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The relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures: A case study of Huron Valley Schools

Julie A. Bedford

The Relationship Between Schools, Communities, and Funding Structures: A Case Study of Huron Valley Schools

by

Julie A. Bedford

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Dissertation Committee:

Ronald Flowers, Ed.D., Chair

James Barott, Ph.D.

Rema Reynolds, Ph.D.

Robert M. Orrange, Ph.D.

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Dedication

For my boys: Matt, Samuel, and Seth.

With gratitude, love, and insurmountable amount of appreciation for always allowing me to pursue my dreams. I love you all with all my heart and always remember, “A bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck.”

Acknowledgments

This project has been a longtime journey that began 22 years ago when my superintendent, Dr. Robert O'Brien, encouraged me to pursue my PhD. Dr. Bob's encouragement took years to grow roots and come to fruition. Along the way, key supporters helped to keep the dream alive. To Dr. Barott, for his patience, his candor, his passion, his never-ending encouragement, and without his expertise of the complex dissertation process, I would not have finished. Words will never express my gratitude, and I truly hope you find joy in the next phase of your life. To Dr. Flowers, for being my chairperson and for accepting all the extra work that comes with this position. Your patience, support, and knowledge of the dissertation process was instrumental in my journey. Thank you for being you and always supporting me; it is appreciated more than I can express. Finally, thank you to Dr. Orrange and Dr. Reynolds for adding your insights and being a part of my journey.

Special thank you to Dr. Nancy Coratti for being my mentor and to Dr. Jackie Johnston for teaching me about school finance. Finally, thank you to Dr. Steve Matthews, Superintendent of Novi Community Schools, for taking a chance on me. A chance that exposed me to a whole new school system. I have been blessed to work for all three of you.

Abstract

Under Proposal A, all public schools in the state of Michigan receive a per-pupil foundation allowance. The context in which a school district exists is not a part of this centralized funding system. As a researcher and 30-year practitioner, I believe context matters and policy becomes relevant at the point of implementation. Equal funding does not automatically make it adequate. Therefore, I designed a case study of Huron Valley Schools to examine the causal relationship that exists between this centralized funding system, the school district, and the communities that exist in the district. To understand the current policies and practices of the district, I examined the history of school funding in Michigan, the development of Huron Valley Schools, and the historical development of each community within the school district were told. Secondary data and published books were used to complete the study. This case study highlights the value of context and the long-term implication of policy decisions. All policies have consequences, intended or unintended. Policymakers and school administrators, need to move beyond the immediate need and must consider not only the future need but how policies may play out in a particular context. State funding structures need to consider the context in which the district exists and adjust funding structures to adequately meet the unique context and need of each district.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Void from the United States Constitution is any direct role the federal government will play in education. The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." The right to a free public education is in the various state constitutions but not in the federal constitution. By design, the federal government removed itself from control and ultimately from the responsibility for funding. Dr. William Price (2012) stated, "Education is a federal interest, a state responsibility, and a local function" (p. 5). In Michigan, school funding had a long history of a tax-based, locally controlled system. Yet, 26 years ago, with the passage of Proposal A, the method for financing Michigan Schools shifted from a locally controlled model to a state-controlled model. I have worked in Southeastern Michigan as a public-school educator for the past 30 years. While working as a public-school administrator, I have had to navigate the implications of Proposal A. Proposal A shifted funding structures from a decentralized model to a centralized model.

In 2019, Michigan State University professors David Arsen, Tanner Delpier, and Jesse Nagel released an educational report on Michigan school finance. The report examined the implications of a quarter of a century of state-controlled school finance. The report examined school finance at a macro, state level. It has been my experience that the outcomes of this centralized funding model are unique to each school district in Michigan. The context of each school district, along with how the district reflects and spreads the values of their individual community, matters. To develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures, I designed a case study around one specific Michigan school district, Huron Valley Schools. I wanted to look at these relationships at a micro level, at

the point of implementation. To help shape my thinking, organizational theory was my framework.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures. A case study was used to articulate how these relationships unfolded relative to the policies and practices in a specific school district, Huron Valley Schools.

Definition of Special Terms

The special terms listed below are used often in the study and will support the reader in understanding the concepts and results of this study:

Adequacy in education. Providing adequate resources so that all students can reach the same high education standard. As a policy goal, it is quite different from a student equity policy goal defined as equal spending per pupil. Equal spending per pupil becomes irrelevant once the purpose has become for all students to reach the same high education standard.

Charter school. In North America, a publicly funded independent school established by teachers, parents, or community groups under the terms of a charter with a local or national authority.

Equity in education. Personal or social circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin, or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (definition of fairness) and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills.

Hold harmless. A provision in an agreement under which one or both parties agree not to hold the other party responsible for any loss, damage, or legal liability.

Horizontal equity in education. A situation in which all students receive what they need.

Mills. A mill is one thousandth of a dollar, or one tenth of one cent. The millage rate is the number of dollars of tax assessed for each $1,000 of property value. A rate of 10 mills means that $10 in tax is levied on every $1,000 in assessed value.

Proposal A. Michigan's centralized school funding system.

Schools of choice. A term for K-12 public education options in the United States, describing a wide array of programs offering students and their families alternatives to publicly provided schools, to which the location of their family residence generally assigns students.

Vertical equity in education. Students who bring specific educational needs to the classroom require additional resources to address those needs within the educational process is useful to conceptualize school responsiveness.

Background of the Study

On March 15, 1994, Michigan voters approved Proposal A, a centralized funding system. Before 1994, Michigan had a long history of relying on locally set millage rates on property taxes for funding local school districts. As a result of the millage-based funding, by the 1990s, Michigan's property tax burden was more than 33% above the national average, with the sales tax 32% below the national average. Additionally, there were vast funding inequities among school districts, and millage elections were failing due to discontent with high property taxes. Michigan residents wanted relief form the high property tax burden, as well as equity in educational funding (Lockwood, 2002).

Proposal A provided tax relief, as it eliminated the use of local property taxes as the primary source for school funding. The proposal created a state education tax based on 6% homestead and 18% non-homestead property tax and increased the state sales tax from 4% to 6%. Under Proposal A, the majority of Michigan school's funding is based on student

enrollment, and each district is given a per pupil foundation allowance. Proposal A also established choice options for parents: schools of choice and charter schools.

At the onset of Proposal, A, the state established a $6,500 per pupil foundation. This amount not only raised the low-funded district's funding but also helped to close the funding gap between regions. Yet the school districts where local taxpayers contributed more than the state established amount, were held harmless from Proposal A. To avoid massive cuts, under the per-pupil funding, these wealthy districts could continue to pay an additional local property tax for their schools' operations (Dawsey, 2014). When Proposal A was passed, 52 of the 554 public school districts had the highest per-pupil revenue due to higher property values. Under Section 20j, these districts could be "hold harmless districts" (Bessette, 2006). Of the 28 public school districts in Oakland County, Michigan, 12 of them are hold harmless districts.

Impact

More than 27 years after the implementation of Proposal A, Michigan's tax rate ranks well below the national average. Proposal A successfully narrowed the revenue gaps that existed across Michigan school districts, but it did not eliminate them: "The Proposal A reforms, however, never addressed the question of funding adequacy, an omission that has become damaging over time" (Arsen et al., 2019, p.13).

Equity and Adequacy

Arsen et al. (2019) stated, "Because education is a key determinant of one's social position, school finance policy is rightly shaped by conceptions of fairness" (p. 9). Two fairness standards are at the root of equity and adequacy. Equity is different from equality. With equality, everyone is the same, whereas equity is the notion of giving people what they need. School inputs and school outputs are essential to financial equity. Equity of inputs is achieved when all

schools receive the same per-pupil funding. Equity of outcomes is achieved when all schools have the necessary resources to produce equal results. Arsen et al. (2019) also claimed, "The goal of equal outcomes is unrealistic because individual outcomes are dependent on student effort and innate ability" (p. 9). Because each student is an individual, the goal for outcome equity is to create equal opportunity. The authors further argued that students from lower income households, as well as students with special needs, cost more to educate. Equity of outcomes, therefore, requires higher funding for students with greater educational needs, and this is called vertical equity. Adequacy connects school inputs and outputs and combines the horizontal and vertical concepts of equity. An adequate education can be defined as meeting or exceeding performance expectations on state achievement tests as institutionalized by standards-based accountability policies. For this study, I examined resource equity and adequacy, in the centralized funding system: Proposal A.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I sought to understand the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures through a case study design exploring how these relationships unfolded relative to the policies and practices in a specific school district, Huron Valley Schools. I grounded the examination in the current circumstances of Huron Valley Schools and the communities in that district, a review of the history of the development of the district, and an overview and past and current school funding. Using my conceptual framework, I explored how the centralized funding unfolded contextually within Huron Valley Schools.

Significance of the Study

In January 2019, David Arsen et al., Michigan State University professors, released an educational policy report entitled, *Michigan School Finance at the Crossroads: A Quarter*

Century of State Control. The report highlighted the fallout of state-controlled funding policy Proposal A. They explained how the principles of equity and adequacy in school finance helped to create solutions to the current state education funding and performance concerns. According to the 2019 report, "In 48 states, 2015 education revenue was higher, often much higher than in 1995. Michigan's real per-pupil revenue declined by 15 percent over this same period, ranking 48th among the 50 states" (Arsen et al., 2019, p. 2). The report pointed out that in 1993, right before the implementation of Proposal A, Michigan taxes were among the highest in the nation, and student performance was also ranked high yet, today, tax rates and student performance in Michigan fall well below the national average.

Although Proposal A successfully lowered property taxes and narrowed the revenue gaps that existed across Michigan school districts, the reforms "never addressed the question of funding adequacy, an omission that has become damaging over time" (Arsen et al., 2019, p. 13). Proposal A also moved funding from local to state control. Under Proposal A, Michigan citizens have little control when it comes to determining local funding for their public schools. The authors pointed out:

> Although the state controls most operating revenue available to Michigan's public schools, it has never calibrated funding levels. The resources needed for students to meet outcome standards, even as the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the Michigan Merit Curriculum dramatically increased achievement expectations. (Arsen et al., 2019, p. 1)

At a state and national level, the report, highlights the impact of Proposal A under increased accountability pressures from the institutional environment. Their work established the foundation for my study. In my study, however, I used a case study to develop an understanding of the relationships between schools, communities, and funding structures at the district level, the

street level. I believe context matters, and policy becomes significant at the point of application. Michael Lipsky (2010) stated:

> I argue that the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out. I maintain that public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of ranking administrators. These decision-making arenas are essential, of course, but they do not represent the complete picture. To the mix of places where policies are made, one must add the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers. (p. 4)

This study was an organic case study of a public school in Oakland County, Michigan. My goal was to share the findings with policymakers to help inform future policy.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures. A case study was used to articulate how these relationships unfolded relative to the policies and practices in a specific school district, Huron Valley Schools. The following research questions were used to structure this case study:

1. What is the origin, background, and current context of Huron Valley Schools?
2. How has the shift in Michigan's school funding structures unfolded relative to the policies and practices of Huron Valley Schools?

Organization of the Chapters

In Chapter One, the introduction, the background, the purpose, and the significance of this study are outlined. In Chapter Two, the methodology and the research tradition that supported the foundation of this research are explained. In Chapter Three, the background

literature that supports the conceptual framework is described. To help tell the story of Huron Valley Schools, Chapter Four is broken into two major sections. In the first section of Chapter Four, the history and development of the five communities as well as the progression and history of Huron Valley Schools are outlined. In the second section of Chapter Four, a brief history of school funding and how current centralized state funding structures have unfolded relative to policies and practices in a Huron Valley Schools are articulated. In Chapter Five, the questions which drove this research paper are answered, a summary of the findings are communicated, and recommendations for future research are made.

Chapter Two: Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures. A case study was used to articulate how these relationships unfolded relative to the policies and practices in a specific school district, Huron Valley Schools.

To help develop an understanding of the circumstances that exist within Huron Valley Schools, I provide, a brief history of the communities that exist within the school district, a brief history of the district development, and an overview of past and current school funding all needed to first be outlined. Then, using the conceptual framework, I outline how the centralized funding unfold, contextually within Huron Valley Schools.

Research Tradition

Robert Stake (1995) claimed that both quantitative and qualitative research are a science and the distinction between the two methods is a matter of emphasis as both are mixtures. Stake (1995) outlined three significant differences in qualitative and quantitative research: (a) the distinction between explanation and understanding as the purpose for inquiry, (b) the distinction between a personal and impersonal role for the researchers, and (c) a difference between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed.

Qualitative research is a search for happenings, for understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists. In qualitative research, the researcher has a personal role and works to construct knowledge by searching for understanding. The researcher describes things in a particular place and time. In qualitative research, the awareness of human experiences is a matter of record and not fixed on cause and effect. Qualitative research uses a natural approach to understand some phenomena in context-specific settings, such as a “real-world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest”

(Patton, 2001, p. 39). Novice field workers worry about personal involvement impacting or contaminating the data. Lofland and Lofland (1995) debunked this worry and stated that being in a natural setting allows the researcher to collect the wealthiest data, achieve intimate familiarity with the environment, and engage in face-to-face interactions. They feel the naturalistic approach encourages "Involvement and enmeshment rather than objectivity and distance" (p. 17). Schram (2006) defined a qualitative study as one that describes and interprets cultural behaviors, the study of what people typically do in a particular place, and the meanings they ascribe to what they do and how it draws attention to the various cultural processes.

Philip Runkel (1990), a research methodologist, described the notion of using case studies as that of "casting nets." We cast a net to learn about the species by examining a large sample or a sample of one. Runkel called casting nets the method of relative frequencies: "Case study researchers, both qualitative and quantitative in orientation, cast nets when they look at frequencies within the case" (Stake, 1995, p. 36). Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) felt the constructivist paradigm is at the base of all case studies. The constructive paradigm states that truth is relative and is dependent on perspective.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined the case study as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (p. 25). Essentially, the situation is the unit of analysis. Stake (1995) defined case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. According to Stake (1995), if the researcher has an inherent interest in the subject, then they need to conduct an intrinsic case study. If the intent is to gain insight into a particular phenomenon, then the researcher must use an instrumental case study. If the intention is to understand the similarities and differences between the cases, then the researcher must use a collective case study. This paper was guided by

an intrinsic desire to develop a deeper understanding of the connection between the policies and practices in Huron Valley Schools and the centralized, state, level funding structure, Proposal A.

I completed an examination of Huron Valley Schools within its real-world setting. To help tell the story of the district, I first told the history of all the communities that exist within the district were, and I told the history of the school district. I then outlined a brief history of Michigan school funding. Finally, using the conceptual framework, I described the relationship between the district, its communities, and the centralized state funding structure, relative to the policies and practices within Huron Valley Schools.

Design of the Study

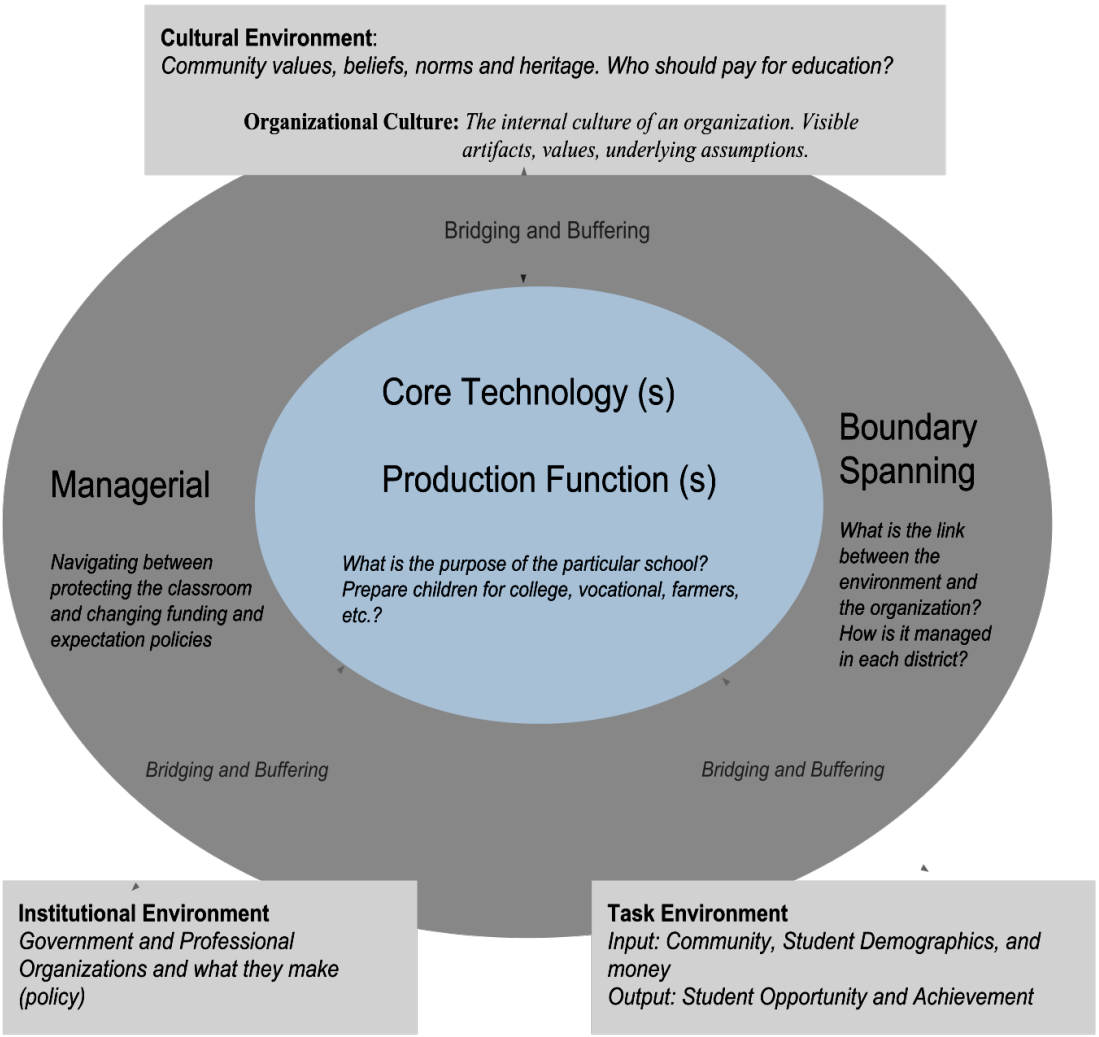
Research is a systematic inquiry that investigates, interprets data, and searches to construct and explain the meaning of some phenomena. In research, the theoretical framework provides the lens to analyze the events. The theoretical framework is the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework draws support from historical theories that represent the findings of many researchers on how a particular experience occurs. The conceptual framework uses developed methods to map out and guide the researcher in the development of understanding of the intent of the study. It also represents the synthesis of the literature on how to explain a phenomenon: "The conceptual framework of your study, is the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 39). Furthermore, it guides the researcher in making meaning of their observations of the research and how to embed the other researchers' points of view to develop some understanding and explanation of the studied phenomena.

I used a case study to understand how the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures unfolded relative to policies and practices in a specific school district,

Huron Valley Schools. The organizing conceptual framework for this study highlighted the institutional environment, the task environment, the cultural environment, and the engrained core technologies and production function that exist within Huron Valley Schools. My framework for this study was grounded in organizational literature. Figure 1 represents my interpretation of this framework (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Interpretation of the Framework



Unit of Analysis

I developed this study to examine the relationship between schools, communities, and school funding structures. To complete this study, Huron Valley Schools (HVS), the communities with the district, and Michigan's school funding structures were the units of analysis.

Moral, Ethical, and Legal Issues

All research for this study complied with the laws, guidelines, and criteria established to protect participants and reflect data accurately. My primary focus was gathering secondary data to help describe the context that exists within Huron Valley Schools. I respected autonomy, ensured minimal risks, and worked to equalize benefits. All school data were collected through data collection resources. Since I completed my research in an environment which I work closely in, I needed to maintain a clear code of ethics: maintain honesty, stay objective, show integrity, avoid negligence, confidentiality, respect for colleagues, and work to minimize harms and risks: "We must also consider the potential wrongness of our actions as qualitative researchers concerning the people whose lives we are studying, to our colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work. The classic principle of humane conduct must guide all researchers: *first, do no harm.*" (Stake, 1995, p. 56).

Protecting confidentiality, respecting the different people, and working to cause no harm was imperative. I kept all data locked in a file cabinet, and electronic files saved with a safeguarded password. The results of the study were shared in an approved dissertation and possibly other professional educational writing journals.

Data Collection

As a researcher, my intent was to explain the district's contexts with an eye toward understanding the students' experiences and outcomes. Published documents and books were used to write an abridged history of school funding reform within Michigan, the story of each community, and the development of Huron Valley Schools. Then using the conceptual framework as a guide, I described the relationship between schools, communities and funding structures, unfolded relative to policies and practices in Huron Valley Schools. Data such as demographics, student populations, and ethnicities we're all collected. Interviews used were only used to answer questions "about what" and not "about whom."

Seeing how I have worked for Huron Valley Schools, I have an intrinsic interest in the operational systems of the school district. Ultimately, I was hoping to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures relative to the policies and practices in Huron Valley Schools.

An interpretive approach was the most appropriate approach for this case study.

Analysis of the Data

I used my conceptual framework to guide my review of all collected data. Huron Valley Schools has its own organizational and cultural environments. By using the elements of the organizational settings, as investigative procedures, I was able to frame my thinking to describe the various relationships that exist between the school district, the communities, and the current funding structure. Additionally, I was able to examine how these relationships shaped the policies and practices in Huron Valley Schools.

Methods for analyzing data in this type of study were varied. Lofland and Lofland (1995) suggested that data analysis cannot be broken down into an assembly line but must be an

"inductive and emergent process" (p. 181). Researchers who preemptively describe how data will be analyzed will likely be wrong. People need to be meaning makers so they can make sense of the most chaotic events. Our equilibrium depends on such skills; we keep the world consistent and predictable by organizing and interpreting it. The critical question is whether the meanings you find in qualitative data are trustworthy and right. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that verifying evidence in qualitative research includes the search for patterns, themes, plausibility, clustering, metaphors, and counting.

As the research project unfolded, so did the analysis procedures. To ensure a somewhat systematic approach, I continuously looked for patterns, explanations, causal flows, and themes of significance. As I wrote the stories of the district, the communities, and funding structures, I repeatedly looked for patterns, and many appeared. These trends were used to help me make sense of the experiences and helped to create conclusions based on verifying evidence.

Self as an Instrument

I was the critical research instrument for this study, and because I was, it was crucial that I clearly articulated my intentions and exposed my biases. I chose this study because it was a way to make sense of and articulate the experiences, I have had over the past 30 years.

I spent the first 23 years of my career in Huron Valley Schools, with the last eight in Novi Community Schools. For the past 21 years, I have served as an elementary school principal. I have worked as the leader of three completely different schools, in two separate school districts. Working in such diverse communities has exposed me to varied organizational and cultural environments. Not only did I work in Huron Valley Schools, but I attended school in the district from 6th to 12th grade. Huron Valley Schools was my home for over 30 years.

As a Huron Valley Schools administrator, spring was always a scary time. Spring meant budget meetings where significant budget cuts would be decided. Over my 12 years as a building principal, I was part of cutting millions from the annual budgets and the closing of three schools. Eventually, to get away from what felt like constant budget strains, I moved to Novi Community Schools, where I have spent the last eight years working as an elementary school principal. Novi has exposed me to a completely new community and school organization.

As an educator and a student, I have always had a natural fascination of the organizational structure of education as well as the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures. As the funding structures for Michigan schools shifted from a decentralized structure to a centralized one, I increasingly became more curious about how state, level policy plays out in the communities and at the district level. While working in two varied school districts, it has been my experience that the relationship between schools, communities, funding structures, and the policies and practices of both school districts play out differently in each school district. I feel the context for which each school district exists matters. To develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures, I developed a case study of Huron Valley Schools.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) claimed, “Unless you are emotionally engaged in your work, the inevitable boredom, confusion, and frustration of rigorous scholarship will endanger even the completion-not to speak of the quality-of the project” (p.15). My natural curiosity to understand, make sense of the past 29 years of my career, and to uncover the value of context and how it impacts a school system’s success allowed me to stay the course.

Validity and Reliability

As a qualitative researcher who chose to complete a study around a district that I am directly involved with, I faced legitimate questions about my biases and the accuracy of my findings. Since I have lived and worked in Huron Valley Schools, I know my views can be blinded by my experiences. I must keep these biases and blind spots in focus and work to negate their impact.

Lofland and Lofland (1995) argued that a researcher's presence within the organization they are studying is beneficial. While there may be methodological and ethical difficulties, it is a small price to pay for such a naturalistic approach. I believe my real-life experiences in each of these environments aided me in this research. I intimately know and care about both cultures. Throughout my study, I worked to cause no harm to either school district. Yet, throughout my research, I knew to investigate an environment in which I worked and lived in over 29 years. Another context in which I work today would cause some to question the accuracy of my findings. I turned to the experts to learn steps I could take to enhance the validity of my study. Lofland and Lofland (1995) stated, "So-called objectivity and distance vis-a-vis the field setting will usually fail to collect any data that are worth analyzing" (p. 17). Miles and Huberman (1994) claimed that while "getting it all right" in qualitative analysis is an unworkable aim, we can follow a practical list to enhance the value of the findings. First, the researcher must remain objective and relatively neutral. Second, she must maintain a consistent research process with stable methods. Have things been done with reasonable care? Third, the researcher must seek internal validity, credibility, and authenticity (truth value). Fourth, she must find external validity, transferability, and fittingness. Are the conclusions of the study transferable to other

contexts? Can they be generalized to different settings? Finally, seek utilization, application, and action orientation. What is the pragmatic validity or goodness of the study?

To increase the trustworthiness of the study, I used Miles and Huberman's advice and worked hard at being transparent about my findings and how I came to them. I consistently used secondary data to help unfold the story. To help build validity, I also worked diligently at being analytical, descriptive, and sought data to back up descriptions when needed. To help with my own biases and subjectivity, I asked for reviews from those working within the two school districts, and I consistently sought feedback from my dissertation committee. Finally, I acknowledged my own biases and the subjectivity that they may have played in my findings. According to Kirk and Miller (1986), "Reliability is the extent to which a measurement procedure yields the same answer; however, and whenever it is carried out; validity is the extent to which it gets the correct answer" (p. 19). To maintain a high degree of validity, Eisenhart and Howe (1992) offered five standards for efficacy in educational research:

- Standard 1: The Fit Between Research Questions, Data Collection Procedures, and Analysis Techniques: "The data collection techniques employed should fit or be suitable for answering the research question entertained. A corollary of this standard is that research questions should drive data collection techniques and analysis rather than vice versa" (pp. 657-658).
- Standard 2: The Effective Application of Specific Data Collection and Analysis Techniques: "Research studies qua arguments cannot be valid without credible reasons for a specific choice of subjects, data-gathering procedures, and analysis techniques" (p. 658). The integrity of the techniques utilized must be maintained, or validity is lost.

- Standard 3: Alertness to and Coherence of Prior Knowledge. To develop credible conclusions, they must be "Built on some theoretical tradition or contribute to some substantive areas or practical arena" (p. 659). The assumptions and goals embedded in the study must be exposed and considered. A researcher's "subjectivity" must be made clear to maintain clarity of purpose.
- Standard 4: Value Constraints. Both internal and external value constraints exist and considered: "Internal value constraints refer to research ethics" (p. 661). The way research is conducted. The external constraint values result and how valuable the study is to improve educational practices.
- Standard 5: Comprehensiveness. This standard encompasses responding holistically to and balancing the first four standards as well as going beyond them. For Standards 1-3, Standard 5 requires a judgement about overall clarity, coherence, and competence. For Standards 1-4, the goal of Standard 5 is to find the balance between. Finally, Standard 5 requires a researcher to apply various perspectives and to be able to apply general principles for evaluating arguments: "It may also be considered a strategy for comprehensiveness by demonstrating that a study competently and ethically conceived and conducted can stand up to the challenge posed by other approaches or different results" (p. 662).

Although these five standards are not the only way to conduct and represent valid research, they do highlight critical considerations. Unequivocally, I met the criteria outlined and followed them throughout my research project.

Internal Validity

A research study with high internal validity lets the reader choose one explanation over another without hesitation because the study has eliminated plausible alternative explanations. The findings of the study are congruent with reality (Shenton, 2004). To strengthen the accuracy of my research and establish internal validity, I triangulated my data, held frequent debriefing sessions with my dissertation team, and examined previous research findings to explore the degree to which my results were compatible with previous research.

Miles and Huberman (1994) claimed that "stripped to its basics, triangulation is supposed to support a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it" (p. 266). Theory triangulation was achieved using both quantitative and qualitative data. Achievement of methodological triangulation was secured through various methods for gathering data: school policy, school records, demographic data, and test data. The triangulation of data collection helped me to gain many insights, view the data from multiple perspectives, and validate my learnings. Throughout my research project, regular communication with the dissertation chair occurred. Those debriefings reviewed methods utilized, checked for accuracy of data, and scrutinized the research completed. My dissertation team review added another layer of accountability and helped to ensure accuracy. Ongoing research and learning around similar research were invaluable parts of my study. Previous research only added significance to my inquiry. This study was a unique case study of one school district. Therefore, the collected data and analysis were specific to this school district; as such, the findings hold a robust internal validity.

External Validity

External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of a study can transfer to other situations. If an investigation can be replicated, with similar results, it adds to the study's generalizability. Qualitative projects are specific to a particular environment and individuals; therefore, it is difficult to apply the findings and conclusions to other settings and populations. Qualitative studies are understood within the context in which the fieldwork was conducted. To assess the extent to which findings may be accurate in other settings, similar projects, employing the same methods, in different environments could be a base in which the results could be compared (Shenton, 2004).

This study was a particular case study of one school district. Therefore, the collected data and analysis were specific to that school district; as such, the findings hold a robust validity. In this study, I explored a deeper understanding of relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures. These relationships exist between all schools, their communities, and their funding structures. While the case study is specific to one school district, the overarching relationships can be applied to any school district. Once the paper is published, I plan to share my findings with policymakers. Although my results relate to one Michigan school district, I am hopeful my framework will be generalizable to other school districts, and will inform my future studies.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

This research is a case study of a school district in Oakland County, Michigan. Developing a strong knowledge of organizational theory and the polity behind school policies was key to the conceptual framework.

Organizational Rationality

According to Thompson (2004), organizational studies did not emerge as a reliable, recognized area of scholarship until the mid-1950s. Before the 1950s, Frederick Taylor (1911), Max Weber (1920), and other social theorists focused on organizations as technical systems with rational production and administration. Eventually, another group of scholars challenged the view that factories were just production systems. They noted the importance of social ties among workers, the informal structure, and non-rational motivations in organizing work. Barnard (1938) and Selznick (1948) viewed the organization as adaptive systems with unique social networks. In 1959, using the work of his predecessors, Gouldner outlined the rational and natural system perspective. The rational system focuses on practical design and planning, assuming participants can control developments. The natural system, by contrast, focuses on organizations as ones that evolve. System survival is the goal and adaptation in the process. At the same time, outside the social sciences, the introduction of the "open system" developed. The open system focused the attention away from the exclusive internal features of an organization to the notion that organizations are influenced by the outside environment.

Thompson (2004) proposed a "levels" model in which he suggested that all organizations are, by their nature, open to the environment, must adapt to their environments by crafting appropriate structures, but are differentiated systems. Some components or sub-units are designed to be more open-and some more closed-to environmental influences than others.

Parson (1960) identified three levels of distinct components of an organization: production, managerial, and institutional. To enhance effectiveness, production components are to be sealed off from environmental changes. The management mediates between the open organizational components that monitor ecological change and closed units. Thompson (2004) considered Parson's levels as technical, managerial, cultural, and institutional rationalities. In Thompson's model, all organizations are simultaneously rational and natural systems, and all are both open and closed systems.

Organizational Theory Models

Scott (2003) provided three views of organization: rational, natural, and open. Each deserves brief mention, yet a unified view is the most useful tool for this study.

Rational System

The rational system focuses on the structure, the purposeful aspects of the organization, the formalized social structures, and the instruments designed to attain specific goals of the organization (Davis & Scott, 2007). The rational system focuses on the formal structure, and not the people or the environment in which the organization exists. Under this system, organizations are entities without people, and the focus is on control (Bennis, 1959, as cited in Davis & Scott 2007). The rational system view helps define the formal structures of the organization, but it ignores the human element or the environment in which the organization exists.

Natural System

In contrast to the rational perspective that focuses on the formal structures and processes, the natural system focuses more on the informal structures and goals of the organization. The human element is key to the natural system view, and participants appear to be motivated by their interests and work to impose these on the organization. Scott (2003) defined the natural

perspective of organizations as “collectives whose participants are pursuing multiple interests, both disparate and common, but who recognize the values of perpetuating the organization as an important resource” (p. 30). The natural perspective is a collection of different and similar schools of thought. The social consensus thought emphasizes individuals as sharing primarily common objectives. Social order is a result of underlying consensus and shared norms and values among the participants. Unlike the social consensus school of thought, the social conflict school of thought views social order resulting from the suppression of interests by others. The order comes not from consensus but the dominance of the weaker by a stronger group. The underlying conflict provides insight into instability and change.

Open System

Rational and natural systems viewpoints see organizations as closed systems, separate from their environment with a focus on the tightness of connections within the organization, whereas an open system perspective exists within its context and is open to external interactions. Scott (2003) stated, “From an open system perspective, environments shape, support and infiltrate organizations. Connections with ‘external’ elements can be more critical than those among ‘internal’ components” (p. 31). The open system states that organizations are impacted by several factors that occur in the external environment, and these factors can have an impact on the internal environment (Millett, 1998). According to Thompson (2004), an open system has more variables than we can comprehend, and these variables are subject to influences we cannot control or predict: “A complex organization is a set of interdependent parts which together make up a whole because each contributes something and receives something from the whole, which in turn is interdependent with some larger environment” (p. 6). Scott (2003), states, “From an open system point of view, there is a close connection between the condition of the environment and

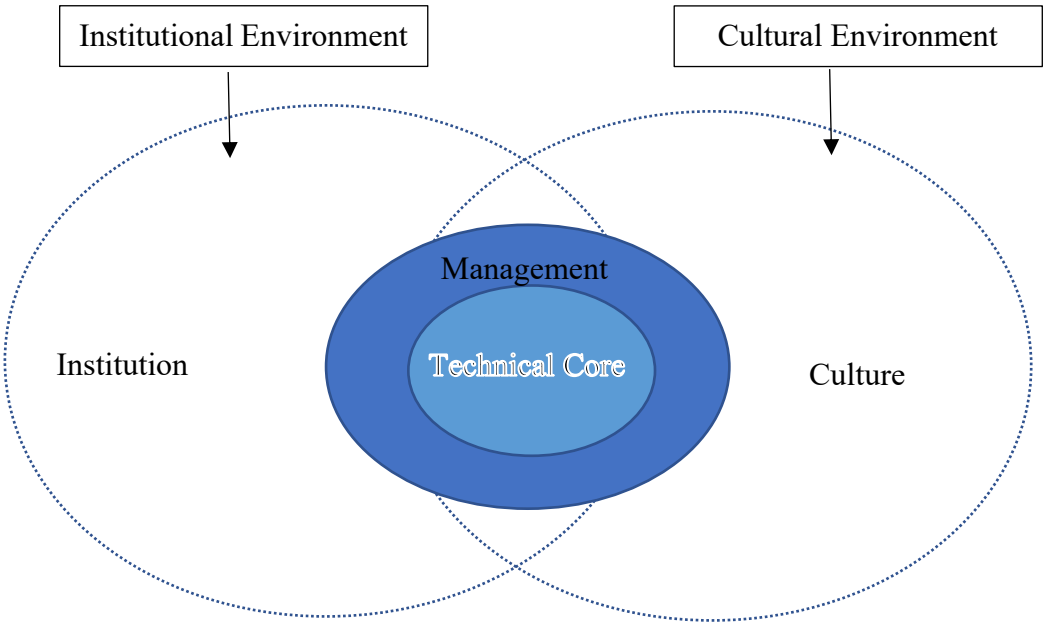
the characteristics of the systems within it: a complex system cannot maintain its complexity in a simple environment" (p. 97). To survive, humans seek a state of homeostasis. An open system perspective views interaction between the environment and the organization itself as a method of survival, a level of balance. As Buckley (1967) observed, an open system is not just free because it interacts with its environment but is open because interaction with the environment is key to the survival of the organization.

Merging Perspectives

According to Shinn (2013), "Viewing an organization from multiple perspectives at different times is necessary to achieve an informed and accurate rendering of reality" (p. 27). Thompson (2004) hypothesized that the rational perspective is supportive when studying the technical behaviors of an organization because professional activities seek to minimize uncertainty, whereas institutional businesses interact with the environment, not by choice, but as a means of survival. The organization relies on the environment, and this creates uncertainty. Consequently, it is suitable to study institutional activities from an open system perspective. Between the technical and institutional settings lies the managerial activities whose purpose is to negotiate between these two varied environments. Parsons (1960) identified the sets of exercises that Thompson (2004) speaks of as technical activities, managerial activities, and institutional activities. Muwonge (2012) offered that the fourth level of organizational activities, cultural activities, are needed to understand how organizations evolve and survive fully (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Adapted from Shinn's (2013) and Muwonge (2012) Model of Organizational Rationality



Core Technologies

Scott (2014) referred to technology (technical core) as the work performed by the organization. Technology includes not only the hardware used in performing work but also the skills and knowledge of workers. The physical, combined with intellectual knowledge, transform into outputs. Henry Mintzberg (1979) stated that the structure of an organization, the technical core, can be described as the sum of how it splits its workforce into individual tasks and then reaches coordination among them. According to Thompson (2004), the norms of rationality state that organizations seek to close off their core technologies from outside/environmental influences. Organizations work to protect the technical core of the organization. The technical task is the transformation of inputs into outputs. The actual manufacturing of the product of an organization. The technical core of public education is "an abstract system of beliefs" about how

teachers educate their students (input). Educators work to create a successful student who graduates from the institution (output).

Managerial

The managerial level services the technical aspects of the organization: “The managerial level controls, or administers, the technical sub-organization by deciding such matters as the broad technical task performed, the scale of operations, employment and purchasing policy and so on” (Thompson, 2004, p. 11). Managerial activities bridge the boundary between the technical activities and the task environment while protecting the technical core (Thompson, 2004). Management is responsible for ensuring that the organization operates to meet its objectives and technical functions. In public education, the managerial activities include the administration of policies that impact how teachers instruct and educate the students.

Task Environment

The task environment refers to the building blocks of an organization’s environment that impact the organization’s ability to carry out its intended task, its ability to exist. The features of this environment consist of sources for inputs into the organization, markets for outputs, and the organization’s competitors’ regulators: “Since no organization generates all the resources necessary for its goal attainment or survival, organizations are forced to enter into exchanges, becoming interdependent with other environmental groups, typically other organizations” (Scott, 2003, p. 197). These external components influence the organization’s ability to reach goals. It is a set of conditions originating from suppliers, distributors, customers, competitors, which directly impact the organization’s ability to attain its goals. No two task environments are identical: “Which individuals, which other organizations, which aggregates constitute the task environment for a particular organization is determined by the requirements of the technology,

the boundaries of the domain, and the composition of the larger environment" (Thompson, 2004, p. 28).

Scott (2003) pointed out, "One cannot understand the structure or behavior of an organization's without understanding the context within which it operates" (p. 118). Scott's perspective is highlighted in the resource dependency theory. Rather than viewing organizations as passive concerning environmental forces, resource dependence theory emphasizes proactive strategies that help when dealing with environmental constraints. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) laid out the theory as such:

> Organizations, transact with others for necessary resources, and control over resources provides others with power over the organizations. Survival of the organizations is partially explained by the ability to cope with environmental contingencies; negotiating exchanges to ensure the continuation of needed resources is the focus of much organizational action. (p. 258)

Boundary Spanning

Having boundaries implies limitations; thus, when an organization seeks to expand on its limitations, it builds relationships outside the organization and links connections. Adjustment and adaptability are vital factors of the boundary-spanning of organizations. Modifications to limitations and possibilities not controlled by the organization are the vital problem for boundary-spanning factors. "Bounded rationality is necessary, and organizations facing heterogeneous task environments seek to identify homogeneous segments and establish structural units to deal with each" (Thompson, 2004, p. 81).

Buffering Tactics

According to Scott (2003), "Organizations seeking to buffer their technical flows from environmental perturbations pursue several tactics" (p. 200). Tactics include coding, stockpiling, leveling, forecasting, and adjusting the scale. Thompson (2004) further explained that buffering cannot control all the variations in an unstable environment; organizations work to smooth or forecast input/output transactions. When these do work, organizations resort to rationing services to preserve the organization.

Bridging Tactics

While buffering works to isolate and protect the core from external influences bridging, works to interact with the outside environments. Bridging techniques address the power position of an organization in relation to its exchange partners: "Organizations strive to improve their positions by developing advantageous linkages with other units" (Scott, 2003, p. 212). Bridging is a way to increase an organization's interdependence.

Scott (2003) highlighted symbiotic and competitive interdependence. Symbiotic interdependence creates varying levels of power if the resource exchange is not equal. Competitive interdependence occurs when two or more organizations compete for the resources of a third party. Like buffering, there are varying bridging techniques, and each varies in strength and essence: bargaining, contracting, co-optation, hierarchical contracts, joint ventures, strategic alliances, and mergers. Organizations employ these various bridging techniques to survive.

Task Environments in Schools

The central task of education is teaching. A critical resource in education is funding. School funding in Michigan is regulated and controlled by the institutional environment. School administrators manage the environment to preserve the core, the classroom, while strategically managing the money. Karl Weick (1969) stated, “Human actors do not react to the environment; they enact it” (p. 64). Weick (1969) felt human actors, usually, managers, *enacted the environment,* to shape into a system that conforms. School systems work to manage the uncertainty of educational funding with buffering and bridging strategies. At times, the management, that is, school administrators, mediate between bridging the gap between policies and practice while still trying to protect the technical core of education, the classroom. They protect their technical core from environmental disturbances through buffering strategies and expand their boundaries to include and control more or less of the environment with bridging strategies.

Institutional Environment

The institutional environment is “characterized by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy from the environment” (Meyer & Scott, 1983, p. 340). Their quality of output does not evaluate organizations operating in this environment. It considers the processes by which structures, including systems, rules, norms, and routines, become established as commanding rules for social behavior: “Organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts for organizational work and institutionalized in society incorporate” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 340).

The exact rules and practices to which an organization must conform depend on the organization itself, its primary function, and the task environment in which it operates. To achieve legitimacy, public school systems must organize the teaching and operate using the traditional structure. Meyer and Rowan (1977) stated that organizational success depends on factors other than the efficient coordination and control of productive activities. Independent of their productive efficiency, organizations that exist in highly elaborated institutional environments and succeed in becoming isomorphic with these environments gain the legitimacy and resources needed to survive.

Scott (2014) used the following framework to outline the institutional pillars: "Institutions comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life" (p. 56). The regulative pillar stresses formal rules and formal laws and is backed up by sanctions of punishment and reward. The normative pillar focuses on values, expectations, and influences organizational behavior based on social obligation. The cognitive pillar focuses on categories, typification, and influences organizational behavior through shared understanding, adhering to established routines and assumptions.

As with the task environment, organizations utilize both buffering and bridging tactics when engaging with their institutional environment.

Buffering Tactics

Scott (2003) discussed two primary buffering tactics: symbolic coding and decoupling. Work is rationalized, made sense of, through various coding mechanisms: "Categorical rules are the essence of institutional frameworks: they provide the distinctions that are coded into the fabric of the organization and into the standard operating procedures employed in sorting and

routing inputs" (Scott, 2003, p. 214). Decoupling occurs when the organization reacts to the institutional demands by decoupling the formal structures from the operational structures. This allows the organization to maintain some autonomy. Oliver (1991) identified other buffering tactics as acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation. These tactics allow organizations to engage in some defensive action, and some institutional pressures are inherently easier to buffer than others.

Bridging Tactics

Scott (2003) states, "Isomorphism is the master bridging process in institutional environments: by incorporating institutional rules within their structures, organizations become more homogeneous, more similar in structure, over time" (p. 215). Scott (2003) identified three mechanisms for isomorphism: coercive, normative, and mimetic. Mimetic forces refer to an organization's ability to imitate the procedures and structures of exemplary models. Normative pressures refer to organizational behavior expected in legitimate directions. Coercive implies formal consequences for failure to conform to the standard operating procedures and structures. The level of institutionalization may be due to more than the desire to appear legitimate. It may be due to the combination of isomorphic forces.

Scott (2003) outlined the following bridging tactics: categorical, structural, procedural, and personnel conformity. Absolute conformity is the most general and "Is the process whereby institutional rules in the form of typification, or taken-for-granted distinctions, provide guidelines to organizations based on which they can pattern their structures" (Scott, 2003, p. 216). Structural conformity occurs when specific structural demands are mandated and adoption is needed for approval. Procedural conformity occurs when institutions carry out specific activities

or carry out these activities in a specific way. Personnel conformity revolves around the notion of hiring personnel based on certification or education.

Institutional Environment in Schools

Schools function under institutional rules and regulations, and schools are legitimized by adhering to these values imposed by the educational policy. Yet schools are not just brick walls following robotic expectations. Schools are human organizations driven by emotions and tradition. Organizations can be rational, yet organizational behavior can be viewed as non-rational. Organizations have a history, traditions, routines, a culture and a set of values. These human aspects to an organization create patterns of activity that vary from the rational formal bureaucratic theory. For this study, Scott's (2014) institutional pillars provide a framework to examine how schools work to meet the institutional demands while managing the social aspects of the organization.

Cultural Environment

The cultural environment is organized around tasks, values, people, religion, and the established community norms and values. The culture of the environment is the heritage of the community, the ground level. Layered over the community is the cultural environment of the county, the state, and the country. The cultural environment influences the institutional environment in the sense that what the community values can ultimately end up in the rules and policies of an organization. I believe a school's legitimacy and success are impacted by how well the school's structure mirrors the norms, values, and ideologies institutionalized by society.

Organizational Culture

The culture of the organization is different from the cultural environment in that it is the culture within the organization itself. Organizations have a culture, an internal culture.

Organizational culture is difficult to understand. But why do people behave differently in different organizations? In 1980, Edgar Schein developed a model of organizational culture. According to Schein (1984),

> Organizational culture is the pattern of underlying assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and 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 to those problems. (p. 3)

Schein (1984) divided organizational culture into three different levels: visible artifacts, values, and underlying assumptions. The visible artifacts are the constructed environment, its architecture, manner of dress, and behavior patterns. The values primarily analyze why members behave the way they do and what values govern their behavior. According to Schein, to understand the culture, one must examine the underlying assumptions which are unconscious but determine how a group perceives, thinks, and feels.

Patty Mulder (2014) described Schein's model as an onion with different layers. The outer layer is relatively easy to adapt and easy to change. The deeper the layer, the harder it becomes to adjust it. Deeply embedded in the core of the onion, we find the assumptions. Around the core, we find the values. The artifacts and symbols can be found in the outer layers of the onion, and these can be changed more easily. Between this layer and the layer where values are embedded, there may be another layer where we find so-called "heroes," people who play or have played an essential role in the organization and who are admired. The core of the onion is made up of assumptions. These are about how the world works according to the people who belong to the organization and stem from experiences and perception (Mulder, 2013).

Bridging and Buffering Between the Cultural and Organizational Environments

The cultural environment functions under the norms and values of the community, whereas the organizational culture is the culture within the organization itself. School managers work to bridge the gap between the community values (cultural) and school values/policy(s) (organizational). At times these values can conflict and can lead to new policy. The new policy can be school-based created to protect the technical core or the organization, or at times the policy comes from the community, the school board, and can reinforce the dominant community culture. Over time, the community culture and school/district culture can become similar: isomorphic culture.

Resource Dependency

Organizations are open systems and are therefore dependent on the environment for their survival. These dependencies create a relationship. If the relationship creates a mutual dependency, it an interdependent one. Yet, if an organization is dependent on the continual success of other organizations to minimize uncertainty, it is a dependent one. The dependent organization may create behavioral dependencies to reduce the risk. Anytime there is a dependence asymmetry between organizations, there is a power difference (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) stated, “It is the fact of the organization’s dependence on the environment that makes the external constraint and control of organizational behavior both possible and almost inevitable” (p. 41). The environment, or group, which controls the most vital resources or can reduce uncertainty has the most power.

Under Proposal A, Michigan public schools are dependent on the state for a major resource: school funding. The state has ownership of the resource and has possession of the

resource. It also makes the rules that regulate how the resource is allocated and how schools can use it. Anytime there is a dependence asymmetry between organizations, there is a power difference.

Chapter Four: History and Data

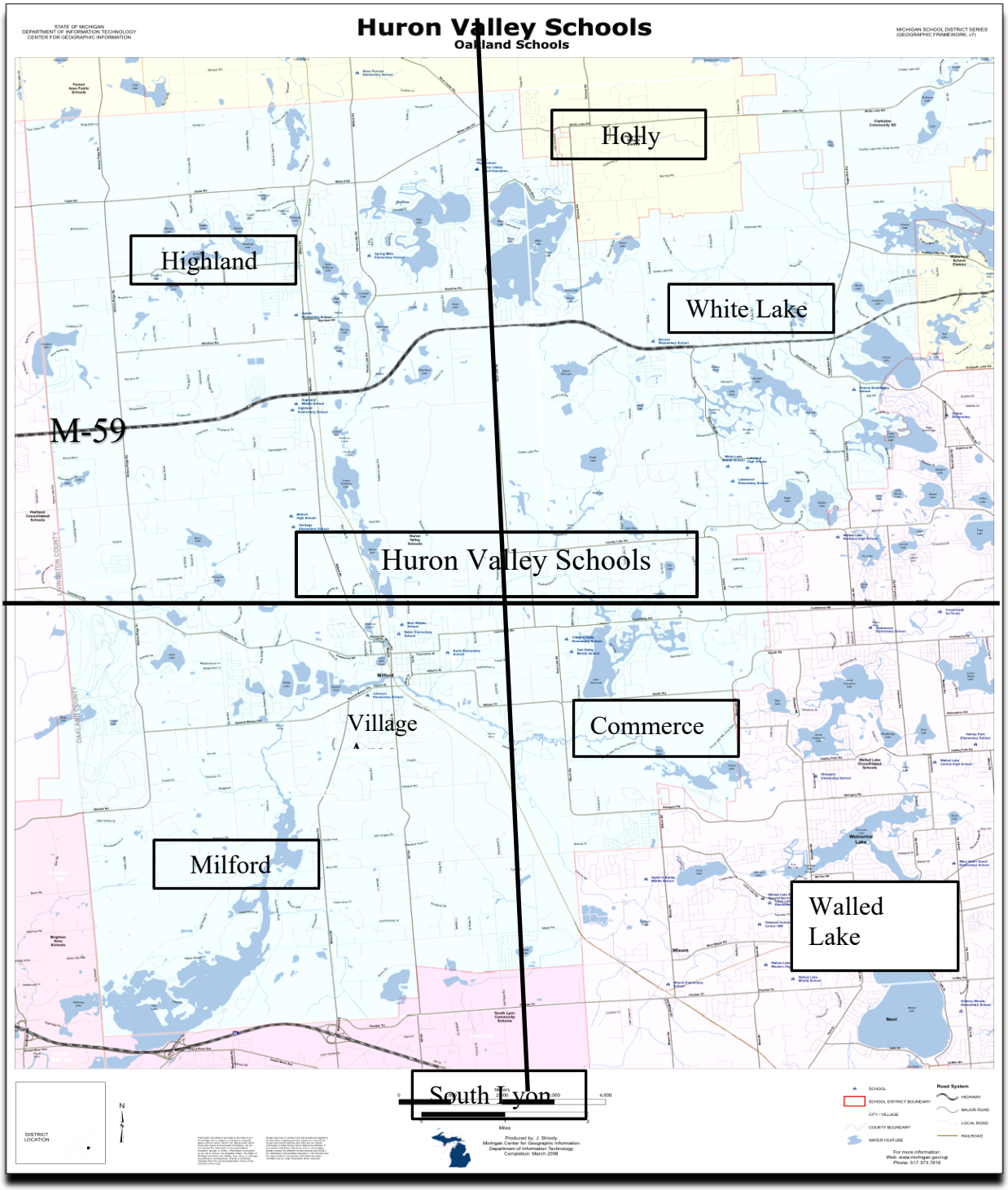
The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures. A case study was used to articulate how these relationships unfolded relative to the policies and practices in a specific school district, Huron Valley Schools.

As Figure 3 shows, Huron Valley Schools is made up of five separate communities: Milford, The Village of Milford, Commerce, White Lake, and Highland. Each of these communities, and their histories, directly connects to how the school district developed and how it functions today. Therefore, to understand the social, cultural, and economic contexts that exist within this school district and its communities today, the story needed to begin with the history.

To help tell the story of Huron Valley Schools, I broke Chapter Four into two major sections. In the first section, I sketched a brief history and development of the five communities, a brief history of school funding, and the progression of Huron Valley Schools. In the second section, I outlined school funding and how current state funding structures unfold in the communities that make up the district as well as within the district itself.

Figure 3

Map of Huron Valley Schools



Community History

The community of Milford and the Village of Milford were the first of the five to be settled. They were followed by Commerce, Highland, and White Lake. The early development of each community was shaped by the rural land and the many lakes and rivers. The rural land and landforms resulted in all the communities first developing as farming and mill communities. As a result, farming, operating mills, and small industries provided the economic opportunities for the early settlers of these communities up through the end of the 19th century. Overall, the early settlers were mainly European, and the Christian faith, along with education, were a large part of the early communities.

The Communities Milford Township and the Village of Milford, Michigan

Milford began at the point where Pettibone Creek flows into the Huron River. In 1827, the first settler, Amos Mead, landed in Milford, Michigan, but it was Eliza and Stanley Ruggles who settled first in Milford. In 1831, the Ruggles chose Milford because the Huron River and Pettibone Creek intersected and this water could power their mill. As Figure 4 shows, the first Grist Mill was built in Milford Township by Lumen Fuller. The Upper Mill Pond was developed in 1845 and had at least five different mills on it. Shortly after the first mill, the first post office was established in 1835 and the post master was Aaron Phelps. The early settlers of Milford came from New England, New York, and England. Education and their Protestant religion were important and the first church was founded in 1836.

Figure 4

First Grist Mill of Milford

Note. From *A Brief History of Milford, Michigan* by B. Young, n.d. (https://www.milfordhistory.org/brief_history.html). Copyright 2018 by The Milford Historical Society. Reprinted with permission.

Early Economy. Like many of the surrounding communities, the early economy of Milford relied on farmers who raised cereal grains, potatoes, and vegetables. The building of the Lower Mill Pond, the Upper Mill Pond, and Hubbard Pond were milestones for the community. These ponds created waterpower for factories and electricity. They used hydropower to become one the first communities to have electric lights in 1892. In 1939, Ford built two hydroelectric stations which allowed farmers to work in the factories while keeping up with agriculture work. The same waterpower that had run in Milford since 1832 was now used to manufacture carburetors for Ford automobiles.

Settlement north of the river began after the development of the mills. Milford gained the title of township in 1835, and in 1869, Milford Village was incorporated. As a result of this

division, and even today, two square miles of the township make up the Village of Milford. The downtown area is located within these 2.5 square miles. The village council worked to establish streets, sidewalks, and a fire department.

The introduction of the railroad in 1871 created new jobs and boosted the Milford economy. However, the biggest impact on Milford's growth came from the invention of the automobile and the opening of the GM Proving Grounds. The invention of the automobile, and eventually interstates, created an avenue for families to travel and move farther east from Detroit. Additionally, when the first dedicated auto testing facility in the state, the GM Proving Grounds, opened in Milford in 1924, more families moved to Milford to live and work. The proving grounds was, and still is, a huge facility as it encompasses 4,000 acres, has 142 buildings, and employs 4,800 workers (Milford Historical Society, n.d.).

Early Development. The jobs created by the auto industry had a trickle-down effect on the Milford community. More jobs resulted in more houses being built outside the village area. The Village of Milford and Milford Township are examples of a common rural mill community from 1832 through 1871 to World War I when business, industries, and residential construction was spurred by the coming of the railroad, and the period from World War I to 1950 when the coming of the automobile spurred further growth.

In the late 19th century, efforts were made to attract businesses to Milford. Buggies, sausages, door knobs, window screens, cultivators, honey, jam, whiskey and flour were all items manufactured in Milford during the nineteenth century. Some are still produced today.

Growth eventually slowed towards the turn of the 19th century. Instead of becoming a large city, Milford evolved into a village with mainly small businesses (Young, n.d.).

Figure 5

Byers Homestead as Seen from Commerce Road

Note. From *Byers Homestead*, n.d. (http://www.byershomestead.org/). Copyright 1995 by The Friends of Byers. Reprinted with permission.

The Community of Commerce, Michigan

In 1834, about 12 years after the community of Milford was established, the municipality of Commerce was established. Commerce is in the southwestern part of Oakland County and just to the east of Milford. The first European to settle in Commerce Township was New Yorker, Abram Walrod built a small settlement on the banks of the Huron River. Today this site is known as Byers Homestead. Figure 5 shows Byers Homestead today, and today, if one travels through Commerce, the homestead is still the epicenter for the township.

Figure 6

Commerce Roller Mill

Notes: From *The Story of Commerce* by Ruggles, G., 2009. (http://michiganhistory.leadr.msu.edu/development-3/). Copyright 2014 by Michigan History. Reprinted with permission.

Early Economy. The water power and the Commerce Roller Mill gave Commerce its start. The opening of the Erie Canal only continued the area's growth. Like many early settlements in Michigan, access to water was an economic benefit and often a key factor in location for settlement. In Commerce, it was the Huron River. The river led to the development of mills and milling allowed the town to grow and develop. The first mill, as shown in Figure 6, was built in 1837 and was operated by Amasa Andres along with Joseph and Asa Farr. The mill processed lumber and ground flour. In the early days, Commerce had a growing trade industry

and many businesses thus the name “Commerce” was given to the area. The Commerce mill was the center of commercial activity in the township throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. Eventually, new techniques and technologies used to process raw materials made the Commerce mill obsolete. The mill closed in 1927.

Early Development. Development of Oakland County was slowed due to terrible roads and access to the various farm and lake areas. Like Milford, the Huron River also flows through Commerce and ultimately connects to many of the area lakes. The geography impacted the early development of the town, the numerous lakes meant straight roads were impossible. Early settlers had to maneuver primitive, twisty, lake roads. Twisty roads are still common within Commerce.

In 1842, the first Commerce United Methodist Church was built and even today it is recognized as the oldest Methodist Church building in Oakland County Michigan. Ministers from some of the larger surrounding areas would travel to Commerce once a week to hold services (Michigan History, n.d.-a).

The Community of Highland, Michigan

In 1835, a year after the municipality of Commerce was established, Highland officially became a township. Highland is located due north of Milford, and the early settlers came to the area from New York by way of the Erie Canal. Many of the early settlers were Baptists, and thus, in 1835 the first Methodist church was established. Originally, they worshiped in the log cabin home of Jesse Tenny. The 12 original members worshipped at the Tenny home until a school was built on his farm later that year (Figure 7). Several churches followed the first church including Clyde Methodist and Methodist Episcopal in 1886 and Highland Christian in 1882.

Figure 7

Early Methodist Church

Notes: From *Historic Highland Township, Michigan: A series of photographic tours*, by Eugene Beach Jr., n.d. (http://www.highlandtownshiphistoricalsociety.com/). Copyright 2009 by The Highland Historical Society. Reprinted with permission.

Highland received its name because, when settled, it was perceived to have the highest land in the established part of Michigan. Within the township, water runs both north and south. Pettibone Creek runs south, and Buckhorn Creek runs north; the sources of these streams are only about a mile apart. There are 22 small bodies of water in the township with Duck, Pettibone, Alderman, Highland, Woodruff, and Kellogg being the largest lakes within the community. Like other surrounding communities, access to water was an economic benefit for the early pioneers of Highland.

Early Development. In the early years, farms were scattered across Highland. Two well-known developments were the Stone Rowe house and Grouse Subdivision. In 1854, Squire Washington Rowe built “Stone Rowe,” a Greek-revival house made from native fieldstone (Figure 8). The home is located on the north side of Lone Tree Road and today is a Michigan Historic site. In 1882, J.B. Grouse and his wife created 50 lots in the southwest part of Highland

Station, called the Crouse Subdivision. It included four new streets: McPherson, Clark, King and John. These streets today still have homes on them and are connected to the Highland Station area.

Figure 8

Stone Rowe House

Notes: From *Historic Highland Township, Michigan: A series of photographic tours*, by Eugene Beach Jr., n.d. (http://www.highlandtownshiphistoricalsociety.com/). Copyright 2009 by The Highland Historical Society. Reprinted with permission.

In the 1900s Highland families established family camp grounds on the shores of the township's major lakes. Summer cottages were eventually built and soon Highland became a summer vacation location for people from all over the Midwest (Highland Township Historical Society, n.d.).

Early Economy. Highland was almost exclusively an agricultural region and farming was the main way to earn a living. Early industries included grain elevators and wind-powered lumber mills as well as pickle and vinegar factories. Additionally, in the early years, a tavern, a general story, a blacksmith shop and other buildings made a village area at the present

intersection of M-59 and Hickory Ridge Road (western section of the township). This village was referred to as the original Highland. The present town of Highland, located to east of the original village, did not develop until the railroad was built in 1871. The railroad stimulated growth, and it was then that a post office was moved to that area, a saw mill was built, and a grain elevator erected. This area became known as the Highland Station.

Figure 9

Highland Station in the Early Years

Notes: From *Historic Highland Township, Michigan: A series of photographic tours*, by Eugene Beach Jr., n.d. (http://www.highlandtownshiphistoricalsociety.com/). Copyright 2009 by The Highland Historical Society. Reprinted with permission.

As Figure 9 shows, the Highland Station was once the hub of the Highland. There was much hope that the Highland Station would develop into a village or downtown area, but that hope was never fulfilled (Highland Township Historical Society, n.d.).

The Community of White Lake, Michigan

The final community in Huron Valley Schools to establish was White Lake, Michigan. The Indians gave named the area White Lake Township due to all the lake in the area. They

called it “white” or “clear” and it stuck. In 1836 the White Lake Township separated from Pontiac Township.

Early Development. Originally the township had two villages: Oxbow and White Lake. Erastus Hopkins started Oxbow Lake Village. Hopkins bought 320 acres in 1833 when he moved to White Lake from New York. Oxbow Village was home to Hopkins Grist and Sawmill, a post office, and blacksmith. The first post office was in the village area and Hopkins was the post master. Eventually the post office in Oxbow was moved to the White Lake area, and the two merged into one. In the 1830s, a stagecoach line used White Lake Road to run between Grand Rapids and Detroit. White Lake Road began as a trail for the Native Americans and eventually was used as a stagecoach line to run between Grand Rapids and Detroit. The line made stops in White Lake starting in 1837. This downtown area, once home to a post office, a general store, three taverns, a feed mill, two blacksmiths, a Knights of the Maccabees Hall, and three churches, is now almost all residential. Eight churches exist in the township and two of them are believed to be the oldest denomination in Oakland County: White Lake Presbyterian (1835) and St. Patrick’s Catholic Church (1840) (Hagman, 1970). The original Presbyterian church burned to the ground and was rebuilt in 1948. That church still stands in White Lake (White Lake Historical Society, n.d.).

Early Economy. The early settlers were farmers and the early pioneers owned large farms. The first pioneer of White Lake Township, Harley Olmsted, came from Monroe County, New York. The family moved to White Lake in 1832 and he owned and farmed 80 acres of land in the township. Other early settlers included the Robert Garner family, the Andrew Bogie family, the Ormond family, and the Brendal family. Robert Garner came to White Lake in the mid 1830’s and was an active abolitionist who conducted the Underground Railroad system to

help runaway slaves. He was a farmer who gave away an acre of his land for a burial ground and today that area is still used for the White Lake Cemetery. Andrew Bogie was a native of Scotland and moved to White Lake with his family in 1840. The Bogie family owned a large farm and was influential in the early years of White Lake. Patrick Ormond was originally from Ireland and following the Civil War, he and his family moved to White Lake. Patrick was a farmer and his children and grandchildren became teachers and served in the office treasury. Johanne Brendel, originally from Germany, moved to White Lake in 1853. John purchased the Wycoff farm in 1881 and the farm is still owned and operated by the Brendel family today (sixth generation). The farm in located on what is now known as Brendal Road in White Lake. Due to their contributions to the early settlement of White Lake, these families have roads and lakes named after them: Bogie Lake, Bogie Lake Road, Ormond Road, Brendal Road, and Garner Road (Michigan History, n.d.-b).

School History

From the founding of the United States, a well-educated citizen was believed to be an essential element in the protection of liberty and welfare of the people (Hornbeck, 2017). Yet, precisely who was going to pay for that education? The 10th Amendment to the United States Constitution stated that any powers not delegated to the United States, nor prohibited by it, are reserved for the state. The constitutional stand left the power to create and ultimately pay for the schools in the hands of the individual states.

School Funding in the Early Years

Even before Michigan became a state, the 1835-36 Michigan Constitution Convention created the perpetual funds to support the school, and the legislation was to provide a system for Common Schools. Michigan's Constitution (1963), Article VIII: Education, Section 2, states,

"The legislature shall maintain and support a system of free public elementary and secondary schools as defined by law. Every school district shall provide for the education of its pupils without discrimination as to religion, creed, race, color, or national origin" (Michigan Government, n.d.-g). Yet what is meant by free public education as someone must pay for the expenses incurred by schools; there is no such thing as free.

Even during the early history of Michigan, parents were expected to pay for their child's education. Paying for public education has occurred through various taxation systems. In 1829, a law, known as the rate bill, required parents to pay tuition and furnish fuel. If parents were too poor to pay, children could attend without being charged. When Michigan became a state, in 1835, the first state legislature stated that Michigan school districts could impose taxes to pay for school funding. Starting in 1845, a one-mill tax was to levied on all personal property. This became known as "Mill Money." Yet in 1869, rate bills were prohibited, and now a two-mill property tax for school funding was made compulsory. In addition to the property tax, the state did provide some money to local school districts, and this aid was known as the primary school fund (Tableman, 1951).

Brief Overview of the Evolution of School Districts in Michigan

The organization of Michigan school districts was a public policy issue even before Michigan became a state. The first public school law was passed on April 12,1827, by the Legislative Council of the Michigan Territory, well before Michigan established statehood. This act helped to establish that education was a public responsibility rather than an individual one. Thus, the practice of organizing school districts within a township with the township officials overseeing the design began.

Early on, each township was divided into several school districts, meaning there were many districts with the establishment of the first districts, and in most areas, school districts were not township-wide. As a result of this formation system, even the local public-school district boundaries of today do not align with the boundaries of other local units of government. School districts within Michigan often meander across several local units and regularly cross county lines. Many of the school district boundaries are irregular as families wanted to be close to the school house.

The elements of these districts changed as the needs of society have evolved. In the early days, one-room school was common and there were also several graded school districts that employed teachers. When two or more graded districts consolidated, they were known as union districts. The union district sometimes included a high school. Union districts were followed by the creation of a comprehensive high school district that operated a K-12 program. Districts with six or more teachers were comprehensive high school districts. Due to this loose definition, some comprehensive high school districts did not include a high school. Eventually, a K-12 comprehensive high school district had to include a high school, so the number of K-12 districts went from 1,305 in 1940 to only 629 in 1945.

From the early 1800s to the late 1900s there were also various public acts that defined how Michigan school districts were classified. Some of the acts helped to establish school boards (Primary School Law of 1837), while others helped to establish graded high schools (Public Act 161 of 1859) or even agricultural school districts for rural areas (Public Act 226 of 1917). Early on, it was established that voters needed to approve the public acts and ultimately this type of public voting for school policy helped to lay the foundation in Michigan for strong local control over schools. The various public acts often resulted in a change of district classification,

reorganization of districts, and even consolidation of districts. All these changes caused the number of school districts in Michigan to peak at 7,362 in 1912 and eventually decline to 562 in 1990. (Citizens Research Council of Michigan, 1990).

The Early Years in Huron Valley Schools

Michigan's first public school law, "an Act for the establishment of common school," passed in 1827. The act allowed townships to set up school district boundaries and number them in accord with other districts within the township. The town inspector was the superintendent. In 1828, the Territorial Legislature made it possible for the election of five people to act as commissioners of common schools (Bourns, n.d.). The 1827 common school law was clearly present in the early years of school in Milford, Highland, Commerce, and White Lake. In the early years, these communities had 28 separate schools and all these school districts were funded by the parents of the children who attended the schools as well as other community members. As public state funding laws for schools articulated, members of the community, with or without children, would be taxed to fund schools.

Early School Districts in Milford

In Milford, there were 11 common school districts that opened between 1833 and 1851. The Vincent District, later known as Tuck was the earliest district established in 1833. Followed by Milford Union (1837), Townline (1838), Stone (1838), Ward (1838), Foote (1840), Bird (1840), Welch (1850) and Hale (1851). In 1921, many of these districts consolidated with Milford District #4 and became one large fractional district (Frl. for short).

Tuck. District #6 was the first district to establish in Milford. Rosetta Albright Phillips was the teacher and had 18 students. Some of the children walked over two miles to attend school. In 1843, the school was relocated and the "old red schoolhouse" was built farther south

on South Hill Road, the southern portion of Milford. In 1894, District #6 tax levy was $75.00 and had 15 students. Eventually this school was replaced with a third building and was called Tuck because it was on the Milton Tuck land. Tuck had a larger enrollment, 40 or more students. Yet as children aged out, attendance dropped, and by 1912, it was down to 10. There was no school in District #6 from 1913 to 1915 and consolidation with Milford #4 district came in 1921.

Milford Union. District #4, was commonly known as the "old red schoolhouse," and was built in the Village of Milford on Main Street. The school served the north and south side of town. In 1851-52 a brick school was built on Detroit Street in the Village area. In 1883, the building burned to the ground and another one was quickly built. It cost about $12,000 to build and around $13,000 to tear down in 1970. The first high school was built beside the 1883 school and opened in 1926. It was known as the Milford Rural Agricultural School. In 1922, the Board wanted to build another building and had authorized an $90,000 bond vote. Yet the local voters did not want to pay for that bond as the vote was defeated 311-18.

Townline. District #1, was located on the northwest corner of Old Plank and Pontiac Trail, the southeast corner of Milford Township. This school went into New Hudson. The earliest teacher, M.D. Wilsey, was paid by student enrollment. If he had over 15 students, he received $15.00 per month, over 30 students $17.00 per month. In 1894, District #1 tax level was $100.39 and the district had 17 students. Eventually, around 1923, the school consolidated with New Hudson.

Stone. District # 5, was a log building on Cooley Lake Road near Ford Road in the north eastern corner of Milford Township. The school had a Mother's Club which was unique for that time. In 1894, District #5 tax levy was $100.26 and it had 20 students. The boundaries for this school included land from all four townships that are now part of Huron Valley Schools.

Ward. District #5, was in the south side of Milford Village. Yet again, another solid red schoolhouse was built on Washington and Clinton Streets. The school was used for a church as well as a school. In 1869, the school consolidated with district #4 into one district. The last term was taught in 1915-16 and not until Johnson Elementary was built was there a school on the south side of the district.

Foote. District #2, first held classes in the home of Mr. Allport and Mr. Pearson. Eventually the log school was built in 1840 on Martindale Road, the south western side of Milford Township. Today, Martindale Road is located at the Tree Farm in Kensington Metro Park. The school grounds were known for the picnic area and were often used by the community. A second school, Bourns School, for George Bourns was built. In 1894, District #2 tax levy was $75.00 and the district had 18 students. Early families included the Pearson, Bamber, Robson, Johnson, Ogden, Phillips, and three branches of the Foote family. In the 1920s the enrollment was low so the district consolidated with Milford District #4 in 1921.

Bird. District #3, was located on the farm of Mr. Atkin on the southwest corner of Buno Road and Hickory Ridge Road, on the north west side of Milford Village. The school was named after the Bird family who lived directly across the street from the school. Dinah Bird was one of the earliest teachers. The school had one of the longest running gymnasiums and was called the Fifth Avenue gym. In 1894, District #3 tax levy was $172.04 and it had 29 students. Early families included Bourns, Bucknell, Cottrell, Crawford, McCullough, McLaughlin, Mahoney, Mitchell and Potter. In 1940, by a vote of 16-6, the district chose to consolidate with Milford District #4.

Welch. District #8, was located on West Commerce Road in the south eastern portion of Milford Township. John Welch was the director of the school in 1897. Three generations of the

Sherwood family attended the school. Today Lake Sherwood is a large subdivision in the area where the school was located. In 1894, District #8 tax levy was $71.31 and had 11 students. Eventually, the district consolidated with Milford District #4 in 1921. The building was sold and eventually torn down.

Hale. District #13, was in the what is today Milford Memorial Cemetery in the southwestern corner of Milford Village. William Hale donated the land. In 1894, District #13 tax levy was $110.84 and it had 10 students. In the 1900s the school changed names to the Gamble School as the building was sold to Charles Gamble in 1919, and in 1921 the district consolidated with Milford District #4 (Bourns, n.d.).

Early School Districts Commerce

In 1834, a road called Pontiac Trail was built and connected Pontiac to the city of Ann Arbor. Pontiac Trail went through Commerce. The year prior to the building of the road, 1833, the first school was built near the village of Walled Lake and near Pontiac Trail (Michigan History, n.d.). In the early years, like Milford, there were individual districts within Commerce Township. Four of them within what is today Huron Valley Schools existed: Stephens, Sleeth, Sugden Lake, and Burch. Sleeth and Burch consolidated into Milford Fraction District in 1921 and Stephens consolidated into Huron Valley Schools in 1944.

Stephens. The district was located on Commerce Road just west of Carey Road in the northwest section of Commerce was believed to be built around 1840. The building was described as a small white building without a well. In 1944, the school consolidated with Huron Valley Schools.

Sleeth. The district was located at the corner of Sleeth and Duck Lake Road in the northwest corner of Commerce. Eventually, another school was built farther west on land owned

by the Sleeth family. In 1916, the residents updated the building with drinking fountains, toilets, and other items. This cost $2,500 and was used until 1921 when the district elected to consolidate with Milford District #4.

Sugden Lake. District #3, Fractional District, was unofficially known as the "Little Red Schoolhouse." The school was located on Cooley Lake Road and Bogie Lake Road in the northern section of Commerce. In 1861, Henry Sugden was the director and, the school had 38 pupils. Yet, in 1908 the school had only five students. The school was torn down around 1910 when Bogie Lake Road was widened.

Burch. District #6, was built on Wixom Road (date unknown), near what is today a trailer park. It was a larger school and, in 1859 had 45 students. Burch, Hartland, Sanders, Decker, Stow, and Thornton were some of the family names. This school was the first to send its students by bus to Milford #4 Frl. The school converted a Model T Ford Truck into the school bus. The school was sold after consolidation in 1921 (Bourns, n.d.).

Early School Districts in Highland

In the early years, like Milford, there were individual districts within Highland Township. Nine districts existed in Highland, Michigan: West Highland (1837), Hickory Ridge (1837), Clyde (1837), Excelsior (1842), Highland Station (1837). Excelsior, Highland Station, and Grubb consolidated with Milford in 1921. Lymen closed around 1909 and Beaumont consolidated with Huron Valley Schools in 1946.

West Highland (Tenny). District #1, was the first school in Highland. The school was a log cabin on Tenny's farm on Lone Tree west of Hickory Ridge Road. In 1834, a two-room log building was built and the school was used for church and school. In 1860, the log school was abandoned. An acre of land was given to Mr. Tenny across from West Highland Cemetery and a

new frame school was built. Overcrowding caused an addition in 1870. In 1917, the school was given the Standard School award which meant they met the twelve criteria for schools. The school burned in 1928 and was rebuilt to be a replica of the Bird School. The district consolidated with Milford in 1921 and the building was moved across the street from present day Highland Junior High. The building is still in use today.

Hickory Ridge. District #2, Fractional District, was a stone building on the southwest corner of Hickory Ridge and Clyde Road in the north west section of Highland. In 1910, the school had 30 families including the Eddy family, the Skinner family, the Gordon family, the Jones family, the Charlick family, the Middleton family, the Bruno family, the Chase family, and the Maxfield family. In 1930, the stone school burned and school was held in the Barrett home until a duplicate of the West Highland School was built two years later. In 1921, the district consolidated with Milford.

Clyde. District #3, was established in 1837 and was located on the south side of White Lake Road in the northern section of Highland. The school was large and had a large student population. Early families included the Baker family, the Bullard family, the Chase family, the Disbrow family, the Parks family, and the Wheaton family. In the 1920s and 1930s, two teachers team taught in one room. The district consolidated with Milford District #4 in 1921.

Excelsior. District #3, Fractional District**,** had three different buildings on two different sites. The first was on the Potts farm in the woods and was a log cabin built around 1840. Before 1850, another school was built on land donated by Alexander Findley. In 1874, Mr. Bartlett built a new frame building. This building became known as Excelsior. The school was in the southwest corner of the district. When it opened, it had about 40 students and the first teacher was Mr. Wheeler. The district consolidated with Milford District #4 in 1921.

Highland Station. District #4, began in 1839, at the home of Michael Beach, and had three students: Jonathon Stratton and Rebecca and George Beach. Eventually, a frame school was built on the corner of Milford Road and what is today M-59. 1880, the school added a second room and there were as many as 60 students. The district consolidated with Milford District #4 in 1921.

Grubb. District #4, Fractional District, was located on corner of Duck Lake and Grubb Roads in the northern section of Highland. The school began in 1872, and in 1908 the district altered boundaries to include students from the Lyman District. Families attending the Grubb District in 1912, included the Beaumont family, the Dahn Family, the Davis family, the Dean family, the Calkins family, the Delaford family, and the Lewis family. The district consolidated with Milford District #4 in 1921.

Lyman. District #6, was located on the Lyman farm on Wardlow Road in the northeast side of Highland. The district was established in 1838, and a building was built in 1840. That building was eventually sold to Mr. Blackmom who moved the school to his property. In 1858, another school was built and eventually the enrollment was so small that the decision to have school was made on a yearly basis. In 1909, families attending the school included Deans, Saylor, Ford, Wardlow, Culver, and Slack. The school was closed in 1910 and the area divided between Clyde and Grubb districts.

Beaumont. District #7, Fractional District, was located at the corner of Duck Lake and Jackson Road in the northern section of Highland. The school opened in 1939 and had eight grades. The school had two rooms and two teachers, A. Squire and W. Dennis. In 1946, the district consolidated and joined Highland Rural Agricultural Schools District; later this consolidated with Milford District #4 (Bourns, n.d.).

Highland Junior High. When they decided to improve the road to Pontiac, the route would make the playground for the Highland Station School unsafe. In 1936, the state gave $5,250, and $25,000 was raised from bonds, which went toward a new brick building which eventually became a part of what is today Highland Middle School. In 1938, the size of the building was doubled. Sometime after 1940, ninth grade was added and the school became known as Highland Junior High School.

Early School Districts in White Lake

The first schools in White Lake started in 1835 and eventually the township had eight schools. The first schools had one teacher who covered all eight of the primary grades in one classroom. During the fall and spring planting and harvest times, many of these schools were empty because the students were needed in the fields. Four of the eight original schools were in what is today Huron Valley School boundaries: Granger (1832), Porter (1837), Gibson (1837), and Thompson (1837). Granger consolidated with Milford in 1921 and the other three consolidated with Huron Valley Schools in 1946.

Granger. District #3, opened in 1837 in a primitive log cabin about half a mile from present day Granger Farm on the Mead Lake farm. In 1852, Mr. Granger build a new rustic cabin-like school. Eventually in 1910, the school was updated with a modern furnace and septic tank. Early families included the Dinnan family, the Kennedy family, the Howland family, the Teeles family, and the Teggerdine family. The school consolidated in 1946, and the building was moved beside Porter School on M-59.

Porter (White Lake Center). District #4**,** started in 1837 and was located on Elizabeth Lake Road just west of Teggerdine. The district covered all Oxbow Lake and extended 12 miles. The school was also used for township business and was often referred to as “White Lake

Center." In 1867, the community voted to build a new school along M-59. The new school became known as The Porter School, named after prominent citizen George Porter. In 1858, the school had over 50 students and families included the Austing family, the Teggerdine family, the Bailey family, the Stockwell family, and the Warden family. In 1946, by two votes, the board decided to join Milford. The building continued to be used by Huron Valley Schools until at least 1953.

Gibson. District #5, dates to at least 1881 and was located on Hill Road in the north section of White Lake Township. The district consolidated in 1921. The building was redone in the 1930s and part of the building is the current Brooks Elementary.

Thompson. The school was built in about 1840 at what is today the corner of Bogie Lake Road and Cedar Island Road. James Thompson gave the school a 50-year lease on a half-acre of his land. Early families included the Farrell family, the Thompson family, the Graves family, the Brendel family, the Fisk family, and the Stowe family. In 1934, the school was remolded with a furnace and electrical wiring. After consolidation in 1946, the building was moved by present day Milford High School (Bourns, n.d.).

Summary

The rural land and landforms in all five communities resulted in all the communities first developing as farming and mill communities. In each community, mills were often built along the various rivers and farming, operating mills, and small industries provided the economic opportunities for the early settlers of these communities up through the end of 19th century. Overall, the early settlers within these communities were mainly European and of the Christian faith. Education was a part of the Christian faith. Many of the original 28 school districts were located on local farmland and were built to educate the farmers' children. It was common for the

school to be a multipurpose building serving as churches, townhall, and a gathering place (Bourns, n.d.).

These 28 school districts experienced two major consolidations. The first one took place on October 7, 1921 when Townline, Foote, Stone, Tuck, Hale, Sleeth, and Burch consolidated with Milford #4 Fractional District (Frl.) From 1940 to 1946, Bird, Welch, Stephens, Thompson, Granger, Porter, Beaumont, and Pickett also combined with Milford #4 Fractional District (Frl.). The vote to consolidate occurred to unify school boards into one united board verses small individual school boards working in isolation. In 1946, the second large consolidation occurred when the Milford Fractional District, along with Beaumont, Porter, Gibson, Thompson and Picket all merged into Huron Valley Schools, with one united school board (Bourns, n.d.). Other than seeking a united school board, exactly why the final consolidation into Huron Valley Schools is unknown. Historian Marjorie Bourns (n.d.) stated that school laws such as the Primary School Law of 1837 forced many of these single school districts to reorganize their existing districts to receive funding. Additionally, many of this one room school buildings closed as children aged out of school thus also causing consolidation.

Today, many of the original buildings are still standing and have either been converted into private residences, used by churches for Sunday School, or used by various businesses. Additionally, many of the names of early district names are today names of lakes and streets, or are cornerstone names in their community. Two of the early districts, District #1 West Highland and District #5 Gibson, became part of modern-day schools Highland Middle School and Brooks Elementary.

Huron Valley Schools, Consolidation: 1946–1994

On September 25, 1946, Milford #4 Frl. and six other local school districts consolidated into what was later named Huron Valley Consolidated Schools. The 107 square mile district is made up of all Highland Township, all of Milford Township except a small piece on the southern border, and over half of White Lake Township and the northwest quarter of Commerce Township (Bourns, n.d.).

According to historian Marjorie Bourns (n.d.), the many lakes and rivers in these communities impacted how students could travel to school. Students often had a long walk to school and traveling through the various water ways was difficult. Parents living on the edge of a township could petition to have their child sent to a closer and easier to access district. This created what is known as a Fractional District (frl.). Many of the early 28 districts, including Huron Valley Schools, were known as a Fractional District.

Ultimately, the development of Huron Valley Schools was influenced by the population migration from Detroit to the suburbs as well as the numerous lakes, parks, streams, and swamps, which forced each community to spread out into pockets of development. Consequently, this led to schools being scattered across five communities, and the five communities were divided even further as smaller separate communities developed around each school.

Population Migration From City to Suburbs

The period 1910 to 1940 in Wayne County, specifically Detroit, proved to be a thriving time as the "Big Three" American car industry resulted in a large growth period for that region. The region peaked at 1.8 million residents in 1950. Yet, by the 1950s, the peak population started to decline as de-industrialization in Wayne County moved jobs away from the city and into the

suburbs (Drawing Detroit, 2017). Additionally, after the end of World War II in 1945, White people began to move from racially mixed urban regions to more racially homogenous suburban ones (Jackman, 2017). The end of the war and deindustrialization were only part of the cause of the Detroit "White flight." The 1967 Detroit Riots and the 1974 Supreme Court desegregation ruling also added White migration out of Detroit.

For five days in August of 1967, Detroit experienced a violent and destructive riot. By the end of the riots, 43 people were dead, 342 injured, almost 1,400 buildings burned, and over 7,000 National Guard and U.S. Army troops had been called to help (History, n.d.).

By 1967, the White population in Detroit had declined by more than 362,000. This movement from the city reduced the tax base in the formerly prosperous city, causing urban blight, poverty, and racial discord (History, n.d.). Then, on July 25, 1974, the Supreme Court ruled, in the case of *Milliken v. Bradley,* that desegregation of Detroit Public Schools could not be extended beyond the boundaries of the city school system. This desegregation within the city boundaries only added to the White migration to the suburbs to avoid desegregated city schools (Clotfelter, 1976). According to Clotfelter (1976), there is belief that such racial disparities caused Whites to increase their rate of suburbanization and ultimately increasing the overall racial segregation. McGraw (2017) stated,

> In the years after 1967, Detroit completed its gradual transformation from a city that was white, Catholic and largely prosperous to one that was increasingly black, Protestant and poor, because of the flight of wealth that accompanied the departure of upper- and middle-class whites. The city itself experienced increasingly desperate financial problems, which culminated in the 2013 filing for bankruptcy. (para.14)

City to Suburb Population Movement and the Communities within Huron Valley Schools

Farming, operating mills, and small industries provided the economic opportunities for the early settlers of these communities up through the end of 19th century. Yet by the early 20th century, the many lakes and parks that made up the landscape of these communities also provided a perfect summer getaway for families wanting to vacation from the booming Detroit area. As highlighted in the section below, summer cottages became common, even the Ford family's summer retreat was in Highland, and the city of Dearborn owned and operated its city camp in the Milford Township.

The 1970s were a great time of growth for the communities within Huron Valley Schools. The Detroit Riots of 1967 and the White flight from Detroit to the suburbs that followed resulted in many of these summer cottages becoming permeant residencies as well as a population explosion in Milford, Highland, Commerce, and White Lake. Table 1 illustrates the 1960 to 1980 census data for each of the communities. The data shows that in a 20-year time span all the communities experienced significant increases in population. The population in Commerce Township grew by over 11,000 residents, the population in Highland grew by over 12,000 residents, the population in Milford (Village and Township) grew by over 5,000 residents and White Lake population grew by over 13,000 residents (Michigan Government, n.d.-c).

Table 1

Community Growth in Huron Valley Schools

Community	1960 population	1980 population
Commerce	12,012	23,757
Highland	4,855	16,958
Milford Township	5,871	10,187
Milford Village	4,323	5,041
White Lake	8,381	21,608

Note: From *1960 to 1990 Census Count by for Michigan and Subcounties*, by Michigan Information Center, n.d.-c (https://www.michigan.gov/documents/MCD1960-1990C_33608_7.pdf).

This population growth resulted in many of the lake communities being developed into large neighborhoods. The sections below outline the lakes and parks that exist in each community and how these land features, along with the population boom that occurred from the White flight, further transformed each of these communities.

Geographic Impact on District Development

The lakes, streams, and rivers impact not only the development of the communities but also the expansion of the district. In all these communities, pockets of development occurred along the major water ways. The areas' early pioneers were farmers or mill operators. Yet the early farmers could also be the teacher, the preacher, or the blacksmith. In the early years, log homes were common in the area and often the community would build a log school on the farmers land for his children and neighboring children. Many of the early schools were also used for church services, social gatherings, and voting polls. The pioneer school year lasted only six to eight months and attendance would fluctuate due to children's needing to work on the farm or the farmers children aged out of school. Then, the school district was no longer needed. Low attendance did cause some early districts to close (Bourns, n.d.).

Highlighted in the next section are examples of the various parks and lakes in each community. This section focuses in on how these land features, along with the population explosion during the 1970's, shaped the growth and development of both the communities and the school district.

Milford Township and The Village of Milford: Parks and Lakes

Within Milford Village and Township, there exist three major parks: Central Park, Kensington Metro Park, and Camp Dearborn. Many of these parks are located along the Huron River or other lake areas. The Huron River runs right though the Village of Milford. Aside from the parks, there are also numerous lakes in the area (Hagman, 1970).

The largest park, Kensington Metro Park is 4,500 acres and it opened in 1947. Within the park there are running and bike paths, skiing, toboggan, beaches along Kent Lake, and a golf course (Metro Parks, n.d.).

Camp Dearborn is the only park in the United States to be in another city while being owned and operated by another city. To establish a park for its residents to visit, the city of Dearborn in 1948 purchased 626 acres in Milford, an area at the time that was viewed as a rustic, countryside area. Today, while the park is still owned by the city of Dearborn, anyone can pay admission to visit the park. Within the park there are many ponds, lakes, the Huron River and various camping options (Camp Dearborn, n.d.).

Central Park is located within the Village limits and encompasses 12 acres of land. The Huron River is the focal point for the park and as the downtown area has developed so has the park. In 2015, the Village board adopted a 20-year plan to further develop the park. These plans include larger playscapes, amphitheater, and more enhancements (Village of Milford, n.d.-b).

Growth in Community of Milford 1970 to 1994

The large parks and the many lakes shaped the community development. Large farm parcels were commonplace in the township of Milford. Yet starting in the 1970s, following the White flight from Detroit to the suburbs, the population of Milford felt another surge. As a result, numerous neighborhoods were developed within the township yet were forced to spread out into clusters surrounding the many parks and lakes that made up the landscape of Milford.

Commerce Township: Parks and Lakes

Commerce is one of the "lake country" areas as it has many lakes: Sherwood, Long, Lower Straits, and Commerce. Up until somewhat recent development, Commerce was a weekend and summer getaway for Detroiters because of its inland lakes and serene seclusion. Originally, Commerce was a part of Novi and Walled Lake Schools but in 1834, for unknown reasons, district lines adjusted, and today parts of Commerce belong to Walled Lake Consolidated Schools and Huron Valley Schools. A large portion of the land in Commerce is allotted for recreational use. Over 5,000 acers are reserved for Proud Lake State Parks, private gun clubs, and golf courses (Hagman, 1970).

Growth in Community of Commerce 1970 to 1994

Only the small northwestern corner of Commerce Township attends Huron Valley Schools. However, within this small section the largest lake development in Commerce exists, Lake Sherwood. As shown in Figure 10, Lake Sherwood was not always a lake, but mainly farmland owned by the Castigilione family. In the late 1950s, James Cole and Lewis Easlick worked with Lakeland Development to create Lake Sherwood. The Lakeland Development also developed various lakes in the Commerce, White Lake, Highland, and Fenton areas. The original goal of connecting many of these lakes fell short when The Michigan Department of Natural

Resources refused and developed restrictions to stop more development of manufactured lakes in the area.

Today, as Figure 10 and 11 show, this manufactured lake has about 11 miles of shoreline and encompasses 147 acres on the main lake, 18 aces on the canals, and 95 acres on the south end. When the project was completed in the late 1960s, it included several miles of roadways, including raising the level of two existing roads and 627 homesites. Over the years, Lake Sherwood has grown to include several off-shoot neighborhoods, such as Sherwood Pines, Sherwood Oaks (Lake Sherwood, n.d.).

Figure 10

Lake Sherwood Before and After

Notes: From *Background of Lake Sherwood Development*, n.d. (http://lake-sherwood.org/).

Figure 11

Lake Sherwood: East Arm Ariel Picture

Notes: From *Background of Lake Sherwood Development*, n.d. (http://lake-sherwood.org/).

Highland Township: Parks and Lakes

Like the surrounding communities, Highland has several lakes and one large state park, Highland Recreation Area (5,900 acres). Table 2 lists the names of the all-sports lakes located in Highland, Michigan: Charlick (50 acres), Duck (253 acres), Highland (53 acres), Tagget (50 acres), Upper Pettibone (44 acres), and, Woodruff (43 acres) (Oakland County Lakefront, July, 2017). Duck Lake is obviously the largest lake in Highland Township and the 900+ home subdivision of Axford Acres is built surrounding it.

Table 2

All-Sports Lakes in Highland, Michigan

Name of Lake	Number of Acres
Charlick	50
Duck	253
Highland	53
Tagget	50
Upper Pettibone	43
Woodruff	43

Note: From *All Sports Lakes in Highland, Michigan* by R. Ravary, 2017. (http://www.oaklandcountylakesmi.com/all-sports-lakes-in-highland-michigan/)

In all these communities, many of the lake communities and the parks began as summer cottages for the wealthy. One example is Edsel Ford's summer cabin located in Highland Recreation Area. In 1903, Edsel Ford bought the hilly property that eventually became his family's retreat at Haven Hill. This 6,900-foot hilltop lodge included a swimming pool, tennis courts, horse stables, motorized toboggan run, and beautiful views of the rolling scenery. The lodge occupied one of the highest elevations in Oakland County, Michigan. The early automobiles of the 1900s made rural settings like Haven Hill much more accessible to the wealthy and those seeking a trip to the countryside from the city (Friends of Highland Recreation Area, n.d.). Figure 12 shows the remains of the cabin today.

Figure 12

Remains of Haven Hill Lodge

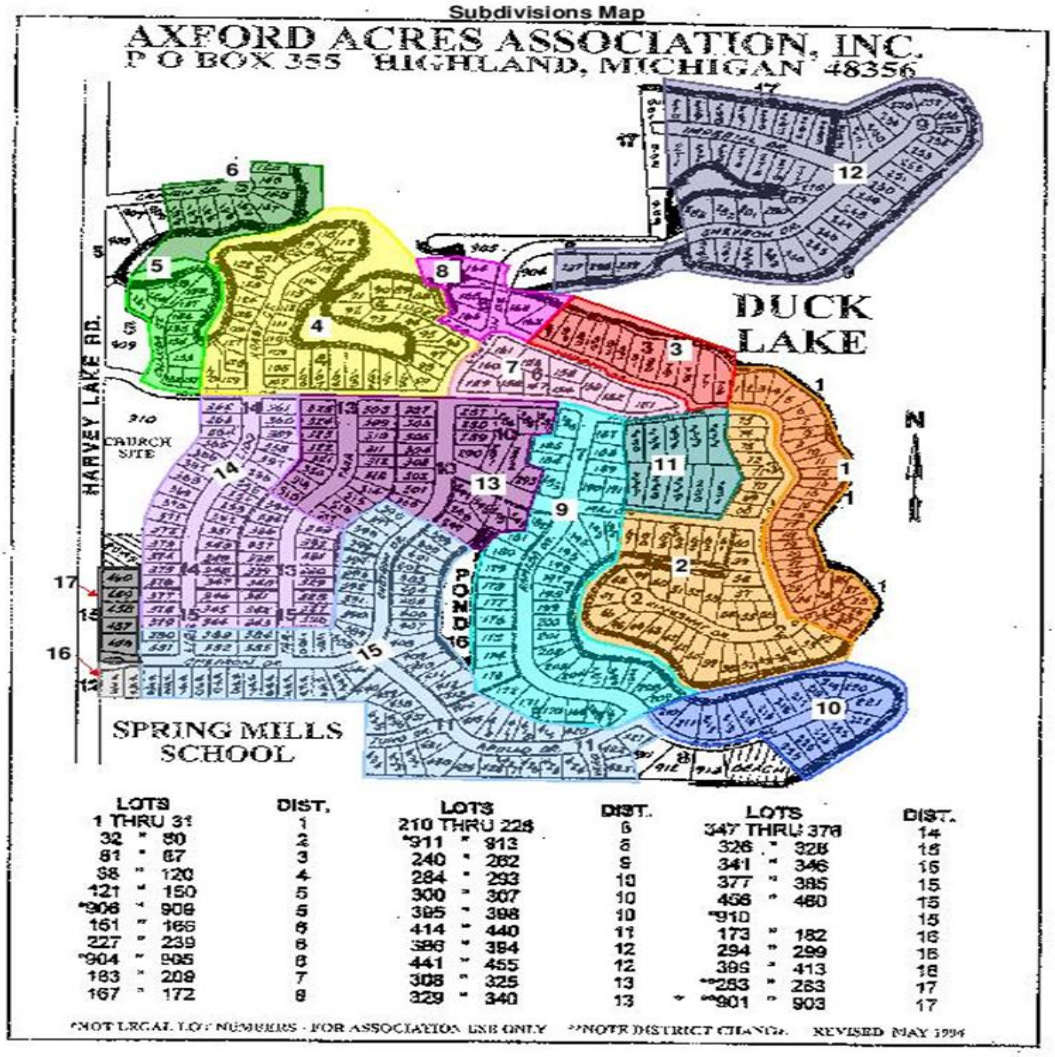
Notes: From Photos of the Lodge, n.d. (https://www.fohravolunteers.org/). Copyrights FOHRAVolunteers.org. Reprinted with permission.

Growth in the Community of Highland 1970 to 1994

The 1970s was a time of growth for Highland, Michigan like the other communities that make up Huron Valley Schools. Many families moved to the rural areas of Milford, Commerce, White Lake, and Highland to escape Detroit following the riots. During that time, over 70 new subdivisions were developed in Highland (Hagman, 1970). Like other families migrating from Detroit, we moved to Highland in the late 1970s. Our home was brand new and was in a new lake-developed subdivision, Axford Acres. Axford Acres was one of the larger 1970s developments, and the subdivision surrounds the largest all-sports lake in Highland, Michigan, Duck Lake. As Figure 13 shows, the subdivision includes just over 900 lots.

Figure 13

Map of Axford Acres



Notes: From Axford Acres Subdivision, Deed Restricted Community, n.d. (http://www.axfordacres.org/downloads/subdivisionmap.pdf)

White Lake Township: Parks and Lakes

White Lake is intersected by M-59, and much of the township's commercial development has occurred along this major east-west corridor. Yet, large parcels of land within the White Lake community have been reserved for state recreation areas and county parks. Indian Springs Metro Park (2,215 acres), a portion of the 5,900-acre state park, Highland Recreation and portion of the

3,745-acre Pontiac Lake State Park is in the township of White Lake. With the two state recreation areas, one county state park, and three township parks, public recreation areas total about 25% of the land use in the township. With two state recreation areas, one county park, one regional park, and three Township parks, public recreation areas total about 25% of the land use in the Township (White Lake Township Planning Commission, 2010).

In the White Lake area, rural residential development and lake living are typical, as the township has 21 lakes within its borders. Table 3 lists the names of these all sports lakes along with their size. All sports lakes with White Lake include: Allen (20 acres), Bogie (76 acres), Brendel (89 acres), Cedar Island (169 acres), Cooley (86 acres), Foley (16 acres), Grass (30 acres), Long (46 acres), Mandon (26 acres), Neva (47 acres), Oxbow (270 acres), Pontiac (612 acres), Round (46 acres), Sugden (67 acres), and White Lake (540 acres). Parts of Pontiac and Long Lake expand into surrounding communities Waterford and Pontiac (Russ, n.d.).

Table 3

All-Sports Lakes in White Lake, Michigan

Name of Lake	Number of Acres
Allan	20
Boogie	76
Brendel	89
Cedar Island	169
Cooley	86
Foley	16
Grass	30
Long	46
Mandon	26
Neva	47
Oxbow	270
Pontiac	612
Round	46
Sugden	67
White Lake	540

Note: From White Lake Township Lakes by R. Ravary, n.d. (http://www.michiganlakerealestatehomes.com/white-lake-township-lakes-oakland-county-mi.),

Growth in the Community of White Lake 1970 to 1994

Like Highland, between the 1920s and 1950s, many of the lake communities within White Lake were used as summer cottages. Yet, like Highland, the 1970s brought a new wave of growth to White Lake Township. Many of the cottages became permanent homes and new subdivisions were developed.

Development of Schools Within Huron Valley Schools

The many parks and lake community developments influenced the location and timing of the schools within Huron Valley School coming on line. Prior to the districts' consolidation, Highland Township School was built in 1936 and once consolidation occurred, an addition was put on and it became Highland Middle School. Following consolidation, several schools were built. As shown in Figure 14, Baker Elementary (Milford), was built in 1950. Brooks Elementary (White Lake), originally part of the pioneer school "The Gibson," opened in 1954. Milford High School and Duck Lake Elementary (Highland) opened in 1957. Johnson Elementary (Milford) opened in 1956.

Figure 14

HVS Schools Built 1936-1956

Notes: From *Former Highland Middle School Students, Teachers Reflect During Buildings Final Days*, 2013 by Joey McClelland. (https://www.themilfordmessenger.com/features/2013/02/21/the-memory-of-highland-middle-school/). *Baker Elementary School Principal Mr. Burkland (50's-60's) in Milford, MI*, [Pinterest Board], by Diana Kemps, n.d. (https://www.pinterest.com/pin/351703052123501846/). *Brooks Elementary School*, n.d.-c (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/baker). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *Milford High School*, n.d.-0 (https://www.hvs.org/schools/highschools/milford/). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *Johnson Elementary Schools*, n.d.-k (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/johnson/). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. Reprinted with permission.

From the start, the actual school buildings were geographically scattered across the communities of Milford, Highland, and White Lake. As de-industrialization of Detroit and the

beginning of White flight took place in the 1960s, many of the summer cottages that existed in these communities became permanent homes and new homes were built as families migrated to the suburbs. This resulted in five new schools being built in the district. As the population was scattered across the communities, so were the new school buildings. As shown in Figure 15, Margaret E. Muir Junior High, (Milford) opened in 1966. Oxbow Elementary (White Lake) and Apollo Elementary (Highland) both opened in 1968. Theresa Kurtz Elementary (Milford) and Highland Elementary (Highland) both opened in 1969. Oxbow and Apollo Elementary are sister schools as they have the same floor plan. The same is true for Kurtz and Highland Elementary. This “sister” school pattern, carried out throughout the development of the schools, afforded each community with their individual neighborhood school.

Figure 15

HVS Schools Built in 1960s

Notes: From *Muir Middle School*, n.d.-p (https: www.hvs.org/schools/middleschools/muir). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *Oxbow Community School*, n.d.-r (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/oxbow). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *Kurtz Elementary Schools,* n.d.-l (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/kurtz/). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. Highland Elementary School, n.d.-f (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/highland/). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. Reprinted with permission.

The 1970s was a time of great growth for the communities within Huron Valley Schools. During this time, mainly middle-class Caucasian families moved from the city area to lake areas that encompassed these five communities (Hagman, 1970). As a result of this population influx, new homes and many large lake communities were built such as Lake Sherwood and Axford Acres. This population boom also resulted in four new schools being added to the district. All

these new schools were in Highland and White Lake. As shown in Figure 16, Spring Mills (Highland) and its sister school Lakewood Elementary (White Lake) both opened in 1974. Lakeland High School (White Lake) opened in 1975. White Lake Junior High (White Lake) opened in 1977. Lakeland High School, White Lake Middle School, and Lakewood Elementary are located on the same complex in the southern corner of White Lake. During this time, the district enrollment reached its peak of 15,000 students. Actually, prior to Lakeland High School's opening, the overcrowding of students was so intense that the high school students were forced to be on split schedules.

Figure 16

HVS Schools Built in the 1970s

Notes: From *Spring Mills Elementary School*, n.d.-s (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/springmills). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *Lakewood Elementary Schools*, n.d.-n (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/lakewood/). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *White Lake Middle Schoo*l, n.d.-t (www.hvs.org/schools/middleschools/whitelake). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *Lakeland High School*, n.d.-m (https://www.hvs.org/schools/highschools/Lakeland/). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright.

The final growth spurt for Huron Valley Schools occurred in the early 1990s with most of the growth occurring in that small corner of Commerce as the community of Lake Sherwood grew due to the opening of the Huron Valley Hospital in 1986. The hospital is located next to Lake Sherwood. During that time, the areas around Lake Sherwood were being developed into new off-shoot neighborhoods. New homes meant more families. As shown in Figure 17, this

growth resulted in Country Oaks Elementary and Oak Valley Middle School, (Commerce) opening in 1993 and 1994. Additionally, at that time, the district comprehensive plan was to build another elementary, middle, and high school complex like the one in White Lake. With that plan in mind, Heritage Elementary (Highland), sister school of Country Oaks, was opened in 1996 and is in front of Milford High School.

Figure 17

HVS Schools Built in 1990s

Notes: from *Heritage Elementary School*, n.d.-e (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/heritage). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *Country Oaks Elementary School*, n.d.-n (https://www.hvs.org/schools/elementaryschools/countryoaks/). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright. *Oak Valley Middle School*, n.d.-q (https://www.hvs.org/schools/middleschools/oakvalley). Copyright 2019 by Foxbright.

School Funding During Huron Valley Schools Expansion Period (1970-1994)

For several years, the funding of schools in Michigan was fulfilled mainly through local millages. Ultimately, school districts that passed millages were able to afford more while school districts that could not pass millages could not. Yet, two state constitutional limitations on the collection of school taxes resulted in this revenue being restricted (The 1978 Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment and Proposal A).

In 1978, Michigan voters amended the state constitution by adopting Article IX, the Headlee Amendment. Beginning in 1979-80, Michigan revenue could not exceed 9.49% of the aggregate personal income of Michigan citizens each year: "The Headlee Amendment required local governments, including school districts, to keep property tax revenue at or below the rate of inflation" (Price, 2012, p. 28). Although the Headlee Amendment put some restrictions on the collection of taxes, schools were still predominantly funded by local property taxes alongside high millage rates. By 1993-94, Michigan property owners were paying about 33 mills for school operations (Price, 2011). This 33-mill average accounted for nearly 70% of the funding of Michigan schools with the state and federal government making up the remaining 30%. Price (2012) affirmed, "By 1993-94, Michigan had become one of the highest property tax states in the nation, and Michigan voters were demanding property tax relief" (p. 34).

Before 1993-94, for about 20 years, Michigan school districts' state per-pupil funding was based on the District Power Equalizing Formula. Under this funding formula, the state guaranteed a set amount of money per child and per mill levied. The formula allowed district voters to decide how many mills they wished to levy to support their local schools through local property taxes. Although the state guaranteed a set dollar amount per student, it did not fluctuate in regards to the district's tax base. A high local tax base meant less money from the state. If a

school district raised enough mills to exceed the state-guaranteed amount, then that school district received no state membership aid per pupil and was called an "out-of-formula" district. In 1993-94, there were 177 "out-of-formula" districts and 381 "in-formula" districts. In that same period, Michigan school operating millages ranged from 8 to 50 mills, and per-pupil and spending ranged from $3,000 to $10,300 per pupil. Thus, most of the school funding for Michigan public schools was locally controlled.

Even prior to Proposal A, Huron Valley struggled in terms of funding. In 1993, Huron Valley Schools was considered an "in-formula" school district, meaning that community voting resulted in local millage rates that did not exceed the state guaranteed funding limit. Huron Valley Schools had to rely on the state to supplement their funding while many other Oakland County school districts were "out of formula" and had local millage rates above the state funding ceiling. Under this local funding system, Huron Valley Schools ranked 24 out of 28 Oakland County Schools in terms of school funding.

In 1993, Huron Valley Schools received $5,089 per student. The state used this amount to determine if the district was to be held harmless from Proposal A. For a school district to be held harmless from Proposal A, their per pupil funding had to be at $6,500 or higher; Huron Valley Schools missed the cut off by about $1,400 per child (Huron Valley Schools, n.d.-h). A factor that continues to put the district at the state minimum in terms of school funding.

Proposal A: 1994-Present Day

Under the centralized funding structure of Proposal A, schools are paid a set foundation allowance. This, state determined, foundation allowance is based on a school district's student population. Meaning, under Proposal A, all school districts in the state of Michigan receive a set dollar amount multiplied by the number of students attending that district. Ultimately, the more

students a school district has, the more foundation allowance it will receive from the state of Michigan.

Population Trends Within the Huron Valley Schools

From the 1990s to 2019, three of the communities that make up Huron Valley Schools have continued to experience an increase in residents while in one community the growth has been minimal. Table 4 shows that, according to 1990 census data, the township of Commerce had 26,955 residents and today's data show the population has grown to approximately 44,065 a growth of over 17,000 residents. Milford township had 3,159 residents in 1990 and in 2019 the township has about 16,905 residents, a growth of over 13,000 residents. White Lake has experienced a similar pattern with 10,616 residents in 1990 and approximately 31,356 residents in 2019, a growth of just over 20,000 residents. While in Highland, the 1990 Census showed the township had 17,941 residents and in 2019 it had about 20,172 a growth of just over 2,000 residents. Yet, in all the communities, the average age of a resident is above 40 years and less than 45% of all the homes in all these communities have school age children. (Michigan Government, n.d.-c.)

Table 4

Community Growth in Huron Valley Schools

Community	1990 population	2019 population (Estimate)
Commerce	26,955	44,065
Highland	17,941	20,172
Milford	3,159	23,420
White Lake	10,616	31,356

Notes: From *United States Census Bureau, Quick Facts*, n.d.-f (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/whitelakechartertownshipoaklandcountymichigan,commercechartertownshipoaklandcountymichigan,milfordvillagemichigan,milfordchartertownshipoaklandcountymichigan,highlandchartertownshipoaklandcountymichigan/PST045219).

Present Day Community Employment and Economic Status

Today, health care and automotive are the top two employment fields in Oakland County. Beaumont Health is number one followed by FCA US Automobile manufacturer, then General Motors and Henry Ford Health system, and finally Ascensions Health Care (Hill, 2018).

These county employment trends also play out in the communities that make up Huron Valley Schools. However, there is a divide between the white- and blue-collar level employment among the communities. In White Lake and Highland, there is a mix of residents working at the white-and blue-collar level, whereas the communities of Milford and Commerce are unequivocally white-collar with 86% of adult workforce in both Milford and Commerce being employed in white-collar jobs. Additionally, 45% of residents in both Milford and Commerce have a four-year or higher college degree as compared to 31% of Highland residents and 32% of White Lake residents.

The variation between manual and salaried level work is further highlighted when comparing the average family income and median home cost. In both areas, the towns of Commerce and Milford average are higher than in the towns of White Lake and Highland. This fact is further stressed by the fact that within the five communities there exist six, lower income communities; three are located within Highland, two in Commerce, and one in White Lake. Four of the six lower income communities are on the M-59 corridor. Finally, of the five communities, Commerce has the highest population and population density. Moreover, 39% of that population living within Milford Township and the Village of Milford, live in the village area resulting in Highland, White Lake, and Milford Township being more rural in nature than the Village of Milford and Commerce. The further north one travels in these communities, the more rural the area becomes and the lower the economic status becomes too. Finally, within all the

communities, the predominate race is White with a small percentage of African American, Asian, and Hispanic populations. Irish, German, English, Polish, and Italian are reported ancestries of the people within these communities. All these community demographics resulted in a school district that is void of racial diversity, is more rural in nature, and possesses socioeconomic diversity. Additionally, while some of the communities in Huron Valley Schools continue to experience population increases, the overall population in these communities is maturing.

The socioeconomic diversity is evident when examining the Title 1 at risk dollars (31A). Three of the eight elementary schools in Huron Valley Schools, Oxbow Elementary (White Lake), Highland Elementary (Highland) and Johnson Elementary (Milford), are Title I schools. Prior to closing, Brooks Elementary (White Lake) and Apollo Elementary (Highland) were also Title 1 schools. Highland Elementary, Apollo Elementary, Brooks Elementary, and Oxbow Elementary are all located close to the M-59 corridor. Not only does this highlight the socioeconomic diversity that exists among these communities, but it also reinforces the notion that the further north one travels, the more rural the area becomes. The varied socioeconomic diversity can also create varied demands from the citizens regarding the schools which can place more burden on the school district when trying to meet these varied needs.

Lake Communities in Huron Valley Schools

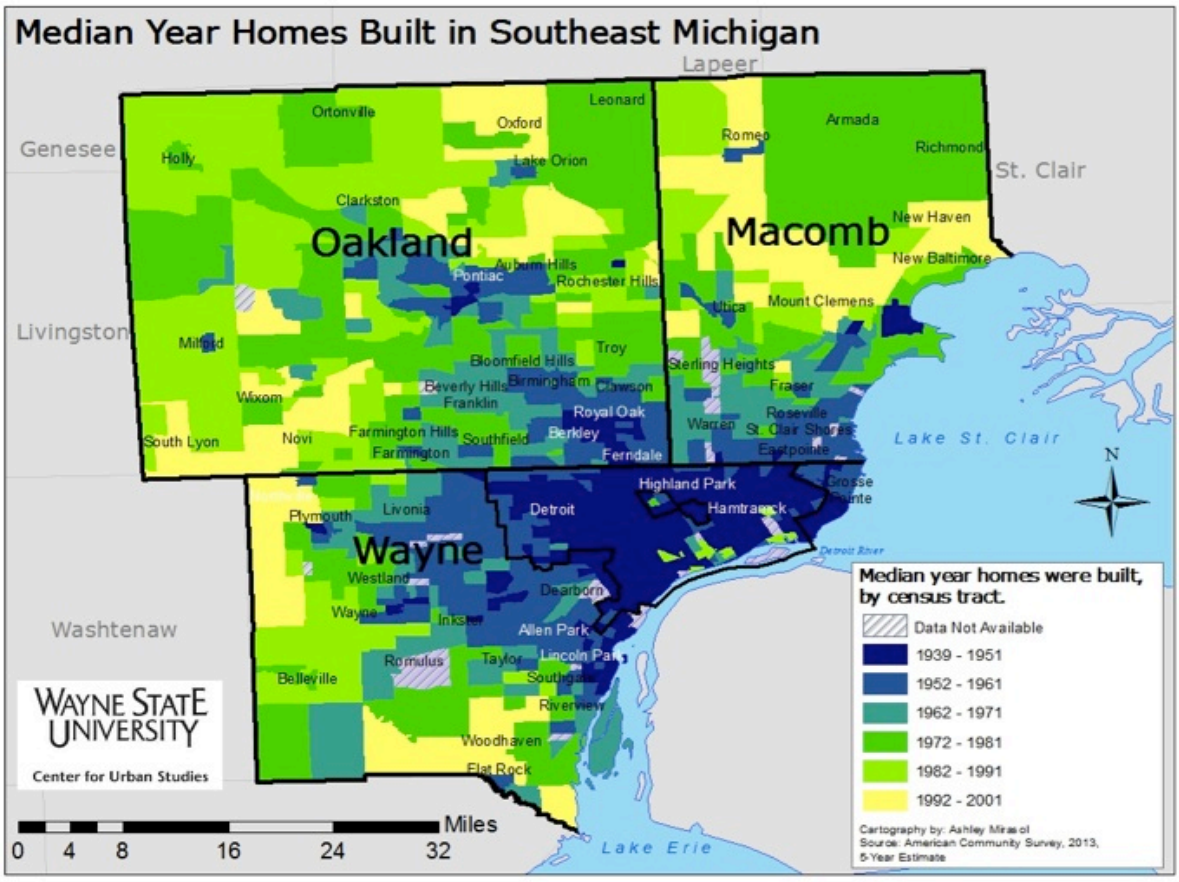
In addition to the socioeconomic diversity, the communities themselves and their residents are aging. As Figure 18 shows, the median home age for the Highland area falls between 35 and 49 years old, and the White Lake and Milford area median home age falls between 30 to 39 years old (Drawing Detroit, 2013). The Commerce area shows the median home age to be between 20 and 29 years old. These home ages directly correlate with the

population boom the area experienced in the late 1960s through the 1980s as well as the building of the various school buildings: four new schools in 1968 and 1969, followed by four new schools in the 1970s and three new schools in the early 1990s.

Today, the Lake Sherwood community is the exception to this aging of homes as it continues to be developed and re-developed. However, several of the lake communities within Highland and White Lake have simply aged, and while some of the homes have been bought and renovated, some have not. Highland Township has had, and continues to have, some small subdivision developments but many of the communities within the area are older. While in White Lake, many of the lake homes began as summer cottages and today are year-round homes. Additionally, in the 1970s and 1980s, newer lake subdivision was developed in the area. As a there is a variety of home styles on the White Lake Township lakes.

Figure 18

Median-Homes Built in Southeast Michigan



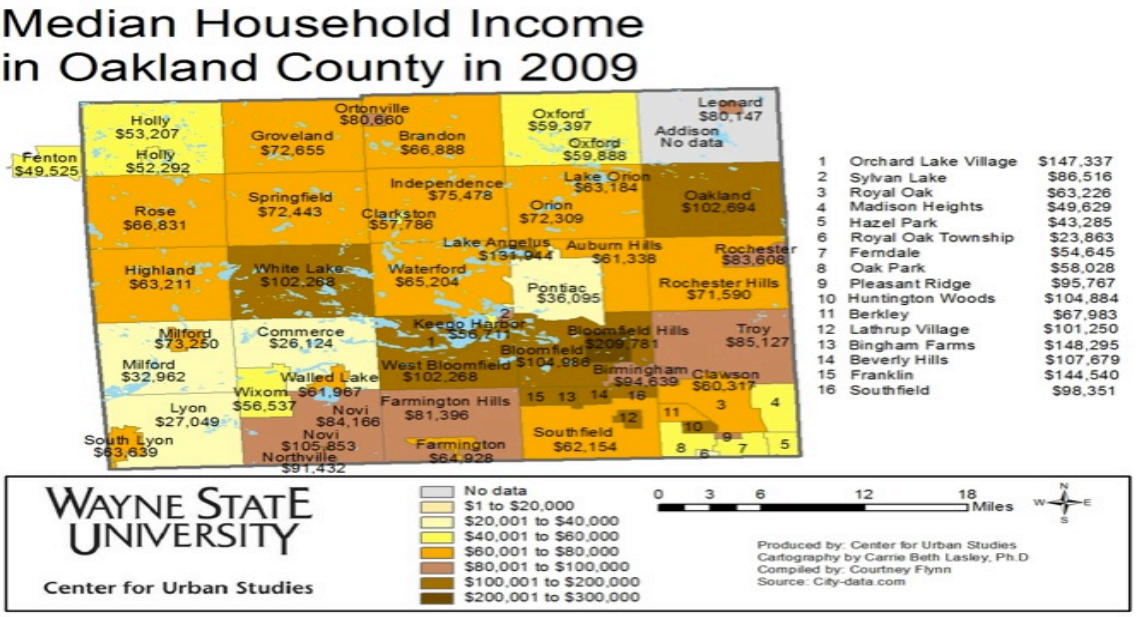
Notes: From *Housing Age Wayne County Home to Region's Oldest Homes*, by Drawing Detroit, 2017. (http://www.drawingdetroit.com/tag/housing-age/).

Typically, communities with aging residents and aging homes reflect fewer school age children. In Huron Valley Schools, this has held true as the district has experienced a population decline for the past 15+ years. Furthermore, the median home values for the five communities support the socioeconomic diversity that exists among the areas. The neighborhoods of Milford and Commerce have a recent home median listing price of $172 to $188 per square foot, while the northern neighborhoods of Highland and White Lake have a recent home median listing price of $164 to $168 per square foot (Realtor.com, n.d.-a-d). Figure 19 highlights the 2009 household

income for Oakland County. In 2009, of these five communities, White Lake showed the highest median household income. White Lake was followed by The Village of Milford, Highland, Milford Township, and Commerce ($102,268, $73,250, $63,211, $32,962, $26,124, respectively) Yet, in 2019 Milford's median household income was the largest. This was followed by Commerce, White Lake, and Highland ($84,970, $83,127, $83,125, $79,834, respectively) (Drawing Detroit, 2013). White Lake's median household income has declined while the other communities have increased. Today, Highland and White Lake have the lowest median household income and both communities are in the northern section of the school district, further highlighting that the further north one travels in these communities the more rural the area becomes and the lower the socioeconomic status becomes as well.

Figure 19

Median Household Incomes 2009



Notes: From *Livingston, Oakland and Washtenaw have Highest Medium Household Income*, by Drawing Detroit, 2013. (http://www.drawingdetroit.com/livingston-oakland-washtenaw-counties-have-highest-median-household-income/).

Communities with a Downtown Area

According to the school of government at the University of North Carolina**,** having a strong downtown center can have numerous benefits for a community because it creates a sense of place, can help to build the local economy, and create a sense of culture. Many businesses prefer locating in downtowns or "live-work-play" communities due to the advantages in attracting and retaining workers and the ability to build business partners (University of North Carolina, 2019).

Within the five communities, the Village of Milford is the only community to have a well-developed downtown area. Today, downtown Milford is locally known. For instance, Huron Valley Schools is made up of more than one community, yet most individuals do not recognize Huron Valley Schools by name, yet if the town of Milford is mentioned, people regularly make the connection. In the early years, as Figure 20 shows, the downtown area was rural. Yet, in 1979, a restaurant in downtown Milford, The Appeteaser, opened its doors and it quickly became a local destination restaurant. This catalyst started a chain of changes in the downtown area. As Figure 21 shows, the downtown area of the Milford Village has evolved into an active downtown area which now includes paved walkways, local shops, and local restaurants.

Figure 20

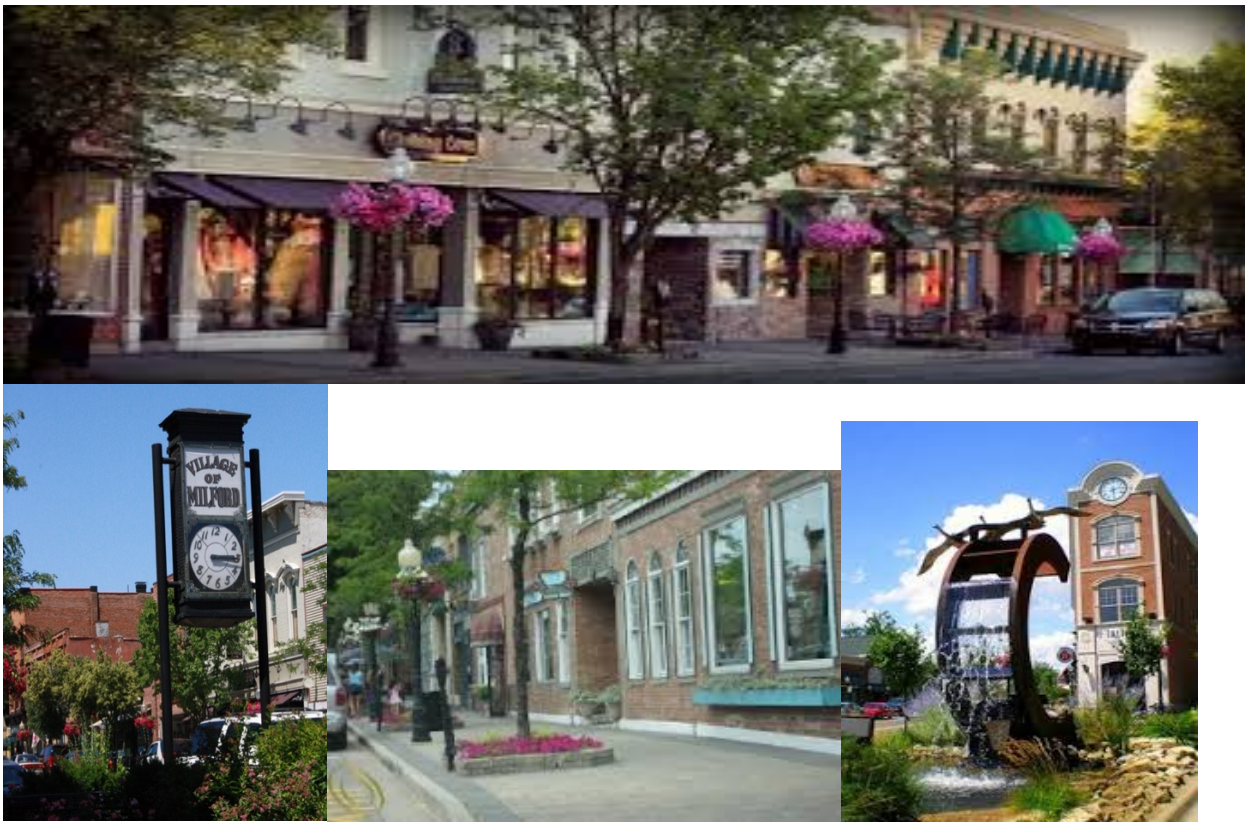
Downtown Milford Mid 1970s

Notes: From *Milford, Michigan my Hometown*, Jeff Smith, n.d. [Pinterest].

(https://www.pinterest.com/spartaneagle/milford-michigan-my-hometown/).

Figure 21

Downtown Milford Today



Notes: From *Village of Milford*, n.d. (https://www.villageofmilford.org/index.php). Copyright 2019 by Village of Milford. Permission to reprint.

The only other community of the five to try to develop a downtown area has been Highland Township. Since the early 1990s, the Highland Township leadership has tried to establish a downtown area. The community of Milford has a developed downtown area, its own newspaper, and an identity that is recognized. Highland Township employees have worked to establish the same for their community. For instance, in the early 2000s, the township leadership established a, "Downtown Development Authority" and for the past 10 years, this authority has tried to turn the "Highland Station" area into a thriving downtown area. Like the earlier efforts, it has not come to fruition. Figure 22 shows the Highland Station area with a sign that states Highland is a "Main Street" community, but as evident from the photo, few businesses are located along the main street.

Figure 22

Main Street, Highland, MI

Notes: From *Highland Downtown Development Authority*, n.d. (https://www.highlanddda.com/). Copyright 2009-2021 by Highland DDA. Reprinted with permission.

In the end, Milford is currently the only community within the school district to have a vibrant downtown area with a local identity.

School Mascot

School mascots can help to create a sense of community, belonging, and loyalty. Communities typically unite around their neighborhood schools, and by bonding around their neighborhood school's mascot a sense of belonging and a common identity can be developed. The united symbolism helps to preserve the notion of a school community having a unique identity and one that separates them from other school communities.

Within Huron Valley Schools, all the schools are scattered across five separate communities, and within these separate communities, each school community embraces their individual school colors and school mascots. Each neighborhood school has a unique identity with a united school community. The nine elementary schools all have their own unique mascot and school colors, as do the three middle schools and the two high schools. Yet, at the high school level, both high school communities not only embrace their mascot but rival against the other high school's mascot. The communities within each high school embrace their individual school symbol yet, this further divides the district as whole. Instead of the all communities within the school district embracing one high school mascot, in Huron Valley Schools, the district is divided by two high schools. This division of school mascots is symbolic in terms of the lack of a unity that exists within the school district and the communities within the district. Instead of having one united community, Huron Valley Schools is made up of five uniquely diverse communities each with its own needs and interests.

Since opening, Lakeland High School's mascot has been the eagle. The mascot at Milford High School has gone through various changes. The school's original mascot was a Trojan. It was later renamed the Redskin. Then in the 2002-03 school year, the new athletic name, The Mavericks, was adopted by the school after the school board voted to change the name. Some in

the community viewed the changing of the mascot as a division between the older Milford ways and newer Milford ways. Longtime residents viewed the Redskin mascot as a symbol of the school community. The changing of the mascot, to some, symbolized the changing of the community. As a result, it became popular to wear shirts stating, “Once a Redskin, always a Redskin.”

In the end, within Huron Valley Schools, there is not one unifying color or mascot theme. Instead, each of the 14 varied school communities unite around their own school colors. The varied mascots and colors negate the concept of one united school district and reinforce the idea of smaller separate communities within one large 107 square mile school district.

Aging Community Impact on the School District

Overall, the five communities within Huron Valley School are aging. As the communities have aged, so has the average age of the residents living in these communities. Older residents typically mean less school age children living in the community. Also, the further north one travels, the more the impact of “aging” is having on the communities. Highland and White Lake townships are the two northern communities within the district. The population of Highland has shown minimal growth over the last decade, the homes in the community are aging, the residential income trends toward blue-collar, and, the entire community attends Huron Valley School. Thus, the community of Highland has a strong influence on the school district. This influence is evident if you examine the schools within Highland and the schools that have closed within the school district. In the township of Highland, there once existed seven schools: Milford High School, Highland Elementary, Spring Mills Elementary, Duck Lake Center, Heritage Elementary, Apollo Elementary, and Highland Middle School. Due to a continual decline in student enrollment, Apollo Elementary, Highland Middle School, and Duck Lake Center (alternative high school) were all closed in 2009, 2011, and 2012, respectively. Three of the five schools the district has closed have

been in the township of Highland. Also, Highland Elementary currently has a student population hovering around 300 students (Niche, n.d.-b). Brooks Elementary and Baker Elementary were both closed when their student populations fell below 300 students. So, the future of Highland Elementary is tenuous. Overall, Huron Valley Schools continues to experience a decline in student enrollment with a large portion of that decline occurring in Highland.

The other northern community in Huron Valley Schools is White Lake Township. Although the entire township has continued to experience population growth, it is divided by five separate school districts: Clarkston, Holly, Walled Lake, Waterford, and Huron Valley. Huron Valley Schools' boundaries are centrally located in White Lake while the other four boundaries include the outskirts of the township. Thus, only a portion of the White Lake demographics influence the school district. Within White Lake, there are four Huron Valley schools: Lakeland High School, White Lake Elementary, Lakewood Elementary, and Oxbow Elementary. The fifth school, Brooks Elementary, closed in 2017 due to decreasing enrollment. It is interesting to note that four of the five closed buildings in Huron Valley School are in Highland and White Lake Townships, the northern section of the school district. Again, this reinforces the pattern that the further one travels in the school district, the more rustic the area becomes, especially north of M-59.

The three southern communities within the school district are Milford, the Village of Milford, and Commerce Township. Population trends in these communities have been positive and as noted earlier, the employment in these communities' trends toward white collar. Huron Valley Schools encompasses all of Milford Township and the Village of Milford but only a small corner of Commerce Township. Thus, the communities of Milford Township and Village of Milford have a strong influence on the school district while Commerce has a smaller influence.

Within Commerce, the neighborhood of Lake Sherwood and its surrounding outskirt neighborhoods make up most neighborhoods falling within the district's boundaries. All these neighborhoods feed into Country Oaks Elementary in Huron Valley Schools. Country Oaks Elementary opened in 1993, and when it did, enrollment exceeded 800 students, whereas today, the school has just under 600 students, a decrease of 200 students (Niche, n.d.-a). While the community of Commerce continues to experience positive population growth, the overall age of residents is increasing, resulting in fewer school-age students even in Huron Valley Schools largest elementary building.

The Village of Milford is completely located with the downtown area of Milford Township. Within these two communities there once existed four schools: Johnson Elementary, Baker Elementary, Kurtz Elementary, and Muir Middle School. Due to decreasing enrollment, Baker Elementary closed in 2012. All the schools within Milford are in the Village boundaries and therefore include student walk zones.

Until the late 1980s, much of Milford was a rural farm community and homes were located on larger plots of land (Figure 23). In the 1990s, the downtown area of Milford was developed into a destination spot and with this development the entire Milford community began to attract various home developments. Historic downtown homes were refurbished and larger homes were built on large parcels of land (Figure 23 and Figure 24). Today, many of the homes in the township are still located on larger pieces of land or in a neighborhood that was created when the farmland was sold to be developed. Yet, within the Village area, the homes are closer together and cluster style homes are being built (Figure 24).

Figure 23

Typical Milford Township large parcel home

Notes: From *Realtor.com*, n.d.-c. Brooked by Coldwell Banker, Ann Arbor. (Retrieved on August 1, 2019 from: https://www.realtor.com). Copyright 1995-2021 by National Association of Realtors.

Figure 24

Today's Village Historical Home and Cluster Home

Notes: From *Realtor*.com, n.d.-c. Brooked by Coldwell Banker, Ann Arbor. (Retrieved on August 1, 2019 from: https://www.realtor.com). Copyright 1995-2021 by National Association of Realtors.

As Milford evolves, there continues to be a struggle between the older farm community and the newer residents who want the small town feel but with larger community amenities. The older Milford residents tend to value the older large farm community and newer residents tend to value a small-town community neighborhood (Hagman, 1970). This value struggle was recently

highlighted when the village of Milford allowed cluster homes to be developed in the downtown area (home on right in Figure 24). This type of zoning did not align with the township of Milford. The township requires one and half acres to build a home. In the spring of 2019, the local newspaper, Milford Hometown Life, reported that the zoning board unanimously declined a proposal to rezone 80 acres to build 121 homes which would cut the zoning to 11,200 square feet (Susan Bromley, 2019). As Figure 25 shows, members of the community supported the denial of the rezoning wanting the community to stick to "The Master Plan." This value struggle influences the student population in Huron Valley Schools. Homes on larger parcels of land result in few homes and fewer students. Fewer homes, on top of the overall decreasing enrollment, compound the loss of students Huron Valley has and continues to experience.

Figure 25

Lawn Sign in Milford

Notes: From *Milford Township Recommends Denial for Rezoning for 121 Homes, New Development Plan Coming,* by Bromley, S., 2019. *(*https://www.hometownlife.com/story/news/local/milford/2019/04/26/milford-twp-recommends-denial-rezoning-80-acres-121-homes/3587085002/)

Additionally, residents living in the Village area pay not only Milford Township property taxes, but also an additional Village property tax. The township property tax rate is 31.4714 whereas the Village tax rate is 39.197 (7.7 % more). Thus, a home with a taxable value of

$350,000 will pay about $11,200 per year to live in the township or about $14,000 per year to live in the village area (Charter Township of Milford, Michigan, n.d.).

Yet, with the shift to a new funding formula for schools in 1993, these community characteristics, along with the school funding formula, continue to significantly impact the funding of Huron Valley Schools. Under Proposal A, these high tax rates do not equate to more financial support to Huron Valley Schools. Regardless of what residents pay in taxes, the district's foundation allowance is still at the state minimum.

Michigan School Funding

Until 1993, Michigan schools were funded mainly through local millages and not based on student enrollment. Much of this type of funding system relied on set millage rates for property taxes. Additionally, under the formula funding structure, inequities among school districts only continued to grow, and millage elections were failing due to frustration with high property taxes (Lockwood, 2002).

In Huron Valley Schools, this millage-based funding system was in place during the district's large population boom. The 1970s and 1980s were a time of great growth for the all the communities that make up Huron Valley Schools as well as the district itself. During this time, millages were being approved to support the school district as evident by the building of seven new Huron Valley school buildings, including one new high school.

Yet, at the state level, this funding range created a taxpayer equity issue and a severe educational equity problem, too (Price, 2012). The high tax issue came to a head in the Kalkaska School District where voters' repeated rejection of a millage renewal resulted in the district closing mid-year on March 15, 1995 (Addonizio & Kearney, 2012). This mid-year closing made

it clear that the state per-pupil minimum was not enough without supplemental millage for the community. The funding structure for Michigan Public Schools needed to be changed.

Proposal A

On March 15, 1994, voters overwhelmingly passed Proposal A (Price, 2012). This proposal not only revamped how Michigan Public Schools would be funded but also added state-controlled, educational reform.

Dawsey (2014) highlighted the three fundamental changes from Proposal A. First, the proposal eliminated the use of local property taxes as a source of school funding and created a new state education tax. Michigan is one of the only states in the United States to fund schools with a state property tax. The state education tax mandates that 6 mills from homestead properties, resident's home, and 18 mills for non-homestead, business, or rental properties, with a .075% on sales price of real estate, would all go to the school aid fund (Dawsey, 2014). The proposal also eliminated the ability of voters to tax themselves to pay for ordinary school operations for their local schools. Voters can still vote on local school bonds where the raised taxes can be used only for school construction, technology, land purchases, or for an Intermediate School District.

Under Proposal A, Michigan school funding is now based on student enrollment and per-pupil payments now paid to each school district (foundation allowance). The second significant change from the proposal is that the state sales tax increased from 4 cents to 6 cents on the dollar with the extra funds going to the school aid fund. The third change required the state's lowest-funded districts to receive a specific level of educational funding, which not only raised these low-funded districts' amounts but closed the funding gap between districts. Yet, the school districts where local taxpayers contributed more than the Proposal A established $6,500 per-pupil

foundation allowance were held harmless from Proposal A. To avoid massive cuts under the per-pupil funding, these higher socioeconomic districts could continue to pay additional local property taxes for their schools' operations (Dawsey, 2014). When Proposal A passed, 52 of the 554 public school districts had the highest per-pupil revenue due to higher property values. Under Section 20j, these districts could be "Hold Harmless Districts" (Bessette, 2006).

When Proposal A passed, there was over a three to one funding disparity between the highest and lowest per-pupil funding ($10,300 in Bloomfield Hills and $3,200 in Onaway). To prevent a complete rollback of spending for the high funded districts, legislators enacted a compromise. The compromise used the 1993-94 school year as the benchmark year. All districts below $4,200 per student in 1993-1994 were moved to that level for the 1994-95 school year. Districts between $4,200 and $6,500 remained at that level and would receive an increase from the state for the 1994-95 school year. The 52 districts which exceeded the $6,500 per-pupil funding in 1993-94 could ask their local voters to fund the difference through hold harmless mills on residential property for school funding. All 52 districts successfully passed the additional tax. These districts, and only these districts were, and continue to be, "held harmless" from Proposal A (Price, 2012). Of the 28 public school districts in Oakland County, Michigan, 12 of them are hold harmless districts. In the end, Proposal A set a one-size-fits-all per-pupil funding for all districts except the hold harmless districts. Huron Valley Schools was not held harmless from Proposal A. In addition to moving from a local to centrally controlled funding system for school districts, Proposal A, also included new school choice measures for families.

Schools of Choice (SOC) and Charter Schools

The passage of Proposal A included the option for parents to "school of choice" their children to schools beyond their immediate neighborhood and to allow entrepreneurs, including

private companies, to convert schools that are “chartered” by agents of the state. Those supporting this measure argue that “if schools must compete with one another for students and dollars, they are likely to be more attentive to what parents want” (Arsen, 2019, p. 13).

Before 1994, school districts were funded from local property taxes. The revenue raised by each district belonged to the local school district. Since 1994, and the passage of Proposal A, the revenues associated with a student no longer belongs to the district where the child resides. The revenues can be taken to any public school in the state (Arsen, 2019). Furthermore, under Proposal A, school districts can decide whether to open themselves to non-resident students. A district cannot stop a student from attending another school district, but it can decide if it wants to open the district up to the school of choice option.

Schools of choice and charter schools created a whole new way for Michigan parents to decide where to send their children to school. Under Proposal A, a child is no longer mandated to attend their local community school; they have a choice.

According to the Oakland County Schools web page, 25 of the 28 districts within Oakland County Michigan offer Schools of Choice enrollment for the 2018-19 school year. Rochester Schools, Bloomfield Schools, and Novi Community School districts do not offer any school of choice enrollment. Bloomfield and Novi are hold harmless districts while Rochester is not (Oakland Schools, n.d.).

Under Proposal A, student enrollment is critical as schools receive funding based on the number of students enrolled in their district. Therefore, both schools of choice and charter schools have the potential to impact school enrollment positively or negatively. Every public school in Michigan receives a set dollar amount for every student. School districts where student enrollment is declining, like Huron Valley Schools, are negatively impacted.

Huron Valley Schools Funding Under Proposal A

Since the passing of Proposal A (1994), Huron Valley Schools has funded their educational programing through state foundation allowances, federal title dollars, civic based bond taxes, and supplemental funding systems. The paragraphs below review each of these different funding structures in detail.

State Foundation Funding

Prior to Proposal A, school districts in the state of Michigan earned most of their money from local property taxes. Because communities varied in their tax base, income development, and their willingness to pass a millage, each school district varied in their level of funding. A school district's financial position could be determined by examining (a) the number of mills a district levied, (b) the size of the district's tax base, and (c) the number of pupils the money had to support. In the 1990s, Huron Valley Schools had over 12,000 students and millages were being passed to support the building of new buildings. Yet the district was still an "in-formula" school district, meaning that while millage votes were being supported by the local voters, the district millage rate did not exceed the state funding guarantee. So the district still received from the state the guaranteed dollar amount for each mill levied. Huron Valley Schools needed state funding support to operate as the local taxes were still not enough.

Under the millage-based funding system, the local property tax dollars belonged to the local school district. As a result, the local tax base level determined how much funding was afforded to the local school districts. This funding system created not only what was perceived as tax overload but also a three to one funding disparity between the highest and lowest tax bases, resulting in the highest-funded district's per pupil allowance being at $10,300 and the lowest-funded district's per pupil allowance being at $3,200 (Price, 2012). In 1993, the year prior to the

implementation of Proposal A, Huron Valley Schools was receiving $5,089 per pupil, representing the middle of the funding range for that time. Historically, the socioeconomic status of the communities within the district has varied, and the 1993 mid-range tax base reflected the variation that exist even then.

Proposal A was designed to change these discrepancies by exchanging property taxes for sales taxes, resulting in a centralization of distribution and giving all schools the same amount. Additionally, the funding was to be based on a per pupil funding ratio. Thus, the more students the district had, the more funding the district would receive. Proposal A did not take into consideration the notion of equity in terms of providing more dollars to support disadvantaged or special education students. All students were weighted equally. Since the mid 1990s, Huron Valley Schools has experienced a decline in student enrollment, has consistently aligned with the state average of poverty students, and is above the state average in terms of students needing IEP's (state average 12% and HVS average 39%) (Huron Valley Schools, n.d.-g). These budge restraint trends have meant less state funding and minimal supplemental funding to educate the at-risk population in Huron Valley Schools.

Prior to Proposal A, student enrollment minimally impacted a district's budgets as a district's income came from local property taxes. Today, under Proposal A, a school district's foundation allowance is built on a per pupil standard. Before implementing Proposal A, the state legislation had to establish a per pupil amount. Using the 1993-94 school year, the year prior to the implementation of Proposal A, the legislators calculated each district's per pupil revenue. This calculation revealed a large gap between school districts ($3,000 per child to over $10,000 per child). Huron Valley School's 1993-94 per pupil amount was $5,089.83.

In the first year of Proposal A (1994-95), the legislators guaranteed that any district below $4,200 per child would be raised to that amount or by $250 per child, whichever was greater. To receive this guarantee, a district had to levy 18-mills on industrial and commercial property only. After the district collected the 18-mills, the State would supply the difference to bring the district to the total guaranteed amount. In addition to this basic local levy on non-homesteads, local districts could seek another additional property tax levy, which required voter approval. This levy was called the "hold harmless" millage and was available only to those 52 local districts whose 1994–95 foundation allowance exceeded $6,500. These 52 school districts were held harmless from Proposal A (hold harmless or 20j districts). All 52 districts successfully passed the additional tax. These districts, and only these districts, were and continue to be "held harmless" from Proposal A. Of the 28 public school districts in Oakland County, Michigan, 12 of them are hold harmless districts (Price, 2012).

In 1994-95, Huron Valley Schools successfully passed the 18-mill tax on non-homestead homes and businesses. Their 1993-94 established amount of $5,089.93 per child put them above the $4,200.00 guaranteed funding amount but, lower than the $6,500.00 cutoff. As a result, Huron Valley Schools was not held harmless from Proposal A. Additionally, during the first year of Proposal A, the district received only the promised "small increase" ($216.00 per pupil).

As Table 5 shows, in 2014-15 school year, Oakland County's highest funded school district has a foundation allowance of $12,244; the county's average foundation allowance is $8,820 and its lowest is $7,871. Huron Valley Schools' foundation allowance is and has consistently been at the state minimum and the counties' lowest amount, $7,871. Furthermore, 12 of the 28 Oakland County School districts in Oakland County are held harmless school districts. For example, in 1994-95 Walled Lake Schools, the district connecting to the south of

Huron Valley Schools, received $6,952 per pupil, $1,863 per pupil more than Huron Valley Schools (Huron Valley Schools, n.d.-h). For that year alone, if Huron Valley Schools had received the same per pupil foundation as Walled Lake Schools, the district would have received about 22 million dollars more. This discrepancy in foundation allowances has compounded for over 25 years.

Table 5

Oakland County Michigan School Funding 2014-15

Rank	District	Foundation	Rank	District	Foundation
1	Bloomfield Hills	12,244	15	Lake Orien	8,409
2	Birmingham	12,164	16	Oak Park	8,393
3	Southfield	11,211	17	Berkley	8,333
4	Lamphere	10,669	18	Ferndale	8,313
5	Farmington	10,285	19	Hazel Park	8,301
6	Troy	9,195	20	Waterford	8,054
7	West Bloomfield	9,036	21-28	Brandon	7,897
8	Royal Oak	8,998		Clarkston	7,871
	County Average	8,820		Holly	7,871
9	Novi	8,719		**Huron Valley**	7,871
10	Walled Lake	8,555		Madison	7,871
11	Avondale	8,409		Oxford	7,871
12	Clarenceville	8,409		Pontiac	7,871
13	Clawson	8,409		South Lyon	7,871
14	Rochester	8,409			

Note: From *Huron Valley Schools Financial & Pupil Data General Operating Fund,* Business Office, Huron Valley Schools, n.d.-g (https://www.hvs.org/downloads/parent_resources/financial_20150108_113140_3.pdf)

In the early 1990s, the communities within Huron Valley Schools were still growing, but the area was still rural in nature, and the socioeconomic make-up of the communities varied resulting in the districts per pupil funding being towards the middle when compared to other Michigan school districts. The district was not so rural or economically disadvantaged that it was at the bottom of the school funding chain but, one the other hand, it was not so wealthy that it was held harmless from Proposal A. Furthermore, Huron Valley Schools is in Oakland County Michigan where 12 of the 28 Oakland County School districts were in fact held harmless from Proposal A. Thus, when schools began to compete for students through school of choice, Huron Valley Schools was competing with several districts that were better funded.

Student Enrollment Under Proposal A

Student enrollment in Huron Valley Schools peaked in the 1970s at about 15,000 students. Since that time, the student population has steadily declined to approximately 8,787 for the 2019-20 school year, a loss of over 6,000 students and millions of dollars (Niche, n.d.-c). This net loss of student funding resulted in the closing of four Huron Valley Schools: Apollo Elementary, Baker Elementary, Highland Middle School, and Brooks Elementary (Huron Valley Schools, n.d.-g). To negate the financial instability strain created by fewer students, Huron Valley Schools accepts “school of choice” (SOC) students.

In 2001, the superintendent of Huron Valley Schools, Dr. Bob O’Brien, encouraged the school board to allow school of choice. At that point, the district was just beginning to experience a decline in enrollment and accepting students from outside the district seemed to be a positive fiscal decision. Today, 19 years later, about 82.4% of the students living in the district attend the schools (Huron Valley Schools, n.d.-i). While working in Huron Valley Schools, it was my experience, that the geographic location of the school dictated the percentage of School

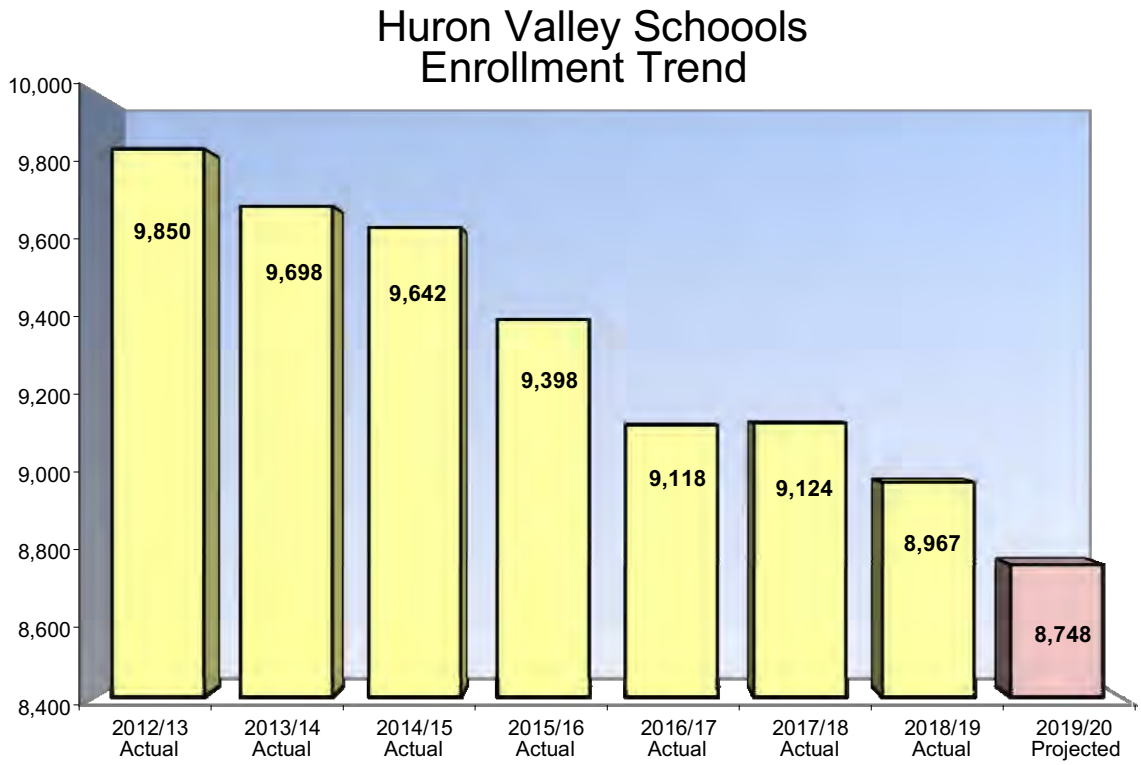
of Choice students. The schools at the north and east side of the district attracted more students than the schools in the middle and southern end of the district. Holly, Waterford, and Pontiac all boarder the northeast section of Huron Valley Schools while Walled Lake, Hartland and South Lyon boarder the southwestern section of the district. In Holly, the high school is located on the northern edge of the school district, making for a long bus ride for those families living in the southern edge of the district. Families living in the southern edge of the Holly School District commonly move over to Huron Valley Schools because the high school is much closer to their home.

Yet, even with the SOC children, Huron Valley Schools continues to have declining student enrollment. The aging residents and neighborhoods along with the push to keep the newer developments more rural in nature have also resulted in fewer school-age children living in the district. Subsequently, under the current state per pupil funding allocation system, the loss of student enrollment continues to create budget strains and ongoing financial instability for the district.

As Figure 26 shows, the student population in Huron Valley Schools has steadily declined to a student population of approximately 8,748 for the 2019-20 school year, a loss of over 6,000 students and millions of dollars.

Figure 26

Huron Valley Schools Enrollment Trend



Note: From *Huron Valley Schools Financial & Pupil Data General Operating Fund,* Business Office, Huron Valley Schools, n.d.-g (https://www.hvs.org/downloads/parent_resources/financial_20150108_113140_3.pdf)

Huron Valley Schools and Title 1 Dollars

Title 1 dollars are federal funds. They are meant to support schools with a high percentage of low-income, at-risk students. The at-risk student is classified based on their free and reduced lunch qualifications. The goal of Title 1-funded programs is to provide equity of educational opportunity to low-income students, regardless of any disadvantage, through no fault of their own. (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Three of the eight elementary buildings in Huron Valley receive 31A at-risk dollars. The three Title 1 schools include three schools and have a range of 40% to 51% Free or Reduced Lunch (FRL) population. The percentage of FRL students within these three schools aligns with the 46% state average. Moreover, these numbers are a reflection of the poverty existing within these school communities (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.-a).

Consequently, for the 2019 -20 school year, Huron Valley Schools will receive about $1.8 million to support the 2,419 FRL students. The English Language Learner population in Huron Valley Schools is low. For the 2019-20 school year, the district will receive $25,379 dollars to support these learners (Michigan Department of Education, n.d.-b).

Civic-Based Bond Taxes

Under Proposal A, school districts in Michigan can enhance their foundation allowances in three ways: sinking funds, enhancement millage, and bond revenue. A sinking fund cannot exceed five mills for a period of 20 years. Sinking fund dollars can be used similarly to bond revenue. From 1994 to 1996, legislators recognized that school districts could longer go out to their voters for operating millage votes. During this time frame, the state legislation allowed school districts to go to their voters for a one-time 3% revenue for improving the operation of the district. Beginning in 1997, the only way school districts could receive revenue under an enhancement millage was through their local intermediate school district (ISD). Such a tax is collected through the ISD and distributed to the school districts within the ISD.

Michigan school districts are local units of government. Under this jurisdiction, school districts can sell municipal bonds. The bond debt is shared by all the property owners in the district and must be approved by the property owners. Local school districts cannot levy more than 13 mills of bonded debt and amortize payments cannot exceed 30 years of taxable property.

Under Proposal A, the state does not fund local school district facilities. Bond revenue can be used to repair, enhance, or build new school facilities. The revenue can also be used to purchase school buses, purchase land, improve playgrounds, athletic, or physical education facilities. Bond revenue cannot be used for salary, uniforms, text books, automobiles, supplies, or service contracts (Price, 2012). Price (2012) affirmed, "Generally, districts that have greater fiscal capacity, that we have defined as high property wealth, find it easier to raise revenue through bond issues" (p. 23).

Throughout the history of Huron Valley Schools, the district has had an inconsistent response to community millage and bond votes. In 2001, the district passed a large bond of $104 million. This bond vote was led by then superintendent, Dr. Robert O'Brien.

The school of choice option created competition between school districts. In the early 2000s, Huron Valley Schools was just beginning to experience the student enrollment decline. To attract and retain students, it was believed that Huron Valley Schools needed to compete with surrounding districts. Part of the plan to stay competitive and attract new families included facilities being up-to-date and offering unique opportunities for students and community members. To stay competitive and achieve the vision a large bond was pitched and sold to the community. The dollars were used to renovate every school building, purchase new buses, make mechanical improvement as well as build two separate pool facilities and workout rooms at both high schools.

Since 2009, when the district passed a 10-year building and site sinking fund millage, which generated approximately $2.1 million annually, the district failed to pass two bond votes. Both the 2014 10-year 1.5 mill and the 2015 2.5 mill proposals failed (Borka, 2015). Both these

votes followed the closing of Highland Middle School. When Highland Middle closed, the dissatisfaction among Highland residents resonated throughout the community.

Following the two failed bond votes, the superintendent of Huron Valley Schools, Robert Baker, left the district. In 2018-19 school year, the district hired the current superintendent, Paul Salah. One of Salah's first tasks as superintendent was to seek another bond vote. In the fall of 2019, the district pursued a 182-million-dollar bond and sinking fund. In October, the voters overwhelmingly approved the vote (72% yes). The dollars will be used for a variety of things including, safety, remedies for costly school building repairs, upgrades to classroom furniture, and an early childhood center. (Bromley, 2019). The goal of the new bond is like the goal of the 2001 bond to attract and retain student enrollment.

Chapter Four Conclusion

Proposal A was established over a quarter century ago and has essentially accomplished what its authors intended, lower property taxes, and narrow the revenue disparities across Michigan school districts. It also shifted power from a local system to centrally controlled system. The 2019 Michigan State University study on Proposal A discussed the notion of equity and adequacy in school funding (Arsen et al., 2019). Equity of inputs is a situation where all students in Michigan receive the same per-pupil funding, which Proposal A was designed to do. Although the equity of outcomes revolves around the notion that it costs more to educate certain students (e.g., low income, special education), adequacy links the inputs and outcomes. Adequacy aims for a financial system where all students attain at least a minimum level of educational outcome. Through this case study, I suggest that one-size funding of Proposal A needs to be adjusted. Students who require more funding to educate should receive more money.

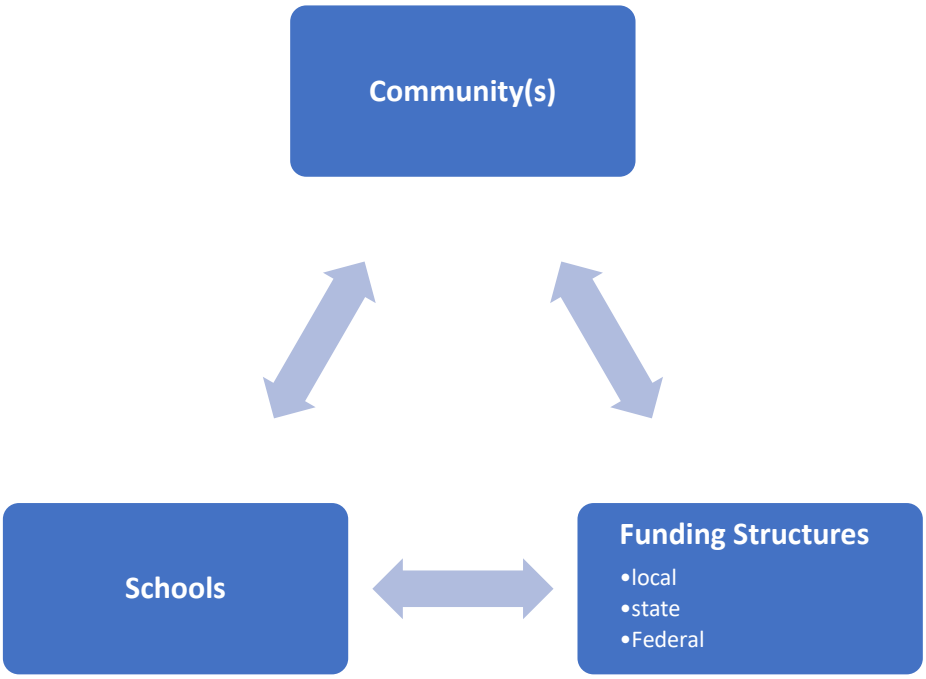
Through this case study on Huron Valley Schools, I move beyond the Michigan State University study. I illustrate how under Proposal A the context with which a school district and its communities exists influences the equity of funding. The relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures are connected and causal. School districts in Michigan are dependent on state funding. Districts funded at the state minimum and have declining student enrollment are negatively impacted. Adequacy of funding for these types of school districts is needed for students to attain at least the minimum level of educational outcomes. State policy makers need to understand how the unique context of each school district and the unique relationship between the district, its communities, and the funding structures matter. One size funding does not meet the need for all school districts.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to understand the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures. A case study was used to articulate how these relationships unfolded relative to the policies and practices in a specific school district, Huron Valley Schools.

Figure 27

Circular Relationship



As Figure 27 shows, the relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures is circular, meaning, each relationship interacts and influences the other relationships. Additionally, these relationships are causal as one relationship causes a reaction to another relationship. Schools are open organizations that exist within a community or communities and schools are dependent on fiscal resources to conduct the business of schooling. Funding structures exist locally, and at the state and federal levels. Schools, communities, and funding structures together guide the business of education.

Michigan's current school funding structure, Proposal A, successfully shifted school funding from a decentralized to centralized structure. In January of 2019, David Arsen, Tanner Delpier, and Jesse Nagel, Michigan State University professors, released an educational policy report entitled, "*Michigan School Finance at the Crossroads: A Quarter Century of State Control."* The report highlighted the fallout of the centralized funding policy, Proposal A.

The authors pointed out how Proposal A was successful in lowering property taxes and narrowing the revenue gaps that existed across Michigan school districts. Yet, according to the report, the principles of equity and adequacy were missing. The question of funding adequacy in terms of what it takes to educate various students in various environments was never a part of Proposal A.

The Michigan State University report was the foundation for this paper. Yet, unlike these authors, who examined school funding at the state and national level, I specifically studied the centralized funding structure at the district and community level. I believe context matters, and policy becomes significant at the point of application. Therefore, the significance of this study is that it is an organic case study of specific Michigan School district, Huron Valley Schools. Through this study, I examined, at the point of application, the relationship between Huron Valley Schools, its communities, and the current centralized funding structure. Additionally, I examined how these circular relationships interact and unfolded relative to the district's policies and practices. Case studies, such as this one, are illustrative of what policy makers must consider when examining policy implementation.

To develop an understanding of the current circumstances that exist within Huron Valley Schools I had to begin with history. First, I outlined a brief history of the communities that exists within the school district, a brief history of the development of the district itself, and an overview

of past and current school funding was outlined. Then, using the conceptual framework, I articulated how the state delegated funding structure unfold contextually within Huron Valley Schools and its communities.

In mapping the arrangement of this study, I organized the chapters to provide a sound usage of the research and to move the reader through the historical perspective of Huron Valley Schools, its communities, and Michigan school funding structures. Ultimately, I wanted to lead the reader to an understanding of how these relationships unfolded relative to the policies and practices of Huron Valley Schools. In Chapter One, I outlined the introduction, the background, the purpose, and the significance of this study. In Chapter Two, I explained the methodology and the research tradition that supported the foundation of this research. In Chapter Three, I used background literature to described the conceptual framework. To help tell the story of Huron Valley Schools, I broke chapter four into two major sections. In the first section, I sketched the history and development of the five communities as well as the progression of Huron Valley Schools. In the second section, I outlined a brief history of school funding and current centralized state funding structures. Finally, I showed how these relationships unfold relative to policies and practices in a Huron Valley Schools. The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the origin, background, and current context of Huron Valley Schools and its communities?
2. How has the shift in Michigan's school funding structures unfolded relative to the policies and practices of Huron Valley Schools?

Research Method

This study was a qualitative case study of a single school district in Southeastern Michigan. I utilized the structures of organizational theory to guide the critical analysis of all collected data.

As the researcher, I used my conceptual framework to guide my review of all collected data. Huron Valley Schools has its own organizational and cultural environments. By using the elements of the organizational settings as investigative procedures, I was able to frame my thinking to describe the causal relationship that exists between the school district, the communities, and the funding structures relative to the policies and practices in Huron Valley Schools, ultimately leading to a deeper comprehension of how relationships interacted with and reacted to one another.

I employed the principals of case study methodology. This interpretative case study involved gathering information through first- and second-hand data. All collected data was scrutinized. This scrutiny encompassed numerous operational aspects of the school district, district budgets, student enrollment, bond issues, and other district wide data. Secondary source documents were also utilized. Secondary sources included books and websites about the history of Huron Valley Schools and all the communities within the school district. Finally, at one time, I was a longtime resident, student, and employee of Huron Valley Schools. I was a teacher and building administrator when the state funding configurations shifted from a decentralized to centralized structure. As a teacher and later as a school administrator, I functioned as a participant observer. My personal observations and experiences were useful in guiding the story the Huron Valley Schools.

Summary of Huron Valley Schools

To understand the current cultural context of Huron Valley Schools, I first explained the origin and background. The history of any community provides insight into the culture that exits today. Below is a summary of the origin, background, and current context of Huron Valley Schools.

The Origin and Background of Huron Valley Schools

Huron Valley Consolidated Schools was created on September 25, 1946. The 107-square mile district embodies five separate communities: all Highland Township; all the Village of Milford; the majority of Milford Township; over half of White Lake Township; and, the northwest quarter of Commerce Township.

As the communities within Huron Valley Schools developed, so did the district. What began as a one-building school district evolved into a large, consolidated school district. At the onset of the district, school funding and operations were largely controlled at the local level. The local community controlled the school funding, therefore it had great influence over the school's operations. The cultures of these communities were organized around the residents' values, religion, and collectively the residents established the community norms and values (Thompson, 2014). The schools were, and continue to be, a reflection of this community culture.

In Huron Valley, right from the beginning, residents opened schools as way to meet the need of educating their own children and neighborhood students. Eventually, to create a united school board and to qualify for funding under state school polices, these small single school districts consolidated into Huron Valley Consolidated Schools.

Within all the boundaries of Huron Valley Schools, there exist numerous natural landforms and regional parks. Early on, all these bodies of water attracted settlers because of

water power. Later, they attracted recreational use and the associated business to support that use. By the early 20th century, the lakes and parks that made up the landscape of these communities provided a perfect summer getaway for families wanting to vacation from the booming Detroit Area. The lakes, streams, and rivers impacted both the development of the communities and the expansion of the district. Furthermore, the many lakes and rivers in these communities impacted how students could travel to school. Students often had a long walk to school and traveling through the various water ways was difficult. Parents living on the edge of a township could petition to have their child sent to a closer and easier to access district resulting in Huron Valley Consolidated Schools being known as a Fractional District (frl.) (Marjorie Bourns, n.d.).

From the conception of the district through the early 1990s, Huron Valley Schools was funded locally, meaning the district had to continually negotiate exchanges with the various communities to ensure needed funded was supported. Examples of this negotiation revolved around the expansion of the school district. The late 1960s and 1970s were the greatest time of growth for the communities within Huron Valley Schools. The Detroit Riots of 1967 and the White flight from Detroit to the suburbs that followed resulted in many of these summer cottages becoming permeant residences as well as a population explosion in Milford, Highland, Commerce, and White Lake. While all the communities grew during this time frame, the northern communities of Highland and White Lake grew the most. This aligns with the fact that two of the largest lake communities developed during this time frame were Lake Sherwood in Commerce and Axford Acres in Highland. Both large lake communities are examples of the lake communities converting from cottages to new neighborhoods or simply lakes being developed into new neighborhoods.

During this time, predominately white, middle-class families moved to the area. The numerous parks and landforms that exist within these communities influenced where the various neighborhoods developed, resulting in neighborhoods being scattered around the numerous lakes. As the communities within the school district grew and expanded, the district responded by building new schools. During this population boom, the district built nine new schools, effectively doubling the number of school buildings in operation.

In general, the communities within Huron Valley Schools began as rural farming and mill work communities. In the 1960s and 1970s these predominately White, blue-collar communities experienced an influx of suburban middle-class families moving to the area. This influx of White, suburban, middle-class families included a blend of semi-professionals, professionals, and managers. Ultimately, the communities evolved into ones that have a range of socio-economic diversity, but little to no racial diversity. Furthermore, the sheer size of the district and the various landforms caused neighborhoods to develop in pockets across the district. These neighborhoods had and continue to have varied socio-economic status resulting in some schools being high- poverty buildings while a building a mile away is not. These social dynamics continue to be the norm in all the Huron Valley Schools today.

Cultural Context

All organizations are created to achieve goals or perform some sort of work. To do so, the organization must interact with various environments. Organizations are influenced by external technical needs which in turn influence the internal workings of the organization (Thompson, 2004).

From conception, Huron Valley Schools, the organization, has been working to unite the varied communities that exist within its boundaries. Originally, the consolidation into one school

district was created under the premises of efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, once the district consolidated into one large district, the goal of educating all students under one united school system became a goal of the organization. Yet, from the start, the 28 smaller school communities that existed across this huge geographic region held varied and conflicting interests. The cultural environment is organized around tasks, values, people, religion, and established community norms and values. The culture of the community is the heritage of the community (Thompson, 2004). Within Huron Valley Schools, each of these smaller school districts represented local cultural communities and each had its own common beliefs, shared understandings, and shared ways of being. Once consolidated, each smaller community within the larger organization, worked to preserve their beliefs and ways of being.

Not only is the physical size of the district a constraint, but the theme of five separate communities existing within one school district still exists today. The district continues to be influenced by the varied community cultural needs all while trying to function under the umbrella of one consolidated school district. The culture of the school district is directly influenced by the heritage of the community. In Huron Valley Schools, the culture of the district is a blend of five various communities and, like the original 28 school districts, each has its own values, beliefs, and ideologies. This point can be highlighted by looking at Spring Mills Elementary. The school was built in the 1970s to meet the increased student enrollment that was created when the 900-homesite Axford Acres was developed. Spring Mills Elementary is adjacent to the perimeter of Axford Acres; therefore, many of the students walk to school, and most of the students attending the school live in Axford Acres. Spring Mills Elementary is a direct reflection of the Axford Acres community. Additionally, all the schools within the district have their own unique mascot and colors. School mascots can help to create a sense of

community, belonging, and loyalty. Communities typically unite around their neighborhood schools, and by bonding around their neighborhood school's mascot, a sense of belonging and a common identity can be developed. The united symbolism helps to preserve the notion of a school community having a unique identity and one that separates them from other school communities. The issue in Huron Valley Schools is that this sense of unity is not only spread out over the five communities and but also is exclusive to each school building, creating a district of schools versus one cohesive and unified school district.

Summary of Michigan School Funding Structures

Michigan schools have a long history of being funded through local millages. This decentralized funding system relied on local property taxes together with local millage rates. Under this funding system, districts were free to ask their voters to support increased millage rates; up to a constitutional limit of 50 mills. As a result, in 1993-94, 70% of school funding in Michigan came from local resources; property owners were paying an average of 33 mills for school operations, and Michigan had the highest property tax states in the nation. Also, under this decentralized funding structure, the state did guarantee some state aid under the District Powers Equalizing Formula. Basically, the more the local voters paid, the less state aid a district received. If the local taxes exceeded the state aide guaranteed amount, the local district received no state aide, resulting in a wide range of school taxes district to district and vastly different amounts of revenue per child among Michigan school districts. Operating millages ranged from 8 to 50 mills, and per-pupil and spending ranged from $3,000 to $10,300 per pupil (Price, 2012). The local funding structure created inequities among school districts that only continued to grow, and millage elections were failing due to frustration with high property taxes (Lockwood, 2002). The funding structure for Michigan Public Schools needed to be changed.

Movement From Decentralized to Centralized Funding Structure

On March 15, 1994, Michigan voters approved Proposal A. This vote effectively shifted school funding from a decentralized, locally controlled system to a centralized, institutionally controlled system. The institutional environment is "characterized by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual organizations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy from the environment" (Meyer & Scott, 1983, p. 340). The institutional environment considers the processes by which structures, including systems, rules, norms, and routines, become established as commanding rules for social behavior.

Proposal A eliminated the use of local property taxes to fund Michigan schools and created a new state education tax. Under Proposal A, every district is guaranteed a stated, determined, foundation allowance that is paid out on a per-pupil base, meaning the foundation allowance is multiplied by the number of students attending the district. Under Proposal A, student enrollment became essential. In Huron Valley Schools, the district was and continues to be funded at the state minimum, and since the mid to late 1990s, the district has experienced a steady decline in student enrollment, resulting in less money.

Student Enrollment Under Proposal A

Proposal A also included new school choice measures for families. Before 1994, school districts were funded from local property taxes. The revenue raised by each district belonged to the local school district. Since 1994 and the passage of Proposal A, the revenues associated with a student no longer belong to the district where the child resides. The revenues can be taken to any public school in the state. Under Proposal A, a child is no longer mandated to attend their local community school; they have a choice (Arsenet al., 1999).

In Huron Valley Schools, the decentralized funding system was in place during the district's large population boom. During this time, local millages were passed as evident by the fact that during this time the district more than doubled in the number of school buildings. When Proposal A passed, Huron Valley Schools' 1993-94 per pupil amount was calculated to be $5,089.83, just below the $6,500 Hold Harmless threshold. Therefore, Huron Valley Schools was not held harmless from Proposal A, and has been funded at the state minimum since the conception of Proposal A. Furthermore, as the communities within Huron Valley Schools experienced a population boom, so did the school district. Similarly, as the communities within the district aged, the district experienced has experienced a steady population decline. These community trends are directly reflected in the school district. From the late 1060s to early 1990s, the communities within Huron Valley Schools were growing, and as the communities grew, so did the school district. As a result of community growth, the district's student enrollment, in the mid 1970s, peaked at about 15,000 students. Since the early 1990s, many of the communities within the Huron Valley Schools have aged and have older residents living within them. These community trends have resulted in less students attending Huron Valley Schools. Today, approximately 8,748 students attend Huron Valley Schools; this is a loss of over 6,000 students since the peak enrollment and millions of dollars.

Interpretations of Findings

As Michigan's school funding structures shifted from a decentralized funding model to a centralized one, Huron Valley Schools was forced to adjust it policies and practices. Below is the story as this policy unfolded in the district.

Financial Instability

Huron Valley Schools is an open organization that responds to the constraints and contingencies of its communities' cultures and institutional demands. The institutional environment of Michigan school districts encompasses the political and legal frameworks, the rules, and laws governing the system. To do the work of the organization, fiscal stability is needed. Under Michigan's current school funding structure, financial inputs to the schools comes from the state legislation, the institutional setting. Schools can raise capital through local bond issues, yet what the funds can be spent on is deliciated by the legislators:

> Because organizations are always embedded in larger systems of action, some parts of the organization must be interdependent with organizations not subordinated to the organization, hence not subject to authoritative specification of permissible actions. The crucial problem for boundary-spanning units of an organization, therefore is not coordination (of variable under control) but adjustments to constraints and contingencies not controlled by the organization-to what the economist calls exogenous variables. (Thompson, 2004, pp. 66-67)

Huron Valley Schools is an open organization that responds to the constraints and contingencies of its communities' cultures and institutional demands. The institutional environment of Michigan school districts encompasses the political and legal frameworks, the rules, and laws governing the system. To do the work of the organization, fiscal stability is needed. Under Michigan's current school funding structure, financial inputs to the schools comes from the state legislation, the institutional setting. Schools can raise capital through local bond issues, yet what the funds can be spent on is deliciated by the legislators.

Moreover, the structure and behavior of an organization is shaped by the context within which it operates (Scott, 2003). This perspective is highlighted in resource dependency theory. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) laid out the theory:

> Organizations, transact with others for necessary resources, and control over resources provides others with power over the organizations. Survival of the organizations is partially explained by the ability to cope with environmental contingencies; negotiating exchanges to ensure the continuation of needed resources is the focus of much organizational action. (p. 258)

Huron Valley Schools is dependent on human and capital resources to survive. In the 1970s and 1980s, the district's financial inputs were locally funded, and the growing communities within the district fiscally supported the district as the residents desired neighborhood schools. Additionally, at that point, the district continued to experience more and more inputs, students. The school administration responded to the desires of the communities, and to the growing number of student inputs by building out the district. Yet, as the years went on, the communities within the district aged resulting in fewer students. Again, Huron Valley Schools is dependent on capital resources. Therefore, fewer students meant less capital and more fiscal insecurity.

The task environment is any external environment that affects the organization's ability to reach its goal; its ability to exist: "The relationship between an organization and its task environment is essentially one of exchange, and unless the organization is judged by those in contact with it as offering something desirable it will not receive the inputs necessary for survival" (Thompson, 2004, p. 28). Capital and students are critical inputs for any school district.

Contextual Factors and District Policies

Unfortunately, for over 25 years, Huron Valley Schools has been funded at the state minimum and has experienced a steady decline in student enrollment. These two factors alone have added to the financial instability of the district, but the financial instability has also been compounded by contextual factors. First, the sheer size of the district results in an annually large transportation budget. Second, the large number of school buildings, along with the physical spacing of the school buildings across the 107 square miles, has resulted a money being needed for maintenance. Lastly, Huron Valley Schools has a higher than average at risk student population, and it costs more money to educate at risk students.

The technical core of education revolves around the abstract concept of how teachers educate students (inputs) and successful graduates from the institution (outputs). School administration activities bridge the boundary between the technical activities and the task environment while protecting the technical core (Thompson, 2004). All organizations seek homeostasis and Huron Valley Schools has sought stability by chasing fiscal security. To combat the fiscal instability created over funding issues, student enrollment, and contextual issues, the administration has tried to bridge the gap between the technical activities of the organization and the task environment by implementing various district policies. Key policies include accepting school of choice students, school board policies as to when to close schools, district budget policies, teacher pay policies, and district bond issues.

School of Choice. To negate the financial instability strain created by fewer students, the district has approved the policy of accepting school of choice (SOC) students, since the late 1990s. Yet, even with the SOC children, Huron Valley Schools still has declining student enrollment. The aging residents and neighborhoods along with the push to keep the newer

developments more rural in nature have resulted in fewer school age children living in the district. Subsequently, the loss of student input continues to create budget strains and adds to the ongoing financial instability for the district.

Adding Schools and Closing Schools. When the schools were being built, student enrollment was at an all-time high. Families moving to new lake community neighborhoods desired neighborhood schools, and the district responded to the increased student inputs by building more brick-and-mortar buildings. The district's approach for accommodating more students, was to add more building.

In Huron Valley, the sheer geographic size of the district is a constraint: "Generally, we may say that organizations find their environmental constraints located in geographic space or in the social composition of their task environments" (Thompson, 2004, p. 68). During the time of growth, if the district had built all nine new schools in one, or even two, sections of the school district, it would have forced long bus rides for some students, and that sense of a small school community would have been forfeited. Furthermore, the loss of social alignment for local school's community would have been hard for local voters to support, and could have resulted in less community fiscal support.

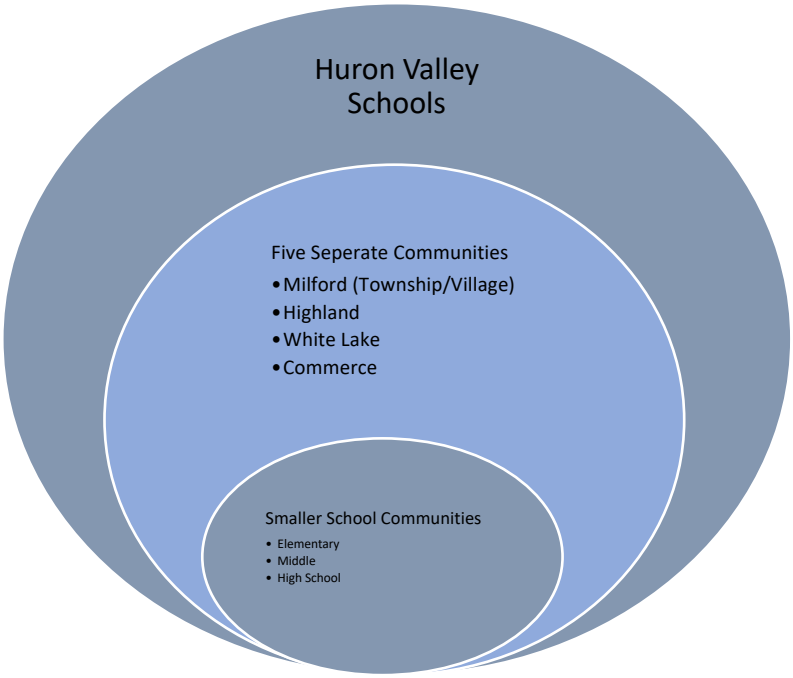
During the decentralized school funding structures, local support meant stronger financial input. The district's approach of adding more school buildings not only placated the sense of a united neighborhood school community, but it ultimately helped the district to secured more capital. As the district expanded and built more schools, the community voters supported the dollars needed to build the new schools as most of the community wanted their own neighborhood school. These factors resulted in nine new schools being scattered across 107 square miles. Also, during the time of expansion, forethought about future student enrollment or

community decline was absent. The district administration and school board did not scan the environment to understand the potential impact of their current decisions on the long-term trends moving forward, an oversight that has proven to be significant.

Today, due to the steady decline in student enrollment, the Huron Valley Schools school board has been forced to close four schools. Two of the recently closed schools have been in Highland, one in Milford, and one in White Lake.

Figure 28

Layers of Communities



The closing of schools has caused community division as each of the five communities have fought to save their neighborhood school and school community culture. As Figure 28 shows, Huron Valley Schools exists within five separate communities. Layered within those communities exists smaller school communities. When the district was forced to close

elementary schools due to declining enrollment, the community impact was relatively small, fewer than 300 children. Yet, when the district was forced to close a middle school, the impact to the communities was larger. The closing of the middle school affected more students, as well as, all the elementary communities that traditionally fed their students to that middle school. The closing of Highland Middle School was met with a widespread community debate. At the time, the school board was debating on closing either Highland Middle School in Highland and Muir Middle School in Milford. Both communities had experienced the closing of one elementary school, Apollo Elementary in Highland and Baker Elementary in Milford. Both middle schools were older and both had declining enrollment. Yet in the end, by a vote of 5-2, the school board voted to close Highland Middle School. This district's decision added to the ongoing power struggles that existed between the communities of Highland and Milford. As highlighted previously, the community of Milford is readily known and has a downtown area while the community of Highland is less known and has struggled to have a downtown area. Additionally, the district's decision directly impacted the three elementary communities that traditionally fed their students to Highland Middle with Highland Elementary being the most affected as the school is located adjacent to Highland Middle. Many of the Highland families responded to this school board decision by leaving the district. Many chose to send their children to the bordering community of Hartland by way of school of choice, leaving the district with even more student input loss. In the end, the enrollment at Highland Elementary has declined the most. Today, its enrollment is under 300 students. Huron Valley Schools board closed Brooks Elementary when its student enrollment fell below 300, a policy the school board, at that time, supported.

As an organization, the district chose to respond to increased student input by building more school buildings. Yet, by doing so, the organization culturally divided even more as more

smaller school communities developed with the additional schools. Although the sheer size of the district forced the decision to add more schools across the district, the foresight about the impact this would have culturally was not at the forefront. Today, the organization, the district, is choosing to respond to decreased student input by closing school buildings. Yet every action has a reaction. The closing of the schools has resulted only in even more community divide as they do not want "their" school closed; a cycle Huron Valley Schools has been in since its conception.

Bond Proposals. Proposal A allows school districts secure bonds through a community vote. Bond project dollars can be used only towards the maintenance or upgrades of facilities and the purchase of school buses. The administration in Huron Valley is continuously seeking to attract and retain student enrollment, and one way to do so is to have updated facilities. Yet the communities within the school district have not always supported school bond proposals. Following the closing of Highland Middle School in 2012, the district experienced two failed bond attempts in 2014 and 2015. The community of Highland voiced its dissatisfaction by voting "no." These failed bond votes left the district to struggle to maintain school facilities (Huron Valley Schools, n.d.-b).

Additionally, in 2001, Huron Valley Schools voters supported a large bond issue of $104 million. The district advertised these bond dollars to keep the district competitive and to attract families to it. One part of this large bond was used to build four pools, two at each high school. One pool was a competitive pool and the other a community pool. In the spring of 2020, Huron Valley Schools was forced to shut down the two community pools as the structures needed costly repairs and the district budget could not afford to support the two pools at 1.5 million per year. While the district focused on attracting and retaining students through up-to-date facilities, it

failed to consider the long-term budget impact. The district did not, and does not, have the capital to support four swimming pools.

District Budget. Since the 2003-04 school year, Huron Valley Schools has cut over 37 million in expenditure costs. The cuts have come from all aspects of the school district's budget, including closing four schools, eliminating student programing, and cutting all staff pay cuts (Business Office, Huron Valley Schools, n.d.). Furthermore, using the districts "savings" has been a recent trend in Huron Valley Schools as evident by the fact that in the 2011-12 school year the district had a $14,951,818 (about 18%) fund balance yet, at the end of the 2019-20 school year, the district is projected to have a $4,190,242 (4%) fund balance. As Arsen et al. (2019) pointed out, the ongoing declining student enrollment does not always match a reduction in cost, resulting in Huron Valley's reducing their expenditures and using their savings to create an equalized budget. This led to a school district that is forced to stay competitive while being funded at state minimum and loosing student enrollment, in essence, trying to do more with less.

Personnel Cost. Retaining staff can be difficult for a school district that has fiscal instability. Also, it is hard for the district to compete for teachers when the adjacent district has an average teacher pay of $30,000 more per year. Furthermore, the instructional salaries for the district rank 274 out of 581 public-school districts in Michigan. In Oakland County, they rank 25th out of 28 school districts (Michigan Government, n.d.-c). Again, the fiscal insecurities of Huron Valley Schools surfaces when it comes to teacher and administrator pay. At the core of education is teaching. School administration works to protect the technical core, yet in Huron Valley retaining new teachings continues to be a struggle.

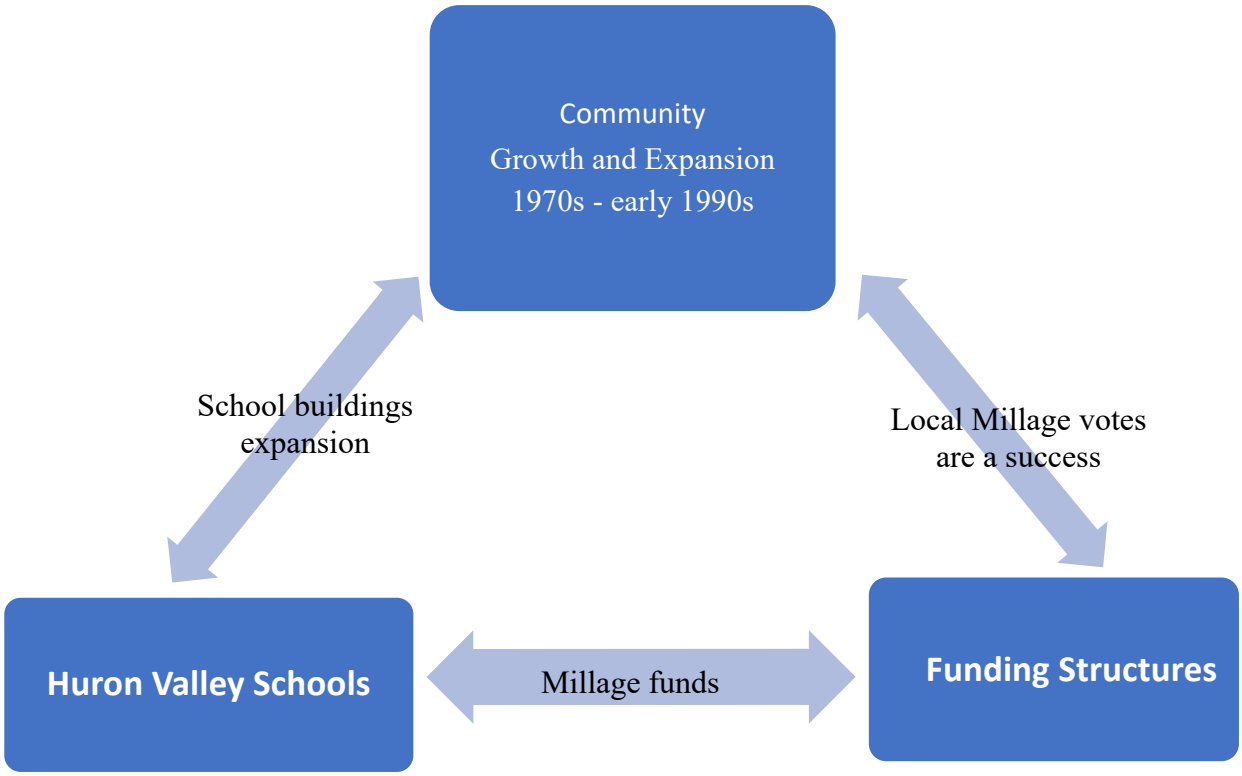
Summary

Figures 29 and 30 graphically illustrate the causal relationship between Huron Valley Schools, its communities, and its funding structure. For instance, families living within a school district's boundaries help to support their local schools in critical ways. Schools rely on students to operate, and these students mainly come from the communities that exist within a school district's boundaries.

School districts not only rely on students to operate, but fiscal stability is needed too. In Michigan, school funding structures tend to come from two sources: local tax dollars and state level funding dollars. Communities can financially support, or not support, their local schools with local tax votes. State level budgets can support schools by allocating dollars to local school budgets. Schools, funding structures and local communities interact and rely on each other. This interaction can be articulated by examining Huron Valley Schools and its relationship with its local communities and the district's funding structures.

Figure 29

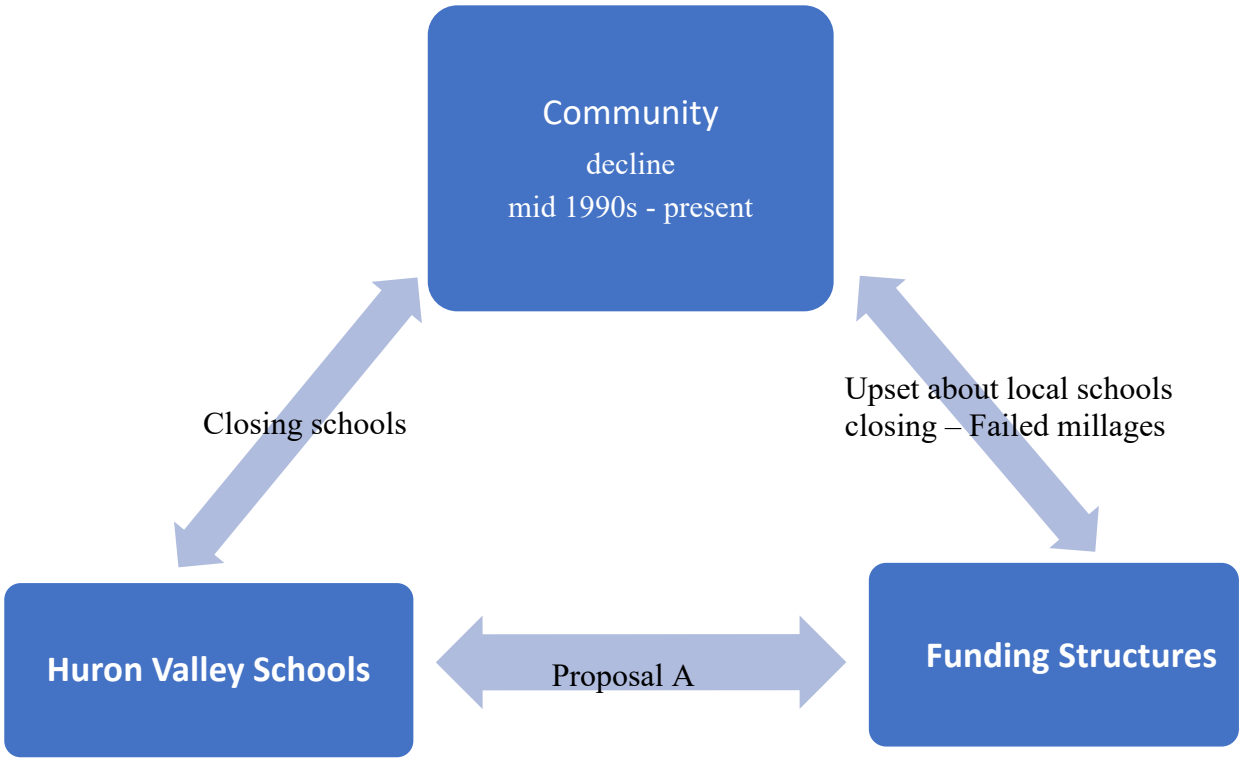
Causal Relationships



During the 1970s and 1980s, the communities within Huron Valley Schools were expanding and developing. As this development occurred, more and more students attended Huron Valley Schools (about 15,000). The district responded to this increase number of students by building nine new schools, including a second high school. During this time of growth, schools in Michigan were funded mainly with local tax dollars, and Huron Valley Schools was fiscally supported, locally, during the years of positive development.

Figure 30

Causal Relationships



Yet, as time moved into the 1990s, the growth within these communities declined, and little new development occurred. As the families aged out of the school district, less new families entered, resulting in a declining student enrollment. Moreover, in the early 1990s, the funding structure for Michigan Schools shifted from locally-controlled system to a state-controlled system; Proposal A. Again, a school district's funding structures directly impact a districts ability to operate as does the vitality of its communities.

Huron Valley Schools has operated under the current state-controlled funding structure for the past 25+ years. Under this funding structure, Huron Valley Schools has been funded at the state minimum, resulting in the district receiving millions of dollars less some surrounding school districts. Additionally, under Proposal A, student enrollment is key. Under Proposal A, school districts in Michigan receive a set foundation allowance and this allowance is multiplied

by the number of students that attend the district. Unfortunately, in Huron Valley, the aging communities have resulted in a 25+ year steady decline in student enrollment (under 9,000 students today).

Under Proposal A, students are capital, and in Huron Valley Schools, this on-going demand for more capital has driven many of the district's policies and practices. The district has tried to overcome this student input deficit by creating policies to attract and retain student enrollment. These policies have not always played out as expected. In the end, to continue to do the work of the organization, the district has been forced to close school buildings, and may still need to close more. These school closings have only fueled the division among the various communities. A division that has historically existed within this massively geographically large school district. These divisions, along with community frustration over school closings, also led to wavered community support in the form of student enrollment and millage votes. Further hindering the district's ability to be fiscally secure. Again, these circular, and causal, relationships have put the district in a never-ending perpetual cycle.

Scott (2003) points out, "One cannot understand the structure or behavior of an organization's without understanding the context within which it operates" (p. 118). Proposal A, a state-controlled, one-size funding system, did not take into consideration the context in which a school district operates. Huron Valley Schools is one example of a unique context. A context that has been in a never-ending perpetual cycle of fiscal despair. So school leaders need to monitor not only their local environment(s) but funding within their task and institutional environments and be clear in how this impacts policy formation in both the near and long term.

Limitations of the Study

The limitation of this study is the simple fact that it was a case study of one school district within the state of Michigan. In this study, I worked to develop an understanding of how the relationships between schools, communities, and funding structures unfolded in a particular school district, Huron Valley Schools. I also explored a deeper understanding of how Proposal A influences the resource equity and adequacy within the context of the school district. The collected data and analysis were specific to that school district, and as such, the findings hold a robust internal validity.

Implications for Practice

In this study I highlighted various theoretical propositions of organizational theory and ones that leaders can use in practice. As organizations, schools are open to the influences of outside sources, and as such, they are a reflection of their communities. School districts are dependent on resources, and this dependency can drive policies and practices. The survival of school districts is partially explained by the ability to manage environmental contingencies. The structure and behavior of a school district is shaped by the context within which it operates; context matters.

Additionally, as leaders, learning to scan the environment in terms of having a pulse on not only the current organization but also the cultural and institutional trends is solid leadership practice. Although difficult, a leader's ability to look at the history of an organization to better understand the context of that organization today is critical to the survival of the organization.

The relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures exists in all school districts. This case study of Huron Valley Schools will allow leaders an example to examine the specific causal relationships that exists between the district, the communities, and

Michigan's current funding structure. These causal relationships exist in all school communities; therefore, the general concepts developed in this study can be generalized to other districts, and can guide a further understanding of these dynamic relationships. Additionally, through this case study, I highlighted how the administrative decisions made in the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, impacted the district today. When Huron Valley Schools was adding all the new schools, if the leaders had the forethought to examine future institutional and cultural changes, the decision to add so many schools may have been different. Current school leaders can use this case study to be reminded that leaders must have a long-term lens, and not just a short-term lens, when it comes to designing and implementing school policy. Leaders need to examine the action and reaction of administrative actions. They need to think not only about the immediate reaction, but they need to think about the future, and the possible long-term ramifications, that may come about due to their actions.

Finally, leaders need to think about the policies and practices at the point of implementation. The leader needs to think about the context of the communities within which a school district exists and operates. All policies have consequences, intended or unintended. Policy makers need to move beyond the immediate need to consider the future and how the policy may play out in a particular context.

Furthermore, the findings of this study would suggest that there are key dimensions that influence the relationships between schools, communities, and funding structures. As described by Thompson (2004) and Parsons (1960), these relationships are descriptive of what defines the nature of the task environment and should be the focus of educational leaders, and potential future researchers, as they scan their environments.

Key dimensions from this case study include: (1) community and district history, (2) life cycle of a district; (3) facility cost; (4) family migrations and cohorts; (5) community and district demographics; (6) upsizing and downsizing trends; (7) resource patterns and dependency linkages at the district, regional, and state level.

1. Educational leaders need to develop a working understanding of not only their school district's history, but the history of the community(s) that is embedded with the district. History can provide understanding for current context. For instance, in Huron Valley Schools, by knowing how the lakes and landforms influenced the community and the school development, a leader can truly comprehend why the school buildings in the district are scattered across the district.
2. School districts and the facilities within the school district all have a life cycle. Additionally, as facilities and communities age, there is a depreciation factor. Keeping these life cycles and depreciation factors in mind when planning all aspects of school budgets is needed. As highlighted in the case study of Huron Valley Schools, older facilities cost more money to run, and as a district ages, home value depreciate student enrollment often declines, leading to possible school closures. Proactively, school budgets should accommodate for these life cycles.
3. In Huron Valley Schools, every time a new facility was added, be it a new building or a new pool, there was an added cost to maintain the facility. Key stakeholders who develop school policy, need to be conscious of these added costs.
4. Monitoring the migration of families and student cohorts is essential. Under Michigan's current funding structure, students are capital and monitoring how the

student capital is moving in and out of the district is essential to all aspects of the organization.

5. Having a working understanding of the community demographics helps the educational leaders to recognize the norms, values, and needs of the community, as well as how the community views and embraces their school district.
6. Monitoring of the community and the district's upsizing and downsizing enhances the educational leadership ability to predict and monitor the need of the district. By monitoring enrollment trends from kindergarten to twelfth grade, school administration can predict their current and future need. In Huron Valley Schools, as they monitored the incoming kindergarten enrollment, they could predict future high school enrollment and proactively prepare for the decline in funding due to smaller enrollment.
7. Whenever there is an imbalance of power, you have a dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In Michigan, public school districts are depended on funding from the state. School leaders need to monitor this dependency, not only at the district and community level, but at the state and federal level. As this study outlined, Huron Valley Schools has been funded at the state minimum for the past 25-plus years and this has led to policies and practices within the district to offset this deficit. Continually the district has created policies to generate more fiscal security. Yet, these efforts have some time to led to a different kind of financial issues. For instance, the district built four pools to enhance and attract families to the district. Yet the pools proved to be costly, and the cost outweighed the benefit, as evident in the fact that the district closed the two community pools in 2020. Educational leaders need to monitor

these dependency linkages and monitor the control they have on district's policy formation.

Recommendations of Future Studies

I focused on a single school district and the relationships that exist between the district, its communities, and the funding structures relative to the policies and practices of the district. Huron Valley Schools is a school district that has a unique context: five separate aging communities and a history of lower funding. Therefore, to further the research, and to gain a stronger external validity, examining the relationship between another school district, its communities, and its funding structure would allow leaders to use their context to examine these relationships.

Conclusion

Proposal A was established over a quarter century ago and has essentially accomplished what its authors intended, lower property taxes and narrow the revenue disparities across Michigan school districts. It also shifted power from a local system to centrally controlled system. The Michigan State University study on Proposal A discussed the notion of equity and adequacy in school funding (Arsen et al., 2019). Equity of inputs is a situation where all students in Michigan receive the same per-pupil funding, which Proposal A was designed to do. Although the equity of outcomes revolves around the notion that it costs more to educate certain students (e.g., low income, special education), adequacy links the inputs and outcomes. Adequacy aims for a financial system where all students attain at least a minimum level of educational outcome. Through this case study, I suggest that one-size funding of Proposal A needs to be adjusted. Students who require more funding to educate should receive more money (Arsen et al., 2019).

Through this case study on Huron Valley Schools, I move beyond the Michigan State University study. I illustrate how under Proposal A the context with which a school district and its communities exists influences the equity of funding. The relationship between schools, communities, and funding structures are connected and causal. School districts in Michigan are dependent on state funding. Districts funded at the state minimum and have declining student enrollment are negatively impacted. Adequacy of funding for these types of school districts is needed for students to attain at least the minimum level of educational outcomes. State policy makers need to understand how the unique context of each school district and the unique relationship between the district, its communities, and the funding structures matter. One-size funding does not meet the need for all school districts.

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