Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations

Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects

2013

Collaborative communities: The relationship between parental-involvement and school culture

Sabin P. Duncan

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.emich.edu/theses

Part of the Education Commons

COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL-INVOLVEMENT

AND SCHOOL CULTURE

by

Sabin P. Duncan

Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
or the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Committee Members:

David Anderson, Ph.D., Chair

Eboni Zamani-Gallher

Jaclynn Tracy

Malverne Winborne

Blandina Rose

July 2013

Ypsilanti, Michigan

ABSTRACT

During this time when schools are publicly ranked according to their students' achievement on standardized exams, when many of the lower-ranked schools are concentrated in urban, low-income, and high-minority populated communities, and when those same schools receive the least amount of state-funding per-pupil, this study is born from the inspiration to further advocate the development of a school improvement strategy that can have a beneficial impact on a school's culture and a small demand on that school's budget. This study seeks to learn of the relationship between parental involvement and school culture. It evolves from personal inspiration to professional legitimacy by building upon Dr. James Comer's School Development Program (SDP). The SDP, also known as the Comer Process, provides structure and strategies for schools to engage and involve the parents and communities of the families they serve. The Comer Process has proven successful in developing positive school culture and raising student achievement. Plymouth Educational Center (PEC) serves as the setting for this researcher's exploration of the Comer Process.

This study begins with a broad historical overview of public education in Detroit since the 1960s. Then the research lens narrows onto decentralization, charter schools, and eventually PEC. This study seeks to contribute to and extend previous research by exploring advocating that the more parents and communities are involved with and in a school, the more likely it is that that school's culture, consisting of a positive and respectful climate, will have a constructive impact on student achievement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation chairperson, Dr. David Anderson. His patience, guidance, and affirmation helped me to develop and complete this study. Additional gratitude is extended to my dissertation committee: Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher, Dr. Jaclynn Tracy, Dr. Malverne Winborne, and Dr. Blandina Rose, who, in their varied opinions, reflect where I have been and where I wish to go. This study owes a debt to the late Dr. Joseph Pollack, who provided encouragement to a then-novice school administrator and served on my committee during the developmental stages. Also, Dr. James Hawkins, who through his involvement as a grandparent of one of my students provided the encouragement and vision of earning a doctorate. I am also indebted to my Hampton University professors whose multiple hands shaped the educator I have become: the late Dr. Sharon White-Williams, Professor Janice Cawthorn, Dr. Tom Ellis, Dr. Gertrude Henry, Dr. JoAnne Haysbert, Dr. Helen Stiff, Professor Robert Watson, Professor Mark-Anthony Hines, and, most importantly, my mentor and hero, the late Dr. Freddye Davy.

This study has been an exercise of my responsibility of contributing to the uplifting of my race, my culture, and my communities, a responsibility that was instilled and nurtured by my parents, Fred and JoAnne Duncan; modeled by my brother, Damon; supported by my wife and daughters, Ramona, Sanaa, and Seylon; and molded, guided, and launched by Dr. Davy. Without the input of those mentioned, this study would have never come to fruition.

Moreover, this study stands as a testimony of God's grace and blessings because any success I have had has been due to his favor; for that, I am eternally grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"We typically … look at standardized achievement test scores as the main, if not sole, index of educational quality" (Eisner, 1998, p. 181). In this era of assessment, standardized test performance by students is highlighted in media reports and has become a measuring tool of education reform. However,

> Educational reform efforts must focus on student achievement and that these efforts are most effective and long-lasting when carried out by people who are affected by decisions and who feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the decision –making process (McGriff, 1993).

Collaborative Communities is the title of this research and it is inspired by the relationships that engage a school, its families, and its' community.

> In schools where a sense of community can be created, regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds, students, staff, and parents can be engaged in a process of continuous growth and learning … such communities can lead to improved student development and academic achievement … (Comer, 2004, p. 7)

"Test scores are also imperfect at measuring what they are supposed to measure: the quality of schools and the academic performance of students" (Ryan, 2010, p 156). When considering that factors other than standardized assessment should be used to measure a school's quality and considering the investment of people who are affected by school decisions and those invested in a school decision making process, this study seeks to determine whether parental involvement and school culture are phenomena that could reflect a school's quality. These considerations lead to the formulation of the question that guides this research.

Research Question

What is the relationship between parental involvement and school culture? In seeking to answer the research question, this study will build upon previous studies advocating parental involvement. More notably, this study will address the question within the context of a Detroit charter school and the unique circumstances it faces. Within that context, this study will explore data derived from that school as an example of parental involvement and its relationship to that school's culture.

Overview

This study begins with a historical review of Detroit spanning the period from the rebellion/riot of 1967 to the development of charter schools. It features Dr. James Comer's School Development Plan (Comer Process) as a research-based model of a collaborative community. It then uses data from Plymouth Educational Center to determine the relationship between parental involvement and the school culture at Plymouth Educational Center. The research lens begins with broad history of the rebellion/riot and its byproducts and then increasingly narrows its focus on the city's traditional public school system, one of their reform strategies, and the development of charters and eventually zeroes in on Plymouth Educational Center.

Detroit is an interesting location for this type of study in because the decline of the city is mirrored by the decline in its public schools. In just under fifty years, the city has gone from being the runner-up selection for hosting the 1968 Olympics to being featured in a *Time Magazine* cover story with a subtitle of "How a great city fell …" In that same span, its school system has gone from being lauded to ridiculed or in the words of the former mayor, "probably among the worst in the state" (Young, 1994, p.312).

Detroit and its Public Schools

Detroit, Michigan, has undergone dramatic changes since 1967, changes that are reflected in its ethnic composition and its deteriorating tax base.

> As Detroit's population shrank, it also grew poorer and blacker. Increasingly, the city became the home for the dispossessed, those marginalized in the housing market, in greater peril of unemployment, most subject to the vagaries of a troubled economy (Surgue, 2005, p. 149).

The city's public schools have also suffered through the ramifications of those changes, becoming mired in an ironic vortex of losing revenue (students) and the need to increase revenue to operate. "The demographics of the Detroit metropolitan region... was becoming blacker while the surrounding suburbs remained overwhelmingly white; the demographic differences between the city and suburb were even more pronounced in the public schools" (Ryan, 2010, p.91). The loss of revenue could have roots in the distrust held by a percentage of the community the schools serve. This distrust leads to decreased revenue because families act upon their displeasure by enrolling their children in other districts or charter schools.

Community Schools and Decentralization

One of the outcomes of the communal discontent that contributed to the 1967 rebellion/riot evolved into a community pushing for control of their schools as exemplified by the efforts of Reverend Albert "Cleage and his supporters began a simultaneous campaign to radically decentralize the Detroit School system" (Mirel, 1999, p. 313). The community's vociferous push for control of its schools pushed the school district to react.

…In large urban centers, when the formally constituted board of education is

socially and geographically far distant from most of the city's communities, the

notion of community control is frequently vested with connotations of being

"revolutionary" or "suspicious." While it is understandable why political and

bureaucratic leaders whose authority is constrained by community control might

oppose it, one wonders … if it is the nature of the communities in these urban

settings, composed as they are of low income, minority families, that is the source

of the critics' distrust of urban democracy (Hess, 1999, p.223)

Decentralization became the school district's panacea for the rise of community control

efforts. The ills faced by the city and the systematic inefficiencies of the school district

proved to undermine the potential of decentralization. "Decentralization in Detroit has

been a rocky road, cluttered with short-lived pilot projects" was a description provided by

a former DPS Superintendent (McGriff, 1993, p.4).

Charter Schools

During the mid-1990s, the first charter schools opened and "Detroit is one the

cities in which charter schools have emerged as a widely available alternative to centrally

controlled neighborhood schools" (Hess, 1999, p. 223). In Detroit, charters exacerbated

the revenue drain of the city's school district with appeals of hope and better education.

School officials say the loss of thousands of students to charter schools is a big

reason why the district {DPS} is digging out of a $200 million hole that education

experts say represents the nation's most dire urban school financial problem (Pratt

& Walsh-Sarnecki, 2005, p. 6A).

Although *charter school* is a collective term, several charter schools (or some small groupings of them) act as independent school districts. Whether the charter school is one building or an independent district, there has been a range of successes and disappointments with their results. "Charter schools are certainly not all alike. Indeed, chief state school officers have been heard to say that some of their highest performing schools are charters – but so are some of their worst performers" (Carpenter, 2005, p. 1). Yet, despite their uneven performance, "charter schools are becoming larger... the median student enrollment for charter schools has steadily increased over the last few years" (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 19).

> Perhaps a factor in their growth in enrollment was their uniqueness.
> Ethnocentric schools, offering an ethnic-based curriculum, such as Armenian,
> African-American, or Hispanic, constitute 13 percent of all charter schools.
> Specialty schools, serving special populations of students such as youth returning
> from incarceration, dropouts, and mentally –impaired youth, constitute 36 percent
> of all charter schools (Ascher & Wamba, 2001, p. 41).

Another factor in their growth was their independence "Proponents of charter school believe that the increased autonomy given charter schools and the expanded opportunities for parents to select their child's school can result in improved student achievement" (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 1).

Considering that charters were deemed as an "available alternative to centrally controlled neighborhood schools", offered "ethnic-based curriculum", and provided expanded opportunities for parents", it is feasible that they could serve as evolutionary forms of community controlled schools. It is this feasibility that prompts the researcher to

contemplate whether charter schools incorporated parental involvement efforts into establishing their school culture.

The Comer Process

The autonomy that charter schools have to develop curriculum and establish culture prompted an exploration of established programs that were uniquely successful with the demographic served by charters. "Charter school operators often locate in or near central cities, where regular public schools are under fire and parents more likely to seek education alternatives for their youngsters" (Nelson, 2004, p.8). This demographic is comparable to one which served as testing ground for The Comer Process. "The School Development Program (SDP), also known as the Comer Process or the Comer Model, is intended to improve the educational experience of poor minority youth" (Lunenburg, 2011, p.1). The Comer Process or School Development Program (SDP) provides a model for this study's theoretical framework because of its emphasis on parental involvement and its' success in urban areas. "The 'Comer Process' … promotes an integrated approach to education, requiring the collaboration of schools, parents and community institutions" (Comer, 2004, p.viii). The Comer Process employs the major components used in this study: the urban public school, its community (parents included) and how their relationships can work together to create a productive learning environment for students.

Plymouth Educational Center

Plymouth Educational Center (PEC) serves as a laboratory for this research. It is one of Detroit's better-performing charter schools with a reputation for engaging parents.

Theoretical Framework

The following conceptual illustration provides a framework for this study:

Figure 1. Researcher's preliminary concept map.

WHO

Community

School Administration

School Board

Parents

School Staff

Artifacts:	**HOW** **School Culture**	Notes home, bulletin boards, etc.
Values:		Collaboration, Consensus, No Fault
Assumptions:		Administration is responsible

WHAT

Instructional Practices

Assessment

Student Learning
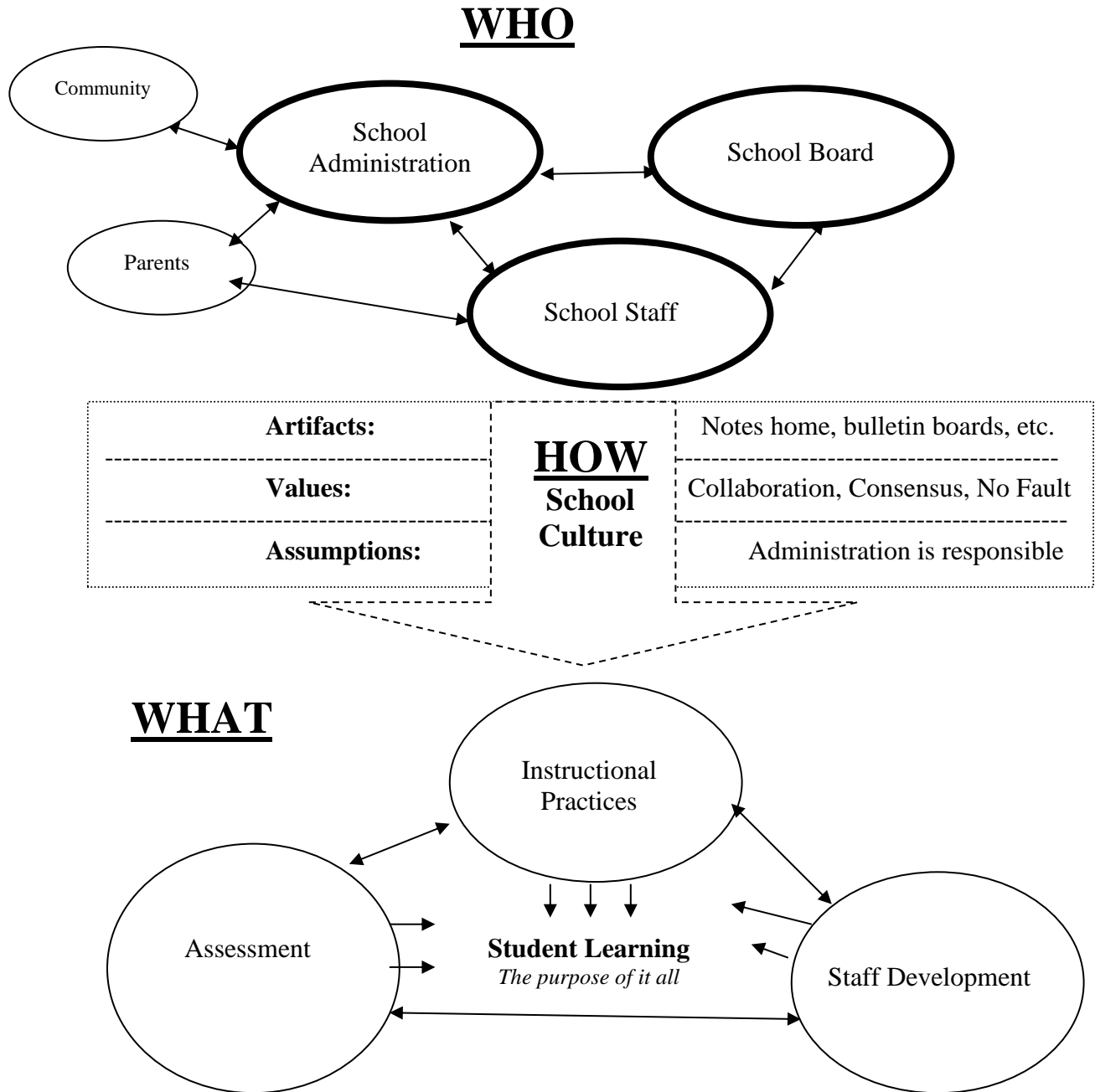*The purpose of it all*

Staff Development

Figure 1. Researcher's preliminary concept map illustrates what this researcher anticipates this study will convey.

The concept map displayed in figure 1 has three sections: *who*, *how* and *what*. *Who* are the characters involved with school operations, parental involvement and community involvement. *How* are the tangible and intangible actions and by-products of those actions undertaken by the *Who* to carry out the purpose of educating children. *What* consists of the mechanisms in place to perform the educating of students.

Table 1. Defining concept map components.

WHO:	• School Administration – the building and district level leaders • School Board – appointees who provide and supervise policy for the school • School Staff – teachers and support staff • Parents – adults whose children are enrolled in the school • Community – tangible organizations (businesses and churches) and intangible influences (neighborhood values and compilations of demographic diversity of student and staff population)
HOW:	• Artifacts – Communications/ notes sent home, bulletin boards and more • Values – things, ideas, concepts whose importance are directly and indirectly promoted through actions, dialogue and mannerisms • Assumptions – ideas and beliefs that are presumed to be true but have not been formally documented or spoken
WHAT:	• Instructional Practices – methods used by staff to deliver curriculum • Assessment – measurement of what students have learned • Staff Development – administrative efforts to invest into and further develop staff • Student Learning – when children can apply information gathered from instruction

Note: Table 1 Defines concept map components. Key components / terminology from preliminary concept map defined.

Definition of Terms

A context for shaping this study requires an understanding of the following listed terms. All the terms have definitions that are more expansive; yet, these concise interpretations provide contextual background.

- *Charter Schools / Public School Academies* are public-funded, tuition-free public schools where students enroll without residential restrictions. These schools operate independently of traditional school districts. Higher education institutions and traditional school districts usually authorize these schools.

- *Collaborative Communities* is a figurative term used by the researcher to in naming the working relationship between the school, its families, and its community. The conceptual essence of collaborative communities is the development of and the products resulting from relationships between the school and its' community. When the communication lines are open to share, and receive information and there is collaborative input from the school, home, and the communities, then the collaborative community concept is in action. It then becomes more evident in the quality of the relationships between parental involvement and school culture

- *Community Involvement* connotes a relationship through which organizations and people, that are not parents or staff, can provide influence and support to a school.

- *Community Schools* is a generalized concept of a community supervising and operating its local schools. On one hand, it promotes the value of community involvement. On the other, it can potentially undermine educational leaders.

- *Decentralization* is an organizational strategy used by traditional school districts that restructures their district and redistributes decision-making from a centralized board to predetermined local school boards. Although decentralization structures vary, figure 2 shows an example of how it could work:

Figure 2. How decentralization works.

School District A prior to decentralization — School Board → Local School 1, Local School 2, Local School 3

Decentralized School District A — School Board → Local School Board 1 → Local School 1, Local School Board 2 → Local School 2, Local School Board 3 → Local School 3
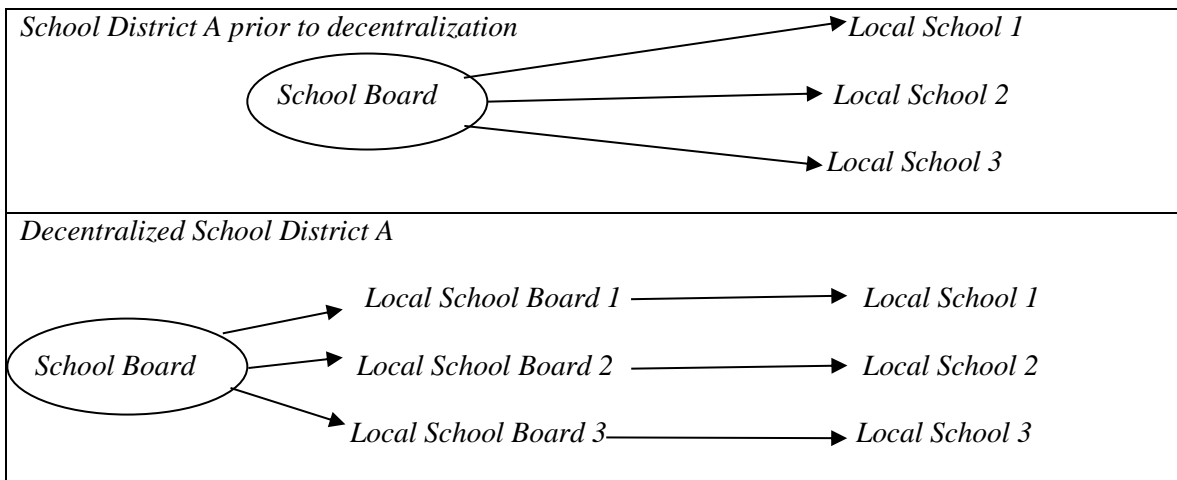
Figure 2. How decentralization works. This figure illustrates the flow of leadership in a school district before and after implementation of decentralization.

- *MEAP* stands for Michigan Educational Assessment Program. This is the standardized assessment instrument for students in Michigan.

- *No Child Left Behind* is a multi-faceted, multi-functional federal law that increases the accountability of student achievement among other things.

- *Parental Involvement* is the cooperation of the parents and families of students with their child's school. Parental involvement has a variety of manifestations.

- *Quality Schools* is a generic term used in this study to classify schools whose students perform-well or demonstrate consistent improvement on standardized exams, possess a climate of a caring community, and provides necessary tools for

students to advance their education and lives. A terminology used interchangeably with *Successful Schools*.

- *School Culture* is a culmination of factors that contribute to the climate and attitude of a school. The values, biases, intentions and actions of the school board, administration, and staff coupled with the physical location of the school, the socio-economic composition of the families of the students, their values, biases, intentions, and actions all come together to create a school's culture. Edgar Schein's definition of organizational culture can provide added perspective:

  > A pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with the problems of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation those problems. (Gibson, 2000, p. 30)

- *Traditional Public Schools* are schools that operate under regionally drawn parameters, are controlled by a democratically elected school board, and are overseen by a centralized administrative team. Some of these schools have existed for decades and can embody the values of the surrounding locality.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

A Historical Overview of Detroit and its Public Educational Systems

In his lyrical opus, *We Almost Lost Detroit*, poet /singer Gil Scott-Heron hauntingly croons "no one stopped to think about the babies, or how they would survive, and we almost lost Detroit, this time" (Scott-Heron, 2000, p. 56). Although, his song protests nuclear power plants, the poignancy of the lyrics could hold symbolic reference to the state of public education in Detroit.

> For many residents of Detroit, the public schools have come to represent
> everything that is wrong with the city and its governance: the historical absence of
> a consistent tax base (the loss of nearly two-thirds of the city's population over
> the last fifty years) administrative ineptitude, and municipal corruption. The
> public schools in Detroit are institutional embodiments of years of "urban crisis"
> in the city (Bergman, p. 18, 2006).

For decades, decisions about public education failed to consider the students and evolving into "the high school graduation rate in Detroit plummeting below 50%" (Wilk, 2009, p.35). Or when one contemplates why corporations choose not to establish jobs in Detroit due to an alleged skill-deficit amongst the citizenry. Or when one also recognizes the school board meetings are more renowned for squabbles and theatrics than effectiveness. Then one can begin to understand how Scott-Heron's inquiry of anyone stopping "to think about the babies" casts foreboding implications. Some argue that the busing controversy accelerated the decline of the school system" (Mirel, 2009, p. 246), whether it was busing or white flight, the continuous deterioration of Detroit Public Schools (DPS) makes the city's future more anemic. Whereas we may not have lost

Detroit that time; if something is not done quickly, then Scott-Heron's concluding ad-libs: "odds are, we gonna lose somewhere, one time" (Scott-Heron, 2000, p.56) will transform from foreshadowing dread into a tragic epilogue.

Detroit 1967-

The spark that ignited the blast has varying descriptions. These descriptions are indicative of varying perspectives.

> Whites and African Americans differed markedly in their understandings of the unrest that spread through the nation, even to the point of disagreeing about what to call it. Many African Americans saw it as a rebellion against a brutal and oppressive white regime… Many whites… viewed it as rampant lawlessness and found in this looting and burning reinforcement for their negative stereotypes of African Americans (Welch, 2001, p.27).

This study will designate the event as the rebellion/riot. Whichever label applied to the event, the ensuing explosion has had extensive debilitating effects for the city of Detroit.

> The Detroit Riot of 1967 began when police vice squad officers executed a raid on an after-hours drinking club or "blind pig" in a predominantly black neighborhood located at Twelfth Street and Clairmount Avenue. They were expecting to round up a few patrons, but instead found 82 people inside holding a party for two returning Vietnam veterans. Yet, the officers attempted to arrest everyone who was on the scene. While the police awaited a 'clean-up crew' to transport the arrestees, a crowd gathered around the establishment in protest. After the last police car left, a small group of men who were 'confused and upset because they were kicked out of the only place they had to go' lifted up the bars

of an adjacent clothing store and broke the windows. From this point of origin,

further reports of vandalism diffused. Looting and fires spread through the

Northwest side of Detroit, then crossed over to the East Side. Within 48 hours, the

National Guard was mobilized, to be followed by the 82nd airborne on the riot's

fourth day. As police and military troops sought to regain control of the city,

violence escalated. At the conclusion of 5 days of rioting, 43 people lay dead,

1189 injured and over 7000 people had been arrested. (Herman, 2003)

The rippling impact from the 1967 rebellion/riot continues to reverberate through

the lives of Detroit's residents. During the 2000s, that reverberation was described as:

Even relatively young people in the neighborhood, none of whom had lived

through the postwar transformation of the city, could recognize and would

acknowledge this historical discontinuity. They knew something cataclysmic had

happened in their city. And they understood that Detroit had become an emblem

of both the promise and disappointment of recent U.S. history – at the cutting

edge of this country's successes and failures (Bergman, p. 2, 2006).

While human casualties, property damage, and business losses following the

rebellion/riot were numerous, Coleman A. Young, Detroit's first African-American

mayor, recounts in his autobiography that "the heaviest casualty, however, was the city.

Detroit's losses went a hell of a lot deeper than the immediate toll of lives and buildings,

the riot put Detroit on the fast track to economic desolation" (Young, 1994, p. 179).

The rebellion/riot is a tipping point for the city's ethnic demographic. After the

rebellion/riot of 1967, Detroit experienced a hastened transformation into a

predominantly African-American city. Using population data beginning in 1960, it

reveals that "in twenty years, the proportion of black residents rose from about 29 percent

in 1960 to nearly 44 percent in 1970 to over 63 percent in 1980" (Mirel, 1999, p. 295).

Mayor Young adds

> The white exodus from Detroit had been prodigiously steady prior to the
>
> rebellion, totaling twenty-two thousand in 1966, but afterwards it was frantic. In
>
> 1967 – with less than half the year remaining after the summer explosion – the
>
> outward population migration reached sixty-seven thousand. In 1968, the figure
>
> hit eighty thousand, followed by forty-six thousand in 1969. (Young, 1994, p.
>
> 179).

This transformation into a predominantly African-American city requires further

exploration. Additional investigation would reveal that as Detroit's African-American

population expanded its overall population decreased.

> As the wealthier white population left Detroit, the overall population shrank and
>
> the city's tax base shrank, too, leaving Detroit less able to support public schools,
>
> public safety, and it's huge, geographically spread-out infrastructure... the
>
> gigantic outmigration of whites that began in the 1950's and turned Detroit from a
>
> wealthy white city into a desperately poor black city (Eisenbrey, 2014).

An illustration of this phenomenon could show that at one point Detroit had one hundred

residents of which thirty were African-American. Since the flames of the rebellion / riot

subsided, an extension of the previous illustration would reveal that Detroit now has fifty

African-American residents out of a total population of sixty. The following description

of one neighborhood could be emblematic of a city-wide phenomenon, "the

neighborhood's conversion from a middle-class Jewish enclave lined with delis and other

shops into a symbol of the late-century urban crisis – vacant lots, abandoned houses, closed storefronts, and exclusively African American residents" (Bergman, p.2, 2006).

With eulogistic tenor, Mayor Young emphasized that "the flight of business and businesses was just as dramatic and even more devastating … in just ten years immediately following the rebellion. Detroit lost more than 110,000 jobs as a result, we were losing Detroit" (Young, 1994, p. 179 - 180).

The mayor was not alone in his analysis. Research reveals that:

> Beginning in 1969, however, a sharp slump in auto production sent the city into an economic tailspin ... From 1969 to 1973… the total number of jobs in Detroit dropped by over 19 percent. Between 1967 and 1985, the city lost 195,000 jobs, almost half of them in manufacturing. In all, Detroit's share of all manufacturing jobs in the metropolitan area fell from just over 40 percent in 1967 to 25 percent in 1982. (Mirel, 1999, p. 295-296)

Detroit Public Schools (DPS) also experienced several negative repercussions as the city began to scab over from the deep wounds of the rebellion/riot. DPS' position as public-serving system within the city positions it as a reflective image of the problems plaguing the city. The population shift of the city was sharply evident within the school system.

> In 1963, Detroit's 293,745 students were almost evenly divided between blacks and whites. Seven years later, following what one NAACP official call the "greatest percentage increase of black students of any northern city, "64 percent of the 288,953 students in the system were black, 35 percent were white and 1 percent were Hispanic. The city population at the time, however, was only 44

percent black. Ten years later, the proportion of blacks rose to 63 percent of the

total city population, while a disproportionate 86 percent of the 214,736 students

in the public schools were black, 12 percent white, and 2 percent Hispanic.

(Mirel, 1999, p. 297)

The transformation of the ethnic composition of the city and public school

system's shrinking population are some factors that eventually counter the claim that

preceded the rebellion / riot "that Detroit, in the mid-1960s, was a 'model city for race

relations.' Indeed, in 1967, the *Washington Post* described the Detroit school system as

'one of the country's leading examples of forceful reform in education'" (Mirel, 1999, p.

299). When reviewing Detroit's transformation from "model city" to its current state

"It is dangerous to let our optimism about urban revitalization obscure the grim

realities that still face most urban residents, particularly people of color. Acres of

rundown houses, abandoned factories, vacant lots, and shuttered stores stand

untended in the shadow of revitalized downtowns and hip urban enclaves. There

has been very little 'trickle down' from downtown revitalization and

neighborhood gentrification to the long-term poor, the urban working class, and

minorities. An influx of coffee shops, bistros, art galleries, and upscale boutiques

have made parts of many cities increasingly appealing for the privileged, but they

have not, in any significant way, altered the everyday miser and impoverishment

that characterize many urban neighborhoods" (Surgue, 2005, p.xxv).

Possibly more perilously significant as Detroit's population transformation was

the financial dilemma of a shrinking tax base. When considering that "between 1960 and

1980, Detroit lost over a quarter of its population, dropping from 1,670,144 in 1960 to

1,203,339" (Mirel, 1999, p. 295), it becomes more apparent that

> …the heart of the problems facing the city and its schools were the massive
>
> demographic and economic transformations of the 1960s and 1970s. As major
>
> industries relocated to the suburbs and later to the Sun Belt, taking with them
>
> jobs, tax revenues, and most of Detroit's middle class, it was increasingly difficult
>
> for the city and its schools to provide adequate services to a population that was
>
> becoming overwhelmingly black and poor. (Mirel, 1999, p. 294)

> The population decline prompted a financial slide as tax revenues began to

disintegrate. The citizens and businesses that fled from Detroit made permanent

withdrawals from Detroit's tax-collecting revenue. By the 2010s, the city's

> Median household income is about half that of the state of Michigan as a whole,
>
> and the median value of its housing is less than half. Its tax base has been
>
> decimated, nearly 40 percent of its residents live in households with income
>
> below the poverty level, and its unemployment rate is the highest of any of the top
>
> 50 cities in the U.S. (Eisenbrey, 2014).

"Property values in the city, the keystone of local school tax revenue, remained stagnant

in the 1960s and fell in the 1970s, going from $4.94 billion in 1960 to $5.10 billion in

1970 to $4.27 billion in 1980" (Mirel, 1999, p.296). In lay terms, DPS has had to operate

an increasingly more expensive system with a steadily decreasing pecuniary reservoir.

> While Detroit's population changed and its tax based began to decline, a bond

between African Americans and organized labor was becoming stronger. "Some of the

issues our Detroit study had dealt with are … the compound effects of race and union

membership … and the factors that account for militancy among employed and

unemployed Negroes" (Leggett, 1968, p. 76). African American membership within

organized labor not only precedes the rebellion/ riot, the possibilities for growing

alliances between them were exemplified with the election of the 1965 school board,

several whom would be in their post following the rebellion/ riot.

> On paper, no school board ever elected in Detroit was better equipped to deal with
> severe racial and class conflict than the one that took office on July 1, 1965.
> Organized labor and leading civil rights organizations had enthusiastically
> supported the three members who took their seats that day: A.L. Zwerdling, a
> labor attorney; Rev. Darneau Stewart, a black minister; and Peter Grylls, an
> executive at Michigan Bell. All three men were deeply committed to school
> integration and, along with Dr. Remus G. Robinson; they formed an unassailable
> liberal majority on the seven-member board. Over the next two years, these liberal
> board members undertook a series of bold policy initiatives, such as substantially
> increasing the number of black administrators and teachers and mandating the use
> of multicultural materials throughout the curriculum. (Mirel, 1999, p. 298)

Yet, as has been proven numerous times in politics, this seemingly well-fit board

proved no match for the tumultuous winds of change that began to gain momentum

during the mid-1960s and that would continue to blow furiously following the

rebellion/riot. The promise of DPS school board elected in 1965 went unfulfilled. "Rather

than ushering in a period of racial harmony, the election of the liberal board of education

marked the beginning of a period of unparalleled conflict" (Mirel, 1999, p. 299). A

former superintendent describes the time (following his appointment in 1966) as "a time

of considerable distrust between the black community and the school system" (Johnson, 2008, p.85).

The brewing conflicts were rooted in the city's demographic changes and its intricate ties to past racist practices. "The most urgent problem was the growing anger and frustration of black Detroiters, who, despite the recent changes in the school system still saw too little progress in educational reform" (Mirel, 1999, p. 299). Detroit's population is ethnically-polarized. A rough assessment would reflect that the outer fringes of the city, the western, northwestern, and northeastern neighborhoods were predominantly white. The neighborhoods that had made up the Black Bottom and Paradise Valley communities and others near the center of the city were predominantly African-American. Per former Superintendent Arthur Johnson,

> The district had twenty-two high school constellations (A constellation included the elementary and middle schools that fed the high school). Four constellations were almost entirely white, and five were almost entirely black… By 1970 the school system was almost two-thirds black, and the pattern of segregation was even more pronounced. Forty-four schools had fewer than twenty black students, and 111 schools had fewer than twenty white students (Johnson, 2008, p. 84).

In addition to separating the races, those boundaries contained marked discrepancies in the quality of education provided by DPS.

> In December 1965, an NAACP report decried the small number of black guidance counselors in the high schools (17 of 116 positions) and the "inadequate" counseling offered to black students. The report argued that racially biased counselors routinely tracked large numbers of black students out of the college

preparatory curriculum. The NAACP report also noted that, in the 1963-64 school year, not a single advanced placement test was given at the predominantly black Central, Northern, Northeastern, and Northwestern high schools. In addition, black leaders repeatedly deplored the failure of school leaders to include units on black history and culture in the curriculum. Finally, not only did black high school students suffer unfairly in academic and vocational programs, many attended schools whose physical conditions, despite some capital improvements, were still as run-down as ever. (Mirel, 1999, p. 300)

The marked difference in the quality of education between African-American and white neighborhoods was additional fodder for the growing resentment between the races. There was also growing distrust between the African-American community and the school system because "the black community had good reason to believe that the school system did not have its best interest at heart" (Johnson, 2008, p.86). Eventually, the resentment and distrust came to a head at one of the predominantly African-American high schools.

In April 1966, a massive walkout by the students from the largely black Northern High School dramatically focused the attention of the city on these issues. In many ways, the situation at Northern was emblematic of all the problems in the black high schools in the city. As Karl D. Gregory, a Wayne State professor and Northern alumnus, put it, "Northern was THE outstanding high school in Detroit in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s." But as the racial composition changed in the postwar years, Gregory stated, Northern became "primarily a custodial institution completes with police as an apparent part of the administration, and was only on

the surface an institution where systematic learning took place. (Mirel, 1999, p.

300)

The walkout would be a part of a series of events that would escalate enhancing

the conflict between African Americans and the school system. As the superintendent

procrastinated on addressing the real concerns, what began to form was a collective voice

speaking for the African-American population. During a board meeting the next year,

Reverend Cleage "led a dramatic report that cited troublesome and accurate statistic

about the low achievement and high dropout rates of black students in Detroit" (Johnson,

2008 p.86). The fallout from the administrative measures regarding the Northern walkout

and community animus represented by Rev. Cleage was reflective of Detroit's growing

internal schisms. Local labor leaders supported the actions of the superintendent, while

the African-American community decried the district's efforts. These positions reflect

two opposing trains of thought within a previous alliance: labor / union organizations and

the African-American community.

An explanation of the rift between labor and African-Americans requires an

understanding of how their relationship.

A culturally homogeneous population, {Blacks} relatively isolated from contacts

with middle-class whites, faced many problems which it subsequently tried to

solve by working through religious organizations, block clubs, and Negro labor

associations… Largely because a considerable proportion of its population was

unionized, many Detroit Negroes earned medium to high incomes … (Leggett,

1968, p.98-99).

Labor provided African American an avenue for African Americans and whites to interact. "White workers in… unions did have contact with Negroes on the job, but social relations generally stopped there" (Leggett, 1968, p 99). Labor also provided a vehicle through which African Americans could channel their voice.

While in general, labor proponents advocate many issues pertinent to the working class, of which much of Detroit's African-Americans belonged; labor does not advocate race specific issues. "Negro workmen's differences with white middle-class interests… generate both class and racial consciousness" (Leggett, 1968, p 104). African-American concerns were both separate and connected to labor issues. The Northern High School walkout is an example of a race issue that organized labor may not understand or possibly would not endorse.

The displeasure that prompted the Northern walkout was reflective of the general feelings held by many of Detroit's African-Americans. Their growing disdain with the school system was gaining a voice of validity.

> In late May, Karl Gregory, the Wayne State economics professor who headed the Northern Freedom School, began a scathing series of articles in the Michigan Chronicle deploring the fact "that inner city education is inferior education" and, for the first time by a prominent public figure, calling for community control of the schools in the ghetto. (Mirel, 1999, p. 305)

His was not a solitary proclamation.

> Reinforcing the legitimacy of Gregory's critique of unequal education in the Detroit system was a report issued in June by the Ad Hoc Committee for Equal Educational Opportunity, which took the unprecedented step of publicly

analyzing standardized test results in Detroit on a school-by-school basis … The

report provided the first hard evidence of unequal educational outcomes on a large

scale, and it implied that the longer black children stayed in the Detroit schools,

the worse they did academically. (Mirel, 1999, p. 305)

The barriers that separated the races in Detroit were becoming increasingly rigid.

"By the middle of 1967 … a new set of radical arguments that rested on the premise that

the schools *were* fulfilling their fundamental mission, namely to *miseducate* black

children" (Mirel, 1999, p. 308). Another study by Mirel (and shared by Johnson, 2008)

quoted Rev. Cleage explaining "the basic threat to the Afro-American child's pride and

self-image is the preponderance of white administrators and teachers in inner city

schools" (Johnson, 2008, p. 86). The position that DPS poorly educated African

American was so entrenched that it endured over decades. During the 1990s, schools with

an Afrocentric curriculum were developed because Clifford Watson described (as shared

by Hartigan) regular schools as an "orchestrated, quiet conspiracy to make sure that only

a small percentage of African Americans succeed" (Hartigan, 1999, p. 209). The

Northern walkout, mounting disenchantment of the African-American community,

demographic alterations and its' financial effects and other societal factors were all

bundled together as emblematic straws on the back of the Detroit mule. The rebellion /

riot of 1967 proved to be the final straw that broke that mule's back.

More than any event in the modern history of the city, the catastrophic Detroit riot

that began on July 23 deepened these racial divisions … Nowhere was the gulf

between the races more apparent than in the totally opposite ways in which blacks

and whites interpreted these events. Researchers from the University of Michigan

found "for the most part, it was as if two different events had taken place in the

same city, one a calculated act of criminal anarchy, the other a spontaneous

protest against mistreatment and injustice. (Mirel, 1999, p. 311)

Hindsight permits the vantage point of viewing how a myriad of factors contributed to the

explosion of 1967; yet, it is also important to consider the perspective of those impacted.

A *Free Press* and Urban League survey of blacks in the riot area found that 22.0

percent … believed that the "failure of schools" had a great deal to do with the

riot and an additional 24.9 percent stated that the schools had something to do

with it. (Mirel, 1999, p. 312)

The difference in perspectives did not stop with the rebellion/riot or its causes,

each side held strong inclinations of what could remedy the conflicts within DPS. "In the

hearings and inquiries that followed the riot, school leaders clung to their basic premise

that more money would cure the ailing ghetto schools" (Mirel, 1999, p. 312). "More

money" for schools was not just an opinion held by the school board, surveyed whites

held a comparable view.

In the 1969 DAS (Detroit Area Survey), whites were not asked to evaluate Detroit

schools or the extent of discrimination faced by blacks in the schools. However,

after being presented with the premise that "at present, some Negro

neighborhoods have schools with rundown buildings and less trained teachers

than in mainly white neighborhoods," they were asked whether the federal

government should spend money to bring these schools "up to the standard of

white school." About 75% expressed support for this idea (Welch, 2001, p. 133).

However, African-Americans held a different view. "Viewing school segregation as inevitable, African Americans in some areas deemphasized integration and fought instead for community control as a way to improve the schools their children attended" (Welch, 2001, p. 130). Additional components of the African American view were:

> In 1968, almost two-thirds of black Detroiters believed that blacks did not have as good schools as did whites in Detroit. When asked about the most important thing to do to improve the schools, about two-thirds of those who were dissatisfied with the schools said it was to improve the quality of black schools rather than to focus on school integration (Welch, 2001, p.133).

The collective voice of African-American antipathy positioned itself away from labor. "In order to deal with the problems of … equal opportunity, members of the marginal working class create their own voluntary associations – all of which are culturally homogenous" (Leggett, 1968, p.101). In response to DPS' post-rebellion/riot initiatives and the movement away from overall organized labor approach into a more distinctive group within labor, African Americans could be considered members of the marginal working class – "the marginal working class belongs to a sub-community subject to considerable discrimination and consequent social isolation" (Leggett, 1968, p.97). It is from this position that African Americans advocated an agenda tailored for the needs of its citizenry, "the campaign for community control severely attenuated the liberal-labor-black coalition, especially as antagonism mounted toward leaders who remained committed to integration rather than separatism" (Mirel, 1999, p. 313). Former Superintendent Johnson corroborated this notion when stating "many black nationalists regarded those of us who were working for integration as sellouts" (Johnson, 2008, p.89).

The community control of schools advocated by Karl Gregory gained momentum with the input of community leaders, most notable among them was the Reverend Albert Cleage, Jr. of the Shrine of the Black Madonna, who declared "there will be no education for black children until the black community controls its own schools" (Mirel, 1999, p. 312). This call for community control was not a request for a liberally empathetic approach. It would be an ambitious, politically contentious initiative, one that would radically usurp DPS' traditional operations.

Community Control and Decentralization

"Community control of schools has been touted as a way to make professionals respond to the desires of parents and community representatives for changes in school operations and performance" (Hess, 1999, p. 1). Reverend Cleage served as a local representative of a phenomenon gaining national popularity; "during the 1960s the movement for community control and community empowerment swept across the country, fueled by concerns over desegregation and the war on poverty" (Hess, 1999, p. 2). As advocated by Reverend Cleage and others, the community control of select DPS schools would be a grassroots stratagem that would give the community formal influence.

Was decentralization DPS'organizational response to the call for community control? Community control and decentralization are used interchangeably; yet, while sharing some similarities they are not one in the same.

> Decentralization requires considerable delegation of powers long held by states
> and central district offices, and must be accompanied by responsible deregulation
> and reduced bureaucracy. In turn, the people making the decisions – those closest

to the students – must be held accountable for students' meeting higher standards.

In a decentralized system, the focus of school boards and central district offices

would be shifted from monitoring compliance to providing technical assistance

and support, and from spending money according to centrally developed priorities

to responding to individual schools' needs and requests. (Education Commission,

1997, p. 11).

Community control has been defined "as a community group with a cross section of the

community gaining control over the operating budget, hiring and firing, and planning for

building and repairing schools" (Danns, 2002, p. 632). Comparatively, "decentralization

is typically a top-down reform, whereas community control is bottom-up" (Danns, 2002,

p. 632).

Decentralization is not a new phenomenon, nor is it exclusive to DPS. As a type

of school reform, it has various manifestations and with assorted results in several cities.

While a detailed description of decentralization in other school districts would be

voluminous, concise snapshots of those scenarios provide an increased understanding of

why decentralization was unsuccessful in Detroit.

Decentralization "… goes back 30 years to Edmonton, Alberta, where principals

today control 92% of the money, and local voters have consistently indicated in school

board elections that they will have it no other way" (Jones, 2006, p. 1). As with most

educational reform initiatives, decentralization experienced some popularity peaks and

valleys. During the 1970s and 1980s, cities throughout the country implemented

decentralizing policies. Decades later, the reverberations of those policies continue.

The number of districts that implemented decentralization strategies also did so in a variety of ways. These varieties were unique to the needs of that district.

The meaning of the word community is quite different in various cities. In the earliest of these decentralization efforts, New York City and Detroit, community referred to sub-regions of the city. In New York City, 32 community boards of education were established to govern the city's elementary schools, while eight regions were established in Detroit. Thus, the word community in these cities refers to areas of a city with somewhere between 50,000 and 200,000 residents. (Hess, 1999, p. 1)

Decentralization took on an assortment of other forms based on the interpretation and needs of the respective school district. "In Salt Lake City, decentralization focused on expanding teacher and parent participation" (Hess, 1999, p.3) while "in Chicago, decentralization involved both expanded participation and the devolution of authority" (Hess, 1999, p. 3). Although the assortment of implemented practices is expansive, the goal of decentralization is to place administrative powers closer to the constituency.

Community control has a less formal composition than decentralization. Decentralization is polished policy developed by school boards. Community control is the rallying call for change and decision-influencing input from the citizenry. While "efforts at community control may lead to decentralization" (Danns, 2002, p. 632); community control is rooted in feelings of discontent and decentralization is rooted in administrative policy. When constituents are optimally benefiting from the services of the traditional school district then there is little desire in the community to assume control. However, when the community receiving the services begins to feel that school

leaders are not addressing their needs, discontent begins to form. As that discontent gains voice and volume, it can evolve into a collective push for community control.

The civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, assassinations of leaders and other cultural and political events all worked together to create a national climate of discontent and yearnings for significant change. It is with these dynamics in mind that one can begin to recognize "urban school reform efforts require understanding the political context in which schools operate" (Byndloss, 2001, p. 86).

Many of the focal points of social turbulence were large urban areas with high population concentrations of African-Americans. Several those African-Americans or Blacks lived in impoverished neighborhoods or other less than desirable circumstances. "When the Black community sounded the call for community control, the demand was viewed in militant terms even though Black parents sought the same governance vehicle that White suburban parents shared" (Byndloss, 2001, p. 87). When we remove the racial components, it is easier to see the essential concept that those crusaders for community control saw it "… as a way to make professionals respond to the desires of parents and community representatives for changes in school operations and performance" (Hess, 1999, p.1).

Unfortunately, community control as a phenomenon suffered not from its purpose, but it became hamstrung through the misperception of its advocates and their intentions.

> … In large urban centers, when the formally constituted board of education is socially and geographically far distant from most of the city's communities, the notion of community control is frequently vested with connotations of being

"revolutionary" or "suspicious." While it is understandable why political and bureaucratic leaders whose authority is constrained by community control might oppose it, one wonders why others in the media or in academe invest it with such negative connotations ... One wonders if it is the nature of the communities in these urban settings, composed as they are of low income, minority families, that is the source of the critics' distrust of urban democracy. (Hess, 1999, p. 7)

From the start, the potential for conflict is high when advocating community control. "The fate of the city is the consequence of the unequal distribution of power and resources" (Surgue, 2005, p. 14). When the people who benefit the least from a system that should benefit all, propose a measure through which they can benefit more, but not at the expense of others – yet more in-line with achieving the stated purposes of the system; when they are viewed with skepticism - that is unfair. Whether that unfairness is called racism or socio-economic bias it hinders the promise of community control.

The push for community control sprouted up in districts across the United States. "In practice, the efforts at community control of schools have played themselves out in distinctive ways" (Hess, 1999, p. 7), and in New York City, Chicago and Detroit, the vociferation for community control of schools approached a crescendo. The collective passion behind the push for community control lends itself to possible conflict with the procedural protocol process of school boards; conflicts from which the preliminaries necessary for political initiatives like decentralization are rooted. Yet prior to decentralization deliberations, community control needs validation.

Community control campaigners in New York City gained a powerful, fiscal ally. "In July 1967, the Ford Foundation funded three experimental demonstration districts in

two of the city's five boroughs" (Byndloss, 2001, p. 92). The garnering of funding was a

tremendous advancement for community control advocates. However, funding alone

does not resolve the festering components of conflict between established bureaucracies,

sociopolitical factors, and revolutionary zeal of community activists. "By the fall of

1967, the experiment in community control exploded … when the community board

attempted to transfer 19 school personnel from the demonstration district. This effort led

to a series of teacher strikes …" (Byndloss, 2001 p. 92). That scenario reflects the

combustible capacity of the implementation of community control initiatives.

The changes and challenges presented by those demonstration districts were a

harbinger of the challenges community control efforts would face across the country.

Community control provided an opportunity for grassroots activist to exert

political power within their communities ... Conflicting political and economic

interests placed parent activist and the White-controlled educational bureaucracy

at odds. Parents were distrustful of city leaders and the educational system, and

both refused to cede power to minority communities. (Byndloss, 2001, p. 97)

In Chicago, the local political structure manipulated efforts for community

control. Over a span of time, constituents witnessed minimal progress in student

achievement.

When parent empowerment and decentralization were first proposed, a number of

the city's African-American leaders were skeptical …They feared that this reform

was designed to fail in order to achieve the real aim of some politicians and

business people: The replacement of the Chicago Public School (CPS) system

with a private educational market. (Bryk, 1992, p. 3)

For years, African-American Chicagoans have had a contentious relationship with the city's political machine. "Black community leaders and politicians sensed that the … dissatisfaction with Mayor Jane Byrne" (Davis, 2016) is a snapshot of the distrust and reflects the potential shortcomings of "Chicago's reforms obviously depend on strong mayoral leadership" (Education Commission, 1997, p.16).

Chicago's politicians and school board members molded their decentralization plans in a manner reflective of their other political systems.

> In response to the experiences of sub-regional community control in New York
> and Detroit and ineffective participatory councils in Salt Lake City, reform
> advocates in Chicago focused decision making at the school, not the sub-district
> level. School-based management there entailed both decentralizing decisions to
> the school level and giving parents and community representatives' greater say in
> how those decisions would be made … School based management … was not
> intended to be exclusively "community control." … As school reform was
> implemented …it looked less like community control and more like local
> decision-making. (Hess, 1999, p. 4-5)

In context of this research, school based management is decision-making done wholly within the school walls. Community control can include a variation of school-based management with soluble walls that permit input from parents and community members outside the school walls.

The intention of Chicago to customize its decentralization plans was astute. While the political mechanisms of Chicago bear some resemblance to New York's, the Chicago school board did not seek to duplicate New York's model nor problems. "Unlike New

York, the fundamental governance unit in Chicago is the individual school ... As a result, the distance between … political activity and its consequences are radically reduced" (Bryk, 1992, p. 4).

However, Chicago's tailored decentralized plan did not resolve the concerns of the community. Instead, in some instances it has been perceived as political systematic deck reshuffling that only yielded the same results.

> The new top-down Chicago school reform may be raising test scores, but it has
> not substantially changed the quality of education for Black and Latino students.
> According to the Illinois School Report Card (2001), the Chicago high school
> graduation rate in the 2000-01 school year was 67.5% compared to the Illinois
> state average of 83.2%. The 67.5% was the highest in 14 years. The dropout rate
> for Chicago was 16.3% compared to the state average of 5.7%. (Danns, 2002, p.
> 651)

That does not preclude that all the results of Chicago's decentralization efforts were unsuccessful, but it does reflect the unfulfilled ambitions of those who asserted community control initiatives and thought them to be the panacea of their communities' education ills.

While the ashes from the Detroit rebellion / riot of 1967 were simmering, community angst demanded control of the predominantly African-American public schools. In the months that ensued, community activists attempted to capitalize on the climate. "Cleage (*community leader*) sought to bring "power to the people" by having the community run the schools directly … supporters began a simultaneous campaign to radically decentralize the Detroit School system" (Mirel, 1999, p. 313).

One of the strongest voices leading the push for decentralization was Detroit's first African-American mayor, Coleman A. Young.   In retrospect, Mayor Young expressed satisfaction in pushing for and creating a decentralized district: "Among the measures I managed to pass was one that decentralized Detroit's school system, dividing the district into sub-regions in which, unlike the all-white school board, there was black representation" (Young, 1994, p. 186). Mayor Young's premise for decentralization was flawed because "…efforts that use segregated communities and schools as a centerpiece for reform are controversial and become vulnerable to political and legal challenges ... the African-American community continues to be disadvantaged … (Byndloss, 2001, p. 98).

The evolution of community control into decentralization in Detroit has roots within a commissioned study following the Northern High walkout. The findings of that commission provided fuel for community activists.

> The opening chapter of the report declared, "it is the conclusion of the Detroit High School Study Commission that the public schools are becoming symbols of society's neglect and indifference, rather than institutions that serve the needs of society by providing upward social and economic mobility." … When the report was presented to the board in late June 1968, Edward Cushman summed up the attitude of the commission, stating that "our schools are appallingly inadequate, a disgrace to the community and a tragedy for the thousands of young men and women whom we compel and cajole to sit in them." … Specifically, the report endorsed two major changes: the decentralization of administrative authority in the system and increased accountability for teachers. (Mirel, 1999, p. 327-328)

Even with the commission's report as a springboard, there was some skepticism in the school board's pending adoption of decentralization. Community control advocates were adamant that "community control, in which parents could take charge of their children's schools, not decentralization, in which the board simply shifted some power to the community, as the only way to improve ghetto schools" (Mirel, 1999, p. 329).

The inherent distrust between the school board and community activists, or better yet, decentralization promoters and community control advocates is exemplified in school board's insincere reasoning for pursuing decentralization.

First, the redistribution of power … through either community control or decentralization, offered radical change at bargain basement prices. At a time when the school system faced growing budget deficits and stood little chance of winning milage increases, redistributing power seemed like a solution that could placate angry citizens without additional expenditures. Paradoxically, the plan was at once radical and reactionary… Finally, the most pressing reason for the growing popularity of political solutions to the city's educational problems was the belief that giving communities more control over their schools might restore order in Detroit's increasingly anarchic junior and senior high schools. (Mirel, 1999, p. 330)

Somewhere amid the intentions of the school board and jaded acceptance of the community lies the real reason decentralization proved ineffective in Detroit.

Detroit offers an example of how the momentum that propelled the ambition for community control can be lost between the time the school board adopts and the time it implements a plan for decentralization. "Implementation of participatory decision-

making in school organization cannot ignore the place of politics and differing and

oftentimes conflicting preferences" (Gok, 2005, p. 18). Nearly four years after the

rebellion / riot s and the initial push for community control, Detroit Public Schools (DPS)

adopted a plan for decentralization.

On January 1, 1971, the Michigan Legislature mandated that the Detroit Public

Schools become decentralized. Detroit was divided into eight administrative

areas, each with its own school board … this decentralization … was designed to:

- Increase citizen participation and autonomy in educational decision-making

- Enhance school-level curriculum development

- Stimulate interest and confidence in education

- Restore faith in school boards

- Improve communications. (McGriff, 1993, p. 1)

A well-crafted plan that faced several significant obstacles, chief among them was

Detroit's history of racial conflict. "The racial disharmony at the center of the

establishment of decentralization in Detroit was also at the heart of its failure" (Hess,

1999, p. 2). A referendum against the decentralization plan delayed and altered its

implementation. During that delay, the student population within DPS shriveled

significantly, indirectly impeding any potential posed by the decentralization plan

because of the loss of revenue from enrollment.

"By 1978, opposition to decentralization was widespread. … These opponents

argued that not only had the reform failed to improve educational quality, but it was

costly and inefficient as well" (Mirel, 1999, p. 367). After a volatile start, perilous

implementation, increased bureaucratic burdens and unimpressive results, "… on

September 15, 1981, Detroiters voted to eliminate decentralization by more than a two-to-one margin" (McGriff, 1993, p. 2). "Community school districts in Detroit never escaped their involvement in the city's racial conflict, and survived for only a decade" (Hess, 1999, p. 7). The epitaph reads: that "decentralization in Detroit has been a rocky road, cluttered with short-lived pilot projects" (McGriff, 1993, p. 4). "'In 1848, Horace Mann warned "that if the tempest of political strife were to be let loose upon our Common Schools, they would be overwhelmed with sudden ruin.' By 1973, Mann's prophecy had become Detroit's reality" (Mirel, 1999, p. 370).

Charter Schools

In the early 1990s, Michigan voters were presented with Proposal A. Proposal A was touted as legislation that would begin to balance public school funding. It addressed that and more. In his "Our Kids Deserve Better" speech to the state legislature in 1993, Governor Engler provided the blueprint for what would become Proposal A.

One Michigan Office of Revenue official recounts:

'The remarkable thing about Proposal A is how Engler managed to pull together so much. It started out as a bill to replace school funding. But Engler seized the opportunity to make it so much more – an opportunity to improve public education, increase accountability, help teachers develop professionally, start charter schools, and much else.' (Whitney, 2002, p. 231)

Engler publicly stated a personal assessment of his leadership's success would be answered by the following questions: "Can I make a difference in Detroit? Can I change state policies and make Detroit a city where people will want to raise their families …

where kids can go to good schools?" (Whitney, 2002, p. 181). His concern for good

schools was demonstrated through his advocacy of charter schools and their eventual

development. With the passage of Proposal A, Engler's ambitions for education were

manifest and the field of public education would be considerably altered. In addition to

the reshaping of per-pupil spending, the first charter school opened in 1994.

A charter school is a public school. They receive public funding based upon

student enrollment. Charter schools are subjected to the same federal and state guidelines

as traditional public schools. "Charter schools, which are public but given more

autonomy than traditional public schools, are usually located in urban districts and enroll

local students" (Ryan, 2010, p.9). Yet, they differ from traditional public schools in

numerous ways. One of the most significant differences is that "PSA boards of directors

are officially appointed by the authorizer and not elected by parents or any other specified

group of stakeholders or persons" (Horn, 1999, p. 22).

Another difference lies in how charter schools operate.

Charter schools, because they receive public funds but operate outside of the

normal regulatory and accountability structures that govern the operation of

traditional public schools, offer operators considerably more latitude in how

money received from the state is spent. It appears that the combination of stable

public funding and reduced accountability make charter school attractive to EMO

operators (Molnar, 2004, p.3).

One major operational difference splits charters into two classifications: managed by an

educational management company (EMO)/educational service provider (ESP) or self-

managed. An EMO is a company that can provide administrative, managerial, and financial services for a school or schools.

> The for-profit management of public schools generally takes two major forms: local school districts contracting with an EMO for the management of existing traditional K – 12 public schools (termed "contract schools") or EMOs managing public charter schools either as the charter holder or under the terms of a contract with the charter holder (Molnar, 2004, p. 3).

At a self-managed school, on-site employees/administrators fulfill those roles. Also,

> Charter schools that had relationships with EMOs were more likely to have universities as their authorizers than other authorizing bodies. This finding was influenced by Michigan, which has large numbers of charter schools chartered by universities and also has a large proportion of charter schools managed by EMOs (United States Department of Education, 2004, p.33)

> The line that distinguished EMOs from self-managed has become blurry.

"Comparing charters managed by for-profits to other charters is an exercise in generalities rather than a precise comparison of private versus public management" (Rhim, 1998, p. 37). At one time, EMO implied national corporate or multiple-school operating organization and self-managed suggested single-building grassroots schools. Over time, some schools have left the EMO umbrella and become self-managed. While some self-managed schools have developed small corporate arms that by definition are management companies, yet those companies only provide oversight for one charter. This scenario is just one example "that the corpus of 3,500-plu charter schools now operating in the United States is so unbelievably diverse that, in truth, each one is best seen as a unique educational institution, unlike all others" (Carpenter, 2005, p. vi).

At their inception, charters were promoted as a wave of educational innovation that would minimize administrative bureaucracy, promote instructional ingenuity, and better manage fiscal resources.

Thus, the original rationale for the establishment of public school academies in Michigan not only aimed to improve educational performance and stimulate innovation, but also included recognition that educational funds might be better utilized by funding schools directly, rather than funding them through the administrative structure of a traditional school district. (Anderson, 2003, p. 5)

Charter school is a broad terminology; yet, not all charter schools are alike. "Charters schools are not the undifferentiated mass imagined by many researchers, journalists, and policymakers" (Carpenter, 2005, p. 7). In addition to the classifications of charters into self-managed and EMO operated, charters can also be further, yet less formally, categorized in one of the following four characteristic groupings:

- *Converted private schools.* This group of schools was largest among the first charter schools in operation … within this group; … were parochial schools and others that were private schools.

- *Converted public schools.* There are a handful of PSAs in the state that were formerly public schools that "opted out" to become a PSA. In all cases that we are aware of, these were former alternative high schools.

- *"Mom and Pop" schools.* These include the many small schools started by individuals or small groups of concerned adults. These schools, because of their small size and because of their limited economic clout, have struggled to secure buildings for their schools. Fewer and fewer of these types of schools are

receiving charters, since the authorizers understand that they will require more

assistance and their small size will make them more vulnerable to shifts in

enrollments. Many of these schools have sought the services of management

companies.

- *"Franchise" or "Cookie cutter" schools.* These are schools that are started by

  management companies and must follow the established curriculum and

  management prescribed by their plan. (Horn, 1999, p. 16)

Categorization into these four types occurs within the previously mentioned

classifications of self-managed and EMO. It is as possible for a mom and pop charter to

operate independently as it is for a converted private school to be led by an EMO. With

an understanding of the assortment of charter school types, it becomes difficult to

compile them into one collective.

It is ironic that charters are heterogeneous in their organizational composition but

rather homogenous in their enrollment. "Most charter schools in Michigan are located in

urban areas, which are predominantly minority" (Cobb, 2000, p.13). An important

outlying variable that must also be factored is that the communities served by many

charters are increasingly poor, as the industrial and economic downturns of the past

decade has had more impact within those communities. "Charter schools

disproportionately attract students and families who are poor and who are from African-

American backgrounds" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. xiii).

A 1996 study referenced by Lee, Groninger and Smith, states "'families in

districts characterized by low property wealth, high proportions of poor students, low

mastery rates on the state tests, and low graduation rates are more likely to favor choice

…'" (Ascher, 2000, p. 16-17). Those who had few choices years ago, are currently the most active in taking advantage of the choices presented by charters.

Charter school enrollment increases every year, a financial drain to their hosting districts - the traditional school district boundaries inside which a charter school operates. While the ongoing depopulation of the city of Detroit is a factor, plummeting enrollment in DPS is exacerbated with the rise of charters. Interestingly the flight to charters could not be due to their collective performance on standardized tests, because

> The PSAs have significantly lower MEAP scores than do their host districts. However, a school-by-school comparison shows that students in some PSAs have higher scores than students in their host districts. Even when comparing 2- and 3-year gains, we find the schools in the host districts have larger gains, on the whole than do PSAs. (Horn, 1999, p. 88)

Tables 2.1 and 2.2 provide reading and math proficiency data for Detroit schools:

Table 2.1. Reading Proficiency

Rank	School	Grades	Proficiency	Type	Enrollment
1	Bates Academy	K-8	92.7%	DPS	853
2	Chrysler	K-5	88.7%	DPS	165
3	**MLK Jr. Education Center**	**K-6**	**87.0%**	**PSA/DPS**	**247**
4	Burton International	K-8	86.5%	DPS	660
5	Pasteur	K-6	84.1%	DPS	321
6	William Beckham Academy	K-5	81.6%	DPS	725
7	**Edison Public School Academy**	**K-8**	**81.3%**	**PSA**	**1085**
8	**YMCA Service Learning Academy**	**K-8**	**80.6%**	**PSA**	**1102**
9	**Merit Charter Academy**	**K-8**	**79.2%**	**PSA**	**691**
10	McColl	K-5	79.1%	DPS	251
11	Charles Wright	K-5	78.1%	DPS	574
12	Ann Arbor Trail Magnet	K-8	77.9%	DPS	436

13	Gompers	K-5	77.6%	DPS	305
14	Carstens	K-5	77.4%	DPS	338
15	Nichols	K-8	76.5%	DPS	347
16	Ronald Brown Academy	K-6	76.4%	DPS	980
17	Vernor	K-6	73.4%	DPS	322

Note. Table 2.1 is a listing of reading proficiency data for the top performing public elementary schools in Detroit. Charter schools are listed in bold. Retrieved June 2010 from School Matters, *Detroit Elementary Schools*.

Table 2.2. Math proficiency

Rank	School	Grades	Proficiency	Type	Enrollment
1	Gompers	K-5	95.0%	DPS	305
2	**MLK Jr. Education Center**	**K-6**	**95.0%**	**PSA/DPS**	**247**
3	Bates Academy	K-8	93.2%	DPS	853
4	Carstens	K-5	90.6%	DPS	338
5	Chrysler	K-5	90.1%	DPS	165
6	Charles Wright	K-5	88.9%	DPS	574
7	Thurgood Marshall	K-6	88.0%	DPS	424
8	Mann	K-5	87.9%	DPS	364
9	McColl	K-5	87.7%	DPS	251
10	Harding	K-5	85.7%	DPS	309
11	**YMCA Service Learning Academy**	**K-8**	**84.7%**	**PSA**	**1102**
12	**Edison Public School Academy**	**K-8**	**83.8%**	**PSA**	**1085**
13	Burton International	K-8	82.4%	DPS	660
14	**Dove Academy**	**K-6**	**80.8%**	**PSA**	**437**
15	**Merit Charter Academy**	**K-8**	**79.8%**	**PSA**	**691**
16	William Beckham Academy	K-5	79.6%	DPS	725
17	**Plymouth Educational Center**	**K-8**	**78.1%**	**PSA**	**927**

Note. Table 2.2 is a listing of math proficiency data for the top performing public elementary schools in Detroit. Charter schools are listed in bold. Retrieved June 2010 from School Matters, *Detroit Elementary Schools*.

Of the 166 elementary public schools in operation in Detroit in 2008-2009, Chart 1A and 1B lists the top ten percent in reading and math proficiency, rounded up to seventeen schools in each category. Twelve schools are present on both lists. Of the twenty-two different schools, only seven are charters and one of those charters is authorized by DPS. Of the seven charters, five (including the charter authorized by DPS) are on both lists. Confirming that students at some schools in the host district (DPS) are demonstrating a higher level of proficiency than students at charters on standardized exams. "At the elementary level, fewer PSA students meet standards than do their counterparts locally or statewide" (MI Department of Education, 2005, p.17).

Since charters do not have the highest student performance on standardized exams, what prompts thousands of Detroit families to choose them instead of DPS? Not every family can enroll their children in those DPS schools listed in Tables 2.1 and 2.2. While the success of those schools should be commended, it must be noted that DPS also has a very high number of schools at the bottom half of those listings of Detroit's elementary schools. "For every lighthouse school, there are dozens of "outhouse" schools where districts dump difficult students and weak staffs" (Hargreaves, 2006, p.19). When factoring the underperforming DPS schools along with the high-performers and comparing them to Detroit's charters (PSAs), research shows that

> There are limited innovations being developed and applied in the PSAs. In fact, charter schools were remarkably similar to regular public schools, with the notable exceptions of … the presence of additional adults in the classroom, governance and span of contracted (management) services. (Horn, 1999, p. 99)

Some charter school information advertises the differences but the standardized assessment performance of charters shares several similarities with Detroit Public Schools. Since the choice (charter schools) has few differences from the traditional district, what drives parents to exercise choice through school enrollment?

One possible explanation for family's choices of charters is a collective growing distrust or lack of confidence in DPS. "For … many parents, the district's poor reputation overshadows its recent improvements… With a few exceptions, charter school parents believe a quality education is impossible in a Detroit Public School" (Pratt & Walsh-Sarnecki, 2005, p.1A). Another explanation presented by a "Carnegie study found … 'many parents based their school choice decision on factors that have nothing to do with the quality of education,' including day care availability, convenience, social factors, and the range and quality of interscholastic sports" (Ascher, 2000, p.10). Lee, Groninger and Smith point out that

> Not all studies show academic quality – even in its widest meaning – as the primary concern for parents. Parents in inner city and suburban Detroit were asked to rate the relative importance of seven school qualities that might hypothetically influence where they would send a child to school. Both groups rated safety first, followed by a school that shares "my values." School requirements and varied courses (proxies for academic quality) were listed next, followed by discipline and proximity. (Ascher, 2000, p. 12)

Families choose schools based upon factors beyond test scores. "Selectivity is a primary reason why parents choose to enroll their children in non-traditional schools …" (Nelson, p. 12). It appears that parents take advantage of having a choice although studies show

likelihood that the choice will produce results like the schools they fled. Those facts add

to the notion of ever-growing contempt and distrust for DPS. Of the parents choosing

charters, it seems that there is some whose preference is anything but DPS.

Since parents are becoming increasingly distrustful of DPS, there is an

implication of parents having given-up. An implication that could say that parents have

done all that they can do, they have hoped for if possible and have chosen to leave the

system that is failing their children. Having opted to exercise their choice in schools that

they believe will better educate their children, schools that will better respond to parent

expectations, and schools that are not traditional Detroit Public Schools; the parents and

families with resources have been choosing charter schools. Those parents, the ones

invested enough to be engaged in their child's education and schools, are the type of

parent's schools hate to lose. As for the schools that gain them, they can address that

parental energy by establishing avenues for parental involvement. The more parents are

involved, the better a school can be.

Parents, Communities, and Schools

Parents, communities and schools are three distinctive groups whose effectiveness

is impacted by the contributions of the other. This triumvirate of influence can be likened

to pairs of hands with unique contributions shaping the realities of the children.   In this

body of research, the definition of community is not bound by neighborhood limitations.

Community includes people who share value sets. Values made evident by the actions or

inactions of parents. Values that are reinforced improved or ignored by the school.

When the parents and the school are working in cohesion, the children and the community can benefit. The relationship between parents and school can be positively potent when the school provides a framework for parents and the community, to be involved. "If parents feel excluded, of little value and hopeless, they will be likely to transmit these attitudes to their children" (Comer, 1980, p. 126). On the contrary,

> Parents in the school sent clear messages to children that school was friendly turf. Children saw their parents respected and contributing to the school program. They saw their parents on friendly terms with the teachers. …. Most importantly, parents talked and word got back to the community that this school and these people are okay. (Comer, 1980, p. 129)

> Why is parental involvement important? "Parents feelings about their child's school, whether positive or negative, influence how deeply they get involved in school activities" (Perkins –Gough, 2008, p. 89). When parents are valued or feel they have a voice at school, their contributions can be for the benefit of the learning environment.

What does parental involvement in school look like? The image of a mother cutting out shapes for the bulletin board is as nostalgically romantic as it is one-dimensional. Dr. Joyce Epstein created an elaborate framework that designates and defines six types of parental involvement. This study will not attempt to quantify nor rank Epstein's types of involvement; but seeks to emphasize that parental / community involvement can take different forms with different individuals at different schools. Whether it is parents acting as crossing guards or policy setters, parental involvement can impact the school's culture. Table 3 provides a concise depiction of Dr. Epstein's six types of parental involvement framework.

Table 3. Concise depiction of the Dr. Epstein's Types Parental Involvement

Type	Description
Parenting	Help all families establish home environments to support children as students (Epstein, 1997, p. 8).
Communicating	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and their children's progress (Epstein, 1997, p. 8).
Volunteering	Recruit and organize parent help and support (Epstein, 1997, p. 8).
Learning at Home	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with their homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning (Epstein, 1997, p. 8).
Decision Making	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives (Epstein, 1997, p. 8).
Collaborating with Community	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development (Epstein, 1997, p. 8).

Note. Table 3 is a concise depiction of Dr. Joyce Epstein's six types of parental involvement model. Each of the six types are accompanied by definitions taken from Dr. Epstein's research.

Systems versus Culture

One Detroit parent said she sent her children to three charter schools before giving up on them. She said they're like traditional public schools – "some are good, some are bad and many fall in between" (Pratt, 2005, p. 5A). Within Detroit's public education options, there is a range of good to bad or quality to underperforming DPS and charter schools. Popular perception equates student scores on standardized tests as an indicator of a good school. Test performance is an attribute but not the sole determinant of a good school, the "focus on higher test scores alone cannot produce the outcomes we want and need for our children or our nation" (Comer, 2004, p.9).

Whether it is a traditional public or charter school, the organizational system of a school does not determine the quality of the school. The culture of the school, as shaped by its leadership (administration and school board), staff and involved families, can determine its' quality or lack of thereof. "High-performing … schools … build positive and productive relationships with students' families and the broader neighborhood and community" (Parrett, 2009, p. 27). On the contrary, in an underperforming school "the climate, context, or culture of the school was the major culprit. In a dysfunctional culture, the kind of interaction and bonding needed to promote development and learning cannot take place" (Comer, 2004, p.21). School culture permits or deflects the potential to build a collaborative community.

This study builds its theoretical framework upon the Comer Process; but seeks to add that even without a formal subscription to the Comer Process, a school could adopt its guiding principles and work toward developing a quality, community-involved school. "When we create conditions that support the development of children, they will learn" (Comer, 2004, p.22). Per Comer, school conditions that result from an influence from and the participation of the community will foster increased student achievement, the type of school community control advocates sought to establish decades ago.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Concept Maps and Methods

Between the qualitative and quantitative methodologies of research, in-depth

inquiry about community involvement within a school and the impact of that involvement

on the school's culture can be more clearly understood with the use of qualitative tools.

The essence of community involvement is relationships: between an individual school

and its community, between the school and the larger organization of which it belongs,

between diverse factions that make up a composite community, and the community and

the larger school organization. Quantifying these relationships could produce statistical

data; yet, that data would prove to be limited in texture, voice and impact. Qualitative

approaches can more appropriately reflect the influence of politics and opinions of those

involved. "A dependence on purely quantitative methods may neglect the social and

cultural construction of the 'variables' which quantitative research seeks to correlate"

(Silverman, 2001, p. 29). This study expounds on the relationship between a school and

its community and how it impacts the school's culture. While previous researchers have

investigated organizational theories and community compositions, this study will explore

the relationships between a school (organization), its' communities and the influence of

those relationships on the culture of the school.

This study will utilize qualitative strategies to depict or attempt to gauge the

impact of the relationship between communities, schools and their influences. Figure 3

depicts a multi-pronged strategic approach to triangulate research data includes:

interviews, observations, photography, and artifact review.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how the culture of a school can be shaped and influenced by parental involvement and whether that involvement has a positive influence that promotes the academic success of the students. Reaching the core of those influences and depicting those relationships require qualitative strategies. "Quantitative methods …

Figure 3. Triangulation Strategies

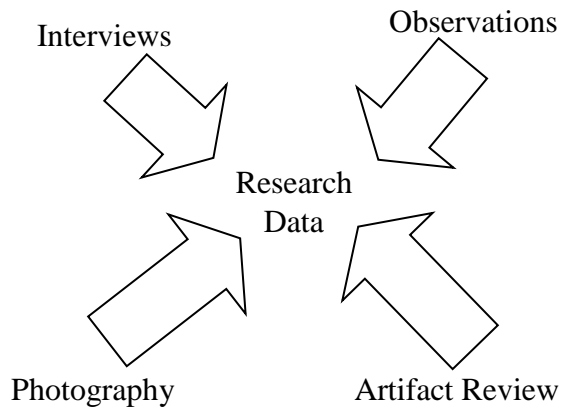*Figure 3.* Triangulation Strategies. This figure illustrates the strategies employed by this research to acquire data.

characterize the world as made of observable, measurable facts. … Qualitative methods … portray a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing" (Glasne, 1999, p.4-5). The involvement and its' influence that are the focus of this study will be observed in the natural setting of the influenced school. This mode of observation counters quantitative or traditional methods of research because "traditional investigations created a contrived situation in which the research participant was 'taken out' of the context and placed within an experimental situation far removed from his or her personal experiences" (Creswell, 2005, p.41-42).   This study will maintain focus on the school, the place where the parental /community influences and organizational duties come together to contribute to the development of a product – the student.

This study also seeks to gain clearer understanding as to how parental involvement has made / will make this school more successful than its' counterparts that have nearly identical demographic composition. During the last few years, public schools in Detroit – an organization comprised of numerous schools, as well as several smaller

charter school 'districts' - have been painted with broad, often-disparaging strokes. Some of the unpleasant perception may be warranted, yet amid several unproductive schools there are comparable numbers of productive schools. The aim of this study involves observing and documenting the culture of one of those productive schools and detailing ways in which that school's community's investment / involvement contributes to the school's ability to stand apart from others. This approach is consistent with the techniques of qualitative researchers whom "observe, interview, record, describe, interpret, and appraise settings as they are" (Eisner, 1998, p. 33). Moreover, the research methods that will be employed for this study will be used with an understanding that a quantitative approach would not fully convey the phenomenon and "whereas the qualitative researcher insists that not all of the reality that constitutes education is in fact reducible to variables" (Silverman, 2001, p. 25).

To segue into specific attributes of this study, the following concept maps can provide visual cues as to the emphasis of this study. Figure 4 is a reproduction of James Comer's School Development Plan (SDP) model, alternately referred to as the Comer Process. The Comer Process provides the yardstick through which this study measures a quality school. Figure 4 aims to provide an overview of this study and its prominent characters and their roles. Finally, explanations are provided to connect attributes from the Comer process with the main components of this research. Those explanations also indirectly imply that without official subscription to the SDP, a school could embody some of its essential elements and achieve promising outcomes for its' students and families. While the researcher finds the SDP to be an effective model, it is believed that

variations and/or inspiration from it could enhance a school's relationship with its community.

Figure 4. Model of the Comer Process

Model of the Comer Process

Guiding Principles
Consensus • Collaboration • No-fault

Parent Team

(PT)
Involves parents at every level of school activity.

School Planning & Management Team

(SPMT)
Plans and coordinates school activities.

Student & Staff Support Team

(SSST)
Addresses schoolwide prevention issues. Manages individual student cases.

Comprehensive School Plan

- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment
- Social and academic climate goals
- Sharing of information between school and community

Assessment & Modification

Periodic assessment creates new information & identifies new opportunities; permits orderly change or adjustment.

Staff Development

Created by needs identified in goals of the Comprehensive School Plan.

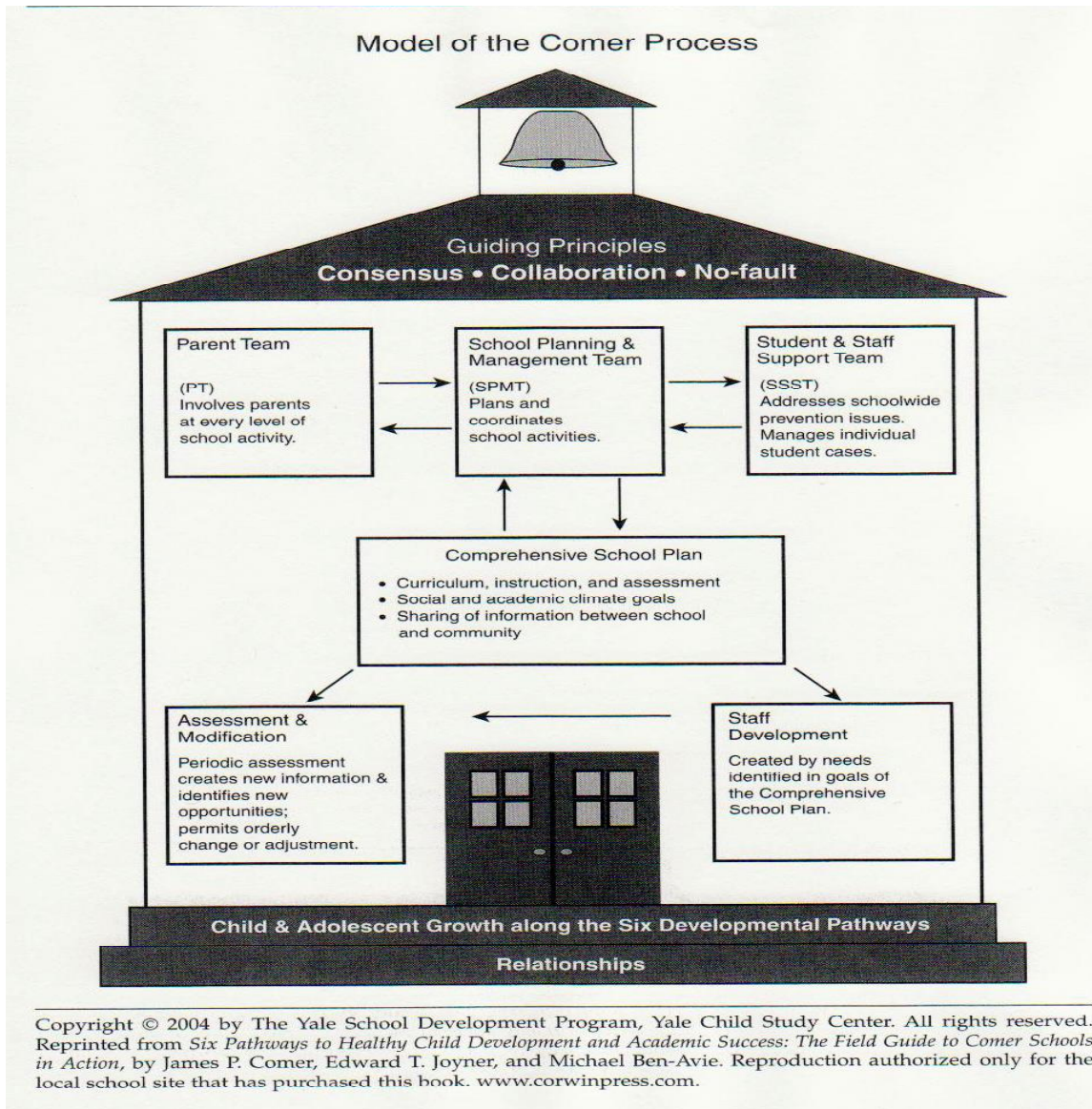**Child & Adolescent Growth along the Six Developmental Pathways**

Relationships

Figure 4. Model of the Comer Process. This figure is a reproduction of the Comer Process created by the Yale School Development Program.

The School Development Plan is a model that contains three groups, carrying out three actions, and guided by three principles. The stakeholders are organized into the three groups or teams:

- "The School Planning and Management Team (SPMT) creates the vision for where the school wants to go (Comer, 1997, p. 50) …Through the SPMT, the schools determine what change is needed and what is possible, at a speed they can manage" (Comer, 1997, p. 52).

- "The Parent Team … allows parents to share their knowledge about their children and the community with the staff, who in turn share their knowledge about child behavior and learning with the parents" (Comer, 1997, p. 52).

- "The Student and Staff Support Team … help the staff and the parents to foster desirable behavior in children. This is done more by changing the culture of the school to better meet the developmental needs of children than by working directly with children" (Comer, 1997, p. 53).

These teams are expected to function with three guiding principles:

- "The *no-fault* principle: Finger pointing and faultfinding only generates defensiveness. Focusing on ways to prevent and solve problems promotes accountability" (Comer, 1997, p. 55).

- *"Consensus* decision making: Voting can lead to power and personality struggles that have little to do with the needs of children … To reduce clique behavior and personality politics, we discuss what appears to be good for the children, then we go with what most think will work – with the proviso that if it doesn't, we will try

the other ideas next. And in the process a better approach than any previously

discussed often turns up" (Comer, 1997, p. 55).

- *"Collaboration*: … the members of the team cannot paralyze the school principal

    … but the principal cannot ignore the considered opinions of team members. This

    promotes a feeling of true collaboration and responsibility for program outcomes"

    (Comer, 1997, p. 55).

With the groups operating under these principles rooted in six developmental

pathways of child development and relationship between involved parties, the

comprehensive school plan can be more realized with the use of a staff development plan

as well as the assessment and modifications of the comprehensive school plan.

While Figure 4 is an actual depiction of the Comer Model and how it works, Figure

5 is the researcher's illustrative attempt to present the actors, actions and procedures in a

school that may not specifically follow Comer's model but does employ similar

conceptual activities.

The *who* of Figure 5 has two groupings: primary and secondary contributors. The

primary contributors, school staff, administration and board members, are shown with

bold-lined large circles and the secondary contributors, parents and community are in the

smaller circles. Both sets of these contributors are represented more formally in the

Comer Model. The primary contributors are Comer's School Planning & Management

Team as well as the Student & Staff Support Team and the secondary contributors are

members of Comer's Parent Team. Whereas their roles and responsibilities are clearly

defined in the Comer Process, in a school fitting the collaborative communities' concept

the contributors act in very similar capacities without the deliberate role defining labels.

Conceptually, Comer's designated teams and their roles are mirrored in some ways by the

who of Figure 5.

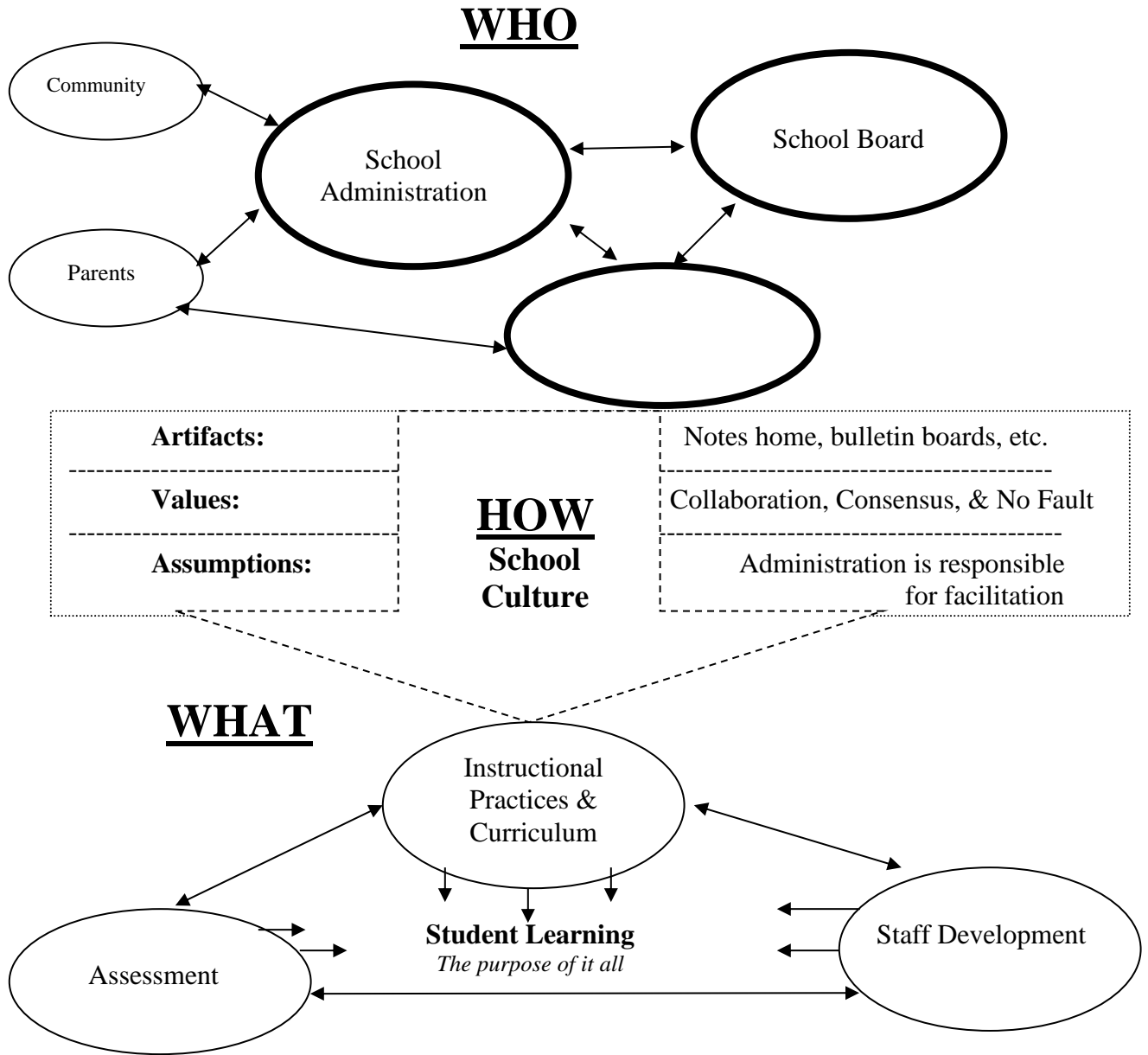*Figure 5.* Incorporation of Comer Process into Researcher's Concept Map.

WHO

Figure 5. Comer Process components incorporated into researcher's concept map. This figure

illustrates a fusion of the Comer Process into the researcher's concept map.

The *how* of Figure 5 displays some attributes that make up school culture. Three of those attributes are artifacts, values and assumptions. In this research, the notes sent home and bulletin board displays serve as artifacts or tangible evidence that convey what is important to the school and its families. The values of collaboration, consensus and no fault are specified guidelines / principles of conduct from the Comer model and serve as operating guidelines used by the *who* to deliver the *what*. The third aspect of *how*, assumptions, will perhaps explains how the school's culture functions. For example, if there is an assumption that "the administration is responsible," such an assumption would provide insight on how parents interact with and their expectations of the administration. It is as if the artifacts are the ship, the values are navigating skills of the captain and the assumptions are the sea, all necessary components for the sailing and school culture.

Finally, the *what* are the strategies used to carry out the purpose of the school. Instructional practices and curriculum, assessment and staff development are all mechanisms used by the *who* to educate children. The *how* is the way those mechanisms are carried forth. It is as if instructional practices and the other strategies are a hammer, the artifacts, values and assumptions determine whether the hammer pounds or is used to pry nails free. In Comer's Model, these strategies are defined as assessment and modification, comprehensive school plan, and staff development. The similarities between the concept maps are evidence that the strategies needed for quality schools could also be perceived as essential ingredients for a quality school.

Unit of Analysis and Participant Selection

This study will be conducted at a Detroit charter school, one with a tie to community control initiative of early 1970s. This school also operates as an independent public school academy. The selection of this school was due to the ability to gain access. In addition to that, consideration was given to the political climate of the larger competing organization of Detroit Public schools, and their desire that research such as this not be conducted in their schools. The researcher's guiding notion is that a study that reflects one of the city's success stories may be more accepted as an avenue toward remedying of the city's school systems due to its' emphasis on strategies that work as opposed to rehashing stories of what has gone wrong. Moreover, using one school as a research base stems from the premise that "it is usually best to begin ethnography by locating a single social situation" (Spradley, 1980, p.42). Because a "social situation can be identified by three primary elements: a *place*, *actors*, and *activities*" (Spradley, 1980, p.39), the research that will be conducted will provide insight on:

- Place - Plymouth Educational Center

- Actors - Administrators, teachers, parents, volunteers and students

- Activities – PTA (Parent –Teacher Association) meetings, school board meetings, normal school day routines, and parent – teacher conferences.

Fieldwork consisting of observations, photographs, interviews, and artifact review were conducted at the PEC K-8 building to explore the relationship between parental involvement and school culture. The insight gathered from this singular site can evolve into a network of relationships and activities. As a qualitative researcher, this researcher

is "interested in those networks of social situations where the *same group of people* share in the activities" (Spradley, 1980, p.43).

Given the political climate and several challenges facing schools in Detroit, gaining access might have been monumental obstacle. Plymouth Educational Center opened its doors as a feasible location for study. Considering this researcher's ties to Plymouth Educational Center, there is a challenge to remain objective to counter:

Moving into a new culture is easier than studying your own. When everything is different, you are more open to new understandings. When you are already familiar with a culture or group or school, your angles of vision are narrowed by preformed assumptions about what is going on. (Glesne, 1999, p. 25)

The critical linchpin needed in understanding the relationship between the school and community is the school's administration. They set the tone for the environment and are essential in establishing the culture. Interviewing the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) will be essential to validity, context and interpretation of activities and observations. "Second in importance to direct observation is the use of the interview" (Eisner, 1998, p. 183). In addition to the CAO, four parents and four staff members were interviewed. Through those interviews, data can be formulated regarding the development of community rapport, the school culture and how the existing culture adds or includes new members.

Researcher as a Data Collection Instrument

One factor in the data collection of this study is that the researcher served as the Assistant Principal for grades K-4 at PEC from August 2002 until May 2005. During that

time, PEC was in a stage of transformative growth. This factor contains attributes of

reflexivity which include "an individual's considered response to an immediate context

and making choices for further direction … the ability of individuals to process

information and create knowledge … and, further, how relations of power operate"

(D'Cruz, 2007, p.75). The gap between this researcher's last day as an employee and first

day as a researcher spans four years. Intentional effort was utilized to document data as it

was presented without coloring data with the perspective of a former employee.

Relationships that were developed as an employee contributed to an ease in gaining

access and the rapport with some interviewees.

Authenticity and Credibility

One of the persistent sources of difficulty for those using qualitative methods of

research and evaluation pertains to questions about the validity of their work.

There are some who believe that what is personal, literary, and at times even

poetic cannot be a valid source of knowledge. (Eisner, 1998, p. 107)

This research's credibility will be supported through three dimensions that Eisner

describes as:

1. Structural Corroboration – essentially like the practice of triangulation, or

   supporting corresponding data through multiple resources. Photography, artifact

   review, observations and interviews will serve as four merging lanes that lead to

   the validation of PEC's relationships with its students, families and community.

2. Consensual Validation – "Agreement among competent others that the

   description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of an educational situation

   are right" (Eisner, 1998, p. 112). Although the researcher is an outsider to

Plymouth Educational Center, the findings from this research would be apparent to reasonable minded adults. While initially, photographs and artifacts appear to be separate; upon the conclusion of this study, readers will come to understand the continuity between them and other activities at the academy.

3. Referential Adequacy – "the extent to which a reader is able to locate in its subject matter the qualities the [researcher] addresses and the meanings he or she ascribes to them" (Eisner, 198, p. 114). The findings from this research are and will be evident to those who experience them. The findings will not be mere happenstance or evident to only the researcher, instead it will be further understood to those who follow this research.

The nature of qualitative research leads to more specific views of data than that of quantitative research. It is not expected that this research would be duplicated in its entirety but the premise and findings could provide inspiration for future research.

Study Design

Data collection will be derived through four primary methods. The use of multiple methods increases validity for this research through the corroboration of information gained from each method. This study will establish validity through use of "three sources of evidence used in educational criticism: *structural corroboration*, *consensual validation* and *referential adequacy*" (Eisner,1985) (Eisner,1998, p.110).

- "Structural corroboration, like the process of triangulation, is a means through which multiple types of data are related to each other to support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation of a state of affairs" (Eisner, 1998, p.110).

- Consensual Validation is, at base, agreement among competent others that the description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics of an educational situation are right (Eisner, 1998, p. 112).

- Referential Adequacy – "criticism is referentially adequate to the extent which a reader is able to locate in its subject matter the qualities the critic addresses and the meanings he or she ascribes to them (Eisener, 1998, p.114).

Structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy are utilized in this research through interviews, artifact review, observations and photography.

Photography will be used as a medium to convey what parents, students, and staff views when they enter Plymouth Educational Center. The photographs will be used "to reproduce the reality in front of the camera's lens, yielding an unmediated and unbiased visual report" (Schwartz, 1989, p.120). Photographs can also "signify multiple representations of a culture and enrich understanding of the phenomena under investigation" (Razvo. 2006). Using photographs as data that conveys the physical setting is summarized by Eisner who shared,

> Photographs … can say things that not only would require pages and pages of words to describe, but in the end, could not be adequately described with words. To show what a classroom looks like, an excellent photo will do far more than the best of texts (Eisner, 1998, p. 187).

Whether the school uses colorful welcome banners or is all steel and concrete slabs does provide qualitative data about the school. Also "pictures of campus buildings symbolized an appreciation for the institution and its stature in the community" (Schulze, 2007, p. 550).

Photographs will be used as data in two ways- as data itself and as a supplement to reinforce other data. None of the photographs will contain live subjects. In this study of school culture, one could question the value of photos. Razvo answers the question, "Why are images important? They signify multiple representations of a culture and enrich understanding of the phenomena under investigation" (Razvo, 2006). Moreover, in gaining an understanding of PEC's families and staff, the photographs can depict the environment. "Human beings are best understood in relation to their environment. Reflexive photography can aid in understanding how meaning is formed when individuals from different social and cultural groups interact with their environments" (Schulze, 2007, p. 552).

Observations will also substantiate validity. This researcher's role during the observations can be defined as that of a participant observer.

> The participant observer comes to a social situation with two purposes: (1) to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) to observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situation. The ordinary participant comes to that same situation with only one purpose - to engage in the appropriate activities. (Spradley, 1980, p. 54)

While this researcher is not a staff member nor parent of a student at Plymouth Educational Center, my position as an outsider evolves with the more time spent in the observational setting. "The participant observer … will experience being both insider and outsider simultaneously" (Spradley, 1980, p. 57). Some of the preliminary areas for observation will be the main entrance, the main office, any areas designated for parents or volunteers, school board meetings, PTA meetings and parent teacher conferences. By

witnessing the activities within these settings, a deeper understanding of the relationship

between PEC and its community members will be garnered. Moreover, the rapport

between PEC and parents and / or the outside community will become more apparent.

Artifact review will be used as a medium to further validate observations or

contradict them. The school's communications sent to parents, the displays boards (as

depicted in the photographs) and other materials (website, pamphlets, etc.) made

available to students and families will be analyzed to contribute to the research. "Another

important source of information about schools is the records and artifacts that frequently

reveal what people will not or cannot say" (Eisner, 1998, p. 184).

> Documents corroborate your observations and interviews and thus make your
>
> findings more trustworthy. Beyond corroboration, they may raise questions about
>
> your hunches and thereby shape new directions for observations and interviews.
>
> They also provide you with historical, demographic, and sometimes personal
>
> information that is unavailable from other sources. (Glesne, 1999, p. 58)

What if the annual education report boasts of a 90% parental participation during

parent – teacher conferences, yet observation only accounts for 20%? Such a discrepancy

will challenge the trustworthiness of the one of the data sources and raise questions about

the author(s) of that report. Moreover, themes derived from the artifact review should

resemble themes revealed by the other data allocation strategies.

The fourth strategy to be used for acquiring research information will be

interviews. "The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore

alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing …"

(Glesne, 1999, p.69). Through interviews, the culture of Plymouth Educational Center

will be given voice. Multiple interviews will provide various points of view; yet the

emergence of common themes can prove to depict the truth about PEC. By interviewing

the CAO, teachers, and parents, an image of PEC's culture should arise.

Data Analysis

After collecting a substantial amount of data, an analysis of all that information

will transform this assorted array of data into a coherent depiction of the culture of

Plymouth Educational Center. "In ethnographic inquiry, analysis is a process of question

–discovery. Instead of coming into the field with specific questions, the ethnographer

analyzes the field data compiled … to discover questions" (Spradley, 1980, p. 33).

> The qualitative researcher faces the problem of systematically analyzing what is
> usually a substantial body of data... unlike the quantitative researcher, however,
> he has relatively little idea at the outset how to partition this continuous mass into
> discrete, perhaps even countable, categories" (Silverman, 2001, p. 20).

The partitioning of the data will be done by using Graham Gibbs' Grounded

Theory Coding Methods will be used as a mechanism for sorting data. Gibb's coding

process consists of the following three strategies:

> *Open coding* – a procedure for developing categories of information
>
> *Axial coding* – a procedure for interconnecting the categories
>
> *Selective coding* – a procedure for building a story that connects the categories
> producing a discursive set of theoretical propositions (Gibbs, 2010).

With the photographs, this researcher aims to reveal that with which some have

become familiar. For example, when glancing at a small bronze disk, many will see a

penny. A small percentage will see Abraham Lincoln, even fewer will notice the

direction he faces and an even more scant percentage will notice his tie – yet all saw a

penny. "Seeing, rather than mere looking, requires an enlightened eye: this is as true and

as important in understanding and improving education" (Eisner, 1998, p.1). This

research will aim to see the symbolism and stories behind the common structures,

pictures and bulletin boards that people at PEC experience every day.

The observations of the office, main entrance, parent –teacher conferences, school

board and PTA meetings will be multidimensional. When selecting settings and/ or

activities to observe, "the goal is to select a social situation in which some activities

frequently occur" (Spradley, 1980, p.50). The high frequency activity this researcher

seeks to observe will be exchanges between the school / staff with parents and

community members. These exchanges would contribute toward affirming the research

premise. These observations "requires the ethnographer to increase his or her awareness,

to raise the level of attention, to tune in things usually tuned out" (Spradley, 1980, p.56),

as with the photographs – during these observations this researcher will be challenged to

become more aware of what is observed and to gather deeper, not-so-obvious meanings.

The reviewing of artifacts will further add to the validations of themes that recur

during data analysis. How is school information communicated to parents? Does it

happen through glossy booklets? Are artifacts developed on-site or off-site? Is it easy to

read or cumbersome? Is it hastily put together, copied and distributed as children exit the

building or does it come prepackaged at a designated time? If there is a website, what

information does it provide? How often is the website updated? Are hardcopy

communications only available in the office? Do these communications convey

information beyond calendar dates and lunch menus? Artifact review can spark

questions; yet, if they convey notices of the local Boy Scout troupe, or senior volunteers or other outside organizations – then these artifacts can come to serve as a link between the school and its community.

The interviews with the CAO, other staff, and parents will be pre-scheduled, digitally recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions will be gathered as a text database, then the "analysis of text consists of dividing it into groups of sentences, called text segments, and determining the meaning of each group of sentences … the result may also include themes or broad categories that represent your findings" (Creswell, 2005, p. 49).

Plymouth Educational Center

Plymouth Educational Center (PEC) is a charter school on the east side of Detroit. It began in 1974 as Plymouth Day School, a private school founded by the Plymouth United Church of Christ. In 1992, church member Vivian Ross was selected to lead the school. Under Dr. Ross' guidance, PEC became a charter school 1995. With Dr. Ross as the administrative leader and Jessie Kilgore (who would eventually become Dr. Kilgore) as the principal, PEC could increase enrollment and secure funding that led to the construction of a new building in 1999. During this time, Dr. Ross functioned as the educational visionary executive with Dr. Kilgore serving as a capable administrative apprentice in charge of day-to-day responsibilities.

Dr. Kilgore evolves into an essential linchpin for PEC's long-term vitality. He is the facilitator of the school board's mission as well as the educational ambassador to the community. His engaging personality and intelligence establishes him as someone parents who distrust DPS could depend upon. His rapport with the community and

articulation of the educational aims of PEC, could establish him as a legitimate and

accessible alternative to DPS. With Dr. Kilgore as the public face, enrollment soars.

During this same time, there is a mentor –pupil, educational-executive-molding process

that could describe his rapport with Dr. Ross. In 2002, that molding process takes new

form as Dr. Ross retires and is voted in as the president of school board. Dr. Kilgore was

then promoted from principal to Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Ross' former role.

Although PEC was then only one building, as a charter school it is recognized as a

school district. Although the responsibilities of the CAO are very like that of a traditional

school district superintendent, the volume of the workload and the location of the central

office within the school building grant the CAO functional opportunities that rival a

principal in a traditional school district. These opportunities could also make him more

publicly viewed as the school leader rather than the principal. PEC has had a few

different principals, but Dr. Kilgore has been constant. He is the identifying figure that

parents trust when enrolling their children in PEC. He has a dominant hand in shaping the

environment that builds upon parents trust and creates the conditions in which they can

participate. Essentially, Dr. Kilgore embodies the values of two communities: the school

board made up of church members and families seeking alternatives to DPS.

Legal and Ethical Issues

Some of the most intrinsically significant issues related to qualitative research

stem from ethical adherence. "Ethical considerations are inseparable from your everyday

interactions with research participants and with your data" (Glesne, 1999, p. 113).

"Traditional ethical concerns have revolved around the topics of *informed consent*

(consent received from the subject after he or she has been carefully and truthfully

informed about the research), *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the

subject) and *protection from harm* (physical, emotional, or any other kind)"

(Fontana, 1998, p.70).

Informed consent will be achieved using the human subjects form necessitated for

the conducting of this research. While the aim of this research is to document the

variables that makes PEC successful, there is a likelihood that some unpopular or

troublesome information may be uncovered or shared. Preceding that likelihood is the

responsibility of the researcher to forewarn participants of the pros and cons of

participating in this study. Permission for this research must be granted from the

administration of PEC.

This research will focus on Plymouth Educational Center as a collective entity.

Students and parents will not be named or photographed. The interviewees will be the

only adults specifically named and described, all others that emerge from details of

observations will be portrayed in a manner that describes their role in the observed

context, but not as individual study focuses.

Delimitations

To establish parameters and guidelines to this study, a series of delimitations were

implemented. The first delimitation was choosing a research laboratory of one school.

This delimitation was imposed to achieve more insightful depth than conceptual breadth.

Second, the selection of Plymouth Educational Center came after access denials by DPS and another charter school. The selection of PEC was further embraced as the researcher has experience with the PEC's customs, experience that allows for more energy to be dedicated to the research question. For example, the researcher would not choose to study classrooms China. Why? Because conducting research in China would require learning Chinese, understanding Chinese social mores and customs, and the researcher standing-out in the new environment. Each of those factors would require significant time to learn and /or overcome. By selecting PEC, the researcher knows their "language," understands their customs, and believes his presence would not disrupt the environment. Moreover, the researcher's maturity and time of separation from PEC diminishes the familiarity that would undermine the research.

Finally, the timing of the fieldwork was targeted for the second half of the school year. Rules, customs, and relationships within the environment are more likely to be shared, learned, and developed during the first half of the school year. By the second half, nearly everyone had settled into their roles, which could enhance the validity of the research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Plymouth Educational Center

Figure 6. Plymouth Educational Center

Figure 6. Plymouth Educational Center. This figure is a photograph of the main entrance of Plymouth Educational Center.

Plymouth Educational Center (PEC) is a charter school located at 1460 East Forest Avenue in Detroit, Michigan that enrolled 873 students in grades kindergarten through eighth during the 2008 -2009 school year. Fieldwork that includes interviews, photographs, artifact collection and observations, was conducted from March 2009 through June 2009, with additional interviews held in November 2009 and June 2011. At one point during the 1990s, the facility that houses PEC was the first newly constructed public school in the city of Detroit in over twenty years. This facility has been named the Vivian Ross Campus as a tribute to the school's first Chief Administrative Officer, whose retirement was followed by additional years of service as president and member of the PEC school board. The late Dr. Ross "successfully provided leadership to secure land

and funding necessary to build a new school from ground up" (Plymouth Educational Center, n.d.).

The school began as the Plymouth United Church of Christ Day Care Center in the basement of the Plymouth United Church of Christ. At the inception of the day care, the pastor of Plymouth United Church was Nicholas Hood, Jr., one of the community advocates for community control of Detroit Public Schools during the 1970s. Pastor Hood's commitment to education and the community is seen through the development of the day care in 1974, its evolution into a private school, and his community building efforts.

> Hood, who was a city council member for 28 years, would … lead his church into building an adjacent 26-acre community that includes mixed-income apartments, townhouses, a senior citizens building, a school, a day-care center, a training center and housing for mentally retarded youth, and a new Plymouth church building. He also was instrumental in getting a shopping center built within walking distance of the development. (Davis, 2010).

Later, during the 1980s, Nicholas Hood III assumed leadership of Plymouth Day School, which had expanded to serve students in grades kindergarten through fifth. Nicholas Hood III succeeded his father as pastor and served as a Detroit City Councilman. Plymouth United Church has a reputation for being the church home of several African-American professionals. "Plymouth … was affiliated more closely with Detroit's black establishment, stocked with doctors and lawyers and other professionals ..." (Maraniss, 2015, p.125). Some of members of the church also serve on the PEC's Board of Directors.

Participant Description

Plymouth Educational Center sits on East Forest, just east of Interstate 75, not far from Wayne State University. It was once a private day school operated by the Plymouth United Church of Christ, which sits about a mile away on Warren Ave. The relatively new constructed school and the larger newly constructed federal-reserve facility across the street, stand in stark contrast to the surrounding neighborhood. In what was at one time an outer fringe of Detroit's historical Black Bottom community, vestiges of old factories, abandoned warehouses and decaying neighborhoods surround the school's campus. Plymouth Educational Center is also within proximity of the Detroit Medical Center, Eastern Market and various museums.

Plymouth Educational Center stands on what they commonly refer to as the Vivian Ross Campus. The late Dr. Vivian Ross was instrumental in reshaping the school from a small private day school into a public-school academy. Her mission in crafting an exceptional school is personified by the building that houses the school.

Plymouth Educational Center continues to evolve as this year marks the second year of their high school, comprised of only ninth and tenth-graders with additional grades to be added with each subsequent year.

Having grown from the basement of the church, to a rented school building in Highland Park, Michigan, and eventually into a gradual occupation of the new facility, PEC's transitions in locations mirrored its enrollment increases. Location and the composition of the enrolled population are important contextual influencers that will be explored with more depth later in this chapter.

Figuratively, the school's DNA could be tied to its roots in a community-oriented church and that church's culture of service, outreach, and support. Does the church's spirit of investment into the community continue to exist in the school? Is PEC an example of a type of community-controlled school that Pastor Hood, Jr. and others pushed for decades ago? How does parental involvement impact PEC?

Overview of Data Sources

The initial goal of this research was to determine the relationship between parental involvement and school culture. When parents are engaged with their child's school, it can have a positive impact on their child's academic performance.

Proponents of parent involvement made at least three strong arguments. First, parents have a knowledge of their children and a relationship on which school personnel can build. Second, the presence of parents could improve accountability and help the tie school programs to community needs. Third, if parents themselves are involved in a school program, they will develop a greater interest in program outcomes and will be supportive of budgetary and other school-related economic and political considerations (Comer, 1980, p.126).

 With that as a premise and the influence of previous research, this study was developed from the belief that if parental involvement is good for an individual child, what could happen when many parents become engaged? Along with that idea, when considering how urban public schools that serve populations with high free-and-reduced lunch rates often fill the lists of underperforming schools, how would parental involvement relate to

the culture of a successful school that shares similar attributes and demographics with the underperforming schools?

Why Data from 2009 and 2011?

The data for this research was collected in two different years. In that two-year window, the researcher changed careers, relocated to another state, and most importantly, improved his research skills. That two-year window falls within a larger frame of time during which Detroit continued to change.

The researcher commuted to PEC as an employee from 2002 -2005. Those commutes were met with daily trepidation due to traffic congestion. During 2009, a different job required a commute along the same interstate to a location a mile north of PEC. The 2009 commutes lacked the traffic volume that had been experienced during the PEC commutes. The drop-in traffic volume reflects a drop-in Detroit's overall population. As reported by CNN online, "According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Detroit saw its population drop from 951,270 in 2000 to 713,777 last year -- its lowest since the 1910 census" (CNN, 2011). A more pronounced description of the decline states, "one person left the city every 22 minutes between 2000 and 2010" (Knapp, 2011).

Within Detroit's population decline, its remaining citizenry contained a higher percentage of impoverished and / or unemployed members.

Today one third of its citizens live in poverty. Detroit's median family income is $33,000, about half the U.S. average. In 2009, the city's unemployment rate was 25 percent, which was 9 percentage points more than any other large city and more than 2.5 times the national average (Glaeser, 2011, p. 41).

The demographic changes that occurred within Detroit from 2009 to 2011 had been ongoing for decades. What makes the difference between 2009 and 2011 most remarkable is the maturity of the researcher.

The maturity of the researcher, while symbolized through career advancement, is most accurately captured in interviewing and coding data. In 2009, the researcher practiced a rigidity in interviewing that resulted in direct questions that led to surface level responses and eventually surface level data analysis. With coaching and additional studies of research practices, the researcher returned to the field with better questions and a more attuned listening ear. The 2011 interviews (some follow-ups with 2009 interviewees and some with new subjects) were richer in context, supported 2009 data, and depicted a more nuanced and evolving school environment. Moreover, the understanding and application of coding strategies empowered a more discerning analysis often leading to revelations about information that had been previously acquired. A changing Detroit contributed to a changed PEC that was better interpreted by a more mature researcher – those factors influence the collection of data in two different years.

While acquiring data for this research, the initial goal became more refined. The data collection process refined the goal into determining the relationship between a school and a changing demographic. The refining of the goal is prompted by the two phases of data collection. The initial goal and data collection phase occurs in 2009 and the refined goal and additional phase occurred with the collection of data in 2011. The 2009 data is derived from observations, artifact review, and interviews. The 2011 data collection is derived from more extensive interviews with different interviewees and photography. The two phases of data collection are valuable because it proved to be of

additional value to collect data over time as opposed to a singular snapshot. The 2009

data is derived from interviews, artifact collection, and observations. The 2011 data is

made of more extensive interviews and photography. The 2011 data added additional

nuance to data collected in 2009. The fieldwork observations at PEC were conducted at

varying times on random days. Locations and events included:

Table 4.1. Research observation location and events

Locations	Events
• Main Office • Elementary hallway • Middle school hallway • Support Services Suite • Lower elementary classroom • Main door/corridor near security guard • Gymnasium /Cafeteria • Media center • Middle school classroom • Parking lot during dismissal	• Board meeting • Parent Teacher Student Association meeting • Grandparents/Special Person Day • Parent Teacher Conferences • Honor Society induction • Middle School Connection Night • Parent Town Hall Meeting • Parents & Pancakes Breakfast • Career Day • Award Ceremonies • Declamation Contest • Parent Information Session for 7th grade
Number of observation hours: 22 hours 35 min *Number of pages of observation notes:* 53 pages	

Note. Table 4.1 is a listing of the research locations and events where and when observations

were conducted.

Interviews were conducted during both 2009 and 2011 and Table 4.2 provides a list of the

interviewees:

Table 4.2. Research observation interviewees.

2009	2011
Arkishi Davis – Parent	Arkishi Davis – Parent
D'Andre Ford – Parent	Ron Jones – Parent
Peggy Hudson – Teacher	Jessie Kilgore – CAO
Jessie Kilgore – CAO	Saundra Scott – Parent
Odessa Spruill – Teacher	James Smith (pseudonym) – Teacher
	Odessia Spruill – Teacher
Total interview time: 93 min 4 seconds	*Total interview time:* 224 min 30 sec
Number of transcribed pages: 14	*Number of transcribed pages:* 69

Note. Table 4.2 is a listing of interview participants and their roles with the school. It also includes transcript details and total time of conducted interviews.

Themes Arising from Data

While conducting the fieldwork, a few themes surfaced. The themes listed below are separated to reflect the 2009 and 2011 data collection phases. This separation is important because as one of the latter themes will specify, different parent types exist at PEC. In 2009, one parent type metaphorically flew beneath the radar. The nature of their actions and their group size rendered them undetectable. By 2011, that parent type had increased in size and influence. The emergence of one parent type alters the visibility of some of the 2009 themes; yet, the following list of themes attempts to capture themes at the time they were most visible.

2009 Themes:

1. Enrollment Reasons
2. School Engagement Strategies
3. Strong Central Figure
4. Intentional Leadership Initiative
5. Administrative Activity
6. Embracing Environment
7. Parental Engagement
8. Commitment
9. Accountability
10. Collaboration
11. Sustained Involvement

2011 Themes:

    11. Participation Decreases

    12. Parental Types

- Commuter Tenured
- Walker Non-Tenure

Themes from both data collection phases will be explained individually. When providing explanations of the themes, it will seem that some themes affect others. It is important to remember that the themes are derived from two phases of data collection. The order in how the themes are explained does not imply that they have a linear relationship. This study will avoid ranking or forcing a relationship between themes. Also, the following themes contain words in bold print. These words are in bold to highlight key concepts and serve as supporting evidence for sub-themes.

Enrollment Reasons

The first theme is enrollment reasons or the reason(s) that prompts parents to enroll in PEC. For this study, enrollment reasons are its **location**, parents **heard it is a good school**, and other attributes such as **MEAP scores** and the **athletic field**.

Some families live a distance from PEC; yet, choose to enroll their children in the school. Arkishi Davis, a PEC parent, stated: "this is what I would like to consider a commuter school. It is on my way to work." She later added that she "chose PEC, **first of all, for its location**." Kristin Woods, a PEC middle school teacher, elaborated on the location when she stated that the school "is close to the DMC (Detroit Medical Center) and a lot of our student population have parents that are employed by the DMC as well … it's a viable option for parents that work in the area." Mrs. Davis, members of the

staff, and other parents pass other schools to bring their children to PEC. Along with the other families who are hoping by the luck of the lottery that their child(ren) can be accepted and the actions of the staff to engage parents, these activities support parents' enrollment reasons. Reasons may vary from each family, yet their goal is uniform: a PEC education for their child(ren).

> When explaining why she chose PEC, Parent Saundra Scott said,
>
> I never dealt with DPS; I've always been at Plymouth. But my other relatives and staff are at a regular school and well, … they don't really have any supervision because they're always fighting, always … that's why I didn't put my kids in public school; because I know how they are and since they out here from when we were at the church. So, we've been here ever since and now they're at the high school.
>
> Mrs. Scott added that families come to PEC "because **they hear about the school and it's a good school** and they know they don't take any mess …" Mrs. Davis added her perception of other parents' enrollment reasons,
>
> I think that if parents research – I think it's the Skillman Foundation, their (PEC) status with them. Our **MEAP scores** … if you did just … a Google search of the school, they have honor roll levels…how many kids … are on honor level. How we have a new **athletic field** that opens us up for more intramural sports, which a lot of schools don't have. They (other schools) have the kids playing in the parking lots. We have an actual football field, where you can do soccer, football, and everything …

One area where enrollment reasons are visible is the annual enrollment lottery for new students. The lottery is an opportunity for families to apply for available enrollment spots. The guidelines for acceptance are specified, such as: younger siblings of current PEC students receive preference and the school will not split families – meaning that if a family has two children in the lottery and one is accepted, the other is also admitted. Although the annual lottery brings out a high turnout for limited spaces, the result of families seeking enrollment has a unique component. The unique component about some of the enrolled students is that a few them are children of PEC staff.

One morning while conducting fieldwork, the researcher observed two staff members in the hall conducting an informal conference. During this conference, the school social worker, a mother of a fourth grader, was meeting with the fourth-grade teacher as a parent, not a colleague. This collaboration reflects collegial respect along with the parent/ staff member's endorsement in what PEC offers. When conducting historical research about DPS, one fact of its history was the demise of community – meaning that teachers no longer lived in the communities where they taught. This physical distance between teacher residence and the children they serve could imply a difference in values. Families enrolling children in PEC, however, share some values. When the researcher was an employee, the Dean of Students, a few teachers, and members of the support staff, all enrolled their children in PEC. Just as some of the families, several staff lived in suburban districts; yet, believed in PEC enough to invest more than their professional talents - they endorsed PEC through the enrollment of their children. An endorsement shared by Mrs. Davis, who said, "there is a school on my

corner ... If I wanted my children to go there, they could have went there. But I rather

get in my car and come where we been going for the last eight years."

School Engagement Strategies

School engagement strategies are efforts undertaken by the staff that results in

varying responses from parents. Some parents engage with tentative reluctance while

others fully immerse themselves. However, it seems that some parental engagement

often stems from school engagement strategies.   In this study, school engagement

strategies involve **parents responding to the staff reaching-out** to them, the

relationship between parents and staff, and the **structure parents' witness**. Evidence

of school engagement strategies can be seen in the school sponsored **extracurricular**

activities and programs that let **parents know what is going-on**. Moreover,

communication is a component that surfaces in a variety of ways and times, a lubricant of

sorts that keeps the gears of engagement strategies working.

The effects of some school engagement strategies are apparent in the window of

time after parents/families have enrolled their children and are determining if what is

happening matches what they perceived would happen. It is in this time that PEC staff

provides evidence for parents to begin immersing themselves in the school. Odessia

Spruill, a PEC middle school teacher, emphasized, "**we have to reach out for them**, we

can't just expect them to come and ask us." When comparing relationships between

parents and either staff or administration, Parent Ron Jones expressed that **the strongest**

relationship is "teacher to parent, because that's who the parents deal with most of the

time." Mrs. Hudson described her commitment when she explained: "I try to do what I

can to convenience the parents so you don't lose them either where they just don't come

back anymore or they feel like people don't appreciate them coming up here." Mrs.

Spruill added: "I think if we as teachers go out and say "you should really come and be a

part of this, your child needs you, your child wants you to be a part of this." That may

help … us all be a part of their child's learning." The actions of the staff and their ability

to cultivate relationships are critical for the success of school engagement strategies.

Mr. Jones summarized his opinion on what new parents will see upon visiting

PEC,

> For a … new parent that comes in, they may be a little leery. But if they come
>
> around and do a visit during the school year when everything is in motion, they
>
> may see … where kids might be in the hallway and they'll see someone come out
>
> - "Hey! Why are you in this hallway? Where is your pass? … - **They see**
>
> **structure** … it's confidence in that school for looking out for their child.

Regarding the resonance of school engagement strategies, Ms. Spruill added that PEC

staff makes "sure that in those walkthroughs, those stop-bys, that it's what they expect."

The staff also pushes toward more meaningful engagement. One example of that

is each week, PEC's third grade teaching team distributes to students/families a

newsletter sharing curriculum information, homework updates and more. Newsletters like

the one shown in Figure 7 are a component of the student folder that includes graded

work and other communications from the school. For the parent whose initial response to

school engagement strategies was tentative consistent communication from the staff

becomes an attribute they can trust and perhaps push them toward increased engagement.

In regards to this study, one form of increased engagement is when parents become

passionate about PEC and bring their child back / re-enroll in the school.

Figure 7. Third grade weekly newsletter

Figure 7. Third grade weekly note. This figure is a replication of the weekly newsletter
distributed by the third-grade teaching team.

The increased engagement that stems from engagement strategies sparks a type of

excited commitment to the school's cause. Parent D'Andre Ford described that parents

"have to get that passion. It's just something I got right now and I want to make

 it infectious, I can affect other parents (and) the teachers." Mr. Ford's passion sounds of

a parent fully "immersed in the waters."

A different view of school engagement strategies involves community

organizations, particularly the foster grandparents. On April 30, 2009, two foster

grandparents from Catholic Social Services were observed grading papers in the upper

elementary hall. Some inquiry revealed that the observed pair has been volunteering at

PEC for three years. They emphasize their preference for upper elementary because of

the students and teachers. They volunteer four days a week from 8:00 am until 2:30pm.

Nearly every day for most the school hours, these senior citizens exhibit a fully immersed

response to the school engagement strategies toward community agencies.

Perhaps one of the more outstanding responses to school engagement strategies

occurred on June 5, 2009, the day of the school award ceremonies. Each grade level held

a ceremony recognizing every student for some form of accomplishment. The

ceremonies for the younger students are the most heavily attended by parents and

families, but there is an audience for each grade. These ceremonies represent a response

to school engagement strategies in that their occurrence at the end of the school year

implies that the student has been enrolled for at least a marking period and possibly the

entire academic year. For the parents/families to remain in attendance long enough for

their child to be recognize for an award demonstrates a level of affirmation in the choice

of enrollment at PEC. Mr. Jones summed it up neatly when he explained, "it was a

combination of the school, the activities, and the staff that was in **making my decisions**

on bringing my kids back." School engagement strategies can prompt a higher level of

involvement for parents and families, a level that the researcher will later address as
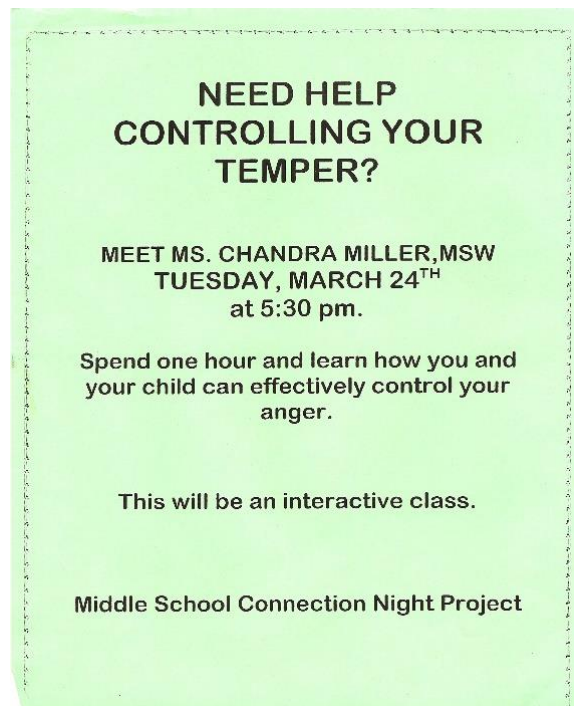
enthusiastic engagement.

The next dimensions of school engagement strategies are the extracurricular

activities and programs that help parents to know what is happening in the school and

builds relationships between parents and the school / administration. These offerings are

services and resources that PEC delivers to parents. As implied by the concept of PEC as

a commuter school, families come from all over Detroit and its suburbs to attend PEC.

PEC's offerings are geared to reach all its families, yet these same activities are

substantively broad in nature to address varying values from diverse sets of families. As

Mrs. Hudson reflected, "I think of all of the **extracurricular activities and the**

programs that we have, like we had the wax museum, science fair, math night … Parents

& Pancakes and … the thing that the social worker does." Mrs. Scott added, that "they

have the PTSA meetings and they have different things going on that invite the parents to

come." Mr. Smith shared the benefits of these offerings is that they help **"parents know**

what's going on in the school … we can conduct parent workshops, some things they

don't know how to do with their kids they are able to learn. Getting to know the staff - it

makes it feel more like a family – you can build a rapport with them." School

engagement strategies are a multi-pronged approach PEC uses to reach its families.

Another school engagement activity is Middle School Connection Night, which

was held in the PEC Media Center. Figure 8 is of the flyer circulated for the event. The

first family arrived twenty minutes prior to the program's scheduled beginning. The event

was facilitated by the school social worker. The audience grew to four parents, three

students, the researcher, the principal, and an office staff member. The program's late

start was apparently forgiven when the principal arrived with pizza and sodas. As the

audience finished the snacks, the facilitator began distributing information packets about

controlling anger and then shared strategies for families to use at home. Ms. Spruill

shared insight regarding parental involvement in middle school and how Middle School

Connection Night addresses it:

Parental involvement decreases as the children get older … (The Principal) has

been an integral part of getting that involvement back, trying to reignite the flame

with middle school parents' involvement by Middle School Connection Night. It

is not as great as we expect it to be, but we can't stop doing it. I think it will

improve. The more we push it, the more parents will come.

Figure 8. Middle School Connection Night flyer

NEED HELP
CONTROLLING YOUR
TEMPER?

MEET MS. CHANDRA MILLER, MSW
TUESDAY, MARCH 24TH
at 5:30 pm.

Spend one hour and learn how you and
your child can effectively control your
anger.

This will be an interactive class.

Middle School Connection Night Project

Figure 8. Middle School Connection Night flyer. This figure is a replication of a flyer inviting
parents of middle school students to a session led by the social worker.

The week of the observed Middle School Connection night was an example of PEC's

engagement strategies as three of the five school nights held events geared toward parents

along with events that encouraged parents to attend. Figures 9 and 10 are examples of

those events. Figure 9 is a flyer for an insurance information session and Figure 10 is a

listing of participants in the school-wide declamation contest.

Figures 9. Insurance Information session flyer (left)

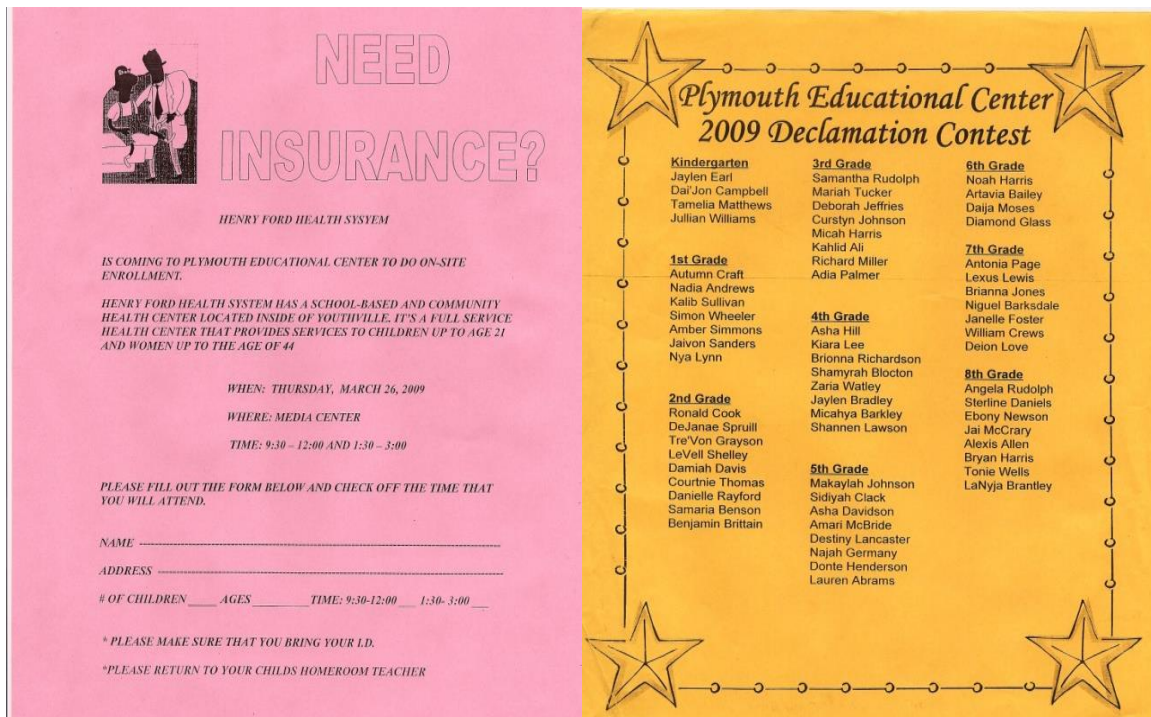*Figure 10.* Declamation Contest participants (right)

Figure 9. Insurance Information session flyer. This figure is a replication of a flyer inviting parents to an insurance information session.

Figure 10. Declamation Contest participants. This figure is a replication of a program announcing the participants in the school-wide declamation contest.

On Thursday March 26, 2009, there was a health fair along with the Declamation Contest. The health fair was conducted by Henry Ford Hospital. In addition to checking blood pressure and providing free clinic information, they were also provided insurance information for families without insurance as announced in Figure 9. Mr. Jones' wife organized and worked the health fair.

The annual Declamation Contest a school-wide poetry, short speech, and public speaking competition contributed to health fair traffic. The participants in this event are listed in Figure 10. Students / classmates became audience members who watched the

contestants compete. The judges were two former employees, one current employee, and a parent. During the observation, there were four parents watching the seventh grade competition.

The following are two examples of engagement strategies that include contributions from the community. Both were after-school programs for middle school students. The Yunion, a local Christian hip-hop ministry, facilitated S.W.A.G. (Students With Aspirations and Goals). Although the Yunion is a Christian based organization, S.W.A.G. was not religiously oriented. Instead, S.W.A.G. promotes integrity, character and positive self-imagery. Three adult males and one adult female led a group of 26 students in self-esteem building activities.

After some conversation with the administrators of S.W.A.G., the researcher learned that the Michigan Department of Community Health sponsored the program. The Yunion also conducted male-mentoring activities with PEC, with PEC providing alternate programming for females. Female students participate in Young L.O.V.E. (You N God Ladies Of Virtue & Excellence). Young L.O.V.E. is coordinated by a former employee, who had two children graduate from PEC. Young L.O.V.E. met twice a month and provided female students with mentoring from professional women.

Another engagement strategy that included the contributions of community members was the annual Career Day held on May 14, 2009. This event included 50 working members of the community who agreed to lead discussions about their professions and answer student questions. Career Day is an example of how community involvement can be seen within PEC's engagement strategies. The school uses

community members and parents as resources to enrich the offerings they provide for

parents. Mrs. Davis explained her feelings about one of PEC's strategies:

>There is a program here now, Star Base, it's been here since last year … I never
>
>even knew the program existed. But NASA, they teach you about the space
>
>exploration, moon watching and they teach you how to design the orbiters – it's a
>
>really good program. And not a lot of schools participate in it. Plymouth was like
>
>one of the groundbreaking schools to get in on Star Base and I was glad I was
>
>able to participate. My little girl was going to be in 5th grade this year was like
>
>'alright I gotta go,' cause it was just amazing. It's only 5th grade and they go
>
>every Tuesday, for like seven weeks … they spend all day there – it's at Selfridge
>
>Air National Guard Base. They work on aeronautics. They do a lot of astronomy,
>
>a lot of space exploration – it's really nice. I was interested and the kids are, too.
>
>It helps them … because a lot of times math and English are pushed … this
>
>opened up the science aspect and it made my daughter want to be a pilot ... so
>
> that she can get on a space exploration tour.

May 5, 6, and 7, 2009, were featured as Parent Visitation Days as advertised in

Figure 11. During these days, PEC conducted an Honor Society induction and

Grandparent/ Special Person Day. During Grandparent Day, May 8, families were

encouraged to visit classrooms and to participate in festivities conducted in the

gymnasium. A reproduction or the program for Grandparent / Special Persons Day is

capture in Figure 12. Festivities included: a speaker promoting Cancer Awareness,

information booths operated by the Henry Ford Clinic, the Skillman Institute, Karmanos

Cancer Treatment Center, and a blood pressure screening station. There were over 200

adults and students in the gym to witness performances from the Declamation Contest

Winners, the Mime troupe, the choir, and the Latin Dance team.

Figure 11. Parent Visitation Days flyer.

Figure 11. Parent Visitation Days flyer. This figure is a replication of a flyer inviting parents to visit the school during Charter School Week.

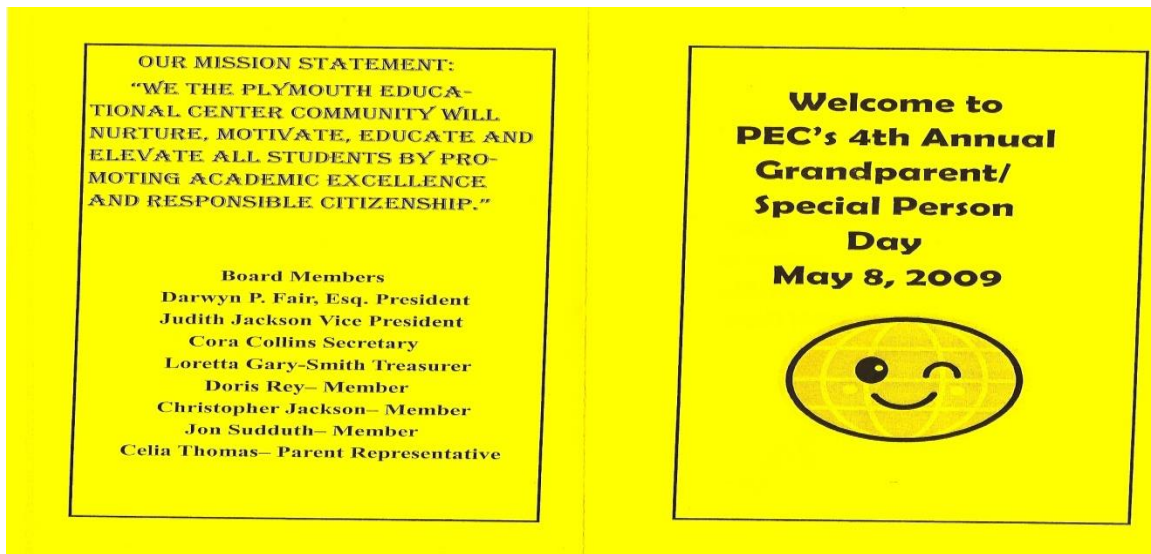*Figure 12.* Grandparent / Special Persons Day program.

Figure 12. Grandparent / Special Persons Day program. This figure is a replication of the program held in the gymnasium on Grandparent / Special Persons Day.

It seems that PEC designs activities to reach a diverse group of parents. These activities

are manifestations of the school engagement strategies and contribute to commitment.

One of these activities is held multiple times a year is Parents & Pancakes. The flyer

announcing this event is seen in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Parents and Pancakes flyer.
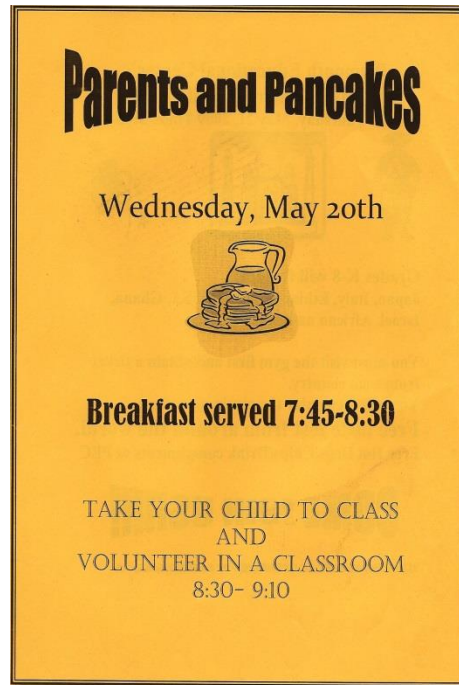
Figure 13. Parents and Pancakes flyer. This figure is a replication of the flyer advertising the Parents and Pancakes event hosted by PEC staff.

Dr. Kilgore described Parents & Pancakes and its implications for the school:

When [the Principal] came aboard we started what's called "Parents &

Pancakes." You know you always hear of a feed-them-and-they-will-come

kind of thing, she pushed that further. Not only did we feed them, we had it

early in the morning before school started. So, the parents would come in, get a

bite to eat, listen to a presenter and then go to work… We were trying to

accommodate their schedules. So, I think that really helped in terms of parents

participating in activities here at the school. Now did that lead to more parents

providing direct services? No, but I do think that the mere fact that a parent is

here in the building is positive. Not only from a **relationship** standpoint **between**

parents and administration, but also when a kid sees their mom or dad here in a

meeting on their behalf or going on a field trip – it has an impact on those

students. That tells them directly and indirectly "hey, my mom cares about my

education, my dad cares about my education." So, to the extent that we can have

those type of activities, the field trips, you know just trying to get as many people

here in the building doing something, I think is real critical.

One attribute about Parents & Pancakes is that staff members work as servers, waiters,

and hosts. The principal demonstrated her engagement by bussing tables.

Figure 14. Parent Town Hall Meeting flyer.
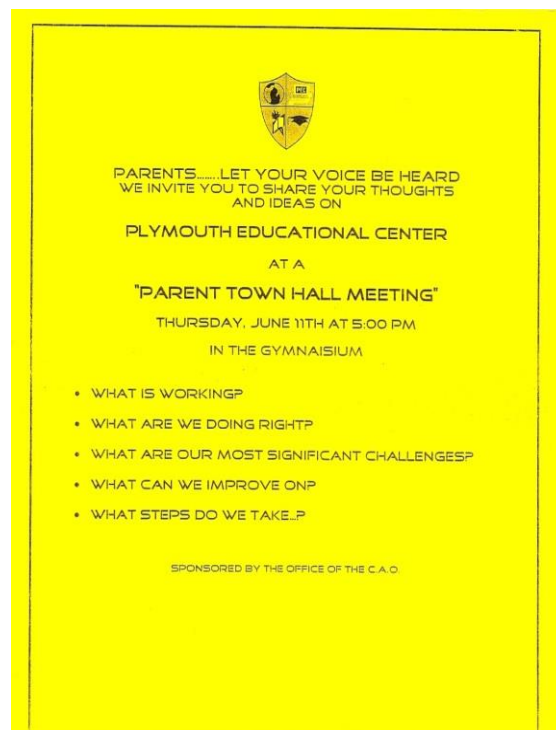
Figure 14. Parent Town Hall Meeting flyer. This figure is a replication of the flyer advertising
the Parent Town Hall Meeting and some of the agenda items.

As the semester began to close, another demonstration of engagement strategies was the PEC Parent Town Hall Meeting. Figure 14 is the announcement distributed to families about the event. During this meeting, the strong central figure listened to the concerns of parents and presented the long-term vision for the school. The long-term vision for the school emphasized its transition into a school district.

The transition would include a reconfiguration of the administration, goals for continued growth of the high school, more emphasis on curriculum and staff professional development, and ideas that would boost parental involvement. After dinner and Dr. Kilgore's presentation, the 45 participants were engaged in a question and answer session with a staff member assigned to their table. The questions were noted on the event flyer and the participating parents were awarded with cash, gifts, and gift cards. Staff members then opened the floor to share parents' responses with the administration. The administrative team addressed every question. PEC also provided childcare, which ended at 7:30, yet the meeting lasted for an additional half hour.

The school engagement strategies are not limited to parents. Some are student-oriented activities that indirectly engage parents. One student-oriented offering was Academic Games. Mrs. Davis shared, "one of the activities that my daughters are invested in are the Academic Games. They have after-school practices … and they encourage the parents to come in. They give you the … study guides and materials … so that we can work with the kids." When asked about something PEC does well, Mr. Jones also discussed Academic Games "because it's challenging to that students on their ability of what they're learning … I think it is one of the best…" Dr. Kilgore added that the

purpose of Academic Games and other student-oriented activities is "giving high

academic achievement its' rightful place." He also said,

> One of the things here is that kids participate in Academic Games and kids who
>
> participate in Debate are just as popular, or more popular, than kids that
>
> participate in athletics. When we do pep rallies and things like that, we include
>
> academic scholars (and) academic athletes as well, because they exercise their
>
> minds- that's done purposely.

Ms. Woods summarized why PEC has engagement strategies when she said, "they do

it in an effort to engage the parents." She later elaborated:

> We do offer a lot to parents … we base the amount that we have on the response
>
> that we get or the support that we have on those particular ventures. I think that if
>
> we have a particular event and it had parents loaded to the point where they're
>
> almost standing, then I think we think about ways to do it more. But I don't think
>
> we want to overwhelm them for fear that they'll shut down completely, nor do we
>
> want to minimize for the ones who do show up … it's a good mix of events in
>
> terms of not being overwhelming and not underwhelming … either.

Strong Central Figure

It could be said that the evolution and success of PEC has been due to the

leadership of a strong central figure. In the context of this study, strong central figure

refers to a school leader that is **consistent**, **accessible**, **visible**, and **challenging**.

The strong central figure is also consistent with

what company representatives described as a 'strong principal' model. In most

cases, this meant that the principal was given considerable discretion in terms of

structuring school governance, including if and how to incorporate parents and

teachers in formal and informal decision –making (Bulkey, 2002, p.18).

Initially, PEC's strong central figure was Dr. Vivian Ross. Dr. Ross was the

transformative visionary that reshaped Plymouth Day School into a charter school. Dr.

Ross' efforts could be perceived as the foundation for PEC's future.

Dr. Jessie Kilgore is the contemporary strong central figure. He was groomed for

this role while serving as principal and was handpicked by Dr. Ross to succeed her as the

chief administrator. He describes his role and tenure, saying, "I was principal and then

moved into the superintendent's role, so about thirteen years now that I've been here …

from the early days and the transition from small school to large school." In another

interview, Dr. Kilgore added,

I'm the longest serving staff person in this district and it is good to have that

stability. Not a lot of schools can say that they have had the same person at the

helm for the number of years that I have been here. Even bond holders, when we

are getting loans, look at that. It is very important that they … want to know that

the person at the head has been **consistent**, very, very important.

Dr. Kilgore is the tone-setter for PEC. He is the driving force - when families

buy-into PEC, it could be debated that they are essentially buying into Dr. Kilgore. He is

the public face, official spokesperson, and metaphorical captain of the ship.

Dr. Kilgore's position as the strong central figure was apparent during the Parent

Town Hall meeting held on June 11, 2009. While other administrators and school leaders

shared the platform with Dr. Kilgore, he was the primary communicator of the school's reorganization and vision for growth. Many questions from parents were addressed to Dr. Kilgore, who either provided the answers or prefaced an answer before having another administrator speak.

Parents share the perception of Dr. Kilgore as the strong central figure. Mrs. Davis explained "The only problem I had … I had to speak to Mr. Kilgore about that… It seemed to have been rectified, something was done about it." Mrs. Davis elaborated that:

> I think that that was wonderful, he was in-house. I had to make an appointment, but he was in-house for me to talk to… It seemed like he was giving me his undivided attention and it may have been an insignificant thing to him … but it didn't come across that way to me… It felt really, really good to have that personable leader right there, in-house and **accessible**.

Staff members also share the perception of Dr. Kilgore as a strong central figure. Teacher James Smith* shared

> Dr. Kilgore … is **visible**. He comes to visit the classrooms. He speaks to parents during the Open House ceremony. He is there during Parent-Teacher Conferences. He asks us one-on-one – he meets with the teachers personally and asks us our thoughts and feelings about the things that are going on inside the school; and I think he values our opinion.

Ms. Spruill added that "the superintendent has an open-door policy, so he is visible. He comes into the classrooms to check on teachers to kind of see what they are doing." She elaborated

> Kids behave differently when he is in the building and so do staff … - it is a

different kind of atmosphere. But really not one of fear, it just really makes you

make sure you are standing upright. Because we are doing what we are supposed

to be doing, but doing it in a way that makes it look good… Who wants to be a

slouch to their boss?

Ms. Woods added

We have the benefit of having a superintendent who is extremely astute … even

though our superintendent may be very busy, if we email him, or if we schedule

an appointment with him, he will be there to hear what it is we have to say. His

mantra has always been 'if it's not good for the kids, then it's not good' … I think

he lives by that auspice and sometimes we have tough love because of it… He is

not afraid to **challenge** us to our maximum potential. And he is not afraid to fire

people who have been weak links …

Dr. Kilgore as the strong central figure was one of the first themes to standout.

His position as the strong central figure is publicly acknowledged through the name of

the PEC athletic grounds as Kilgore Field which is captured in Figure 15.

Figure 15. Kilgore Field.

Figure 15. Kilgore Field. This figure is a photograph of Kilgore Field, the track and football field
at the rear of the school.

Intentional Leadership Initiative

Another theme derived from the data is intentional leadership initiative. Intentional leadership initiative is work done by the strong central figure and other administrators. In this study, intentional leadership initiative is activity that is **proactive**, **data-driven**, and **heads-things-off-at-the-pass**.

With intentional leadership initiative, the work (initiative) itself is not always visibly apparent, but the results can be visible. One example is the campus. Before construction, land needed to be purchased, architects selected, renderings approved, and finances secured. As described on an online PDF, "Rev. Hood III brought together the first board of directors of the School, and the persons who could put the financial package together which made possible the financing and the construction of the 9 million dollar Plymouth Educational Center" (History of Blacks in Congregational United Church of Christ, nd.). The leaders of the church who transitioned the Day School into a charter and successfully constructed a new facility demonstrated intentional leadership initiative. The result of that initiative is that PEC stands in contrast to other charters throughout Detroit that either lease closed parochial schools, have renovated structures that were not originally designed as schools, or whose construction may not match PEC's. The appeal of a new building was a factor in attracting new enrollment perhaps since "new" schools were not common in Detroit. Also, PEC's athletic grounds are comparable those of DPS'. The plans and execution of the plans that led to a new building are examples of an intentional leadership initiative.

Another result of an intentional leadership initiative is PEC's designation as a *Good School in Detroit* by the Skillman Foundation. The Skillman Foundation is a local non-profit grant-making organization that supports and develops good schools throughout the Detroit area. When staff, parents, students, and visitors approach the main entrance of PEC, they are made aware of PEC's Good School designation by the prominently displayed banner on the front façade along the main entranceway as seen in Figure 16. Acknowledgement by the Skillman Foundation is a product of an intentional leadership initiative due to the necessity of applying to the foundation as well as participating in their review process.

Figure 16. Skillman Banner

Figure 16. Skillman Banner. This figure is a photograph of Skillman Foundation Banner hanging near the main entrance.

Another representation of an intentional leadership initiative is the Middle School Connection Night. Ms. Spruill described it when she explained:

Mr. Plum [newly designated Chief Academic Officer, former middle school principal] came up with it, actually maybe even Ms. Jones [former middle school assistant principal]. It's one night a month where the parents and the teachers and the students of middle school, in middle school would have an activity outside of school – that's the way it started. And it ended up being something where we would have people come in and speak to that group of people. So, you may have

someone come in and talk about health care to middle school, specifically for

middle school kids and parents.

At the time of the researcher's employment at PEC, his administrative colleague, Ms.

Jones, organized the first Middle School Connection in her role as the middle school

assistant principal. She was intentional in developing an initiative that increased parental

interaction within the middle school. The value of the effort was extended and enhanced

by the subsequent middle school administrator, Dr. Plum.

Ms. Woods followed Ms. Spruill's example when she stated

For the most part I think that everything they [administration] have surrounding

the year, in terms of the school calendar is very intentional. I think they do a

good job at the end of the year of always making us be reflective and telling what

worked; what didn't work; what we would like to see. So, that more times than

not when you start the new year, or though out the year, they are trying to be

proactive versus reactive to things.

Intentional leadership initiative reflects past, current, and future efforts. It cannot

be captured in one manifestation, but can be seen when the strong central figure exerts

effort to make things happen. Dr. Kilgore explained the motives behind what this study

deems intentional leadership initiative:

I think we are so **data-driven** here, we don't do anything by the seat of our pants.

Everything we do is intentional, based on some type of quantifiable data. So, we

look at data from everything from surveys, scores, etc. and we triangulate that

data and make a decision from it.

Dr. Kilgore shared other examples that are products of an intentional leadership initiative. The following example explains an approach to parental involvement,

> this is why we hired a parental involvement consultant ... using some of our Title One dollars to really target getting more parents involved – getting over any fears that parents have … so we create non-threatening opportunities for parents to participate…

Dr. Kilgore provided another example:

> The newest policy we started is called the Plymouth Cares Campaign … where we are having a turnaround time where teachers having to return the calls within 48 hours, return the emails within 48 hours ... and have to make "x" number of contacts throughout the course of the year for each kid in their care. Just making sure that the call that (parents) get is not always negative … calling to say 'hey, how things are going this year? Is there anything we can do to help you?' ... that way we kind of head off at the pass any significant problems. What one parent says, there are probably twenty others that feel the same way; so, to the extent that we can **head those things off at the pass**, that's the whole purpose of the Plymouth Cares Campaign.

"Heading things off at the pass" is not only the purpose of the Plymouth Cares Campaign; it also embodies the efforts that concretize as intentional leadership initiative. As Mr. Jones, summarized, "PEC does things to motivate people to do what needs to be done … they intentionally go out and get you to make sure things are done."

Administrative Activity

Administrative activity is a theme that is apparent in the main office and is the

best help for parents, communication among staff, and **timely responses** to parents.

The front lobby of main office is where the secretarial staff work with a waiting

area captured in Figure 17. The receptionists/administrative assistants interact with

students, staff, and parents by providing solutions or avenues to achieve solutions. The

office staff is versed in school procedures that contribute to efficiency. This efficiency

was captured on March 23, 2009 from 2:45 pm to 3:45 pm. In a 60-minute span

preceding dismissal, office staff interacted with or addressed the concerns of 13 staff

members, 20 adults (parents and/or visitors) and 27 students – statistically that is one

different form of human interaction every minute. The two office personnel were polite,

humorous, firm, and helpful in addressing questions about re-enrollment and early

dismissal requirements, filtering the severity of student disciplinary issues, attending to

one student's bloody nose, and more. This occurred within a climate of increased anxiety

demonstrated by those entering the office in anticipation for dismissal, but the pending

dismissal did not change the staff's performance of quality administrative activity.

Figure 17. Receptionist area of main office.

Figure 17. Receptionist area of main office. This figure is a photograph of a bulletin board and
promotional poster featured in the main office.

The office is a hub of communication that is both implied and overt. The welcoming atmosphere presented by the décor and the attitudes of the staff is an implied invitation. This implied invitation is further affirmed through the courtesy and resourcefulness of the office staff. The overt communication is evident through what the office staff communicates along with the school notes and outside resource flyers that are on display.

The physical office and the climate it projects could be a school engagement strategy. The office is a conduit for PEC's received and distributed communications. It is a point of engagement and the way communication is received or distributed can make an impression on parents. Parents' trust in PEC will either grow or diminish through the actions of the office staff. If interactions are negative and lacking substance, parents may not be engaged. When administrative functions are working efficiently, it becomes easier to engage parents and families.

While administrative activity can be witnessed in the office, it also indirectly permeates the school environment. Mr. Jones spoke to this notion when stating, "The staff they have here that's teaching the kids, the classroom staff, your dean of students, even in the office, the way that when the parents come in they **help them the best they can**. It's a positive outcome and I believe that's the goal."

The permeating of PEC's administrative activity is noted by Mrs. Davis as being on a "superior level - the teachers, the **communication between my children's teachers**, first, sixth, and seventh grade is excellent. I've never had to call, leave a message and wait three or four days to get a return phone call." Ms. Spruill added,

If we get an email from a parent or a phone call, we have to **respond within 48**

hours; that's something they (administration) push … the whole reaching out and

letting parents know that we're here if you're having some trouble … or things

are not going right, then let me know.

Embracing Environment

Initiative and administrative activity are not enough to make a school successful.

There must be something participants (staff, students, parents, and visitors) can feel.

That something is the embracing environment theme. For this study, an embracing

environment is one that is **inviting**, **caring**, **clean**, and **feels like a family**.

Embracing environment can be seen as well as felt. Figures 18 – 23 are

photographs of the sights and signs around PEC:

Figure 18. Sign above entrance.   *Figure 19.* Calendar display at entrance.

Figure 18. Sign above entrance. This figure is a photograph of a window sign posted above the main entrance door.

Figure 19. Calendar display at entrance. This figure is a photograph of ceiling to floor week calendar display that greets all once they enter the main entrance.

Figure 20. Trophy Case.   *Figure 21*. Thank You Bulletin Board.

Figure 20. Trophy Case. This figure is a photograph of a trophy case near the front entrance, several the displayed trophies were from academic competitions.

Figure 21. Thank You Bulletin Board. This figure is a photograph of a thank you bulletin board located in the main corridor listing all the volunteers who assisted that school year.

Figure 22. Appreciation sign.   *Figure 23*. TEAM Banner.

Figure 22. Appreciation sign. This figure is a photograph of a sign of appreciation affixed to the door of a staff member.

Figure 23. TEAM Banner. This figure is a photograph of banner capturing an acronym for team. The banner hangs in the main office.

The values of an institution are communicated through its signs and ornaments. At PEC, there is a value of appreciation, invitation, and celebration – each can contribute to the embracing environment.

Mrs. Davis described the environment when she says

I think it's good. I think it's **inviting**. I think it's warming. I like how the trophies are displayed to show that they do have achievement in many areas. The classrooms are well put together; they are structured for the children. They focus on grade levels, like things that are displayed are for the accurate grade levels and what they are doing academically as well as more advanced things too. I love the campus; I love it here.

Ms. Spruill shared that, "I think the cleanliness, organization, [and] the way that we get the kids – the drop off and pick up points are relatively smooth… Just the look; what is appealing is the way the building is made." Ms. Woods expatiated,

We have a nice building. When you hear people say our (their) building is run-down (or) when I hear my friends say that (they) work in a building where there are no bathroom stalls, where there is no tissue … that isn't my fate here… the environment is clean … we've done a good job maintaining the aesthetics of the building and the teachers, even in their classrooms, adding their own flair to it. So, the kids see a **clean** environment that kind of makes them want to learn.

Parents and staff also describe the environment as feeling like family. Ms. Woods clearly stated that, "I think PEC has a caring environment … and I think they [parents] see this as a family environment and they feel like we are doing what's in the best interest

of the child and that we do care." Mr. Jones said "the culture here at PEC is … more of a family… it's a **caring** environment for the well-being of the student." He elaborated:

> I would consider PEC a family. In my time here … we've had a couple of staff members pass away; we've had a few students pass away. Just to see the students, the reaction, the way, [they're] upset – talking about how they remember how the teacher helped them do this and do that. And like I said, if you steadily come back and re-enroll, even when we take the break for the summer and come back, you're happy to see that person again (though they may get on your nerves, but you're happy to see them again). So, that's what makes it **family**.

Mrs. Scott said, "I consider it a family because the teachers work together to try to help the kids and try to get the parents in here." Mrs. Davis added, "I would consider them a family… each grade has little teams and the teams work well together. They have a good bond which in turn lets them have a good bond with the students."

Staff shares the perspective of the family environment. Dr. Kilgore explained:

> I think … it's a family atmosphere. And I think that permeates across all segments of the school community. In terms of the relationships with parents and staff, staff to staff, administration to staff, there is a true goal to have a family-like atmosphere. And you know, in families, sometimes you disagree … but all in all, we are committed to the mission and vision of the district.

The motto "Success is the Only Option" which is featured above the main entranceway is also displayed on the website, repeated on the recorded voice greeting on the main telephone line, and stated by office staff when answering the phone. The repetition of this motto publicizes PEC's values.

The staff also contributes to an embracing environment. Teacher Peggy Hudson explained, "I do almost, like, anything to get them (parents) to call me..." She continues to describe an incident when feeling tired, "... I had some weird request and I'm like 'I really don't feel like doing this' but I'll do it because that's just what they need …"

Parental Engagement

Parents, families, and staff are engaged because they choose to be engaged. In this research, parental engagement includes **parents' comfort level**, permits **opportunities for them to help**, and **solidifies their commitment to the school**. Parental engagement also includes **assurance**, **trust**, and the **energy that brings families back** to PEC.

One explanation for this engagement can be the tone set by Dr. Kilgore, who shared:

> In terms of in-school parental involvement, I think it is necessary for us to have non-threatening activities for the parents to be able to participate in ... We can kind of direct that involvement with more simple activities based upon the parents' **comfort level** ... Where some parents can certainly interact with kids on an academic level, others can make copies and the other mundane functions that we really need done. We can never have too many bodies in a building.

With an expressed ambition of having parents inside the school and providing avenues to convey this spirit of welcome, Dr. Kilgore's initiative is met with the parental engagement of parents and students.

Mr. Jones shared his enthusiasm as he explained,

I've … been here since '04. I've seen engaged – like me personally, the type of

works I do … being engaged, forming relationships with students that, some

might have bad days and you can spot it and you talk to them and you try to keep

them from getting in trouble. When we have our after-school programs – when

we put on productions like *Schoolhouse Rock Out*, **parents** would **help** with

costumes, help with props; with athletics – with sports concessions, and all that …

I saw a lot of the parent involvement.

Mrs. Hudson, who has been teaching since 2000 but was in her first year at PEC,

described parental involvement at PEC: "just comparing to other schools I have been at, I

was pretty impressed because I see a lot of parents around the school … and at parent-

teacher conferences I see large turnouts." Ms. Woods described parental involvement, "I

feel when parents are engaged, the ones that are, **their commitment is very solid**. You'll

see them walking the halls. You'll see them assisting us with programs, with fundraisers

and things of that nature…"

Engagement is not limited to visits and involvement in activities, it also includes

mechanisms where parents' opinions can be heard.   In April 2009, people entering the

building were greeted by the display captured in Figure 24.A and 24.B:

Figures 24.A and *24.B*. Invitation to participate in online survey.

*Figure*s *24 A & B*. Invitation to participate in online survey. These figures are photographs of the same object from a close-up and further back angle. The object an invitation poster that invites parents to participate in an online survey. The cubicles immediately behind the poster have small computers on which parents can complete the survey.

This display was an invitation for parents to participate in an online survey. To facilitate this invitation, two computers with easy-to-follow directions were placed near the main entrance. To test the ease of the process, the researcher could successfully complete a survey in less than three minutes. These computers and the survey program are one way parents can engage and PEC can assess that engagement.

Commitment

Enrollment reasons brought parents to PEC and perhaps their experiences with school engagement strategies provided opportunities to interact. Yet, parental engagement can evolve into commitment. In the context of this study, commitment is **assurance**, **trust**, and the **energy that brings families back** to PEC.

Perhaps parents do not generate that energy. This notion stems from the previously mentioned April 23, 2009 PTSA meeting – the meeting's agenda is captured in Figure 25. During the meeting, there were nine adults present with four of them seated at the front table. Those four were the PTSA officers. The agenda was adjusted to accommodate the late arriving principal, whose report was shared twenty minutes later than scheduled. One other staff member would arrive later and her participation was more of an announcer of up-coming school events than that of a grandparent (her grandchild was a PEC student). Given the reporting and agenda topics discussed at the meeting as opposed to a strategy session for the future or an evaluation

of previously led activities, the researcher gathered that the PTSA is not a driving force

for parental involvement in PEC.

Figure 25. PTSA Meeting Agenda.
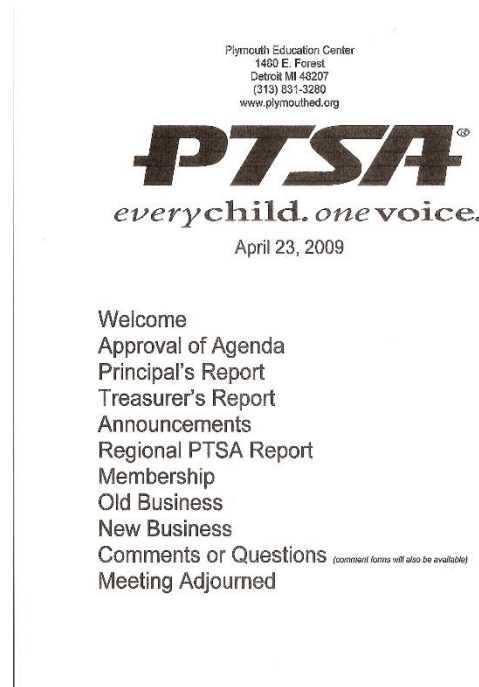
Figure 25. PTSA Meeting Agenda. This figure is a reproduction of the April 23, 2009 PTSA
meeting agenda.

Mrs. Davis added, "I have never really been involved with PTA ... I was really pushed to

join but I really didn't have time. Now that I actually have time, I don't hear as much

about it." It seems that the energy that prompts commitment is not generated by parents,

but maybe stems from intentional leadership initiatives.

Commitment can be seen through reenrollment. Mr. Jones shared ideas on

reenrollment:

What makes families reenroll … is that I was able to see, by being here what my

child was getting ready to come to the next level by having a team- each grade

level has a team. And being here when my daughter was in third grade, walking

around I was able to see how the fourth grade did things, so I was assured that it

was good. When my son was in the fourth grade, I'd see how the fifth-grade team

went. So, it was having the **assurance** that there was the learning in the best

interest of the child, as far as teaching, was going to be there. Just knowing and

being able to see that the next level was going to be good… so that's why it was

easy for me to keep bringing them back.

Ms. Spruill expanded upon Mr. Jones' ideas when she shared,

They **trust** PEC because of what they've heard; a lot of it is word of mouth. And

then once they get in and they do the walk through and they see it, then they talk

to the people in the office. I mean … all the stakeholders are saying the same

thing. We know the mission, we know the vision, [and] we know – we can read it

to you, we can recite it. I think they feel it when [they] come in the building.

Ms. Woods added another take on trust when she summarized the adding of new ideas,

And if it works out great, and if it doesn't they won't be shy to tell you … I think

that they're at least willing to take a risk with us to try new things to approach

their kids. They are not as shy about telling us that they might not agree with it,

but in the end, they allow us to do it because that **trust** exists.

She also added, "there is a consensus … this environment is safe for them … that

probably tops everything else …" She later elaborated

I think trust factor is why these **parents keep bringing their kids back** … I don't

know that parents even know that every day what goes on in the classroom: what

we teach, what worksheets we go over, what our content really consists of, or

what a unit really represents. But more than anything, they know when they pull

up and they drop their kid off, that they're in good hands. I believe that without a

shadow of a doubt and that is what allows them to bring their kids back all the

time … one of the strong suits that this school has is that people know what to

expect from us and we know what to expect from them.

Commitment was exemplified one morning as the researcher followed Mr. Jones,

who was volunteering in the middle school hall. Mr. Jones was an involved father when

the researcher was an employee; yet, years later, he was still committed to PEC. During

the observation, he was operating in an unofficial disciplinary capacity during the

exchange period. Under his directives, students emptied out of restrooms, proceeded

through the hall in organized lines, and even engaged in brief, respectful banter with him.

He shared comments and laughs with students and staff. One staff member who

conversed with him was a member of the discipline team. However, during the

observation, Mr. Jones gave directives to students as the disciplinary staff member stood

mute. The disciplinary staff member's lack of action could be perceived as deference to

the parent. For this parent to volunteer and command respect is telling and reflects his

commitment and PEC's provision of an opportunity for him to exercise his commitment.

Table 5. Depiction of a communication exchange.

Parents	1) Seeks to contribute	PEC
	2) Provides opportunity for contributions	
	3) Affirmation of contributions builds trust	
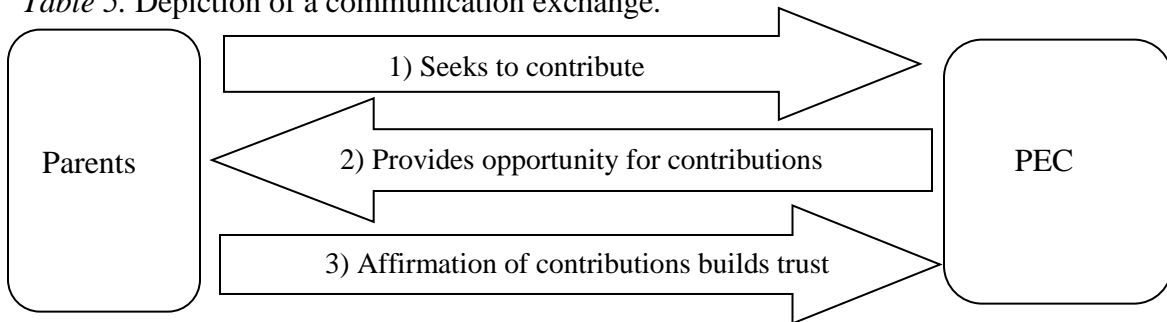
Note. Table 5 captures a series of steps in the communication exchange where parents seek to help, the school create opportunities to help, and the parents feel affirmed through the opportunities.

Commitment is an exchange, a series of efforts and affirmations that cumulate to strengthen trust. A depiction of this exchange is seen in Table 5.

Some observations began with the researcher inquiring whether any parents in the building. On April 3, 2009, an hour was spent seeking a parent volunteer whose efforts include a transient mobility – meaning they assist in one area and relocate to another area to provide another type of assistance. In varying stops, staff would answer inquiries with responses such as: "she's always here" or "I just saw her in Spanish." Comments such as those imply a level of familiarity and comfort that this parent has in volunteering. That parent has become an accepted, normal part of the daily experience.

On April 22, 2009, the researcher could witness that parent in action as she assisted in one of the lower elementary classrooms. Every Wednesday, she volunteers in the same class and in the cafeteria. This parent is noteworthy in that the researcher hired her to work in the cafeteria in the past. At that time, her youngest child was a student in the class where she was currently volunteering. At the time of this observation, that child would have been in middle school; yet, the parent's commitment toward the teacher led her to continue to volunteer after she had given up her employment and her child had advanced grades. In the classroom, she had a designated space and duties. Students interacted with her for small group supplemental instruction.

That parent and Mr. Jones are examples of commitment. They believe in PEC, its' mission, and they are validated in their efforts to help. The validation of their help could indirectly affirm a type of commonality in goals and ideas. That type of commonality is reflective of their commitment. Ms. Woods provides a summary

Anything that presents a change to parents from the norm of what they know, I

think they approach with trepidation. But if you have valid facts for it, then at

least our parents are willing to say "okay, I don't know how that's going to turn

out, but we'll try it." And if it works out great, and if it doesn't they won't be shy

to tell you … I think that they're at least willing to take a risk with us to try new

things to approach their kids. They are not as shy about telling us that they might

not agree with it, but in the end, they allow us to do it because that trust exists.

Commitment brings about that type of trust and rapport.

Accountability

The theme of accountability could be compared to the no fault elements of the

Comer Process. At PEC, accountability consists of **holding people accountable**, **not**

pointing fingers, and in the event of something not working well, **not wasting time**.

Each of these attributes is carried-out in efforts toward **progress**. While PEC does not

officially subscribe to the Comer Process, its' indirect use of "no-fault approach to

identifying and solving problems … promote collaborative working relationships"

(Comer, 1996, p. 1). Working relationships that rely on the accountability of all parties.

Dr. Kilgore explains accountability at PEC:

The leadership team here, we just don't have time for the blame game, we really

don't. If something's not working, we need to figure out why and change it. Time

for pointing fingers, we don't have time for that; certainly, we **hold people**

accountable when they err in their ways, but at the end of the day we **can't let**

that stop forward progress.

Ms. Woods expands on Dr. Kilgore's position:

> … it's not necessarily a point the blame because if we did that I don't think we'd
> progress as far as we can. We could sit here if we wanted to point the finger and
> take stabs at, we could do that all day; we could say that the parents should bring
> their kids to school clean, that the parents should work with their kids on
> homework, that parents should never hear their kids say that "I don't have
> homework" and take that as that's okay. But at the end of the day, we need to
> focus on whatever those parents are not doing; trying to the best of our ability to
> give them that in the confines of a six or seven-hour period, on top of giving them
> the content that we know to teach. So, I think that we **don't really have time to**
> **point fingers**; and if it happens, we kind of got to get over it, because at the end
> of the day **we have to make those kids progress**.

In her explanation of accountability, Ms. Woods spoke of the school not pointing

fingers at the parents; however, there are some parents who may point fingers at the

school. At the observed PTSA meeting, there were some vague accusations or attempts at

finger pointing toward the school from some parents. At that meeting, the notion of

money being collected for PTSA dues, that the money collected for dues was being held

by / banked by the school, and it then not being accessible to PTSA officers was

discussed. Given the sparse population at the meeting and that the accusation did not

gathering momentum through extended discussion, adds some credence to Ms. Woods'

implication that the finger pointing that goes on at PEC is done by a few parents. Ms.

Woods summarized that a particular type of "parent … might have a point the finger

mentality but that's a parent who hasn't been necessarily engaged throughout every step

of the process. So, at that point, they're acting out of guilt, and at that moment, and you know, desperation." The misappropriation of funds allegations that surfaced during the PTSA meeting could be considered desperate. The PTSA meeting could also be an example of what Comer addressed when he stated, "sometimes … parents are placed on important committees to discuss matters about which they … do not have experience or expertise. In this situation, parents usually withdraw, attend sporadically, or may even become defensive, obstructive, and difficult" (Comer, 1980, 128). Another view of the PTSA meeting may be that it was a harbinger of the demographic shift or increase in a particular parent type more apparent in 2011.

Pointing-the-finger parents may be a small population as that PTSA meeting was the only time it was observed. Perhaps other parents share Mr. Jones' feelings that

no fault? You know what, I'm a firm believer someone, someone has to be responsible at some point, if it's successful or if fails. Now when I say, if you say place blame or however, I feel someone has to be accountable when it comes to dealing with the education of the kids. Be it if it's running around the track to algebra, someone has to be responsible for that.

Accountability is what some parents want and is also what Dr. Kilgore expects. Ms. Spruill shares "I've never seen finger-pointing … at least I haven't experienced it. I don't see it as being part of our culture." The absence of finger pointing is an indicator of the existence of accountability.

When it comes to disciplining a student, it is not uncommon for parents to disagree with the disciplinary actions of a school. Sometimes parents' disagreement with discipline stems from a perception of their child's innocence, feelings of distrust that

brew beneath the surface of feelings, and other sources. At PEC, the Dean of Students is

the administrator from whom parents learn of their child's infractions. Due to his

responsibilities for discipline, the Dean of Students could become the target of parent

angst and an example of people attempting to punish the messenger. On the morning of

April 1, 2009, when a parent was observed approaching the office with a deliberate,

angry energy, the researcher was prepared to witness another attempt at punishing the

messenger.

      The Dean of Students has been a part of PEC for over ten years with most of that

time served in his current position. He is a part of the school's culture and his tenure

reflects his value in operating in that role. When the parent with the angry energy burst

into the office, the Dean of Students was both calm and respectful. The parent's energy

never subsided. However, the observation revealed that energy was disappointment

directed toward the child. This parent's agitation possibly reflected a merging of values

between her expectations and the school's actions. She expects the school to reinforce

her expectations of her child's behavior, an example of the accountability she expects.

The school expects her (as an example of all parents) to be accountable in doing their part

in keeping their children aligned with the purpose of school. That day's dialogue

between the Dean and that parent could exemplify the accountability that the school and

parents have for each other.

Collaboration

PEC's similarities to the Comer Process are apparent through collaboration. At PEC, collaboration is when parents and staff are **involved in planning** and **communicate** with each other. This sometimes occurs in the form of **committees**. Dr. Kilgore describes PEC as "a shared decision institution" when explaining the collaboration between staff and parents.

Collaboration amongst staff occurs at their weekly grade level meetings. These meetings have an instructional, curricular, and professional value. At these meetings, teachers and support staff plan instruction, parent communication, field trips, and more.

Collaboration not only includes staff and parent interaction, but also amongst staff. Dr. Kilgore explains,

> I think it's a truly collaborative model. We meet constantly, even down to when I
> do a memo to staff I always bring in my executive team, Dr. Plum and Mrs.
> Stokes, and say, "look this over, what do you guys think?" Give it a couple sets of
> eyes - to think about the impact that it may have, the hidden messages that I may
> not be aware of; those types of things, so we collaborate at that level. And
> certainly, the large strategic planning, etc., we have **numerous committees** - we
> have board level committees, we have school level committees, everything from
> the school improvement to budget and finance, to the board of education
> committee to specific issues. … **we get people involved and people want to be**
> **involved**.

He continued explaining

… many of our committees have parent involvement on them – everything from

school improvement committee to the Board member that's a parent, who is an

active parent, who goes to various PTSA meetings, brings those issues back to the

Board of Directors. That's something that I think is unique for us. We have

families and parents involved in planning many of our events; like I said the

eighth-grade College Tour, the whole eighth grade graduation ... We are

beginning to kind of rely on them as we don't have money to staff all these type

of events, so it's becoming almost a necessity that we have a good relationship

with these parents in order to maintain some of the activities that we do.

One of the activities that reflect a reliance on collaborative efforts with parents is

Career Day. Fifty career professionals, ranging from policemen to attorneys, visited

classrooms on May 14, 2009. Parents and staff were responsible for soliciting

professionals to visit (with several the professionals also being PEC parents), scheduling

who speaks to which class at what time, and manning a hospitality suite for all guests.

The reliance upon parents stands out because all the Career Day activities occurred

during a normal school day with staff carrying out their normal responsibilities.

Another dimension of collaboration seen at PEC is its collaboration with

community institutions. Ms. Woods expanded on this type of collaboration and shared

her ideas that this type of collaboration is also an area for improvement.

There are several different organizations that have afforded us opportunity to

participate in essay contests. We actually have field trips where we walk to the

DIA *(Detroit Institute of Arts)*, or we walk to the African American Museum

(C.H. Wright Museum of African American History), where we walk to the

(Detroit) Science Center. So, the people who are around here are aware that PEC

is here, and we do a good job of trying to always let them know what's going on;

whether it be something as simple as putting it out on the marquee. But like I said,

I think that it could still be an increase in community involvement because we

continue to probably just always give love to those who give us love; and those

people who extend outside of this area may not even know that we do exist … I

think it could be a greater push because the more stakeholders the better; but I

think we do a good job with actually **communicating** and keeping a rapport and

an ongoing relationship with the ones that we do have.

Metaphorically speaking, communication is the lubrication that allows the gears

of collaboration to work effectively. Mrs. Scott, a parent, shared her view on how

communication can facilitate collaboration at PEC, "…the teachers work together to try

to help the kids and try to get the parents in here. If they [parents] can't handle it, they

can talk to another teacher and see which way they would handle it …" In creating a

collaborative atmosphere, parents are not restricted to interactions with their child's

classroom teacher, the culture is one that states indirectly, 'we are all in this together.'

Ms. Spruill summed it up more succinctly when she said "it's important for us to work

together." Collaboration is a guideline within the Comer Process and a value exercised at

PEC.

Sustained Involvement

Sustained involvement is a thematic acknowledgement of the fact that people (staff and families) stay connected to PEC for durations of time. In this study, sustained involvement is **longevity with teachers (staff)**, **parents who have been involved for a number of years**, and **a parental involvement rate that is better than other schools**. It also reflects **cohesiveness between the parents and the school** that comes about when **parent volunteers that are engaged** and when **parents make things happen**.

Sustained involvement was evident during the parent teacher conferences observed on April 24, 2009. At one point in the gymnasium conference setting, 51 staff members were visibly engaged with parents in some capacity. Of those 51 staff members, 36 were employees during the researcher's employment. Those figures translate to a 71% staff retention rate but should carry consideration that the entire staff was not visible. This perception of staff retention is considered above average because it is dissimilar to earlier research that says some charter schools experience "high levels of teacher turnover, which likely diminishes staff quality" (Nelson, 2006, p.5). PEC's above average staff retention reflects sustained involvement in that the individuals who carry out the function of the organization have been doing so for some time. This sustained involvement contributes to school culture.

Ms. Spruill alluded to her contributions to a sustained involvement when she explained, "I've had parents that got kids in like second grade saying, 'Ms. Spruill, I can't wait until my baby gets to your class."   Ms. Woods elaborated further when noting the sustained involvement of PEC when compared to other charters "most charter schools, they don't have much **longevity with** their **teachers** … I've worked on a team of

individuals for seven years" She also added descriptions that "teachers … stay and stick around."

Following Parent-Teacher conferences, the researcher talked to a staff member with a unique history. When the researcher was an employee, she was an involved grandparent. At the time of this research, she had been working as the Director of Support Services. The transition from involved family member to employee is another example of sustained involvement. This person has a perspective of PEC having been served by its function and now operates in serving or carrying-out PEC's function. A staff addition such as this could strengthen the sustenance of the culture.

In addition to staff retention and the addition of involved parents to the staff, families tend to remain at PEC and that contributes to sustained involvement. During nearly every day spent conducting fieldwork at PEC, the researcher had conversations with different students and parents who remembered the researcher as a PEC staff member. That is unique because it reflects that families are staying with PEC once their children are enrolled - a notion confirmed during an interview with D'Andre Ford, a parent and president of the PTSA. When explaining his connection to PEC, he states:

> I have been **involved** now for … at least four or five years in the PTSA and I've
> had three students come through PEC. My oldest is nineteen at the University of
> Michigan-Dearborn. My daughter is seventeen, she is now at the University of
> Toledo … and I have another daughter who graduated from here. She is sixteen
> ... and I currently have one daughter in the fifth grade that attends here.

Mrs. Davis added: "I am a parent of three children that attend school here, all since kindergarten, my newest kindergartener is here now. Tylese is in sixth grade, Alana

is in fifth grade and Anthony is in kindergarten". These parents personify the notion of

families staying at PEC. They are tangible testimonies of the theme of sustained

involvement. Mr. Ford expresses an idea that possibly could be shared by other PEC

parents who are a part of the core culture - "being that my daughter is here so that's

definitely why I'd be more involved. But again, I see myself after she is gone continuing

to be involved."

At PEC, most staff are retained each year. Also, a consistent percentage of

parents are involved each year. Of those consistently involved parents, some become:

- Employees, as demonstrated by the Director of Support Services;

- Volunteers, as demonstrated by the parent in early childhood classroom;

- Resource providers as demonstrated by the parent providing insurance
  information at the health fair;

- Supplemental disciplinary voices, as demonstrated by the father patrolling the
  middle school hall;

- Community access facilitators, as demonstrated by the mother and former
  employee who conducts Young L.O.V.E.; and

- Parents who enroll multiple children from kindergarten to eighth grade as
  demonstrated by Arkishi Davis and D'Andre Ford.

These people and their actions that are guided by their investment and belief in

PEC, all represent components that make a sustained involvement. With a sustained

group, the strong central figure invariably becomes a stronger central figure. A figure

empowered through vision, past success, invested parents and staff, and organizational

results to maintain or intensify the efforts needed to continue the cycle of observed themes.

The more engaged parents become, the more they become aware or fortified in merging values with PEC. When those values are fortified, the committed parents and staff form a sustained involvement. A culture that is responsive and supportive of the strong central figure that could trigger the emergence of each of the themes all over again.

Sustained involvement as a theme also incorporates that the values of parents and the school began as separate entities and over time joins together as one. Once "joined," the parents then reinforce the school's values with their children. Probably within those separate entities, school and parents, their values may have strong similarities. However, until circumstances, interaction, and familiarity coalesce, the entities may perceive their values as separate or different from the other entity. As parent Arkishi Davis explains, "It has to be a certain amount of **cohesiveness between the parents and the school** for the child to succeed and Plymouth does a good, excellent job..." The "cohesiveness" she describes evokes energy beyond buy-in; it instead shows a level of agreed, aligned interaction. Ms. Woods describes the effects of cohesiveness when she shared, "I think that all of us, in all our different niches and all our strengths compiled together have formed an excellent school." In this theme, there is an intangible space where parents know that the school operates with their child's best interest in mind. In this same intangible space, the school understands its responsibility and feels supported by parents. The variables of that intangible space makes-up sustained involvement.

Another component of sustained involvement is that parents no longer have to be enticed by the school. They choose to be involved due to their own volition. These **parent volunteers that are engaged** can work to a level where they as **parents make things happen** to impact the overall school. This type of engagement is distinctive from times when the school says it needs parents to fill a predetermined role or when roles are established from parent and school collaboration, this level of engagement extends from committed parents and contributes to school's overall culture.

Teacher Mr. Smith shared a personal story,

I have a **parent volunteer that is engaged** in the school. Her kids are here, but they weren't in my classroom, and she still came in because she knew what to do. (She would) … check papers, work with the kids, she put up bulletin boards, and she helped in the office … she was there, consistently.

Mr. Jones, one of the interviewees, best exemplified this theme. Ms. Spruill specified when thinking of examples of self-initiated parents,

The college tour – definitely Mr. and Mrs. Jones and other parents were intricate in making sure this happened. They sold - we had bake sales; we had skating parties; we had dances; we had blue jean days – and **they made that happen**. Taking the actual cost of the college trip initially … from $600 to $400. So, that these parents, chaperones didn't all have to pay … Mr. Jones actually contacted bus companies … raised the money. Mrs. Jones put out that she wanted to raise $20,000; we got $15,000 to $16,000. So, it was really just sweet to just watch it take place … it was incredible.

Dr. Kilgore corroborated, "… Mr. Jones, he is a prime example, he planned the entire eighth grade college tour trip … him and his wife. Without any school assistance, raised all the money for the entire program."

The contributions of engaged parents, the cohesiveness between parents and staff, the tenure of staff and duration of student enrollment all contribute toward sustained involvement.

Participation Decreases

One of the outcomes of revisiting PEC in 2011 was that from that vantage point the theme of participation decreases became apparent. This theme is a harbinger of sorts as it portends the emergence of the subsequent theme of parent types. As it relates to this study, this type of participation decreases differs from the phenomena of decreases along grade levels. Participation decreases across grade levels is not an unusual circumstance – for example a school could have 20 parent volunteers for first grade and two for seventh grade. Yet, for this research participation decreases references **lower percentage of involved parents, parents** (who) **don't know how to be proactive and readily involved in their children's education,** and the **disappearance of the middle class**.

It is unknown whether the PEC administration agrees with the idea of parental participation decline. However, it is known that PEC has attempted to address the matter. Most notably, the addition of a parental involvement consultant is one of the most prominent efforts. Ms. Spruill described the parental involvement consultant,

> Mrs. Merchant, she's the Title I person. She is really doing some outreach. She
> has established a room down the hall for parents. It's called the Parent Room,

where parents can come and use the computer. There are all kinds of pamphlets,

and information brochures in this room … her job I think is to reach those kids

who are having a difficult time [and] building that connection with the school and

the parent.

The use of a parental involvement consultant perhaps speaks of an effort to

reverse participation decreases. Mr. Jones shared some estimates that speak to the

decreases over time when he speculated that "**in 2005 I would say that 75% of the**

parents were involved [and] in 2010 … 40% of the parents were involved."   Mr.

Smith summarizes the services of the involvement consultant more succinctly when he

said the consultant

Mrs. Merchant is very, very adamant about getting parents to come in – volunteer

in the classroom. She's had (not like Parents and Pancakes that we used to have

before, that kind of fell off) but she's had ceremonies where the parents come in

and they're pinned just for signing their kids up for the Title I services. Other than

that, we don't have any parental involvement.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones comments about the overall decline in parental

participation leads toward descriptions of the parents. Mr. Smith said

The new group of parents lacks little or no value that is associated with education.

The beliefs or perceptions are that the **parents don't know how to be proactive**

and readily involved in their children's education. It is a possibility that the

parents themselves lack education, values and parental skills.

Mr. Smith also shared, "when I first started here it was a Title I school, but not as many impoverished families, and professional people would bring their kids to the school for services and **we're not getting the middle-class families anymore**."

The city's dismal financial climate permeates into schools. Dr. Kilgore discussed some effects of the economy stating, "quite frankly the economy is terrible here. People can't get off work, or are scared to take off work fearing they're going to lose their job. People are working multiple jobs trying to make ends meet, so you know you have a time factor as well involved … I think those are some of the things that discourage engagement." Dr. Kilgore's comments were in response to a question about parents that are not engaged. The idea is that the economy is so adverse that its impact is felt not only in school budgets, but also in parental engagement.

The disappearance of the middle class, parents uninvolved with their child's education, and the decline in percentages of involved parents contribute to the theme of participation decreases.   A theme that segues into the next: parent types.

Parent Types

In 2009, the involved parents were observed and interviewed. In 2011, the interviews revealed the growing existence of a different set of parents. This different set contrasts with those observed in 2009. This contrast leads to the development of parent types theme. The recognition of this contrasting types influence the interpretation of the data. Moreover, this distinction between types is captured by an involved parent, Mr. Jones, who shared, "there has been some demographic change at PEC. I don't think it is

just with the student. The type of parent has changed. If the parents are disrespectful and don't care, that is what you get from the student."

Regarding the concept of changed parent types it is important to establish distinctions among the types. At PEC, those distinctions could be commuters, walkers, tenured, and non-tenured students / parent types. The interpretation of parent types will be preceded by some contextual setting information. These contextual matters are shared to facilitate an understanding of the types of parents PEC serves.

As with all public institutions in Detroit, the Great Recession has had an adverse impact on PEC's resources. "School-aged population in the City of Detroit has seen a rapid and steady decline in the last decade, dropping from approximately 200,000 in 2002 to approximately 120,000 in 2013" (Detroit Public Schools, 2015). Detroit, historically, has been the home of blue- collar workers and middle class families. A great number of the city's residents were employed by automakers and/or ancillary companies. The significant shrinkage of the major auto companies and evaporation of jobs can be visibly noted by the abandoned factories and warehouses that are within a mile radius of PEC. But moreover, the shrinkage of the auto companies has led to:

- o   A decrease in employed city citizens,

- o   A decrease in taxable revenue,

- o   An increase in citizens leaving Detroit, and

- o   An increase in the percentage of impoverished families remaining in Detroit.

In summary, Detroit's decreasing population is increasingly poor as documented in a Brookings research report compiled by Elizabeth Kneebone, who shared that the percentage of Detroit residents living in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 20% or

higher from 2008 – 2012 was 61/5%. The same study reported that in neighborhoods of

with poverty rates of 40% or higher, the percentage of Detroit residents was 29.2%. The

study also conveyed that the change in the poor population from 2000 to 2008 -2012

increased by 48.6%.

Wading through an antagonistic economy is a challenge for PEC. Mr. Smith

shared, that PEC is "not getting the middle-class families anymore" and must work to

prevent from becoming "a typical Detroit Public School." Whereas the effects of the

economy that are instantly recognizable are salary freezes, lay-offs, and program cuts;

there are some less recognizable effects, one is the demographic change in the student

population. PEC's location may contribute to the changing demographics.

PEC's Location

Understanding PEC's location provides insight into its' student population.

Figures 26 – 37 are a montage of images from Google Maps that begin with a bird's eye

view of PEC and commences around a square block with a street level view.

Figure 26. Bird's eye view (via Google maps) of PEC.

Figure 26. Bird's eye view of PEC. This figure is an aerial view depicting PEC and the
surrounding neighborhood.

Figure 27. Eastbound Forest Ave.

Figure 27. Eastbound Forest Ave. This figure is a street level view of Eastbound Forest Ave with PEC on the right (south) side of the street and the Federal Reserve Bank on the left (north).

Figure 28. Corner of Russell and Forest Ave.

Figure 28. Corner of Russell and Forest Ave. This figure is a street level view of the corner of Russell and Forest Ave. It is taken from the same position as Figure 27 except it is facing south, where Sweetest Heart of Mary Church is visible. The church is on the northeast corner of Russell and East Canfield.

Figure 29. Eastbound Forest west of the corner at Russell.

Figure 29. Eastbound Forest west of corner at Russell. This figure is a street level view is a tad further west of the corner of Russell and Forest Ave. On the right is subsidized housing managed by the Detroit Housing Commission. The pointed steeples of Sweetest Heart of Mary Church are visible in the background.

Figure 30. East Canfield west of Russell.

*Figure 30. East Canfield west of Russell. bound Forest west of corner at Russell. This figure captures the senior living housing also overseen by the Detroit Housing Commission and a frontal view of the church. This photo is taken on East Canfield St, the closet east –west thoroughfare south of PEC.

Figure 31. East Canfield facing south with view of park and housing community.

Figure 31. East Canfield facing south with view of park and housing community. This figure is from the corner of Russell and Canfield facing south. The Forest Park housing community is to the right and the park is on the left.

Figure 32. East Canfield facing south with view of park and downtown.

Figure 32. East Canfield facing south with view of park and downtown. This figure is taken from Canfield directly behind PEC, facing south. It shows Forest Park and the downtown Detroit skyline in the distance.

Figure 33. East Canfield facing north with distant view of PEC's rear.

Figure 33. East Canfield facing north with distant view of PEC's rear. This figure is taken from the same spot as Figure 32 but facing north. It captures a view of the church's parking lot in the foreground and PEC's rear in background. Also visible is PEC's parking lot and the Office of Family Services building.

Figure 34. Corner of Canfield and Dequindire.

Figure 34. Corner of Canfield and Dequindire. This figure is the corner of Canfield and Dequindre which is southeast of PEC. In the right background is the roof and steeple of the long abandoned St. Albertus school and church. To the left is some type of building supply yard.

Figure 35. Northbound Dequindire.

Figure 35. Northbound Dequindire. This figure is a northbound view of Dequindire that captures a supply yard on the right just east of train tracks. The Federal Reserve Bank is visible to the left and a vacant warehouse in the center.

Figure 36. Dequindire facing west.

Figure 36. Dequindire facing west. This figure is taken from the same spot as Figure 35 but faces west with a view of the eastern side of PEC and the Family Services building to the right.

Figure 37. Corner of Dequindire and East Forest.

Figure 37. Corner of Dequindire and East Forest. This figure shows the circular drive / cul de sac ending of East Forest at Dequindre. East Forest picks up again as a one way eastbound street at Dequindre. Kilgore Field and PEC are located on the left.

The photo montage in Figures 26 - 37 provide a view of PEC's surrounding environment. They reinforce the idea of PEC being removed from residential areas except the subsidized housing units. Although the school is approximately a mile and a half away from Plymouth United Church of Christ, PEC's location contributes to its internal changing demographic.

That changing demographic can be described by their length of enrollment and their means of getting to school. The categories that designate the students' length of enrollment are Tenured and Transfer (non-tenured). The categories designated the students' method for getting to school are Commuters and Walkers.

Although this research recognizes distinctions among the student population, if we were to take a metaphorical lens and zoom out, the family circumstances among all the students would not represent a broad spectrum. Ms. Woods specifies, "We always

cater to the needs of like your Title I type of population because that's what the

overwhelmingly majority of our students are." Another way of understanding is viewing

through an automotive metaphor – of all the vehicles created by automotive companies,

one brand is Ford. Ford is the metaphoric parallel to the Metro Detroit population.

Ford's best-selling vehicle is the F-150, this metaphor's parallel to the entire PEC

population. The F-150 comes in two doors, four doors, 4x2, 4x4, and other varieties.

PEC's population is made of middle, lower middle, working, working poor and poor

socioeconomic classifications. PEC's population parallels F-150s as they have some base

similarities while also having some sub-group uniqueness. Those sub-groups have

additional, sub-group specific values.

This research's view of PEC's population has been guided by two variables, their

method for getting to school (walkers and commuters) and the length of their enrollment

(tenured and non-tenured). Another manner of viewing this population would be to

combine the variables and form new groups: Commuter-Tenured, Commuter-Non-

tenured, Walker-Tenured, and Walker-Non-tenured. Table 6 provides a percentage

estimate of these groups in 2011:

Table 6. Percentage estimate of PEC population sub-groups

	Tenured	**Non-tenured**
Commuter	Commuter-Tenured – 35 %	Commuter-Non-tenured – 15 %
Walkers	Walker-Tenured – 15%	Walker-Non-tenured - 35%

Note. Table 6 conveys estimates of the overlapping of student group types within PEC into
subgroups.

If each of the four groups were placed along a spectrum, Commuter-Tenured and Walker-Non-tenured would be stationed at opposing sides. They are the estimated two largest groups of combined variables and the groups whose values contrast the most. Their size and the contrasting nature of their values could necessitate the level of priority attributed to them by school administrators. The subgroups of commuter-tenured and walker-non-tenured will be used for the duration of this study.

Tenured and Transfer (Non-Tenured)

There are tenured students who as described by Dr. Kilgore are "students who have been have been enrolled at least three or more consecutive years." Then there are students that Dr. Kilgore deems "non-tenured" and they "have been at PEC for less than three years". Parent Ron Jones shared about tenured students that "I've seen a lot of these kids from the first grade up." Mrs. Scott shared "I've always been at Plymouth … since they started out here from when we were at the church; so, we've been here ever since, and now they're at the high school." From the researcher's experience as a PEC employee, tenured students have more of a rapport with PEC staff. Tenured students and their families become a part of the PEC culture. Familiarity may prompt these parents to request a certain teacher. A situation illustrated by Ms. Spruill when reenacting a parent conversation with the following statement: "I'm glad you're still here. Are you going to be teaching eighth grade next year? Let my baby finish seventh grade, then, you'll see her." Such interactions are by-products of the rapport tenured students and their families have with the staff. That rapport can be a positive contributor to the school culture.

Transfer or non-tenured (as they will be noted going forward) students have been socialized and educated in other schools. This research does not label their previous socialization or quality of earlier educational experiences, it only notes that socialization and education in another school is different from those at PEC. Elements of the socialization and education of tenured PEC students is apparent in the 2009 themes of embracing environment, enthusiastic engagement, and sustained involvement. Non-tenured students do not begin their matriculation at PEC with the staff rapport already developed by tenured students, that rapport either takes time to develop or may never develop. Non-tenured students can include kindergarteners, first, and second graders who do not have older siblings that are tenured. Table 7 shares estimates of PEC's population change majority tenured students to majority of non-tenured students.

Table 7. Estimated percentages of changes within tenured and non-tenured populations.

2005	2010
70% Tenured	55% Tenured
30% Non-Tenured	45% Non-Tenured

Note. Table 7 conveys estimates that illustrates the changing majority from tenured to non-tenured students in a five-year span.

Commuters and Walkers

In addition to the Tenured and Non-Tenured distinctions of PEC's student population, another set of distinctions is Commuters and Walkers. Commuter students come from families who live throughout the city of Detroit. The walkers are students who walk to PEC, some coming from the subsidized housing along Interstate 75 service drive. Unlike the larger Detroit Public Schools district, PEC has been able to maintain a consistent number of enrolled students. However, comparable to schools throughout

Detroit, the students are poorer or as Mr. Smith noted "while the enrollment is stable, it is

stabilized by the entire new group of parents that are enrolling their children." Dr.

Kilgore defines a commuter as "a student that to dropped off and picked up at school by a

parent, guardian, relative or other assigned adult." He describes a walker as "a student

that walks to school from home or who utilized public transportation and walks to and

from a bus stop daily." From Dr. Kilgore's description, the implication is that commuters

arrive by car quite possibly at the escort of a family member or friend. Walkers are

responsible for getting themselves (and/or siblings) to school.   When factoring the

parents of these two groups, the important matter is that they are different. The reasons

for their differences vary; however, it is probable that a parent who will or can drive their

child to school has a different set of circumstances than a parent who will not or cannot.

PEC community members interpret the difference. Mrs. Davis, a parent, stated, "I

think with the slow demise of the DPS system, some of the parents who aren't as

enthusiastic about education are using this school as a more convenient location because

their neighborhood DPS schools are closing." She went on to elaborate "it's some of the

newer students I've noticed in the last past couple of years, you can even tell what the (I

don't want to say the quality of children), but it's a different mindset…" She adds that the

reason those newer students come to PEC is "their neighborhood schools are closing and

this is a charter school so they can come on." She concluded by saying

> PEC used to be a lot more structured than it is now to me being in a classroom
>
> setting. It's just a couple little wild bunches now, and I think that's because of the
>
> parents; some of the newer parents' lack of focus within their students.

Due to PEC's location, there is also a perception of where those newer students reside. In describing PEC's physical community, Mr. Jones stated

Who makes up the community? … we have two housing projects, and I don't want to say low income, or whatever, but that's what's in this area. We sit on the corner across from a Federal Reserve and then on the back side of us is a big open field; so, it's really not much around us.

Mr. Jones reiterated the uniqueness of PEC physical location when implying a challenge administration faces with engaging the parents of the walkers "… it's just that we just sit in the area where … all we have around us … is housing projects. Trying to entice them, how do you entice them? I really don't know." Mr. Jones is a commuter parent. His distinction of "them" carries implications of differences between commuters and walkers and tenured and transfer students.

Ms. Woods shares implications about community involvement and demographics

I don't think the community involvement is probably as great as it should be, but again, in the area in which we are, this is not like a community school. The only children who are able to use it in that capacity are children who are in the projects.

The distinctions of commuters and walkers and tenured and non-tenured are ways of compartmentalizing the data, in the same manner one could compartmentalize some fruit as apples, oranges, and bananas. The unifying factor is that apples, oranges, and bananas are all fruit and that commuter, walker, tenured, and non-tenured are all students at PEC. Also, noting the increase in impoverished families is not to imply that the

increase or the families are bad. It is simply noting that there is an increase and that there are differences that come with a changing population. Ms. Woods shared

> I hate to put everything back on socioeconomic status, but I think some of these parents have things that are going on (they have other children at home; they're trying to work; they may be single parents), so a lot of their flexibility and the time that they have is limited. So, they kind of make it encumbrance upon the student to do what it is that they are supposed to do in the hopes that they do that so they only have to come up here on an as needed basis, because that's just the dynamic of the world in which they live.

Recognizing the differences within the population, Dr. Kilgore communicated that

> When I look at other charter schools, there are some doing a really, really good job of getting their parents engaged. And a lot of that has to do with … look at the Canton Charter Academy, they have a parent population where 70 -80 % of the parents are stay-at-home moms. So, it's a different … level of parental participation versus here where you have mother working two or three jobs … and it's just a different kind of scenario…

In a later interview, he added,

> Regardless what happens at home, regardless of what happens in the community, we have to take kids where they are and we have to make magic happen. Regardless of their circumstances, background situations, we don't make the assumption that a kid can't be helped and can't achieve because of whatever factors that exist – we assume that we can overcome those factors.

It may be some time before the slow recovery of the national economy is felt in fiscal

budgets of public schools in Detroit. In the meantime, those schools must stretch their

limited resources to service a population with greater needs. Table 8 provides some

estimates of the growth of the walker population at PEC.

Table 8. Estimated percentages of changes within commuter and walker populations.

2005	2010
75% Commuter	30% Commuter
25% Walker	60% Walker
	10% Other
	(Public transportation, child care pick-up, etc.)

Note. Table 8 shows estimated percentages that illustrates the changing majority from commuter
to walker students in a five-year span.

Mr. Smith shared that "From … 2005 to 2010, it has turned full circle. In the year 2005,

PEC had more working to middle class families in its population. In five years, the

population has reversed. Now a majority of the parents are impoverished." Mr. Jones

added that in "2005, parents seem to value the communication between them and the

teachers … The 2010 parents (some but not all), they valued that the school was just open

so they could just drop their student off."

The data collected, analyzed, and grouped into themes evolved from 2009 to

2011. A portion of the evolution comes from the researcher's development and another

portion captures PEC's changing demographics. Table 9 provides a synoptic overview of

that evolution of data themes. While reviewing, consider the arrows used in place of

bullets convey progression from one theme to the next arriving at the theme (and sub-

themes) of Parent Types. Additional analysis of the Parent Types theme provides a

perspective of PEC's future.

Table 9. Data themes from 2009 and 2011 observations.

	Themes	
2009	➢ Enrollment Reasons ➢ School Engagement Strategies ➢ Strong Central Figure ➢ Intentional Leadership Initiative ➢ Administrative Activity ➢ Embracing Environment	➢ Parental Engagement ➢ Commitment ➢ Accountability ➢ Collaboration ➢ Sustained Involvement

2011	➢ Participation Decreases	➢ Parental Types
		     o *Commuter Tenured*
		     o *Walker Non-Tenure*

Note. Table 9 conveys the prominent themes from the data from 2009 and 2011 observations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONNECTIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Connecting School Engagement Strategies and Parent Types

Earlier in this research, the theme of school engagement strategies was described as efforts undertaken by the staff that results in varying responses from parents. With this additional look at school engagement strategies, this research revealed that programs aimed for certain segments of the population. Ms. Spruill summarizes the idea when she stated, "different parents come at different events -so the Parents and Pancakes may not have all the ones that may come to the Middle School Connection Night." Mr. Jones also shared that

> I think they offer a lot of activities that, whereas me being a parent, it may not
>
> pertain to me, but maybe another parent it might. I think there are different
>
> activities to hit all different kind of parents, like Parents and Pancakes, Science
>
> Fair; well everybody has to do a science project, so more kids coming in. SWAG
>
> Night – that might pertain to somebody else that might be a little more jazzy and
>
> might not like the science part but want to see the creative part outside of maybe
>
> what the traditional school assignment might be. I believe that PEC puts things

The challenge stemming from school engagement strategies is perhaps the parents who could benefit from participation are the least likely to attend. Mr. Jones said, "I see things that are offered and I don't know if a lot of parents take hold to things that are being offered to try to help." Mr. Smith offered "we had the International Festival, and the ELA Night, and you could throw a boulder through here. It's there, but they don't come."

When reviewing the observed 2009 school engagement strategies, it is possible that each event may have had a target group within the population. In Table 10, the potential primary target audience will be identified by one or two capital letters. Those letters will designate a specific population or a combination of the classifications: *Tenured (T), Non-tenured (N), Commuter (C), and Walkers (W).*

Table 10. Target population of PEC's programs.

Broad Diverse Offering	Primary Target	Broad Diverse Offering	Primary Target
Academic Games	TC	Parents & Pancakes	C
After-School Care (Latch Key)	C	Parent University	NW
Career Day	TNCW	Parent Visitation Days	TNCW
Declamation Contest	T	PTSA Meeting	TC
Grandparents Day	WN	School Board Meeting	W
Health Fair	WN	S.W.A.G.	T
Honor Society Induction	T	Town Hall Meeting	TNCW
Middle School Connection	N	Young L.O.V.E.	T

Note. Table 10 conveys which of the population groups may have been the target audience for the different events sponsored by PEC.

One the school engagement strategies listed is the after-school latchkey program. When the researcher was an employee, the latchkey program was staffed by PEC's paraprofessionals. The students who participated in this program were commuters and their families paid for the service. Walkers would depart campus after school. However, there was another smaller population that was not enrolled in latchkey, did not walk home, nor were they picked up within thirty minutes of dismissal. The implication is that these students were commuters or else they could have walked home. Mr. Jones, an

engaged commuter parent, shared some comments about the parents of this particular

population when he said

> … some of the parents (like with dismissal) they make the assumption that we're
>
> supposed to watch their kid until they get here. And you know there are other
>
> options that are available and it's made known at the beginning of the school year
>
> about latchkey and late pickup; and they just make the assumption that the
>
> teachers have to be responsible for them until – if school is out at 3:30, some
>
> parent's make the assumption that the teacher is supposed to stay here until 5:00.
>
> And I just don't think that's a good assumption that a parent should make.

The administrative team has wrestled with strategies to address that population since the

researcher was an employee. The students who are hang around after dismissal but are

not enrolled in latchkey or other after-school activities are examples of a population not

responding to a school engagement strategy.

Two Sub-Cultures within PEC

The distinction of a group that responds to school engagement and a group that

does not began to be viewed as two distinct sub-cultures. The two sub-cultures or parent

types can be better understood with the use of two additional lenses for understanding.

One is Edgar Schein's organizational culture theory and Annette Lareau's work on the

concept of cultural capital is another.

Schein's organizational culture theory grants "explanations for variations in

climate and norms, and … ultimately drives us to 'deeper' concepts such as culture"

(Schein, 1990, p.109). The transformation of PEC's enrolled population fits Schein's

variation in climate and norms' and is the phenomena that prompted a 'transforming

years' designation by the researcher. Unlike the 'growth years' (2001-2007), where PEC

served a population where the majority shared or held similar values of the staff, the

transforming years (2008-2011) feature a new group with differing values becoming most

the enrolled population. The emergence of the new group also includes a break from the

sustained involvement and the rapport administration shared with the earlier group of

parents.

This study of the relationship between parental involvement and school culture

elicits a variety of interpretations of culture as defined by Schein. One definition is

> …culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual. We can
>
> see the behavior that results, but often we cannot see the forces underneath that
>
> cause certain kinds of behavior. Yet, just as our personality and character guide
>
> and constrain our behavior, so does culture guide and constrain the behavior of
>
> members of a group through the shared norms that are held in that group (Schein,
>
> 2004, p.8).

Another definition is that "… culture refers to those elements of a group or organization

that are most stable and least malleable" (Schein, 2004, p.11). Another take is that

culture is "what a group learns over a period as that group solves its problems of survival

in an external environment and its problems of internal integration" (Schein, 1990, p.

111). As it relates to this study and PEC, the 'problems of survival' and "problem of

internal integration" is PEC's adjustment to a growing population that is unlike the

previous majority and has demonstrated minimal involvement. The 'external

environment' is the city of Detroit, which has been enduring a decline in citizenry and

jobs along with increases in poverty. To a degree, Detroit's circumstances are mirrored within PEC.

The contrasting cultures of commuter-tenured and walker-non-tenured students create a conflict for PEC. Schein states that conflict "…may result from insufficient stability of membership, insufficient shared history of experience, or the presence of many subgroups with different kinds of shared experiences" (Schein, 2004, p.17). The transition within the enrolled membership makes for 'insufficient shared history of experience.' The emergence of the walker non-tenured students is the 'presence of … subgroup with different kinds of shared experiences.' These conflict definitions fit PEC.

Another view of the data through the Lareau research lens states that "parents in both communities valued educational success' all wanted their children to do well in school" (Lareau, 1987, p.81).   From that shared value, the same research proceeds to distinguish the types of parents in its research pool

> Although the educational values of the two groups of parents did not differ, the ways in which they promoted educational success did. In the working-class community, parents turned over the responsibility for education to the teacher. … In the middle-class community, however, parents saw education as a shared enterprise and scrutinized, monitored, and supplemented the school experience of their children (Lareau, 1987, p.81).

Lareau's research covers populations at two separate schools and uses social class distinctions to define them separately in categories of cultural capital. Cultural capital is "the process by which social and cultural resources of family life shape academic success

in a subtle and pervasive fashion" (Lamont and Lareau, 1988, p. 154). Cultural capital is

an applicable research lens for understanding the differences amongst PEC's sub-groups.

Inherent within the conflict PEC faces are the class issues described by Lareau.

This conflict has implications, some of which are:

- o   Commuter-tenured parents will withdraw (enroll elsewhere),

- o   The school serves a group who may not value what that school values, and

- o   The adoption of the walker-non-tenure values could erode the school's future.

The cultural capital that is being leveraged at PEC is a microcosm of the larger class

conflicts within African American communities. This conflict pits impoverished African

Americans against more affluent African Americans. Middle class African Americans are

distinguishable in this conflict as they may have roots in poverty along with aspirations

for affluence. Whereas their financial standing may not mirror affluent African

Americans, their actions can be viewed as imitations of or modeled after affluence. For

example, affluent African Americans used to live in Detroit's Rosedale Park

neighborhood. Some middle class African Americans either moved into smaller homes

nearby or immediately adjacent to that neighborhood. Impoverished African Americans

lived a few miles away in the Brightmoor neighborhood. All those social classes share

the same zip code (48223), while adhering to distinct value sets. Just as individuals of

different social classes and differing values can occupy the same Detroit zip code, a

similar convolution is apparent at PEC. The cultural capital enjoyed by the commuter

tenured parents is rooted in sharing middle class values with staff. However, the increase

in walker-non-tenured families could challenge the hold commuter-tenured families have

on the cultural capital at PEC.

The differences between the two parent types can be paired with the two company types Schein used in his examples. Those companies, the Action Company and the Multi-Company, operated from different assumptions, guided by different values, and showed different artifacts. He described, "… in the Action Company, the family is kind of safety net and an assurance of membership, in the Multi Company it is an authoritarian/ paternalistic system of eliciting loyalty and compliance in exchange for economic security" (Schein, 1990, p.115). When drawing parallels from PEC's parent types to Schein's company examples, the commuter-tenured parents align with the Action Company, while the walker non-tenured parents may appear to be a closer match to the Multi-Company. PEC could be viewed as having been an Action Company and may have to transition toward a Multi-Company. The demise of Parents & Pancakes and the establishment of Parent University could signal this transition.

The use of Schein's levels of culture as a lens includes dimensions of organizational culture. Some definitions for ideas in some of these dimensions of organizational culture were taken from Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck's research on value orientation. Mrs. Kluckholm's husband "argued that humans share biological traits and characteristics which form the basis for the development of culture, and that people typically feel their own cultural beliefs and practices are normal and natural, and those of others are strange, or even inferior or abnormal" (Hills, 2002, p.3-4). The phrase "people typically feel their own cultural beliefs and practices are normal and natural and those of others are strange, or even inferior or abnormal" captures the burgeoning conflict at PEC. Mrs. Davis' comment on the "new" parents supports this idea when she stated,

You have the parents that … come early and leave late; … talk to teachers, and will come on their lunch breaks and will do extra things. It's some of the newer students I've noticed in the last past couple of years, you can even tell what the (I don't want to say the quality of children), but it's a different mindset even with the kids that show how vested the parents are."

Mr. Smith shared "the new group of parents lack little or no value … associated with education." Mr. Jones added,

… sad to say but the newer parents are increasing and the older parents are decreasing. It's obvious to me that the newer parents are increasing because the lack of interest the students show … the newer parents themselves show no interest in school.

Kluckhohn's and Strodtbeck's table of dimensions of organizational culture was used by Schein and subsequently assists this study in better understanding the culture(s) at PEC. To depict that understanding, the underlying dimensions are paired with corresponding questions to be answered. Schein shares seven of these dimensions; five of which have some application to the PEC data. The omitted dimensions – the nature of time and the nature of human nature – do not directly lend themselves to this study. To facilitate clarity, the dimensions, questions to be answered, and the descriptions of the three groups will be shown on Table 11. Definitions of key terms will follow.

Table 11. Dimensions of organizational culture within PEC and subgroups.

Dimension	Questions to be answered	PEC	Commuter-Tenured	Walker-Non-Tenured
The organization's relationship to its environment.	Does the organization perceive itself to be dominant, submissive, harmonizing, searching out a niche?	PEC demonstrated a **harmonizing** approach while also **searching out a niche.**	Responds to PEC's **harmonizing** approach. And at one time held the greatest cultural capital.	The target group through which PEC is **searching out a niche** that better engages them.
The nature of human activity	Is the "correct" way for humans to behave to be dominant/pro-active, harmonizing, or passive/fatalistic?	PEC demonstrated a **dominant/ pro-active,** and **harmonizing** approach to engaging parents.	Their shared or similar values with PEC's staff are reflective of **harmonizing**.	Requires **dominant /pro-active** measures as evidenced by their involvement only in response to problems such as student discipline matters.
The nature of reality and truth	How do we define what is true and what is not true; and how is truth ultimately determined both in the physical and social world? By pragmatic test, reliance on wisdom, or social consensus?	PEC demonstrated the use of **pragmatic test** and **reliance on wisdom** as means of determining truth.	Demonstrated an adherence to **social consensus** as means of determining truth.	Demonstrated a **reliance on wisdom** as a means for determining truth.
The nature of human relationships	What is the "correct" way for people to relate to each other, to distribute power and affection? Is life competitive or cooperative? Is the best way to organize society based on individualism or groupism? Is the best authority system autocratic/paternalistic or collegial/participative?	PEC demonstrated **collegial/ participative** methods of engaging parents	Responded to **collegial/ participative** methods - as this group is initially invested and seeks ways to be engaged.	Perhaps would be more responsive to **autocratic/ paternalistic** methods - as they are not responsive to the collegial/ participative.
Homogeneity vs. diversity	Is the group best off if it is highly diverse or if it is highly homogeneous, and should individuals in a group be encouraged to innovate or conform?	PEC demonstrated activity that would reflects values of a **highly homogeneous** although they may say they value a highly diverse group	Value a **highly homogeneous** environment with those who share values. When the homogeny diminishes, this group uses it resources and chooses another school.	These parents may value a **highly diverse** as they may perceive that exposure to other social classes may have benefits.

Note. Table 11 uses "Dimensions" and "Questions to be answered" taken from: (Schein, 1990, p. 114) as framework for understanding PEC and its subgroups.

Definitions for key terms in Table 11:

- **Harmonious** (harmonizing): "exercise partial but not total control by living in a balance with the natural forces" (Hills, 2002, p.3-4).

- **Searching out a niche**: "Organizations operating according to this orientation look for a niche in their environment that allows them to survive and they always think in terms of adapting to external realities rather than trying to create markets or dominate some portion of the environment" (Schein, 2004, p.176).

- **Dominant/ Proactive**: "The particular beliefs and talents of the founders and leaders of the group will determine which functions become dominant as the group evolves" (Schein, 2004, p.97).

- **Pragmatic Test**: a thought process illustrated by Schein as "let's try it out this way and evaluate how we are doing" (Schein, 2004, p.146).

- **Reliance on wisdom**: a concept Schein illustrates as variations of one the three following statements - "our president wants to do it this way. Our consultants have recommended that we do it this way. She has had the most experience, so we should do what she says" (Schein, 2004, p.146).

- **Social Consensus**: two lines of thinking that reflect social consensus are:
  - "We've done three surveys and analyzed the statistics very carefully; they all show the same thing so let's act one them" (Schein, 2004, p.146).

- o "Our survey results may not be completely valid, but our focus group

    follow-up data support the findings so we should go ahead and do it"

    (Schein, 2004, p.146).

- **Collegial Participative**: an interactive environment in which the leadership and

    different subcultures can interact and equally exchange ideas.

- **Autocratic / Paternalistic**: a top-down environment where the leadership sets

    the tone and manner of how things should be done. Sub-culture groups adhere to

    the establish directives and norms.

- **Highly homogenous**: the values and behaviors of individuals and / or sub-

    cultures within an organization share a great amount of similarities.

- **Highly diverse**: the values and behaviors of individuals and / or sub-cultures

    within an organization are widely different.

When reviewing Table 1 it is important to consider an alignment between PEC and the Commuter-Tenure group and a disconnection between PEC and the Walker-Non-tenured group. PEC and the Commuter-Tenure group share values, while the difference in values between PEC and Walker-Non-tenured contributes to their disconnection. With shared values, the Commuter-Tenure group enjoys a higher level of cultural capital than the Walker-Non-tenured group.

Both of groups function from their embedded values about schools. Those values were introduced with Lareau's distinction of working and middle class values about schools. School administration and teachers function with middle class values. By virtue of their employment level and the similarity in employment levels with Commuter-Tenure parents, there is a social capital between the two groups. Table 12 attempts to

draw parallels between PEC data (the social capital or alignment between the school and

Commuter-Tenure parents) and Lareau's research:

Table 12. Paralleling Lareau's research with PEC data.

	Commuter-Tenured	**Walker- Non-tenured**
Lareau	"… saw education as a shared enterprise and scrutinized, monitored, and supplemented the school experience of their children." "…had educational skills and occupational prestige that matched or surpassed that of teachers	"…turned over the responsibility for education to the teacher." "…had poor educational skills, relatively lower occupational prestige than teachers, and limited time and disposable income to supplement and intervene in their children's schooling."
	Commuter-Tenured	**Walker- Non-tenured**
Interviewees	"…has the education, they have a solid job, their expectation for their kid is that they are successful, and they see them through that process." "…parents chose for them to be here not because it's a school that's in the neighborhood, but because it's a place that they want them to be."	"…don't know how to be proactive and readily involved in their children's education." "…interaction would probably only be when that student might have an issue with behavior; when that student might have an issue with an exorbitant amount of missing assignments."

Note. Table 12 parallels concepts from Lareau's research and matches it with comments made by interviewees from PEC.

At PEC, the entire population believes their child should have an education. Ms.

Spruill explained "they want the best education for their children. There are some who

don't know quite how to go about making it happen; but they all want the same thing –

they want their child to be well educated." Yet, commuters feel so strongly about PEC

that they drive from locations throughout the city and by-pass other schools to act upon

their value of PEC. The walkers may choose PEC because of its proximity, indirectly

implying that if there were another school closer, they would choose that one. The

commuters demonstrate a more intense interest in PEC, while walkers may value PEC

but their primary interest is the concept of a school, possibly any school. There is a group that really wants to be at PEC and another group that is at PEC because it is the closest school. One group could be pro-active about education and the other perceived as reactive. One group has at least a minimal level of engagement, taking their child to school, while the other group's engagement is less than that minimum.

Another perspective of the commuter and walker groups is of their resources. The commuter group has enough resources to have cars and gas money to travel. The walker group may or may not have cars or gas money. If they do have a car, they deduce that it is a better option for the child to walk. Within this perspective, there is an underlying parental involvement element. For the commuter group to utilize their resources, an adult/parent must get the child to PEC. By getting the child to school, this responsibility brings the parent to the school grounds. With the walker group, the child is responsible for getting to school; their parents do not go to the school grounds.

The values of the walker-non-tenured and commuter-tenured students mirror those classified by Lareau as working-class and middle class. Lareau's definition is

> The working-class parents had poor educational skills, relatively lower
> occupational prestige than teachers, and limited time and disposable income to
> supplement and intervene in their children's schooling. The middle-class parents,
> on the other hand, had educational skills and occupational prestige that matched
> or surpassed that of teachers; they also had the necessary economic resources to
> manage child care, transportation, and time required to meet with teachers, to hire
> tutors, and to become intensely involved in their children's schooling (Lareau,
> 1987, p. 81).

Ms. Woods' description of two types of PEC parents bears resemblance to

Lareau's classifications. Ms. Woods stated

I think about two parents in particular; again, I think that what I see is … just their

background. The parent that I know that is the consistent parent, the one that is

engaged is the parent who has the education, they have a solid job, their

expectation for their kid is that they are successful, and they see them through that

process. Whereas the [other type of] parent …I would say that their interaction

would probably only be when that student might have an issue with behavior;

when that student might have an issue with an exorbitant amount of missing

assignments. And if you notice, there is a correlation between that in most times.

If a parent is not engaged, then that kid will only probably see that parent when

it's a problem; and sometimes it makes you wonder is that kid just acting out or

showing out for that reason, because that's the only time that not only do we get

to see the parent, but that they get to get that attention and that one on one as well.

Mr. Jones was more succinct with a description comparing his rapport with teachers as a

commuter-tenured parent and the relationship the other type of parents has:

 … I do what I can to help them regardless of what grade my child was in. Other

parents sometimes, I would say, the fact of them may not knowing how to do the

work to help the kids, or whatever, so a lot of parents (I don't want to say

inferior), or knowing they can't help their kids because we do have some parents

like that. Then when you talk to them, some of them take the fact that you're

talking down to them – but you're just talking to them; and it's the fact that they

don't know what's going on, what their child needs to know and they get upset

about it sometimes.

Mr. Smith said

The beliefs or perceptions are that the parents don't know how to be proactive and

readily involved in their children's education. It is a possibility that the parents

themselves lack education, values and parental skills. All of these variables are

attributed to unemployment, economics, demographic and political issues.

Ms. Woods, Mr. Jones, and Mr. Smith allude to differences in socio-economics

and educational levels. Ms. Spruill summarized the differences in students when she

said, "we have some students - middle income, low income, extremely low income."

There are differences within the PEC's student population are like Lareau's ideas.

With the differing values within the student population, Lareau's research on

cultural capital could prompt inquiries of whether commuter-tenured or walker-non-

tenured families influenced the actions of PEC's administration. During the researcher's

time of employment, it is possible that the commuter –tenured population held the greater

influence as they made up a larger percentage of enrolled students at a school which then

had much smaller overall population. At that time, the school had relocated from the city

of Highland Park to the current East Forest location. That relocation was several miles, a

distance that a walker would not undertake. However, a sizable portion of the population

maintained their enrollment despite the relocation. This sizable portion was the core of

the commuter-tenured group. Those students who made the transition could symbolize

the population the school was designed to serve.

Another indicator of school's guiding values was the school board. In years past all the school board members and the first Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Vivian Ross, were members of the Plymouth United Church. The membership of Plymouth United Church has a sizable percentage of white-collar African American professionals. Included in their benevolence to provide an educational option for the city were their professional class values. There was a perception that the school was somewhat of private school alternative and perhaps that led to its high number of applicants. At that time, those applicants participated in a lottery for enrollment. As Mr. Smith shared, "I recall in 2002, when PEC had to hold a lottery for enrollment. That time has come and gone. Enrollment is open to the public all year round." The transition of how students enroll is a story itself. While the overall enrollment number is consistent, who makes up that number and how it is achieved tells of the changes within the PEC enrolled population.

While the commuter-tenured group held more influence on the learning environment in the past, an influence that was developed from the values of the school board, administration, and enrolling families, it appears that one of the greatest challenges facing PEC is conflict between the values held by the administration and the shrinking commuter-tenured group when compared to the values of the growing walker-non-tenured group. Perhaps in the past, the walker-non-tenured group attended PEC with an intention of being exposed to or influenced by the values held by the school board and administration. However, if those aspirations did exist, it appears that they have diminished. Mr. Smith shared that at one event, participants "left the hallways with a

strong stench of marijuana, showcased unkempt and unclean children, [and] parents

wearing sagging pants, do-rags, pajamas, etc."

How does the PEC's administration engage a group with differing values? It

appears that while the programming for an event may benefit a certain group, PEC casts a

wide net in programming with an intention of securing as many families as possible.

PEC targets both commuter-tenured and walker-non-tenured families with the same

programs. According to Mr. Smith,

> PEC interacts with both groups the same way. The school has a new initiative
>
> called Parent University in which it supposedly offers workshop for parents to
>
> attend on-line. Data shows that only 10% of the parents attended the workshops.
>
> There are other opportunities for parent interactions throughout the school year.
>
> Unfortunately, the turnout is extremely low. For example, on MEAP Review
>
> Night…12 parents attended.

Mr. Jones also commented that PEC "did do a Parenting University to try to bring

them in; but then again it's up to the parents to come in."

Detroit has been losing citizens for decades. The remaining citizens are

increasingly poor. These citizens also have choices in public education. Plymouth

Educational Center, a public education choice, has a student population that mirrors the

economic changes within Detroit's population. Or perhaps more accurately described by

Mr. Smith:

> PEC's population reflects only Detroit's most blighted populated area. … until
>
> approximately 2007, a lot of Detroit's working to middle class families wanted
>
> their children to attend PEC. The working to middle class families have either

left the city and transferred their children to suburban schools or remain in the city

and have chosen a better school for them.

Of all the challenges facing PEC, how the school adjusts to the changing

demographic is one of the most important. Perhaps that adjustment can be initiated by a

strong central figure through some intentional leadership initiative. Or perhaps the

methods that worked for the commuter-tenured group of the late 1990s through the mid-

2000s, will not be effective for the new population and their unique needs. For PEC to

avoid become a "typical Detroit Public School," its school engagement strategies are

going to have to cultivate more parental engagement from a population that historically

has not been engaged. Because for PEC's core culture or purpose to be sustained, it must

create an engaging culture for a student population that differs from the population they

were designed to serve.

What Happened to the Comer Process?

Plymouth Educational Center does not officially subscribe to the Comer Process;

however, the Comer Process' guiding principles of *collaboration*, *consensus*, and *no-fault*

were apparent within PEC in 2009. These principles were less apparent in 2011 as the

make-up of the population transitioned toward an increase in Walker-Non-tenured

families; families with differing values from the school and less responsive the school's

efforts at engagement. It is important to note the distinction of PEC's unofficial

subscription for at least two reasons. The first is the conceptual ubiquity of Comer's

guiding principles. These principles are not tangible commodities for purchase and

eventual application; they are intangible matters that can be represented, discussed, and

possibly measured. Due to this ubiquity, Comer's guiding principles are not exclusive to the Comer Process, but can be replicated in a variety of forms for diverse circumstances. While the replication of these principles is apparent at PEC, there is no indication that that replication is intentional.

Another reason to recognize the distinction of PEC's non-formal subscription to the Comer Process is that in regards to school improvement efforts; PEC's culture and improvement efforts were shaped to fit the original student population. As evidenced by PEC, the avoidance of an over-reliance upon commercial blueprints or products as remedies for school building-specific issues may be a hurdle school improvement teams can by-pass in their efforts at advancement. Also, evidenced by PEC, the changes in a school's population would require changes in their official or unofficial application of the Comer Process.

Comer's no-fault principle functions within the Comer Process as a standard of behavior between the school planning, student support, and parent teams. At PEC, the no-fault principle is embodied within the administration's adherence to the Tribal Rules of attentive listening, mutual respect, and appreciations/no-put downs. The tribal rules do not employ the term "no-fault" but the conceptual implications are present. Comer states "faultfinding only generates defensiveness" (Comer, 1997, p. 55) and with the tribal rules as informal guidelines for behavior, the PEC staff (some of whom were practitioners of the tribal rules at the time when the rules were formally practiced at the school) comply with Comer's no-fault principle.

While the no-fault principle works as a guideline for behavior, *collaboration* and *consensus* are evident at PEC as actual behaviors. The Health Fair, Declamation Contest,

and Career Fair are all examples of the value PEC places upon collaboration or input

from parents. The parents are contributors to the successful implementation of activities.

While perhaps a small percentage of parents may engage in the planning of activities, a

larger percentage is involved in execution of activities. When staff and parents work

together in executing a program, the spirit of Comer's principle of collaboration is

apparent.

   While researching Comer's Process, the image of consensus was of designated

team members operating with consensus as a conceptual guide. The researcher perceived

Comer's consensus as a dynamic achieved within a meeting. Yet, at PEC, consensus

operates beyond the confines of a meeting and morphs into a behavior initiated by the

administration. The Town Hall Meeting was a forum for parents to share opinions, ideas,

and concerns. PEC's administrative team was noting parental ideas as contributions

toward administrative planning. When viewing consensus at PEC, one must include the

parent's perception that the administration is responsible. With parents viewing the

administration as responsible and the administration actively mining for parental opinions

and ideas – consensus becomes a series of behaviors. That series of behaviors could be

perceived as:

- o   PEC establishes a climate where parents feel their input is valued;

- o   Parents provide their input;

- o   PEC formulates that input along with organizational goals and creates a

  product, event or some type of manifestation;

- o   Parents and families participate or experience the manifestation;

- o   Parents provide feedback to re-start the consensus process again.

Coincidentally, PEC's non-subscription to the Comer Process is an indirect

endorsement of it because it demonstrates the universality of the Comer Process

principles and that value of those principles are location or person (facilitator) specific.

PEC's use of Comer's guiding principles serves as an example of the relevance of the

conceptual spirit of the Comer Process. The conceptual spirit whose

> Focus was on creating a school context in which the adults could support the
>
> development of children and not focus only on raising test scores. But test scores
>
> went up significantly. And equally important, student-staff-parent behavior and
>
> participation improved greatly. (Comer, 2004, p. 21)

Moreover, PEC's non-subscription to the Comer Process does not equal non-agreement

with Comer's values. As an advocate for parental involvement, Comer outlines three

attributes needed for schools to have meaningful parental involvement, attributes that are

immersed within the themes arising from the fieldwork and the culture of PEC.

> Proponents of parent involvement made at least three strong arguments. First,
>
> parents have knowledge of their children and a relationship on which school
>
> personnel can build. Second, the presence of parents could improve
>
> accountability and help to tie school programs to community needs. Third, if
>
> parents themselves are involved in a school program, they will develop a greater
>
> interest in program outcomes and will be supportive of budgetary and other
>
> school-related economic and political considerations. (Comer, 1980, p. 126)

> In retrospect, perhaps it is striking that the Comer Process-like behaviors of PEC

would diminish with the increased number of another parent type. Were the strategies

purposely abandoned, deemed ineffective, or not entrenched enough to endure? The

transformation of PEC's population from 2009 to 2011 occurs with a diminishing

visibility of Comer Process-like behaviors. An original lens for understanding proved

inapplicable to PEC's changing demographic.
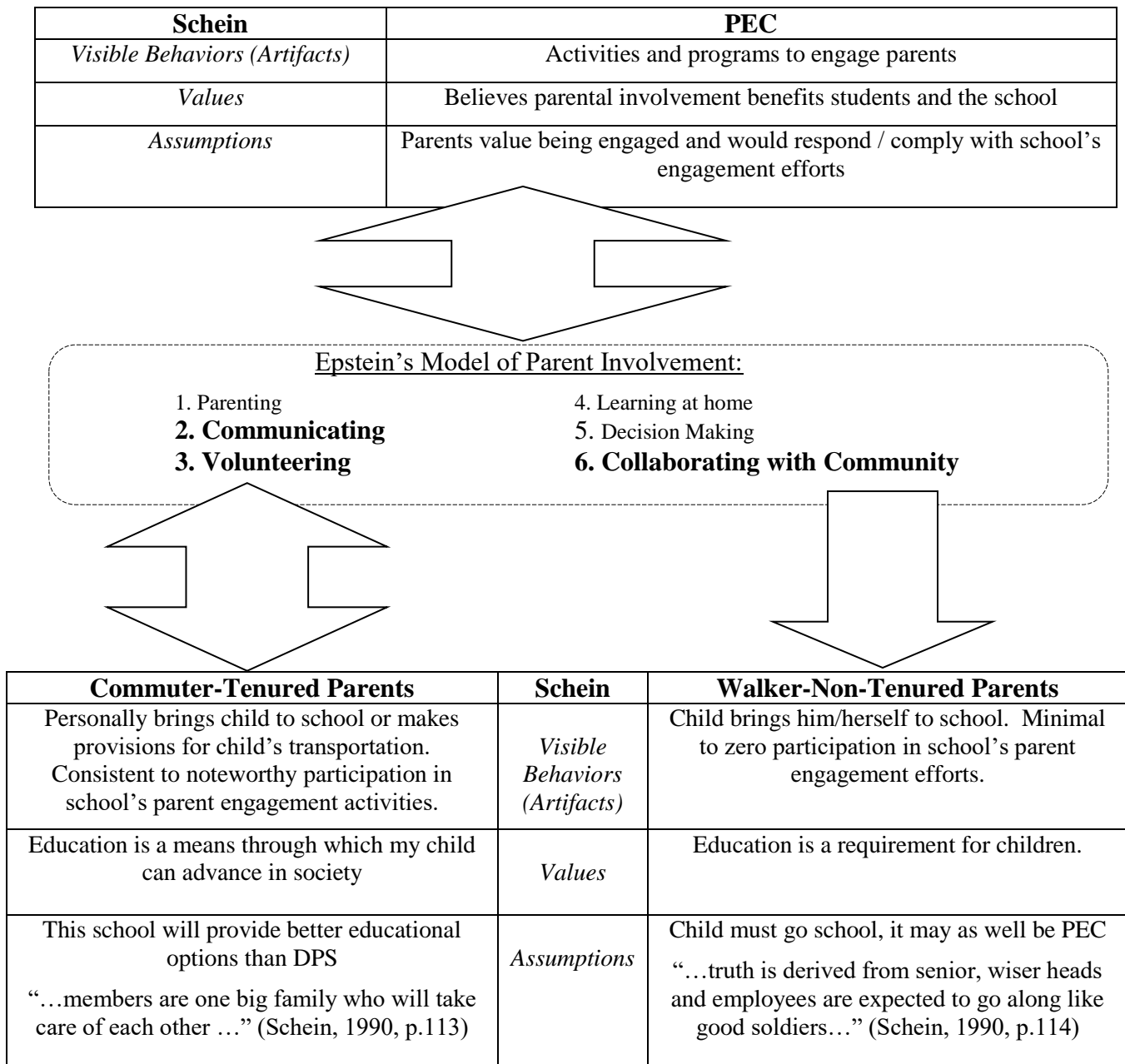
Concept Map Revision

In 2009, the projected expectations of what the fieldwork would reveal were not

far from what was observed – a good school providing good services for its' students.

However, at that time, PEC was, metaphorically speaking, at the last stages of its growth

years (a term applied by the researcher). Growth years would be a time when most

parents shared the values of the administration and students were enrolled via lottery or

re-enrollment. The growth years also signify the time when the district continued to

expand by adding a grade per year until PEC became a K-12 district with two campuses.

Yet, there were some fissures in the good news of the initial fieldwork, fissures that seem

to have grown more pronounced by 2011. The use of the Comer Process was a fitting

way to make sense of the 2009 PEC. However, as PEC moved from the growth years

toward the next phase, the additional lenses of understanding provided by Schien's levels

of culture and Lareau's cultural capital helped to make sense of the transformation within

PEC.

The addition of Schein necessitated concept map revisions that include

experiences derived from the fieldwork and Epstein's Model of Parent Involvement. The

revised map featured in Figure 38 matches Schein's levels of culture, artifacts, values,

and assumptions, with PEC data. It also aims to depict the two types of parents the school

serves and their levels of culture. The revised concept map has 5 phases: (1) an

interpretation of PEC through the Schein lens, (2) an arrow to illustrate the energy PEC

invests in engaging parents and the energy it reciprocates, (3) a listing of the stages of

Epstein's Model of Parent Involvement with emphasis placed on the ones observed at

PEC, (4) two arrows that typify how PEC's efforts flow towards both parent types but is

requited by one type, and (5) an interpretation of the parent types through the Schein lens.

Figure 38. Researcher's revised concept map.

Schein	PEC
Visible Behaviors (Artifacts)	Activities and programs to engage parents
Values	Believes parental involvement benefits students and the school
Assumptions	Parents value being engaged and would respond / comply with school's engagement efforts

Epstein's Model of Parent Involvement:

1. Parenting	4. Learning at home
2. Communicating	5. Decision Making
3. Volunteering	**6. Collaborating with Community**

Commuter-Tenured Parents	Schein	Walker-Non-Tenured Parents
Personally brings child to school or makes provisions for child's transportation. Consistent to noteworthy participation in school's parent engagement activities.	*Visible Behaviors (Artifacts)*	Child brings him/herself to school. Minimal to zero participation in school's parent engagement efforts.
Education is a means through which my child can advance in society	*Values*	Education is a requirement for children.
This school will provide better educational options than DPS	*Assumptions*	Child must go school, it may as well be PEC
"…members are one big family who will take care of each other …" (Schein, 1990, p.113)		"…truth is derived from senior, wiser heads and employees are expected to go along like good soldiers…" (Schein, 1990, p.114)

Figure 38. Researcher's revised concept map illustrates that this researcher derived from the data and additional research.

Schein's levels of culture, artifacts, values, and assumptions, were apparent in PEC. In 2009 and 2011, some of these artifacts are the activities that were categorized as the school engagement strategies theme. The values of PEC seeking to engage parents and parents (who in time proved to be commuter-tenured parents) who sought opportunities to be engaged became more tangible during the interviews. The follow-up interviews delved into the realm of assumptions as they (2011 interviews) were of greater length and more substance. The aha! moment of understanding the data occurred once the Schein lens was utilized.

The second phase of the revised concept map symbolizes PEC's efforts to engage parents and the reciprocity of parents.   Perhaps no parent exercised this reciprocity more than the interviewee, Ron Jones.   From volunteering as a hall monitor to organizing a cross-country college tour, Mr. Jones made maximum use of the space PEC granted for parents to become involved. There were other parents who functioned in this space with less notoriety than Mr. Jones; however, the purpose of the two-way arrow in the concept map is to illustrate the existence of this type of space for involvement.

PEC's assumptions about engaging parents and their impact on the school becomes manifest through its utilization of three of Epstein's Parental Involvement strategies – the third phase of the revised concept map. Communicating, volunteering, and collaborating with the community are depicted in bold and larger font to convey their presence in the fieldwork. Communicating was done through notes/ flyers that were sent home, the use of the list serve, and grade level teams' use of homework folders.

Volunteering was apparent during the Health Fair, the Book Fair, and through the parent that is a former employee who consistently assisted in an early elementary class. Collaborating with the community is seen through S.W.A.G., Young L.O.V.E., and Career Day. Elements of other Epstein measures were seen in the form of the Parent University representing the Epstein stage of Parenting, and Epstein's Decision-Making could be assigned to the parent representative on the school board. Yet, those two items are more speculative whereas the previous three Epstein strategies were more definitive.

The fourth stage of the revised concept map shows arrows that portray the energy extended to and returned by the two types of parents. Both arrows point from the Epstein strategies as a way of conveying how PEC uses these strategies to engage two types of parents. Pointing towards the walker-non-tenured parents is a one-way arrow coming from PEC (through Epstein). That arrow contrasts with the two-way arrow that shows the commuter-tenure parents respond to PEC's efforts at engagement.

The fifth stage of the revised map uses the Schein lens for insight on the cultures of the two parent types. Schein provides an explanation that can be used in understanding the possibility of two different parent types within one school:

> For our purposes, it is enough to specify that any definable group with a shared history can have a culture and that within an organization there can therefore be many subcultures. If the organization as a whole has had shared experiences, there will also be a total organizational culture. Within in any given unit, the tendency for integration and consistency will be assumed to be present, but it is perfectly possible for coexisting units of a larger system to have cultures that are independent and even in conflict with each other. (Schein, 1990, p. 111)

By applying Schein's underlying dimensions and questions to be answered, a more acute perspective of PEC and the two types of parents/ families they serve can be reached. While the data provided information about what was, it is tempting to begin drawing conjectural parallels between the conflict within PEC and transformations that occurred happened historically in DPS.

　　While conducting the research that became the historical analysis of this study, there was a distinction that at one time within the city of Detroit, the inner-core schools (Northern, Northwestern, Central, Northeastern, etc.) were predominantly Black, lacked Advanced Placement programs, and were made up of working or lower class students. These facts were shared in Mirel's research, "The NAACP report also noted that, in the 1963 -64 school year, not a single advanced placement test was given at the predominantly black Central, Northern, Northeastern, and Northwestern high schools" (Mirel, 1999, p.300). This distinction contrasts with the outer-ring DPS high schools (Henry Ford, Osborn, Denby, Redford, Cody, Mumford, etc.) being predominantly White, having Advanced Placement programs, and being made of middle class students. This study wants to emphatically avoid better / worse prejudices amongst race and social classes and simply use the terms to designate differences.

　　If we were to extend the hypothetical parallels, it could start with Mumford being a "good" high school in the 1960s. The researcher has a professional colleague, Dr. Benjamin Cuker of Hampton University, who jokingly shared that he was among the last White graduates of Mumford High School in 1974. By the 1990s, the researcher remembers Mumford as the place where a childhood friend murdered another student. Other friends shared stories of being robbed of jewelry and jackets, implying a necessary

level of street smarts were needed to survive at Mumford. By the 2000s, Mumford was

designated for closure as its population had dwindled and its student academic

performance has tanked. How does PEC parallel Mumford or any of those other (former)

outer-ring DPS Schools?

The parallel between PEC and those outer-ring DPS schools begins with their

creation to serve a specific demographic. This creation included features that set them

apart from other schools. The historical outer-ring DPS schools had Advanced

Placement programs. PEC had a new building with athletic facilities. Both experienced

shifts in population, those outer-ring DPS schools witnessed the transition from white to

black middle classes, and then from black middle class, to black working class to

impoverished blacks. These population transitions within those outer-ring schools

mirrored the transitions of their surrounding neighborhoods. A transition that the

researcher lived through while residing in the neighborhood that served Henry Ford High

School on Detroit's north west side. When the researcher's family arrived in that

community in 1977, the researcher recalls some white families living on the same block.

By the time the researcher's parents sold that house in the early 2000s, they were the one

of the few homeowners as the block consisted of primarily renters and all African

Americans. The transformation of that neighborhood was reflected at Henry Ford and

throughout DPS.

PEC initially served black middle to working class families who drove from

various parts of the city to attend. Since then, that population has either left the city or

chosen other educational options, leaving behind more impoverished black families at

PEC. Will PEC become a school that makes successfully competitive students from an

impoverished population or lose its uniqueness and as stated by Mr. Smith, become "a typical Detroit Public School?"

Two of the more highly regarded charter school districts, Detroit Edison Public School Academy (DEPSA) for its Blue-Ribbon Award and University Preparatory Academy (UPA) for its business connections, attractive campuses, and location, are direct competitors to PEC. The researcher ponders whether the commuter-tenure parents who work in the Detroit Medical Center or at Wayne State would choose UPA over PEC because it has greater proximity to their jobs as UPA is in the heart of the Midtown area, the same area where parents who used to commute to PEC work.

Extending the speculation, PEC's location may have become a contributor to its population transition. Although its campus is within a mile or two of both DEPSA and UPA, PEC is the most remote. The nearby businesses (east of I75) have shuttered and the reconfiguration of the streets makes the K-8 campus even less accessible. Moreover, the PEC High School is miles away whereas the DEPSA High School shares the same campus as its K-8 and one of the UPA High Schools is one to two blocks over from two of its elementary schools.

Following theoretical projections paints a bleak picture for the future of PEC. Perhaps it creates a niche for itself that distinguishes it from UPA and DEPSA. Or perhaps it draws a hard line on its values and continues to disengage its newer families. Whichever fate becomes PEC, it is possible that the themes that contributed to its standing as a good school may or may not contribute to its future success. Just as one must be sensitive to the values and circumstances of the different parent types who choose PEC, one must be sensitive to the limitations of the vitality of the data themes

enduring the population transition. Of all the observed themes, the strong central figure appears to be the one that causes the most effect. However, it could be deduced that the population shift and expansion into high school / two campuses can be too much for one person to effect. The limitations of the strong central figure are not indictments on Dr. Kilgore. Instead the limitations of a strong central figure at an 800 hundred-student school would be profoundly more apparent in a 10,000-student organization. Due to the size of PEC, particularly the K-8 campus, the assumption that 'the administration is responsible' can be sustained. Dr. Kilgore's accessibility and relationship building skills reinforces that assumption. However, as the values of the enrolled population changes will the effectiveness of a strong central figure be as potent? Will the assumptions/trust parents have for Dr. Kilgore or the next superintendent sustain as the population changes? Would the PEC administration have to go to greater lengths for parental buy-in? In 2009, the context of PEC was one where the functions of a strong central figure could operate with success. The researcher believes that as the context changes, as it appears to be changing within the student demographic, the ability of the strong central figure to 'juggle all the balls' would be altered. The success of the strong central figure and other themes are acutely susceptible to the context of the environment.

Additional perspective of PEC's strong central figure and other themes are shared in Appendix One.

CHAPTER SIX: ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Answering the Research Question

What is the relationship between parental involvement and school culture? It is a relationship that exists within multiple overlapping layers. To better explain the relationship between parental involvement and school culture, a section from the anatomy chapter in science textbooks could be used as an analogy. In the anatomy pictures, there are sometimes multiple transparent pages with illustrations of layers of the human body. Those pages could symbolize the overlapping layers of the relationship between parents, community and the culture of the school. The metaphoric layers of the human body are parallel to Edgar Schein's organizational levels of culture. It is important to note that because the two parent types view and interact with schools in dissimilar manners, the overlapping layers function disparately amongst them. Finally, Table 13 will assign the observed data themes from PEC, the parent types, and the corresponding layer of culture.

(Table 13 is depicted in its' entirety on the following page.)

Table 13. Parallels of Anatomy analogy to Schein, PEC, & subgroups.

Anatomy	Schein (Description)	PEC		Commuter-Tenured	Walker-Non-tenured
Skin (surface)	Observable Artifacts (What is visible)	o *Strong Central Figure* o *Intentional Leadership Initiative* o *School Engagement Strategies* o *Administrative Activity* o *Embracing Environment*	**L E A D S**	o *Enrollment Reasons* o *Parental Engagement*	o *Enrollment Reasons* o *Participation Decreases*
Muscles & Organs	Values (Organizational Values & Guiding Principles)	o *Accountability* o *Collaboration* o *Sustained involvement* o *Strong Central Figure*	**T O**	*Parents are deliberate in connecting children to best educational option their resources can provide (proactive).*	*Circumstances influence parents' choice of educational options for children (reactive).*
Skeleton	Basic Underlying Assumptions	o *is harmonizing,* o *is searching out a niche,* o *can be dominant paternalistic,* o *views itself as collegial participative, and* o *has been highly homogenous*		o *is harmonizing,* o *operates from a reliance on wisdom,* o *is collegial participative, and* o *seems to prefer highly homogenous*	o *is searching out a niche,* o *responds to dominant/ proactive,* o *follows social consensus,* o *seems to prefer autocratic /paternalistic and* o *may aspire for highly diverse*

Note. Table 13 parallels concepts this researcher's anatomy analogy to Schien's organizational layers to PEC and its subgroups.

The information conveyed in Table 13 implies that there are lines of progression from one layer to another within the columns of PEC, Commuter-Tenure, and Walker-Non-Tenured. Line of progression connotes how a variable on one level leads to or prompts a variable on subsequent levels. The skeletal layer (basic underlying assumptions) is where the core beliefs lie. These core beliefs are not visible or tangible, but evidence of their existence is seen in the other layers. From the skeletal layer (assumptions), muscles and organs allow values (organizational values and guiding principles) to function, move, and / or otherwise happen. At the muscle layer, these items have a low level of visibility and require some investigation or discernment to recognize. Finally, at the skin layer (artifacts) the values manifest themselves into something that is easily seen. Beginning with the skeletal layer, followed by the muscles and organs, and ending with the skin layer, these lines of progression are featured in Tables 14, 15, and 16.

Table 14. Lines of progression within PEC.

Skeletal	Muscles & Organs	Skin
Dominant / Paternalistic	Strong Central Figure	Strong Central Figure
Collegial	Collaboration Sustained involvement	Intentional Leadership Initiative, Parental Engagement and Administrative Activity
Harmonizing	Accountability	Embracing Environment
Searching out a niche	Collaboration	School Engagement Strategies

Note. Table 14 illustrates lines of progression between layers in the anatomy analogy with data themes related to PEC and Schein's organizational research.

Table 15. Lines of progression with Commuter-Tenured Parents.

Skeletal	**Muscles & Organs**	**Skin**
Harmonizing	*Deliberate and / or proactive in exercising choices for child's education*	*Parental Engagement*
Reliance on Wisdom		
Collegial / Participative		*Enrollment Reasons*
Highly homogenous		
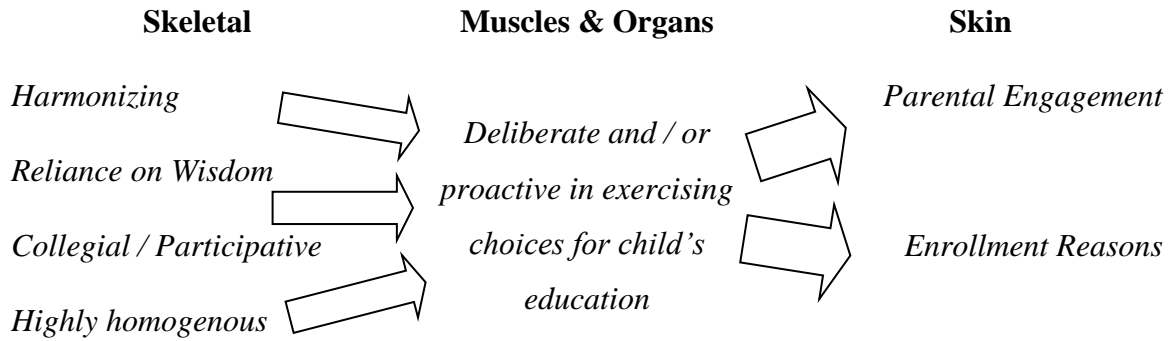
Note. Table 15 illustrates lines of progression between layers in the anatomy analogy with data themes related to Commuter-Tenured Parents and Schein's organizational research.

Table 16. Lines of progression with Walker-Non-Tenured Parents.

Skeletal	**Muscles & Organs**	**Skin**
Searching out a niche	*Reactive / or allows circumstances to guide child's educational options*	*Enrollment Reasons*
Dominant / Proactive		
Social Consensus		*Participation Decreases*
Autocratic / Paternalistic		
Highly Diverse		
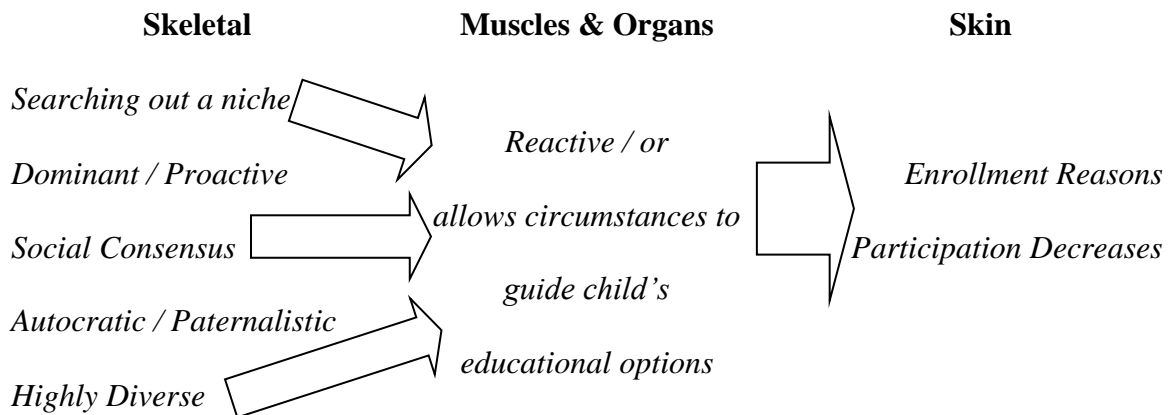
Note. Table 16 illustrates lines of progression between layers in the anatomy analogy with data themes related to Walker-Non-Tenured Parents and Schein's organizational research.

In addition to the lines of progression, each layer of the relationship between school culture and parental involvement requires the active functioning or vitality of the underlying layers. The lines of progression in Tables 14-16 also convey that the efforts extended by PEC are received and acted upon by the Commuter-Tenure parents. Those same efforts are not acted upon by the Walker-Non-tenure parents. The notion of "acted upon" is captured in the proactive and reactive descriptions of the respective parent types.

Since PEC's engagement efforts are acted upon by the Commuter-Tenure parents, parental engagement is something that can be seen (skin layer) and is an example of the alignment of values of these parents and the school. On the contrary, the skin layer for the Walker-Non-tenure parents shows decreases in participation and reflects their disconnection with PEC's engagement efforts. This disconnection can be viewed as unhealthy and /or a disharmony between one body layer to another.

Tables 14-16 also illustrates where each layer (skeletal, muscles & organs, and skin) also embodies certain themes. The skeletal layer is the core and it embodies the school's basic underlying assumptions. The following is an explanation of assumptions:

> Through more intense observation, through more focused questions, and through
> involving motivated members of the group in intensive self-analysis, one can seek
> out and decipher the taken-for-granted, underlying, and usually unconscious
> *assumptions* that determine perceptions, thought processes, feelings, and
> behavior. Once one understands some of these assumptions, it becomes easier to
> decipher the meanings implicit in the various behavioral and artificial phenomena
> … (Schein, p. 112, 1990)

Underlying assumptions at PEC are fostered by the community enrichment goals of the Plymouth United Church, maintained by the current school board, and carried out by the Superintendent. At PEC, their core purpose involves nurturance, motivation, and education achieved by emphasis on academic excellence and responsible citizenship; their mission is not just a statement it is an underlying assumption. It is this skeletal core where the activity of the school board and superintendent occurs. It is also where intentional leadership initiative is born. This is where the preliminary energy that evolves

to encompass parental involvement lies. The skeletal layer provides structural foundation for the other layers.

The inclusion of the strong central figure theme at both the skin and skeletal layers requires specification. At the skin layer, the strong central figure (Dr. Kilgore) was the public embodiment of why PEC is different. He was tangible evidence of the difference between PEC and DPS. However, at the skeletal layer, the strong central figure is a prominent stakeholder (along with board members) steering the direction of the school. The strong central figure's values and assumptions are variables in which direction they lead the school. Essentially, the perception of the strong central figure is evident on the skin layer and his actions are represented at the skeletal layer.

The muscles and organs layer represent guiding principles and organizational values. These layers do not provide structure; instead act as the lifelines or facilitators of the mission. This is the realm where PEC makes something happen. Just as muscles prompt arms to bend and organs circulate blood, the organizational values prompt parental involvement by doing things that engages parents and community. Another view of the data through the lens of the anatomy analogy could prompt questions regarding the health of PEC's muscles and organs due to the differences in relationships with the two parent types. At one time, Grandparents Day, S.W.A.G., and the Parent Town Hall Meeting were all examples of PEC healthy muscle and organ activity because the administration and staff were making things happen to achieve the aims of the school mission. The eventual dissolution of the afterschool program and Parents & Pancakes could be examples muscle and organ deterioration. Moreover, PEC's muscle and organ activity also represent the "culture's espoused and documented values" (Schein, p.112,

1990) and answers, "why certain observed phenomena happen the way they do" (Schein, p.112, 1990). These activities are supported by the basic underlying assumptions just as the skeleton supports organs and muscles. Because PEC values participation from parents and community, PEC "does" something about it as muscles and organs "do" something to achieve an end.

> The skin/surface layer is where palpable things can be seen. According to Schein, This category includes everything from the physical layout, the dress code, the manner in which people address each other, the smell and feel of the place, its emotional intensity, and other phenomena, to the more permanent archival manifestations such as company records, products, statements of philosophy, and annual reports. (Schein, p. 111, 1990)

> Teachers escorting students out of the building each day and hanging around

outside for impromptu interaction are actions that parents can see. The banners, communications sent home, hospitality, and more are noticeable signs that are reflective of the healthy functioning of the subordinate layers. Just as unhealthy organs can sometimes engender dull or discolored skin; unhealthy or disconnected organizational values, out-of-touch underlying assumptions, and detached missions would manifest as unhealthy skin or unpleasant things that people could see.

> The overlaying layers of PEC work in unison to make it a successful school. Successful schools are often led by principals who are unusually gifted and have the temperament and intuitive skills to apply child development and human relations principles to their school programs. Such administrators establish reasonable levels of parent-staff-student trust and mutual support, even if it is

simply parent support for student compliance with school expectations. (Comer, 1980, p. 233-234)

Within PEC's skeleton, intentional leadership initiative is one of the roots of its success, not because parents provide the administration and staff with detailed suggestions of what must be done to educate children or because a random community member drove past the school and figured they could go inside and make a difference. PEC is a good school because the administration and staff create avenues for a diverse group of parents and community members to become engaged with the school. Those avenues for engagement are the school engagement strategies. *The Leadership Challenge* notes, "proactivity consistently produces better results than reactivity or inactivity" (Kouzes, 2007, p.168). The data derived from fieldwork reflects the proactivity / proactive action / intentional initiative of the PEC staff-initiative that exhibits itself through PEC's diverse offerings of activities. Table 3 attempts to capture this idea with its depiction of PEC's themes leading to parent themes and values.

In taking the initiative to develop and implement school engagement strategies, PEC utilizes strategies influenced by Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement. Epstein's Model includes: *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making*, and *collaborating with the community*. Of those six components in Epstein's model, three of them were observed during the fieldwork – *communicating, volunteering*, and *collaborating with the community*. Of the remaining three, parenting and learning at home are parental involvement models that PEC cannot control but could make contributions toward their occurrence. Fieldwork for these areas could occur in the students' homes, but that would be beyond the scope of this study. PEC has avenues for

parents to contribute as decision makers; yet this component is overshadowed by the parents' trust / deference to the administration along with other decision making parents being absorbed into the staff or utilized as community resources. This component of Epstein's model does exist, however the analysis of it is an area for studies stemming from this one.

Epstein defines *communicating* as "effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and their children's progress" (Epstein, 1997, p. 8). In addition to the flyers that are sent home, the announcement posters on display at the entrances, and the school website, PEC also utilizes a list-serve service. Dr. Kilgore explained, "We have a list-serve where we email out all types of things: from job announcements to summer camps to you name it. Things that we can use to give parents ideas, give them hints, and directions on ways they can help their kids." Information from and about community agencies is also on display in the main hall and office, where visitors were observed picking up pamphlets and other materials.

Another component of the Epstein Model, *volunteering* is when schools "recruit and organize parent help and support" (Epstein, 1997, p. 8). Volunteering was evident during the Career Fair, the Health Fair, the Book Fair (an event held simultaneously with the Health Fair and Parent-Teacher conferences), and the in-the-classroom/hallway assistance provided by parents and grandparents. Volunteers in each of those capacities were recruited, given an explanation of expectations or needed services, and provided a capacity in which they could carry out their volunteering activity. Parents and community members carried out the volunteering acts; yet, the duties of and opportunities for volunteers were created by the initiative of the PEC administration.

Another example of Epstein's parental involvement model is *collaborating with the community*. PEC's collaboration is apparent during and after the school day. The foster grandparents who act as supplemental supportive resources, Young L.O.V.E., and S.W.A.G. are all manifestations of PEC's collaboration with the community. Moreover, each of those organizations' participation within PEC is another testimony to the intentional initiative of the administration or the impetus that sets things in motion.

Yet, as the passing of time has shown and implies for the future, the rapport between PEC and parents is diminishing in effectiveness as the school becomes increasingly made of Walker-Non-tenure families. As the Walker-Non-tenure population grows, PEC's transition from a good school to a "typical Detroit Public School" becomes more likely. This transition is rooted in the disconnection of values. Moreover, the disconnection will become more profound unless PEC alters its methods (the muscles & organs) for engaging parents. Imagine muscles atrophying as humans lay in a hospital. For that human to recover and continue living as a sickness survivor, their muscles must be retrained or recalibrated to function in their post-sickness living. PEC's engagement efforts (muscles) will need to be recalibrated to engage the disconnected Walker-Non-tenure families.

For all the efforts required to make PEC a good school in years past, it appears the challenge of engaging a changing demographic will be monumental. Engaging that demographic is essentially a new challenge. The city of Detroit is mired in survival efforts for stability with faint hopes of recapturing its former glory. Like Detroit, PEC must work through its current variables for the stability of becoming a good school again. The challenge is immense and the definitions of a "good school" will require adjustment

along with as PEC's efforts. A succinct assessment of the disconnection, the challenge

PEC faces to engage a group with different values, was posted on the social media forum,

Facebook. On Facebook, a PEC high school teacher who had also worked as K-8 staff

member, posted the following comment: *"I have NO FAITH in PARENTS of today. I*

teach 140 students … after 7 hours of conferences I saw NINE PARENTS. They TRIFE."

With "trife" being a slang variation of trifling, the view of this staff member symbolizes

the disconnection with the changing demographic. Indeed, PEC's challenge is immense

and can be fertile ground with implications for future research and practitioners.

Implications from this Research

Practitioners

The anatomy analogy can provide a template for practitioners when devising

school improvement plans and other organization-wide strategies. By recognizing the

skeleton or core purpose of a school, practitioners can assess whether initiatives

undertaken by the school match the school's core purpose. They can also ascertain under

what layer of functionality their initiatives fall. Should a fine and performing arts school

adopt a vocational program? No. That type of program does not match the mission or

guiding principle. Nor would the organs and muscle layer of a performing arts school

support the skin of a vocational program. Underlying assumptions that the school will

produce painters, dancers and other artists would not be consistent with a product of

mechanics and plumbers. With the anatomy analogy as a template, crafting school

activities that are consistent with the mission and values of a school becomes easier.

Practitioners can also derive value from themes, particularly the functions of the strong central figure. School leaders can leverage their positions and the expectations of parents and staff into exercising the attributes of a strong central figure. The initial acquiescence among staff and parents can be a window of opportunity where the strong central figure can start a domino effect of these themes. Table 17 lists recommendations.

Table 17. Recommendations for practitioners.

Anatomy	Themes	Conclusion	Recommendations
Skin (surface)	Strong Central Figure, Enrollment Reasons, and School Engagement Strategies	Creates an environment for parents and community members to be involved	School leaders should be deliberate in their decisions and actions. This would demonstrate that they are advocates for students and families. They should also actively gauge the make-up of their membership to prepare for changes that can impact their organization.
Muscles & Organs	Intentional Leadership Initiative, Embracing Environment, Enrollment Reasons, Parental Engagement, Administrative Activity, Participation Decreases and Collaboration	Staff & administration value parental involvement & Administration is responsible for creating avenues for involvement	School leaders must have intimate knowledge of their students/families and conduct multiple diverse measures that engage them with the school. School leaders must establish accountability systems that facilitate the foundational purpose. School leaders should anticipate change and make appropriate adjustments to changes
Skeleton	Strong Central Figure and Sustained involvement	Foundational purpose to serve community fostered by the Plymouth United Church implemented by school board and carried out by Superintendent	School leaders should know, carry out, instill, and promote the foundational purpose of the school in all their leadership choices and actions.

Note. Table 17 charts conclusions inspired by research themes and the anatomy analogy and pairs those conclusions with recommendations for practitioners.

Theoretical Implications

The use of the anatomy analogy is not limited to practitioners; the application of the anatomy analogy could also have theoretical value for understanding other types of institutions and organizations. If the anatomy analogy were to be applied to a school district, a college, or even a business corporation, would it produce informative data in the same manner as it did with PEC? As a tool for self-analysis, could a business corporation apply the anatomy analogy in preparing the annual report or constructing their ten-year vision? The researcher is confident that the way-of-viewing provided by the anatomy analogy has potential pertinence beyond the relationship of parental involvement and school culture. Moreover, it could also provide a warning signaling the necessity of organizational change needed to address the influence of external variables. An example of this use would stem from an assessment answering whom the organization serves.

In addition to the utilization of the anatomy analogy, this research provides identifiable, related themes that can be used as measuring points for organizational change. As the themes move from the skeletal layer to the skin, components of change also advance from administrative ideas into institutionalized and sustainable practices. For example, a school board may deem it necessary to revitalize the social studies curriculum. Those ideas will be discussed at the skeletal level, but for the desired themes to be apparent on the skin/surface level, there would be a progression through each of the themes outlined in this study. What happens at the organ layer to make accommodations for a new curriculum? What muscles would be used in the process? The anatomy

analogy and the parallel themes provide a template of sorts as a means for understanding the process of instituting change within an organization.

Moreover, the observed themes and anatomy analogy can be viewed as interpretations or extensions of Schein's explanation of organizational culture. Some would assert that guiding principles of the anatomy analogy and Schein's underlying assumptions are similar concepts. They are not. With the anatomy analogy, underlying assumptions are more static or significantly much slower to change than guiding principles, hence, the analogous parallel drawn between skeletons and underlying assumptions. Guiding principles are subject to change at a rate much faster than underlying principles. For example, the United States has underlying assumptions depicted in the Constitution and Bill of Rights and those principles take years to change. The time between the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and *Brown vs. the Board of Education* demonstrate the snail pace of change seen in underlying assumptions. However, with each election cycle there are changes to the guiding principles/muscle and organ layer.

Theoreticians could also use *Concept Map C* (p.158) as a lens for understanding. Just as a scientist utilizes an assortment of scopes during their research, a perspective on urban schools, charter schools, or other organizations can be gained using *Concept Map C* - particularly, the marriage of Epstein's Model of Parental Involvement and the anatomy analogy. *Concept Map C* could assist in framing ways of viewing, discussing, and understanding organizations.

Finally, a potential aligning of the Schein's organizational concepts with Comer's school improvement strategies could have theoretical implications. If PEC's leaders were to apply this implication, starting with Schein, they would assess the space between their

underlying assumption of nurturing, motivating, educating and elevating "all students by promoting academic excellence and responsible citizenship" and their values. Their values refined 'all students' to 'middle class students.' By acknowledging that space difference from their values and underlying assumptions, they can employ Comer's strategies of collaboration, consensus, and no-fault to engage its new demographic. Among Comer's concepts, no-fault would possible need to be embraced first. With a sincere commitment to no-fault, the discrepancy between commuter-tenured / middle class values and walker-non-tenured values can be diminished. New efforts at collaboration will be required since the walker-non-tenured group does not respond to the old strategies. One example could be holding parent teacher conferences in the community centers of the low-income housing communities where some of the walker-non-tenured families resides. This would be a new effort toward collaboration and would exemplify no-fault motivations while bridging towards the type of interactions and dialogue that prompt consensus. The collaborative use of Schein and Comer can have valuable theoretical implications.

Future Research

When researching information for a topic, it is possible to be exposed to other themes or related topics that could capture one's interest. At varying points during this study, each of the following ideas emerged as worthy of future research.

One of the first topics that nearly delayed this study was the number of currently independent charter schools that had previously operated under management companies. The Service Learning Academy and Detroit Edison Public School Academy are two

examples of successful independent charters with the latter being the first charter to be

recognized as a Blue-Ribbon Award winner in the state of Michigan. Additional research

could uncover whether their rising success stems from their independence.

Another topic that branches away from this study was the dimensions of parental

involvement. Prior to conducting the fieldwork for this study, the researcher had

assumed parental involvement to be a singular manifestation of parents doing something.

However, the fieldwork has prompted an expanded perspective of parental involvement

as multi-dimensional. One aspect of those multiple dimensions that is not listed by

Epstein, the researcher labels "parental presence." Parental presence does not require

parents to do anything, such as lead the bake sale or organize a canned food drive.

Parental presence means parents just come and participate in preplanned activities.

Parental presence places value on the parent for who they are without assigning a task.

Future research could expand upon the notion of parental presence as a legitimate form of

parental involvement.

An additional interesting topic is the expedited extinction of private schools,

particularly parochial ones. Upon closer inspection, while the elite private schools

continue to exist, it is Detroit's working-class private schools that have vanished. Is their

disappearance indebted to the rise of charters, the vanishing middle-class, school-of-

choice options, each of those, or more? The gradual and eventual disappearance of this

particular type of school is ripe for excavation.

A researcher seeking to build directly upon this study could pursue the

relationships between the themes. There is a distinction between the researcher's

professional expertise and what the data results explicitly stated. That professional

expertise can be likened to a football coach who views a failure in his team's execution

leading to the other team's score, but another researcher might uncover that the other

team's score was more indebted to the other team's talent. Sometimes expertise can

cloud data interpretation. In this study, the researcher fought the urge to say the observed

themes were connected or formed a cycle of some sort. However, the notion that themes

are somehow connected may not be far-fetched and could be further validated by a

researcher with fresh eyes.

The anatomy analogy has two prospective avenues for future research. One of the

avenues is specific-research geared toward the differentiation of the muscles and organs

layer. In the human body, muscles and organs are two separate layers. In the anatomy

analogy, they are combined as one to represent the space between the core and the

surface or the skeleton and the skin. Additional research could establish distinctions

between muscles and organs within the analogy.

The other avenue for future research would be the use of the anatomy analogy as

a method for making sense of educational systems. The anatomy analogy acknowledges

the depth and diversity of organizations by viewing organizational actions as isolated

layers with dependence upon and responsibility to other layers within the organization.

All organizations are multi-layered, and the anatomy analogy allows researchers to view

layers individually and collectively. Whether future research uncovers the appearance of

observed themes at PEC's high school (which operates on a separate campus, miles

away), or uncovers negative manifestations of the themes within DPS – the use of the

analogy and themes can be utilized in future research.

Finally, one more avenue for future research is the concept of charter school "shelf life." Shelf life is a term taken from the notion that food stocked in a grocery market has a window of time when its flavor is optimal. When considering the PEC of the early 2000s when compared to the PEC of 2011, one could view that PEC's shelf life is diminishing or has passed. That view gains additional validity when bearing in mind that some of the fastest growing charters of the late 1990s and early 2000s (Detroit Academy of Arts & Sciences and Marvin L. Winans Academy of Performing Arts to name a few), have subsided in enrollment and perceived effectiveness. The phenomenon could be likened to a new restaurant that hosts many patrons from its inception and its first few years. Yet, as other restaurants open, that initially popular restaurant experiences experienced a wane in patronage. Do charter schools as a concept or individual charter schools have shelf lives? It seems that the notion of high performing years followed by subsequent recessions in performance may not be happenstance or random. The shelf life of charter schools is an area primed for future research.

Personal Implications

Renowned author Wayne Dyer teaches, "Our intention creates our reality." What Dr. Dyer's wisdom does not directly convey is that our reality can sometimes require a new way of viewing before we can grasp its full meaning. Just as Columbus set sail from Europe to uncover a route to India and instead arrived in America, the researcher intended to do research that compared charter schools with traditional public schools, yet arrived at a study of school culture. My intentions were to study a subject that I had previously believed I was familiar; however, I came to better understand my intentions

revealed a multi-dimensional reality beyond what I thought I knew. The reality unveiled

by this research shows that in some ways, the challenges facing PEC are reflections of

challenges facing Detroit. In hindsight, the most significant obstacle to this research was

the researcher's own limited perception.

In conducting this study, the researcher better understands that information and

conclusions are dynamic and very time-sensitive. The PEC observed in 2009 is different

than the PEC revisited in 2011. In 2011, the themes were still apparent; however,

questions of what would be the intentional leadership initiative to address the changing

socio-economic demographic surfaced during a few of the interviews.

PEC's changing demographic, noted through the increase of walker-non-tenured

students and the decrease of commuter-tenured students mirror the demographic changes

in Detroit. A notable caveat being that Detroit's overall population is shrinking while

PEC's enrollment has held constant. It remains to be seen whether the organizational

attributes that made PEC a good school in the past will be the same attributes that will

allow it to be a good school in the future.

In addition to overcoming the obstacle of limited perception and learning that

organizations within an environment can begin to reflect the environment, another

unforeseen obstacle to this research was denied access. Denied access can be viewed two

ways – first, as a barricade that prevents any access and second, as a boundary

experienced after some access. The public scrutiny to which DPS has been subjected

possibly served as their reason to erect a barricade that prevented access. Yet, in the latter

stages of this study, interviewing PEC subjects became frustratingly more complicated.

Those complications were evident in forms ranging from guarded and concise responses

to unreturned phone calls. What the researcher cannot say is whether the interviewees had become uncomfortable or intentionally or unintentionally inaccessible. However, when reading a biography of Zora Neale Hurston and her experiences as an anthropologist, the biographer quotes Ms. Hurston's views of interviewees. Where Ms. Hurston uses the term 'Negro,' the researcher found that by substituting that term for 'PEC Interviewees,' the following quote would describe the researcher's feelings about the research interviews.

> The Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive,' she would write. 'You see we are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, 'Get out of here!' We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies … because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing … The Negro offers a feather-bed resistance. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries. (Boyd, 2003, p. 163)

It is apparent that the obstacle of getting the most substantive, revealing quotes from research subjects is far from a new phenomenon.

When revisiting the denied access from DPS, the researcher's guiding callow notion was that DPS could have benefited from some well-researched good news from within their system. Good news that this research had the potential to provide. However, despite the intention to research good news, perhaps DPS knew that the then-limited perception of the researcher would come to see things that are contributing to its demise. Optimistic naivety coupled with limited perception proved that the real unforeseen obstacles were not out there, but internal. The dissertation process uncovered more than

information about Detroit and PEC, it uncovered things the researcher needed to learn about himself. Moreover, it provided a process through which the researcher could grow beyond those limitations.

During the marathon that has been this research, the researcher has grown tremendously. As a professional, the researcher has moved from assistant principal, to principal, to Chief Operating Officer of a then 9,000-member church, and currently to Director of the Freddye T. Davy Honors College at Hampton University. This array of professional roles is rooted in the expanding understanding of organizations and how they work. This study has promoted an understanding that a myriad of variables contributes to the circumstances that make organizations function. By recognizing those variables, understanding their relationships, and gauging their potential, the researcher has been an asset to employers and has begun planting the seeds of entrepreneurship and additional future professional accomplishment.

Moreover, this study has tremendously transformed the naïve first year teacher who wanted to "make a difference" into a seasoned educator who understands how politics, organizational culture, and timing impact the feasibility of making a difference. Has my urge to be a catalyst for change been diminished? No. However, it has been refined. A refining process that evolved from frustration regarding failing to be selected for professional opportunities to being thankful for not becoming involved with organizations that could have had impeding effects on my career and spirits.

This research has also provided perspective to why schools and school systems are the way they are. Whether outstanding or deplorable, neither is the fault of the children; yet, both are products from the actions and inactions of adults. During the early

stages of the researcher's doctoral studies, Morris Brown College (MBC) underwent

some tumultuous times that led to the loss of their accreditation and earned their former

president legal penalties. However, after participating in this research, the researcher

recognizes MBC's decline is a manifestation of the pre-existing culture and the

consequences faced by a former president may not have been earned but instead saddled

upon her as the she became a scapegoat. An organization's culture and/or descriptive

attributes of its anatomy analogy tell a story of its values and can determine its future.

More than any other lesson, the researcher has learned that professional ascension

is not guaranteed with the acquisition of loftier titles, but the matching of personal values

with an organization that holds similar values. The matching of personal values with the

values of an organization is also the core of the concept of collaborative communities.

The researched concept evolved into a personal professional ambition.

Parting Thought

The researcher has crafted a career of leadership rooted in empathy. From that

core, there is a sense of indebtedness and concern toward PEC. The challenges that the

school faced in 2011 appear to have become more serious. Several subjects interviewed

during this study have left or are planning to leave the school. In this period of

adjustment, maybe an official subscription to the Comer Process can pave the way toward

PEC's resurgence. The researcher believes such a commitment to the Comer Process or a

comparable school improvement strategy would synthesize current effective practices

and good-intentions towards a proactive and definitive school culture that would have

increasing value over time.

Appendix One

From Promise to Concern

The 2009 themes were derived from data analysis and the themes' potential relationship conveys solid information that would be apparent to another researcher utilizing the same resources. A difference in perspective of those 2009 themes could occur if a researcher approached the study with a more pessimistic perception of Dr. Kilgore's motives. The researcher's experience working with Dr. Kilgore for three years undergirds the optimistic view of Dr. Kilgore's efforts. Moreover, the optimistic undercurrent reflects the time of which the bulk of this research was conducted. The latter stages of data collection revealed a school facing challenges that had most research been started two years later, the outcomes may not have been as optimistic.

Dr. Kilgore's function as the Chief Administrative Officer / Superintendent bares similarities to charismatic leaders in business and possibly political dictators. Do his actions have totalitarian attributes? Possibly. Could his leadership mirror that of Jerry Jones? Jones is the owner of the Dallas Cowboys professional football organization, who has employed several coaches during his tenure as Kilgore has employed a few principals. A case could be made for that comparison. However, the researcher is convinced that what separates Dr. Kilgore from those similarities is his purpose. If his aim were money, he has the credentials to attract positions that are more lucrative. If his aim were notoriety, his tenure would have been aborted in pursuit of higher leadership profiles. The researcher is confident that Dr. Kilgore's aim was providing a quality education option for children in Detroit. Evidence of that aim is apparent from the academic results at PEC and this body of research.

Except for interviews conducted in 2011, the use of the same tools, observing the same situations, and interviewing the same people would perhaps dissuade the pessimistic researcher. Initial pessimism and dissuasion however would be outside factors and not meaning communicated from the data. The researcher has the experience of working in varying charter and traditional public schools. The researcher has also worked with an assortment of supervisors with a diverse range of goals, strategies, and egos. Those experiences provide a perspective for viewing and understanding Dr. Kilgore. While the preliminary data results have the potential to be auspicious, their auspiciousness does not refute their legitimacy.

The inclusion of the 2011 interviews does not depict PEC as having lost the aura of 2009; but instead reveals a school facing the challenge of adapting to its increasingly poorer student population. One of the parents added, "PEC used to be more structured than it is now." When asked in 2011 whether they viewed parents as vested in the success of the school, a staff member shared "they used to be. I remember a time when parents were." Another staff member pointed to changes in standardized test scores when mentioning, "the scores would probably be leaving a lot to be desired in the areas of math and science." Nearby DPS buildings have closed leading to some of their students transferring to PEC. When the researcher was an employee, test scores from that time showed a drop-off in standardized test scores from the students who had been at PEC from kindergarten (tenured) when compared to those who had been at the school less than three years (non-tenured). Perhaps that discrepancy has grown; however, one thing has certainly grown since the initial data collection and themes, the population of walker-non-tenured students.

When considering the themes and data derived from PEC, primarily data collected in 2009, the evidence compiled lends to a very favorable view of PEC - a view that if not taken into context could prompt the impression that PEC is an educational utopia. Such a view would be as erroneous as it would be non-substantive. However, by understanding the context of this study, it becomes more possible to recognize PEC's success as it relates to other schools and educational systems. When considering the population, it is designed to serve and the services it aims to provide, PEC is a good school.

An effort to illustrate the context of this PEC and other schools evokes the imagery of the automobile industry while acknowledging the rigid boundaries within that industry should not be applied to the metaphorical example that provides context for viewing PEC, educational systems, and other schools.

Within the last decade, America has witnessed General Motors' request for substantial financial assistance from the government. General Motors had once been a profitable corporation that had succumbed to outdated practices and over-inflated bureaucratic structure. Those factors and others contributed to its declining relevance and mounting fiscal insolvency, attributes and factors that mirror the state of public education within the city of Detroit. An Emergency Financial Manager, who led the largest faction of public education in Detroit, had politicked for a substantial financial assistance from the state, like the financial request fielded by General Motors. His request was captured in newspaper headlines - "Detroit Public School officials may ask the state to forgive its $332 million deficit as a part of a plan that could reshape the district" (Lewis, 2010).

However, within the degenerating General Motors, there exists a smaller profitable brand – Cadillac. While the larger organization or concept (General Motors and public education in Detroit) was experiencing decline, a smaller entity within the larger structures experienced some success, Cadillac and PEC.   Viewing PEC as a metaphorical Cadillac brand (successful school) within a larger decaying structure (public education in Detroit) lends itself to additional perspectives on this context for understanding. The first is that while Cadillac is recognized as a luxury brand, there are other luxury and more luxurious automotive brands. Cadillac has been productive in catering to its small-market share and even capturing new customers. PEC has been productive to its small market audience while enrolling new students. BMW, Mercedes, and Lexus are luxury automotive brands that are publicly perceived as a step-above Cadillac, even as they sometimes pursue the same customers. Detroit Edison Public School Academy (DEPSA), the Service Learning Academy (formerly YMCA Learning Academy), and Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse are all Detroit charter schools who could be perceived as a step-above PEC, even as they often enroll students of similar demographic backgrounds.   The debate of whether BMW or DEPSA are better brands than Cadillac or PEC does not negate the productive work of Cadillac or PEC. Indeed, there are better luxury cars and charter/public schools; however, both Cadillac and PEC do good work and satisfy their customers/families.

Another perspective that expands the automobile industry metaphor is that the success of Cadillac occurs simultaneously with the shortcomings of General Motors. Public education in Detroit, consisting largely of Detroit Public Schools, has demonstrated a multitude of shortcomings along with individual school successes.

Whereas General Motors has the success of Cadillac and the failings of Saab, public education in Detroit has the success of PEC along with the failings of several DPS and charter schools. Success for a smaller controlled group carved out of an environment bountiful in shortcomings. That success does not make Cadillac the premier automotive brand nor does it make PEC the premier public education option in Detroit. It does however make Cadillac and PEC good options that serve their customers.

Was PEC an educational utopia? No. With the appropriate resources, families probably would opt for the greater luxury brand/ educational options of Friends School or University of Detroit. However, those with the resources to invest in Cadillac/PEC are oftentimes returning customers/re-enrolling families. Ms. Woods echoed that notion exactly when she stated,

> It is not a perfect utopia that every parent may not be satisfied with everything that goes on here. But I don't think there is an environment in education where everybody would be satisfied with everything. I think even in those times where there is disparity between what we believe and what we deliver … parents … realize why it is that we're doing what we do, and for the most part, they do support us in those endeavors.

REFERENCES

Anderson, P., Watkins, S., & Cotton, C. (2003). *The Public School Academy Funding Gap*. Lansing, MI: Anderson Economic Group.

Ascher, C., & Wamba, N. (2000, May). *An Examination of Charter School Equity* prepared for the Conference on "School Choice and Racial Diversity," Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.

Bergman, L. (2006). *Getting Ghost*. The New Press: New York.

Boyd. V. (2003). *Wrapped in Rainbows*. A Lisa Drew Book: New York.

Brown, M. (2006). "Moral Person and Moral Manager: How Executives Develop a Reputation for Ethical Leadership." In W. Rosenbach and R. Taylor (Eds.), *Contemporary Issues In Leadership* (p 45-62). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Bryk, A. S., & Rollow, S. G. (1992). The Chicago Experiment: Enhanced Democratic Participation as a Lever for School Improvement. *Issues in Restructuring School*; (3) p. 3-8.

Byndloss, D. C. (November 2001). Revisiting Paradigms in Black Education: Community Control and African-Centered Schools. *Urban Education*, (34) 1, p. 84 -100.

Carpenter, D. (2005). *Playing to Type: Mapping the Charter School Landscape*. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

CNN Wire Staff. (2011). Detroit loses a staggering 25% of its population in a decade. CNN U.S. Retrieved from:

http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/03/22/michigan.detroit.population/index.html

Cobb, C., Glass, G., & Crockett, C. (2000, April). *The U.S. Charter School Movement and Ethnic Segregation* presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans.

Comer, J. (1980). *School Power*. The Free Press: New York.

Comer, J. (1997). *Waiting for a Miracle*. Dutton: New York.

Comer, J. (2004). *Leave No Child Behind*. Yale University Press: New Haven, CT.

Creswell, J. (2005). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Merrill: Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Danns, D. (November 2002). Black Student Empowerment and Chicago. *Urban Education*, (37) 5, p. 631-655.

Davis, L. (2010, Feb. 2). Detroit church's housing initiative still fills void in Midtown. *Detroit News*, Retrieved from:

http://www.detnews.com/article/20100202/METRO/2020303/1041/Detroit-church-s-housing-initiative-still-fills-void-in-Midtown#ixzz0eOG69NAz

Davis, R. (2016). The election of Harold Washington the first Black mayor of Chicago. The Chicago Tribune. Retrieved from:

http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/politics/chi-chicagodays-haroldwashington-story-story.html

D'Cruz, H., Gillingham, P. and Melendez, S. (2007). Reflexivity, its Meanings and Relevance for Social Work: A Critical Review of the Literature. *British Journal of Social Work*, (37), p. 73-90.

Detroit Public Schools. (2015). *DPS 10-Point Management Plan Addendum A*. Detroit:

MI: Detroit Public Schools. Retrieved from:

http://detroit.k12.mi.us/data/finance/docs/2015.03.03_DPS_10-

Point_Management_Plan_Addendum_A_Attachments.pdf

Education Commission of the States. (1997). *Redesigning the Urban School District*.

Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

Eisenbrey, R. (2014, February 25). Detroit's Bankruptcy Reflects a History of Racism.

Retrieved from: http://www.epi.org/blog/detroits-bankruptcy-reflects-history-

racism/

Eisner, E. (1998). *The Enlightened Eye*. Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ.

Epstein, J., Coates, L., Salina, K. C., Sanders, M., & Simon, B. (1997). *School,*

Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action. Corwin Press:

Thousand Oaks, CA.

Fontana, A., & Frey, J. (1998). Interviewing: The Art of Science. *Collecting and*

Interpreting Qualitative Materials. Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

Gibbs, G. (2010). *Grounded Theory - Open Coding* (online video series). Huddersfield,

West Yorkshire, England: University of Huddersfield.

Gibson, J., Ivancevich, J., & Donnelly, J. (2000). *Organizations*. Irwin McGraw-Hill:

Boston, MA.

Glaeser, E. (2011). *Triumph of the City*. The Penguin Press: New York.

Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*. Addison Wesley Longman:

New York.

Gok, K., Peterson, K., & Warren, V. (2005, August). *The Demands of Decentralization:*

Skills and Knowledge for Leaders in Restructured Schools presented at the

Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San

Francisco, CA.

Hargreaves, A., & Fink, D. (2006). The Ripple Effect. *Educational Leadership*, (63)

8, p. 16 – 20.

Hartigan, J. (1999). *Racial Situations: Class Predicaments of Whiteness in Detroit*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Herman, M. (May 2003). *Detroit Riots -1967*. Retrieved October 29, 2006, from

http://www.67riots.rutgers.edu/d_index.htm.

Hess, G. (Fall 1999). Community Participation or Control? From New York to Chicago.

Theory into Practice, (38) 4, p. 217 -224.

Hills, M. D. (2002). Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Values Orientation Theory. Online

Readings in Psychology and Culture, Unit 4. Retrieved from

http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/vol4/iss4/3

History of Blacks in the Congregational United Church of Christ, (n.d.). Retrieved from

http://www.puccdetroit.org/History%20of%20Blacks%20in%20UCC%202.pdf

Horn, J. & Miron, G. (1999). Evaluation of the Michigan Public School Academy

Initiative: Final Report [and] Executive Summary. MI State Department of

Education.

Johnson, A. L. (2008). *Race and Remembrance: A Memoir*. Detroit: Wayne State

University Press.

Jones, D. (2006, March 9). Schools take a lesson from big business. *USA Today*.

Retrieved October 15, 2006, from:

http://www.usatoday.com/money/companies/management/2006-03-08-principals-

cover-usat_x.htm

Knapp, L. (2011). Detroit's Population Decline: 1 Person Departed Every 22 Minutes.

PBS Newshour. Retrieved from:

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2011/03/-sarah-hulett-of-michigan.html

Kneebone, E. (2014). The Growth and Spreach of Concentrated Poverty, 2000 to 2008-

2012. Retrieved from:

http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2014/concentrated-

poverty#/M10420

Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (2007). *The Leadership Challenge*. San Francisco, CA; Jossey-

Bass.

Lamont, M., & Lareau, A. (1988). Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in

Recent Theoretical Developments. Sociological Theory, (6) 2, p. 153-168.

Lareau, A. (1987). Social Class Differences in Family-School Relationships: The

Importance of Cultural Capital. *Sociology of Education*, (60) 2, p. 73-85.

Leggett, J.C. (1968). *Class, Race, and Labor: Working-Class Consciousness in Detroit*.

New York: Oxford University Press.

Lewis, S., & French R. (2010). Boob wants state to wipe out DPS debt. *The Detroit

News*. Retrieved December 19, 2010, from:

http://www.detnews.com/article/20101014/SCHOOLS/10140406

Lunenburg, F. C. (2011). The Comer School Development Program: Improving

education for low income students. *National Forum of Multicultural Issues

Journal*, *8*(1), 1-14.

Maraniss, D. (2015). Once In A Great City: A Detroit Story. Simon & Schuster: New

York.

McGriff, D. (1993). Decentralization: Why, How, and Toward What Ends? *North

Central Regional Educational Laboratory Policy Briefs*. Retrieved July 17, 2006,

from: http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/envrnmnt/go/93-1mcgr.htm

Michigan Department of Education. (2005). *Report to the Legislature on Public

School Academies 2003 -2004*. Lansing, MI: Michigan Department of Education.

Mirel, J. (1999). *The Rise and Fall of Urban School System.* Ann Arbor, MI: The

University of Michigan Press.

Molnar, A., Wilson, G. & Allen, D. (2004). Profiles of For-Profit Education

Management Companies Sixth Annual Report 2003 – 2004. Tempe, AZ:

Commercialism in Education Research Unit, Arizona State University.

Nelson, F.H., Rosenberg, B. & Van Meter, N. (2004). Charter School Achievement on

the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Washington, D.C.:

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.

Nelson, F. H., & Van Meter, N. (2000). "What Does Private Management Offer Public

Education?" Retrieved May 12, 2006, from

http://www.aft.org/research/downloads/charter/WhatDoesPrivate.pdf.

Parrett, W. (2009, October). Tough questions for tough times. *Educational Leadership*

(67) 2, p. 22-27.

Perkins-Gough, D. (2008, September). School Climate: Urban Parents Views.

Educational Leadership (66) 1, p. 89-91.

Plymouth Educational Center, (n.d.). *About Us* Retrieved from

http://www.plymouthed.org/aboutUs.htm

Pratt, C. (2005, May 10). Unhappy parents go back to DPS. *Detroit Free Press*, 5A.

Pratt, C., & Walsh-Sarnecki, P. (2005, May 9). Parents see charters as best hope for

kids. *Detroit Free Press*, pp. 1A, 6A.

Razvi, M. (2006, October). *Image-Based Research: Ethics of Photographic Evidence In*

Qualitative Research. Presented at the Midwest Research-to-Practice Conference

in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education, University of Missouri-St.

Louis, St. Louis, MO.

Rhim, L. M. (1998, April). *Franchising Public Education: A Study of the Linkage of*

Charter Schools and Private Education Management Companies in

Massachusetts presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational

Research Association, San Diego.

Ryan, J. (2010). *Five Miles Away, A World Apart: One city, two schools, and the story of*

educational opportunity in Modern America. Oxford University Press: United

Kingdom.

Schein, E. H. (1990, February). Organizational Culture. *American Psychologist* (45) 2,

p. 109-119.

Schein, E. (2004). *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco,

CA.

School Matters: CCSSO. *Detroit Elementary Schools* [Data File].

Reading scores retrieved from:

http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx/q/page=sr/txt=detroit/ust=MI/so=0/s

c=2/p=-1/fp=1/fltr_nb=Elementary?ctxt=detroit%20%20%2CMI

Math scores retrieved from:

http://www.schoolmatters.com/schools.aspx/q/page=sr/txt=detroit/ust=MI/so=0/s

c=3/p=-1/fp=1/fltr_nb=Elementary?ctxt=detroit%20%20%2CMI

Schwartz, D. (1989). Visual Ethnography: Using Photography in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 12, issue 2, pp. 119-154.

Scott-Heron, G. (2000). *Now and Then --*. Scotland, UK: Cannongate Books.

Silverman, D. (2001). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text, and Interaction*. SAGE publishers: Thousand Oaks, CA.

Spradley, J. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Harcourt Brace: Forth Worth, TX.

Surgrue, T. (2005). *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ. Trevino, L., Hartman, L., &

United States Department of Education. (2004). *Evaluation of Public Charter Schools Program*. Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education.

Whitney, G. (2002). *John Engler: The Man, The Leader & The Legacy*. Chelsea, MI: Sleeping Bear Press.

Welch, S. Sigelman, L., Bledsoe, T. & Combs, M. (2001). *Race and Place: Race Relations in an American City*. United Kingdom: University of Cambridge Press.

Wilk, Thomas A. (2009) "High School Graduation Rates in the Metro-Detroit Area: What Really Affects Public Secondary Education," *Undergraduate Economic Review*, vol. 5, issue2, article 4

Young, C. & Wheeler, L. (1994). *Hard Stuff: The Autobiography of Coleman Young*. New York: Penguin Books.

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES