however, just as I would expect that no two students would need exactly the same resources to learn, why should I believe that two schools would as well? It is in this aspect of an individual—an individual community—that I find the hope for school reform to be the most powerful. But, as mentioned previously, if school-community partnerships are designed to complement the current system, then why would different outcomes than those we have seen historically from our current system be expected?

### **Significance of the Study**

Concerns have been raised that even schools involved in community partnerships simply reproduce current social stratification and injustices prevalent in schools. The significance of this study was grounded in the idea that partnerships do hold much promise in combating inequities

in schools and communities, and that certain conceptualizations of a school's host community by school leaders (including political entities associated with the school) could lend themselves more readily to a confluence of the school and community in fulfilling such a promise. Although partnerships are also affected by other factors such as a market economy and globalization (Mawhinney, 2004), better understanding how principals conceptualize the local community could offer an avenue for further investigating school and community relationships, partnerships, and their impacts on students, and thus, provide a platform for exploring how authentic and locally-valued changes in school and community interaction could exist.

### **Definitions**

For the purposes of this project, community was delineated into different possible meanings. As a general term, community implied (as defined by McMillan & Chavis, 1986) any group of people united by geographical location, social interaction, or common interest or purpose, although all notions of community were recognized as holding "imaginary" boundary lines (see Anderson, 1983). Host or local community referred specifically to the geographical community encapsulating a school. School community, as a simple working definition, designated all faculty, staff, administrators, students, parents and guardians associated with a given school.

School-community partnerships were used to indicate any organized activities intended to partner external sources with the schools for some expected benefit, mutually or not. Franklin, Bloch, and Popkewitz's (2004) explanation of partnerships within education as both "organizational processes to bring people together" and "practices in reconstructing the contemporary state and social/cultural relationships through which the qualities of the citizen are produced" (p. 3) undergirds any discussion and understanding of school-community

partnerships. In this way, partnerships can be viewed as a means to produce and reproduce society, regardless of whether such a purpose is questioned by the involved parties. Hence, partnerships encapsulate multiple aspects of consideration—such as intended and/or stated purposes, possible benefits, parties affected or involved, and governing discourses.

Rural, urban, and suburban also have distinct connotations. This study used the parameters for urban, rural, and suburban areas as defined for the Department of Justice in an Attorney General's Report to Congress (National Drug Intelligence Center, 2008). Urban areas were designated by a place that has a population density of at least 2,000 persons per square mile and has at least 100,000 persons within the entire area or a place with at least 200,000 persons in the entire area. Rural areas, in contrast, should have a population density of less than 500 persons per square mile. Suburban areas should be located at least 30 miles or less from an urban area and maintain a population density between 500 and 2,000 persons per square mile. It should be noted that while Popkewitz (2004) drew a powerful distinction between urbane and urban (urbane represents areas in which higher-income occupants reside and have access to high quality schooling; students who receive an urban education, on the other hand, are not bound to geographical designations), the distinctions for this study were drawn geographically. Instead, the issue of which students are urbane as opposed to urban was discussed in terms of privilege and educational opportunities.

Deficit thinking has been evident in how student success and failure has been conceptualized since the beginning of American education (Valencia, 2010). Valencia defined deficit thinking as a theory which claims “that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies” (pp. 6-7). These deficiencies can be affected by “limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior”

(p. 7). Valencia, as well as others (e.g., Ryan, 2004) challenged deficit thinking as racist and ethnocentric.

Cultural capital is a term which originated with Bourdieu that “denotes an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, cited in Yosso, 2006, p. 174). Bourdieu also delineated social capital—which has to do with the ability to navigate social networks—and economic capital—which has to do with monetary assets—as forms of currency that affect social mobility (Yosso, 2006).

The “violence of mercy” was an expression used by Paperson (2010) to illustrate the continued patronization of peoples of color and lower economic class by the dominant group, who are namely the White middle- and upper-class. Acts seen as charitable by the dominant group actually reek of the racist and segregating practices still in existence, as evidenced by distinct and nearly homogenous ghettos. “Mercy” is administered within the narrative and interpretation of the dominant group, and actually functions to fuel patronizing beliefs (Paperson, 2010).

Paperson (2010) offered the construct of the “postcolonial ghetto” as a means for locating the oppression and segregation of people of color within the historical roots of colonization. Paperson was careful to distinguish that the “post” in postcolonial does not mean the postcolonial ghetto only exists after colonialism. Instead, post is offered as a means to reflect and reinterpret, as “the verb form of post...to ‘keep someone posted’” (p. 8).

Wacquant (2009) introduced the concept of the “criminalization of poverty” as a way to understand the penal system in the U.S. today. Nonviolent crimes are indicted, and perpetrators are incarcerated. These perpetrators are largely from urban, impoverished areas. Wacquant

explored the concept from its political roots, showing that the penal system is in fact a business and the heavy incarceration rates among the poor assists in “*neoliberal punitive doxa* composed of notions and measures aiming to criminalize poverty—and thereby normalize work at the bottom of the class structure” (p. 2).

Erasure was a concept used from both a poststructuralist standpoint and postcolonial standpoint to illustrate how some segments of community are perceived in a negative context and disregarded as having no value. The simultaneous experience of hypervisibility and invisibility reflect one of the ways erasure exists (Paperson, 2010). Van Dijk (1993) explained that “some ‘voices’ are thereby censored, some opinions are not heard, some perspectives ignored” (p. 260).

Social justice reform referred to activities that move beyond simply raising student test scores to embody efforts at providing a more equitable educational opportunity for students. Human rights, democracy, multiculturalism, and respect are likely components of a reform effort aimed at promoting social justice (Marshall & Olivia, 2006; Theoharis, 2009). Dantley and Tillman (2006) positioned leadership for social justice as leadership which actively “investigates and poses solutions for issues that generate and reproduce societal inequities” (p. 17).

### **Limitations**

It is within conducting this study that I developed a better understanding of what the limitations are. I began with the recognition that as is the case for any qualitative study, the findings are not “generalizable in the probabilistic sense” but “may be transferable” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, pp. 76-77). Also, because of the geographical bounds of the study, I realized that the sample would be limited to the academic and social culture of the Southeastern United States. Furthermore, I expected that another limitation would be the influence of politics and decisions made regarding partnerships from a power higher than the principal. The decision to

engage in or refrain from a partnership may not be a decision afforded to some principals. However, the remainder of this section will discuss the limitations I discovered throughout the data collection and analysis process.

First, I found that working with principals can be a challenging task, as they juggle a heavy workload and many different responsibilities. It was difficult to conduct follow-up interviews face-to-face. Although I emailed principals as needed for clarification, there is a limitation to interviewing participants only once.

Second, as I began to read and code the interview data, I found that I wanted more data in terms of context from my own observations and experiences. For instance, I began to wonder who shows up for PTO meetings and functions, and what actually happens at the meetings. Simply asking the principals and PTO presidents about parent participation and involvement left much information to be desired. Moreover, as the principals described partnerships and I pressed to learn how partnerships were initiated and maintained, I began to wonder how partnership implementation might differ and desired to verify the role and impact of partnerships as well as teacher, student, and parent responses to them. Musings such as these led me to think that this study would benefit from a follow-up, ethnographic investigation of any one of the schools.

A third major limitation I found was that the principals occupy a place of [some] power within the schools. Relying on their representations of the community renders my analysis to one of those speaking within a privileged position and forces another layer of silence onto community members already traditionally silenced by those in power. Although each principal seemed to have the best intentions toward their students and generally toward the surrounding community members, such a position of status and in some cases economic and academic benefit

cannot and should not be divorced from understanding the discourse of community within each context.

In a similar vein, as a researcher and an outsider, my work representing the principals' representations poses a problem and limitation. Being from a small town near all three research sites, there are certain assumptions and background knowledge I hold particular to each region. Working through my own characterizations of each community and expectations of how the principals would interpret me became a part of my journey through the study. In efforts to mediate my influence on the data, I have included my own descriptions of the communities along with descriptions provided by the participants and from artifacts.

Lastly, as perhaps many qualitative researchers feel after conducting a study, I have a running list of questions I wish I would have asked differently or included in the initial interviews. For example, one question I would have liked to have asked is, "How do you know what the word community means?" Or, instead of asking "What comes to mind when you hear the word community," I might have asked, "What does community mean to you?" It may also have been beneficial to ask directly what the participants saw as the purpose of school-community partnerships instead of asking about possible, desirable, and actual impacts of partnerships. The endless avenues for questions in inquiry highlight the limited nature of any project; these examples of additional questions in particular mark the limited scope of this study.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore common modes of thinking among principals regarding their schools' host communities and regarding school-community partnerships. The movement to involve community in education has faced little resistance—perhaps many educators and advocates believe the old proverb that it takes a community to rear a child.

However, who benefits from partnerships that reinforce a trend to disregard, isolate, and erase certain members of a community? This project was designed to exploit and challenge such harmful habits in education with the hopes of finding an alternative paradigm(s) for school-community partnerships to inhabit. Chapter 2 provides a discussion of the literature regarding school and community partnerships—paying particular attention to community as a form of doublespeak<sup>3</sup>—and further discusses how local communities have been conceptualized in education. Chapter 3 introduces theoretical considerations for the study as well as outlines the methodology used. Chapter 4 is a presentation and discussion of the data collected through interviews, artifacts, and field notes. And last, Chapter 5 connects the data with relevant literature and additionally presents implications derived from the findings of this study regarding the precarious position principals occupy with regard to the outcomes of partnerships.

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<sup>3</sup> Doublespeak is not the same concept as George Orwell's (1949) concept of "Newspeak" found in *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Schools have historically been tied to the local community in complex, intentional, and unintentional ways, and despite trends towards standardization, variation among schools is still prevalent and, arguably, inevitable. Thus, there is a need for schools to be able to participate in individualized or localized reform. One such means, which typically capitalizes on some resource or support available to a given school, is the approach of engaging in school-community partnerships. Moreover, school-community partnerships are burgeoning in the school reform front (Sanders, 2006), and purposefully tying the school to the community is seen as holding much promise (Merz & Furman, 1997).

However, it has been argued within education that students' communities can preclude and limit students' actual educational opportunities. For instance, in *Savage Inequalities*, Jonathan Kozol (1991) provided multiple examples of dilapidated and dangerous communities and their local schools—schools in which the students were provided with little hope for success from their limited educational opportunities. And, as the local environment of a school can impact school leaders' decisions (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976), a better understanding of how principals perceive the local community of their schools is needed. The following review of literature begins by broadly conceptualizing how community exists as a term within education and considering the impact of the historical situatedness of communities and political lines. School community partnerships are discussed in terms of doublespeak, illustrating how the very word community can be employed for significantly different meanings, interpretations and

implications. Last, I argue that community partnerships have been promoted as a strategy for educational reform with little prospect of challenging meta-narratives that tell a story of who has something to offer to our schools and who does not.

### **Community as a Concept in Education**

Community as a concept in education has taken on a form of offering an imaginary boundary, including and excluding certain students, families, and neighborhoods associated with any given school. Anderson (1983) described how community as a concept may be similarly defined at the general or abstract level, but is not so neatly constructed when honing in on a case-by-case basis. Yet, community has become a term used within education laden with meaning. While the notion of community in and of itself is imagined, I argue that it is used within education to define and designate value to local community members and students.

As discussed in Chapter 1, community can be understood in terms of geographic proximity, such as the communities existing within distinct rural, suburban, or urban areas; and it similarly can be defined in terms of political lines, such as voting districts or school zones. On the other hand, community has been defined also to include human connections and common interests (Dewey, 1944; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In a highly technological society, online communities are now prevalent, linking people by interest, affiliation, or relationship in ways unbound by geographical proximity. McMillan and Chavis (1986) explained that community can and does exist in all of these forms, sometimes simultaneously.

Moreover, within education, the word community is used and overused to the point that it holds little concrete meaning. There are school-community partnerships, professional learning communities, community schools, the local community, community leaders and services, community building, community health, community service projects, and myriad other uses

within individual schools. Beck (1999) grappled with the diverse usage of the term through examining metaphors often employed for community within education literature. Offering a romanticized notion of community, Beck rendered the images that school community is a family, focused on providing care and building connections; a village, with every person responsible for raising the child; and a musical performance, with differences playing together in harmony as would a jazz band or an orchestra (Beck, 1999). These commonly used metaphors found by Beck illustrate the idealized version of community resounding throughout education today. Beck (1999) contended that community is simply a “rich and multifaceted” word that should not be restricted to one definition (p. 17). Here it is useful to draw a distinction between idealized and imagined. As previously mentioned, Benedict Anderson’s (1983) concept of the “imagined community” was particularly poignant in this project—how community is perceived within a group or by a person varies to a degree that no exact line of community membership can be drawn for any significantly sized community. Community is indeed an imagined group, with boundary lines varying in definition from group to group and individual to individual; yet community as idealized paints it as an essential good. By settling for an idealized notion of the concept, issues and implications with community and how community is constructed, maintained, or perceived can easily go unchallenged.

Moreover, Iris Marion Young (1990) challenged the notion of community as a concept that “privileges unity over difference,” which in turn acts as an exclusionary force that constructs borders between individuals (p. 300). Young argued that the notion of community is often ideal, yet it is a notion seldom defined explicitly and partially undergirds ethnocentric, classist, and racist desires for commonality and connection. There is an “othering” which takes place for a community to exist—those inside the community and the others (Young). Young challenged

“radical theorists and activists” who herald community as “an alternative to the oppression and exploitation” existing in society without questioning the exclusionary nature of community (p. 301). As opposed to community as the ideal, Young suggested that efforts should be made to move society toward being “unoppressive” and accepting of difference (p. 317).

It could be argued that Dewey described community as essentialized and idealized. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1944) tied community, communication, and commonality together in such a way as to make each a component of the other. Furthermore, this well-known “father of progressive education” argued that “men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common,” as opposed to “living in physical proximity” (p. 4), thus seemingly disregarding communities defined by political lines. Instead, he compared individuals who are living in proximity without a mutual interest and purpose to the individual parts of a machine operating for some perceivable end goal—they are functioning in tandem but are not a community. Dewey explained that community is impossible without some form of communication and acceptance of a common desire or goal. Thus, within his definition, he explained that “such words as ‘society’ and ‘community’ are likely to be misleading, for they have a tendency to make us think there is a single thing corresponding to the single word” (Dewey, 1944, p. 20-21). Yet, despite the absence of a concrete definition, to Dewey the notion of building community was imperative; Westbrook (1991) surmised that Dewey held “the belief that democracy as an ethical ideal calls upon men and women to build communities in which the necessary opportunities and resources are available for every individual to fully realize his or her particular capacities and powers through participation in political, social, and cultural life” (p. xv). In this regard, community is not only the essence of what is, but should also exist in a form that enables individual members to some level of personal actualization. In other words, the

common goals which bind the community members coalesce in each member's needs and personal growth.

Dewey's concept of community is both inspiring and problematic. While community from Dewey's perspective is an idealistic actualization of a democratic society, restricting community only to those who can or who wish to participate in a common goal establishes criteria which have the capacity to exclude those not interested in a dominant agenda. Furthermore, it presumes that those who might be interested in supporting a common goal, such as in the case of student growth in schooling, would have access and the means to participate and buy into a similar ideal of student success.

These complex, overlapping, and perhaps competing definitions of community exemplify the conundrum which exists when considering who and what constitute the local host community of a school. In negotiating (imaginary) boundary lines for the communit(ies) that are woven together to make the school's local host community (which is always contested and subjective), we must ask, how do the community members within these parameters describe themselves and one another in relation to the community and the school. Furthermore, we must probe into these descriptors to find the implicit value they carry—value which impacts how these communities are perceived and approached. Yet simultaneously, we must not assume that this value has the same meaning to or for everyone in the community. Arguably, schools and their local communities inhabit a broader narrative that venerates only certain ways of being in the world. Thus, we should question how community is being understood and defined within schools and particularly through partnerships that are based on the premise that students can and should somehow benefit from community involvement and/or intervention. But first, let us consider how our current school community divides can be understood.

## **Community as Historically, Geographically, and Politically Bound**

Sociologists such as Paperson (2010), Wacquant (2009), and Wilson (2009) made powerful arguments as to current political divisions among communities having a historical tie. For instance, Paperson drew from Frantz Fanon's work to discuss how modern education is a replication of colonialism. In discussing colonization, Fanon (1963) dichotomized the world into the natives and the other (the other being the colonizers), those "belonging to" and those not (p. 40). Despite resistance, communities of people were forced by weaponry to acquiesce a new culture—that being the culture of the invading Europeans (Fanon, 1963). Fanon argued that this violence was maintained by stringent policing and borders; it is even at these boundaries between the colonized and the other that police stations are certain to be found. Although Fanon claimed that within capitalist countries policing and separating the oppressed from those in power happens by persons such as "moral teachers" (p. 38), Wacquant distinguished a modern day example of this border patrol in the form of the hyper-policing of low income and urban areas. In contrast, Paperson provided maps of the ghetto in Oakland, California, easily mapped by the location of Starbucks and Wells Fargo bank machines which appear almost exclusively beyond the low income and racially segregated boundaries inside the city.

Fanon (1963) explained that policed areas become spaces of "ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute" (p. 39). He went on to say,

As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking values. . . .The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. ( p. 40)

Algerian doctors, Fanon recounted, were even taught that "the Algerian is born a criminal" (p. 289). In calling attention to the historical demonizing and policing of those suffering colonization, we must consider the potential for its prevalence today. Paperson (2010) argued,

for example, that the modern mentality is that violence is what “‘happens in’ the ghetto rather than something that is ‘done to’ the people there” (p. 17).

Drawing largely from Fanon (1963), Paperson (2010) analyzed how current communities are geographically constructed from a postcolonial perspective. Schooling is one of the means by which ghettos are maintained, with schooling typically taking the form of imperialism or colonialism (the distinction being imperial education attempts to teach students how to be like the oppressor for some social mobility while colonial education acts quite functionally to reproduce social stratification). Neither form of education is one that poses a challenge to the ghetto and urban structure of community. Paperson illustrated his argument with the closing of a community school in Oakland, California, and the demonization of the school by the state and ruling class (i.e., middle- and upper-class White parents) versus the close connection to the school of the parents and students from “the ghetto.” Using Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, Paperson went on to expose how efforts to “save” the students were nothing short of a display of “the violence of mercy” (p. 25), in which “mercy” and assistance were offered in exchange for the denial of one’s self, identity, culture, and very being. The “violence of mercy,” as explained by Paperson, follows on the coattails of the violence inflicted by colonization and naming (or rather, name-calling), with the members of the privileged offering charity to those who have been deemed the “other.” Fanon (1963) discussed a similar concept evidenced among missionary activity from the church; he likened the efforts to impose religious salvation on the colonized peoples to the practice of using DDT to stop parasites from bringing disease into the colonial homeland.

Paperson’s (2010) exposure of the remnants and reproduction of colonization in the postcolonial ghetto illuminated the historical context at play with any community. The legacy of

oppression passed down from prior generations becomes accepted as merely the product of community members' choices instead of reproduced segregation, marginalization, and the ghettoization of minorities in particular. Wilson (2009) drew from Bobo, Kluegal, and Smith to explain this pattern of thinking as “‘laissez faire racism,’ a perception that blacks are responsible for their own economic predicament and therefore undeserving of special government support” (p. 16). Similarly, Wilson (2009) explained how ghettos and urban areas have been constructed by political leaders, isolating and excluding certain populations from access to social mobility. Specifically, Wilson traced the decisions made for the routes of highway and interstate systems as a poignant example. Repeatedly, freeways were built in locations that created a physical geographical barrier between races and classes of people. Birmingham is one such case; Wilson (2009) stated that Birmingham's

interstate highway system, which curved and twisted to bisect several black neighborhoods rather than taking a more direct route through some predominantly white neighborhoods . . . essentially followed the boundaries that had been established in 1926 as part of the city's racial zoning law, although these boundaries technically had been removed a few years before the highway construction began in 1956. (p. 29)

Wilson also discussed policies that excluded certain races from purchasing housing in predominantly White areas as well as incentives that “drew middle-class whites away from cities and into the suburbs,” further reinforcing segregated communities (p. 30).

Likewise, Jean Anyon (1997), in her in-depth study of “ghetto schooling” practices in New Jersey, attributed much of the community's decline to “federal policies that discriminated against blacks, against whites who wanted to stay in the city, and ultimately against the cities themselves” (p. 62). For instance, in order to curb the effects of the Great Depression, lenders were insured by the federal government, but only for new homes in the suburbs. Anyon also considered the impact of certain political leaders and some corrupt political patterns, with

“almost 100 years of educational graft and corruption” in her analysis of how and why separate and inequitable communities came into and have remained in existence (p. 116).

Moreover, the historical and political violence of segregation can be seen geographically today. Kozol (1991) provided a poignant illustration of how geographic location and isolation in St. Louis has been and continues to be used to separate, punish, and disadvantage. A pedestrian bridge which provided the only foot access across the Mississippi River from East St. Louis (a ghettoized area) to downtown was blocked for East St. Louis residents, prohibiting access for residents to attend a Fourth of July fair, reportedly as a means to reduce crime. Although court order reopened the bridge at a later date, Kozol explained that much injury and insult was felt among the people of East St. Louis at the exclusion and segregation. Moreover, a prevalent mentality that the East St. Louis residents carried crime with them was evident among the larger St. Louis residents.

But criminal activity is often associated with impoverished, urban areas (Wacquant, 2009). Wacquant (2009) argued, however, that the perpetrators of crime in these cases are also the victims, and the media and unstable employment options have “fueled a culture of vilification of criminals,” “villains” who are typically men of color (p. 154). Wacquant and Wilson (2009) both discussed reasons why crime rates are higher in low-income urban areas (e.g., economic instability; lack of job opportunities; barriers to social mobility); however, both authors also considered the systematic attitudes and policies that literally lock certain community members into a life of poverty or behind a cell door. While members of low-income communities may be at a higher risk of overt, violent crime, they are consistently subjected to covert policies aimed at segregating certain segments of the population and reproducing an unstable working class (Wacquant, 2009).

Wacquant (2009) wrote extensively of the overrepresentation of crime within urban and ghetto areas as an offshoot of poverty. However, he traced the increase of incarceration through policies to withhold welfare and dominant narratives of the “underclass,” a concept marketed by Charles Murray. Wacquant illustrated how the war on poverty, the war on crime, and the war on drugs all systematically focused on certain demographics. Incarceration rates have increased dramatically, but not because violent crimes have increased. Instead, incarceration over drug possession or use, burglary, and theft now account for the majority of prison or jail time as opposed to using community sanctions as a form of reparation and reform. For instance, in disaggregating the statistics on men under 30 years of age who were incarcerated in 1992, Wacquant explained that 7 out of 10 cases were for nonviolent offenses, with over half of those convicted being African American. Wacquant attributed the increase in incarceration rates largely to “the *attitude of the society and the responses of the authorities toward street delinquency* and its principal source, urban poverty concentrated in the big cities” (p. 149).

Juxtaposing the history of community lines as a product of postcolonial politics and practices (Fanon, 1963; Paperson, 2010) and racist and classist policies (Wacquant, 2009; Wilson, 2009) with Dewey’s (1944) plea for community to be a democratizing and unifying component of American society and schools unearths a challenging conundrum—a conundrum of which communities are allowed to be identified as a community, and within those communities, which members are included or disregarded. What follows is an analysis of the literature regarding both macro and micro-level views of school-community partnerships with respect to competing and/or hidden discourses of community.

## School-Community Partnerships

Largely, the discourse surrounding school-community partnerships appears both positivist and pragmatic, with a hyper-focus on student achievement (Auerbach, 2010). But Burgos (2004) argued that the concept of “partnerships” in education can take on multiple meanings, offering a complicit front for reform efforts. For example, Burgos explained that

the ambiguous character of the signifier partnership makes visible that it means both the road to salvation—to democracy and national progress, equity and control over corruption, the civil society involvement in education, and so on—and also the road to imperialist exploitation—that is, the withdrawal of government responsibility over public education. (p. 73)

As ambiguously defined, policies and movements can utilize the term “partnership” for a variety of goals and objectives, yet all meanings coalesce under the same banner of progress despite any politics driving the “partnership” (Burgos, 2004). The concept of community within educational partnerships should receive no lesser of an indictment; it is a term that can be used to label, classify, include, and exclude without being called into question.

But, school-community partnerships are promoted as the solution to school and societal ills, often without challenging conceptualizations of community or purposes of partnerships. Popkewitz (2004) explained that partnerships resonate with a secular salvation theme which offers “the deliverance of the nation through the education of the child” and “collective progress through promoting civic participation through individual and group involvement in the local agencies” (p. 27). Moreover, the rhetoric of partnerships resounds with the “state’s collective obligation to promote justice and equity through the schools” while simultaneously establishing the “responsibility of the community and individual to participate as agents of progress” (Popkewitz, 2004, p. 27). However, Popkewitz argued that partnerships with schools exist within a cultural and educational narrative of “who the child is and should be” (p. 29). Similarly, within

the school-community partnership rhetoric, I argue that there exists a similar cultural construct delineating what constitutes a “community” and which communities count as ideal or desirable or as a state to be obtained.

Beyond or perhaps within the agenda for progress, many partnerships exist between businesses and schools. Mirón attributed the movement of businesses to “assume a dominant role” in education and educational reform to a policy promoted by the Committee for Economic Development (CED) in the mid-1980s encouraging school-community partnerships (1996, p. 79). Mirón asserted that “the interconnections between an educated workforce and a competitive global economy” provides rationalization for the movement (p. 80). Furthermore, Hursh (2007) argued that much of the education debate and educational policy is framed in business and/or “neoliberal” terms and ideologies. Hursh included examples of dishonest districts and pitfalls of standardized testing for accountability measures as indicators of neoliberal thought. Boyles (2005, 2008) similarly expressed a concern that neoliberal tendencies have crept into schools as corporate partnerships under the guise of community partnerships. Exploiting various corporations for their monetary incentive for “investing” in schools (such as Chic-fil-A and the news program Channel 1), Boyles (2008) claimed that many school and community partnerships today have become a “corporate assault on youth.” He condemned the efforts as a means to promote a culture of consumption within the confines of education, grooming students to be future, as well as current, consumers.

However, many education experts and advocates lobby for neoliberal policies and practices to undergird school reform efforts. For example, Carroll and Carroll (1994) positioned schools in such a way as to exploit a need to appeal to customers for community support. Carroll and Carroll explained that local community members are taxpayers, and thus stakeholders in

education. They suggested that “asking Americans to spend tax dollars in support of school systems will be difficult if the perception that the quality of public education is not worth the cost remains pervasive” (p. 2); and thus, school leaders should work to analyze current community perceptions of local schools and work to improve this “cost unworthy” image. Carroll and Carroll epitomized Disney and the Girls Scouts as successful organizations, with the companies’ successes lying in their abilities to focus on small, yet significant needs of consumers. The authors also posited that “public schools are realizing that solid community relationships are critical to the school's growth and health,” and that they can build “better community relationships by telling the customers that their opinions are important” (p. 63). Cibulka and Kritek (1996) claimed a similar perspective in their proposition that education reform begins with community, school, and family partnerships. The authors frame current problems with education from a deficit model, blaming a culture of poverty, while offering a business/market mentality for solutions. The taxpayer’s interest is reiterated: education is seen as a “burden on taxpayers who are called on to pay for social services and the prison system” (Kritek, 1996, p. xi). Thus, partnerships with the business community are seen as a strategic economic effort.

In general, school-community partnerships are discussed within educational research and practice upon a broad spectrum of scenarios, from partnerships with parents and guardians (Williams, Sánchez, & Hunnell, 2011) to partnerships with local or national agencies or businesses (Bosma et al., 2010) to complete community schools (Blank, 2003; Dryfoos, 2003), in which schools serve as a community center often open well before and beyond school hours. Moreover, school partnerships with the local community (or a larger community) have taken various forms with differing purposes, driving motivations, and receptivity to the geographically-

bound community in which the school resides. Little attention, however, is given to understanding and challenging the ways in which community and partnerships are discussed. In this study, I attempt to trouble notions of community in ways that others have not. Additionally, I contend that how “community” is conceptualized or idealized underpins the goals and types of reforms chosen by principals and offered through partnerships.

While the dream of a democratic and equitable school system may have captured the heart of educational reformers and advocates, the extent to which these goals are evident within partnerships is often scant. For example, Sanders (2006) grouped the purposes of school-community partnerships within four rationales: effective school functioning, economic competitiveness (which includes building a future workforce), student well-being, and community health and development. Although individual studies and partnerships might aim at reducing the marginalization of students or promoting a multicultural or multilingual school environment, the language in these broad rationales coined by Sanders appears limiting. Moreover, these overarching goals can be positioned under the “salvation theme” explained by Popkewitz (2004).

In considering the salvation narrative we should return once again to Fanon (1963), Freire (2000), and Paperson (2010). If school-community partnerships are imbued with a sentiment of salvation, we must question who is being “rescued,” who are the “saviors,” and to what end is salvation to take place. Is there evidence of continued segregation and postcolonial practices? Are the “saviors” imparting charity as penance for guilt? Are discriminatory district lines or policies being challenged, or as Paperson explained, is mercy being distributed in disregard to the cultural interests of those under subordination? To surmise, we might consider whether or not the politics within school-community partnerships are imposing on certain community members a particular way of being in the world.

Thus, school-community partnership rhetoric embraces an idealized notion of community to be attained without addressing whose ideal is being promoted. Much as in the way we trouble colorblind<sup>4</sup> policies, blanket assumptions of community for school-community partnerships must be challenged. We should ask, is there some injustice in drawing a distinction between communities that are different economically, culturally, or racially? Moreover, is it racist or classist or oppressive to distinguish between community members?

The literature appears to fold along the line of community as an ideal place and space and community as a problem, oftentimes embodying both conceptualizations within the same discussion. Who are the “problem” members of community or the “troubled” spaces around a school? And who is not? It seems that within education, we want community—but whose community is it that we want? In the following discussion, I briefly explore how community is discussed in educational partnerships as a form of doublespeak or mask. At the danger of setting up a false dichotomy, I narrate the tension along the tear between utopian and dystopian constructions of community, both of which are fallacious. Then, I examine some of the ways in which advocates of school-community partnerships have traversed the divide between a dominant ideal motif with charity and salvation choruses and a call for just schools, sometimes landing in between with a pragmatic negotiation of student academic success and community reform.

### **Community as a Resource; Community as a Threat**

Community can be used in education as a form of doublespeak for both problem and promise. As most school-community partnerships are couched within reform efforts, there is a

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<sup>4</sup> Being “colorblind” is critiqued on multiple levels. First, a colorblind policy disregards the culture and identity associated with race. Secondly, without paying respect to how race affects educational opportunities, continued discrimination is allowed without scrutiny or questioning. We might instead liken colorblindness to whitewashing, a form of covering over diversity, history, and color with blanket assumptions from a dominant cultural perspective. See Schofield (2006) for a lengthier discussion of the complications of being colorblind.

focus on improvement either for students, the school, or the local community. However, community can be referenced as a valuable asset or as the root cause of student failure or problems. Hill's (2005) case study of a grassroots community initiative provided a solid example of the tension and concerns felt by those working in partnerships as well as by the author. Hill's study took place in an underachieving school in Chicago and revolved around a school in which all students received some federal aid and in which the racial demographics consisted of primarily (96%) low-income African American students. This school had recently been deemed "failing" and in need of state intervention at the beginning of the study.

The grassroots organization, which took it upon themselves to begin meeting as a Collaborative reform group, consisted of parents, community residents, local alumni, students, local business owners, and members of local community organizations. The Collaborative established its purpose as bringing "together a diverse group of stakeholders possessing a range of skills and assets to deal with problems that had significant implications for the future of the school and the Vernon Heights community" (Hill, 2005, p. 307). Although the Collaborative and its members were interested primarily in student success, their approach to address student achievement was not to try to raise test scores, but to try to reintegrate the school with the community, capitalizing on community resources and efforts.

Hill (2005) reported on multiple instances of success for the Collaborative. It was with the persistence of the Collaborative members that \$4 million in improvement funds were secured from the district. Furthermore, the advanced curriculum was enhanced as German classes and more Advanced Placement (AP) courses were added and offered at the high school. The school benefited directly from informal partnerships with local universities and professors, including financial resources that allowed for science laboratory space and personnel resources of

volunteer professors hosting academic programs for students. Another valuable improvement initiated by the Collaborative was replacing the school's security guards with employees not associated with local gangs as previous guards had been.

Unfortunately, the Collaborative's efforts were not always maintained. For instance, the district failed to pay the new security personnel in a timely fashion, revealing how changes from the community level may be difficult to maintain even when properly enacted. Hill (2005) reported that the Collaborative also became discouraged by apathetic teachers and other attempted programs or efforts that were ineffective. Eventually, the Collaborative determined that reconstitution efforts from the state were needed and welcomed for school reform.

Hill (2005) inferred two primary conclusions regarding the relationship between community and school reform from her study. First, she explained that the Collaborative was a successful example, even if only for a period of time, of how community members and resources can be a vital factor of reform regardless of socioeconomic status. Hill continued in this vein to suggest that the Collaborative "created a kind of resource that researchers and policymakers have long recognized as critical for successful educational outcomes but that does not figure predominantly in school reform strategies" (p. 317). Secondly, she posited that it is imperative for school reformers to pay heed to the value and effect of the community. In this regard, community is depicted as both a resource and a potential threat.

A similar thread surfaced among partnerships aimed at improving student achievement. Studies indicated that student achievement is grossly affected by the local community, compounded by family values, income, and access to resources (Epstein, 1994; 2010; Hands, 2010; Redding, 1997). In the very art of engaging with the local community for academic purposes, principals face parents as the ally and the enemy. Redding (1997), for instance, posited

that family behaviors and culture have an impact on student achievement. By conducting a survey with parents and staff in two school districts in Pennsylvania and correlating that data to student test scores in the area, Redding hypothesized that parent practices as well as poverty impact student learning. Redding argued that poverty may not have an impact on whether or not students' parents value reading at home or support learning, but that it does seem to affect the degree to which the school communicates with parents. In taking ownership of the need to improve connections with parents, Redding advocated for challenging low expectations of parents based on their income level and emphasized supporting the local parents to promote a homework-friendly environment, exemplifying some parents (those with desired behaviors) as allies and others as hindering student progress.

### **Community to Police; Community to Restore**

Although a common strand among the purposes for school-community partnerships, academic achievement was not always the sole objective. Partnerships can be designed and implemented as ameliorative or restorative, for example, often addressing concerns regarding student behavior and school discipline. For example, Turner, Powell, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, and Carson (2009) found that community partnerships have the ability to help at-risk students in such a way that reduces school violence and discipline infractions. Studying the impact of the HFI (Helping Families Initiative) in Mobile, Alabama, the researchers collected data from 147 participating families using a pretest and a posttest that assessed family functioning and child wellbeing. HFI staff developed individualized intervention plans based on individual family and student needs, connected the family and students with available and relevant community resources, and stayed abreast of the students and families through weekly meetings or monthly meetings held at each of the student's home or school (Turner et al., 2009). According to Turner

et al., the study provided an example of a community-school partnership that can effectively “reduce and prevent youth violence by improving family functioning, decreasing risk factors, and promoting protective factors” (p. 220).

While also proposing methods for reducing student discipline infractions, Vaandering (2010), on the other hand, questioned whether or not such programs are for students’ wellbeing or for teaching social control, asking even if restorative justice efforts are about “establishing a relationship based environment” or “to better manage and control students” (p. 150).

Vaandering’s (2010) approach focused on offering restorative justice within a school’s community, a process that holds students accountable to the offended for infractions. Through restorative justice, circle discussions were held to restore broken community and relationships. Vaandering explained that “all are in need of help” (p. 146), and community is about being connected despite difference. Vaandering also discussed community in terms of a “collective vulnerability” which occurs as members embrace one another, “supporting [both] the harmed and the one causing harm” (p. 165).

These two articles offer a contrast for how community is constructed. In the Turner et al. (2009) scenario, the students and their families are in need of repair, which is administered and monitored by the community partner in a regulatory fashion. Simply stated, the community partner acted in a policing role. In Vaandering’s (2010) case, student misconduct implied that relationships and community wellbeing had become damaged and were in need of being addressed by affected and affecting parties. This reciprocal perspective holds both parties and the community at large responsible in order to restore community health both collectively and individually. Social control is no less of a player in the restorative justice approach (Vaandering,

2010); but perhaps its utilitarian flavor and dispersion of responsibility and blame create a distinction between justice as punishment and justice as outcome.

### **Communities to Trust; Communities to Manage**

The themes of social control and salvation are evident elsewhere in school-community partnerships, often simultaneously. And, intertwined within this coexistence, is an unchallenged assumption of whom within the community the school leadership should trust and whom it should seek to manage.

Following with the salvation narrative, Hands (2010) conducted a case study of two Canadian schools heavily engaged in a plethora of school-community partnerships. Mostly interested in what propelled teachers to participate and even lead partnerships, Hands concluded that to teachers, students' needs were the paramount purpose of the partnerships (p. 199). Thus, Hands primarily positioned partnerships as an avenue to meet students' needs given the "economically and culturally diverse" needs of today's society (p. 189). Specifically, the two schools partnered with their local communities to provide counseling services and dental and medical care to students as needed. Some partnerships also allowed an avenue for students to "work in local businesses," teaching students certain "work ethics and occupational responsibilities" (p. 203). Hands surmised that teachers "were motivated to engage in partnering practices as a result of their perceptions of their students' and programming needs" (p. 203). Moreover, Hands found that teachers believed that student success was interwoven with their basic and social needs and that "successful partnership establishment" as initiated by the educators in her study was contingent upon such philosophies (p. 204). Thus, the teachers involved with partnerships were motivated to meet identifiable student needs (such as "material

resources and social opportunities”) and would have been unlikely to engage otherwise (Hands, 2010, p. 200).

Hands (2010), however, observed that partnerships are mutually beneficial for both the students and the school, particularly in regard to improving the school’s image within its community. Hands depicted the relationship between schools and communities as complex, saying that “while schools and communities are distinct entities, the borders between them are permeable” (p. 191). She also argued that “the need for partnerships and the nature of these liaisons is shaped in part by the characteristics of the community; that is, the needs of the students are influenced by the community in which they live, and the organizations and individuals that are available to work with schools are specific to communities as well” (p. 191). In other words, Hands was offering the observation that who and what a community has to offer depends on which community it is, and students’ needs are a reflection of community deficits. Despite the needs-based view, she noted that there is a level of trust that is a prerequisite for a school and community to partner. But, in the case that a deficit or blame-based view of a local community is maintained by school leaders, how can this trust be earned? Moreover, are only the members of the community who can offer medical, dental, and counseling services considered an asset to the school and its students?

Bosma et al. (2010) paid some heed to this question in their discussion of a service learning partnership between elementary schools, a local university, and a community agency. Lead Peace, the service learning project under study, was intended to “reduce violence” and “school failure by promoting specific skills, motivations, opportunities, and supports in students’ lives,” and through their mixed-methods study, the authors extrapolated 10 guiding principles for the successful implementation of a service learning project such as Lead Peace, ranging from

communication and respect to the presence of key leaders (p. 503). The authors did not conclude that the program effectively reduced school violence or improved student achievement but contended that in the future the 10 guidelines for partnerships would aid in such evaluation of service learning projects.

Despite calling for “partnerships that are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and [that] address community needs” while advocating for mutual respect among partners, the partners within the Bosma et al. (2010) study appeared largely to be limited to select organizations with defined objectives (p. 501). The space for community input comes at the relationships the community agencies have established within the schools’ communities and any “groups of community” which choose to participate. The authors expressed that “regrettably, some economically challenged communities and communities of color have historically had negative experiences with research” and so “it is advisable to understand and explicitly acknowledge the historical context and recognize the expertise that all partners bring to a collaborative project” (p. 502). However, little information was provided to indicate that the “expertise” of the “economically challenged communities and communities of color” was solicited and/or valued (p. 502). It would seem that an acknowledgement was made that partners outside of those able to provide tangible assets are also value contributors, but a thorough explanation and example of this claim was missing from their description of the multiple instances of implementation of the Lead Peace partnership.

Not surprisingly, a salvation narrative (Popkewitz, 2004) resounded within Bosma et al.’s (2010) Lead Peace partnership findings. Not only were the outside agencies partnering with the school to implement outside change (albeit reducing violence is likely welcomed by all communities), of their 10 principles for successful partnerships, 1 included the participation of a

“patron saint” (p. 505). This role is maintained by a person with authority who can rally and sustain support for the partnership within the school. The patron saint in this regard is limited to those persons with visible authority within the school; and in the case of their study, both patron saints were “key administrators” (p. 505).

Perhaps more problematic than the absence of substance to Bosma et al.’s (2010) claim and cry for mutual respect and community member participation is a complete denial of differing levels of community engagement with regard to differences in race and/or class, such as in the case of Horvat, Curci, and Partlow’s (2010) study of how principals “manage” parental involvement in the school. Horvat et al. (2010) presented a historical case study of three White school principals serving in succession within one school and the ways in which the principals engaged with the community and parents. The first principal focused on improving discipline and structure within the predominantly African American school. In order to meet integration requirements, this principal sought to recruit potential White students to no avail. However, changes within the demographics of the local neighborhoods occurred when White, middle-class families returned to urban areas. After being approached and prompted by these White parents for the principal to start a preschool program, the parents enrolled their students in the school. The construction of an interstate near the neighborhoods brought significant change once again, reducing the housing value and attracting “hippies,” in the words of the principal (p. 712).

Although the authors did not offer this critique, it was evident that the White parents initially ousted Black parents from roles of involvement, such as in the case of the Home and School Association. Horvat et al. (2010) quoted one White parent as saying,

when we got there, of course it was all Black. And then when White parents started coming in they were going to just take over. So they [the Black parents] removed themselves completely. So a small group of White parents filled the positions. . . .And it remained White for a few years. But we started to make friends. (p. 712)

Surprisingly, Horvat et al. interpret the parent's statement as indicating that parents were eventually able to collaborate despite racial differences: "this quote foreshadows the developments that were to come: Black and White parents learned to work together over time in a communal and respectful way, and leadership was shared across race lines" (pp. 712-713). The authors included a footnote to rationalize turning a blind eye to the racial politics at play in the school community by noting that at the time of data collection, a minimum of 20 years later, the presidency of the Home and School Association was shared by two African Americans.

This disregard for racial inequities continued throughout Horvat et al.'s (2010) work. The second principal, for example, was revered as being collaborative in stark contrast to the disciplinarian bent of the first, with only the mention of demographic differences. When the second principal served in her position, the community had become 74% White and the percentage of families receiving public aid had decreased from 20% to 10%. The authors failed to ask if the principal was more collaborative because of the change in the demographics of the community. In contrasting the first two principals, the authors stated "whereas Frost was described as authoritarian and controlling, Fitzgerald was described as collaborative" (p. 715). The authors took the stance that the difference in how the principals engaged with the communities was due to their leadership styles and differences in each person's "approach to working with parents" (p. 718). There seems to be an omission in the article that the possibility existed that the administrators were less willing to seek engagement and partnerships with certain demographics or segments of the community.

The third principal in their study served in the community when only 3% of the members received public assistance and the racial breakdown was 79% White, 15% Black, and 6% other (Horvat et al., 2010). He was lauded by the authors as "sustaining change," rallying parents as

political allies to fight for an increase in school funding, and initiating partnerships with the local community to help provide resources for students, as in the case of ensuring each child was able to obtain a Halloween costume (p. 718). Again, however, his partnerships existed primarily with middle-class parents participating in the gentrification of the area—parents moving to the city presumably with the inspiration to “reach out to the long-maligned urban public schools” (p. 723). The authors theorized that “understanding how to work with these empowered and efficacious parents is critical for principals” (Horvat et al., 2010, p. 723). The authors’ language values middle-class parents as “empowered and efficacious;” yet, what is to be said of those parents and community members who were a part of the community from the beginning, or who are different in some capacity from those persons in leadership positions?

Horvat et al.’s (2010) analysis and discussion of the three cases within their study illuminate the need to address how principals are conceptualizing the local community. While the authors did not—perhaps would not—suggest that the principals’ beliefs about the local community members impacted how they engaged with them, I contend that indeed their perceptions were very likely to have played a role in their decisions to partner and how to partner with the community.

### **Principal Leadership**

Cooper, Riehl, and Hasan (2010) raised a similar question regarding the connection of principals’ beliefs and practice. Specifically, Cooper et al. argued that the diverse communities of today warrant principals who maintain a “critical epistemology” (p. 780); without a critical epistemology, which enables principals to challenge traditional ideas of how to interact with parents, principals are at risk of assuming a “benevolent” yet racist stance (p. 774). Drawing from the concept of “benevolent racism” (Villénas, 2002), Cooper et al. (2010) explained that

well-intentioned educators are unaware of the extent to which they accept and perpetuate condescending stereotypes; perceive families as only lacking, instead of having meaningful knowledge, experience, and cultural insight; and overlook the nonmonetary resources that families can contribute to schools. (p. 774-5)

In this way, principals participate in reproducing the status quo by holding tainted views of what the community members have to offer the school.

Principals have been considered an instrumental factor in guiding the mission, atmosphere, and partnerships within schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). In writing on how to develop leaders for social justice, Marshall and Olivia (2006) claimed that “policymakers and scholars talk about what can or should be done, but educational leaders are the people who must *deliver* some version of social justice and equity” (p. 1). Scheurich (1998) echoed their concern that school leaders are the keepers of change and reform.

In a case study of three schools with predominantly minority low socioeconomic status students, it was “the loving and passionate commitment to the school’s children on the parts of the principals” that made a primary difference in reform (Scheurich, 1998, p. 453). Scheurich (1998) found that these principals maintained high expectations for all students, treated all students lovingly and with care with no exceptions, and valued home cultures and languages equally within the schools. Scheurich considered the schools in the study as a postcolonial hybrid—yet even with the remnants of postcolonialism, the leadership of the principals led to schools described as “highly successful” (p. 451).

Similarly, Theoharis (2009), in his guide for social justice leadership, contended that principals committed to meaningful school reform must challenge societal injustices. From his study of principals advocating for social justice, Theoharis concluded that principals should purposefully work to dismantle “structures that marginalize and segregate students and impede

their learning” (p. 14). It is equally essential for principals to “create a climate of belonging,” inviting the community to participate in education (Theoharis, 2009). Principals in his study “reached out” to the community through home visits, hosting forums for different ethnic groups represented by the school so that parents could have an avenue for expressing their ideas and concerns, and working with local community agencies to provide “holistic services” for students (Theoharis, 2009, p. 70).

Involving parents is not always the object or priority of the school leadership. Griffith (2001) conducted a study in attempt to address the dearth of literature on principal behaviors in relation to parental involvement. Griffith found that parental involvement was most directly associated to factors such as parent’s expectations for student(s)’ success (the parents most involved reported being the least informed) and race (African American parents reported being the least involved but the most informed; Hispanic parents reported having a sense of empowerment and being well-informed by the school). Although Griffith also found that there was a relationship between increased parental consensus and some principal behaviors, in the study the relationship was found to be causal and indirect. Still, principals who were more outgoing and open to the local community and focused on instruction—specifically those principals identified as exhibiting “missionary” behaviors—impacted parental involvement positively, in contrast to principals who were more political in their approach to the local community. The author also concluded that certain principal behaviors were more effective in low SES schools and schools with high non-native English speaking populations (p. 182). Interestingly, Griffith went on to suggest that the effectiveness of the principal is contingent upon the local community’s circumstances. However, I would argue that it is not solely the

context mitigating a principal's effectiveness; instead, it is the principal's beliefs which impact how he or she "behaves" toward the local community.

## **Resistance**

Yet, even if a principal has the "right behaviors" and mindset to promote social justice within his or her school, resistance may come in other forms. Theoharis (2009), for instance, acknowledged that some parents are likely to be resistant to principals' efforts to lead a school with a social justice mindset. Principals within his study encountered "privileged" parents who noisily expressed opinions that complicated movements toward reform, insisting on academic opportunities that benefited their own children even at the expense of the efforts to help others (Theoharis, 2009, p. 94). One such example occurred as a principal tried to "detrack" the school's tracked mathematics program. This principal reported receiving veiled threats from some parents in favor of tracking. Other cases included parents who claimed to be liberal and anti-racist but expressed concerns regarding reforms that diminished the traditional advantages afforded to White children. These principals "found that privileged parents could create tremendous pressure against a social justice agenda" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 96). In this regard, principals who are embracing a "critical epistemology" (Cooper et al., 2010), a social justice platform (Theoharis, 2009), and who are resisting deficit models of thinking (Valencia, 2010) and "benevolent racism" (Villenas, 2002), still face opposition from community members who are part of the dominant culture.

As also alluded to by Epstein (2010) in regard to funding, Theoharis (2009) acknowledged that resistance might lie at the district or central office level. The principals in his study sometimes reported feeling as if their efforts were "undermined" and misunderstood by those in authority above them and among those who held similar positions within the district,

such as other principals (Theoharis, 2009). The principals within Theoharis's study concurred that many other school leaders "had neither the drive, commitment, or knowledge to carry out an equity-oriented school reform agenda nor the belief that they should" (p. 101).

Last, Theoharis noted that the principals in his study faced enormous challenges at the institutional level on three fronts. Principals explained how they rarely had sufficient resources, in terms of both finances and time. For example, some principals realized that little could be done in areas such as professional development due to the paucity of needed resources. "Harmful state and federal regulations" also proved to impede the successful implementation of reform efforts (Theoharis, 2009, p. 103). Theoharis reported how one principal complained that "state regulations compromised his ability to increase access, improve the teaching and curriculum, and create a climate of belonging" (p. 105). The principals also felt that preparation programs at the university level were lacking in their ability to train principals to be innovative, inspired leaders within their local communities. For example, one principal explained, "I feel that a lot of the preparation was theoretical, but not theory about equity or race or dealing with big issues. It was bland . . ." (Theoharis, 2009, p. 108). The tension behind the idealized notion of community, which masks the various needs, divisions, and cultures embedded in school communities, is evident in the principal's realization that leadership preparation programs excluded pressing issues in leading a school.

### **Building Local Leaders**

One concern in working for social justice is that unless leaders themselves hail from their local communities, the face of reform or "salvation" is likely to be one from the dominant group. In regard to school reform in working and lower class areas, Schutz (2010) addressed the potential lack of leadership within communities from a historical perspective. Following the

example of Saul Alinsky, leaders within the local community exist and simply must be found (Schutz, 2010). Alinsky expressed a sincere interest in searching for the natural leaders who people trusted, and then working to connect them to other leaders and resources (Schutz, 2010). Schutz pointed out that today, community improvement efforts are often at the hands of local churches or established organizations such as ACORN. Yet, he also suggested that Alinsky's approach and philosophy could be beneficial for those interested in bringing about change. Not only is it essential that school leaders work for social justice, but it is imperative that the local community be invited to represent themselves and their own interests, especially in the case that the leader is in fact an outsider.

### **Principal Potential Perspectives**

With a recognition of how minority and low-income groups have been oppressed and “erased by power, but are there nonetheless” (Paperson, 2010, p. 7), alternative means for understanding and valuing certain communities exist. For example, Valenzuela (1999) proffered that schooling for many Latinos/as is culturally harmful. Via a concept she termed “subtractive schooling,” Valenzuela articulated a concern that many school policies are “designed to erase students’ culture;” moreover, schools are “organized in ways that subtract resources from Mexican youth” and “strip away students’ identities, thus weakening or precluding supportive social ties and draining resources important to academic success” (p. 10). Valenzuela reported on tracking practices, a lack of mentoring, and cultural disjuncture for the very meaning of education as affecting the potential success of first generation Americans. Furthermore, students are taught to “devalue the Spanish language, Mexico, Mexican culture, and things Mexican” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 19).

In contrast, Valenzuela proposed “additive schooling,” a “pluralistic model of schooling” (p. 269). Culture within an additive schooling scenario is valued and respected, and education is “meaningfully tied to children’s lives” (p. 269). And germane to school-community partnership concerns, Valenzuela explained that “additive schooling is especially about the maintenance of community, which includes improving the home-school relationship” (p. 270). Here, Valenzuela drew a distinction between home and school communities as she called for a greater acceptance and representation of diverse communities and community values in school practices.

Yosso (2006) similarly challenged traditional schooling and educational theories, particularly Bourdeiu’s explanation of cultural, social, and economic capital, as upholding a White, middle-class culture as the normalized standard for schooling. Specifically, Yosso offered a view that

Communities of Color are places with multiple strengths. In contrast, deficit scholars bemoan a lack of cultural capital, which E. D. Hirsch (1988, 1996) terms “cultural literacy,” in low-income Communities of Color. Such research utilizes a deficit analytical lens and places value judgments on communities that often do not have access to White, middle- or upper-class resources. (p. 180).

Traditional notions of cultural capital have been viewed as the medium for social mobility and students not from the dominant culture are interpreted as “culturally poor” (p. 174). Yosso contrasted the value given to knowledge of computer vocabulary and use learned from a owning a home computer, common among middle and upper class families, with the knowledge of how to navigate a city by public transportation and communicate in more than one language, that might be learned in a bilingual, working class household. In this way, the second example of “cultural knowledge is very valuable to the student and her/his family, but is not necessarily considered to carry any capital in the school context” (p. 175).

Thus, instead of social or cultural capital with a bent to deficit thinking as a means for conceptualizing community resources and culture, Yosso proposed “community cultural wealth” (p. 176). Yosso defined community cultural wealth as possessing the following facets: familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, linguistic capital, and aspirational capital. Community cultural wealth is locally defined, as opposed to being defined by White, middle-class culture. Yet, do today’s leaders and partnerships interpret the local community as having “community cultural wealth?” Moreover, are there only some communities which are perceived as having something to offer the school?

McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) discussed how teachers and administrators fall into “equity traps,” or ideological perspectives which promulgate patterns and programs in schools that do little to assist students in low income or from minority groups in succeeding academically. The four equity traps the authors identify are deficit thinking (as defined by Valencia, 1997), racial erasure (as defined by bell hooks, 1992), avoiding the “gaze,” [as defined by Foucault (1990) but used in regard to teachers escaping accountability within schools], and paralogical beliefs and behaviors, such as faulty conclusions and blaming students for teacher’s own behaviors. The authors argued that these traps “cause us to become, as J. King (1997) suggested, ‘dysconscious,’” a state lacking critical reflection and awareness and that allows inequities to persist unchallenged (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 603). Are today’s administrators guilty of being “dysconscious?” Are our programs that tie the school with the local community merely a means of shielding our eyes from inequities, offering nothing more than a band-aid to a symptom for the ache within our inequitable educational system?

Arguably, educators such as Valenzuela (1999) and Yosso (2006) have offered novel and constructive avenues for conceptualizing diverse and distinct communities. And school reform

efforts glisten with the hope that authentic change—change involving the local community in ways that are valuable to its members—is available through school-community partnerships. Yet, in troubling the notion of community, we have seen that a prevalent discourse which devalues certain community members or entire communities and reproduces community stratification, distrust, and patronization resounds throughout the partnership movement.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed particular conceptualizations of community both within and from outside the education literature. Table 1 provides a brief synopsis of major themes discussed surrounding community and partnerships from this chapter. Community is conceptualized as imagined (Anderson, 1985) despite common geographical designations or bonds of commonality (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). There is an idealized nature of community (Beck, 1999) that can mask its exclusionary nature (Young, 1990), historicity and political roots (Fanon, 1963; Paperson, 2010; Wacquant, 2010; Wilson, 2010). Moreover, there are discourses which govern any society, and in regard to this project, govern membership and association within communities tied to schools (Foucault, 1972).

As listed in Table 1, I also provided multiple perspectives of school-community partnerships for consideration. The actual term and concept “partnership” has multiple meanings and thus can be used politically to promote a hidden or unquestioned agenda (Burgos, 2004). Partnerships have also been a means of positioning those in power as “saviors” through programs (Popkewitz, 2004). Corporate sponsors and partners occupy a space within the neoliberal discourse of capitalism and use schooling as a way to build and maintain a customer base (Boyles, 2005, 2008). On the other hand, partnerships are seen as a means to improve academic success of students (Epstein, 2010; Sanders, 2006), provide much needed resources for the

school (Carroll & Carroll, 1994; Cibulka & Kritek, 1996), meet students’ needs (Sanders, 2006; Hands, 2010), and work toward social justice (Anderson, 1998; Theoharis, 2009).

Table 1

*Primary Sources Discussed Regarding Community and School-Community Partnerships*

Conceptualizations of Community	Conversations Regarding Partnerships
Community as imagined (Anderson, 1985)	Partnerships as an ambiguous signifier (Burgos, 2004)
Community as geographically defined (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)	Partnerships as a secular salvation strategy (Popkewitz, 2004)
Community as human connections and common interests, including technological communities (Dewey, 1944; McMillan & Chavis, 1986)	Partnerships as a corporate tool and aspect of the modern Neoliberal discourse (Boyles, 2005, 2008)
Community as an ideal (Beck, 1999)	Partnerships for academic achievement (Sanders, 2006; Epstein, 2010)
Community as historical and political (Fanon, 1963; Paperson, 2010; Wacquant, 2009; Wilson, 2009)	Partnerships for financial support (Carroll & Carroll, 1994; Cibulka & Kritek, 1996)
Community as exclusionary (Young, 1990)	Partnerships to meet student needs (Sanders, 2006; Hands, 2010)
Community as discursive formation (Foucault, 1972)	Partnerships for social justice/ authentic reform (Anderson, 1998; Theoharis, 2009)

In conclusion, school leaders interested in improving the educational opportunities for students should consider developing partnerships with the local host community but not without examining their own beliefs and conceptualizations regarding their community’s members.

While being aware of potential challenges (Hoy & Miskel, 2008), working to develop oneself professionally while also seeking out and investing in potential local leaders (Shutz, 2006), and following the advice presented in research regarding implementing partnerships, particularly in regards to seeking out a community’s interests and desires (Cooper et al., 2010; Epstein, 2010; Villénas, 2002), are important principles for today’s principals to follow, I contend, along with Cooper et al. (2010) and Auberbach (2010), that the real work begins when school leaders challenge their own epistemological assumptions, particularly in regard to how they perceive

their school's community. Allowing partnerships to continue to be employed under an idealized banner of school reform and community offers no resistance to hegemonic norms. Better understanding how principals conceptualize community and interpret their constituents may provide a framework for understanding the choices principals make in engaging with the local community through partnerships; but perhaps more importantly, I contend that the discourse surrounding community as it exists in research warrants that it must be challenged in practice. Otherwise, school-community partnerships will function merely as a tool of social reproduction and the goals, desires, culture, and values of entire communities and/or members of communities will continue to be erased, ignored, or constructed as a problem.

Consequently, more research is needed about principal attitudes toward and perceptions of school and community partnerships, beginning with their conceptualizations of the local host community. It may be the case that theories such as deficit thinking (Valencia, 2010) and benevolent racism (Villénas, 2002) underscore most of the implementation of school-community partnerships. However, it may also be the case that there are other prominent narratives impacting principals' partnership choices and decisions. This qualitative study is an effort to begin the work of tuning into the discourses surrounding who and what community is and is not, as believed by school principals.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

In the preceding chapters I have discussed a need to further investigate how community is conceptualized by school leaders, particularly in regard to their role in connecting the school to the local community. The current segregation of students of color or impoverished areas to separate districts and schools can be explained by postcolonial practices and policies (Fanon, 1963; Paperson, 2010), racist and classist politics (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Tuzzolo & Hewitt, 2007; Wacquant, 2009; Wilson, 2009), and a perpetuation of demeaning and oppressive discourses that label students and families as lacking (Valencia, 2010). Moreover, within the school-community partnership literature, the concept of community is used as a form of doublespeak; community as an advantage appears to be limited to those members who have assets or resources desired by the school—these members hold promise. Those members who represent economic paucity or linguistic or cultural barriers are positioned as a problem. The historical situatedness of community divisions both by school districts and within school districts is arguably perpetuated by programs such as school-community partnerships aimed at reform yet that function simply to reinscribe and reproduce the divisions as they are; the idealized notion of community along with its unquestioned doublespeak nature prevalent in the school-community partner literature further complicates this phenomenon and must be challenged.

And if principals are the “gatekeepers” to school and community partnerships (Decker et al., 2007, p. 124), then it is with principals that work must be done to challenge any exclusionary understandings of community and norms dictating which members have value to a local school.

Thus, this study explored how principals understand their local communities and how they partner the schools with the local communities. It is positioned at the intersection of studies showing the value and role of principal leadership (e.g., Auerbach, 2010; Theoharis, 2009, 2010), varying conceptualizations and understandings of community (e.g., Anderson, 1983; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Paperson, 2010), and current theories and trends revolving around school-community partnerships (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Boyles, 2005; Popkewitz, 2004). Three overarching research questions encapsulate the study to help tune into the discourse surrounding community and partnerships at each site.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do school leaders identify and understand their schools' host communities?
2. How do these perceptions impact the decisions principals make regarding partnerships?
3. What school-community partnerships do the principals pursue, support or desire to have implemented within their schools?

### **Research Design**

The dialectical nature of the problems surrounding how community is conceptualized, idealized, and decided (and by whom) and how these perceptions impact schools' engagement and partnerships with the local community called for an investigation into principals' use of language—and specifically, the absence and/or ambiguity of words defining or restricting who and where community exists. Additionally, the context and specifics of a community may impact a principal's perceptions and choices regarding which partnerships to embrace and how. Thus, this study employed a qualitative approach.

Epistemologically, qualitative research zeroes in on the human subject as a source of knowledge (Husén, 1999). Evers (1999) explained that postmodern qualitative research eschews claims to any absolute truth but instead is “an exercise in story-telling, in producing a narrative, and in giving voice to different viewpoints” (p. 270). Similarly, Van Manen (1990) described research as always rooted in the “lived experiences” of the participants and researcher. For example, in analyzing a transcript, Van Manen (1990) argued, “Expressing the fundamental or overall meaning of a text is a judgment call. Different readers might discern different fundamental meaning. And it does not make one interpretation necessarily more true than another” (p. 94). Weedon, on the other hand, asserted that attending to experience and “lived reality” solely is insufficient for making sense of society (1987, p.8). Instead, she postulated that one must work toward “understanding how particular social structures and processes create the conditions of existence which are at one and the same time both material and discursive” (p. 8). Thus, postmodern qualitative research balances precariously on a hinge of no real truth and truth in the lived experience mediated by social and political factors, making it essential to hone in on school principals’ narratives to listen for common threads tying into a metanarrative regarding a school’s community and its members.

Additionally, language is often a primary vehicle for investigating a phenomenon or unearthing dominant, resistant, or silenced narratives, particularly in regards to interviewing. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argued that “knowledge is constituted through linguistic interaction” (p. 55), underscoring the value of language within research. Moreover, it is within interviews that narratives which “inform us of the human world of meanings” find a space to emerge (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 55). To explore the narrative(s) of community and school-community partnerships, nine principals were interviewed as the primary participants. The

principals represented three different school levels and three different demographic classifications: three principals represented a rural school district, four principals represented a suburban district, and two principals represented an urban district. Parent-teacher organization members were interviewed from each district to verify the data collected from the principals. Moreover, archival data in the form of news articles, school board meeting minutes, school district documents, and school websites were collected and reviewed. Field notes provided data from the researcher's perspective.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was conducted using a poststructuralist understanding of community as both “imagined” and existing within a discourse which excludes or devalues certain members (Anderson, 1983; Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1990). As exemplified in how school-community partnerships have been discussed, community inhabits a contested space wherein “discursive production” occurs (Foucault, 1990, p. 12). Specifically, community is discursively produced within various ruling discourses of what and who community is or should be. It is in this discursive nature of discourse that also “administer[s] silences” so that some persons and ways of living in the world are excluded from the discussion surrounding community, neither fitting into a dominant idealized notion of community nor recognized as holding valuable membership (p. 12). These members are overlooked on one hand and positioned as needing both managed and “saved” on the other.

Much in the way that the discourse surrounding sex influenced how children in the 18th century were viewed and subsequently impacted how secondary schools were designed and operated (Foucault, 1990), the discourse of community has another productive quality in its influence upon how partnerships are structured and implemented. Partnerships are designed to

regulate and control certain segments of the community or particular communities as the dominant culture is reproduced [recall, both Fanon (1963) and Wacquant (2009) illustrated this phenomenon on a large scale through the policing of oppressed groups, whether minorities, colonized peoples, or the lower class]. Furthermore, Foucault (1990) wrote that there exists a “multiplicity of discourses produced by a whole series of mechanisms operating in different institutions” (p. 33). Discourse is not only productive, but its productive nature varies along power differences.

Moreover, underlying poststructuralist thought is a belief that “the way we speak and write reflects the structures of power in our society” (Lather, 1991, p. 25). As Popke (2003) explained, “poststructuralist theory offers the potential to break down existing categories of power and knowledge, and thereby to foster alternative narratives” (p. 298). Thus, this study considered the dominant narratives surrounding community as woven by the principals and the implications those narratives have within their schools, and poststructuralism provided the tools with which the analysis in the study occurred. Generally speaking, for this project knowledge and truth were understood as subjective and locally and historically situated; and, language was viewed as possessing a power to influence culture and norms through disciplining discourses—a Foucaultian concept—and erasure—coined by Derrida (Dobie, 2002). Specifically, I relied heavily on Anderson’s (1983) notion of the “imagined community” to explore how the term community is understood by principals and used in regard to partnerships, especially with respect to which community members or aspects are chosen as assets for partnerships versus which community members are targeted or chosen to benefit from program efforts.

In discussing feminist post-structuralist research, and more specifically ethnography, Britzman (2000) suggested that research entails unearthing and “constructing particular versions

of truth” and “questioning how regimes of truth become neutralized as knowledge” (p. 38). This study attempted to uncover reigning discourses among principals with respect to community. Using primarily interview data from the principals who participated, I identified language which coalesced into discourses surrounding school-community partnerships and different populations within the school community. Archival data and data from the interviews of secondary participants were used to support principals’ narratives and researcher findings.

### **Researcher Positionality**

My own location within the study is as a female, White, graduate student with experience as a teacher and as a lead teacher. As a researcher, I have been questioning my own tendency to value a school’s host community in terms of economic, academic, or professional success. Thus, it was essential that I consider the following questions while engaging in my research. 1. Am I prone to conceptualize communities lacking in economic resources as deficient? 2. Is my desire to improve a community in certain ways actually an act of patronization? 3. And, in attempting instead to consider diverse communities as rich in cultural resources, is it possible that I (and others) might actually increase the disadvantage(s) many students face? It is within this tension that I worked to explore how principals involved in community programs and partnerships understand their local communities and to investigate to what extent such perspectives serve to challenge the status quo, reproduce it, or simply teach students how to navigate to a different tier within the current governance.

### **Ethical and Political Considerations**

Popke (2003) argued that poststructuralist thought broadens the space for pursuing an ethical mindset in a postmodern world. Drawing from Emmanuel Lévinas, Popke reiterated the idea that people are interdependent, and thus it is ethical to look after one another. This

responsibility is crucial for community (Popke, 2003). From Popke's vantage point of community, "to live ethically is to acknowledge this shared Being, and to participate in a collective spatial politics in which a commitment to the other is our abiding concern" (p. 312). Community must be reciprocal and underwritten by care and commitment to be ethical. While the participants in this study may or may not subscribe to a definition of ethics as described by Popke, in building a relationship with participants and establishing a research community, I worked to maintain an attitude of respect and support, guarding principals' time and allowing for their input or changes in the transcripts. Both primary and secondary participants chose the time and place for interviews to occur.

Moreover, I worked vigorously to maintain the participants' anonymity for the study. Pseudonyms have been assigned and identifying information has been omitted. Also, when collecting data from social media sources, I altered my own social media profile settings such that my activity and relationship with the school and PTOs were not visible to others.

Also, as a point of ethical dilemma, I struggled with presenting certain data about the schools and communities. In some cases, the data do not cast the participants or communities in a positive light or it feeds into stereotypes about the regions (particularly with the urban and rural schools). It was my intention to share the data in such a way as to honor the integrity and dignity of the participants and their communities while choosing relevant and pertinent data to present.

### **Participants and Settings**

Fifteen principals were recruited to participate in this study by a letter of invitation followed by a phone call to clarify any questions or concerns. Nine agreed to participate. Nine PTO members were then contacted and asked to participate, all of whom agreed but only seven of whom actually participated. Two principals were from urban schools, four were from

suburban schools—one of which was a magnet school—and the remaining three were from rural schools. Within each region, I interviewed principals from differing grade levels: the primary or elementary, the middle or junior high, and the high school level. It was not necessary that all the school leaders worked in schools with school-community partnerships, although it was expected that the majority of schools would host some degree of partnership(s). Participants were interviewed one time for approximately 1 hour, with follow-up questions sent via email as needed. Each participant submitted a consent form to participate. And confidentiality has been maintained by assigning pseudonyms and omitting identifying information within the study.

Van Manen (1990), in discussing studying the phenomenon of pedagogy, argued that

Nothing about the notion of pedagogy (parenting or teaching) should be considered ‘given’ or ‘granted’; only that the meaning of pedagogy needs to be *found* in the experience of pedagogy, because the lived experience of pedagogy is all that remains if presuppositions are suspended. (p. 54)

Similarly, because of the complex way in which participants understood community in terms of their own contexts, I would like to proffer that the meaning of community “needs to be *found* in the experience of” community. However, as argued by Weedon (1987), even experiences are mediated by societal structures and reigning ideologies. Therefore, it is in the collective narrative of the understandings of and contradictions within the definitions of community among the principals that predominant discourses influencing those experiences become visible. Thus, descriptions of the participants, schools, and communities are provided in Chapter 4 as a rich and essential source of data alongside of the interview data. But, a general description of the demographics of each area chosen for the study, as well as a table briefly identifying the principals, are provided in this chapter (see Table 2).

## **Rural Site**

The schools enlisted for the rural sample were located in a county within the Southeast. In 2010, Hudson County (a pseudonym) had a population of approximately 67,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Of the population, 90% of the residents were White, 6% were African American, 2% were Hispanic or Latino/a, and 2% constituted other or multiple ethnicities. On average, there were 84.7 persons per square mile. The per capita income was \$20,881 and the median income was \$37,761 for the county. With 23 schools, Hudson County serves approximately 8,000 students [National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), n.d.]. Of those 8,000 students, 0.5% qualify for English language services and 13% have Individualized Education Plans.

Hudson County recently underwent school closings, changing school zoning for stakeholders and the county schools. The change in community designations provided an interesting platform for discussing community with the local principals. The three rural schools which participated share a common campus, although each contains distinct and separate school leadership. The smaller community encapsulating the three schools is referred to as Hudsonville. The elementary and middle schools are classified as Title I, although the high school is not.

## **Suburban Site**

Bakerton (a pseudonym), a city with approximately 1,500 persons per square mile, and its surrounding areas, served as the suburban region within this study. The principals interviewed from Bakerton were from a primary, middle, middle school magnet, and high school, with the magnet school located within the city school zone and the remaining three a part of the county school district while holding a Bakerton address. As a city, Bakerton hosted a population of approximately 91,000 people in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Of this population, 52.6%

identified as White, 41.5% identified as African American, 3% identified as Hispanic or Latino/a, and 2.9% identified as other or mixed ethnicities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The per capita income was \$20,800 and the median income was \$34,359.

According to Census data, the county containing Bakerton hosted nearly 200,000 persons in 2010. Of those persons, 64.6% identified as White, 30% identified as African American, 3.1% identified as Hispanic or Latino/a, and 2.7% identified as other or mixed ethnicities.<sup>5</sup> The per capita income for residents in Bakerton County is \$22,449 and the median income is \$43,538 (which is slightly higher than the median income of the state as a whole, at \$42,934). Only the magnet middle school, located within the Bakerton City Schools district, is classified as Title I. The Bakerton County School System serves approximately 18,000 students, with less than 2% qualifying for English language services and 14% with Individualized Education Plans (NCES, n.d.).

### **Urban Site**

Within the urban setting, referred to as Lakeside, an elementary and middle school principal participated; both schools were Title I. The district itself serves nearly 27,000 students, with approximately 2% of its students being English Language Learners and 12% having an Individualized Education Plan (NCES, n.d.). Of the 212,000 persons living within this midsized city in 2010, 73.4% were African American, 21.1% were White, 3.6% were Hispanic or Latino/a, and 1.2% were other or a combination of ethnicities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).<sup>6</sup> The per capita income for Lakeside is \$19,962 and the median income is \$31,898.

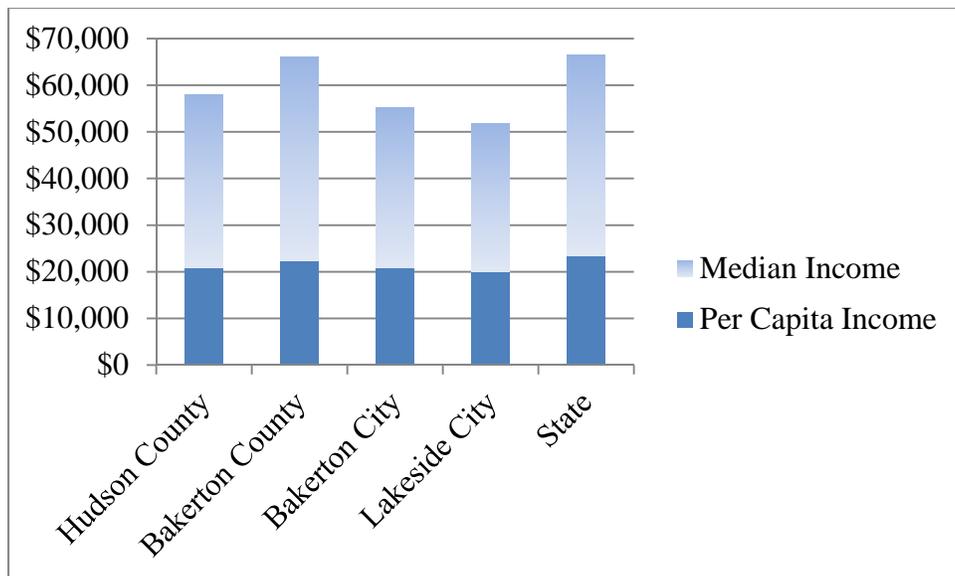
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<sup>5</sup> The total is 100.4% due to imprecision in rounding; percentages collected directly from the Census website

<sup>6</sup> Note that the total is 99.3% due to imprecision in rounding; percentages collected directly from the Census website.

## General Comparisons

From Figure 1, which provides a comparison of the per capita and median incomes of the county and cities involved within the study, it is possible to see that Bakerton County is wealthier than the other regions with regard both to average and median incomes. If it were possible, disaggregating the income data of the major cities from the income data of the containing counties might further reveal a larger discrepancy in incomes; however, such data were not available in the public census data. More information regarding the individual schools is provided in the subsequent chapter. Also, while a description of the primary participants accompanies a further discussion of the setting in Chapter 4, a brief table describing the participants follows Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Comparison of median and per capita incomes. This bar graph represents the average and median income levels within the regions included in this study.

Table 2 provides an alphabetized list of the primary participants within the study. However, it similarly represents a disparity between the communities with regard to the academic status of the principals. None of the rural participants have earned a doctorate or

similar degree, although Mr. Hancock completed the coursework for a doctoral program several years before this study. All of the urban and suburban principals have earned a doctorate, with the exception of Ms. Whitt who holds a law degree and is currently enrolled in a doctoral program in Educational Leadership.

Table 2

*Alphabetized List and Brief Description of Primary Participants*

Name	Ethnicity and Gender	Years as a Principal	Community Classification	School Name and Grade Level Classification
Dr. Banks	Black male	6	Suburban	Bakerton Middle School
Dr. Gill	Black female	12	Urban	Lakeside Middle School
Mr. Hancock	White male	9	Rural	Hudsonville Elementary School
Dr. Hubbard	White female	4	Suburban	Amerson Magnet Middle School
Mr. Moore	White male	2	Rural	Hudsonville High School
Mr. Norris	White male	13	Rural	Hudsonville Middle School
Dr. Owens	Black female	3	Urban	Lakeside Elementary School
Dr. Prado	White male	24	Suburban	Bakerton Primary School
Ms. Whitt	White female	2	Suburban	Bakerton High School

**Data Collection**

Using the works of Corbin and Strauss (2008), Dyson and Genishi (2005), and Weiss (1995) as guides, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant, contacting participants as needed for follow-up and clarifying information. Data collection began in August 2012 and concluded in March 2013. An interview protocol was used for both primary and secondary participants (see Appendices B and C); questions addressed the participants' conceptualizations of community and engagement with school-community partnerships, but the questions were designed to be open-ended and in such a way as to allow for additional information that the principals felt was pertinent to be provided. The open-ended nature also allowed for a broader narrative while the specific focus of the questions provided an avenue for pursuing deeper levels of the discourse surrounding community. I kept observation notes during

the visits to the schools and communities, providing an additional source of data and space for reflection during the research process.

After obtaining The University of Alabama's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study, I began contacting principals by phone calls, email invitations, and school visits to ask for participation. During this time, I became aware of three school districts which required approval from the school board for research. I completed the necessary steps to obtain approval and proceeded, scheduling to meet principals at their convenience. Each principal chose to host the interview in his or her office. I audiotaped the interviews on a digital recorder with the participants' permission. During the interviews, I also jotted notes about the principals' responses. Since in one case, the digital space on the digital recorder became exhausted midway through the interview, it was helpful to have these interview notes as a record of the main points of the principal's responses. At the end of each interview, I asked the principals if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. All of the principals responded in the affirmative. I also asked if they would mind if I contacted the PTO president or a parent on the PTO. In only one instance did the principal request that I contact a teacher instead. Many of the principals emailed the PTO president directly, providing my information so that the parent could contact me him or herself.

I recruited most secondary participants based on the recommendations of the principals; however, in some cases I searched the schools' websites and contacted PTO presidents directly to participate. I asked the secondary participants to choose a location for the interviews, offering public libraries and coffee shops as suggestions. Two secondary participants requested that we conduct the interview by phone. Two other participants initially agreed to participate but later declined. Because many of the interviews were conducted with surrounding noise, tapes were

more difficult to transcribe. In those cases, interviews were partially transcribed and partially summarized. I justified this decision based on the role of the secondary participants as providing contextual data for the study as opposed to providing language to be analyzed.

Both primary and secondary interviews were transcribed periodically throughout the data collection phase. Initially I transcribed by playing the tape from the digital recorder in small increments, pausing and typing as I went. After transcribing the first three interviews and expressing my concern over the length of time required to transcribe, a fellow graduate student recommended the free transcription software called Express Scribe. With Express Scribe, I could transfer my digital files to a program which allowed me to use function keys on my laptop to adjust the speed and playback of the recordings. I found, however, that in some cases it was essential to listen to the tape at normal speed, as some words sounded different at an adjusted pace.

As needed, primary and secondary participants were contacted via email to provide clarifying information. I also emailed each primary participant a copy of his or her transcript as a form of member checking, inviting each principal to provide a pseudonym to represent him or herself and to review the data and make any changes in the case that his or her views were not being accurately represented. One principal chose his pseudonym. Only two principals responded to reviewing the transcript, one with specific corrections to the transcript and the other with the comment that while the transcript reflected his views, he preferred that filler sounds be removed so that he did not sound like a “country boy.” In order to respect his wishes and provide consistency, I have removed “ums” and “uhs” and similar such utterances in quotes used from all of the data. Punctuation usage in the interviews matches the flow of the dialogue based on researcher discretion. Grammatical errors have been retained and left unmarked in the dialogue.

Archival data, such as PTO agendas, newspaper articles, and school newsletters were also collected for the study. I spent time driving around each community, noting businesses, neighborhoods, and general descriptive information. By invitation, I attended one PTO meeting and one beauty pageant (a major school fundraiser), recording observations of each to provide additional context and data regarding the rural schools. Attending these events also allowed for extra opportunity to interact with the principal of the elementary school and hear his perspective in a less restrained context than that created in a formal interview. Also, I subscribed to announcements for the schools and PTOs which host a social media presence through Facebook, providing another avenue of artifacts available via my personal Facebook newsfeed. In order to guard the anonymity of the schools and participants, I changed my public viewing settings to “hide” my association with the organizations.

### **Coding and Analysis**

Arguably, data analysis is a data management dilemma that deserves some recognition. Throughout the process of this study, I was constantly searching for a system of managing the data to prevent being overwhelmed and lost within the data. Scanning documents, creating electronic folders, creating paper files, creating hard copies, organizing hard copies, creating graphic organizers, and staring in disbelief at my word processor’s limited diagram options and at sticky notes that did not stay stuck to the wall in Alabama humidity were all a part of the journey.

While coding took place in three distinct stages, analyzing my data was ongoing as I used the constant comparative method to analyze the data (Creswell, 2007). First, I openly coded the data, “reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments” (Creswell, 2007, p. 148). Organizing the transcripts into folders on my computer and printed

copies into a binder, I was able to read through and flip through the data easily. This initial round of coding provided codes such as “to give back,” “a blessing and a curse,” “community as a challenge,” “crime,” “visibility,” “those kids,” and “geographical proximity.” After openly coding, I used Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Miner 4 Lite software to assist in managing the codes by completing an additional reading of the texts and adding electronic tags. I also completed additional readings of the PTO transcripts, field notes, and archival data to consider any sub-textual information in the responses or observations. I began to identify overarching themes among all of the codes and experimented with various groupings. For example, I grouped “security” and a “sense of safety” under “policing;” I grouped “drugs,” “theft,” “break-ins,” “violence,” and “delinquent behavior” under “crime.” I also collected similes of community among the codes: community as stakeholders, as geographical proximity, as local businesses, as parents, as collaboration, as support.

Second, finding the hierarchical ordering and linear grouping of codes imposed by the coding software to be superficial, I used the software instead to organize the interview data by questions and large topics. I printed the data in segments and completed additional rounds of coding, trying out new terminology and groupings to refine the codes and work toward saturation. For example, I considered discussions about geography in terms of boundaries and also in terms of space. At this time, I also conducted axial coding, working to identify connections among the major themes and attempting to better understand the relationships among the themes. Geographical boundaries as an aspect of community was not the only concept with a boundary for example. Shared culture and common goals also acted as a boundary, tying together certain people into a group classified by the participants as a community. I also used the QDA software to generate particular responses of questions juxtaposed with one another. For

example, I pulled the principals' discussions of who they considered to be an asset within the community as well as any segments they found to be problematic to read in light of their responses of what they valued in their communities.

Lastly, I engaged in selective coding, rereading the transcripts in light of the connections of the codes and themes. I worked with the themes, attempting to uncover the many potential ways in which they can coalesce into an explanatory theory of social phenomenon among how principals understand community. I found that understanding and analyzing the transcript as a text with overt and underlying meanings, hued with governing narratives, required an in-depth reading and analysis, efforts to deconstruct the interviews for basic beliefs and possible implications, and a consideration of the discourses found with regard to the entire interview. For instance, to one principal, improving the community meant changing who the community members were. Such a view was likely interwoven into her understandings of the community at large as well as of particular community members and parents. Yet, it is problematic to assume that a sentiment expressed for one scenario was necessarily generalizable to the entire interview. Thus, how the principal discussed parents and the community should be read both with and without respect to this possible underlying belief.

### **Validity**

One way in which I addressed validity was to adhere to the standards of validation explained in *Quality Inquiry & Research Design* (Cresswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) provided five stages for ensuring validity: (a) study a process, (b) use a three-step coding method to analyze my data and ultimately extrapolate a generalized theory, (c) create a graphic organizer displaying the major components of the theory as taken from the data, (d) write the evolving storyline that emerged from the interview data, and (e) express my own views and position in the

study (p. 217). However, from a poststructuralist standpoint in which the subject is neither static nor comprehensively knowable, validity becomes a more complicated issue.

Thus, I also considered validity from a rhizomatic standpoint, as defined by Patti Lather (2007). Lather (2007) explained that “rhizomatics are about the move from hierarchies to networks and the complexity of problematics” in which all concepts are intertwined and, when examined, impossible to be separated from their many connections (p. 124). For example, parents were often interpreted as a part of the community but also as a means for partnering with the community. Their involvement or lack thereof was understood, accepted, or challenged by principals under a broad range of rationalizations. Decisions made by the principals often impacted how parents could be involved (as in the case of the absence of PTOs and an urban principal speaking of restricting parental participation in parties unless participation in other areas had previously been demonstrated). This complex dynamic of parental involvement and partnership is just one example of the rhizomes at play in the process by which principals defined and understood their local communities and partnerships.

Lather (2007) went on to say that “rather than a linear progress, rhizomatics is a journey among intersections, nodes, and regionalizations through a multicentered complexity” (p. 124). And although I found my data to be as she described, I continually tried to force it into a linear, two-dimensional graphic organizer. Consulting with several mentors and presenting my own understandings of the data helped draw me away from a narrow interpretation of the processes and phenomenon at play within the communities in this study. Also, in grappling with how to represent the players in my study as well as the school and community relationship and partnership efforts, I found an inherent tension between truth-telling and whose truth is being told, by whom, and how. I addressed this tension by using secondary participant data, artifacts,

observation notes, and my own reflections along with the principals' narratives to construct an overall narrative of community and school partnerships prevalent within this study. It is my hope that this project challenges traditional practices that have conventionally dictated how school and community partnerships have been understood.

### **Conclusion**

Perhaps Decker et al. (2007) phrased it best, stating that “educators have launched many initiatives to bring the community into the school, to take school programs and activities into the community, and to create communities of learning within the school itself” (p. 43). Yet, little is known of how and why principals choose to partner with the community, which communities or sections of the community they gravitate toward in partnerships, and whether or not these movements offer any outcome contrary to social reproduction. Thus, this study was designed to explore the views of the administrators in schools in order to find how they understood community and what thoughts and discourses potentially govern the implementation of school-community partnerships.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA AND ANALYSIS**

For this study, nine principals were interviewed as primary participants and seven parent-teacher organization (PTO) members were interviewed as secondary participants. What follows is a description of the primary participants and their schools as well as the associated PTO member and his or her role and connection to the school. The remainder of the chapter is a report of the findings from this study.

#### **Rural Participants and Setting**

##### **Mr. Hancock; Rural Elementary School**

Mr. Hancock, the principal at a rural elementary school, is a 46-year-old White male, born and raised in the community for which he currently serves as principal. At the time of the study, Mr. Hancock was in his 9th year as principal. His father had also been a principal within the county. Mr. Hancock currently lives four blocks from the school in a small subdivision.

The elementary school where Mr. Hancock works shares a cafeteria with the rural middle school and is located on the same site as the high school. There is a playground within a fenced area in front of the school and a smaller playground in the back near the teacher parking lot. The drive around the school is paved although the teacher lot is gravel. There are three modular classrooms on the facility, one of which hosts the elementary school library. At Mr. Hancock's elementary school, 61% of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and the school is a Title I school. According to public data provided by the state department of education, out of 534 students at the elementary school, 3 are Black, 3 are Hispanic, 3 are Native American, 1 is Asian or Pacific Islander, and 2 identify as multiracial; the remaining 534 (97.8%) students are White.

Within the past 2 years, the school has appeared in the local newspaper for various events, such as P.E. students participating in an activity to try to beat the Guinness Book of World Records' speed stacking record and students voting in a mock election for president. One activity described in the local paper detailed when Mr. Hancock organized a field day/fun day to ease the stress after many of the community members were affected by severe weather. The event was described as a fun-filled day and was held at the adjacent baseball field, with large inflatable balloons and activities such as a "booger fight," a game in which students threw bags of green beans at one another. It was reported that more than 1,000 people participated, including a nearby school invited by Mr. Hancock. The school was also praised in another write-up for implementing the "Leader in Me" program via a grant, being one of only two schools within the county to utilize this particular character development curriculum.

Mr. Cotton, the secondary participant in the study for this school, was the PTO president for the previous 4 years but currently is serving as the local toybowl football association president. Mr. Cotton is a 40-year-old, White male who has always lived within 2 miles of his current address. He and his wife have two adopted daughters enrolled in the elementary school. He is a fulltime police officer but explained that he spends several hours a week as a volunteer at the school, assisting teachers, working with students, and providing a positive male role model and friendly image of the local police. Mr. Cotton began a social network page for the PTO using Facebook which is maintained by the current president. Announcements cover a variety of topics, such as fundraiser information, school announcements, inclement weather updates, and PTO meeting reminders. Mr. Cotton invited me to attend a PTO meeting in the school cafeteria that was followed by a toy bowl meeting. Chili, vegetable soup, and pizza were served for a donation. The PTO meeting, scheduled for 6pm, began at 6:32 (the original time of the toybowl

meeting was at 6:30pm) and ended at 6:35. During that time, the current PTO president made announcements about upcoming events. No input was solicited from the parents or teachers. The principal and vice principal were both in attendance. Despite the stormy, cold weather, 42 people were spread out among the cafeteria tables for the meeting while a gaggle of children ran and played throughout the area and in the hallway outside the cafeteria. However, other than one teacher, the administration, and me, everyone else in attendance was dually associated with the athletic organization meeting.

### **Mr. Norris; Rural Middle School**

Mr. Norris is a 57-year-old, White male serving as the principal for the rural middle school selected for this study. He has been the principal at the middle school since 2000 and this year will be his final year as principal as he is retiring. Before becoming principal of the middle school, he served as the assistant principal at the adjacent high school. Mr. Norris is a deeply religious man, holding a leadership role at a nearby church. Once he retires, Mr. Norris hopes to travel with his wife to another country for foreign missions through his church. Before becoming a principal, Mr. Norris was a P.E. teacher and coach. He explained that he did not aspire to be a principal, having loved his role as a teacher, but was recruited to the profession by the local superintendent. Although he did not specifically grow up in his current community, Mr. Norris did grow up in a rural community about 10 miles away that hosts its own high school.

The middle school in which Mr. Norris works, as well as the adjoining elementary school described previously, recently experienced structural and demographic changes. The middle school, formerly a 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade program, lost the 5<sup>th</sup> grade to the elementary school for space purposes. Also, both schools experienced an influx of new students due to two school closings which happened within their district.

Similarly to Mr. Hancock's school, the middle school is a Title I school, with 53% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. The absence of diversity also mirrors the student composition with regard to race of the elementary school: there is 1 Black student, 2 Hispanic students, and 325 White students.

In the local newspaper, the middle school was praised for earning an award through the "Blue Ribbon of Excellence" program. The school solicited feedback from parents about ways to improve the school; the number one suggestion was to revitalize the atmosphere by painting the mostly white walls with warm and inviting colors. A picture of the teacher work room was provided, illustrating the vivid new environment. The article also mentioned the renovated restrooms, which were under construction when I first visited the school. The labor for the construction, which included tiling, plumbing, and painting, was provided by parent and teacher volunteers. The county board of education meeting minutes verify the award, listing as a matter of business a vote to approve travel for the vice principal to receive the award on behalf of the school. Moreover, the secondary participant interviewed from the school made mention of the physical changes which recently have taken place within the school.

Also an area of concern for renovation is the school's air conditioning. In 2011, the local newspaper reported an outraged parent who took the 97° temperature in classrooms and the gym to the school board, demanding new air conditioning units be installed for the safety and comfort of the students. The following year, the board reported that it would consider using leftover funds from an energy-efficiency grant to purchase more air conditioning units; yet, according to Mr. Cotton, the former elementary PTO president, no changes have been made.

Also included in the local news, the middle school is acknowledged as being one of the first schools in the county to provide archery lessons to students through the physical education

curriculum. Teachers are trained through the state wildlife department; the department also hosts regional and state archery competitions. In the previous year, the middle school placed 10th out of 20 teams in the state competition.

This rural middle school does not have an official parent-teacher association; however, Ms. Franklin, who participated as a secondary participant in the study, has a son in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and was referred by one of the teachers for the study because she is a parent who is “very involved.” Ms. Franklin is a 39-year-old White female with three children. In years past, she assisted with the elementary school PTO. Both the referring teacher and Ms. Franklin herself attributed some of her involvement at the middle school to her role as a substitute, which affords her ample opportunity to provide a physical presence at the school. Ms. Franklin described the administration’s efforts to improve the appearance and atmosphere of the school by painting walls and hanging curtains in the main lobby; however, unlike the newspaper, she credited much of the initiation and work of the project to a small group of teachers in the school. She also described a new fundraiser in which parents and students sold flats of strawberries. Due to the absence of a local library or coffee shop, the interview was conducted at a Jack’s Restaurant located in the only shopping district available within the community. The shopping strip also hosts a small- to medium-sized grocery store, a thrift shop, a dollar store, a small exercise gym, a movie store/tanning bed facility, and a hardware store.

### **Mr. Moore; Rural High School**

Mr. Moore is in his second year as principal of the rural high school that shares the same campus (yet with separate facilities) as the rural middle and elementary school described in this study. Mr. Moore is a 50-year-old, White male, originally from a bordering rural community 9 miles away which feeds into the high school where he currently works. After teaching for 13

years in the school, he decided that there were “a lot of ideas that were being wasted” and took up the role as assistant principal in order to bring about change. After 3 years as assistant principal he took on the responsibility of principal.

The rural high school also reflects a similar demographic as that of the elementary and middle school, yet it draws students from a much larger area as there are several other elementary and middle schools within the county. Out of 540 students, 52% are on free or reduced lunch. Five hundred twenty-eight students are White, 8 are Hispanic, 2 are multiracial, 1 is Black, and 1 is Native American. Very little information is provided on the school website, which largely remains a shell of the template provided by the county school board. For instance, there is a school calendar but it is blank (in contrast, the elementary school calendar has important dates marked). There are no new announcements nor any information provided under the links for parents or for students. However, there is an active link for parents to check students’ grades through a secure, outside provider.

According to Mr. Moore, most parental involvement and support takes place through the athletic and band booster clubs. Many of the recent news articles reflect an emphasis on the band and sports as they highlight wins and defeats for the school. The football team has seen a dismal decade of losing seasons while girls’ volleyball and softball have thrived. Also included in local news is the arrival of two temporary trade-school portable labs with machinery. The agriculture teacher remarked on the excitement of the students to learn to use the tools, beginning with attached computers for design. One fundraiser in the news is an annual band competition hosted by the high school; the competition generally garners \$5,000 in support that pays for the expenses of transporting the band to and from athletic events and competitions and the upkeep of instruments. Another unique fundraiser common in the area includes a “cow patty drop.”

Participants purchase square foot plots on the football field. A cow is left to graze on the field and the winner is the one whose plot is chosen by the cow for defecating purposes. Another article details the sense of loss felt among students and staff, who signed a large poster in memory of the bookkeeper who passed away during the school year. The secretary reported that cards and phone calls were received from alumni expressing their sympathies as well.

Mr. Lane, a young, White male with a child in the elementary school, recently took on the role of leading the football booster club for the high school. Although Mr. Lane participated in the study, his brevity as a leader and his disconnected state with the high school provided for only limited information about the school. Mr. Lane's primary concern about the school is the failing football program which he recalled as being a strong, solid program when he was a student at the high school. Mr. Moore mentioned in his interview that sports were not high on his priority list, although he was supportive; Mr. Lane similarly noted that the athletic program did not seem to be a priority to the administration of the school.

### **Surrounding Area Description: Hudson County; Researcher's Observations**

Covering an expanse of 805 square miles, the students in this county are divided by area and zoned to one of six county high schools or one city high school. The county school district offers a mixture of elementary and middle schools and K-8 schools for students not yet in secondary programs. Head Start is available at many of the elementary and K-8 school sites. In particular to the rural high school within this study, students may take a bus to the school from a distance as far as 16 miles away. Public transportation to the county seat, the largest city within the county, is available 1 day a week for the areas supporting the remaining five high schools but is not actually available for community members within this community, making private transportation necessary.

Historically an area for dairy and cattle farming, several of the local roads are named after prominent dairy farms. The community is also influenced by the mining industry, which until the mid-1990s employed a large percentage of the residents. In driving around the community, I passed many open fields still occupied by cows and a few horses. On one occasion, while on my way to the community yet still within the county seat city limits, I passed a donkey standing free on the side of the road. I called the police to report the escaped animal, and they responded nonchalantly, familiar with the area I described and perhaps the donkey.

Houses within the area vary dramatically. Near the lake bordering the community, there is a mixture of trailers, one- to three-bedroom homes, four- to eight-bedroom homes, and vacation lake houses. Closer to the school, there are more single and doublewide trailers and less mansion-style homes, although periodically there are still acres of fenced land with an uncharacteristically large home set well beyond the road (the owners are typically notorious for their entrepreneurial success). While there are a few older subdivisions near the school and a new subdivision being developed with houses, there are also great expanses of cleared land which were once used or are currently used for pasturing. Less than 2 miles from the school sit two chicken houses, often reeking of farm smells. On a winding road approximately 2 miles from the three schools, I drove past multiple cul-de-sacs lined with single-wide trailers, most of which were severely weathered on the exterior (which is no indication to the interior state). Parked in front of several of the homes were new SUVs, cars, and trucks. There are very few apartment complexes in the community; rental options are limited to houses and mobile homes.

Sharing the same entry road as the schools is an old cemetery and church. Multiple churches line the main highway; also, several churches can be found down back roads. There is one bank and one insurance office and the previously mentioned businesses in the shopping strip.

Otherwise, there are very few other businesses found within the community apart from gas stations. These gas stations typically provide some fresh food options, such as milk and eggs, and fast food options, such as pizza, fried chicken, or in the morning, homemade egg, bacon, or sausage biscuits.

Although the schools are classified as rural by NCES based on population density and census demographic information, the community is culturally rural as well. There is a sense of family legacy associated with rural communities, such as in the case of Mr. Hancock following in his father's footsteps or of Mr. Cotton and Mr. Hancock mentioning moving into their grandparents' homes upon the passing of the family members. There are farms and livestock near the school, even if agriculture is no longer a major industry for the community. And there are limited physically present business options (the nearest and only superstore is Wal-mart, located in the county seat), although online shopping is available for those who have access to technology. And while services such as cable internet are not accessible in all parts of the county, cell phone services provide online access in all but the most isolated of areas.

### **Urban Participants and Setting**

#### **Dr. Owens; Urban Elementary School**

Dr. Owens is a 37-year-old, African American female in her 3rd year as a principal and her 2nd year as the principal of her current school. She is from the school district and holds a B.A., M.A., Ed.S., and Ph.D. within the field of education. Dr. Owens was a student athlete in college and a teacher and coach for 8 years before becoming an assistant principal. She quickly moved from being an assistant principal (only 2 years) to serving as the lead principal. While Dr. Owens is originally from the community, she explained that it was "a blessing and a curse" to be assigned to the school, where she knew she could make a difference but also had a realistic

understanding of the challenges ahead. Currently she lives in another city, 20 miles from the school.

Dr. Owens works at an urban elementary school with 562 students. Two students are White, 37 students are Hispanic, and 523 students are African American (93%). The school is a Title I school, and 93% of its students receive free or reduced lunch services. The school is located beside an abandoned baseball field but earned its name due to the nearby park. Lakeside Elementary School is located in an area with approximately a 36% graduation rate.

Although the school website has been developed from a shell provided by the central office, it is mostly active. There are hyperlinks listed for parent and student resources, a directory for faculty and staff, information about the principal, an up-to-date calendar, and a listing of parent-teacher organization leaders although no contact information is provided. An example of a past event broadcast on the website is the annual “Walk Your Child to School Day,” which provided instructions for the event.

News articles, blogs, and social media pages which reference the school mainly report on visitors who have attended. For an entire year, students received music lessons from a local symphony conductor. A state legislator visited the school and read to multiple classes. A member of the Harlem Globe Trotters came to speak to the students and demonstrate his skill. A chief meteorologist conducted a lesson on weather safety precautions. A local college men’s basketball team visited the school, and the players and coaches read to different classes. Although the principal spoke extensively of a student leader program at the school, no mention of it was found in the news; likewise, Dr. Owens had expressed concern that the media seems to ignore her requests to cover positive events related to the school.

The local news has, however, covered events in the past. A video is available online showing a clip of the school's celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Day in 2008. Students are seen dancing throughout the gym in traditional Spanish attire; one student describes the artwork created for the event as colorful piñatas and crafts are displayed. Other media coverage has reported on crime-related news within the area. One example from 2012 is an article drawing attention to an event aimed at reducing violence through a caravan of hearses and ambulances which drove through the community. The motorcade parked between the park and the school at the end of the caravan. Another article from 2012 explains that a police force special initiative made 38 arrests in 1 week, largely targeting the community around the park next to the school. Of the arrests, 16 were for felonies and 22 were for misdemeanors. Two of the arrests happened during an actual burglary and were not just follow-up arrests to warrants.

Dr. Owens provided a detailed description of the community surrounding the school in terms of residents and businesses:

It's a transient neighborhood, people move in and the move out. We have a lot of abandoned homes just on these, right around the school, literally, you can look out the window and see abandoned homes. Some have been burned down, that's what children see when they walk home. So that's part of the demographics around here. I would say about 60% of the parents do not work, but are on welfare. So they come up here throughout the day because they're not working. But the other 40% are, they're working and going to school. Usually, when they get the job they want they leave. But we want them to stay because they're the parents we need and that are getting involved but they're looking for a better life. So once they get a better life they move to a place that's safer, with better schools, better environment for their children. ...The businesses around here are usually small businesses. Either Black owned, or I don't know where they're from, Arabs maybe, and a couple of Asians and a few Africans. We have a lot of hair shops, whether selling hair, hair products, or they're cutting hair in barber shops and beauty salons, so they're fixing hair and nails. We have a lot of small businesses where they have urban wear that they sell. One mall, very small, and lots of chicken places. Wings, lots of unhealthy food, lots of fried foods. Hard to find a salad around here unless you go to Subway. So a lot of fried foods.

She also expressed hope that as the mayor worked to revitalize a nearby area, a change in local business and dining options would occur—options that would provide healthier and more family friendly dining alternatives. Dr. Owens’ descriptions of the local businesses and housing options were corroborated by observation notes describing the area near the school.

### **Surrounding Area Description: Lakeside Elementary School; Researcher’s Observations**

The area immediately surrounding this urban elementary school is mostly residential. Many of the homes are older brick homes or have vinyl siding. A leasing sign is displayed from one empty house’s window, verifying that the area is largely occupied by renters, as indicated by Dr. Owens. Several houses have ADT signs in their yards and/or bars on windows. Trash was strewn about some streets although most were tidy. On both visits to the school area, adult African American men were walking down the residential area sidewalks or streets, several singularly and on two occasions as a pair.

There is a small park nearby with a recreation center, a baseball field, and an open field with a pavilion and picnic tables. The recreation center is a newer facility and hosts a playground and picnic area. Children were using the playground facility when I visited the community. Some adults were present as well, sitting on benches near the recreation center. A banner outside the recreation center advertised an upcoming day camp program.

Six blocks from the school there is a highway with various businesses. At one intersection leading to the school, an old mattress was abandoned on the side of the road. Businesses were largely targeting an African American population, as evident in the pictures of Black women on advertisements. There were several hair supply and salon shops near the school. There were also at least three day cares within 2 miles of the school. Spread throughout the business district were two pawn shops and six “money” stores—businesses which offered check

cashing services and small loans. Many buildings were dilapidated and empty, with bars or boards on the doors and windows. Active businesses also had bars and boards in use. Other businesses included some fast food options, an Applebee's, an optometrist, a small grocery store, a laundry facility, a health food specialty store, and an employment training center. Roughly 2 miles away there is a Boys and Girls Club facility.

On the corner of the busier part of the business district, on one visit there was a man with a microphone hooked to two speakers preaching about sin and salvation. There were also churches in the area, including one in an old business building directly behind the school. A large Baptist church was nearby as well as a smaller Church of God and a Good News Bible Fellowship.

### **Dr. Gill; Urban Middle School**

A 40-year-old African American female, Dr. Gill has been the principal of the urban middle school where she currently works for 6 of her 12 years as a principal. Not only does she have her doctorate in school administration, but she also completed a state superintendent training program; although, when asked if she missed teaching, she quipped: "always a teacher first." Dr. Gill resides in another city, driving 37 miles to work each day.

The urban middle school for which she is principal hosts 339 students. One student identifies as multiracial, 2 as Asian or Pacific Islander, 7 as White, 13 as Hispanic, and 316 as Black (93%). The school is a Title I school, with 95% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch services. The website is maintained with announcements. A promotional video is available which scrolls through pictures and clips of the administration, faculty, staff, students, and activities at the school. One clip shows students in a club dancing modern-step style while another shows students dancing in a traditional African style.

The media coverage regarding the school is diverse. One article, corroborated by Dr. Gill, reported on a visit from a female astronaut to the school to encourage students interested in math and science field. In contrast, a local paper covered a school break-in happening just a month after this school year began; Dr. Gill also described this incident as a major point of concern during her interview. No items were found to be stolen, nor did any vandalism take place. Although the news reported that one of the teenagers was a student at the school, Dr. Gill clarified that neither teenager was actually a student at her school. In February, the police were called to the school due to a “disgruntled” student. No one was injured, although the student left the school in an ambulance.

In 2009, one journalist reported that arrests in the city schools within this district account for 82% of all of the cases seen by the Family Court. In many cases, according to a local judge, students were arrested for offenses that would never warrant an arrest, such as cursing or talking loudly. Also, the journalist noted that only 7% of the arrests accounted for felonies or bringing weapons to school.

The most current news regarding the school, however, is an approved plan by the school board to close the school. This urban middle school, along with two other middle schools and five elementary schools, are scheduled to close this school year and consolidate with nearby schools in order for the school board to meet state budget requirements.

### **Surrounding Area Description: Lakeside Middle School; Researcher’s Observations**

Dr. Gill’s middle school is located within 2 miles of a major interstate. The exit for the school provides access to many different eating options and a Wal-Mart. There is also a three-story, round Easy Title store. Other businesses include a Wells Fargo, popular pharmacies, a used car lot, a motel, a Sylvan Learning Center, a pet supply shop, a Check Depot, and gas

stations. Most businesses appear to be active, although there is a sandwich shop building closed with a sign advertising it to lease.

Closer to the school there is a police department, an eye doctor, and a YMCA. The school is within a landing path for the airport, which is located less than five miles away. Trees beside the baseball field behind the middle school provide a barrier for the property on two sides. The baseball field is in use, but the bleachers are completely rusted and old tires are both outside and inside the fence. Although the middle school is a fairly new building, it is adjacent to a school with a much older building (by the rust and overall look of the facility I had assumed it was an empty building but found that it is currently in use as an elementary school by the school district; the playground is new, however). Both schools are across from a neighborhood of smaller, vinyl-siding homes with well-manicured lawns.

In the neighborhood past the school, houses are older and well-kept. One home near the school had a “no trespassing” sign. Some yards have trampolines and swing sets. Multiple churches traditionally associated with the African American community in the Southeast are dispersed throughout the area. Some residents were seen outside in their yards and on a couple of blocks children had gathered outside to play basketball.

### **Suburban Participants and Setting**

#### **Dr. Prado; Bakerton Primary School**

Dr. Prado always knew he wanted to be a principal and planned his teaching experiences accordingly, teaching in as many different grades as possible before moving into an administrative role. A 61-year-old, White male, Dr. Prado has been principal of Bakerton Primary since its opening 12 years prior. His total time as a principal is 24 years, all spent within

the Bakerton community. Although he used to live near the school, 5 years ago he and his wife built a home near a country club, moving 15 miles away from the school.

Bakerton Primary School is located in an area classified by NCES as a midsize suburb. It hosts only three grades, kindergarten through second. Teachers are given the option of whether or not to loop with the students, teaching the same class for 2 consecutive years. Of the 698 students who attend, 370 (53%) are White, 303 (43%) are Black, 6 are Hispanic, 6 are multiracial, and 1 is Native American. The school is not a Title I school; 48% receive free or reduced lunch services. Dr. Prado explained that the demographics have changed in the last couple of years due to project housing that was relocated in his zone after being destroyed by a natural disaster in 2011.

Statistically, based on race, the school composition did change from the 2010-2011 school year to the 2011-2012 school year. Following the kindergarten class to 1st grade within those years, there was a 16.9% increase in African American students (N=83, 97) and an 8.1% decrease in White students (N=136, 125). Following the 1st grade class in a similar manner, there was a 21.4% increase of African American students (N=98, 119) and a 7.9% decrease of White students (N=152, 140). The sample size of Hispanic students was too small to provide useful information about trend changes among the student population, growing by one student each consecutive year since 2010, in which there were four Hispanic students. The PTO president, Ms. Lincoln, also referred to the changing demographics at the school.

Ms. Lincoln, a secondary participant in the study, is one of two co-presidents for Bakerton Primary School. Ms. Lincoln is a White female and mother who also directs a local church-run preschool program. As a former primary teacher herself, she became active in the school by responding to a request at a PTO meeting for more parent volunteers. She explained

that with the challenging economy, it is important for the PTO to raise funds to pay for the school's music teacher's salary and for art supplies. And although she felt like parents were fairly active in the PTO, she expressed concern that "people are just not selling," making it difficult for the PTO to have successful fundraisers.

Both Dr. Prado and Ms. Lincoln discussed the Adopt-A-School partners when talking about partnerships at the school; on the school website, the only information provided under "our community" is information about these partnerships. The school has two official Adopt-A-School partners: a local taekwondo gym and a local bank. The taekwondo staff often comes to the school and provides demonstrations and lessons in character development. The bank partners by providing rewards for a student-of-the month from each classroom and by allowing 2nd grade students to shadow workers at the bank; students, according to Dr. Prado, enjoy watching the tellers count money.

Bakerton Primary maintains an active website hosted by the district as well as two social media pages through Facebook—one for the school and one specifically dedicated to a large spring carnival. All three sources of online information provide updates and announcements for the school, often overlapping in content. Examples of information on the school Facebook page include a posting of pictures from a traveling African children's choir, a few words encouraging parents to register their children for an athletic race which supports a local fundraiser, and a reminder for parents to have dinner at Chic-fil-A on the school's designated night to earn money for the school through a partnership with the PTO. The carnival Facebook page contains related announcements and advertisements for items to be auctioned and t-shirts that are available to purchase. The school website provides a reminder about the carnival as well as information about the athletic race also described on the Facebook page.

Within the past few years, Bakerton Primary has been featured in the local news for various reasons. On one occasion, a reporter described the growing Bakerton suburb and the impact of the growth on the school—the school began using five portable classrooms. The district eventually addressed the growth by planning to build a new school that would accommodate a significant portion of the Bakerton Primary School students. Another article highlighted a teacher at Bakerton Primary who was the first in the state to win a particular award in excellence. She was heralded for her work in connecting the content areas into meaningful units of study, for instance, using textbooks only as reference material and integrating concepts in math, reading, art, and history.

Several videos are available online that recount different events at the school. For example, a local weather reporting station provided a video of its visit to Bakerton Primary during a career fair. During this visit, meteorologists spoke with the four second grade classes. Parents have also posted clips of groups of students performing readers' theaters and singing.

Another online video artifact from the year prior to this study is of a PTO meeting. At the meeting, a choir of students was singing for a crowd of parents when their performance was overtaken by a flash-mob of teachers in honor of Dr. Prado's birthday. Parents and students applauded along with the teachers in good wishes to the principal. The video presents the Bakerton Primary School community as one in which the principal is well-loved and celebrated.

### **Dr. Banks; Bakerton Middle School**

Dr. Banks is a 40-year-old Black male not originally from the Bakerton community. He completed his academic studies, however, at the nearby university, and stayed in the area for work. Although he does not live in the Bakerton community, he pointed out that where he lives, approximately 10 miles from the school, is relatively similar in comparison. His previous roles

include being a teacher, coach, athletic director, and assistant principal. Dr. Banks said he always knew that he wanted to work in administration, explaining that leadership came naturally to him. His leadership focus is evident when he explained that he “love[s] helping teachers become better teachers.” His warm and gregarious persona and seemingly genuine concern for his teachers and students caused me to leave the interview thinking to myself, “If academia doesn’t work out, I want to work for him!”

Bakerton Middle School is situated between two wooded areas and multiple athletic fields. A dual purpose soccer/football field belonging to the high school is behind the school. The racial demographics mirror those of Bakerton Primary. Out of 606 students, 303 (50%) are White, 281(46%) are Black, 13 are Asian or Pacific Islander, 5 are multiracial, and 4 are Hispanic. Free or reduced lunch services are provided for 46% of the Bakerton Middle School students; it is not a Title I school.

Ms. Suny is currently the PTO president at Bakerton Middle School. She also serves on the board of the Bakerton High School PTO and previously was the president of Bakerton Elementary (which serves grades 3 through 5). Ms. Suny is White and has one child enrolled in the middle school. She recalled the difficulty of organizing parents at the middle school level, especially as she is not only the president but currently the sole member of the board. Ms. Suny attributed the decreased involvement level mainly to the creation of a new middle school within their zone that happened a few years prior, dividing the Bakerton Middle School community. She spent a significant amount of time describing the animosity felt between parents and students regarding the split, a split which she felt caused a “rift” in the Bakerton community.

Parental frustration over the divide was confirmed in both Dr. Banks’ interview and in the local newspaper which reported on the board meeting when the division was finalized.

Considering four possible realignments, the school board chose the rezoning option that affected the most families, reassigning 206 students to a different middle school to distribute students more evenly among the two schools.

Another news item includes a write-up regarding two female students who made the middle school football team. Nearly half the students who tried out for the team were cut, some of whom were girls. But, the outstanding athleticism of the girls who made the team is recognized as challenging and changing the longtime tradition of American football as a male-dominated sport.

Bakerton Middle School manages an up-to-date school website with useful information and announcements available to anyone with internet access. There is a page on the site updated each day with a note for character development and relevant PTO announcements. For example, one daily bulletin discussed the value of kindness, quoting the French novelist George Sand. Readers, such as the middle school audience, are provided with instructions for learning about kindness: “Today, notice what a real treasure kindness is. Pay attention to how you feel when others are kind to you, and notice how you feel when you are kind to others.” Other character development topics covered themes such as courage, friendship, diversity, and confidence. Relevant information about PTO-sponsored events follows the character development segment on the daily bulletin webpage within the school’s website. PTO-sponsored events included a womanless beauty pageant, a spring festival, middle school dances, and luncheons throughout the school year for teachers. The PTO occasionally raises money by selling special snacks, such as doughnuts, to students during their morning breaks.

### **Ms. Whitt; Bakerton High School**

Ms. Whitt, currently balancing a principal position and graduate work in Educational Leadership, is principal of Bakerton High located in a midsize, suburban area. Her background is law, and after being a lawyer for several years and working with multiple schools, she decided to pursue a career in education. Ms. Whitt explained, “I could kind of see a disconnect between what lawyers thought how the law should be applied and how practioners thought how the law should be applied.” Although she has been in administration for 6 years, she is currently only in her second year as principal of the school. During her time as an assistant principal, Ms. Whitt was mentored by the previous Bakerton High School principal and attributes much of her move to her current role to her mentor’s influence. While she is not originally from the area, Ms. Whitt now lives about 4 miles from the school.

Bakerton High School is catty-corner to the middle school, although it is not accessible by the same road. The school serves 1,310 students. Of the students, 725 (55%) are White, 549 (42%) are Black, 15 are Hispanic, 13 are Asian or Pacific Islander, 5 are multiracial, and 4 are Native American. Forty-three percent receive free or reduced lunch services. In 2011, Bakerton High had a graduation rate of 79%; in reviewing specific populations, 83% of students who were White graduated, 73% of students who were Black graduated, and 67% of students enrolled in the free or reduced lunch programs graduated.

Ms. Thomas, the current PTO president, participated in the study, providing contextual information about the school. As a parent of two children at the school, she has been on the PTO for 5 years and the president for 1. She also is present at the school daily, working part-time in the attendance office. Eleven other women serve on the board; the 12 women are divided such that each grade is designated with 3 PTO representatives. Ms. Thomas explained that this

organizational structure is helpful for drawing upon parental support as each representative can recruit her friends for support as needed. She also views the school's principals as the biggest asset to the PTO and described Ms. Whitt as friendly and wise in dealing with issues at the school. Other than the homecoming fundraisers, Ms. Thomas feels the PTO is rarely involved with the school.

The homecoming fundraisers are a source of fun and income for the PTO and school. Each year, every male senior is allowed to run for homecoming king. The five top winners receive gift baskets filled with gift cards and items solicited from local vendors by the PTO members. For example, the baskets may include a free tux rental, a gas card, movie tickets, and similar items. Ms. Thomas recounted that the baskets ranged in value from \$400 to \$700 last year, with the homecoming king awarded the highest value basket. A contestant wins based on how much money is donated in his name. Jugs in the cafeteria are provided for students to make cash or check donations. Ms. Whitt explained,

It's an easy fundraiser and it costs us nothing. Our PTO board comes in and counts the money. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday there's not a lot to count. But on Thursday, it starts coming in. People walk in and will start throwing in \$100 bills. It's like, bring it on. It's free money, so between that and the homecoming kick-off, that's significant money for us. That's about \$10,000 we wouldn't have, it doesn't take us a lot of work to do it but it's also something everybody seems to like.

The homecoming queen and court also provide revenue, as each of the 100 homecoming maids have to pay to enter. Students vote on the homecoming maids, and then vote from the maids for the senior court and queen. The principal commented that she thinks "the kids always get it right," choosing the best person for queen. When asked, she recounted that while this year's queen was a White student, the last 2 years' homecoming queens were Black. She also noted that even though the school could potentially generate more money by requiring maids to

raise money to be on the court, the process they currently use keeps money from being a deterrent to participation. If students want to be a part of homecoming, they can.

Similarly to the rural high school in this study, articles about Bakerton High are frequently found in the sports section of the newspaper. The school website also lists 17 sports, such as track, cheerleading, football, and tennis. Other announcements are provided in the local news, however, such as information regarding the annual plant sale—a fundraiser to generate funds for the special needs program and students at the school.

The news also reported on a day when the local police department responded to a general threat rumored about the school. Ms. Thomas described the threat as not credible, but appreciated that the administration and teachers responded in such a way as to indicate to parents that they would take care of their children. The news article suggested that the threat was tied to the Mayan apocalypse hype. Police brought metal detectors to the school for the day, screening students before entering. Teachers were assigned specific positions to greet students and help reassure them about attending school that day in spite of the metal detectors and threat.

The school website is the primary online source for information and announcements related to the school. Some webpage headings do not actually contain information as the website is a template provided by the district, but most of the links and headings are active. Also included on the website are modified schedules in the case that the school needs to open later.

The high school band also hosts its own website. Provided are pictures from performances, information about the staff, and a calendar of practices and events. Descriptions of the four ensembles are also available on the website, as well as needed forms and links to collegiate level bands.

## **Dr. Hubbard; Amerson Magnet Middle School**

Dr. Hubbard is a 61-year-old White female from the Southeast. Her background is with gifted education, and she explained that her current job is her lifetime dream job:

When my husband started on his PhD we used to say if we had all the money in the world what would we do? And I think because I taught in inner city for 5 years, I kept thinking, gifted ed. curriculum could be in this school. And I said if I won lottery I would open my own school and experiment with the gifted ed. curriculum and open to all students, because it would take lots of money to do that. So when the magnet school opened, and I was hired, I said “Oh my gosh! I didn’t have to win the lottery. This is the school I’ve always dreamed of!”

Dr. Hubbard transitioned from being an assistant principal at a middle school to helping open Amerson Magnet Middle School as its principal. She currently lives in the Bakerton area suburbs.

Amerson Magnet Middle School has been in operation for 4 years. It serves 6th-8th grade students with a gifted education curriculum. There are six core classroom teachers, so students do not necessarily learn in a smaller classroom environment but do have the benefit of being in a smaller school overall (there are 156 students at Amerson compared with 606 students at Bakerton Middle School). The city school board caps the enrollment to 7% of the total middle school enrollment in the district.

Amerson Magnet Middle School is located off a major highway and is less than a mile from a large university campus and the city hospital. The students must apply to enter, with only 7% of each city school’s population accepted. Once accepted, students do not tend to leave, according to Dr. Hubbard. Of the 156 students, 88 (56%) are Black, 61 (38%) are White, 4 are Hispanic, 2 are Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1 is Native American. These percentages should theoretically correspond with the school district demographics; however, there is reportedly smaller of a percentage (16% less) of Black students at the magnet school than there is of Black

students in the district. Likewise, there is a higher percentage (16% more) of White students at the magnet school than there is within the district (see Figure 2).

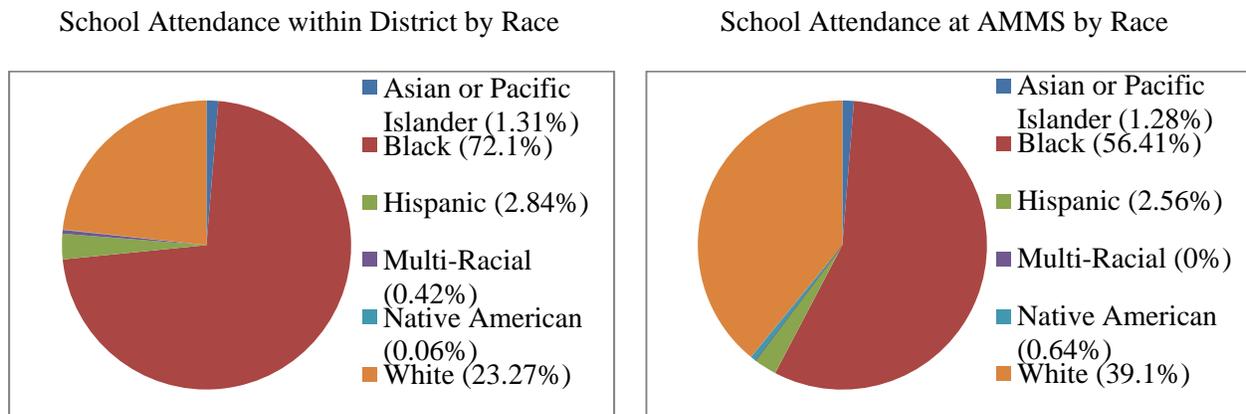
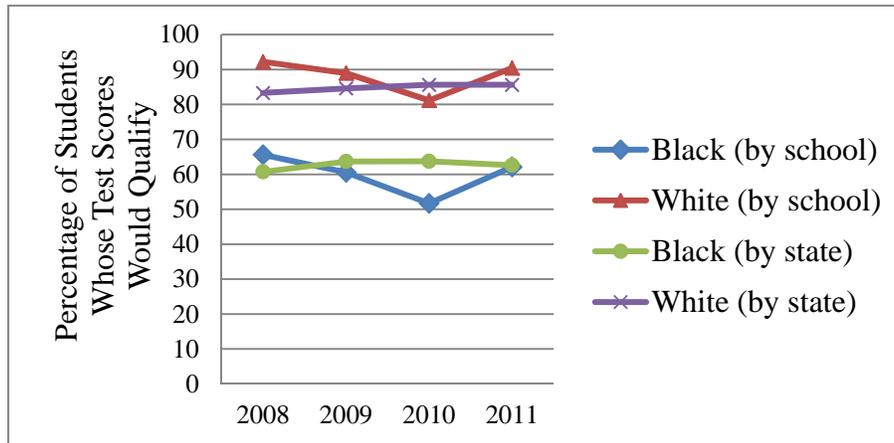


Figure 2. Percentages of student enrollment by race. This figure illustrates the discrepancies of enrollment between the school district and Amerson Magnet Middle School based on race in 2012-2013; data available from state department of education.

There are many possible interpretations of why this discrepancy in demographic representations at Amerson Magnet Middle School exists. At the time of the school’s openings, two schools received double the percentage allowance for students. The larger of the two schools hosts predominantly White students. There is no provision or clause restricting enrollment to match that of the district<sup>7</sup>. Another potential factor is the possibility that because each school is only allowed 7% of students, but students are required to meet certain standardized test scores, some schools may not have enough students to fill the 7% allocation, opening up other spaces for homeschooled or private school students. As evidenced by NCEs data reports, most minorities perform on average below that of their White classmates; thus, test scores may be an inequitable criteria for determining who should qualify for the district’s gifted program. A comparison of test scores for each school with regard to race verifies a discrepancy in performance among

<sup>7</sup> The U.S. Department of Education advocates using “race neutral” admission policies, instead setting admission requirements to descriptors such as a parent’s highest degree of education earned as opposed to affirmative action measures. The Office for Civil Rights (2012) published a report detailing “race neutral” approaches following the *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701 (2007) Supreme Court case.

racial groups for the schools in this community (data provided on state website). For example, at one school, whereas 90% of the students who are White would meet the minimum requirements for the magnet school, only 62% of students who are Black would (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* A comparison of Black and White students who would qualify for the magnet school based on 6<sup>th</sup> grade state standardized math test scores. The percentage of Black and White students at one school whose scores would qualify them is also compared with the overall percentage of students who would qualify at the state level.

Ms. Clifford currently supports Amerson Magnet Middle School in the role of PTO president. She described the school as both religiously and culturally diverse. She also pointed out that because Amerson Magnet is not a neighborhood school, many of the parents and students come to the school knowing very few other people, whereas if they had remained in their prior schools they would have been in classes with some students they may have known since kindergarten. Consequently, she felt it could sometimes be difficult to get parents to participate.

Primarily, Ms. Clifford views the role of the PTO as one that provides support to the school and teachers. When needed, they will gather resources for teachers; they also organize fund raisers and school dances. The PTO maintains a Facebook page with pictures from events and general school announcements, such as severe weather updates, fundraiser instructions, and

reminders for upcoming school activities. It has also been used as a means to disseminate an online survey to determine which sports parents desired to have offered at the school.

Amerson Magnet Middle School has had a vibrant presence in the local news since its opening 4 years prior. Just this year the school won a grant to implement a running program to combat childhood obesity. It also attained International Baccalaureate (IB) program status, a goal pursued since the inception of the school. Within the local university paper, a program at the magnet school was described in which students learned how to play chess from university students. The driving idea was that chess could help students improve test scores.

However, Amerson Magnet Middle School has also been in the news for problematic issues as well. For example, there has been a recent concern about how bussing is utilized. Students who ride the bus must first take a bus to their originally zoned school, and then board a second bus to the magnet school. Two buses are also needed in the afternoon. Students arrive late to school and must leave early due to these arrangements. Possible racial discrimination within the school has been a topic of news as well. Some parents are concerned that Black students are disciplined more harshly, seated separately in certain classrooms, and generally do not receive the same treatment. Other parents disagree. One African American parent decided to enroll his daughter in a private school because of the “1930s mentality” of racial discrimination he witnessed. Not all parents have the funds to make a similar decision for their children.

### **Surrounding Area Description: Bakerton Suburb and City; Researcher’s Observations**

Although the Bakerton schools do not share the same campus, they are relatively close to one another in proximity. The middle and high school are neighbors, while the primary school is only 1 mile away. The primary school is neighbors with a branch of the Bakerton Public Library and an activity center. All three schools are accessible by a major highway which runs the length

of the area. Amerson Magnet Middle School is located in the heart of Bakerton, as opposed to the Bakerton suburbs. A general description of the larger city will follow the suburb description.

The main campus for a popular community college in the region is located in the Bakerton Community, just a few miles from the schools. There is also a shopping center with a Publix, a UPS Store, a salon, and other small businesses. Fast food restaurants such as Dairy Queen and Taco Casa are dispersed along the highway. Before turning into the road leading to the middle and high schools I noticed a Tractor Supply store. I was struck by the expanse of land and rural-feel contrasted with the suburban style neighborhoods. Driving around the neighborhood nearest the primary school, I noted that homes were fairly close to one another (in contrast to more rural areas where there are often fields, fences, or trees between neighboring homes). The houses in this neighborhood were particularly large. A real-estate search online revealed many of the homes are four- to five-bedroom houses with two to three bathrooms. The houses appeared to be fairly new with manicured and perhaps professionally maintained lawns.

Farther away from the school I drove through a neighborhood with more average size houses (two- to three-bedroom homes). From residents enjoying the weather outside, I observed that both Black and White families reside in the neighborhood. Again, homes and yards were well-kept.

The Bakerton suburbs differ from the city itself largely due to the city/county boundary lines and the rural aspects of this suburban area. Bakerton City is home to a university and approximately 91,000 residents (please return to Chapter 3 for more detailed demographic information about the city). The city is demographically divided by race and class. One large but distinct area of town caters primarily to the city's lower income African American population. None of the schools represent the city's racial demographic composition; the local newspaper

reported on a recent study conducted on the schools which described the neighborhood school movement as a movement toward resegregation, causing many schools to be largely homogenous in terms of race and income.

### **Participants and Settings as Data**

Thus far in the chapter, I have provided a description from multiple sources of the principals, schools, and areas surrounding the schools. The participants and settings have been included as data because it is through the “lived experiences” and contexts of the schools’ communities that the principals have made sense of community and engaged in partnerships. In the following sections I present the interview data regarding how the principals understand the concept of community, how they perceive their schools’ host communities, and how they describe the partnerships at their schools.

### **Conceptualizing Community as a Principal**

When asked the question, “What do you think of when you hear the word community?” the principals provided a variety of ideas for the concept. Some principals responded about location and boundaries, some about members and stakeholders, and others about values. Their descriptions often reflected their current school’s host community, pointing to areas they saw as strengths of their communities. On some occasions a disruption from their idealized notions of communities surfaced within their descriptions. In summary, principals held a working definition of community, one which combined a textbook-style definition with romanticized notions of community, their day-to-day experiences, and community circumstances.

Within the textbook-style definition, principals described community as a grouping of people bound together by geography, politics, or commonality. Typically, however, these ideas were rooted in or impacted by their own community contexts. Their romanticized notions of

community conceptualized community as containing shared values and a shared spirit as well as a providing a space for and platform of support for the school. However, while some of their experiences validated their idealizations of community, disruptions to those definitions were evident in the principals' descriptions as well. The following section provides key pieces of data regarding the principals' understandings of community, and in particular their understandings of their local communities.

### **Community as Bound by Geographical, Political Lines, or Commonality**

**Bound by geography.** In discussing what the concept "community" means, many participants indicated that geographical space is a defining aspect of community. Dr. Prado pinpointed that the community is "the area that we serve here," while Dr. Owens explained it as "all the stakeholders who live and work around my school." Space for community is ascribed to "the area . . . here" which is inhabited by those who "live and work around" the school. In this instance, no particular boundary is drawn for the local communities, although generally a conception of geographical area is being identified with relation to the local schools. Dr. Banks expressed a similar idea, explaining that community is "everyone in this school, the students, the teachers in this surrounding area, neighborhoods. But also, I think it expands to the entire city." Dr. Banks offered a larger encapsulation of community in terms of its geographical space by identifying not only the "surrounding area" but also the entirety of the host city.

Similarly, Mr. Moore described his community using a concept of space: "When I think about [this] community I think it's a huge community because we cover about half the county . . . Really it covers more than half the county." Here, Mr. Moore identified the community as "huge," even to the extent of including students from "more than half a county" despite the presence of five other county high schools. He went on to explain that the community is

disconnected over the course of the geographical expanse: “It’s so scattered . . . We don’t have a network of folks. Here I have about five people that I can trust, that if I needed something I could call and they’d do it. And they’re kind of scattered too.” The geographical expanse within his school district affected how he perceives the cohesiveness or lack thereof within his community.

**Political boundaries.** Others also discussed the geographic lines drawn by his/her school district—lines that dictated not only which students were enrolled in the schools but also who would be a stakeholder or patron of the school. Mr. Hancock discussed district zoning in terms of borders and specifically how those borders have changed over time:

Our borders are not what they used to be. When I was in school, if you crossed Hudson Creek you were in Hudsonville. If you crossed Highway 32 you were in Posey . . . So, our borders have changed a lot, but I think in all the community—it’s still just good, hard-working people who want a decent education for their kids and are willing to help us when we need it.”

Mr. Hancock recognized how boundaries and school zoning have changed, but not in such a way as to impact the characteristics of the people within the community—it is “still just good, hard-working people.” Dr. Banks, on the other hand, found that the changing boundaries did have a noteworthy impact on who was being served by the school. He explained that

When I first entered this school we were about 900 to 1,000 students. And it was definitely more, we do have rural and urban/suburban subgroups in our school, but my first couple of years here when we were 1,000 it was much larger. They split the school into [another] middle school and it was really really really a, and I don’t think this, but I think from some of the people’s perspective [the other middle school] was now the very rural school—not very rural—has more of the rural community that goes to that school. And, we are more of a suburban school. But again we’re talking about cross neighborhoods. It’s not that much, but it is, [the other middle school] is the rural school, has a rural population. And [from] meeting and having discussions prior to the split, and meeting with parents as we go through athletics, and the high school principal and the [other middle school] principal—we really got the feel that there was a lot of, not necessarily animosity, but there were problems that I was not aware of as far as the haves and the have nots, for lack of a better term, you know that meeting with some of the parents from that community or that school, talking about booster clubs and that kind of stuff, it came out from some parents that this had been ongoing as far as us versus them and that kind of thing. I was not necessarily aware of it because I’m not from this

community, don't live in this community. I wasn't from Bakerton so it was somewhat news to me but there were some underlying things where some people that there were lines drawn for the haves and have nots, from an economic standpoint and from a proximity standpoint.

The impact of the change in school community boundaries separated students and communities by rural and suburban criteria as well as income (the "haves and have nots"). But, even with two distinct middle school communities, Dr. Banks referred to them as "cross communities." He also identified a division within his own zoning: "With school zones. . . lines are drawn for you . . . . But even within [this] cluster you have two different communities in a sense within this one school zone . . . . We're America at its best." School district lines provide a political boundary for separating people into school communities.

Dr. Prado, within the same district as Dr. Banks, is facing a similar boundary change to happen in the upcoming year. Dr. Prado expressed his concern about the division to take place:

I worry about this new school . . . . Although it's about 5, 5-1/2 miles down the road, it can only be described as a rural school. And I'm not sure what kind of partnerships they're going to be able to develop because really there are no neighborhoods that it serves. It's going to serve this house here and that one over there, and down the dirt road.

When asked about his predictions of how the demographic makeup of his school might be impacted by the new school and zoning, he explained, "We'll lose about 200 students. It's a K5 school . . . . We expect our free and reduced population to increase significantly, because the new school does not encompass any of those low income housing." Thus, similarly to Dr. Banks, Dr. Prado discussed community with respect to boundaries imposed by his school board and also noted a disparity in the economic makeup that is likely to be created by the upcoming school zone changes.

**Boundaries of shared culture, values, and goals.** The perception of common values, goals, ideas, and/or characteristics was another binding factor of community according to the

participants. After describing the changing borders, Mr. Hancock, as previously mentioned, made the assessment that “in all the community, it's still just good, hard-working people who want a decent education for their kids and are willing to help us when we need it.” Mr. Hancock makes the generalization that the members of the community are “good, hard-working people” who “are willing to help” as needed, signifying an expectation of community members as holding a shared work ethic and commitment to serving the school. Moreover, this group of people, according to Mr. Hancock, desires “a decent education for their kids.” In this case, he was suggesting a common goal and underlying value for education as typically held by the community members. Despite the border changes, the community remained the same in his eyes with respect to these values and characteristics.

Mr. Norris, focusing on what he perceived to be the values and traditions of his community, stated,

For me, it's more about the culture of the community. This is kind of a laid back community. I'm old school and that works well in this community. Old school in the sense that when we tell a student what to do we expect them to do it. And in a large part, that's what the community expects. We've got those few always, but the overall expectation of the community is that they want to stay close to their child. They want a place that listens to them; that if we say the child has done something wrong then they expect that even their child will be punished. They don't mind corporal punishment at all. And a lot of culture, a lot of systems, mostly, even our state even where corporal punishment isn't allowed—forbid it. This community here expects it. And that's kind of old school to me. To me that's a benefit: “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” Grew up, and most people grew up, you know that's anywhere close to my age, would never abuse a child, but there are some people that would call corporal punishment—if you smack them at all you've abused them. You can't win that argument, no matter what. That's what I usually think in community.

He described the community as “laid back” and “old school,” meaning specifically what he perceived as shared values of the community. The reference to a verse in the Bible (“spare the rod and spoil the child”) and a philosophy of disciplining children from it illustrates a religious component to how he understands this “old school” community. One secondary participant

corroborated the possibility that religion affected the values and culture of the area, suggesting that the school should have a greater degree of involvement from the church and support related religious practices.

**Bound by cooperation.** Dr. Gill rendered a textbook definition of community, alluding to cooperation and encapsulating the central idea of a group bound by commonalities such as location and goals. Dr. Gill explained, “Community [is] a group of people who may have several things in common which may include where they work, where they live, [and] working towards a common goal—any of those things could constitute a community.” Here, along with geographical boundaries and a common purpose or goal, there is collaboration as the members are “working towards a common goal.” Two rural principals echoed this sentiment. Mr. Hancock included the middle and high schools’ collaboration as an aspect of community: “Community also means to me that the three schools work together. We try to really work to make things feel like we’re all working together.” Mr. Moore suggested that “usually when you think of community you think of a whole group of people that are working towards the same thing.” Even though Dr. Banks does not live in his school’s community, he repeatedly identified himself as a part by sharing a common goal. For instance, in one case he stated, “I guess we are all in this together” and in another case he explained, “From the custodian all the way up to me, I think we all have our hands in the bucket, in a sense, to help to rear these children, and to teach them and educate them.” Collaboration or some movement toward a common goal is an aspect of how principals define community.

### **Idealized Notions of Community**

Along with textbook-style definitions of community as commonality and geographically bound, some principals also indicated a more romanticized or idealized view of community. Mr.

Hancock explained that community “is the Hudsonville spirit.” Mr. Norris suggested that defining community has to do with “the culture of the community.” Ms. Whitt discussed a nearby small community as ideal:

I’m always envious of places like, I’ll use Westwood for example, where Westwood High School is the high school for the area, that community. And the community, every Friday night they’re at football games. There’s no competition about do we support this school or do we support this school. It’s just kind of a feel of being very close-knit and supportive of the school.

However, despite her lamentation that smaller communities have a stronger degree of loyalty and connection, Ms. Whitt also commented that “if you talk about community being a kind of spirit of we’re all in this together, we all want to work hard and be successful—I think that’s something we have built here.”

Mr. Moore held a similar sentiment of desire for a more cohesive community: “You have small schools that have towns and stuff that are really close-knit, and everybody's kind of pulling for everybody and it's not like that here. It's, we're so scattered until it's, I wish it were, but it's just not.” Community takes on an essentialized quality as a spirit, a close-knit connection, a culture, or a group holding shared values and purposes in these cases. But, it is also a status to be “built” or attained.

### **Experience Defines the Meaning of Community**

While the principals define community generally with regard to location and groupings of people, they also tended to locate their own community boundaries in their descriptions, such as in the accounts of Mr. Hancock and Mr. Banks provided previously. Moreover, the principals used language which located themselves within the community, as either a member or a potential stakeholder. In providing examples of community from their own contexts, principals sometimes chose counterexamples to illustrate the lack of or challenges for building community. And, for

several principals, the stakeholders of their communities provided substance for making meaning of who the communities were.

**We versus it.** Principals tended to discuss their schools' communities from the perspective that they were members. For example, Mr. Moore, who lives within the school's community, identified himself within the community, saying "we cover" as opposed to "it covers" or "they cover." Mr. Banks, who lives outside his school community, used "we have" to describe the different community members. Mr. Norris set up a contrast between people who oppose what he sees as the predominant community values and himself, stating,

When we tell a student what to do we expect them to do it. And in a large part, that's what the community expects. We've got those few always, but overall the expectation of the community is that they want to stay close to their child.

In this way, Mr. Norris identified himself as a member by using the pronoun "we" but further identified himself with whom he feels is the majority by distinguishing that "those few" who are different are "they" and not a part of "we." Perhaps it is this day-to-day of living community and locating oneself within it that influences principals' understandings and definitions of community.

**Disruption defines community.** Often the principals in this study used counter examples of experiences they have had within their communities to their textbook definitions. For instance, Mr. Moore recognized community as a concept that unites people with shared purpose, but found his experience of community due to the rural context to be antithetical:

Usually like when you think of community you think of a whole group of people that are kind of working towards the same thing, but with us, half of our community doesn't know what the other half is doing, or more.

By holding the assumption that community should involve a common goal, Mr. Moore perceived his school's host community as lacking community in the absence of connection and commonality in purpose.

Borders were also a source of disruption. The principals in this study appeared to accept the imposed borders as one partition set to designate their local communities, but they did not always agree with how the borders were drawn. Dr. Prado, for instance, expressed concern about future zoning plans that would divide his community in a way similar to the new zone that was created in Dr. Banks' area—separating the more rural families from the suburban community. As previously mentioned, he was “worr[ied] about this new school.” He went on to speculate that the new school is

... going to serve this house here and that one over on the other side of the hill, and down the dirt road. And really, it's going to be difficult for them to build the kind of relationships that we have.

His concern suggests an underlying disapproval of the school board's decision, relocating a predicted 200 students from his school.

Mr. Moore, as a rural principal, expressed a similar frustration to Dr. Prado's anticipation of the impact the space can have on a rural school, stating that

We have kids coming from everywhere. It's not just like, when you think of community and it's one small area. We cover I mean, we have kids from [the neighboring] county that come here. It's a lot bigger than when you think of... it's more like half a county than it is a community.

Mr. Moore expressed his concern over the geographical expanse allotted to his school and the disregard some families have for school zoning, sending their children to his school even though they lived in a different district. Although the school zones may have distinct boundaries, not everyone chooses to adhere to the zonings, further disrupting a notion of a definite school community.

For Dr. Owens, transiency and crime marked her community, leaving her desiring a new community altogether. When asked if transiency was an issue at her school, she replied:

When someone goes someone else comes, you have a waiting list for Section 8. So while someone is moving out of this house because they're doing better and moving over to the eastside, for someone else it's an opportunity to get housing. So that helps, but when the house is so old and torn up no one wants to move into it. So we can't fix the transiency because that's a Lakeside problem, that's the city of Lakeside who has to stop the crime, who has to get better people to come into the neighborhood and we can clean them up and property rates can go up. We won't get enough money for our school as long as we have renters and not buyers. We have to get people to buy the houses in our community. The only way they're going to do that is if they're worth living in. So we've got to get the police, and the city, the mayor and the council to make our community better to live in, and that's what's going to stop the transiency.

Dr. Owens indicated in this explanation that bettering the community would entail improving the housing in order to change who the local residents are, or in her words, in order to “get better people to come.” Moreover, it is a change reliant upon external parties, such as the mayor, police, and city council.

Mr. Norris also found transiency and homelessness to be a concern for his community. He pointed out that students who were transient or classified as homeless required greater levels of attention and assistance, stating that

We just take them as they come and deal with them. We try to take care of them all we can. And, you know your eyes are opened up when you make home visits, and I try to do that. I try to make 15 to 25 or 30 home visits a year.

Mr. Norris's perception of students facing homelessness and transience is one that characterizes them as needing help on one hand and to be “deal[t] with” on the other.

School closings which displace large groups of students caused a disruption in how the principals understood their communities as well. Both Mr. Hancock and Mr. Norris used the expression “those kids” in regards to students who were relocated to their schools after a local school closing. Although the principals were primarily discussing this group of students from the

standpoint of how to help them transition to their schools, especially given they appeared mostly to be academically behind their new classmates, the distinction was still made between the previous student body and the new additions. Mr. Norris was aware of drawing a distinction between the displaced students and the original students, correcting himself in the following response, “. . . those kids—and that’s the term that I asked the teachers not to use. Don’t refer to those Midtown kids as ‘those Midtown kids.’ And, they did very well with that.” The disruption of changing zones from school closings forced two communities into once space, and, as illustrated by Mr. Norris, was not a seamless transition.

**Stakeholders.** Several principals referred to the “stakeholders” when describing their schools’ communities. Stakeholders could include the local businesses, as they have a stake in the future workforce (Hubbard; Norris; Owens). Neighbors can also be considered stakeholders in the school, as they have a stake in the lifestyle of the students and presentation of the school (Gill; Whitt; Banks). And parents are stakeholders as well; in the words of Dr. Banks, the school has “their most precious commodity . . . from 7 to 3 every day.” In the section that follows, I focus only on how parents were perceived by the principals. The remaining stakeholders are discussed in the context of partnerships later in the chapter.

Parents were often described as supportive. Dr. Hubbard appreciated the ways in which the parents support their children and the teachers at the school, stating, “I value that the parent really wants their child to have the best education that’s out there.” Also, she noted,

The teachers are treated so well by the parents and the PTO here. So, I have teachers that came from other situations and other schools, not necessarily in this state, and they say, “Oh my, you know, it’s just wonderful here!” And I think, part of it is, we are small, and the parents want their children here.

Dr. Hubbard ties the support from parents to the parents' high value for education, partially evident in the initiative that was taken in getting their children to Amerson Magnet Middle. She also attributes the atmosphere of support at the school to its small size.

However, parents were not always interpreted as being supportive. Dr. Gill expressed her concern that parental support was lacking at Lakeside Middle School. Upon being asked about her word choice of "apathy," she clarified to indicate she was speaking more about the consequences of the circumstances the parents face than a general indifference about education.

The related section of transcript from her interview is provided below:

*Parrish:* How would you describe the attitude of your teachers toward the parents?

*Dr. Gill:* Well, our goal is to try to make parents to feel welcome, because we want more parent involvement. I do think that the teachers feel, as well as myself, that there is a limited parent involvement. A little apathy, not necessarily toward the school, or the teachers, but in being involved in education period. So, honestly, it's almost better to deal with the kids, and get the kids to . . . understand. Even though we continue to try with the parents, we can't control the parents. We can still somewhat control the students.

*Parrish:* Do you have any thoughts on why the parents would be apathetic?

*Dr. Gill:* Well, maybe apathetic is, maybe that's not the correct word. You know, time constraints. A lot of our parents work two or three jobs. They don't have time or, and who wants to take time out to deal with something that's negative? We've tried to, we've had a push to making good phone calls to parents to try to better that relationship, of having good things to say before we have to voice a concern or an issue.

Dr. Gill indicated that from her experience with parental involvement, it is more advantageous to "deal with" students than parents. While she desired a greater degree of parental support, she felt that the workload of parents prohibits them from being involved. Interestingly, she seemed to excuse parents for not addressing "negative" issues with their children's educational experiences, considering not just their workloads but also the undesirability of "deal[ing] with something that's negative."

Moreover, in some cases parents were seen as a factor in some of the problems facing the schools. Mr. Norris narrated the struggle his school has had with meeting Average Yearly Progress (AYP) goals and the role parents have played in the school's "failing" status:

My main goal really is to get [parents] here and talk about attendance because we barely made AYP, Average Yearly Progress, last year. We barely made that last year in the attendance part of that. I think our first quarter attendance rate was like 94.7, which rounded up to 95 which is the minimum you can have. So, and it's gone down over the last 3 years, it's gone down each year. So, I'm really going to drive that home to them that if we ever don't make AYP because of attendance you can only blame yourselves. And we're going to be viewed as a failing school, and it's only because parents are not taking their kids to school.

Here, Mr. Norris articulated a frustration with parents. He did not specify if the high absentee rate is also true of students who ride the bus or if he feels parents are responsible in the event that their children do not board the bus. Regardless, his focus for the upcoming open house was to "draw" parents to the meeting by making their children's state-administered test results available there in order to "talk about attendance."

Dr. Owens found some parents posed a problem to the school due to illegal behavior. Upon finding a bag of drugs on a hallway inside the school, Dr. Owens assumed it had been dropped by a parent. And, because murder is an occurrence within their local community, the impact is felt by students who may have been related to victims. She explained,

I've found two bags of marijuana on the ground since I've been here. One on the hallway, I think it was dropped by a parent, I don't think it was a child. And one right outside the front door. . . A lot of the murders are their siblings, or their aunts or uncles. Or parents sometimes.

The school provides counseling to assist children who have faced such tragedy and trauma and also has a "prison service," in which they collect and distribute supplies to children "with fathers in prison."

In some cases, a distinction was drawn between parents who are seen as supportive or likely to contribute to the school and those who are seen otherwise. Mr. Norris commented about parents with jobs or businesses as being helpful workers. He hypothesized,

. . . And even if not monetarily then they help us by just, they're workers already. You don't give the job to somebody that is not interested in the job. You give it to somebody who's already working and you're probably going to get it done. And, that's meant for, no matter what.

Although he was not directly stating that it is unproductive to ask parents who are not already involved in the school (or perhaps more broadly who do not have jobs) for help, he does specify that it is more productive to ask parents who are "already working" since "you're probably going to get it done" with their help. Mr. Moore similarly noted that "it's a small portion of parents who actually help," although he did not distinguish between who helps and who does not.

Dr. Prado commented on a distinction in parental involvement in the school based on income level. He explained,

When we first opened we had 20-30% of our students were on free and reduced lunches, and next year it'll be like 60 to 65% of our students will be on free and reduced lunch. And there's a direct correlation between that and the amount of parental support that we have. The parents with limited means are not the parents who are going to be big supporters in fundraisers, or in activities. So that presents a challenge for us to try to keep those people involved in their children's education because it's a really critical time for them to be involved is at the primary.

Dr. Prado's correlation between income level and parental support at the school is causal:

"limited means" prevents parents from being able to be financially "big supporters in fundraisers." This correlation, according to Dr. Prado, also leads to "a challenge" to "keep those people involved in their children's education," even though parental involvement within a school is not necessarily precluded based on income.

Dr. Owens provided an interesting take on the parent-teacher relationships at Lakeside Elementary, intermingling her own beliefs and policies in her description. She explained,

I think the teachers have a real good two-side of things when it comes to the parents. In the presence of the parents, it's "You're right, you're right, yeah, yeah." But outside of parents it is, "Oh my God I can't believe she came up here with pajamas on." So, if you want the parents to do a better job of parenting, don't let your child come home and tell you they didn't have homework because they do. Don't listen to everything they say right away, ask some questions first. Those are the things our teachers wish our parents would do more of—get more involved with their children's education. Make sure they're doing something every night, especially in the area of reading. Making it a priority, do homework, making school a priority, and that's just, don't just come up here when you're ready to jump on the teacher. But come when we ask for you to come. Come and talk about your child's grade, come and get involved with the projects and everything, and when we're having a field trip—pay for the field trip, pay for books instead of sending your money when it's time to have a Christmas Party only. So there's some parents that I don't see until Christmas and Valentine's because they want to be a part of the parties. And, I had to come up with a rule that unless you've been up here two or three times then you can't participate. I know that seems really ugly, but I'm trying to get them to know that education comes before partying and anything else, so that's one thing, I think the teachers wish the parents would get more involved with the important things and less involved with the frivolous.

To Dr. Owens, either through the beliefs of her teachers or her own perspective, some parents are lacking in good parenting practices. The parents are seen as needing to be involved with the school in the capacity of supporting learning as opposed to appearing only to attend class and school parties. She also felt dismayed at the low turnout for a "parent workshop" last year; the workshop was to provide parents with assistance in revising their resumes and preparing job applications.

Some parents are also viewed as a concern for the school in the lack of involvement they have in either the school itself or their children's education. Dr. Gill spoke of starting a parent night on Thursdays so that parents could come learn about what their children were doing at school:

We have parent seminars that are coming up on Thursdays. We used to do one subject at a time, like a math night, science night, social studies. But, very very very very few people come, so we combined them all into one night.

Ms. Whitt believed that the geographical distance can impact parental involvement. She also described how the absence of trust can impact the degree to which parents engage with the school. A segment from the transcript during this discussion is provided below:

*Ms. Whitt:* But then we have some parents who just never, they never felt welcome at school. You know school wasn't easy for them, or they had some situation where this was never a good place for them. So sometimes I think it's a little harder to get those folks to come in the doors and be welcomed into what we have to offer.

*Parrish:* Will you describe those parents?

*Ms. Whitt:* Often they're not, typically not graduates of the school. Did not attend here, the people who moved into that area at some point they, don't have a formal education, typically themselves. And, so they're a little, they're just a little distrustful of kind of what we do. And, sometimes they're the parents we want to pull in the most.

She attributes the lack of involvement of parents to their distrust of the school, possibly stemming from being an outsider either to the Bakerton community or to education itself. Dr. Banks also commented on the impact education level can have on how comfortable parents feel interacting with the school. He said, "We have some parents that come in here that didn't go to college, didn't go to high school, that can be intimidated when coming into this setting, for meeting with teachers and administrators, and that sort of thing."

Thus, parent attitudes have also presented a challenge to some administrators. Mr. Hancock and Dr. Owens also described the distrust felt from parents initially. According to Dr. Owens, parents opposed her initially:

When I initially got here parents were a little reluctant because I established rules and they weren't used to rules. So a few of them were trying to get rid of me at the beginning. And once they saw how those rules benefitted their children they backed off and started thanking me.

Mr. Hancock similarly has experienced distrust from parents whose children were rezoned to his school after a school closing. He recounted,

With them closing Midtown I already gained another 75 or 80 students. Took a long time and I don't know that we're there yet on trust with those people. They didn't trust the

school where they were at. They didn't trust the board of education. And now I don't know that they trust us fully.

He felt that he is still in the process of building trust with the relocated parents at Hudsonville Elementary.

Parental attitudes regarding students at the school can also be a concern of the principals. Ms. Whitt has found parents can be condescending toward certain groups of students. She told of an instance in which a parent requested that her child not be in the same class as "those kids;" Whitt explained,

We have some parents who, who are great parents but there is somewhat a sense of entitlement because they choose to send their kids here and they view with disdain some of my children who are from less advantaged background. And, sometimes I have to contain myself when a parent tries to criticize "those children."

Following the interview, in a casual discussion, Ms. Whitt provided an example of a parent referring to students as "those children;" the parent had requested her child be added to an honors class despite not having the test scores to qualify. The parent argued that she did not want her child with "those kids." Ms. Whitt said she retorted, "Those kids are my kids."

Parents are an undeniable component of the school community. However, their roles and associations with the schools are complex. Parents can be a source of support or a source of contention. As evident in the data provided previously, there are various ways in which parents can be read by the principals such as parents as negligent, distrustful, a problem, a resource, and/or an ally.

### **Discussion of Partnerships Data**

In discussing partnerships with the participants of this study, I intentionally did not define "partnership" during the interviews in order to allow them to answer based on their own understandings and experiences of school-community partnerships. Principals provided a variety

of examples of with whom to partner and reasons why partnerships can be beneficial. I also prompted each one to describe what an ideal partnership would look like. In the following section, I will describe their responses and discussions surrounding educational partnerships.

### **Partnerships: With Whom?**

All of the principals discussed some level of involvement with parents in their schools, but typically with regards to PTOs or booster clubs when referring to partnerships. They also described business partnerships, varying in level of involvement and means for initiating such partnerships. Local organizations, such as churches or sororities, often partnered with the school directly through the principals or through a connection with a teacher or parent. In each case, these partnerships were bound to their geographic location and community context.

**Parent teacher organizations (PTOs).** All but two schools have parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) in place. While the Hudsonville middle and high schools did not have PTOs, they did have parental involvement or athletic and band booster clubs. The principals with PTOs typically expressed their appreciation for the work of the PTO boards and members. For example, Mr. Hancock described the partnership between the school and the elementary PTO with the following praise:

Well, now we have an excellent partnership with our PTO. They really work hard in our school. They provide financial resources. They provide support in the classroom. They treat our teachers real nice. They take lunch plans for them during comeback day next week. That's a loosely organized group of parents that get a lot done. They get a lot more done than their organization really indicates that they should. We've got a good core group of parents that work hard.

However, after attending a PTO meeting at the school, he commented on the board making decisions separate from the remainder of parent members. My field notes recount, "Spoke with principal informally afterward. He pointed out that there was no discussion among the parents, and that input should be solicited. Also noted the emphasis on sports instead of PTO." The

meeting had started 30 minutes late, lasted less than 5 minutes, and consisted of the president reading announcements regarding decisions the board had made: a Valentine's Dance with a disc jockey was to be held as a family-friendly event, trophies were bought for the upcoming beauty pageant using PTO funds, and four hand dryers were bought for restrooms to help the school reduce the use of paper products. After the PTO president's brief presentation, the toybowl football association meeting began, lasting nearly an hour and including discussion about topics such as uniform costs, registration deadlines, a partnership with Subway, planning other fundraisers, and the need for parents to speak only positively about the coaches in front of their children. There was also a lengthy but lighthearted plea reminding parents not to get kicked out of football games for arguing with the referees, as the toybowl association is fined each time. From observation, the activity level of the parents was much greater in the toybowl association than with the PTO.

The other two rural schools did not have PTOs. Mr. Norris, principal of the middle school, discussed the shift in parental involvement that he feels should occur between elementary and middle school:

The parent teacher organization at the elementary school is fairly good right now. I've seen good years and bad years. And there's that perception out there that we don't want parents in the middle school, and I really don't understand that exactly. There's a difference. There is definitely a difference. And the difference is that we try to move them out of this, parents walking them down the hallway to the classroom on the first day kind of thing, to [phone ringing] to cutting those strings and turning them loose. Not that we don't want them involved in their education. They just don't need to be smothered like some parents would do if we allowed them. So the perception out there is we don't want them in the school which is not correct. I mean we love having parents up here, and we need them, we gotta have, we gotta have their support. And, uh, what's different about it is that once they understand that they're usually good to go with it, even though they feel like initially when they first come here in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, when they had 5<sup>th</sup> grade here and now 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they have this idea that the community is talked about that we don't want them up here. Once they get to know us and what we're trying to accomplish, and they're fine with it, it seems like.

Although Mr. Norris valued the support of parents, later describing the role parents were playing in improving the school facilities, he also saw middle school as a time for parents to begin to offer autonomy to their children.

With the absence of a PTO, Mr. Moore described the benefit of the booster clubs at the high school:

The booster clubs really help us. Our sports program, they have been in a bind before, and money [is] getting tight, and a lot of our sports programs are in the hole. And, we kinda do some things to change the way we spent money and what we spent it on and all. And the booster clubs stepped up and in the place of where like football was paying for a lot of things—booster club—they stepped up and they paid for it. And then, that took a lot of pressure off the baseball coach and the basketball coach who were paying for other things. And girls' sports—we've got a real good girls' booster club that, we're going to meet tonight of matter of fact, and they have got seven or eight thousand dollars in their account and they're going to split it up between all of the girls' sports.

The absence of a PTO did not mean parents were uninvolved with the school in an organized fashion. However, Mr. Moore also pointed out that parental involvement was only at about 3-4% of the parent population: “It’s a small portion of parents who actually help. You know? It’s probably three or four percent of them. It’s not many.”

Within the suburban schools, the parent teacher organizations maintained a critical role, even though in some cases the boards consisted of only a few members. Principals made comments such as “The PTO is unbelievable” (Dr. Hubbard); “our biggest community support comes from our parent-teacher organization” (Dr. Prado); “They do a great job of, to me our PTO is, [it] kind of ties it together” (Ms. Whitt). Dr. Banks mentioned the PTO in generally discussing those who support the school.

Parents at Dr. Hubbard’s school were not always able to volunteer during the work day; however, Dr. Hubbard found that the PTO requests to parents for support yielded prolific responses. She said,

If you said, how many times did you come to the school and do something for the teachers? Then it might be, it wouldn't be most. It would be some or few. The PTO board has about 10 people on it. But anytime that they plan an activity, thank goodness for technology, with email and blogs, they send out the word, we get a quick response and more than we wanted. So, sometimes I think on that question I'm analyzing when I have done surveys and you wanted the physical presence of the parents, they might not be here. So many parents work. For example, once a month we do teacher luncheons. We have more food than we know what to do with. Because, the parent can bring that by, leave it, and go on to work. Can the parent come here and volunteer all day long? No. So, as times have changed with working parents I look at the support with the question, "When I have a need, was it met?" And the answer is "yes."

At the urban schools, there was very little information provided from the principals about the PTO. Dr. Gill explained, "We are desperately working on trying to improve our PTO. I have a parent that I pretty much recruited to be the president, and she has agreed to that . . . So, we're trying to get started." Since the president was new and "apprehensive" about the role, Dr. Gill preferred that instead of asking her PTO president to participate in the study that I contact their teacher liaison. At Lakeside Elementary, Dr. Owens views the PTO as a major asset: "Our PTO is really really an asset because they work hard in trying to help us get what our children need. And they'll go out into the community and help." She also mentioned that the PTO president visits the school frequently: "She comes by two or three days a week," but she provided no concrete information or examples of the work of their PTO.

**Parents (and other individuals) as partners.** Both in conjunction with the PTO and separately, parents were sometimes viewed as partners. For instance, Mr. Hancock recounted that "the parents, teachers, and students at the elementary school really work together and we have a lot of parental support." Mr. Norris also found that parents with small businesses were promising partners for the school:

Most of them are parents with businesses that have regularly helped us as their children go through. The unfortunate thing is that they're only here 2, 3, or 4 years and gone it seems like; so we don't get to know them as well as we'd like. But, you know even in the

short time a lot of times we're able to draw on their resources that they're willing to share. And even if not monetarily then they help us by just, they're workers already.

Mr. Norris found these parents to be beneficial and lamented the brevity of their partnerships with the school.

And while Ms. Whitt reported that the parents at Bakerton High School are helpful—"I'm very fortunate to have supportive parents"—she also echoed Mr. Norris' sentiment that parents can play an important role in providing partnerships for the school:

Sometimes it's parents who either own businesses in the area or who know friends who own businesses in the area, they'll go and approach them and say, "Hey can you help them with the school." And then we're not just talking about monetary support either. A lot of times it's just, "Hey can you, do you have any jobs open for any of our students?"

Parents help provide and/or initiate partnerships through their own resources or acquaintances with others. Dr. Banks illustrated the value of parent partnerships: "We have parents that own their own companies, we've got to put an irrigation system in our football practice field so we've had a lot of that stuff donated."

Similarly, other individuals were described as assets to the schools. Dr. Banks mentioned a neighbor who, since funding for lawn care was cut, maintains the school's practice field as an example of how the school receives support from the community. Dr. Hubbard referred to her liaison with the medical school as an example of an asset for the school, telling how he had built picnic benches on his own to meet a need the school had. Dr. Prado quickly attributed support to alumni from the system, including the current county commissioner who, according to Dr. Prado, "If he can't do it, he finds someone who can."

**Business partnerships.** Partnerships with businesses took a forefront role in the principals' discussions of partnerships. Principals listed globally and nationally renowned businesses and chains as partners or potential partners. However, they more often described

partnerships with local businesses and franchises. While many of these partnerships were informal or initiated by the principal or a parental connection, some partnerships were formal and assigned through the local Chamber of Commerce.

Table 3 organizes the partnerships described the principals and secondary participants based on type and geographical region. While the lists may not be exhaustive, it is interesting to notice which partnerships came to mind to the participants in the study based on their geographical context and thus access. Most notably, there are a higher number of business partnerships supporting the urban schools; the rural schools have the least amount of business support.

Table 3

*Partnerships with Schools by Region*

Partner Types	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Business Partners	Champion Sports Pepsi Power company Subway	Auto manufacturer Banks Dentist Fitness gym Gas stations Geotechnical engineering firm Hospital Medical school Restaurants Taekwondo Winn Dixie	Academy Sports Banks Barber shop Coca-Cola Flower shop Medical school Museum of Flight Power company Restaurants Sam's Club Target Wal-Mart Winn Dixie

Table 3 (con't)

Partner Types	Rural	Suburban	Urban
Organizations	After school program Churches Community college FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) Fire department School athletic teams School clubs Parent Project PTO Wildlife Conservation	Activities center After school clubs Churches Community college Eagle Scouts Local library PTO Women Engineers University	Churches Department of Youth Services Neighborhood association Police department PTO Sororities Universities
Individuals	Parents	Alumni County Commissioner Neighbor who cuts grass for school Parents	Neighborhood association president Parents

Corporate businesses played a role in supporting the schools in this study. According to Mr. Moore, Pepsi sponsored the scoreboard and a 30-second clock for the high school football field; Champion Sports also sends an athletic trainer to all of the sporting events. For Lakeside Elementary, Dr. Owens told of how the downturn in the economy has affected their business partnerships, but some partnerships still remain: “Coca-Cola still partners with us. Wal-Mart partners, Target may do some things—they may just do a \$25 gift card, but it’s still more than nothing. Academy Sports donates uniforms.” Dr. Gill also listed Wal-Mart as a partner as well as Sam’s Club and Regions bank. Ms. Whitt explained,

We have a very informal but beneficial relationship with several of the restaurants around here, [and] the banks that are in this area. Publix assists us, Winn Dixie. It’s just, everybody helps out where they can, but we just don’t have a plethora of businesses in this area to do things.

As Ms. Whitt described, proximity affected access to corporate partnerships for the suburban schools; the limited number of corporate sponsors for the rural schools indicates that potentially

a similar scenario exists. And Mr. Norris expressed a similar sentiment, “There’s not a lot of big corporations here.”

Local businesses were a primary asset to the schools in terms of partnerships. Dr. Owens initiated a unique partnership with a local barber simply by walking from business to business to try and garner support for the school. Each year, the barber comes to the school and transforms a classroom into a barbershop, bringing chairs, mirrors, and all needed equipment. The boys wait in anticipation for the chance to sit in the chair and receive a free haircut. She explained,

When the barber comes out he transforms the classroom into the barber shop. Chairs and all, he brings his chairs mirror, radio and it’s like you’re actually at the barber shop. And a little boy asked me, “Are we having barber shop today?” and I said yes and he went “YES!” ...if you ever look at them they’re sitting there so proud, and then the barber will talk to them and they’ll bring in a speaker. So while they’re waiting for their turn there’s a gentleman talking about making good decisions and being a man, you know, character traits, and it was really really wonderful. And we got something from that. He mentored our boys.

The barbershop partnership illustrates a context-specific means of mentoring students and meeting a possible need through a local business.

The rural schools tended to draw on local businesses that were owned or associated with parents at the schools. A career fair at the elementary school was one way in which parents could volunteer. Both the middle school and high school principal talked about partnering with the local power company. At the middle school level, Mr. Norris was interested in having employees representing a future career with the power company come talk to his students. Mr. Moore, on the other hand, recalled a time workers at the power company bought chicken dinners his school was selling as a fundraiser.

Ms. Whitt similarly gave examples of partnering with nearby businesses. She explained that

We've had some really great support from the smaller businesses that have been here for a long time. Just kind of unquestioned, you need something and just call me and we'll take care of it. And we have formed some relationships with some of the bigger businesses that are here that are the same way.

However, she also had an instance when a local business which "caters to [her] students" used a social media page to accuse one of her students of stealing property from his facility. She verified that it was not one of her students (based on his description of the student's uniform) but he delayed removing the accusatory public posting. He only deleted the post when she replied in the public forum that it was not one of her students. She mused, "I won't go around and disparage his business, but I certainly won't be encouraging my kids to go there." And although in all other cases the examples of school-business relationships were positive, Mr. Hancock expressed the principals' sentiment about local businesses well when he said, "We try to support them as much as we can and they try to support us as much as they can." Because, as Ms. Whitt poignantly stated, "I have 1,300 of his customers."

**Organizations.** Organizations were also beneficial partners for many of the schools. For example, Mr. Hancock initiated a partnership with the local Fish and Wildlife Conservation through a casual conversation with one of their staff members; both the local school board and the Conservation share a building. Conservation representatives now visit the different classrooms, teaching a curriculum on nature preservation. Mr. Hancock described,

Another partnership I have is with the fish and wildlife folks. They do a great set of programs for our students. With our Kindergarteners we do animals. And they talk about animals that are native to [the region]. With our 2nd graders they do plants and even to the point that we get seedlings for the kids to take home and plant. With our 3rd graders they do vegetables. And again they give every kid a cabbage plant, and they can take it home and plant. And those guys do a wonderful set of lessons with them. As you move on up and get in fishing and hunting, you know, type of thing for the guys and then for the girls they do a little bit more on the flowers and on the vegetables again. We've got a good partnership with those folks down at fish and wildlife.

In the past, when more funding was available, the classes would also visit a local state park to explore and participate in hands-on learning activities.

Churches also played a role in supporting each school. Two of the suburban schools used the auditorium of a local church for large events. Dr. Owens explained that her church as well as several others provide services to the school. For instance, one church provides free tutoring and has a toy drive for the students; two churches host breakfast events for parents and teachers. Dr. Owens described her church's activity:

My church [name omitted] does a breakfast every year. Now, it's about bringing people to Jesus, but they still do it. So they're going to do one in around Valentine's Day called "Spreading the Love of Christ." So they come out and try to make people feel good for that day and give them a free breakfast.

Mr. Hancock noted the presence of the church without elaboration: "We have a lot of churches that are active in our school." One secondary rural participant mentioned that she wished the churches had an even greater level of involvement within their school system.

Sororities and fraternities were also another avenue of organizational support for the urban schools. Both Dr. Owens and Dr. Gill have teachers who are involved with sororities or fraternities; Dr. Owens herself is also a member of a sorority. Dr. Gill, in describing mentorship which happens at Lakeside Middle School, mentioned that teachers have called upon their Greek organizations to assist in different programs. Dr. Owens' sorority is the organization that conducts the supply drive for students with a parent in prison mentioned earlier. She described her sorority as "partner[ing] with the school" to "do whatever is needed."

The school-community partnerships in existence in the schools in this study included relationships with individuals, businesses, and organizations. Parents were the primary individuals seen as potential partners, although more in terms of the capacity to bring about other partnerships. They were also viewed as partners via the PTOs and booster clubs. Businesses

provided several avenues for partnerships. Organizations, varying in mission, were another way in which the school and community could partner. The question remains, however, for what purposes were these partnership initiated or maintained? Or, in other words, who would benefit from such partnerships?

### **Partnerships: To What End?**

When asked about the purposes of partnerships, principals supplied a myriad of responses. Purposes such as supporting the school, academic achievement, improving students' lives and life potential, and benefitting the local community were woven into the principals' broader discussions of school-community partnerships.

**Support.** Although support for the school was often clarified to imply more than just financial support, the principals referred to support (both financially and otherwise) as an essential purpose for school-community partnerships. "Help" often described the partners or benefits of partnerships. For instance, Mr. Hancock said, "We've got a few business people in the community that help us when they can." Mr. Norris stated, "Ideally we all would want that time and financial support from some community business. We have a lot of monetary needs that we can't fund anymore." He also explained that "the greater business community of Hudson County is willing to help out sometimes," and he referred to the local power company as a "big supporter" because of its employees that are willing "to help us out." He later reiterated that "certainly helping the school out financially" was a hoped for outcome.

Dr. Owens described the local universities as "stepping up to the plate." In addition to sending volunteers to Lakeside Elementary, the schools also send student teachers: "They're really beneficial. Especially second semester when we we're getting ready for testing, they help us a lot with tutoring, that's very helpful." In answering the question of what outcomes he hoped

to see from partnerships, Dr. Banks explained, “Depending on the partnership, it can be something as simple as “Hey, we need this done” or “We need this painted.” Or, “Here we are, we need this.” And according to Mr. Norris, partnerships can relieve the financial burden many teachers have felt due to cuts in funding: “Well, on the financial front it certainly helps that teachers don’t have to draw out of their own pockets.”

**Academic achievement.** Academic achievement was only directly mentioned by two principals: Mr. Hancock and Dr. Gill. Academic achievement was the sole purpose for partnerships, according to Mr. Hancock:

Ultimately everything points back to academic achievement for us. If what we’re doing is getting in the way of students learning, we’re going to quit doing it. And if all of that other stuff cannot funnel somehow into supporting the academic program at the school then we’re just wasting our time. That’s our number one goal is student achievement.

Dr. Gill concurred, although she also felt teaching students how to be successful through their social interactions and behavior was also essential:

Well the ultimate goal is always to improve or enhance student achievement. However, I’d like to add to that, because our goal is not just academically—it’s socially and behaviorally. So, if academic, social behavior, and well I guess, the regular behavior, if all of those are improved then, we’re meeting our goal.

And, although not all of the principals used the exact phrase “academic achievement,” student success was a major component of the driving purposes behind school partnerships, exemplified by instances such as the university students visiting Dr. Owens’ school, the football players and cheerleaders from the high school reading as student mentors to the Hudsonville elementary school students, and the after school “community education” and homework program provided for the rural schools.

**Life opportunities.** Education was held to be an opportunity to change the possible life outcomes of students by some, if not all, of the principals. Dr. Banks poignantly stated his belief, “the only true equalizer in life is education,” using his own story as an example:

I think some of our kids are seeing opportunities for them that aren't limited to just staying around here and really doing nothing to improve their lives.... I think they're getting an understanding that there's more out there you just have to take advantage of it. And, I'm definitely evidence of that. People's kids come in here all the time and I tell them, “I was raised by a single mother, my brother's an engineer, lives in Boston and I think I'm doing pretty good for myself. So there's no excuse just to say, ‘Because I'm Black, my mom is single, I'm from a small country town,’” all those are just excuses and I really don't accept that from kids. It's what you make of your life. Sure it's going to be difficult. Nobody said, hands you anything. The only true equalizer in life is education. I can guarantee you won't get a job—I can't guarantee that you're going to get a great job with education but I can guarantee you won't get one if you don't have one. And that's the only equalizer that people have in life is to get an education. That's the only equalizer. So that's what we really really really try to stress to them.

He also provided evidence of how he uses partnerships to try to illustrate the importance and possibility for education:

And the more we can expose our children to college type settings, trade schools for lack of a better phrase, the better it is for, you know we've got a kid that may not necessarily be doing, may be doing something in class, trying to find the relevance of it, and if we can expose them to something and say this is why we learn that, so those from those two standpoints, those two particular partnerships [with the community college and engineering firm] are very important. What I expect is to get kids to see where they can end up. I talk to kids all the time about how I have to pay my air condition guy 200 to 300 dollars and he's there an hour, luckily! You don't always have to go to the [local university] or Harvard to get, but you've got to get a skill. So the more we can expose them to that, because it comes second nature when you see these things and that kind of thing—where people are doing, what they're doing, it doesn't seem so foreign to step out and say I want to go to college. You were the odd man when everybody's doing or when everybody's been exposed to, it becomes just well this is what we do. I guess that's the biggest thing—real life situations and the whole college atmosphere. You know some of our groups, the National Junior Honor Society and those types of things, sometimes we take field trips and part of it is that they each lunch in the [local university cafeteria]. They need to be around those types of things.

Mr. Banks expressed the importance of education as leading to wage-earning potential. He also underscored the value of exposing students to possible opportunities for work and life so that

they might be able to envision an outcome different than “just staying around” and “really doing nothing to improve their lives.” The honor society students were noted as participants in field trips to visit the campus of the nearby university as opposed to the local community college, drawing a distinction between expectations of outcomes for the students. During the interview he also lauded a partnership with a robotics program at the community college as providing a platform for students to see more possibilities for a future.

Mr. Norris was similarly concerned about exposing his students to possible life careers. He explained that one possible value of partnerships is the “the long term impact of parents coming in and talking with the kids and then different people coming in and talking, and then down the road after high school ending up getting a job in that profession.” Partnerships such as the career fair assisted in this goal. However, Mr. Norris wanted to take a step further and show students that they could follow in the footsteps of the students who had come before them. Mr. Norris said that he was considering “developing a hall of fame. For middle school, [we would] hang their picture up and a story about that person and what they’re doing right now, so these kids can know that you can start here and go anywhere in the world.”

Seeing others’ success was also a strategy employed by Dr. Owens. With the student ambassadors at her elementary school—a club consisting of students “who are trying to do right, who are on honor roll, [and] who get involved in extracurricular”—Dr. Owens planned to expose students to the US government during President Obama’s term through a visit to the Capitol. She explained,

It’s a big deal for us because it will be the first time that this school has been in existence that they’ve gone to Washington, D.C. But we’re trying to get them to see how government really works, go to Washington while President Obama is in office because he looks like them, and he’s inspiration for them.

She also invited a local author to speak to the students and is planning for students to tour a college to increase exposure:

We're about to have a writing workshop, and an author's going to come and do a writing workshop with them and give them a signed autographed books that she's written about children with natural hair. So, we're trying to expose them to things that they wouldn't have thought of or ordinarily exposed to. We have a college tour coming up, and we're trying to decide which college we're going to go to.

Ms. Whitt also discussed exposure for career options and life experiences as a desirable outcome of partnerships. The partnerships at her school have also been open to students with special needs. She explained,

With [the hospital] specifically, we've got people who, kids who are exposed to clinical kinds of aspects of medicine and how they would not have had that opportunity before. Just having the ability to send our kids out to get some work, community work experience, in an environment where it's okay if one of our special needs students likes to, I don't know, randomly scream every now and then, they're not going to be paranoid, they're not going to say you can't come here because of that. They're just going to kind of smile and just keep going. . . . we're all trying to make the school, not just Bakerton High School, but the feeder schools, the two middle schools and all the elementary schools, into the best possible experience as we can in this particular area for our kids. So, if that goal gets accomplished then I'm happy.

Improving the educational experiences and exposure for potential careers and life trajectories was an essential aspect of the purposes of partnerships. However, improving the local community was also a common goal.

**Investing in the community.** One avenue for improving the community through partnerships was community service. Dr. Owens described taking her students to sing to the elderly at a nursing home in order to “to encourage them and boost their spirits.” Ms. Whitt has students collect any trash in the areas around the school out of respect for the neighbors: “We can help with that so that the neighbors don't have to see it or pick it up.” Dr. Banks encouraged involvement in recycling and service projects not only to help the community but to help his students grow in self-esteem as well:

We try to teach our kids that they can help some kind of way, no matter what they have, what they bring to the table. We have a recycling program that we're a part of. We have a canned food drive going on right now, we're going to donate the cans to Temporary Emergency Services. We always do Toys for Tots at Christmas. And so, I really want our kids to see that no matter what your background, and what you have you can help someone else. That's definitely the only way these kids are going to learn. And they do a very very good job of being a part of that. And I think that gives them a little extra self-worth.

From a slightly different perspective, Dr. Hubbard similarly wanted to teach her students that they could contribute back to society themselves. She explained that by exposing students to the medical school, students would see the medical school investing in them and thus would hopefully become investors in the education of the next generation:

The outcome would be that my students learn from the model of helping a school. Because someday these students will be adults and leaders in their community, and will they give back to the school? That's what I'm hoping. And I think they will.

With the expectation that the magnet school students would be "leaders in their community," Dr. Hubbard saw it as important for partnerships to "model" investing in schools.

Partnerships can also be a means for building a spirit of community. Dr. Prado found the sense of connection beneficial, stating,

Anytime you can have a good working relationship with a community organization, like churches, other schools, neighborhood organizations, it can't be anything but good for the school. We actually feel connected and makes our students and teachers feel connected to the community. And I think parents enjoy that close relationship as well.

Dr. Owens desired to build a sense of connection with the host community: "I'm hoping to achieve a, I guess you could say a sense of we're in this together, and that the school is not the sole one responsible for the raising of these children." Dr. Owens saw the community as sharing in the responsibility for the wellbeing of the students.

Dr. Owens also explored this possibility from the perspective of possible outcomes in the absence of partnerships. She argued,

We're just trying to get them to help us help these children so they won't be robbing us when they're grown, or they won't be having children too soon, just to encourage them so we can make better citizens right here in this community.

Her concern is rooted in the circumstances surrounding the children and school in her community, as well as her expectations and visible trends regarding the life outcomes of some students from her region.

In one respect, from the principals' perspectives, partnerships that somehow improved the life trajectory and earning power of students were seen as a means for improving the local community. Thus, student academic success and exposure to college and possible jobs may ultimately be goals for building a better society. Moreover, community service can be a means of building students' self-worth while making a contribution to the surrounding community. However, on the other hand, negligence from the community in partnering with the school can be perceived as a reason as to why some students face a bleak future.

### **Ideal Partnerships**

When asked what their ideal partnerships would be, many of the principals echoed themes that surfaced in their descriptions of current partnerships. Funding and support was an issue. Partnering with larger corporations was also a concern. Dr. Prado summarized those two points well when he said, "Well, I try not to think about what a partnership with Apple or Microsoft would be like, because schools always need money and always things they don't have." Improving opportunities for students was foundational as was building a strong sense of connection, responsibility, and community. But, two new concerns arose in the principals' musings of possibilities without limits: a common governing committee for partnerships and community support and a program to improve the surveillance and accountability of students.

Ms. Whitt, in thinking of what an ideal partnership would be, expressed a desire for a group of leaders to work proactively and collectively toward meeting student needs. She stated,

What ideally I would like to see is, I would like to see perhaps, where we could have community leaders meet on a regular basis to talk about the needs of the school, and then the school talk about ways we could help them, whatever the needs of the community are, in terms of service learning for our kids.

Ms. Whitt expressed her perception that her community was disconnected. Such a leadership team could serve as a unifying element.

Dr. Gill described her ideal partnership as one with a reciprocal relationship. She went on to describe a partnership she would like to initiate with the local police; it would also promote mutually beneficial outcomes as it would improve the police image in the area while monitoring student behavior in the community.

I want members from the police team to come in, we have 12 sections of homeroom. And they can come and spend like 15 to 30 minutes talking, trying to move back to the more of “protect and serve.” And knowing your police officer who works in the community. And when they’re in the schools they also get to know the students, so if they see some somebody in the community if you could call students by name, that puts a stop to a whole lot of different things. So it’s them coming in without anybody being in trouble—just talk to them about different things or concerns that they know that’s going out. The right way to handle different types of situations. And basically just get a relationship between the students and the policeman.

However, Dr. Gill may have conjured up such a partnership due to the context of her school. She lamented her students’ misconduct outside of school:

Our kids, they may, they don’t do what they do in the community what they do inside of the school. Meaning, they, outside of the school they are in trouble with the law. We have a lot of kids, I have to speak to the policemen about robberies, car theft, break ins, those are the two highest ones that we get.

Her ideal partnership responded to what she perceived as pressing needs within the context of her school’s community.

## **Conclusion**

The principals within this study viewed their local communities and partnerships with respect to the context and conditions of their local host communities. This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the data collected for the study, disaggregated into community contexts, the conceptualizations and understanding of community by the principals, and the presence of partnerships in the schools. In the following chapter, I offer my interpretation of the data as well as the possible implications of my findings within the field of education.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

As previously argued, although community is an “imagined” concept, today’s schools and district lines reveal a real and troubling division (Anyon, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Paperson, 2010). Principals made meaning of their local communities through the materiality of their surrounding contexts imbued with discursively produced meaning. In the preceding chapters, I presented differing theories regarding community and considered particular ways in which community and partnerships are discussed within academic literature. I also provided community and participant profiles and a presentation of how principals discussed community and partnerships within this study. In this chapter, I present an interpretation of the data, underscoring the reigning discourses surrounding community and school partnerships and the bearings these narratives have on modern education. I conclude with the possible implications of these data for principal preparation programs.

Understandings of community among the principals in this study are rooted in the material. Yet simultaneously, dominant narratives dictating who is valuable to the community and what community should mean color principals’ understandings in such a way as to restrict how partnerships are framed, desired, initiated, and enacted. These contradictory understandings have a productive power, placing principals in a role as gatekeepers who deliberately or unintentionally encourage the reinscription of value (such as who offers promise or poses threat); such value marks community members and more germane to this study, students, leading to differences in educational opportunities. Moreover, the seemingly innocent idealized notion of

community with its ability to exclude students and function in the capacity of doublespeak (as it is used to designate promise or problem) creates a dangerous and unquestioned façade of community worth. Thus, it is in the discursive formations of community and school-community partnerships that structural inequalities are maintained, creating a precarious and compromising situation for many principals to inhabit—school leaders who genuinely care for students yet fail to resist or challenge their own epistemology of and assumptions about community subscribe to the very discourses which functionally reproduce disadvantage.

### **Dominant Discourses of Community**

Community as a concept was idealized by principals even as it was understood in its material realities. In other words, the prevalent discourse venerating community as an ideal was mediated and disrupted by the communities' contexts, ranging from the local demographic information to specifics such as open fields, school politics, and the absence of security cameras. As an idealized notion, community was cast with a textbook definition of shared location and interests. However, as a working definition of community, principals understood it to be an imaginative space bound by district lines or perceived cultural commonalities. These definitions necessarily excluded members within the schools' host communities as generalizations often erase outliers and individual uniqueness.

### **The Imagined Community**

According to Anderson (1983), community is an imaginary construct varying in perception from individual to individual. Each participant in this study described his/her community as he or she imagined it to be, often including location descriptors. Community membership was spread out among the districts but sometimes included persons or businesses outside the school zones. Moreover, in some cases, a school's community members might feel

ostracized or experience differential treatment within the community, raising the question as to whether or not they would self-identify as a part of the community (recall parents who felt their children were separated by race in the magnet school classrooms). Thus, membership is imagined as much as the actual restricting political boundaries crossed by students attending schools outside of their districts are. Yet, there are tangible consequences to this definition of community; the common narrative that defines community based on political lines, geographical space, or test score entry requirements binds students to a particular school while deflecting others (although, once again, students who cross district lines to attend school illustrate the imaginative quality of community boundaries).

Furthermore, the principals in this study also understood their communities as communities inside communities—as described by Dr. Banks (two communities within one zone) or by Mr. Moore who named multiple areas of the county when describing his student population—further complicating the notion of a geographically defined community. In this way, the geographical community that hosts a school is one in which multiple communities are imaginatively bound together by location and political lines.

Yet, the vast space containing the communities inside the rural and suburban districts left some principals yearning for both a smaller geographical area and a tighter connection among community members. Ms. Whitt offered a romanticized depiction of a smaller community—a Mayberry-like town—in describing the nearby Seaside community and wishing for a similar “close-knit” feel for her own school community. Mr. Moore also found the absence of a geographically smaller and closer-knit group to be a loss and impediment for community building. He illustrated the complication of garnering community support in his community context by commenting that because of the dispersion throughout the vast county, “it’s not like

you can put a sign up on the side of the road and people will come help you” since parents were unlikely to regularly drive past the school. To these participants, the dispersion, or “sprawl” as expressed by Ms. Whitt, fragmented their communities into unconnected and disconnected segments. Cohesion and a more idealized notion of community as a family (Beck, 1999) were evident in this interpretation of community but absent in the lived reality of it.

Although the school is often seen as a unifying factor among the principals, there is an absence of substance for their romanticized notions of community. This absence points to a desire for community to be as Dewey dreamed—one in which individuals are united in common goals and purpose. However, it also underscores the difficulty in achieving such a community given the dispersion of the students and their families and the absence of representation by the majority of members. For example, Mr. Norris believed his community largely consisted of persons with his religious and cultural values. Such an assumption excludes students and families who do not subscribe to the same ideologies. The diversity of beliefs, cultures, and desires reflected by a school’s student body and larger encapsulating community are not likely to be as homogeneous as one might find in Mayberry.

Ms. Whitt attributed this sentiment of a loss of Mayberry not only to the geographical spread within her school’s zone but also to the absence of a supporting municipality, explaining that “the area that we’re located in is suburban and does not have a feel of being a municipality.” Ms. Whitt also lamented the contrast between her school and another suburban school within the district that was “tied” to a nearby municipality, Seaside: “They can go to downtown Seaside and have a parade for their school. That kind of feel . . .” In response to her sense of a lack of cohesion and support from a (missing) municipality, Ms. Whitt proposed the creation of a “foundation” of members to initiate and oversee partnerships and fundraising for its school and

its feeder schools but found her suggestion never made it to fruition. To Ms. Whitt, a political entity would provide more support and avenues for social cohesion within her school's host community. In this way, she attributed value and the ability to govern the district well to outside political forces and leaders as opposed to turning an eye to the local community members and their possible talents and visions for the school.

Thus, both the geographical spread and absence of municipal cohesion and support caused a disruption in how the rural and suburban principals experienced community. Community in this sense is to them too difficult to achieve and/or maintain as school communities are too loosely tied together or simply too large. This imaginative space constructed by principals, however, speaks little to how members assigned to the community identify themselves. Moreover, other mediating factors impacted how these principals understood and interpreted their (imagined) communities.

Another fragmenting factor within the communities directly or indirectly addressed by most of the principals was the demographic makeup of the area. Economic and racial divisions within the imaginative space of community impacted how the community was understood and thus what programs were initiated or desired, again illustrating the materiality and historicity of community. Prevalent discourses affecting how principals understood their communities include narratives of salvation, deficit thinking, and the victimization and criminalization of the urban poor. The theme of historical and political demarcations intertwined with the discursive nature of community provides an avenue for considering how the communities are currently constructed, understood, and approached, especially as historicity was not articulated by the principals. Signifiers in certain communities, marking some as rural and some as urban for instance, reflect the political designations of the postcolonial ghetto described by Paperson (2010) and provide a

platform for discussing the inequitable and problematic consequences of community lines for marginalized communities.

### **The Discourse of Deficit**

Deficit thinking permeated much of the principals' understandings of their schools' local communities and students. Some communities were described as lacking needed resources, such as the rural communities depicted as needing more business partners or uninvolved parents characterized as uneducated or overworked. For example, at the urban middle school, Dr. Gill expressed that parental involvement was affected by "time restraints" parents faced from work; moreover, she justified their absences in rationalizing, "who wants to take time out to deal with something that's negative?" Similarly, students from low income households were generalized as having less parental support at the school, as articulated by Dr. Prado in the suburban elementary school, or less valued support, as illustrated by Dr. Owens when she described parents who would send money for classroom parties but not for books.

### **The Salvation Narrative**

As caregivers acting *in loco parentis* during and sometimes beyond school hours, principals occupy a role as benefactor for students. However, efforts to improve students' life opportunities can embody a paternalistic framework for support or designate only certain students as worthy of such salvation. Taking into consideration the partnerships present within this study collectively reflects an absence of community voice from anyone apart from organizations, businesses, or PTOs headed exclusively by White women. The organizing principle and motivating rationale of many partnerships was to aid students in social mobility as a means to escape the local community. For instance, at Bakerton Middle, college exposure and career possibilities were fundamental to many activities and partnerships, as explained by Dr.

Banks. At Lakeside Elementary, some programs were geared at helping students find their ways out of the impoverished and crime-ridden community hosting the school. But, several of these programs and opportunities were restricted to the student ambassadors. Students not on the honor roll and consequently not ambassadors were excluded from the college campus visits and even the school trip planned for D.C.

### **The Discourse of Poverty**

Urban, poor, and transient students were simultaneously seen as victims and as problems, revealing that poverty is ensconced in a discourse which narrates poverty as criminal and pitiable but solely the result of individuals' decisions (see Paperson, 2010; Wacquant, 2009). The discourse of poverty projects some students as having means and the needed tools to navigate schooling successfully while other students are as projected as lacking economic and familial support (also a component of the discourse of deficit) and likely to be involved in criminal activity outside of school. Students were also distinguished by class through designations as "those" students and by "free or reduced lunch" status.

**The haves and the have nots.** Although Marxist in its original language, "the haves" and the "have nots" were descriptors used by Dr. Banks in discussing the disparate circumstances between lower and higher income students and families within his community. He, along with Ms. Whitt, noted multiple times the economic disadvantage as well as the academic disparity among the parents within their communities. Because some of the parents in the community, according to both principals, did not have a high school education, they perceived parents as distrustful of the schools. For example, Ms. Whitt explained, "We have some parents who just never, they never felt welcome at school . . . school wasn't easy for them . . . so sometimes I think it's a little harder to get those folks to come in the doors." Both of these principals

expressed efforts and interest in trying to get this segment of their community more involved in the schools, to be “welcomed into what we have to offer.” In a comical manner, Dr. Banks pointed out that he often has people from both the haves and the have nots who interject their opinions as to how the school should be run, noting the people in his community not working either do not have jobs due to privilege or due to unemployment. In contrast, while Dr. Owens also saw a greater parent presence among unemployed parents, she did not seem to have a high degree of parental involvement in the school otherwise, perhaps due to the absence of any economically privileged stay-at-home parents. Other designations of economic disadvantage were used by principals as well. Dr. Prado referred to Title I students, project housing, and low income students. Mr. Norris referenced his homeless students, free or reduced lunch children, and transient families. Parents on welfare were discussed by Dr. Owens. Despite the terminology choices, the distinction of community members by class was evident among the principals. Predominantly, it was the lower-income students who were named/labeled, with the exception of Dr. Banks’ use of haves and have nots, which identified the wealthier class in his community as well.

Partnerships were seen by some as a means to provide for low-income students. Ms. Whitt in particular explained how some partnerships directly benefited the students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, as in the case of a student who received free orthodontic surgery by one of the community members. Dr. Prado explained that some afterschool programs were available via scholarship for students whose families could not afford the services otherwise, although he did not specify to what degree these services were actually available and utilized, and whether families were aware of these services.

**Those kids.** The principals were not the only ones in the community to notice the difference in economic circumstances of the families attending the schools. Ms. Whitt told of an instance of a parent insisting that she did not want her children in the class with “those children,” indirectly but unmistakably referring to the lower class children. The principal retorted by saying “those children are my children,” bringing the negotiation to change the child’s class placement to a close. Yet, it is important to note that Ms. Whitt was well aware of who “those children” implied, indicating that the distinction was a part of the school-community discourse.

“Those kids” was also an expression utilized by the rural principals to designate the students who were relocated to their schools due to a school closing. Mr. Hancock spoke of working to earn the trust of the parents of the displaced students. Mr. Norris mentioned directing the nature of faculty members’ discussion regarding the displaced children, asking them not to refer to the students as “those kids.” Yet, both principals still recognized that the displaced students and parents posed a problem to the school in terms of the additional support needed to improve the students’ academic performance to grade level without considering the potential benefits the new students and families might bring to the school and community.

### **Dominant Discourses of Partnerships**

Community is a term in education laden with meaning and possible interpretations both generally and localized. And, both generally and specifically to a certain location, the power of community as a utopian idea can mask the mission of school-community partnerships to create customers, promote a social agenda, and/or “save” the “less desirable.” Moreover, conflicting conceptions of whom and what community should be reflect the complicit nature of principals’ role in partnerships at schools.

Social reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) as a product of discourse was woven into multiple strands of thought among the participants in this study. I specifically discuss the principals' perceptions of the needs of their schools and the differentiated expectations they held for their students. Education for the workforce and as a means of social class reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Willis, 1977) embedded within the narrative of worth and wealth is also considered. Considering the Neoliberal discourse of school-community partnerships, I highlight the reciprocal relationship encouraged by principals with businesses in exchange for support, presenting students as consumers and the school as a medium for advertisement (Boyles, 2005, 2008; Stasko & Norris, 2008). In the remainder of the chapter I discuss these themes more thoroughly and present possible implications for education.

### **The Narrative of Worth and Wealth and the Reproduction of the Division of Labor**

Throughout the discussion of partnerships and especially within the examples of current partnerships and purposes of partnerships, a discourse regarding what it means to be successful influenced a mentality in which the reproduction of labor resounded. Education was cast as the means for moving up the social ladder while simultaneously serving to reproduce current divisions within society.

To begin, for each of the suburban schools, the Chamber of Commerce assigned an Adopt-a-School partner. The high school was partnered with the local hospital, although it also had placements for students with special needs at the nearby community college. The middle school was partnered with the local community college and a geotechnical engineering firm. The magnet school was partnered with the medical school associated with the local university. While the implications of the partnership decisions, with the magnet school tied to the medical school and the middle school connected to the community college, could indicate an expectation about

the future careers of the students, it would be fallacious to presume such since each school is located within only a few miles of its primary partner. However, the discussions of the principals indeed indicated a certain expectation of the life trajectories and career choices of their students.

The middle school principal, Dr. Banks, emphasized his concern that many students were not aware of college and career options. By taking the students on tours of the community college and local university, he hoped to increase the students' likelihood to consider college. Dr. Banks noted, however, that trade-oriented jobs were also respectable career paths and similarly wanted to encourage his students to consider such options as well so that they would not be "limited to just staying around here and really doing nothing to improve their lives." Despite suggesting alternative opportunities, however, the practice in his school was to direct such opportunities based upon presumed life trajectories. Students received differing exposure to programs within his school; National Junior Honor Society students toured the local university campus unlike their classmates delegated to the local community college.

Moreover, opportunities varied by school. In contrast to the expectations expressed regarding the students at Dr. Banks' school, the magnet school principal, Dr. Hubbard, maintained that her students would go on to be the future professionals and leaders in society. She explained that by involving her students with experiences at the medical school and by highlighting the assistance from the medical school to the students, the partnership would provide an example of a philanthropic life for students to follow in the future. Specifically, she hoped her students would appreciate the time and investment of the medical school so that when they become "leaders in their community" they can similarly invest in education.

With regard to the high school, Ms. Whitt recounted that some students were partnered in co-op capacities, while others worked as needed as volunteers for organizations. Students also

were allowed to shadow doctors and nurses at their Adopt-A-School partner. However, some students were placed at the community college—she specifically explained how students with special needs worked in a community service capacity at the local community center and community college. When asked which students participated in partnerships, Ms. Whitt confessed that it was mostly limited to students with their own transportation.

In each of these cases, whether it was due to access or expectations, sorting of the students both between schools and within schools occurred in regard to the partnerships. In this way, partnerships appeared to fulfill a utilitarian function for schooling, sending the students who placed into the magnet school or who were financially able to transport themselves for any after school opportunities to explore careers in medicine and sending the remainder of the students to explore technical careers or begin their post-secondary careers at a community college or technical school.

A similar utilitarian theme was present with the ambassador program at Dr. Owens' elementary school. In a school troubled by limited parental support, crime, and the products of poverty, Dr. Owens invested her energy and extra funds into the ambassador program, which consisted of honor roll students. By choosing only the honor roll students to attend such a significant field trip as the D.C. trip, a message was communicated to students, both at the top and bottom of the hierarchy, about the scope of the possibilities for their lives and more problematically, which students were worth the economic resources and time invested in them.

The discourse of who can be successful in life as well as the narrow definition of success as gainful employment plays into a reproduction of social stratification and division of labor in the communities. The principals, whether knowingly or not, contribute to this reproduction by considering how to help their students be successful without considering at what expense some

students are being offered a different trajectory for life through the partnerships within their schools or broader communities or considering why some students were oriented toward a lower paying or lesser valued job and what could be done to lessen any disparities. In other words, principals contribute to reproduction through assignments and partnership offerings in that they do not appear to carefully consider consequences and costs of differential offerings. As Lipman (2011) contended, “education, for those in power, plays a key role in social reproduction of the labor force and in ideological legitimization of the social order” (p. 116), and such ideological legitimization is evident in the expectations principals had for their students. In this way, partnerships serve as an instrument in social reproduction rather than a disruption of barriers to class mobility under the guise of providing some opportunity for students.

### **The Neoliberal Discourse of School-Community Partnerships**

The infiltration of a Neoliberal ideology regarding schools as businesses and partnerships with businesses and corporations as common sense was evident in the principals’ discussions of school-community partnerships both in what was said and what was left unsaid. First, the unhindered assumption that school-community partnerships automatically include businesses and corporations reflects the power of the market-economy mindset in schools. For instance, in discussing partnerships the rural principals included the few business partnerships they had garnered and bemoaned a lack of business and corporate options. Moreover, some of the principals indicated that their ideal partnerships would entail more or stronger business or corporate sponsorships. Business partnerships appeared axiomatic, viewed as holding the capacity to provide needed resources and mirror future job opportunities for students.

Second, there was a troubling absence of questioning among the principals regarding the driving purposes behind corporate and business partnerships and the subsequent sell-out of

students as consumers. Although the principals explained the possible benefit these partnerships could have for the schools, there was no evidence that thought was given to any potential harm to the students in subjecting them to further doses of advertisement, nor was there any indication that principals were considering the ethical practices and premises behind any of the businesses or corporations. Stasko and Norris challenged this “consumer culture” of schools, arguing that the onslaught of advertisements targeting students within schools increases a “deep attachment to commodities, reinforce[s] the notion that happiness and positive self-image comes from acquisition,” and provides corporations a platform to market their products in an altruistic light (2008, pp. 144-145). Moreover, the political agenda and potential exclusionary ideologies behind partnering companies remained unquestioned (for instance, what members of society are visible in their advertisements and what members remain unrepresented?).

Similarly, the Adopt-A-School partners in the suburban schools were assigned by the local Chamber of Commerce without evidence of critique or questioning from the principals. Although there was an awareness that the schools contained “customers,” as illustrated by Ms. Whitt (recall, “I have 1,300 of his customers”), only a mutually beneficial capacity for business or corporate partnerships was entertained. Again, the subjection of students as prey to companies seeking consumer loyalty among a population of minors was left unexamined. Instead, the exchange of advertisement for support appeared to be an obvious (and if not innocent, a necessary evil) tradeoff with regard to partnerships with businesses and corporations. While casting businesses which partner in an altruistic light, little space for critique and accountability is provided. Moreover, several principals were so desperate for business partnership support that they could have been likely to rationalize any opportunity for support, even at the expense of best interests of their students. Yet, based on the region of the school, some types of business

partnerships were not an option. Furthermore, the businesses which are available in an area are indicative of their target audiences and as demonstrated by Paperson (2010) can be used to reveal modern-day segregation patterns.

### **The Postcolonial Ghetto: The Politics and Historicity of Community Lines**

While Paperson (2010) used a mapping of Starbucks and Wells Fargo Bank machines to illuminate segregation patterns remnant of Colonialism, one participant in this study noted a similar occurrence of her own. Dr. Owens lamented the absence of “healthy food options” in the local community. Moreover, the primary businesses she described in the area, such as hair shops, catered to an African American population, as evidenced by the advertisements on the shop windows. Quick money lending shops which prey on lower income populations were common in the region. Similarly, the business district nearest to Dr. Gill’s school, which also served a largely minority population, was rife with money lending shops and fast food restaurants, although there were more dining options present than for Dr. Owens’ community. Arguably, with respect to the targeted consumers, the locations of these businesses in the Lakeside communities mark the regions as lower-income and predominantly Black areas.

But, historical patterns of segregation and income/racial-profiling business practices do more than just mark certain communities or areas of a given community with a certain flavor or style. As expressed by Dr. Owens, these trends reflect an absence of localized opportunity and choice for healthy eating habits outside of the home and limited access to fresh food within the region. Instead, the community was marked with “lots of unhealthy food, [and] lots of fried foods.” Limited or less healthy food choices illustrates another aspect of Paperson’s (2009) argument of the pathology of a place; what is “done to” to the ghetto and its inhabitants remains an unasked question with material and embodied consequences (p. 17).

Housing proved to be an issue in particular for the urban elementary school community as well, marking the community with a trend of transiency. Dr. Owens lamented the frequent turnover of residents in the many rental homes near the school. Her concern that the rental properties were lowering real estate values illustrated her preconception of the impact of low income circumstances on students and families and an expectation that wealthier residents would bring greater stability to the school and community. In her words, having grown up in the same neighborhood, “I knew the environment wasn’t perfect.” Her perspective of the neighborhood and troubles within the community (such as “drugs, and gangs, and violence”) is couched within the economic depression of the area. However, while her suggestions to improve the community involved upgrading the housing context, her vision for a better community did not entail improving the economic status of the current residents. Instead, she expressed a desire to move in an entirely different stakeholder base. This leaning cast Dr. Owens’ views of the community as not only needing repair but also as irreparable—replacement was seen as the most viable solution which could occur through a political move to gentrify the housing market and business opportunities in the area. The current community, as described by Fanon in explaining the reputation attributed to colonized areas, consisted of members of “evil repute” (1963, p. 39), gang members, drug users, and violent persons. This perception of community also raises the question as to how the students as community members are understood. Are they also perceived beyond repair because of the community from which they hail?

These trends of thought and practice again reflect the postcolonial ghetto described by Paperson (2010) yet also illustrate the political zoning and practices of segregation such as in the case of Birmingham, Alabama earlier reported by Wilson (2009), where the city government built its interstate system along the segregation era color lines, further dividing the Black and

White communities. Paperson's question of what is happening in the ghetto instead of what is happening to those living in the ghetto almost seems irrelevant in light of Dr. Owens' desire to change the face of the community. Yet, it is ousting the current members that would inflict further oppression to an already oppressed community. Moreover, while it seems that she forewent the salvation narrative explained by Fanon (1963) in erasing current members from an ideal community, she did not dismiss a desire for a dominant-culture (or colonizing) metropolitan community. Given that she works within a school in which guarding her children from violence and crime existing within the local community is a real concern and responsibility, navigating the tension between tangible circumstances and consequences with patterns of social reproduction and the postcolonial ghetto becomes untenable. But, Dr. Owens recognized some structural injustices and patterns with housing practices and policies within her community; this disparity between her community and wealthier Lakeside communities reflect a political history of segregation, racism, and inequitable opportunities.

Dr. Gill also viewed her community—one in which the majority of residents and students was Black—as posing a problem to the local school and furthermore creating a space for a lifestyle of crime among her students. Dr. Gill experienced crime within her community even to the extent that her school was once robbed. She expressed a fear that her students were involved in unlawful activity outside of school, despite what their behavior in school might indicate. Her response to this context was to increase police presence and relationships with students so that the surveillance from and familiarity with the local officers would diminish the likelihood of student misconduct outside of school. This desire for surveillance and controlling student behavior resembles Foucault's (1977) consideration of schools as means for perpetrating a disciplining discourse.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault (1977) theorized that in a disciplined society docile bodies are subject to surveillance from a disciplining power that is “visible” yet “unverifiable,” as in Bentham’s *Panopticon* prison design (p. 201). In this way, Foucault provided two avenues to understand schools as disciplining structures—one as an “enclosed institution,” and the other through the norms, hierarchy, sanctions, regulations, and surveillance of “panopticism” as the “discipline-mechanism” of “subtle coercion” (p. 209). In other words, the physical design, space, and practices of schooling impose surveillance and a regulation of students into particular habits and behaviors while dominant narratives of acceptance and success discipline students to self-police.

Interestingly, it was through her desire to police students that Dr. Gill saw an avenue to guard them from prison. Is it the case that her notion of guarding and policing students for the students’ well-being is also a means of subjecting student bodies to a subtle coercion aimed at making them comply with her notions of membership for society? Arguably, resisting/avoiding a life of crime for students is a positive and productive goal. However, in policing bodies already unfairly marked and poised within a structural system guilty of reproducing crime and an unstable lower class (Wacquant, 2009) she is also playing into the metanarrative that these students warrant policing. It is in this way that through the selection of certain well-intentioned partnerships that principals nevertheless reproduce dominant discourses. Reacting to unexamined expectations of students based upon community designations and hoping to help students rise above disadvantaged circumstances, principals create circumstances and environments that inadvertently compromise the well-being of such students. Negotiating the perceived needs of students and the community and the desire to rescue or help students without considering the

political, historical, and contextual depth of the community serves to position principals not as change agents but as (perhaps unwilling but unaware) perpetrators of an unjust school system.

Policing students provides one such example of how principals occupy a role which can subject students to a reinscription of current discourses impacting life trajectory as the principals accept dominant narratives of the criminality of the minority and poor and wage an attack to change such trends by focusing on particular community members as a form of surveillance instead of tackling structural inequalities and widespread injustices. Even the aspect of desired mentorship from the police can be conceptualized as a means to teach students the hierarchy in their world and how to submit to such authority; however, in another sense it is to, in the words of Foucault (1977), “eradicate places of ill-repute” through a partnership designed to discipline and make “useful” or “docile” bodies (p. 212). Students’ bodies are being read as victims to be saved through regulation and protected by surveillance, and simultaneously as potential perpetrators to be punished by law.

Although perhaps pale in comparison, suburban and rural districts experienced economic class-based and sometimes<sup>8</sup> racial segregation within the larger communities. In both rural and suburban schools, trailer parks and government housing on fringe areas of the communities provided concentrated groups of students with similar economic status. Again, historical patterns and trends of marginalization and disparity of access to resources continue to be evident. Moreover, the rural principals repeatedly returned to a desire to partner with businesses for financial support, illustrating an acute and constant disparity of funds experienced at their schools. For example, while the suburban primary PTO could raise enough money from the local

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<sup>8</sup> In some communities, there was an acute absence of racial diversity. This segregation is evident in the racial composition of the urban and rural schools and has a strong political and historical basis.

community to pay the salary of a music teacher, the rural elementary school's PTO, in contrast, was able to buy four hand dryers for the school.

### **Doublespeak: Contradictory Understandings and Uses of Language**

As a concept with little restrictions as to how it is defined, community can be used and understood in contradictory ways. Moreover, as previously argued, the unchallenged nature and purposes of partnerships reflect a quality of duplicity. Recalling Beck's (1999) metaphors for an idealized community in contrast to Young's (1990) warning that even the designation of community ostracizes or excludes those identified as outsiders to the community reflects the ways in which principals' definitions of community were disrupted by the mediating contexts encapsulating the schools. Thus, discussions of the community can take on a form of doublespeak, in which "community" on one hand means a desired state and membership composition and on the other hand implies a hindrance to the priorities and objectives the principals have for their schools.

Dr. Gill provided a poignant illustration of how perceptions of parents as community members can be double-laden with meaning. She talked of parents as an essential asset to the school and expressed a belief that parental involvement is key for students to be well-supported in schools. However, she also explained that garnering parental support has been a challenge and consequently has found it easier just to "deal with the kids." Using doublespeak regarding parents creates conflicting narratives. Instead of causing a hindrance to parental involvement, these conflicting lines of thought can and should become a springboard for discussion.

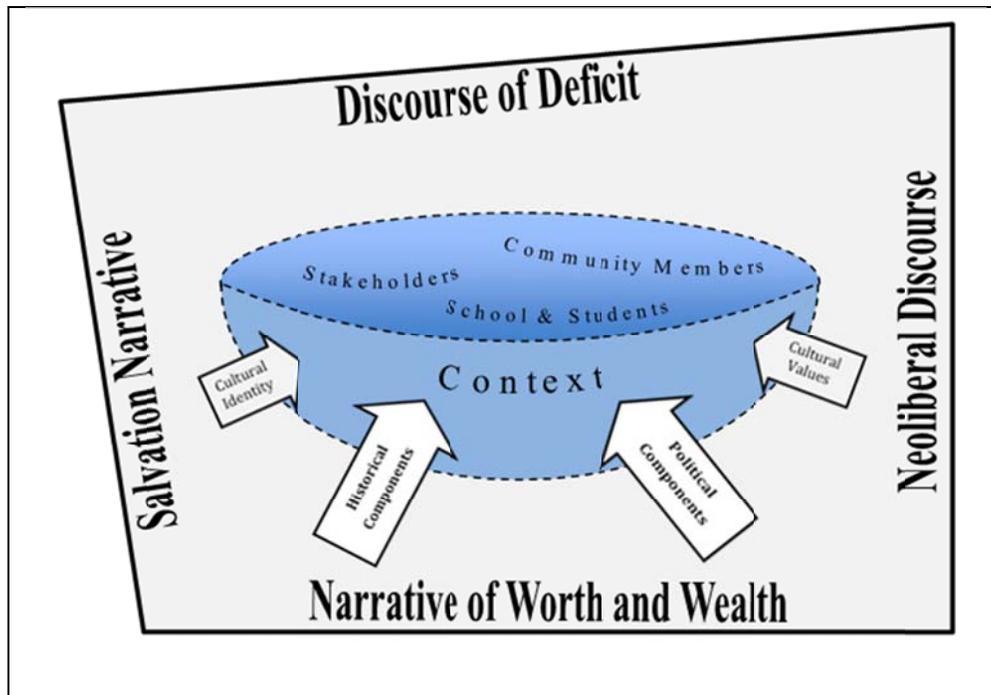
### **School-Community Partnerships: Supporting Structural Inequalities**

From my observations and interactions with both the primary and secondary participants in this study, the principals leading the Hudsonville, Bakerton, and Lakeside schools are

committed to the well-being and academic success of the students. School-community partnerships are seen as an avenue for improving opportunities for students; and in some cases, such partnerships are required by external influences. However, the dominant discourses at play within education with regard to community worth and wealth and partnerships along with material constraints such as budget deficits, AYP goals, crime, and transiency place principals in a compromising situation of utilizing partnerships without considering the ultimate purposes or possible outcomes. Arguably, desire to afford students with the best opportunities available does not absolve principals from acting in a role to confront the hidden but unjust nature of school-community partnerships. Moreover, the duplicity of an idealization of community and the ontological implausibility of community render imposed or outside partnerships simply another tool reproducing societal inequities within and through schooling. Thus, it is this compromising position of power bound in the discursive formation of community which warrants an urgent concentration of the confluence of principal leadership with notions of community and school-community partnerships in principal preparation programs.

Figure 4 is a limited graphic representation of some of the considerations principals should take into account when attempting to understand their schools' communities (the imaginative quality of community renders any one representation limited and incomplete). This illustration displays dominant discourses containing (and restricting) a community. The community has permeable and imaginative borders, represented by dashes. This imaginative community encapsulating the students, the school, and other community members and stakeholders, is shaped by mitigating historical and political components and existing cultures. Moreover, the context is imbued with the richness of diverse cultural values and identities that are often overlooked. Such a figure could be a starting point for discussion among principals in

unpacking the many layers and components which influence their understandings of community and purposes of school-community partnerships.



*Figure 4.* A starting point for discussing understandings of community. This figure represents the multiple aspects at play in making meaning of community, an imaginative concept with real consequences.

In summary, Anderson (1998) critiqued partnerships and shared-leadership strategies as reproducing old agendas and narratives of student/school success. Being involved in partnerships then warrants multiple layers of critique—who benefits, at what expense, and what is the cost or compromise of tying an outside party to the school are just a few of the questions to be asked. Yet, dealing with the tactile, day-to-day needs of the students and concerns of the community complicates the consideration of options for principals. It is thus imperative to understand the underlying beliefs of principals about local communities, as such beliefs inevitably impact the decisions they make regarding with whom to partner and how.

## **Implications for Education**

The implications for education in this study are weighty. Each principal revealed a commitment to their students' well-being and a desire to prepare them for life through education. Moreover, the principals were aware of discrepancies within the communities among the contexts and home lives of students in their schools. But despite a genuine concern for each student and a hesitance to consider any student as uneducable or hopeless, the principals acted in their positions of power to allow, initiate, or encourage partnerships that function in ways that reproduce class stratification and marginalization. In other words, this study shows how partnerships are incorporated, allowed, and/or initiated by principals without necessarily a deeper questioning of what agendas are being met with regard to the students and what underlying discourses may be influencing common thought. Consequently, to some extent it is through unexamined beliefs and the disconnect between idealized notions of community with the exigencies of existing forces that principals expose vulnerable student populations to the harmful effects of partnerships.

Thus, more preparation is needed within principal training programs for exploring differing ways of conceptualizing the local community, particularly with regard to the historical and political contexts of any given space and the dominant narratives of success and life trajectory of students. Principals should be engaged in developing a self-reflective practice to better understand how their own unexamined beliefs and assumptions contribute to reifying discursive limitations that exist. Moreover, how principals can negotiate the needs of the students with authentic partnerships should be addressed philosophically in principal preparation programs to help them develop an awareness of and guard against acting in a role of compromising the well-being of students.

I contend that within all principal preparation programs, in the very least, a foundational and philosophical course should be required which involves school leaders and leaders-to-be in discussion and reflection around the ontology and epistemology of community. Moreover, principals should be challenged to investigate and critique existing companies in partnerships with schools, asking what demographics are represented at the different pay grades and positions with the businesses, what the goals would be in partnering with a school, what driving philosophies and ethics may exist behind the business practices, and what are the possible outcomes in selling a student to advertisements. Furthermore, an avenue for seeking authentic partnerships by spending time in a community with members and listening to their desires and concerns should be fostered within the program via an action research project.<sup>9</sup> Without the platform for the local community to come to the table of school momentum and movement, and without principals critically examining their own beliefs and the practices predominant in their schools, school-community partnerships provide little hope for offering the authentic reform called upon by Anderson (1998) and Schutz (2010) and needed to challenge structural factors yielding repeatedly inequitable educational opportunities and outcomes.

### **Future Research**

This study can be used as a springboard for future research in the dynamic relationship between principals, communities, and partnerships. Using an ethnographic approach, the ways in which a principal understands his or her local community, along with the dominant discourse among teachers, parents, and faculty, could provide a deeper and focused image of how notions of community are constructed. The principals' and other participants' understandings of

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<sup>9</sup> While seeking corporate partnerships (for financial reasons), the principals within this study did not express desire to organize or build community resident or "grass roots" partners as a way to improve both current conditions and future prospects of the community.

community and reports of community involvement could be verified through ongoing observation. Moreover, occupying a space of the constant compromise could be analyzed with more anecdotal evidence, possibly unearthing more explicitly how compromising negotiations are made.

Moving toward considering trends in leadership, this study could also lend itself to developing a survey of how principals understand their local communities and ways in which they partner the school with the local community. As more participants are interviewed, a theory of common understandings of the local community might emerge. Possible correlations may exist through the conceptualizations of community and principals' dispositions toward engaging with the community or even with regard to factors such as location, race, or class. Generalizing a relationship between belief and partnerships, trends may be found regarding a number of factors, such as principals' backgrounds, leadership styles, or specific community descriptors.

### **Conclusion**

Community is an imagined construct and concept within education that can be used to generalize to the detriment and exclusion of certain members or values within society. As a utopian idea it can serve in a capacity of doublespeak, demarcating both promise and problem within a school and larger encapsulating area. Moreover, school-community partnerships today play into dominant narratives of success and promulgate a market-driven focus of schools and a consumer mentality of students. Principals occupy a space in which in many instances they serve as gatekeepers to partnerships, with a final word on whom and how the school and community can partner.

Consequently, it is imperative to understand principals' underlying beliefs about and conceptualizations of the local community, as an omission to recognize the political and

historical context of a community may position the principal in such a way that the decisions he or she makes regarding how and with whom to partner can be detrimental to students. Moreover, principals need to develop a clearer awareness of their understandings of community and potential partnerships so that the purposes of any partnership reflect the values and desires of the school's community and resist patronizing, segregating, or oppressive patterns.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**IRB APPROVAL**

July 12, 2012

Office for Research  
Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**ALABAMA**  
R E S E A R C H

Tasha Parrish  
Department of ELPTS  
College of Education  
Box 870302

Re: IRB # 12-OR-247: "Engaging Exclusionary Lines of Community:  
Principals' Understandings, from Theory to Practice"

Dear Ms. Parrish,

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

*(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.*

Your application will expire on July 11, 2013. If the study continues beyond that date, you must complete the IRB Renewal Application. If you modify the application, please complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, please complete the Request for Study Closure (Investigator) form.

**Please use reproductions of the IRB-stamped consent form.**

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this application, please include the assigned IRB application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



Stuart Usdan, Ph.D.  
Chair, Non-Medical Institutional Review Board  
The University of Alabama



358 Rose Administration Building  
Box 870127  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127  
(205) 348-8461  
FAX (205) 348-7189  
TOLL FREE (877) 820-3066

## AAHRPP DOCUMENT #192

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA  
HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM

## Informed Consent for a Non-Medical Study

**Engaging Exclusionary Lines of Community:  
Principals' Understandings, from Theory to Practice**

*a study conducted by Tasha Parrish,  
a graduate student at The University of Alabama*

**Dear Potential Participant,**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is called "Engaging Exclusionary Lines of Community: Principals' Understandings, from Theory to Practice." The study is being done by Tasha Parrish, who is graduate student at the University of Alabama. Ms. Parrish is being supervised by Professor Nirmala Erevelles who is a professor of Instructional Leadership at the University of Alabama.

**What is this study about? What is the investigator trying to learn?**

This study is being done to find out about how principals think about and engage with the communities surrounding their schools. Principals and active school-community members, such as Parent-Teacher Organization presidents, will be interviewed in this study.

**Why is this study important or useful?**

This knowledge is important because school-community partnerships are often expected to be beneficial to students and desired by administrators. However, no one knows for sure. What I hope to do is find out what principals believe and think about their schools' communities and partnering with the community so that future leadership programs can better prepare principals for such a role and future partnerships can be designed in ways that help all of the community. In other words, the results of this study will help principals to better understand ways to help students. The results will also help principal leadership program instructors understand better ways to help prepare principals.

**Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

I am interested in learning about how schools engage with their communities. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are considered a key stakeholder in your school and/or community.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA RB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 7/12/2012  
EXPIRATION DATE: 7/11/2013

**How many people will be in this study?**

There are 18 participants needed for this study, 9 who are principals and 9 who are Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) presidents. Participants will be selected from a total of 9 middle and high schools in Alabama.

**What will I be asked to do in this study?**

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one or two interviews. If you are a PTO president, you will only be needed for one interview. Principals are needed to participate in two interviews. In order for the principal investigator to accurately capture your thoughts and opinions as you express them, the interviews will be audiotaped using a digital voice recorder. To participate in this study, it is necessary for the interviews to be audiotaped.

**How much time will I spend being this study?**

Each interview should take about 30 to 45 minutes. For PTO presidents, no more than 45 minutes will be needed for participation. For principals, who will participate in two interviews, no more than 90 minutes for both interviews total will be required. PTO presidents should be interviewed prior to December 2012. The first interview for principals should be conducted before the 2012-2013 school year. If possible, both interviews will be conducted prior to the start of school; however, based on scheduling, one interview may need to take place in the fall.

**Will being in this study cost me anything?**

The only cost to you from this study is your time.

**Will I be compensated for being in this study?**

You will not be compensated for being in this study.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

Little or no risk is foreseen for this study. Privacy and confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms, deleting any identifying information about you, your school, or your community from the report, and destroying the data collected at the completion of the project.

**What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?**

Although you will not benefit personally from being in the study, you may feel good about knowing that you have helped other principals in learning how to choose and implement successful school-community partnerships.

**What are the benefits to science or society?**

The results of this study may help inform principals about the local community for their students. In addition, this study may be generalizable beyond the schools and communities represented to the study for other school leaders interested in improving the school by investing in its local community.

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 EXPIRATION DATE: 7/11/2013

**How will my privacy be protected?**

Privacy will be maintained by conducting the interviews in a private room or site of your own choosing. Interviews will be about your local school community and existing partnerships. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Confidentiality will be maintained.

**How will my confidentiality be protected?**

In order to maintain confidentiality, signed consent forms will be kept separate from all data that is collected, pseudonyms will be used in all places, even within the transcripts, collected data will be kept in a locked drawer, and no one will have access to the data except the principal investigator. Moreover, all raw data and identifiers will be destroyed after data has been entered, including audiotaped recordings.

**What are the alternatives to being in this study? Do I have other choices?**

The alternative to being in this study is not to participate.

**What are my rights as a participant in this study?**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. It is your free choice. You can refuse to be in it at all. If you start the study, you can stop at any time. There will be no effect on your relations with the University of Alabama.

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board ("the IRB") is the committee that protects the rights of people in research studies. The IRB may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.

**Who do I call if I have questions or problems?**

If you have questions about the study right now, please ask them. If you have questions about the study later on, please call the investigator, Tasha Parrish at 205-275-2981 or her faculty advisor, Dr. Nirmla Erevelles at 205-348-1179. [

If you have questions, complaints, or concerns about your rights as a person in a research study, call Ms. Tanta Myles, the Research Compliance Officer of the University, at 205-348-8461 or toll-free at 1-877-820-3066.

You may also ask questions, make suggestions, or file complaints and concerns through the IRB Outreach website at [http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO\\_Welcome.html](http://osp.ua.edu/site/PRCO_Welcome.html) or email the Research Compliance office at [participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu](mailto:participantoutreach@bama.ua.edu).

After you participate, you are encouraged to complete the survey for research participants that is online at the outreach website or you may ask the investigator for a copy of it and mail it to the University Office for Research Compliance, Box 870127, 358 Rose Administration Building, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0127.

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
 CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 7/12/2012  
 EXPIRATION DATE: 7/11/2013

I have read this consent form. I have had a chance to ask questions. I agree to take part in it.

I will receive a copy of this consent form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Participant Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IRB  
CONSENT FORM APPROVED: 7/12/2012  
EXPIRATION DATE: 7/11/2013

Approval to Proceed with Dissertation Process

██████████ City Schools

Applicant's Name: Tasha Parrish

Date of Submission: 9/26/2012



Prerequisite: Adherence to ██████████ City Schools' Board Policy  
<http://blogs.██████████.nr/policy-manual/section-m-relations-with-other-educational-agencies/research-conducted-by-representatives-of-universities-colleges-and-other-agencies-in-the-██████████-city-schools/>

- 1. IRB Approval
  - Must contain signature (nothing from the internet, etc.)
  - # 12-OR-247
- 2. Methodology/Abstract (explaining study)
  - Survey or other instrument for quantitative study
- 3. Consent letter, memorandum, etc.
  - Consent form, explanation, etc. that clearly states participant does NOT have to participate in study (strictly voluntary)

Approved  
 Denied

Explanation (if needed):

Superintendent or Designee Signature: ██████████ Ed.D, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, ██████████

**FXI**

- 4. Contact Administrator(s) of schools (if applicable)
  - The administrator has the final decision as to whether or not he/she will allow for the study to be conducted at his/her site.

**Additional Comments**



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

October 15, 2012

Ms. Tasha Parrish  
The University of Alabama  
Box 870302  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0302

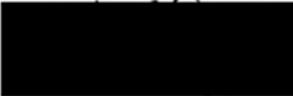
Dear Ms. Parrish:

Your request to conduct a study in the [REDACTED] County School System is granted. Your proposal is clearly written and you have complied with the requirements of our system. You are approved to begin your study.

I have contacted middle and high school principals and made them aware of your needs and asked them to consider your request. Since there are many researchers requesting studies at any given time, we leave the final decision to participate to the building principal.

I wish you continued success with your project.

Sincerely,



Deputy Superintendent, [REDACTED] County Schools

c middle and high school principals

[REDACTED]  
Director of Testing

September 28, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

Tasha Parrish, a doctoral learner at the University of Alabama, is conducting a study entitled, "Engaging Exclusionary Lines of Community: Principals' Understandings, from Theory to Practice". The purpose of this exploratory study is to gather background data in how principals understand their local school communities and school partnerships and subsequently choose to engage in school-community partnerships. During this study, Ms. Parrish will interview principals and volunteers with schools to provide data regarding the context of the schools and their host communities. Ms. Parrish has permission to conduct this study with the principals' approval.

The [REDACTED] City School System approves this study as a means of gathering information for educational purposes. **All information to be gathered will be done in a confidential and appropriate manner. At no time will Ms. Parrish's study be used in a way that would represent a potential risk to her subjects. The names of individuals, school system and all other information that would identify [REDACTED] City Schools will not be revealed in any published or oral form.** Any additional research or study will require further approval of the school system

Please contact the [REDACTED] Board of Education Testing Department at [REDACTED] if there are any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]  
Coordinator of Testing, Research and Accountability

---

**APPENDIX B**  
**PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

The following protocol was used in conducting the interviews with the primary participants.

#### Demographic and Background Information

- Can you tell me about yourself (age, number of years as a principal, school where you currently work)?
- Where did you grow up?
- What prompted your move to become a principal?
- What brought you to this job?
- Where do you live in terms of proximity to the school?
- What do you like/dislike about the job?

#### Regarding Community

- When I say the word “community,” what comes to mind?
- Who makes up your school’s community? Please distinguish between inside and outside the school walls.
- What do you value in this community? Who do you think are assets and why?
- Are there any segments of your school’s community which you find to be problematic or particularly troubling? Please elaborate on who they are and why you are concerned.
- How would you describe the attitude of parents at your school toward the school?
- How would you describe the attitude of teachers at your school of the parents?

#### Partnerships

- What partnerships does your school currently participate in? Please describe in detail.
- How are these partnerships initiated?
- What outcomes do you hope to achieve from the partnerships?

- What impact have you seen from the partnerships?
- Who participates in the partnerships?
- Who all benefits from the partnerships? How would you describe the benefits?
- What would be an ideal school community partnership? Explain why?

**APPENDIX C**  
**PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION PROTOCOL**

The following protocol was used in conducting interviews with members of the school community who can provide a background to the context of the school and its involvement with the local community.

#### Demographic and Background Information

- Can you tell me about yourself (age, relationship to the school, current role within the school)?
- Where did you grow up?
- Where do you live in terms of proximity to the school?
- Why are you involved with this school?

#### Regarding Community Context of School

- Who would you say makes up your school's community? Please distinguish between inside and outside the school walls.
- In what ways would you say this school is engaged with the local community?
- How does the school benefit from the local community?
- How would you describe the attitude of parents at your school toward the school?
- How would you describe the attitude of teachers at your school of the parents?
- How would you describe the principal's role in engaging the school with the community and vice versa?