

“Where I Bloomed”: Exploring Teacher Professional Vitality in the Teacher-Powered School

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Dedication

For Ivy, the very essence of vitality.

Abstract

Ample research has identified and sought to understand the problem of high teacher turnover and low morale in U.S. schools. One consistent finding is that teachers' working conditions have a pronounced impact on their wellbeing, sense of efficacy, and career decisions. This dissertation presents findings from a mixed-methods study exploring teachers' work lives in "teacher-powered schools," where teachers have collective decision-making authority (CDMA) to shape their schools as workplaces. Evidence from observations and interviews with 31 staff members at 3 teacher-powered schools coupled with survey responses from 342 teachers in 39 schools is used to characterize teacher-powered schools as a group and support five counter-narratives of teacher work life within them. Implications for *teacher professional vitality*—a holistic concept bridging teacher motivation, commitment, and retention—are discussed.

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	Factors mostly for <u>less</u> independent schools (i.e., HSHR, YLA)	Factors for <u>all</u> schools, regardless of independence	Factors mostly for <u>more</u> independent schools (i.e., Explore)
Mostly <u>enabling</u> factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal advocacy Principal “buffering” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple domains of CDMA Ample non-teaching time Small school size Shared values and norms Intentional hiring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible teaching schedule “Looping” with students
<u>Both</u> enabling and constraining factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative decision-making Contractual stipulations (e.g., pay, work hours) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent of student needs Availability of funding State academic standards Teacher autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus-based decision-making No principal
Mostly <u>constraining</u> factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsupportive district or union leaders Inflexible workload Bureaucratic red tape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test-based accountability Norms inhibiting critical peer feedback Implicit power imbalance 	

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List of Abbreviations

CDMA	Collective Decision-Making Authority
EWA	Elect to Work Agreement
HSHR	High School for Human Rights
ILT	Instructional Leadership Team
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
OCB	Organizational Citizenship Behavior
PD	Professional Development
PDM	Participation in Decision-Making or Participative Decision-Making
PLC	Professional Learning Community
SASS	Schools and Staffing Survey
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SLC	Small Learning Community
SMT	School Management Team
SRI	School Reform Initiative
TPSI	Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative
TPV	Teacher Professional Vitality
YLA	Young Leaders Academy

Chapter 1: Introduction

Education policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in the U.S. have been struggling to improve the attractiveness and sustainability of the teaching profession for decades. Despite countless efforts to influence the flow of teachers into (and sometimes out of) schools, teaching remains a profession plagued by shortages and “maldistributions” (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Sutchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Two major human resource challenges have persisted: (1) high rates of voluntary teacher turnover, and (2) an undermotivated and disengaged teacher workforce. Both challenges are indicative of a more general problem: for too many teachers, schools have simply become demoralizing places to work.

Approximately 16 percent of teachers leave their positions each year in the U.S., with two-thirds of those teachers leaving for voluntary, pre-retirement reasons. Alarming, attrition from the teaching profession has increased over the past two decades, with attrition rates currently being about twice as high as those in countries widely recognized for educational excellence, such as Finland, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Scholars examining the composition of the teacher workforce have noted particularly high rates of turnover among novice teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006; Ingersoll, 2001), with an estimated 40 to 50 percent of teachers leaving the profession altogether within their first five years in the classroom (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). The rate of teacher turnover is higher in schools in low-income, urban communities than it is in higher-resourced communities, in part due to the prevalence of novice teachers in low-income schools compared with those in more affluent communities (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999). Turnover has also been found to disproportionately impact students of color, who are more likely than their white peers to attend schools in under-resourced communities (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Following Ingersoll (2001), I consider teacher turnover to be the combined effect of teacher *migration* (moving from one school to another) and teacher *attrition* (leaving the teaching profession altogether). Teacher turnover may be *voluntary* (i.e., a teacher chooses to resign) or *involuntary* (i.e., a teacher is terminated or laid off). A further distinction can be made between “healthy” turnover and “unhealthy” turnover (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Some employee turnover may positively impact organizational functioning; the introduction of “new blood” or the dismissal of ineffective staff members may be beneficial to an organization’s overall performance. When the negative effects of turnover outweigh any such positive effects, however, turnover is harmful to the overall health of the school organization.

Researchers have identified numerous negative consequences of teacher turnover. Turnover results in job vacancies and shortages that are costly to fill (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016); Carroll (2007) estimates that the annual cost of replacing teachers lost to turnover in the U.S. is over 7 billion dollars. Shortages and vacancies not only stress school leaders and hiring managers who may be compelled to accept under-qualified teachers in order to meet their schools’ staffing needs, but they also stress faculty members who must “pick up the slack” to ensure the school continues to run smoothly.

In addition to being costly and stress-inducing, persistent turnover has been shown to significantly reduce staff morale and deteriorate positive school climate in affected schools (Guin, 2004). Seeing peers leave their positions not only suggests to staff members that more satisfactory work can be found elsewhere, but it also endangers the development of collegial trust and professional community as teachers begin to perceive their colleagues as uncommitted and itinerant (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Furthermore, turnover typically results in a net decrease in teacher experience in affected schools, as exiting teachers are often replaced by novice teachers. Combined with the

disproportionately high turnover among novices, this phenomenon creates a “revolving door” of new teachers in some schools, and particularly in schools serving students from disadvantaged populations (Ingersoll, 2001; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002).

Perhaps the most compelling reason to be concerned about teacher turnover is that it negatively impacts student learning (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Importantly, not only do students in classrooms directly affected by turnover suffer academically, but their grade level peers—whose teachers are, themselves, experiencing additional stress from staffing shortages and instability—have been shown to suffer indirectly (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

Researchers concerned with teacher turnover have largely taken for granted that retention is the ultimate goal, regardless of whether retained teachers are motivated and able to flourish professionally. After all, limited alternative employment prospects and other market forces can cause burnt out, disengaged teachers to stay in their jobs indefinitely (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). The importance of considering motivation and commitment as critical human resource factors is emphasized by Watt and Richardson (2008): “of course it is not only persistence that we are concerned with, although that is an important outcome in the current climate of teacher shortages. Also important is how teachers will develop in the profession, and which teachers will become and remain committed, engaged, and effortful” (p. 26).

Retention numbers aside, national teacher survey data suggest that teacher burnout and dissatisfaction are growing problems. According to the MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, over half of teachers (51 percent) reported feeling “under great stress” at least several days a week in 2012, compared to 36 percent of teachers in 1985. Between 2008 and 2012 alone, the percentage of teachers who reported feeling “very satisfied” in their jobs dropped precipitously, from 62 to 39 percent (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013). As concerning is a longstanding phenomenon whereby overwhelmed and insecure teachers isolate themselves in their classrooms,

leaving colleagues to “sink or swim” (Hargreaves, 2010; Lortie, 1975). These attitudes and behaviors have serious consequences both for the quality of teaching students receive in the individual classroom as well as the capacity of schools to improve as organizations.

Envisioning Teacher Professional Vitality (TPV)

What follows from these problematic trends are two human resource objectives: first, keeping high quality teachers in our schools; and second, supporting those teachers in becoming their best possible professional selves. Schools must be places where teachers are motivated to work hard to improve their practice and meet their students’ varied needs. Given the demonstrated importance of collaboration and collegiality to school success and improvement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), schools must be places where teachers are committed wholeheartedly to their schools’ missions and to helping their colleagues.

Rather than treating the constructs of teacher motivation, commitment, and retention as conceptually separate, I have chosen to identify *teacher professional vitality* (TPV) as a single concept that encapsulates all three and reflects a more holistic approach to thinking about teachers’ collective experience at work. I define TPV as an organizational quality characterized by high teacher retention, organizational commitment, and motivation. “Vitality” is defined by the New Oxford American Dictionary as “the state of being strong and active,” or “the power giving continuance of life, present in all living things.” It connotes a sense of thriving in a way that motivation, commitment, or retention alone do not. TPV recognizes the teacher as a living, breathing member of the broader school ecosystem. Their physical, intellectual, and spiritual strength depends in large part on the character of that ecosystem and determines the quality and duration of their teaching and broader service to the school organization.

Components of TPV. The three components of TPV—motivation, commitment, and retention—are described below along with related constructs.

Teacher motivation. Motivation “concerns energy, direction, persistence and equifinality—all aspects of activation and intention” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 69). Highly motivated teachers exert consistent effort toward solving challenging teaching problems in the interest of student learning. As “an important antecedent of productivity” (Deci & Ryan, 2014, p. 13), motivation is especially crucial to work that demands responsiveness and defies routine, as teaching does (Shulman, 1987).

Following Ryan and Deci’s (2000) widely used self-determination theory (SDT), motivation falls along a spectrum from *amotivation*—“the state of lacking the intention to act” (p. 72)—to *extrinsic motivation* to *intrinsic motivation*. “The term *extrinsic motivation* refers to the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome and, thus, contrasts with *intrinsic motivation*, which refers to doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 71). Seeing as little work behavior can be said to be motivated by “the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself” (e.g., grading papers because it is enjoyable) but by the desire to achieve some other end (e.g., grading papers because doing so will provide helpful feedback to students), most adult behavior in the context of work is extrinsically motivated. However, extrinsic motivation can be further understood to exist along a spectrum from *controlled motivation* to *autonomous motivation* according to how it is regulated (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Motivation deriving from a sense of pressure or obligation is said to be controlled. In contrast, autonomous motivation causes an individual to do something volitionally “because of its personal value and importance” (Deci & Ryan, 2014, p. 16). Given the considerable evidence that autonomous motivation far surpasses controlled motivation in terms of its efficacy in inducing worker persistence and goal progress (Koestner, Otis, Powers, Pelletier, & Gagnon, 2008; Ratelle, Guay, Vallerand, Larose, & Sénécal, 2007), “motivation” as it is used in this dissertation most closely resembles autonomous motivation.

According to SDT, autonomous motivation requires the satisfaction of three “innate psychological needs”: *competence*, *relatedness*, and *autonomy* (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A person’s willingness to pursue a particular course of action rests on whether they feel competent in completing that action. Such willingness is further bolstered when they experience relatedness, or “the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others” (p. 73). Ryan and Deci write that, “because extrinsically motivated behaviors are not typically interesting, the primary reason people initially perform such actions is because the behaviors are prompted, modeled, or valued by significant others to whom they feel (or want to feel) attached or related” (p. 73). Finally, autonomy, or “an internal perceived locus of causality” (p. 70), ensures that the doer feels the task required is within their control. Together, the satisfaction of these three needs gives individuals the determination to take on and persist at difficult work. Chapter 2 will go into further detail about the extent to which teachers experience competence, relatedness, and autonomy in their jobs.

Related terms. While not directly synonymous with motivation as it is understood here, the following terms are frequently used in research pertaining to teacher work life and similarly convey notions of energy, effort, and persistence (or their converse): *engagement*, *self-efficacy*, *burnout*, *strain*, and *exhaustion* (see, e.g., Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Ross, 1995; Somech, 2010; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Teacher commitment. Teachers who are highly committed to their schools buy in to their schools’ mission, vision, and values. If motivation concerns energy, commitment concerns the heart; it arises from the desire to contribute to a worthy cause that is bigger than oneself. Teacher commitment is important to the extent that it encourages collegiality and collaboration in the service of achieving shared goals (Somech & Bogler, 2002). Committed teachers demonstrate discretionary behaviors aimed at promoting the success of the school and its students as a

collective (known as “organizational citizenship behaviors,” or OCBs; see Somech & Bogler, 2002; Bogler & Somech, 2004). For example, they may share lesson plans with colleagues, volunteer to mentor new teachers, or participate in a range of school improvement initiatives. Crucially, teacher commitment has been shown to foster student engagement and learning (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

Researchers contrast *organizational commitment*, which—in the context of teaching—refers to teachers’ commitment to a particular school, with *professional commitment*, which refers to teachers’ commitment to teaching as a profession, whether at a single school or across multiple schools over the course of a career (see, e.g., Riehl & Sipple, 1996). In this dissertation, “teacher commitment” primarily refers to organizational, not professional, commitment given this study’s emphasis on understanding teacher work life at particular schools.

Related terms. Scholars interested in understanding how to promote teachers’ collective contributions to schools have studied concepts related to teacher commitment, including *organizational citizenship behavior*, *collective efficacy*, and *collective responsibility* (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004; Kruse & Louis, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1996; Ross & Gray, 2006; Sun & Leithwood, 2015).

Teacher retention. Schools with high *teacher retention*, as understood here, employ teachers who choose to return to their schools for employment year after year. It is an indication of the extent to which the benefits of remaining in a teaching job outweigh the costs, which may be informed by teachers’ personal characteristics, labor market forces, as well as school working conditions (Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006; Borman & Dowling, 2008). As described above, teacher retention is widely considered to be a worthy goal because of its association with school stability, development of professional community, and student learning (Ingersoll, 2001; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Teacher retention is often contrasted with

teacher turnover, which includes both *teacher migration* (moving from one school to another) and *teacher attrition* (leaving the teaching profession altogether) (Ingersoll, 2001).

Related terms. Researchers concerned with teachers' continued employment in their schools have studied a range of concepts related to teacher retention and turnover, including *job satisfaction*, *wellbeing*, *intent to return*, and *resilience* (Ladd, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011; Stanford, 2001).

Rationale for synthesis. Figure 1.1, below, shows TPV as a “three-legged stool,” supported by teacher motivation, commitment, and retention. Numerous other concepts could fit under the umbrella of TPV, as indicated in the “related terms” sections, above, but the three concepts highlighted here were chosen to represent and be understood as three broad categories of action-inducing dispositions: *motivation* as essential to putting forth daily effort, *commitment* as it promotes mission-directed helping behaviors (i.e., OCBs), and *retention* insofar as it captures teachers' ultimate choices about staying in or leaving their jobs.

I argue that an exclusive focus on only one of the three components jeopardizes the strength and stability of teachers' professional wellbeing. An exclusive focus on retention may inspire reforms that make teaching jobs difficult to leave (such as raising salaries or increasing benefits) without addressing the negative working conditions that have been shown to be the source of much turnover and on-the-job dissatisfaction; retaining unmotivated, disgruntled teachers may be just as bad as *not* retaining motivated, engaged ones. As Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) state:

Retention, in and of itself, is not a worthy goal. Students are not served well when a district retains teachers without regard to quality. Little can be achieved (and much might be lost) when a district succeeds in reducing teacher turnover if some of those teachers are incompetent, mediocre, disengaged, or burnt out. Instead, student learning is the goal, and schools must seek to retain teachers who demonstrate that they are skilled and effective in the classroom, are committed to student learning, and are ready and able to contribute to the improvement of their school. (p. 2)

It is similarly dangerous to focus exclusively on motivation or commitment without attending to long-term career sustainability. Numerous studies have documented how time pressure and overwork can exhaust the highly motivated, committed teacher to the point of quitting (see, e.g., Bartlett, 2004; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Furthermore, a teacher may be highly motivated as an individual to do outstanding work in the confines of their own classroom, but not totally buy in to the direction of the school, thus depriving that school and its staff of valuable OCBs. TPV as supported by high motivation, commitment, and retention conveys a more holistic vision of a highly functional work environment for teachers than any one of these constructs alone.

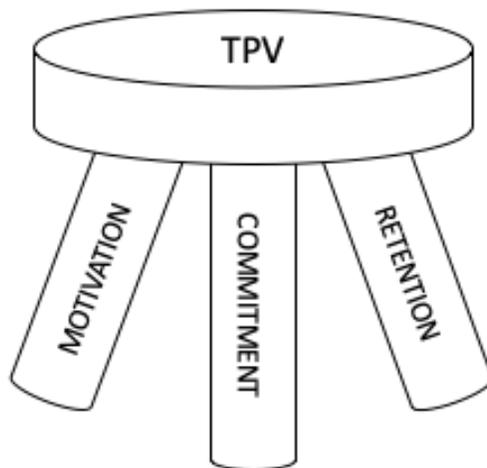


Figure 1.1. A three-legged stool model of teacher professional vitality (TPV).

School Working Conditions and TPV

Researchers studying teacher motivation, commitment, and retention have sought to identify key factors that reliably predict these outcomes, from teachers' educational backgrounds to students' demographic characteristics to labor market forces. One set of factors has been found to bear strongly on all three components of TPV: school-level working conditions.

For example, in a landmark study of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) data from thousands of U.S. teachers, Ingersoll (2001) determined that several organizational characteristics of schools—including administrative support, student discipline, and teacher “voice” in school-level decision-making—predicted voluntary teacher turnover when controlling for teacher and school demographic characteristics (Ingersoll, 2001). Similarly, in analyzing a large sample of survey data from California teachers, Loeb, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak (2005) found that “the strongest predictor of turnover problems is teachers’ rating of school conditions” (p. 62). In that study, such “conditions” included large class sizes, facilities problems, and lack of textbooks. In their meta-analytic review of the research on teacher attrition, Borman and Dowling (2008) also found that, in addition to personal and professional factors, “there are a large number of characteristics of the environments in which teachers work that predict attrition” (p. 398).

These studies call into question other large-scale analyses that attribute teachers’ turnover decisions to student demographic characteristics (see, e.g., Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004). For example, Hanushek et al. (2004), in analyzing teacher mobility data from Texas, found that teachers tended to move from schools with lower-income students to those with higher-income students, and from schools with more students of color to those with fewer students of color, concluding that “teachers systematically favor higher-achieving, non-minority, non-low-income students” (p. 337). When school organizational factors

are taken into account, however, a different picture emerges; Ladd (2011), for example, found that working conditions predict teachers' intentions to move schools, "independent of other school characteristics such as the racial mix of students" (p. 235). In a recent review of studies examining teacher turnover in high-poverty schools, Simon and Johnson (2015) wrote that:

Using a range of research methods and definitions of working conditions, researchers have repeatedly found that when teacher turnover is analyzed from an organizational perspective, the poor working conditions common in America's neediest schools explain away most, if not all, of the relationship between student characteristics and teacher attrition. (p. 29)

These findings are significant from a policy and school improvement standpoint because working conditions, unlike students' demographic characteristics, are amenable to change. From an equity standpoint, these findings demand even greater urgency in addressing the negative working conditions in schools serving the most disadvantaged students.

Compared to the topic of teacher retention and its causes, less has been written about the factors influencing teacher motivation and commitment, though scholarship in those areas has also found that the organizational characteristics of schools play a critical role. Motivation researchers have identified such working conditions as job ambiguity, time constraints, job overload, pressure to comply with superiors' and colleagues' demands, pressure to meet teaching targets, and disruptive student behavior as detrimental to teachers' autonomous motivation (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Fernet, Austin, Trepanier, & Dussault, 2013; Pelletier, Séguin-Lévesque, & Legault, 2002; Roth, 2014; Taylor, Ntoumanis, & Standage, 2008). Similarly, scholars have found that various aspects of the quality of teachers' work lives bear on organizational commitment, including task autonomy, feedback, opportunity for skills development, collegiality, sense of respect, adequacy of resources, principal leadership, and participation in decision-making (Devos, Tuytens, & Hulpia, 2014; Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Louis, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1991; Rowan, 1990).

As evidenced in the preceding paragraphs, the scope of working conditions that affect TPV is quite broad. Though these characteristics of teacher work life are amenable to change, the fact that there is no singular working condition that stands out above all others means that any attempt to improve only one or two will likely fall short of effecting meaningful change. Such a perspective is advanced by Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2012), who found that teachers working at schools with “particularly poor conditions of work” were three times more likely to plan to transfer than were teachers with “average” work environments:

Our findings do not provide simple answers for policy makers. Not surprisingly, those who would increase students’ learning by reforming the teacher’s workplace typically focus on factors that can be readily manipulated. Indeed, if school facilities had emerged as the most important element of the workplace, our recommendation for renovating school buildings would be clear... (p. 30)

Instead, a more comprehensive approach to changing teachers’ working conditions—one that prioritizes versatility and cooperation—is needed:

...What is clear, however, is that guaranteeing an effective teacher for all students—especially minority students who live in poverty—cannot be accomplished simply by offering financial bonuses or mandating the reassignment of effective teachers. Rather, if the school is known to be a supportive and productive workplace, good teachers will come, they will stay, and their students will learn. Therefore, policy makers would do well to avoid mandates that limit schools’ flexibility and instead promote changes that encourage innovation, adaptability, and collaboration among those at the school site. (pp. 30-31)

This dissertation explores how teacher *collective decision-making authority*, a form of teacher empowerment that has henceforth received little attention in the school improvement and teacher work life literature, paves the way for such “innovation, adaptability, and collaboration” in ways that fundamentally reshape teachers’ experience of work.

Teacher-Powered Schools and Collective Decision-Making Authority (CMDA)

One promising arena for examining teacher work life and TPV is the “teacher-powered school.” The Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI), a project of the Minnesota education

policy think tank Education Evolving, maintains a database of over 150 schools nationwide that are intentionally designed to give teachers voice in school decision-making¹. To be included in the TPSI “inventory,” teachers at a given school must have “final authority” in at least one of fifteen decision-making domains (see teacherpowered.org). These domains, which TPSI calls “autonomies,” include, for example, budgetary discretion, choice of curricular materials, school staffing decisions, and school discipline policy (for a full list of the fifteen autonomies, see Appendix A). While TPSI launched in 2014, many of the schools in the network have been around for decades, some since the 1970s.

For the purposes of this dissertation, “teacher-powered schools” are schools in which teachers possess what I have termed *collective decision-making authority*, or *CDMA*. CDMA refers to the power that a group or groups of teachers possess at a particular school site to make school-level decisions in one or more domains which are legitimated either by formal arrangement (e.g., in a school’s governing documents) or, less commonly, by the informal assent of an individual in a designated position of authority (e.g., by the implicit approval of a principal or a district superintendent). CDMA includes teachers but may not be limited to them; for example, administrators or other staff members may also participate in decision-making, though not unilaterally. For the sake of clarity, I will henceforth refer to the formal initiative described in the preceding paragraph as TPSI, but will describe the schools within the TPSI inventory, and other schools possessing teacher CDMA, as “teacher-powered schools.”

¹ The number of schools in the TPSI inventory has grown rapidly over the past few years. There were 90 inventory schools when I embarked on this study in 2016 and 99 when I began the survey component in 2017.

It is important to note that CDMA is analogous to the word “autonomy” as used by TPSI in the preceding paragraph, but avoids the ambiguity associated with the latter term. Among education researchers, the word “autonomy” is commonly used to refer to one of two concepts: either (1) the discretion of individual teachers to select their own teaching materials and practices within the confines of the classroom (see, e.g., Ingersoll, 2003), or (2) the local control of schools by a school leader or a leadership team as opposed to some external entity (e.g., Hanushek, Link, & Woessmann, 2013). Thus, I have chosen to refer to the decision-making control that teachers possess in various domains as CDMA instead of “autonomy” to avoid confusion.

The explicit purpose of TPSI is to “empower teacher teams to secure collective autonomy to design and run schools” (see teacherpowered.org). Their approach is three-pronged: (1) to build awareness of schools managed by teachers, (2) to support teachers in the design and implementation of teacher-powered schools, and (3) to advocate for policies at all levels of government that help teacher-powered schools to thrive.

No two schools in the TPSI inventory are entirely alike. To some extent, this is to be expected; when decision making authority is granted to the teachers at any given school site, that school is likely to evolve out of local need and in response to the unique blend of teachers, students, and families that make up the school community. Some TPSI schools have principals, others do not. While all TPSI schools are public schools, some are in traditional school districts and some are charter schools. Some serve predominantly students of color from low-income neighborhoods, while others serve a majority of white students from more affluent backgrounds. A more complete description of the kinds of schools that make up the TPSI inventory is provided in Chapter 4.

The mechanisms by which teacher-powered schools have secured teacher CDMA also vary considerably. TPSI delineates ten categories of “autonomy arrangements,” or the policy

provisions enabling the establishment and site-governance of teacher-powered schools. These arrangements include various types of agreements between school districts and teacher unions, charter school contracts or bylaws, as well as “goodwill” arrangements in which school and district leaders grant teachers considerable discretion in making school-level decisions despite having no formal agreement to do so. A full list of the autonomy arrangements compiled by TPSI is provided in Appendix B.

The slogan of TPSI is “Teacher-Powered Schools: Student-Centered Learning” (see teacherpowered.org). Proponents have observed that teacher-powered schools are more likely than traditionally-structured schools to emphasize project-based learning (PBL) or other forms of individualized learning as a core component of their educational program. Such student-centered pedagogy may explain teacher-powered schools’ appeal among learners who may have been unsuccessful in more traditional school settings as well as special education students (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2012).

An assumption underlying TPSI is that, in teacher-powered schools, “teachers have greater ability to make the dramatic changes that they determine are needed to truly improve student learning and the teaching profession,” changes that include, among others, “making teaching a more attractive job and career” (see teacherpowered.org). However, this assumption has not yet been supported by empirical academic research.

In fact, a Google Scholar search for academic research articles with “teacher-powered schools,” “teacher-led schools,” “educator-run schools,” or similar phrases in the title yields very few results, with most being recent doctoral dissertations. Wright (2018), for example, compared teachers’ perceptions of autonomy in a traditionally-structured and teacher-powered school, finding that teachers expressed having greater curricular and instructional autonomy in the teacher-powered school. Helm (2019) studied the power dynamics among staff members at one

“teacher-run” school, finding that teachers were largely unable to disrupt traditional, hierarchical power structures, in part due to accountability pressures. Most recently, Weinberg (2020) studied structural and cultural factors supporting and inhibiting teachers’ participation in decision-making in an “educator-run” school.

Much of the existing research on schools within the TPSI inventory has been conducted by affiliates of the initiative’s parent organizations, Education Evolving and the Center for School Quality (CSQ). For example, perhaps the most comprehensive portrayal of teacher-powered schools is provided in the book, *Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots* (Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2012). This book was co-authored by Kim Farris-Berg, an Education Evolving Senior Fellow at the time of publication, and organizational consultant Edward Dirkswager, with contributions from Amy Junge, then an associate at Education Evolving who now directs TPSI nationally.

The central question posed in *Trusting Teachers* is: “What would happen if we trusted teachers with school success?” (p. 1), which the authors seek to answer through interviewing, observing, and surveying teachers at 11 schools within the TPSI inventory. Farris-Berg and Dirkswager’s (2012) key finding is that the eleven schools they studied share the nine characteristics of high-performing organizations that the authors synthesized from the organizational leadership literature. High-performing organizations *and* teacher-powered schools, they found, have managers and workers who:

1. “Accept ownership: Welcome authority and responsibility for making decisions and be accountable for the outcomes;
2. Innovate: Take risks to try creative new things, challenge old processes, and continuously adapt;

3. Share purpose: Seek clarity and buy in to the mission, values, goals, and standards of practice;
4. Collaborate: Establish a culture of interdependence characterized by an open flow of ideas, listening to and understanding others, and valuing differences;
5. Lead effectively: Expect leadership from all and perceive leadership as in service to all;
6. Function as learners: Establish a culture characterized by a sense of common challenge and discovery, rather than a culture where experts impart information;
7. Avoid insularity: Learn from and be sensitive to the external environment;
8. Motivate: Be engaged, motivated, and motivating;
9. Assess performance: Set and measure progress toward goals and act upon results to improve performance.” (pp. 31-2)

The authors present exciting and compelling evidence in favor of teacher-powered schools, suggesting that the presence of these nine characteristics serves as a “reasonable proxy for whether a school has the potential to achieve superior results” (p. 13).

While these few studies provide glimpses into individual teacher-powered schools and how they function, as well as valuable perspectives from TPSI insiders, one major omission from the existing academic research is independent, multi-site analysis of teachers’ work lives, perceptions, and experiences in these schools. In light of the troubling statistics surrounding teacher turnover and burnout, is there a case to be made that ceding school-level decision-making authority to teaching staffs can result in more fulfilled and more committed teachers? My dissertation seeks to lay the groundwork for beginning to answer this question, leveraging a mixed-methods, exploratory research design to understand how CDMA shapes teacher professional work life in 39 teacher-powered schools in 10 U.S. states.

Positionality

I came across teacher-powered schools somewhat haphazardly in the fall of 2015. One of my professors included me on an email to a group of graduate students asking for volunteers for the first-ever TPSI conference on behalf of the Education Evolving staff. Given my long-standing interest in teacher leadership and my budding curiosity about schools “run by teachers,” I jumped at the opportunity.

At the conference, which took place that November in Minneapolis, I was impressed by the presentations given by staff at existing teacher-powered schools and inspired to see so many teachers and school leaders from more conventional schools in attendance to learn about teacher-powered models of governance. I was fortunate to have a brief conversation with Lars Esdal (né Johnson), Executive Director of Education Evolving, who mentioned that the anecdotal evidence in support of teacher-powered schools was indeed strong, but that rigorous independent research on the subject was lacking. He asked if I had a dissertation topic, and this project was born.

In part, I was motivated to pursue this study as a result of my own experience as a teacher. After two years as a Teach For America (TFA) recruit teaching fifth grade in a high-poverty, predominantly African-American school in Wilmington, Delaware, I was burnt out from the demanding requirements of the job and the miserably low staff morale that characterized my school. The constant complaining in the staff lounge, the palpable fear of district administrators constantly roaming our halls, and the abrupt policy changes handed down from on high² were enough to zap my motivation. What was perhaps most frustrating about my brief teaching experience was the powerlessness I felt to make things better. Sure, there were opportunities to

² For example, when the school district mandated that all fifth-grade students at my school be in single-sex classrooms mid-way through my first year of teaching.

voice concern, and the principal made an effort to listen. However, decisions still rested on administrators' shoulders and were heavily influenced by the demands and expectations of district leaders, who were themselves beholden to the state.

Bureaucracy and its limitations aside, I felt trapped in a position with few opportunities for learning or advancement. Even as a first-year teacher, my role and responsibilities were identical to those of the 10-year veteran across the hall. What time my colleagues and I had together was typically spent hurriedly completing paperwork or bemoaning the curriculum pacing guide, not collaborating to address problems of practice. While on paper I was succeeding as a teacher, as a young, white, middle-class teacher from the Midwest, I struggled to connect with my mostly poor Black students. I did not have the tools, the energy, or the guidance to truly understand and bridge the gap in our respective experiences, though I desperately wanted to. With little hope for my own improvement or advancement, and fearing I was incapable of meeting my students' varied needs, I left the job and I left teaching.

Like many other teachers, I was not "fleeing" my students but the negative working conditions that I, my colleagues, and my students were made to endure (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012, p. 24). Some readers may suspect that my inadequate TFA training is to blame for my swift departure from the profession. I think that presumption is unfair. Certainly my training could have been more comprehensive, and some research would support that preparation and turnover are related (see Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002, for example). Ultimately, however, it was the job itself that ran me ragged and left me feeling depressed and hopeless.

My teaching experience motivated me to pursue graduate studies in Education Policy and Leadership because I wanted to better understand the problems of teacher dissatisfaction and turnover so that I might work to redress them. At the time, I did not have a good grasp of the

extent and severity of the problem, but I knew intuitively that demoralized, exhausted, and itinerant teachers were bad for students. I also knew intuitively that it did not have to be that way.

Graduate school has also afforded me the opportunity to take on the role of teacher educator, which also informs my position as a researcher. In my first two years of doctoral work, I had the distinct pleasure of serving as an instructional coach and clinical supervisor for two novice teachers through the University of Minnesota's partnership with TFA. These teachers never failed to impress me with their ability to build caring relationships with their students and their laser-like focus on living out the values of equity and social justice. They grew into great teachers, but both have since moved on to non-teaching roles in the education sector because their teaching jobs felt neither sustainable nor professionally fulfilling.

I also served as a graduate instructor for the secondary education licensure courses, "Culture, Schools, and Communities" and "School and Society." My students frequently expressed concern about entering an occupation that is tightly controlled and little respected. These experiences have motivated me to help make schools great places to work for the bright, passionate, and equity-oriented beginning teachers I have had the privilege of knowing and teaching. As a society, we cannot afford to lose these teachers to burnout and disillusionment.

Accompanying my professional experiences as a teacher and teacher educator are the many other identities I hold as a researcher. As a white, middle-class female, I saw myself reflected in the teachers I had growing up and in numerous media portrayals of teachers (Cann, 2015). These identities inevitably constrain my sense of what constitutes a "good job" or a "good school." I was therefore intentional in seeking the perspectives of a diverse group of teachers as I embarked on this study. I also acknowledge that my whiteness, class privilege, and status as a Ph.D. student may have made me suspect in the eyes of some of the teachers I interviewed, particularly those working in communities most affected by institutional racism and class-cultural

oppression, which were also the communities farthest from my own. While I do believe that the teachers I spoke with were generally forthright, and while I made a conscious effort to earn teachers' trust in the short time I spent with them, their statements should be viewed in the context of my otherness.

For me, the opportunity to study teacher-powered schools is an opportunity to peek through a window into what teaching might have been for me, my former colleagues, and the young teachers I have taught and mentored. Ironically, my academic interests emerged because part of me still wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to be the kind of teacher that has professional discretion in designing lessons to meet students' needs, the kind of teacher that has opportunities to pursue mastery in her craft and advance in her career, the kind of teacher who works collaboratively and enthusiastically with colleagues toward a collective vision. Did such teachers exist? What factors promoted such a teaching job? This project represents a first foray into beginning to answer these questions.

Significance

For decades, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners alike have sought to reform public education in the U.S. Citing sinking international test scores relative to other developed nations as well as glaring “achievement gaps” between students of color and their white, more affluent peers, these individuals and the groups they represent have countless conflicting explanations for the problems facing public education today—and countless “silver bullet” solutions for solving them. Some see education as suffering from a low bar of entry into the teaching profession and seek to increase teacher licensure standards; some see the traditional bureaucratic organization of schooling as hampering innovation and strive to de-couple schools from highly centralized district offices; still others claim that students lack adequate preparation for twenty-first century jobs and insist on “one-to-one” technology programs to get students

connected and up to speed. These and other explanations and proposed solutions cost American taxpayers and private funders billions of dollars in new initiatives aimed at redressing gaps and helping bring U.S. children up to snuff with their international peers.

Puzzlingly, as a country, we have little to show for these herculean efforts. For example, recent Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results show U.S. students continuing to lag behind many other developed nations in math, reading, and science literacy (OECD, 2014b). Faculty members in U.S. institutions of higher education bemoan the insufficient high school preparation their students have received in basic skills and critical thinking (Blum, 2016). Meanwhile, gaps in academic achievement and educational attainment between students of color and white students in the U.S. continue to be among the widest in the world (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Social justice advocates are appalled to learn that even sixty years after the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling against “separate but equal” schooling, students of color continue to receive an inferior education in largely segregated school systems (Kozol, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Teachers matter. While the results of decades of attempts at education reform are discouraging, and debates continue over the best ways to improve the American public school system, scholars and practitioners agree on one key point: *teachers matter*. Since the “Coleman Report” cited teachers as the single most important school-based factor in student achievement (Coleman, 1966), scholars on all sides of the education reform debate have acknowledged that the person at the helm of the classroom can make or break a child’s educational and life chances (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 1996, 1997; Hanushek, 1992; Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Numerous teacher reforms have been proposed and implemented to increase teacher quality in response to the abundance of evidence that teachers matter in student success. Many

school districts and state departments of education have leveraged teacher compensation as a means to attract, retain, and motivate high quality teachers (Podgursky & Springer, 2007). Some have sought to attract the “best and the brightest” into teaching by reducing the costs of entry (i.e., training requirements) for top-tier college graduates and marketing teaching as a stepping stone to a more lucrative or prestigious career (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Zeichner, 2003). Other reforms have sought to increase teacher quality through more punitive measures. The accountability movement initiated in the early 2000s by the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) rests upon the simple logic that teachers will work harder and perform better if their jobs are on the line (Finnigan & Gross, 2007; Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004).

Despite being premised upon the now widely-accepted maxim that “teachers matter” in the quest to improve schools, these reforms have not resulted in meaningful increases in teacher quality, and some appear to have done more harm than good (Hiebert & Morris, 2012). One commonality between these various teacher reforms is their assumption that increasing teacher quality rests on improving the caliber and capacity of the individual teacher without consideration of the social and cultural contexts in which teachers work.

Over the past two decades, scholars examining teachers’ work in schools have called this assumption into question, arguing that improving teaching rests upon developing *schools as improving organizations*. The heart of this shift in thinking about improving teacher quality is expressed in the following quotation from Hargreaves and Fullan (2012):

The teacher is indeed the key. But this doesn’t mean we should focus on getting and rewarding better individual teachers. The highest performing [school] systems in the world have good teachers all right, but they have them in numbers. High-performing systems have virtually all of their teachers on the move. It’s a school thing, a professional thing, and a system thing. The only solutions that will work on any scale are those that mobilize the teaching force as a whole—including strategies where teachers push and support each other. (pp. 21-2)

Having “teachers on the move” requires that teachers want to stay in their teaching jobs, grow professionally, and take on greater responsibility for the success of their schools and colleagues. It requires that the conditions under which teachers work foster improvement and adaptability, not constraint and discouragement. Who better than teachers to know what they need to thrive?

This study is significant because it explores an alternative to the top-down teacher reforms that have failed to bring about meaningful improvements in teaching quality or wellbeing: teacher CDMA. CDMA challenges prevailing, institutionalized norms surrounding educational leadership while also adhering to prevailing wisdom about human motivation and the complexities of the teaching job. CDMA holds promise as a non-prescriptive, context-responsive form of school management—it allows teachers to leverage their professional wisdom and local expertise to enact school-level changes they deem critical to their own success and to that of their students. By the same token, it carries significant risks: will teachers make decisions that are self-serving but not in their students’ best interests? Will CDMA stall progress toward educational equity by centering teacher needs above those of historically marginalized students? Will it result in even greater teacher burnout as teachers find themselves taking on more responsibility? Answering these questions will require more than just a single study, but my hope in conducting this one is to initiate a broader conversation among scholars of educational leadership about the potential of teacher CDMA as a source of TPV and, more broadly, a mechanism for school improvement.

In fact, findings from this study largely support the potential of CDMA as a means to improve schools as workplaces for teachers. The educators I spoke with were passionate about the ways in which their participation in decision-making shaped their ability to meet their students’ varied learning needs, grow as professionals, and transform their schools into places where students and teachers alike felt cared for and supported. The nature of teachers’

involvement in decision-making, the institutional pressures under which participating schools operated, and the kinds of choices teachers made together varied considerably across teacher-powered schools. Not all teachers felt equally satisfied with the power dynamics or working conditions they experienced in their schools, and survey results confirmed such variation in teachers' work experiences. However, the vast majority of them ultimately felt lucky to have found schools where their professional expertise was consistently respected and honored, and over 90 percent of the teachers I surveyed reported that they enjoyed teaching at their schools "more than any other job" they had held previously.

Roadmap to Chapters 2 through 10

In the chapters that follow, I will present the theoretical and empirical basis for the overarching argument that teacher CDMA, as practiced in a diverse sample of teacher-powered schools, is a viable model of distributed school leadership and mechanism for enhanced TPV. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical basis for this study in much greater detail, providing a survey of relevant literatures. Chapter 3 will describe the specific methods used for data collection and analysis for this mixed-methods, exploratory study. Chapter 4, "Settings," will introduce the three teacher-powered schools whose teachers I observed and interviewed as part of the multiple case study (qualitative) portion of the study. In the same chapter, I will summarize the broader group of 39 schools whose teachers participated in the survey (quantitative) portion of the study. Chapters 5 through 9 each present one "core finding," leveraging both qualitative and quantitative data to describe how teacher CDMA in one or two decision-making domains shaped teachers' roles and experiences at work, with implications for TPV. Finally, Chapter 10 will synthesize findings from Chapters 4 through 9, discuss implications of the study for various educational stakeholders, and present both limitations of the current study as well as possible directions for future research.

Next, I will turn to a review of scholarship in two focus areas—teacher leadership and schools as workplaces—to situate this study within the context of previous theory and research. With regard to the latter topic, I will review what is known about five teacher working conditions in particular (*uncertainty, time pressure, isolation, deprofessionalization, and conflict*) that have historically undermined TPV but that were less evident in the teacher-powered schools I studied. I will conclude my review with the development of a conceptual map that illustrates my initial understanding of the mechanisms by which CDMA may lead to desirable outcomes for teachers and students. Finally, I will leverage this framework in presenting a series of research questions that guided my dissertation study.

Chapter 2: Teacher Leadership and Schools as Workplaces: A Review of the Literature

While there is a substantial lack of research on teacher-powered schools as a group, many researchers concerned with teacher wellbeing and professional growth have pursued scholarship that is relevant to the topic of collective decision-making authority (CDMA) and its influence on teacher work life. I have chosen to position this dissertation at the intersection of two primary bodies of research: *teacher leadership* and *schools as workplaces*. I begin the chapter by briefly reviewing the literature on teacher leadership, discussing its effects on teachers as well as barriers to its implementation. Then, I will describe five prevailing narratives of the school as a workplace for teachers, attending specifically to the implications of those narratives for teacher professional vitality (TPV) and exploring possible pathways by which teacher empowerment in the form of CDMA may foster different kinds of work experiences for teachers.

In light of the research reviewed in this chapter, I will then make a theoretical argument for studying teacher-powered schools, concluding this chapter with a conceptual map depicting my understanding of the channels by which teacher CDMA may be a promising source of enhanced teacher professional vitality and the research questions that such a conceptualization raises.

Teacher Leadership

For the purpose of this review, I examined a significant body of research on a range of related constructs involving enhanced teacher leadership and decision-making as they pertain to teacher work life. Groups concerned with the low status of the teaching profession have long called for an increase in teacher participation in school decision-making and, to a lesser extent, teacher autonomy (Holmes Group, 1986; National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 2003; The Carnegie Task Force on Teaching, 1986). While theoretical arguments for teacher empowerment prevailed for years before its practical implementation in schools, efforts aimed at

expanding teachers' roles in school leadership activities have blossomed in recent years (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). This affords an opportunity to examine how such efforts have influenced teachers' experience at work.

Conceptualizing teacher leadership. Given the conceptual “muddiness” attributed to the various terms used to describe teacher leadership and related constructs (Wenner & Campbell, 2017), some clarity on the topic is warranted. Scholars in this category refer to such concepts as *distributed leadership* (Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001), *teacher leadership* (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wenner & Campbell, 2017), *teacher empowerment* (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Marks & Louis, 1997), *collaborative leadership* (Hallinger & Heck, 2010), and *participative decision making* (PDM) (Smylie, Lazarus, & Brownlee-Conyers, 1996; Somech, 2010) or *participatory reform* (Anderson, 1998). For the sake of simplicity and inclusivity, I have chosen to refer to these ideas collectively as “teacher leadership” initiatives in order to emphasize *teachers'* involvement in leadership work, specifically.

In their seminal review of scholarship on teacher leadership, York-Barr and Duke (2004) define the construct as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (pp. 287-8). In general, contemporary scholars have conceptualized teacher leadership as: (1) a distributed property of organizations, “spread” over individuals and domains (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995) and (2) a means to professional learning about effective teaching practice through collaboration, inquiry, and reflection with colleagues (Fullan, 1994; Harris, 2003; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Researchers in this area have largely rejected the ‘charismatic head’ theory of leadership that views leaders as those possessing individual

formal authority (Muijs & Harris, 2003), being instead more inclined to perceive leadership as a practice of *influence* (Spillane, 2006; York-Barr & Duke, 2004).

Effects. Many studies have explored the influence of teacher leadership opportunities on teacher leaders and their colleagues, finding both positive and negative effects. In their recent review, Wenner and Campbell (2017) described four themes of teacher leader effects: “the stresses/difficulties, changing relationships with peers and administration, increased positive feelings and professional growth, and increased leadership capacity” (p. 29). On the negative end, increased teacher responsibilities without structural accommodations (e.g., time set aside for leadership duties) led to stress and burnout (Ovando, 1996; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). For example, some teachers in Baecher’s (2012) study of novice teacher leaders in New York City reported feeling overwhelmed by the additional responsibilities that leadership roles entailed. Additionally, several researchers have documented how teacher leadership initiatives conflict with prevailing norms of egalitarianism and autonomy in schools, resulting in teacher leaders experiencing relational conflict with colleagues as these norms are challenged (Duke, 1994; Lieberman, Saxl, & Miles, 2000; Weiner, 2011; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Such conflict is exacerbated when teacher leader roles are not clearly defined, as the “hybrid teacher leaders” in Margolis and Huggins’ (2012) study experienced. Teacher leaders with under-defined roles inevitably took on various *de facto* roles that often conflicted, resulting in decreased leadership capacity and relational strain.

On the positive end, some studies have documented teacher leadership effects related to professional vitality, such as increased morale and commitment (Duke, 1994; Smylie, 1994; Wenner & Campbell, 2017), as well as self-efficacy in leadership abilities as teachers gain experience exercising influence (Barth, 2001; Harris, 2004). Marks and Louis (1997) found that

empowered teachers were more likely to experience a sense of professional community and were more likely to accept responsibility for student learning.

Domains. Scholars classify the domains of teacher leadership in various ways. Bacharach, Bamberger, Conley, & Bauer (1990) distinguish between four “decision domains”: *operational-organizational*, *operational-personal*, *strategic-organizational*, and *strategic-personal* (p. 134). Along the operational-strategic axis, “operational” domains pertain to technical decisions about the means of accomplishing a certain task (e.g., performance evaluation, student discipline), whereas “strategic” domains pertain to decisions about longer-term strategies and goals (e.g., budget development, staff hiring). Along the organizational-personal axis, “organizational” domains are those that affect the organization as a whole (e.g., school-level decisions), whereas “personal” domains are those that primarily affect individuals (e.g., classroom-level decisions). Marks and Louis (1997) distinguish between four “empowerment” domains: *school operations and management*, *student experiences*, *teacher work life*, and *classroom instruction*. Ingersoll (2003) distinguishes between *administrative* (e.g., hiring, determining class sizes), *social* (e.g., setting discipline policy, determining faculty inservice), and *instructional* (e.g., establishing curriculum, selecting teaching techniques) decisions. In their review, York-Barr and Duke (2004) distinguish between the following domains of teacher leadership: *coordination and management*, *school or district curriculum work*, *professional development of colleagues*, *participation in school change and improvement initiatives*, *parent and community involvement*, *contributions to the profession of teachers*, and *preservice teacher education*.

Regardless of the particular classification used, these scholars have largely agreed on two things: first, that teachers report having far less influence in decision-making at the school-level than at the classroom-level, particularly over non-instructional matters; and second, that the

outcomes of teacher leadership, broadly, and teacher PDM, specifically, depend on the domain of participation being considered (see, e.g., Bacharach, Bamberger, Conley, & Bauer, 1990; Ingersoll, 2003).

Scholars have arrived at somewhat different conclusions, however, about the domains of leadership in which teachers *desire* to participate. Smylie (1992) investigated the factors influencing teachers' decisions to participate in decision-making, finding that teachers were less willing to participate in personnel decisions or general administration decisions, but more likely to want to participate in instructional decisions and decisions involving staff development. This parallels Bacharach et al.'s (1990) findings that teachers' "decision deprivation" (i.e., the difference between desired and actual participation) was greatest in the operational-organizational domain, which includes teacher evaluation and professional development. However, Bacharach et al. also found that teachers reported greater decision deprivation in the strategic-organizational domain, which includes personnel and administrative decisions, than they did in either of the personal domains, which suggests that participating teachers desired more influence over organizational decisions than they had in actuality.

The inconsistent findings regarding leadership domains suggest that there are likely other factors at play in determining teachers' willingness to participate. For example, Weiss, Cambone, and Wyeth (1992), who interviewed teachers about interpersonal relationships involved in teacher leadership, found that some teachers' *expectations* of how their participation would impact decisions factored into their willingness to engage. Ambivalence toward teacher leadership stemmed in part from teachers' uncertainty about their power and previous experiences in which their participation had "come to naught" (p. 353). One participant remarked, "I could see an advantage [to teacher participation] only when the teachers are truly given real decision-making power. Right now, they're really not. The principal when it comes down to it has overriding

authority on any decision. Okay?” (pp. 356-7). The authors posit that “confusion about the locus of final decision authority” (p. 357) undermines teachers’ sense of empowerment and discourages participation. In theory, then, teachers may be more likely to take on leadership responsibilities in those domains in which teachers have previously secured meaningful influence.

Barriers. In light of the negative individual and organizational effects of teacher leadership, and only marginal benefits, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of scholars writing on the topic continue to maintain faith in its potential. These scholars argue that successful implementation of teacher leadership initiatives has been thwarted by largely surmountable, if substantial, barriers (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Duke, 1994; Harris, 2003, 2004; Lieberman, Saxl, Miles, 2000; Marks & Louis, 1997; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Ovando, 1996; Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Relative consensus has emerged surrounding the barriers to implementation of teacher leadership efforts provided in Table 2.1, below.

Table 2.1. Common barriers to effective teacher leadership implementation.

Barrier
1. Lack of principal support for teacher leadership
2. Lack of role clarity for teacher leaders
3. Insufficient time to conduct additional leadership responsibilities
4. Insufficient training for teacher leaders
5. Culture of egalitarianism in which teacher leadership is distrusted
6. Culture of individualism and isolation in which collaboration is avoided
7. External accountability pressures leading to increased administrative control
8. Inauthentic opportunities to participate leading to teacher disillusionment

In light of these substantial barriers, along with the well-established difficulty of cultural and structural changes in complex, institutionalized organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) it is no wonder that the espoused potential of teacher leadership far exceeds its success in practice.

Summary. This section has briefly reviewed the existing research literature on teacher leadership, describing how teacher leadership is commonly conceptualized, what is known about how teacher leadership affects teachers, teacher leadership domains, and barriers to effective teacher leadership. The studies reviewed found both positive and negative effects of teacher leadership, including improved teacher commitment and sense of professional community on the positive end, and stress and strained relationships on the negative end. Many cultural and structural barriers to teacher leadership were found to hinder its enactment despite its theoretical potential.

It is important to highlight that, in practice, teacher leadership is not conceived first and foremost as a strategy for improving TPV. Instead, teacher leadership is most commonly referenced as a strategy for improving teaching and learning. The definition of teacher leadership given above by York-Barr and Duke (2004), for example, labels the practice as a means to “improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement.” This emphasis is logical; having first-hand knowledge of and experience working with their students, teachers are well-positioned to make decisions about what and how to teach. If teacher leadership efforts are frequently thwarted by the many organizational barriers highlighted above, however, teachers’ influence will certainly be limited. Perhaps, then, if teachers are empowered to collectively shape the social and environmental context in which they conduct their work—as they are in teacher-powered schools—the obstacles facing teacher leaders would be diminished.

The second section of this chapter is organized around five prevailing narratives about teacher work life. It describes elements of teachers’ working conditions that have historically and persistently kept teachers from doing their best work—many of which parallel the kinds of barriers to teacher leadership discussed in the previous section.

Schools as Workplaces: Five Prevailing Narratives

Findings from the present study called into question five prevailing narratives about the character and quality of teacher work life in the U.S. These narratives—which I have labeled *uncertainty*, *time pressure*, *isolation*, *deprofessionalization*, and *conflict*—are largely taken for granted as conditions of the teaching job, but in many ways did not reflect the experiences of the teachers I interviewed. These conditions have continued to plague the teaching profession for decades despite continued efforts to curb turnover and reform schooling, presumably because they are either inherent to teaching or the result of deeply-seated cultural norms and institutionalized structures governing schools as workplaces (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975; Smylie, 1994; Talbert, 2010; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Waller, 1932). However, the fact that these conditions are not universally experienced in schools suggests they are not intractable and are in fact amenable to change. In the pages that follow, I will describe each of the five narratives in greater depth, review what is known about their impact on TPV, and suggest ways in which studying teacher CDMA may offer new insight into entrenched challenges.

Narrative 1: Uncertainty of success “spoils the pleasures of teaching.” Education scholars have generally agreed that teachers’ work is characterized by pervasive uncertainty (Bidwell, 2001; Lortie, 1975; Munthe, 2003; Schön, 1983; Weick, 1976). To education sociologist Dan Lortie (1975), “teaching demands, it seems, the capacity to work for protracted periods without sure knowledge that one is having any positive effect on students” (p. 144). Teachers are likely to wonder if they are “getting through” to students, if their imprint will follow students into the next grade, or if the learning goals to which they hold their students accountable really matter in the grand scheme of the child’s lifetime.

In many ways, uncertainty is considered “endemic” to the teaching profession because of the multiplicity of students’ learning needs and the sheer complexity of children’s developing

brains (Helsing, 2007; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1991; Wasserman, 1999). A profession “centered on human relationships,” teaching involves “predicting, interpreting and assessing others’ thoughts, emotions, and behavior” (Helsing, 2007, p. 1318). It is complex and dynamic work, with teachers making hundreds of decisions every day in response to students’ expressed and unspoken needs.

According to Lortie (1975), the “inherently changeful” nature of children distinguishes teaching from professions in which the results of work are characterized by relative permanence:

People in many crafts can count on the stability of their efforts: the novelist or mason need not worry that his imprint will soon vanish. But teachers work with inherently changeful materials; the objects of their efforts—maturing children—are supposed to keep changing after they have been taught. (p. 136)

In other words, student learning is a moving target; it is never “complete.” As a student masters one concept or skill, a world of unknowns and deficiencies becomes apparent. Just able to recognize the letter “A”, they must now learn to reproduce it. At last having learned what it means to divide whole numbers, they must now grasp the concept of the fraction. Finally at ease with observing and describing the visible world, they must now comprehend the microscopic. No achievement or effort is ever quite enough. Success is tentative and ephemeral.

Furthermore, there is no consistent “core technology” available to teachers to reliably achieve desired outcomes (Bidwell, 2001; Rowan, 1990; Weick, 1982). The act of going from Point A to Point B in teaching is not at all straightforward; the work required is “nonroutine” in that it “relies on teacher judgment and expertise for its success” (Perrow, 1967; Rowan, 1990, p. 357). Teaching a young child to read, for example, requires that a teacher have considerable and specific knowledge (of their student, of reading pedagogy), skill, and—even then—a bit of trial and error.

Uncertainty is exacerbated by at least three features of modern public education. First, the desired outcomes of schooling are often ambiguous and fiercely debated (Lortie, 1975). Is the purpose of schooling to instill in youth the principles of democracy? A strong work ethic and marketable skill set? A thirst for lifelong learning? A commitment to social justice? A loyalty to a particular set of cultural values? While these may all be worthy pursuits, they entail different approaches to organizing schools for teaching and learning.

Complicating matters further, organizational scholars in the 1970s found that the espoused goals of school and district leaders are often only loosely related to the learning goals teachers work toward in the privacy of their own classrooms. Espoused goals often serve more to protect the legitimacy of school systems—and the public’s support of them—than to further the educational interests of students (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976). This may lead to the promotion of educational fads and even “best practices” that are quickly abandoned once the next great thing comes along (Hess, 2010; Peck & Reitzug, 2012; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Subject to the whims of system leaders’ attempts to keep up with the latest trends, teachers are caught scrambling to accommodate to their superiors’ demands while attempting to be responsive to their students’ needs.

Second, in an age of increasing public scrutiny and accountability, pressure to “teach to the test” and curricular standardization have undermined teachers’ confidence that their efforts are effective or appropriate (Rooney, 2015; Wills & Sandholtz, 2009). For example, Rooney (2015) conducted an ethnographic study of teachers’ working conditions and their experience of intrinsic rewards in two high-poverty urban schools, finding that pressure from high-stakes testing significantly “narrowed” the curriculum and led teachers to doubt their effectiveness as educators. “The narrowed curriculum has reached into teachers’ classrooms and interfered with teachers’ abilities to use their skills and judgments as professionals... This experience was

fundamentally out of synch with teachers' beliefs and values about doing what is right and enjoyable in terms of students and the profession" (p. 493). Such pressures have even been felt in schools whose leaders have actively sought to resist a focus on test preparation and curricular standardization (Wills & Sandholtz, 2009).

Third, even if a teacher does feel that what they are teaching is important, evaluation of results using standardized measures is often so subject to error (both random and situation-specific, such as a child having an "off" day on testing day) that teachers are hesitant to fully trust them (Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004). Even if a teacher performs well on a standardized teacher evaluation or if her students perform well on some combination of assessments, she may doubt her particular role in achieving those results, or wonder whether she successfully met the social and emotional needs of students not captured by the evaluation.

Impact of uncertainty on TPV. Scholars concerned with teacher motivation, commitment, and retention have argued that uncertainty and related sentiments can interfere with the psychological processes that help teachers persist. Conversely, certainty that one is contributing meaningfully to desired work outcomes has been shown to have a positive effect on motivation and perseverance in the face of obstacles.

Two widely-supported theories of worker motivation are relevant to the discussion of uncertainty in teaching: Hackman and Oldham's (1976) Job Characteristics Model (JCM), and Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT). According to Hackman and Oldham's (1976) JCM, five "core job dimensions" predict positive worker outcomes (including motivation) through their impact on workers' psychological states (p. 256; see Figure 2.1, below). These core job dimensions include:

1. Skill variety: “The degree to which a job requires a variety of different activities in carrying out the work, which involve the use of a number of different skills and talents of the person” (p. 257);
2. Task identity: “The degree to which the job requires completion of a ‘whole’ and identifiable piece of work; that is, doing a job from beginning to end with a visible outcome” (p. 257);
3. Task significance: “The degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, whether in the immediate organization or in the external environment” (p. 257);
4. Autonomy: “The degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and in determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out” (p. 258); and
5. Feedback: “The degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance” (p. 258).

The uncertainty pervading the teaching profession makes at least two of these core job dimensions—*task identity* and *feedback*—very difficult to come by. *Task identity* is low because there is no clear indication to a teacher that any given child’s education is “complete”; *feedback* is low because, as discussed earlier, assessments of learning may be untrustworthy and desired results of teaching are often abstract and distant (Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004; Lortie, 1975). The JCM would predict low internal work motivation, low satisfaction, and high turnover under these conditions.

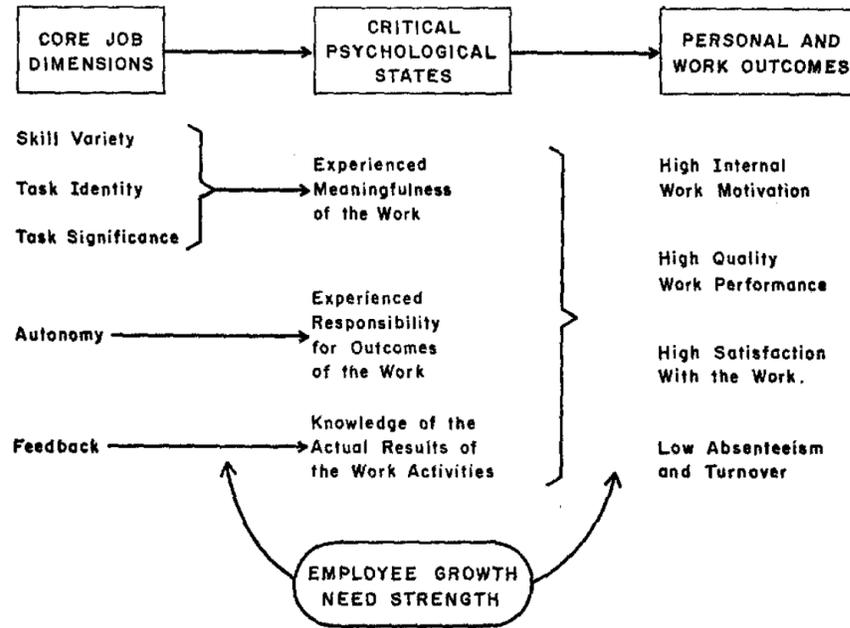


Figure 2.1. Hackman and Oldham's (1976) job characteristics model of work motivation.

According to SDT, as discussed in Chapter 1, autonomous motivation is supported under conditions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Uncertainty in teaching is likely to undermine teachers' experience of competence for the same reason it limits the feedback they get on their job performance—measuring success is exceedingly difficult and the expected outcomes of teaching are highly ambiguous. If teachers do not have a sense of how well they are doing their jobs, they will struggle to experience competence, thus depleting their motivation.

Researchers concerned with schools as workplaces have largely confirmed what these theories of motivation would predict. Lortie (1975), whose classic volume, *Schoolteacher*, painted a detailed portrait of the teaching profession based on extensive observations and interviews of American teachers during the 1960s and 1970s, concluded that “doubts about one’s effectiveness can spoil the pleasures of teaching” (p. 142). Doubts are not problematic only

because they make teachers unhappy, but also because they weaken teachers' motivation and effort. Lortie continues, "endemic uncertainties complicate the teaching craft and hamper the earning of psychic rewards" (p. 159). *Psychic or intrinsic rewards*, which Lortie distinguishes from extrinsic and ancillary rewards, such as pay and summers off, are the subjectively-felt rewards derived from teachers' experience of success with students. Psychic rewards are hugely important to teachers because it is they, rather than more extrinsic rewards, that result from teachers' own efforts. Absent the experience of these rewards, teachers tend toward conservatism in their practices, unwilling to expend the effort to take risks or work harder for fear that such effort will go unrewarded and signal failure. More recently, Rooney's (2015) work suggests that test-based accountability may further reduce teachers' experience of intrinsic rewards as teachers lose the ability to control what and how they teach.

Over a decade later, Rosenholtz (1991) came to similar conclusions about the effect of uncertainty on teachers' motivation to persist in overcoming teaching challenges, but found differences between teachers in schools with "routine" versus "nonroutine technical cultures." Teachers in schools with routine technical cultures—that is, where teaching had become a routine, standardized endeavor due to insufficient technical knowledge and confidence to solve emergent classroom dilemmas—attributed students' success or failure to factors beyond themselves, such as students' attitudes and fixed levels of ability (pp. 116-7). As a result, Rosenholtz found, these teachers lacked the motivation to persist in helping struggling students:

Because teachers feel uncertain about how best to proceed in teaching these students, because they have limited faith in students' ability to succeed and their technical knowledge, they may not persist instructionally with them... That is, teachers may indulge normally unacceptable work, oblivious of any clamorous students about them, rather than engage in possibly self-defeating efforts to help them learn. (pp. 116-7)

In contrast, in schools with nonroutine technical cultures, teachers see dilemmas as inherent to their work and themselves as nimble problem-solvers. In these schools, teachers are more likely to seek colleagues' guidance and other professional learning opportunities, which can diminish their uncertainty, enhance feelings of competence, and strengthen teachers' belief that struggling students are worthy of their intervention:

Where teachers collectively perceive students as capable learners, and themselves as capable teachers vested with a technical culture to help them learn and grow, they seem more likely to persevere, to define problem students as a challenge, to seek outside resources to conquer that challenge, and, in that way, to actually foster students' academic gains. (p. 138)

Therefore, Rosenholtz argues, teachers can overcome uncertainty in schools where collaboration and access to learning and resources are abundant, with profound motivational consequences for themselves and their students.

In addition to motivational consequences, uncertainty in teaching has been linked to teacher turnover. Building off the earlier teacher workplace research of Lortie (1975) and Rosenholtz (1991), Susan Moore Johnson and colleagues at Harvard's Project on the Next Generation of Teachers have sought to understand how teachers joining the profession since the turn of the millennium perceive their workplaces and the impact of such perceptions on their plans to persist in teaching. Certainty of success—or the confidence that new teachers have the knowledge, resources, and support necessary to meet students' academic needs—has emerged in their work as a key determinant to new teachers' decisions to remain in teaching (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Johnson, 2004). In their study of 50 first- and second-year Massachusetts teachers, Johnson and Birkeland (2003), for example, found that “in deciding whether to stay in their schools, transfer to new schools, or leave public school teaching, the teachers weighed, more than anything else, whether they could be effective with their students” (p. 583). In their book *Finders and Keepers*, Johnson and colleagues (2004) suggest that newer teachers, in a culture that

allows multiple career changes and multiple pathways, particularly for women, novice teachers may be even more responsive to a sense of success or failure when making career decisions than were teachers several decades ago, who were perhaps more apt to stay around for lack of better options elsewhere.

What these qualitative accounts point to is that uncertainty undermines TPV through its influence on teachers' self- and collective efficacy: without a clear and consistent vision of success, agreed-upon mechanisms to achieve success, or trustworthy (and timely) indicators of success, teachers begin to doubt that they have the capabilities and resources needed to succeed in their roles—both individually and collectively. Such doubt may have real consequences for teachers' persistence in their roles or in the teaching profession. Indeed, a number of quantitative studies have explored the consequences of self- and collective efficacy for a range of teacher outcomes, finding that these variables correlate positively with teacher engagement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014), persistence (Ross, 1995), organizational and professional commitment (Ross & Gray, 2006; Ware & Kitsantas, 2007; Wu & Short, 1996), job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Wu & Short, 1996), and retention (Coladarci, 1992), and negatively with emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014).

Uncertainty and CDMA: Possibilities. Since uncertainty is largely considered inherent to teaching, eliminating it altogether is likely a fruitless endeavor. However, teachers can—and do—grapple with dilemmas and ambiguities in their work in ways that can reduce uncertainty (Helsing, 2007). How might teachers in teacher-powered schools leverage CDMA in addressing “endemic uncertainties”? What might they do to either reduce uncertainty or grapple with it? Several areas of school-level decision-making may be relevant here. Teachers who play a role in in goal-setting may select goals they feel like are attainable and meaningful. There is also a possibility they will shy away from ambitious goals and instead choose easier ones. They may

desire and work toward greater alignment between school goals and the means of achieving them—the curriculum and teaching methods. Or, they may choose to work independently toward individual classroom goals. They may select trustworthy measures of success that help them track progress toward goals. Or, if teachers continue to doubt the trustworthiness of success measures, they may abandon them altogether. These possibilities along with their implications for TPV will be explored in Chapter 5.

Narrative 2: Teachers work under enormous time pressure. One condition that may contribute to teachers' lack of efficacy in the classroom is time pressure, the second of five teacher work-life narratives. Following Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011), *time pressure* refers to the combination of workload and the experience of a “hectic workday” (p. 1031). It is related to the concepts of *workload* (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Kyriacou & Kunc, 2007), *classroom overload* (Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012), and *job demands* (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). In simple terms, time pressure results when the tasks one needs to accomplish are greater than the time available to accomplish those tasks. Given the large number of responsibilities teachers carry and the wide range of student needs they must accommodate, it is unsurprising that teachers experience time pressure on a regular basis (American Federation of Teachers, 2017) and that teachers attribute their own lack of success to insufficient time (Blase, 1986; Miller, 2014).

In the United States, primary and secondary full-time teachers spend roughly 1,100 hours per year teaching and supervising students, according to data compiled by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the organization of teachers' work time in 36 member nations (OECD, 2014a). Furthermore, American teachers spend an additional 850 hours on other work-related tasks for a total annual work time of about 1,950 hours. In comparison, OECD nations average a total of about 1,650 work hours per teacher per year, with about 700-750 of those hours devoted to teaching. Not only, then, do American teachers work

more on average than their international peers, but a greater proportion of their time is spent working directly with students (OECD, 2014a). Precious little time and energy is left for planning, grading, collaborating, taking breaks, or carrying out administrative duties—one reason for the reluctance of many teachers to engage in leadership activities at their schools (Anderson, 1998; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

In addition to the long hours, the teacher workday is fairly rigid, constrained largely by bureaucratic and institutional forces. High school start and end times continue to be dictated by transportation and athletic concerns, despite mounting evidence that students suffer academically and physically when the school day is misaligned to natural adolescent sleep cycles (Wheaton, Chapman, & Croft, 2016). While “block” scheduling that allows for fewer, longer class periods has become more common, a 6.5-hour school day with 6 periods of 50-55 minutes each is still the norm in most high schools, contributing to fragmented and rushed instruction (Cuban, 2008; Khazzaka, 1997).

The familiar structure of the high school day dates back to the early twentieth century when “Carnegie units” were introduced as a means of better preparing the increasing numbers of American high school students for college *en masse*. In theory, students receiving a standardized dose of coursework in discrete subject areas such as math, literature, science, and history would efficiently receive the educational content needed to succeed at the nation’s post-secondary institutions (Kruse & Kruse, 1995; Tyack & Tobin, 1994). The 6-period day remains largely untouched over a century later as an element of the institutionalized “grammar of schooling,” buttressed by the public’s expectations of what school ought to be and to look like; it has persisted despite little evidence to suggest it supports effective teaching and learning (Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

Impact of time pressure on TPV. With a relatively full teaching load and a course schedule that demands the efficient use of multiple, back-to-back, 50- to 55-minute class periods, teachers frequently find themselves faced with too much to do in too little time (American Federation of Teachers, 2017; Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975). What is the impact of such time pressure on teachers' motivation, commitment, and retention in the teaching profession?

Several studies have linked time pressure and related stressors with teacher burnout—a construct falling under the motivation umbrella as described in Chapter 1 (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006; Fernet, Guay, Senècal, & Austin, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). For example, in several studies of Norwegian elementary and middle school teachers, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009; 2011) have found that time pressure predicts emotional exhaustion, a component of burnout (Maslach, Leiter, & Schaufeli, 2008).

Similarly, Fernet et al. (2012), studying the effects of school environment factors on teachers' intraindividual changes in burnout in French-Canadian elementary schools, found that teachers' perceptions of classroom overload predicted teacher burnout. Importantly, this relationship was mediated by teachers' autonomous motivation—what the authors defined as motivation derived from “the experience of choice in initiating behavior” (p. 516). In other words, perceptions of overload decreased teachers' sense of control over their ability to achieve meaningful work goals, which contributed to the experience of burnout. The authors conclude that, “the effect of environmental demands is particularly detrimental to teachers' psychological well-being when they perceive that their self-determination and efficacy are threatened” (p. 522).

Fernet et al.'s (2012) findings parallel what Johnson (1990) found in her sociological study of the work life of “above-average” teachers. Teachers in that study felt that insufficient time compromised the quality of their instruction and the earning of intrinsic rewards. Specifically, teachers who felt pressed for time were more likely to select more routine teaching

strategies over more innovative or creative ones, even when the latter were more likely to be effective. Johnson concluded:

No matter how talented and committed, teachers could not do their best work in settings that distracted them or undermined their efforts... When there was insufficient time for teachers to do their best work or when their time was poorly protected from disruption and abuse, the quality of teaching was inevitably compromised. (pp. 325-6)

For these teachers, knowingly selecting inferior teaching strategies not only compromised the quality of their instruction, but in turn had deleterious effects on teachers' intrinsic motivation.

The theme of "protection" of time was important in several other studies exploring the relationship between time pressure and organizational commitment. Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990), in their study of workplace factors influencing job commitment among Tennessee elementary teachers, found that novice teachers, in particular, looked to principals to "buffer" them from unwanted time intrusions. Principal buffering had the highest correlation to teacher commitment of six organizational factors included in the study.

Principal buffering was also found to positively influence organizational commitment in a large study of secondary teachers conducted by Riehl and Sipple (1996). Interestingly, Riehl and Sipple (1996) also found that elements of teachers' "task environment"—including the number of classes teachers are assigned to teach and the number of students per class—were unrelated to commitment. This finding, in conjunction with findings highlighting the important role of administrative "buffering," seems to suggest that structural elements of the teacher workday may matter less to teachers in terms of their commitment to their schools than their perception that they can use allotted time according to plan, without the threat of distracting intrusions.

Still others have investigated the role of time pressure on teacher retention and commitment to the teaching profession. In the same study referenced above, Skaalvik and

Skaalvik (2011) found that time pressure was one of six school context factors related to low job satisfaction and motivation to leave teaching. Kyriacou and Kunc (2007) investigated how new teachers prepared in the North of England experienced changes in their expectations of the teaching profession from the time they were training through their first two years of teaching. They found that time pressure, or the “feeling that there is not time enough to do the work demanded to an acceptable standard” (p. 1253), was one of four primary factors that influenced teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession. Similarly, Struyven, and Vanthournout (2014) studied the reasons for attrition among a sample of newly trained teachers in Flanders, Belgium. Workload (including time pressure and “emotional tiredness”) emerged as one of five overarching reasons for attrition, second in salience only to “future prospects.”

In an American context, Ingersoll (2001) found that “inadequate time to prepare” was listed as a reason for attrition from the teaching profession for nearly a quarter (23 percent) of respondents who left teaching due to “dissatisfaction.” However, inadequate time to prepare was selected less frequently as a reason for dissatisfaction than poor salary (45 percent), lack of student motivation (38 percent), inadequate administrative support (30 percent), and student discipline problems (30 percent). Furthermore, another factor related to time pressure, “intrusions on teaching time,” was selected by only 11 percent of dissatisfied leavers. These results suggest that while time pressure does factor into some teachers’ decisions for leaving the profession, it may be less important than other organizational factors.

Time pressure and CDMA: Possibilities. As described earlier in this chapter in the section on teacher leadership, researchers have found that lack of time and an overwhelming workload are major barriers to teachers taking on leadership responsibilities in their schools (Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Relatedly, teachers who do take on leadership responsibilities have been found to experience considerable stress as they seek to

balance competing teaching and leadership roles (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). However, these findings have emerged in contexts in which the institutionalized “grammar of schooling”—for example, 6-period days, 55-minute class periods, and hour-long preps—has not changed to accommodate shifting teacher roles.

When teachers have the collective authority to determine how their time is spent throughout the school day, do they maintain these traditional structures? Or, do they seek to fashion different kinds of workdays that better support hybrid teacher-leader roles? Presumably, teachers empowered to do so would make decisions around the use of time that would support their varied responsibilities and reduce their experience of time pressure. By the same token, teachers who must also take on significant leadership work, as in the teacher-powered school, are likely to have a sizeable workload. This study will endeavor to understand how CDMA shapes teachers’ workdays and experience of time pressure, a topic explored in Chapter 6.

Narrative 3: Teachers work in isolation from their colleagues. Also a taken-for-granted part of the “grammar of schooling,” teacher isolation from adult colleagues throughout the majority of the school day keeps teachers from accessing the social, emotional, and professional support needed to cope with the rigorous demands of the teaching job. In the U.S., of the approximately 7.5 hours teachers spend at work each day, an average of only 45 minutes are devoted to planning—with only a fraction of that time spent collaborating. “In this short time,” Benner and Partelow (2017) write, “teachers must grade student work, plan for future lessons, engage with families, and complete necessary paperwork. As a result, teachers have little time to plan or collaborate with peers” (p. 1). Collaboration time that teachers do experience is often filled with administrative tasks or so tightly controlled by administrators that it feels “contrived” (Hargreaves, 1994; Glazier, Boyd, Bell Hughes, Able, & Mallous, 2017). Given the importance of authentic collaboration to teacher development and collective responsibility for school

improvement (Datnow, 2011; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), isolation represents a serious roadblock to teachers' professional wellbeing.

In many ways, isolation is a byproduct of the industrial-era "egg-crate" school (Lortie, 1975; Tyack, 1974, p. 44). The traditional school building is neatly divided into roughly equally-sized, rectangular classrooms designed to accommodate one teacher and two or three dozen students. During the common school movement of the early 1900s, when public school systems were coping with massive influxes of students, the egg-crate model provided an efficient way to make use of limited space and resources. At the same time, it facilitated the process of dividing students into discrete age groups in the elementary school, or subject-area classes that would make up the six-period secondary school day as described in the previous section. In essence, the egg-crate model represented a turn to the values of efficiency, standardization, and scientific management that became hallmarks of the common school movement (Tyack, 1974). This is still true today; most teachers work in their own four-walled classrooms, though co-teaching and team-teaching has become more prevalent (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Heasley & Smith, 2019).

An effect of the "egg-crate" school design is that its classrooms in many ways have served as safe havens for teachers from the tumultuous school environment beyond the classroom doors (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Lortie, 1975). The organization of schools has created "norms of privacy and noninterference" that discourage meaningful collaboration and interdependence (Little, 1990, p. 530). Such norms further isolate teachers from each other.

Somewhat paradoxically, norms of egalitarianism in teaching have also been shown to reinforce isolation (Donaldson, Johnson, Kirkpatrick, Marinell, Steele, & Szczesiul, 2008; Lortie, 1975). Egalitarianism in the context of the teaching profession has historically meant that "every teacher in the system has equal rights and equal stature, distinguished only by years of service and by hours of graduate credit taken" (Wasley, 1991, p. 147). Teachers accustomed to

egalitarian norms may be discouraged from offering help or receiving suggestions from colleagues on the grounds that doing so would imply a status hierarchy. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), “teachers often associate help with evaluation, and collaboration with supervision and control” (p. 108). These associations can breed distrust of colleagues offering advice, and, as discussed earlier in this chapter, may preclude some teachers from taking on leadership roles for fear of collegial resistance (Donaldson, Johnson, Kirkpatrick, Marinell, Steele, & Szczesiul, 2008; Duke, 1994). Distrust of peers’ motives can encourage teachers to go further into seclusion. “Isolation and individualism are their armor here—their protection against scrutiny and intrusion” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 108).

Importantly, egalitarian norms do not bolster isolation in all contexts. The basic premise of egalitarianism—that no one teacher is “better” than another—may serve to simultaneously encourage some teachers and excuse others from seeking assistance from peers. Those who crave assistance can rest assured that seeking it will not compromise their status, and those who wish to conduct their work independently are assumed to possess the requisite knowledge and skill.

According to Lortie (1975):

Collegial norms can be said to arbitrate tension between the quest for individual autonomy and the desire for collegial assistance... The norms respect the individual’s right to choose between association and privacy; they also protect individual teachers against unsolicited interventions by others. (p. 195)

Lortie describes the choice between “association and privacy” as being mediated by individual “personality differences” (p. 195), but there is substantial evidence to suggest that school-level norms of non-interference and patterns of interaction influence teachers’ behaviors toward their colleagues. In schools already characterized by minimal collegial interaction and the physical isolation of teachers from each other, teachers are less likely to develop trusting professional relationships and are therefore more likely to perceive an intervening colleague as *acting*

superior—a clear violation of egalitarian norms—responding by protecting their “turf” and avoiding such intrusions in the future. In schools in which collegial interaction and observation are more commonplace, teachers are more likely to learn to trust their colleagues, and do not see their assistance as threatening the egalitarian social order (Little, 1990; Rosenholtz, 1991).

Schools’ technical cultures—shared norms surrounding the nature of teachers’ work with students—also bears on teachers’ willingness to engage with colleagues for the purposes of professional development. Norms of isolation may be buttressed in schools with a “routine technical” culture, discussed in the *uncertainty* section, above. Rosenholtz (1991) found that teachers in such schools came to view their roles as essentially fixed and routine rather than flexible and adaptive, causing them to view outsiders’ presence in their classrooms as threatening and unnecessary. In contrast, teachers in schools with “nonroutine technical” cultures viewed uncertainty and ambiguity as inherent to their work and were therefore more likely to view the presence and feedback of others as helpful and non-threatening.

Impact of isolation on TPV. Historically, isolation has served in many ways as “armor” to protect teachers from the threat of inspection or unwanted interference. However, in the context of teaching as highly complex and uncertain work, isolation comes with myriad costs to teachers and schools. What have researchers found to be the impact of collegial isolation (and its converse, collaboration) on the three elements of professional vitality?

Numerous scholars have written about the connection between the social conditions of work and motivation. Returning to Ryan and Deci’s (2000) widely used self-determination theory described in Chapter 1, *relatedness* is one of three basic psychological needs (the others being autonomy and competence) which “when satisfied yields enhanced self-motivation and mental health and when thwarted leads to diminished motivation and well-being” (p. 68). Relatedness, or “the need to feel belongingness and connectedness with others” (p. 73) has been found to be a

critical component of motivation in a wide range of workplace settings, including schools (Deci & Ryan, 2014; Gagné & Deci, 2005; Lam & Lau, 2008). According to SDT, relatedness is important to the extent to which it accounts for “the internalization of values, attitudes, mores, and extrinsic motivations within a social environment” (Deci & Ryan, 2014, p. 11). In other words, the universal psychological need for relatedness leads people to internalize the values and motivations of others.

For example, Lam, Cheng, and Choy (2010) drew on SDT in studying teacher motivation and persistence in implementing project-based learning (PBL) in Hong Kong. The authors found that the presence of social factors such as collaborative school cultures and supportive administrators was related to teachers’ motivation to implement PBL. They concluded that, “when teachers perceived their school as being stronger in collegiality, and more supportive of their competence and autonomy, they had a higher degree of self-determination in implementing project-based learning and stronger attitude of persistence in this educational innovation” (p. 493). While the authors suggest that teachers in Hong Kong may experience relatedness needs particularly strongly due to a “collectivist culture that treasures interdependence” (p. 489), this study provides important insight into the role of collegiality in motivating teachers to persist in trying a new approach to teaching.

In contrast, teachers who work in more isolated settings have been shown to be more likely to resist changes to their practice. In Rosenholtz’ (1991) study, for example, teachers in isolated schools tended toward conservatism in their teaching, lacking confidence that problem-solving or learning new approaches would lead to improvements in students’ learning. Rosenholtz links this behavior to teachers’ threatened self-esteem in isolated settings and faculty norms limiting peer interaction to “experience-swapping,” which mostly amounted to complaints about students (p. 52). Instead of getting helpful feedback or advice from colleagues, teachers in

these schools got “sympathy and support” (p. 53), which sent the message that the problems they experienced were inevitable. These defeatist attitudes had major implications for teachers’ motivation, as “the absence of faith in a technical culture, in situated knowledge, tends to diminish teachers’ sense of what they are able to do” (p. 111).

In addition to its motivational consequences, isolation has been shown to reduce teachers’ organizational commitment. With limited access to colleagues, teachers view their work more as an independent rather than collective endeavor, furthering personal rather than organizational goals. In a qualitative study investigating distributed leadership and teacher commitment, Hulpia and Devos (2010), for example, found that in schools with less-committed teachers, several aspects of the social environment were lacking. Principals and teacher leaders were minimally accessible, teachers had few interactions or supportive conversations with members of leadership teams, and there were few opportunities for teacher involvement in decision-making. In schools with high teacher commitment, interaction, support, and involvement were abundant. More recently, Thomsen, Karsten, and Oort (2016) drew similar conclusions about the importance of communication and teacher opportunities for involvement in decision-making in reducing the “psychological distance” between teachers and school leaders and improving teachers’ organizational commitment. These studies highlight the important role of supportive interaction between teachers and school leaders (including teacher leaders)—not just between teachers—in fostering commitment as a component of TPV.

Ultimately, research suggests that isolation and its converse, collaboration, are intimately related to teacher turnover and retention. Lortie (1975) argued that high teacher turnover during the early twentieth century fostered the conditions for collegial isolation in schools. He found that the organization of schools as “aggregates of classroom units, as collections of independent cells”

(p. 16) accommodated the reality of high turnover of young, female teachers who were not expected (and, for a period, not *allowed*) to remain in their jobs upon marrying:

Assuming the teacher left at the end of the school year... new teachers could readily be placed in the former teachers' classrooms with new groups of students. Such flexibility was possible as long as teachers worked independently; but had their tasks been closely interwoven, the comings and goings of staff members would have created administrative problems. (p. 16)

As such, administrators coped with high turnover in ways that promoted teacher isolation and independence. Similarly, turnover made it difficult for teachers to form relationships of interdependence. Lortie continued:

The continual coming and going of staff members militated against the development of that easy familiarity which permits people to mutually adapt their actions and tasks. It would have required great effort on the part of administrators and teachers to develop the necessary teamwork. (p. 16)

With the expectation that their colleagues would soon leave, teachers had little reason to invest in professional relationships with peers.

Although the demographics of the teacher workforce have changed over time, the structural and normative isolation of teachers—largely—has not. In more recent years, numerous researchers have studied the interplay of teachers' social environments with their intentions of remaining in their jobs (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Simon & Johnson, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Weiss, 1999). These scholars have overwhelmingly extolled the benefits of interpersonal relationships and collaboration for teacher retention. For example, in a meta-analysis of reasons for teacher attrition, Borman and Dowling (2008) found that “a greater reported prevalence of school-based teacher networks and opportunities for collaboration was related to lower attrition rates” (p. 390). Similarly, Johnson et al. (2012) found that teachers' satisfaction and intent to stay in their jobs could be predicted by

the social conditions of their work. Analyzing data from a statewide teacher survey in Massachusetts, the authors found that:

Teachers are more satisfied and plan to stay longer in schools that have a positive work context, independent of the school's student demographic characteristics. Furthermore, although a wide range of working conditions matter to teachers, the specific elements of the work environment that matter the most to teachers are not narrowly conceived working conditions such as clean and well-maintained facilities or access to modern instructional technology. Instead, it is the social conditions—the school's culture, the principal's leadership, and relationships among colleagues—that predominate in predicting teachers' job satisfaction and career plans. (p. 2)

These findings parallel what the business world has begun to acknowledge: that comradeship and collaboration at work significantly predict employee satisfaction and engagement (Riordan, 2013).

Qualitative studies have provided further insight into the relationship between teacher collaboration and retention. For example, in her acclaimed volume, *What Keeps Teachers Going?*, Sonia Nieto (2003) describes how teachers participating in an inquiry group valued time with colleagues to reflect on teaching experiences and challenges. Nieto suggests that dedicated public school teachers crave, but generally have limited opportunities for, such “adult conversations” that contribute to teaching as intellectually stimulating work (p. 77). “For most inquiry group members, talking about questions in teaching that mattered was a powerful validation of the importance of their work,” she writes (p. 78), highlighting the importance of these conversations for affirming teachers' sense of purpose.

While Nieto's (2003) work is about persevering experienced teachers, others have written about how critical social interaction, collaboration, and mentorship are for novice teachers, who are at particular risk for turnover (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Weiss, 1999). Johnson (2004) and colleagues have argued that teachers entering the workforce in the twenty-first century expect and desire a high degree of interaction

and collaboration with colleagues. Unlike their predecessors—who had become accustomed to isolationist school cultures—many of the new teachers in their study “do not expect or want to work alone” (p. 252). When faced with isolated teaching assignments and school cultures that are resistant to collaboration, these new teachers are less likely to persevere in their jobs.

From isolation to professional community. As recognition of the benefits of teacher collaboration has increased over the past several decades, scholars and practitioners alike have begun to challenge the norms of isolation that have long characterized the teaching profession in the U.S. Multi-site studies investigating between-school differences have drawn fairly clear distinctions between schools that are fostering effective collaboration and those that are not. Several such studies are reviewed below with an emphasis on factors that were found to foster collegial collaboration.

For example, Rosenholtz (1991), in her mixed methods study of 78 Tennessee elementary schools, sought to understand what school organizational factors promoted faculty collaboration, defined as “[faculty members’] requests for and offers of collegial advice and assistance” (p. 41). Rosenholtz distinguished between “isolated” and “collaborative” school settings, finding the latter to be places in which teachers “share instructional goals, involve themselves in technical decision-making, feel less uncertain about their technical culture and instructional practice, and work as part of a teaching team” (p. 46). Investigating further using interview data, collaborative schools were those in which teachers “engaged in mutual sharing with colleagues” (p. 50), had principals that demonstrated “willingness to confront classroom or school problems” by empowering teachers (p. 58), and welcomed collegial leadership pertaining to instructional improvement. In collaborative schools, “teachers may come to perceive that advice is frequently required to master instructional goals, that mutual assistance is often needed, and that teachers should avail themselves of collegial resources whenever possible” (p. 67). In contrast, “norms of

self-reliance” prevailed in isolated school settings (p. 69), where both teachers and principals sought to protect themselves from questions about their professional competence.

In another study highlighting schools that have overcome norms of isolation, Louis, Kruse, and associates (1995) sought to examine how *professional community* manifested and developed in five restructuring urban schools. The authors describe school-based professional community as having the following characteristics: shared norms and values, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, collective focus on student learning, and collaboration (pp. 28-34). These characteristics were present in varying degrees at the schools studied, with the formation of professional community being dependent on multiple structural, social, and human resource conditions. Structural conditions supporting professional community included time to meet and talk, physical proximity, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures, and teacher empowerment and school autonomy. Social and human resources conditions included openness to improvement, trust and respect, access to expertise, supportive leadership, and socialization (p. 25).

Demerath’s (2018) ethnographic study of an improving urban high school provides important insight into how collaborative school cultures can develop over time. Through interviews with teachers, staff members, and the school principal, Demerath identified shared discourses surrounding student capabilities and trust in faculty that contributed to an “emotion culture” conducive to staff commitment to the school. Six different feedback loops promoted the development of a “common moral purpose” (p. 500), suggesting that the formation of a collaborative school culture depends on repeat efficacy experiences stemming from staff members’ emotional investments, including trust in shared leadership, empathy for staff members and students, and optimism in students’ capabilities (p. 493).

The work of Rosenholtz (1991), Louis and Kruse (1995), Demerath (2018) and many others (see, for example, Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Horn & Little, 2010; Little, 1982; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen & Grissom, 2015) demonstrates that isolation need not be a taken-for-granted condition of work life in schools. Taken together, these studies highlight several recurring themes about schools that foster collaboration and professional community: they are characterized by staff interdependence, trust, alignment of purpose, and empowerment. However, in light of the historical, institutional, and normative forces buttressing isolation, pathways to teacher collaboration and professional community are not always obvious or free from obstacles. The following section highlights several potential ways in which teacher CDMA may mitigate some of these obstacles.

Isolation and CDMA: Possibilities. When teaching faculties have the collective authority to determine structures and expectations for collaboration with colleagues, what do they decide to do? And how do their decisions translate into norms of interaction or noninteraction? Decades ago, Rosenholtz (1991) surmised that “norms of collaboration may evolve directly from faculty decision-making in at least four ways” (p. 44). These included:

First, in making technical decisions—in reasoning, formulating, debating and discovering—teachers may become sensitized to their own situations so that their needs become defined as “problems” for which possible solutions might be found. Second, teachers may discover the relevance and usefulness of colleagues’ special skills and competencies, partaking of the pleasures of other people’s work as well as their own. Under both these conditions, helping behaviors have been found to increase sharply (Gross et al. 1979). Finally, decision-making opportunities may develop the awareness that no teacher is immune to classroom problems and therefore that all teachers stand to benefit from the mutual exchange of ideas. To overcome difficulties inherent in the practice of teaching, mutual assistance may come to be understood as a necessary and legitimate prerequisite to successful teaching. (p. 44-5)

Since then, researchers have investigated how teacher leadership and participation in decision-making have influenced collegial relationships and norms of interaction. According to a recent

review describing teacher leadership impacts on collegial relationships, “most often, the changes in relationships were negative; peers resented teacher leaders because it disrupted the egalitarian norms typically seen in schools” (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 151). That is, teacher leaders were viewed by their teaching colleagues as suspect because they appeared to possess greater power than teachers who did not take on leadership roles. Teacher leadership in these cases was not found to dramatically improve faculty collaboration. However, in the context of teacher CDMA, where teacher leadership is an expectation for *all* teachers, participating in leadership work would presumably not conflict with egalitarian norms and therefore be less likely to engender resentment or distrust.

Narrative 4: Teachers’ work has been deprofessionalized. The meaningfulness and impact of collegial relationships depends in part on what can come of those relationships—can teachers work together to make changes at their schools? Or are they merely tasked with collaborating for the sake of collaborating with little opportunity to impact their work together? The fourth prevailing narrative of teachers’ work, *deprofessionalization*, concerns teachers’ inability to leverage their professional judgment—honed through what may be years of education and experience—in responding to the educational needs of students and the organizational needs of schools.

Is teaching a “profession”? Teaching as an occupation in the U.S. has historically had an ambiguous status in the world of work. Is it, or isn’t it, a “profession”? According to education scholar and historian David Labaree, “two key elements that are demonstrably part of any successful claim of professional status [are] formal knowledge and workplace autonomy,” (Labaree, 1992, p. 125). He clarifies:

The claim to professional status rests on a simple bargain: technical competence is exchanged for technical autonomy, practical knowledge for control over practice. The upwardly mobile occupational group must establish that it has mastery of a formal body of knowledge that is not accessible to the layperson and that gives it special competence in carrying out a particular form of work. In return, the group asks for a monopoly over its area of work on the grounds that only those who are certifiably capable should be authorized to do such work and to define appropriate forms of practice in the area. (p. 125)

To the extent that teachers, as a group, are seen as possessing such “special competence” by virtue of their knowledge of teaching, and to the extent that they have control over what they do to achieve desired outcomes with students, teachers achieve a professional status. To the extent that teachers’ knowledge of their craft is questioned or dictated by others—whether that be parents, elected school board members, or professional administrators—and to the extent that they lack such control over their practice, they do not achieve a professional status.

Ingersoll and Collins (2018) recently undertook an analysis attempting to answer the question, “how professionalized is teaching?” using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS 11-12) (p. 202). They looked for evidence of professionalization in seven different domains:

1. Credential and licensing levels
2. Induction and mentoring programs for entrants
3. Professional development support, opportunities, and participation
4. Specialization
5. Authority over decision making
6. Compensation levels, and
7. Prestige and occupational social standing (p. 201)

The findings were mixed, and varied between public and private schools and between “low poverty” and “high poverty” public schools. While most public school teachers had formal

credentials—viewed as indicative of teachers possessing the “special competence” discussed in the preceding paragraph—50 percent of private school teachers, and 10 percent of public school teachers in high poverty schools, did not. Most novice teachers participated in induction and mentoring programs, though again, private school teachers did so less frequently. The vast majority of surveyed teachers were granted time for professional development. However, only 77 percent of public school teachers and 58 percent of private school teachers taught classes that were in their field of specialization; faculty authority over hiring and evaluation was abysmally low; and compensation levels were found to be “frontloaded,” with teachers having much less opportunity for pay increases over time than members of many other occupations. Finally, the authors determined that teachers occupied a middling social standing, far below that of physicians, professors, and lawyers; above that of police, secretaries, and mail carriers; and approximating that of nurses.

In assessing teaching’s claim to a professional status vis à vis control over their work, it is useful to view teacher control as comprising two separate (though related) constructs. Following Spector (1986) and Ashforth (1989), I conceive of the notion of control as encompassing both *autonomy* and *participation*. Autonomy “concerns the freedom of the individual to be his or her own master within the prescribed task domain,” whereas participation “concerns the degree to which the individual has input into or influence over strategic, administrative, and operating decisions” (Ashforth, 1989, pp. 207-8). Applied to teaching, “autonomy” generally represents the freedom individual teachers have to conduct their lessons as they see fit within the confines of the classroom, whereas “participation” or “participation in decision-making” (PDM) represents teachers’ influence over school-level decisions, such as establishing goals, selecting colleagues, and determining how school funds are to be spent.

Similarly, Ingersoll (2003) argues that control in schools is very much a relative concept; deciding whether teachers have too much or too little control depends on the domains of decision-making being considered. In examining data from a previous administration of the SASS, for example, Ingersoll found that “teachers report far higher levels of control at the classroom level” as opposed to influence at the school level (p. 95). More recent data from the same survey conducted during the 2011-2012 school year suggest that this pattern has persisted. On measures of school level influence, 36 percent of teachers reported “moderate influence” or “a great deal of influence,” on average, compared to 80 percent of teachers reporting “moderate control” or “a great deal of control” on measures of classroom control (NCES, 2015).

In summary, in the U.S., although teachers receive due “appreciation” for their work, they are generally not granted the kind of control over their work that professionals tend to have; they are “special but shadowed” (Lortie, 1975, p. 10). Reflecting on the inconsistency in how teachers are perceived by the public, Nieto (2003) stated, “there is, on the one hand, a curious reverence for the profession of teaching, and on the other, a persistent disapproval of the job that most teachers are doing” (p. 1). Such “persistent disapproval” has, over time, bred distrust in teachers’ abilities to collectively self-manage.

Historical roots of deprofessionalization. The uneven distribution of control in U.S. schools has been attributed in part to historical forces that have, over time, inadvertently suppressed the power of teachers. For example, the Common School movement, which gained momentum during the second half of the nineteenth century, sought to significantly expand access to public education for lower- and middle-class children (Sadovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 2006). The corresponding need to educate huge numbers of children for the industrializing nation had two effects relevant to the present discussion: first, a huge spike in the demand for teachers

(Labaree, 2004), and second, the standardization of teaching and learning to increase schools' efficiency and promote equity of educational opportunity (Sadovnik et al., 2006).

Together, these effects contributed to the rise of a “factory” model of schooling in which efficiency, standardization, and the deskilling of teachers' work were the norm. The sudden increase in enrollments meant that schools across the country would need to recruit teachers, mostly women, who had received little or no formal training in education. Female teachers were expected—and sometimes required—to leave their jobs upon marrying, further exacerbating the demand for “warm bodies” to fill the nation's classrooms (Labaree, 2004, p. 21). A major consequence of this shift toward minimally educated, minimally experienced teachers was a notable shift in society's regard for teachers, and public distrust of teachers became the norm (Labaree, 2004).

To deal with the ever-rotating cast of teachers occupying increasingly large, factory-like schools, school boards hired administrators—predominantly men—to manage them. This allowed a division of labor in which teachers would spend all their time delivering instruction and administrators would spend their time directing them, much as a foreman directs the factory workers in an automobile plant. Administrators themselves would report to an expanding centralized bureaucracy led by a district superintendent (Goldstein, 2015; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Tyack, 1974).

Thus schools became part of hierarchical institutions, “organized on the authority principle, with power theoretically vested in the school superintendent and radiating from him down to the lowest substitute teacher in the system,” according to Willard Waller, credited with conducting the first sociological study of teaching as an occupation (Waller, 1932, p. 9). Waller went on to observe that schools “have a despotic political structure... in a state of perilous equilibrium” (pp. 9-10). In other words, the authority that teachers and principals do possess is

constantly threatened by “students, parents, the school board, each other” and other members of the school community who keep a watchful eye on its activities (p. 11). What Waller described is not the kind of place where teachers (or administrators, for that matter) can readily and flexibly adjust course to meet changing student needs.

While the Common School movement revolutionized public education in the U.S. and represented an important step toward equal opportunity for children of all backgrounds and not just the wealthy elite, its emphasis on standardization and maximizing outputs reduced the role of teachers to that of factory workers. However, the essence of teaching as described by Lortie (1975) in the section above about uncertainty remained the same: children could not be standardized, they remained unpredictable, and the rewards of the profession remained elusive. But instead of having more control over their classrooms and schools, teachers had less.

The product of these historical forces in combination with the reality that teaching is highly complex, ambiguous, and relational work is that there is considerable disagreement over the nature of teaching as an occupation, even among teachers themselves. For those with a routine-technical view of teaching as discussed in the previous section, teaching is skilled labor; deprofessionalization poses little threat because teachers view themselves as essentially non-professional. For those who view teaching as non-routine and for whom the ambiguities and possibilities of teaching are what make it exciting, challenging, and motivating work, deprofessionalization serves to inhibit teachers from self-actualizing in their roles. It is this latter group of teachers—those motivated to seek continuous improvement both in their own practice and at the school level—that I am most concerned with when discussing the negative impact of deprofessionalization on TPV. These are the teachers that schools would do well to retain and motivate.

Impact of deprofessionalization on TPV. There are two primary pathways by which deprofessionalization threatens TPV: directly, through a psychological pathway, and indirectly, through the impact of limited decision-making influence on the nature of teachers' work.

Autonomy, broadly construed, is widely considered an essential component of motivation in an organizational setting (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Pink, 2011). As described in Chapter 1, autonomy is a key component of Deci and Ryan's (2012) self-determination theory of motivation. In essence, people have an intrinsic desire to direct the course of their own lives, which requires some degree of control over what they do and how they do it.

Validating these theories of motivation, researchers have identified numerous positive organizational outcomes of enhanced employee autonomy and participation in decision-making over the past several decades. These outcomes include not only increased motivation, but also increased job satisfaction, job performance, work-life satisfaction, creativity, commitment, and openness to organizational change (Hornung & Rousseau, 2007; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Spector, 1986; Thompson & Prottas, 2006). In addition to research demonstrating the positive impact of distribution of power to lower-level employees, the converse has also been shown to be true—powerlessness (the absence of control) may lead to discouragement, rebellion, attrition, and, at its worst, sabotage (Ashforth, 1989; Barnard, 1938; Kanter, 1979).

Of course, increased autonomy and participation is not a “silver bullet” solution to problems of motivation and performance in organizations. Scholars have pointed out that not all individuals respond positively to enhanced control over their work (Abernethy & Stoelwinder, 1995; Spector, 1982; Spector, 1986). For instance, although his extensive meta-analysis of research on workplace autonomy found it to be an overall strong predictor of positive work outcomes, Spector (1986) concedes that

with increased control comes increased responsibility and often increased workload. There may be circumstances in which these possible negative outcomes outweigh the positives for an individual, especially in circumstances where the individual does not have the ability to exercise control appropriately. (p. 1014)

Other studies have suggested that the type of job matters in the extent to which autonomy affects performance (Abernethy & Stoelwinder, 1995; Spector, 1982). Generally speaking, “knowledge workers” are thought to require and expect more autonomy than workers performing more routinized jobs (Davenport, 2013). Davenport defines knowledge workers as workers whose jobs “involve the creation, distribution, or application of knowledge” (p. 10). A common challenge faced by knowledge workers is that “their work is inherently emergent—the important problems they solve and opportunities they capitalize on are novel and rarely, if ever, standard to the point that the work can become routine” (pp. 12-13). As such, knowledge workers “don’t like to be told what to do” (p. 14) and “don’t like to see their jobs reduced to a series of boxes and arrows” (p. 17).

Given that teachers are categorized as “knowledge workers” by Davenport’s (2013) criteria, it would make sense that teachers would be likely to respond well to enhanced control in their jobs. In fact, numerous researchers have identified positive relationships between teacher control (as autonomy, participation in decision-making, or both) and all three components of TPV: motivation (Roth, 2014; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Somech, 2010; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1997), commitment (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Kushman, 1992; Riehl & Sipple, 1996; Somech & Bogler, 2002; Weiss, 1999; Wu & Short, 1996), and retention (Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Shen, 1997; Weiss, 1999).

For example, drawing on SDT, Roth (2014) reviewed studies that explored both outcomes and antecedents of teachers’ “autonomous motivation.” As discussed in Chapter 1, in

the context of SDT, *autonomous motivation* is typically contrasted with *controlled motivation*.

Roth explained, “When autonomously motivated, people perceive themselves as the ‘origin’ of their own behavior, whereas in controlled motivation, they perceive themselves as ‘pawns’ subjected to the play of forces imposed by others” (p. 2). Roth concluded:

The research reviewed substantiates two main propositions anchored in SDT. First, teachers’ autonomous motivation predicts positive psychological outcomes for teachers and students. Second, autonomy-supportive and autonomy-suppressive environmental contexts respectively, can support or inhibit teachers’ autonomous motivation and its positive consequences. (pp. 20-21)

“Autonomy-supportive” contexts, Roth found, are those that reduce external pressures on teachers (such as “restrictions, reforms, standards, and goals,” p. 21) and that are characterized by a transformational style of leadership—one that honors the expertise and perspectives of individuals while aligning faculty members toward a shared organizational vision.

Other researchers have focused specifically on how teacher participation in decision-making (PDM) shapes teachers’ commitment to their schools and related constructs, such as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and collective responsibility (Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Marks & Louis, 1997; Somech & Bogler, 2002; Bogler & Somech, 2004; Somech, 2005). The research in this area has not always yielded consistent findings (Somech & Bogler, 2002; Bogler & Somech, 2004; Chan, Lau, Nie, Lim, & Hogan, 2008). For instance, leveraging survey data from Israeli teachers, Somech and Bogler (2002) found that PDM in the area of managerial (non-instructional) decisions predicted organizational commitment, but that PDM in the area of technical (instructional) decisions did not. Bogler and Somech (2004) found that PDM and organizational commitment were correlated, but that PDM did not predict organizational commitment. The authors suggested that PDM was measured in this later study as a one-dimensional construct, not accounting for differences in decision-making at the technical versus managerial domains, as had been found in their earlier study. Somech (2005) explained that

teacher empowerment likely served as a mediating factor in the relationship between PDM and organizational commitment.

The view that the relationship between PDM and commitment is not straightforward, but mediated by a range of teacher, teacher-leader dyad, organizational, and cultural factors has been supported by others (Chan, Lau, Nie, Lim, & Hogan, 2008; Somech, 2010). The basic premise behind this view is that the success of PDM as measured by various teacher and school outcomes is dependent on the conditions under which it is implemented. For example, Somech's (2010) analytical framework suggests that schools with more bureaucratic forms of management and low-quality teacher-principal relationships will be less likely to achieve success (in terms of productivity, innovation, OCB, job satisfaction, and strain) with PDM than will schools with more organic forms of management and high-quality teacher-principal relationships.

The relationship between teacher PDM and teacher retention appears to be more straightforward. Numerous qualitative and quantitative studies have extolled the benefits of enhanced teacher decision-making for retention (Ingersoll & Alsalam, 1997; Johnson, 2004; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Weiss, 1999). For example, leveraging both qualitative data from interviews with teachers at four different types of schools as well as statistical analysis of national teacher data, Ingersoll (2003) found that U.S. schools with greater teacher control over various facets of their work had less intra-organizational conflict and greater staff retention than schools with less teacher control. As in Somech and Bogler (2002), Ingersoll distinguishes between two basic domains of control: the "academic" domain, which includes decision-making about what is taught and how, and the "social" domain, which includes decision-making about a range of school-level matters that ultimately impact teachers' work, including decisions about scheduling, student discipline policy, and working conditions (among others). Ingersoll found that the effect of control on conflict and retention was especially pronounced in the "social" domain of decision

making relative to the “academic” domain. These findings highlight the particular role of participation in school-level decision-making, as distinct from classroom autonomy, in promoting teacher retention.

Deprofessionalization and CDMA: Possibilities. Of the five prevailing narratives of teaching described in this chapter, deprofessionalization is most directly linked to the study of teacher-powered schools because it speaks specifically to the role of teachers as decision-makers. In theory, according to the research reviewed herein, teachers working in schools where they have collective authority to shape the conditions of their work will feel more motivated to improve their practice, more responsible for the outcomes of their work, and more committed to their schools and teaching jobs.

Narrative 5: Teachers’ work with young people is mired in conflict. The fifth and final narrative surrounding the work of teachers for this review is the narrative of conflict that exists between teachers and students. This narrative is so universal that it is frequently portrayed in movies, TV shows, cartoons, and internet memes. A common trope is the new, inexperienced teacher on a quest to control their classroom and a group of students who are hell-bent on destroying any semblance of order, whether for amusement or as payback for unjust punishment or an undeserved bad grade.

It would be inaccurate to describe most student-teacher relationships as conflictual. Numerous studies have described teachers’ relationships with students as positive and fulfilling (see, for example, Huberman, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2003).

However, conflict with just one or two students in a class may preoccupy a teacher to such a degree that they must devote considerable time and energy toward diffusing or resolving it (Friedman, 2006). Challenges with student behavior have been found to be a significant source of workplace stress for teachers (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008),

particularly in secondary schools; according to Brouwers and Tomic (2000), “the demands made on secondary school teachers consist to a substantial extent of emotionally charged relationships with students” (p. 239).

Conflict takes on a range of forms in schools. Here, I define student-teacher conflict as an incompatibility—real or perceived—between the interests of a student and teacher that jeopardizes the quality of the relational bond between them. Sources of conflict may include, for example, incompatible expectations around productivity (e.g., a teacher expects a student to “work harder”), behavioral conduct (e.g., a teacher expects a student to stay seated), relational closeness (e.g., a student expects a teacher to demonstrate interest in their life outside of school), or assistance (e.g., a student expects a teacher to help with an assignment). Manifestations of conflict may include defiant or disruptive student behavior, teacher censuring or disciplinary action, teacher sarcasm or humiliation, or relational distance, among others.

Student-teacher conflict is often self-perpetuating. When a student “misbehaves”—or behaves in ways inconsistent with their teacher’s expectations—the teacher’s or administrator’s behavioral or disciplinary response can further deteriorate the bond between them, prompting future resistance as the student begins to internalize a sense of alienation from school and rejection from their teacher (Lewis, 2001; Milner, 2006). This may be especially true where students and teachers do not share the same cultural norms governing “appropriate” behavior, a topic explored in greater depth in the “causes” section, below (Delpit, 1995; Milner, 2006; Noguera, 2003).

While we know student-teacher conflict is prevalent, it has received much less attention in the educational research literature than research portraying positive student-teacher interactions. The subject of student-teacher conflict is considered taboo, especially when it implicates teachers as misbehaving or incompetent themselves (Metz, 2003; Sava, 2002). As

Sava (2002) recounts, “most of us can remember one or more classroom episodes when teachers’ acts determined some lasting negative effects on pupils... Unfortunately, researchers often tend to overlook teachers as a potential source of problems in the classroom,” (p. 1007).

For teachers, recalling such episodes may elicit strong emotional responses, including feelings of incompetence, shame, anger, fear, and guilt (Chang, 2009; Lortie, 1975; Metz, 1993; Waller, 1932). The reluctance of teachers and researchers to discuss painful episodes may therefore obscure the extent of conflict in the classroom. Next, causes of student-teacher conflict will be reviewed, followed by the impact of conflict on TPV.

Causes. Some scholars have written about conflict with students as an inherent part of the teaching job; others have described how conflict is either exacerbated or mitigated by a range of factors, including structures and norms surrounding control and discipline in the classroom as well as the socioeconomic, racial, and cultural identities of teachers and students. These various sources of conflict are described below, in turn. While this is not a comprehensive portrayal of a very complex phenomenon, it highlights a range of factors that contribute to schools being conflict-ridden places.

One perspective on student-teacher conflict is that it is inevitable, as conflict is inevitable in any organization. In describing the “political frame” of studying complex organizations, Bolman and Deal (2013) write that “the combination of scarce resources and divergent interests produces conflict as surely as night follows day” (p. 201). In the context of the classroom, scarce resources in the form of time, space, and materials, coupled with the divergent interests of teachers and students, necessitates some degree of conflict.

In fact, some have argued that schools are at particular risk for conflict. Lortie (1975), for example, cited “three peculiarities” of the teaching profession that make it particularly fraught with conflict: “the low degree of voluntarism in the student-teacher relationship, the problem of

extracting work from immature workers, and the grouped context of teacher endeavors” (p. 137). First, students have no choice but to attend school. They typically have no say over what teacher to which they are assigned, nor what classes they take. “Any class will include at least some students who would rather be elsewhere” (p. 137). Likewise, teachers have no say in selecting their “clients.” Lortie writes, “The absence of voluntarism in the teacher-student relationship means that neither party brings preexisting bonds to the relationship. It is the role obligation of the teacher to forge bonds which will not merely ensure compliance but, it is hoped, generate effort and interest in ‘learning jobs’” (p. 137).

Second, students—as young people—are not yet “fully socialized” to work cooperatively in spite of divergent interests (Lortie, 1975, p. 137), nor have they “acquired the capacity for sustained effort” (p. 152). Children have not yet mastered the kind of self-regulation required of sustained effort toward learning goals. School is perhaps the foremost setting where such development is supposed to occur.

Third, teachers teach *groups* of students, each with divergent skills, needs, and interests; each with an awareness of how the teacher interacts with every other student:

Teachers do not establish entirely distinct and separate working contracts with each student—they establish general rules for class conduct and find it necessary to discipline deviation from those rules. Actions taken with or for one child are generally visible to other children, and like subordinates in other settings, students are quick to resent treatment they see as inequitable. Action with one, therefore, can become precedent for all; the claims of “individualized instruction” must be seen in light of these fundamental constraints. (pp. 137-8)

The difficulties of meeting the varied needs of students while maintaining the semblance of fairness in the classroom have been well documented, particularly in the context of the inclusion of special education students in the general education classroom (Berry, 2008; Cameron, 2014; Welch, 2000).

Motivating unwilling, immature students with diverse needs and interests requires a delicate balancing act of being responsive and caring on the one hand and strict and demanding on the other (Lortie, 1975, p. 153). Both are required to earn students' respect, but a teacher who steps too far in one direction can risk losing students' trust and jeopardizing their cooperation. This tension between "task and expressive aspects of their role" (p. 154) has confounded many novice teachers, in particular, as their friendly efforts to win students' favor backfire when a more authoritative stance is required (Aultman, Williams-Johnson, & Schutz, 2009; McLaughlin, 1991; Weinstein, 1998). Lortie concludes, "It does not appear that [teachers'] work culture has come to grips with the inevitabilities of interpersonal clash and considerations of how one copes with them. Teachers seem lonely; they fight battles alone with their consciences and, it seems, frequently lose," (p. 159).

Other sources of "interpersonal clash" are not inherent to teaching, *per se*, but are byproducts of how schools have come to be structured. As stated in the previous section on deprofessionalization, Waller (1932) observed long ago that American public schools are "organized on the authority principle" (p. 9), with administrators in positions of dominance, students in positions of subordination, and teachers somewhere in the middle. Furthermore, he wrote:

It is not enough to point out that the school is a despotism. It is a despotism in a state of perilous equilibrium. It is a despotism threatened from within and exposed to regulation and interference from without. It is a despotism capable of being overturned in a moment, exposed to the instant loss of its stability and its prestige. It is a despotism demanded by the community of parents, but specially limited by them as to the techniques which it may use for the maintenance of a stable social order. It is a despotism resting on children, at once the most tractable and the most unstable members of the community. (p. 10)

Lest the fragile, hierarchical "despotism" described here come crashing down, teachers find themselves in the precarious position of answering to administrators and parents while

negotiating “treaties” with their unpredictable and independent-minded students to keep the peace in the classroom (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). As external demands made of teachers shift, conflict and tension with students are unavoidable.

Waller (1932) argued that the “perilousness” of authority in schools contributes to tightened control and discipline: “the school is continually threatened because it is autocratic, and it has to be autocratic because it is threatened. The antagonistic forces are balanced in that ever-fickle equilibrium which is discipline” (p. 11). Preserving the autocratic order in schools, or at least the appearance of one, requires a system of control in which there are predictable, negative consequences for students’ noncompliance. Parents, teachers, school board members, and students alike have come to expect them.

The difficulty with managing student behavior in this way is that it tends to diminish students’ free expression and sense of autonomy. While some students may acquiesce to teachers’ demands, others will protest the injustice of such coercion. This is a natural human response. In the general organizational literature, a common consequence of tightened managerial control is subordinate misbehavior or apathy. Ashforth (1989), in describing how “control” and “deviance” at work may inadvertently perpetuate each other, writes:

It is interesting to note that the usual managerial response to disruptive or apathetic behaviors and work alienation is to reinforce the system of control. It is argued here that it is precisely because controls frustrate many individuals’ expectations and desires for autonomy and participation that much of this behavior occurs. The prescription—at least prior to work adjustment—is less control over these individuals, not more. Unfortunately, it is the irony of control systems that they tend to be self-validating: Compliance justifies the existing controls; noncompliance justifies their extension. This circularity, of course, gives rise to a vicious circle of ever-increasing control and deviance. (p. 235)

This highlights an important mechanism by which schools being “organized on the authority principle” (Waller, 1932, p. 9), ironically, perpetuates student misbehavior and conflict with teachers. In denying students the freedom to govern their own conduct, in an effort to maintain

the semblance of order, teachers give students good reason to protest. It is important to note, here, that teachers' hands are tied; being themselves subject to the orders of administrators and school board members, they are left with little recourse but to turn to mechanisms of control.

Other structures have been shown to influence conflict and the quality of teacher-student relationships. These factors may include how large class sizes are, how large the school is, time available for students and teachers to get to know each other, and discipline policies (Ayers, 2000; Fronius, Persson, Guckenberger, Hurley, & Petrosino, 2016; Pedder, 2006). For example, whereas large schools may present structural barriers to strong student-teacher relationships, small school models “emphasize personalism, or sustained interpersonal interactions between students and teachers” (Phillippo, 2010, p. 2261). In a review of research on class size, Pedder (2006) found that, “reduced opportunities for individual interactions in larger classes make it more difficult than in smaller classes for [teachers] to establish and maintain rapport with pupils, to develop knowledge of pupils' needs, interests, background and academic progress, and to provide personalised forms of support and formative guidance” (p. 228). It is important to note that researchers and practitioners do not universally endorse school structures such as small schools and class sizes, particularly due to limited evidence that they necessarily lead to enhanced student learning; however, their benefits for student-teacher relationships are intuitive and strongly supported (see, e.g., Gershenson & Langbein, 2015; Pedder, 2006).

Discipline policies have been shown to bear strongly on the quality of student-teacher relationships. Discipline approaches such as “zero-tolerance” models use exclusionary practices for even minor offenses, which have been found to strain student-teacher relationships and cause further conflict (Ashley & Burke, 2009). Other approaches, such as restorative justice, seek first and foremost to repair harm to relationships caused by student behavior:

Restorative justice practices and policies can offer an alternative to other more punitive responses used by schools. Students are often unaware of the harmful impact of their behavior on themselves and others. Handling conflict and misbehavior in a restorative way allows students and staff to actively make amends and repair harm. In addition, restorative practices in schools can promote positive feelings, rather than resentment and alienation within the school setting. (Ashley & Burke, 2009, p. 10)

A number of studies have found that restorative justice approaches significantly reduce student discipline problems in schools, which may further reduce student-teacher conflict (Fronius et al., 2016).

Scholars studying student-teacher relations from a critical lens have also pointed out that clashes in class, cultural, or racial identities of students and teachers can trigger classroom conflict and student resistance (see, e.g., Achinstein & Aguirre, 2008; Delpit, 1995; Willis, 1977). In his landmark ethnographic study examining the schooling of working-class white boys in England, Willis (1977), for example, observed students defying and playing pranks on their middle-class teachers and administrators. Willis explains the “lads” behavior as a means of rejecting formal schooling’s prizing of white-collar mobility and culture, of which they do not see themselves as part.

Undoubtedly, bias on the part of teachers and administrators plays a role in identity-based classroom conflict. Numerous studies have shown that Black students receive harsher punishments than white students for similar infractions (see, e.g., Girvan, Gion, McIntosh, & Smolkowski, 2017; Rocque, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). In analyzing student disciplinary data from 364 elementary and middle schools from the 2005-2006 school year, for example, Skiba, Horner, Choong-Guen, Rausch, May, and Tobin (2011) found that African American and Latino students were more likely than white students to be expelled or suspended for comparable behaviors. Students are perceptive of such differences in treatment

(Bottiani, Bradshaw, & Mendelson, 2017), which may cause them to distrust and resent teachers whom they see as unjust.

Impact of student-teacher conflict on TPV. Until recently, scholarship about student-teacher relationships has focused mostly on student learning impacts. According to Spilt, Koomen, and Thijs (2011), “many studies have examined the importance of teacher-student relationships for the development of children. Much less is known, however, about how these relationships impact the professional and personal lives of teachers” (p. 457). That said, some scholars have identified multiple pathways by which conflict—most often manifesting as “student disruptive behavior” and “challenging behavior”—threatens teachers’ well-being and professional vitality at work.

Several studies considering the impact of student-teacher conflict on teachers have identified motivational consequences such as reduced self-efficacy and burnout (see, e.g., Blase, 1986; Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Friedman, 1995; Friedman, 2006; Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010). In fact, according to Friedman (2006), classroom behavior challenges are among the most significant sources of teacher burnout: “Facing student disruptive and unruly behavior can make teachers feel degraded and inferior, and make them question their leadership abilities... From the teacher’s perspective, disrespect to the teacher means a shameful—and in the worst case—irreversible sense of professional failure” (p. 940).

Surveying 610 teachers from four U.S. districts, Tsouloupas et al. (2010), for example, found that teacher perceptions of student misbehavior were positively correlated to emotional exhaustion, considered “the core dimension of burnout” (p. 174). This finding supported what others had shown previously (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Friedman, 1995). Furthermore, employing structural equation modeling, the authors studied two potential kinds of mediators of this relationship: teacher efficacy in handling student misbehavior, and two forms of emotion

regulation: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. While teacher efficacy was found to mediate the relationship between perceptions of student misbehavior and emotional exhaustion, neither of the two emotion regulation strategies met the criteria for mediation. This study suggests that teacher self-efficacy—and particularly domain-specific self-efficacy (in this case, efficacy related to handling student misbehavior)—may be an important protective factor in preventing burnout related to student-teacher conflict.

Others studying the relationship between student disruptive behavior, teacher self-efficacy, and burnout have suggested that these experiences are self-perpetuating (Lamude & Scudder, 1992; Brouwers & Tomic, 1998). For example, Brouwers and Tomic (1998) identified a cyclical relationship by which student disruptive behavior diminished teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management, which increased teacher burnout, which promoted the incidence of disruptive behavior.

Qualitative research provides an important source of insight on how student-teacher conflict diminishes teacher self-efficacy and leads to burnout. Metz (1993), for example, observed and interviewed 8 Midwestern comprehensive high schools in communities that varied dramatically in terms of socioeconomic status (SES) and race, finding that the feedback and validation teachers got from observing students' behavior powerfully mediated teachers' perceptions of their own self-worth as educators. Especially in low-SES schools in which the student body had less reason to acquiesce to their teachers' demands, primarily due to students' low expectations of future educational and employment prospects, students' lack of compliance or respect severely diminished teachers' "pride of craft" and led to considerable cynicism and anger (p. 119). Such conflict with students, and its effects on teachers, underscored teachers' paradoxical but "ultimate dependence on their students" despite societal expectations of their superior authority (p. 104).

In an unusual study leveraging open-ended responses to questions about sources of teacher stress, Blase (1986) identified student discipline challenges and student apathy as major categories of stressors that detracted from teachers' sense that they could perform their jobs well. Blase coined the term Performance Adaptation Syndrome (PAS) to refer to the reduction in teachers' effort and expectations of themselves in response to these and other work stressors.

Some scholars have written about the impact of student-teacher conflict on teacher workplace commitment (Johnson et al., 2005; Rosenholtz, 1991). However, there appears to be less empirical data suggesting that disruptive behavior is a major detractor from commitment. At the same time, there is evidence to suggest that *how* schools collectively approach issues of student behavior matters greatly to teachers' organizational commitment, especially among new teachers for whom support in this area is often needed (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). For example, in a longitudinal study investigating the impact of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)—a schoolwide program to reduce disruptive student behavior—on school organizational health, Bradshaw, Koth, Bevans, Ialongo, and Leaf (2008) found that participating schools saw a significant increase in “staff affiliation,” a measure closely paralleling organizational commitment. The authors state that, “although it is difficult to determine which elements of PBIS were responsible for the changes in organizational health, it is likely that participation in high quality training, convening regular PBIS team meetings, promoting consistency among staff regarding student discipline, and receiving ongoing technical assistance from the PBIS coach contributed to the observed outcomes” (p. 472).

Many studies suggest that the character of student-teacher relationships and student behavior toward teachers bear heavily on teachers' overall wellbeing and satisfaction at work as well as their career decisions (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001; Guarino, Santibañez, and Daley, 2006; Liu & Meyer, 2005; Shann, 1998; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). Johnson, Berg,

and Donaldson (2005), for example, emphasized the importance of the student-teacher relationship in their review of research on teacher retention:

Today as much as ever before, teachers want to be able to make a difference in the lives of their students. Positive student relationships, feedback and compliance may enable teachers to reap the psychic rewards they seek, while misbehavior, disrespect, and disengagement may keep these rewards distant. When teachers do not feel effective in their work with students, dissatisfaction, anger and self-doubt result, and attrition, transfer, or disengagement may follow. (p. 82)

Scholarship providing evidence for these claims is reviewed below.

In a large-scale analysis of reasons for teacher turnover (cited previously), Ingersoll (2001) found that, “in schools with lower levels of student discipline problems, turnover rates are distinctly lower. A 1-unit difference in reported student discipline problems between two schools (on a 4-unit scale) is associated with a 47 percent difference in the odds of a teacher departing” (pp. 518-519). In their analysis of data from the 1994-1995 NCES Teacher Follow-Up Survey, Liu and Meyer (2005) also found a strong relationship between student discipline problems and teacher dissatisfaction, which the authors viewed as an important antecedent to turnover.

Simon and Johnson (2015) reviewed a wide range of studies investigating the sources of teacher turnover in high-poverty schools, finding that student discipline challenges were consistently identified as a major threat to staff retention. “Teachers leave schools where a lack of student discipline impedes their ability to teach,” the authors conclude (p. 22), suggesting that the threat of problematic behavior lies in its impact on teachers’ instructional self-efficacy. Simon and Johnson acknowledge that the reasons for particularly high rates of student discipline challenges in high-poverty schools are “complicated” (p. 23), ranging from the detrimental effects of poverty on behavior, to poorer leadership, fewer resources, and high turnover itself; one reviewed study had found that students at a New York City middle school had become so

accustomed to their teachers leaving that they had learned not to trust incoming teachers, contributing to student-teacher conflict and further turnover (Marinell & Coca, 2013).

Other scholars have suggested that the link between student discipline problems and turnover lies in the impact of perceived misbehavior on teachers' beliefs about their relationships with students (Chang, 2009; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). In a review of studies about the impact of student-teacher relationships on teacher wellbeing, Spilt, Koomen, and Thijs (2011) suggested that student-teacher conflict causes stress for teachers because it undermines their relationship with students, which they view as instrumental in their ability to teach and feel good about their work. The authors write, "not student misbehavior in general but the extent to which it undermines the teacher-student relationship may cause prolonged distress in teachers" (p. 470). Citing Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, Spilt and colleagues highlight *relatedness* to students as a universal need for teachers. To the extent that teachers feel that their connectedness to students is in jeopardy, based on how they appraise interactions with students, their wellbeing is likely to suffer.

That relationships with students is essential to teachers' *raison d'être* is reinforced by Nieto (2003). Nieto sought to understand what makes public school teachers in urban schools persevere in their jobs "in spite of everything" (p. 121). One major finding from discussions with a group of experienced Boston educators was how important relationships with students were to teachers' resilience in the face of major on-the-job challenges. Nieto emphasized *love* and *caring* for students as not only prerequisite to good teaching, but as essential to teacher persistence. She described how this distinguishes teaching from other professions:

In some quarters, it is unfashionable to talk about teaching and love in the same breath. After all, teaching is a *profession*, like medicine or law or engineering, and we rarely hear talk about love as a major motivation in these professions. To be sure, while the word *professional* brings up images of careful preparation and deep knowledge of a discipline, it also implies a certain distance, as if being a professional meant discarding one's emotions. But teaching is different. Teaching involves trust and respect as well as close, special relationships between students and teachers. It is, simply put, a vocation based on love. In my work with the inquiry group teachers in Boston as well as with hundreds of other teachers in numerous settings over the years, the simplicity of this fact has been reinforced many times over. At our first inquiry group meeting, for instance, Junia Yearwood stated quite plainly, "*They* keep me going," and everyone knew exactly what she meant. (p. 33)

While many studies have focused on the negative impact of student-teacher conflict on teachers' careers, Nieto's work emphasizes that student-teacher relationships can be a major reason why teachers choose to stay in their jobs (see also Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Student-teacher conflict and CDMA: Possibilities. Nieto (2003) and others (Osterman, 2000; Walls, 2017) discuss how structural conditions of schools can make it difficult for teachers to care for students and build the relationships necessary to sustain effective practice. At the same time, Nieto points to evidence that structural reforms—including enhanced teacher decision-making—have resulted in school environments that lessen conflict and facilitate caring relationships, citing Nancie Zane's (1994) work:

The links that exist between school reform and caring are sometimes striking. In a discussion of the changes that resulted from reform efforts in four urban high schools, Nancie Zane found that discipline problems, which had previously figured prominently in teachers' conversations, receded to the background. Structural changes in the schools included more democratic decision-making mechanisms for teachers and students and a greater focus on relationships.

When teachers have CDMA over domains that bear on student-teacher relationships, such as discipline policies, class sizes, and time spent with individual students, what choices do they make? Presumably, given the mounting evidence that teachers greatly value their positive relationships with students, and that those relationships are instrumental to quality teaching and

learning (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Nieto, 2003; Wentzel, 2010), teachers would select policies and procedures that would strengthen and support those relationships.

There is some indirect evidence that CDMA in the area of setting discipline policy, specifically, positively impacts TPV. Weiss (1999) used survey data to study how various school working conditions influenced novice teachers' workplace satisfaction and career intentions, finding—as others did—that student behavior problems were negatively related to new teachers' morale and job satisfaction. However, what Weiss' analysis suggests is that it was not the discipline problems, *per se*, that factored into novice teachers' quit decisions, but how school administrators managed them—and left teachers out of the process—that demoralized them:

It may be that problems with students and school social climate do not in themselves necessarily always explain why new teachers leave. Rather, it may be when new teachers see mis-management of behavior problems (part of school leadership) that they think about leaving teaching. Furthermore, new teachers may become discouraged when they are prevented from making decisions about student discipline (part of school leadership and autonomy and discretion). This study suggests that the more first-year teachers believe that teachers have influence in determining discipline policy, the more they are apt to exert their best effort, be more certain about their career choice, and be more likely to say they will stay in teaching.

While this conclusion is based on large-scale, quantitative research, and pertains to influence rather than decision-making authority, it offers promising evidence that teacher CDMA may engender responses to conflict that strengthen rather than harm student-teacher relationships. However, little is known about possible mechanisms by which this may occur.

Links between the 5 narratives. The five narratives of teacher professional work life (uncertainty, time pressure, isolation, deprofessionalization, and conflict) are presented here individually as a means of illustrating five ways in which teachers' work is particularly challenging. Some challenges are inherent to teaching, others are products of historical and institutional forces that have shaped what schools are and how they operate today. These

challenges, however, do not occur in isolation from each other but are fundamentally interrelated, building on each other in ways that further exacerbate the situation for teachers. Blase (1986), for example, found that time pressure and student-teacher conflict were related for the teacher participants in his study:

Busyness with day-to-day work problems seems to interfere with teachers' ability to relate to students in a personal and caring manner... Personal caring takes time and a kind of sensitivity that seems especially vulnerable to the constant assault of daily work stressors. Over the long run, work stress serves to remove teachers, emotionally and socially, from students. (p. 31)

Confronted with the onslaught of paperwork, administrative demands, and other stressors, teachers found themselves unable to devote the necessary time to get to know students.

Distancing themselves from students seemed to be the only way they could feasibly meet minimal job requirements and guarantee their survival in the role.

The opposite is also true: where we see counterexamples of one narrative, we also tend to see counterexamples of one or more other narratives. Rosenholtz (1991), for example, found that teacher collaboration and perceived professional certainty were positively related. Empowered teachers in Louis, Marks, and Kruse's (1996) study—with influence across several decision-making domains—were more likely to exhibit characteristics of professional community than were unempowered teachers. Furthermore, these teachers were more likely to be satisfied in their jobs.

Synthesis: Development of a Conceptual Map and Research Questions

In the preceding literature review, I have discussed the findings and implications of two lines of research as they pertain to the discussion of CDMA and its relationship to TPV. First, I briefly reviewed scholarship examining various initiatives designed to improve schools by redistributing leadership functions and influence to teachers. Empowering teachers to be “teacher leaders” was shown to have promise, but significant structural and cultural barriers to enacting

teacher leadership were identified that made assessment of its potential as a means of improving TPV challenging.

Second, I described five prevailing narratives of teachers' work lives in the U.S. that have emerged largely from the sociological study of schools as workplaces: uncertainty, time pressure, isolation, deprofessionalization, and conflict. These five narratives were selected as a means of situating the five major findings of this dissertation in the context of current understandings about teachers' work lives. The working conditions associated with these narratives were shown to diminish teachers' experience of motivation, commitment, and retention—the three components of TPV. Although these five narratives are not intended in any way to be exhaustive in describing teaching as an occupation, they cover a wide range of aspects of schools as workplaces, from the goals teachers work toward, to the amount and quality of collaboration with peers, to the extent of teacher influence over instructional and non-instructional decisions that impact their work.

Importantly, the research reviewed in this chapter has suggested that the typical conditions of teachers' work lives in the U.S. are not necessarily inevitable features of schools but are, in fact, amenable to change—or at least amelioration—at the school level. Schools can be understood as falling along a spectrum of teacher experience in each of these areas: from uncertainty of success to self-efficacy, from time pressure to the sense of time expansion, from isolation to professional community, from deprofessionalization to empowerment, and from conflict to mutual regard in the student-teacher relationship (see Figure 2.2, below).

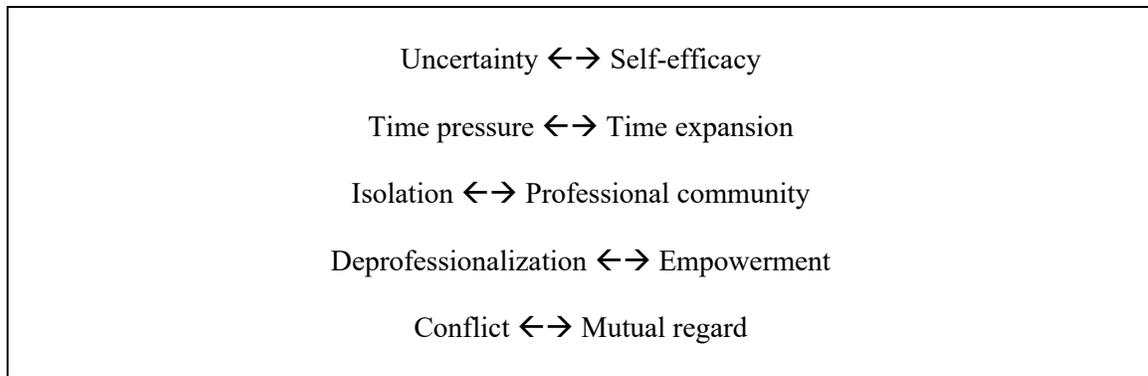


Figure 2.2. Teacher perceptions and experiences fall along a spectrum.

This dissertation explores various pathways and mechanisms by which a dramatically different approach to school leadership—the collective decision-making authority (CDMA) of teachers—may move teachers along these spectra of experiences.

Conceptual framework. The conceptual framework presented below (Figure 2.3) displays a potential logic of impact of CDMA on TPV through its influence on teachers’ job characteristics, teaching practices, and perceptions and experiences. The model loosely follows a similar logic as Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) Job Characteristics Model (JCM; see Figure 2.1, above) with the important addition of CDMA as an antecedent to teachers’ job characteristics. According to the proposed model, decisions teachers make (in areas such as performance standards, curriculum, professional development, evaluating teachers, hiring teachers, budget, and student discipline³) shape their everyday structural *job characteristics*—the hours they are expected to be at school, their schedule and course assignments, the autonomy they have to select

³ Though not exhaustive of areas in which teachers may have CDMA, these domains represent a wide range of decision-making domains and are the same domains of “influence” used on the SASS 11-12 and the survey instrument developed for this study.

teaching methods and materials, the proportion of the day they spend working alongside other adults, what resources they have access to, and how they are evaluated. These structural conditions, in turn, shape both *teacher practices*—what teachers *do* to promote student learning (the “core technology” of teaching)—and *teacher perceptions and experiences of work life*—the degree to which their experiences align with the five narratives presented herein. Teacher practices also influence perceptions and experiences of work life through their impact on *student learning outcomes*: do they perceive that their teaching efforts are “paying off”? Perceptions and experiences of work life, akin to Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) “critical psychological states,” give rise to TPV as a combination of motivation, commitment, and retention. A direct arrow from *teachers’ collective decision-making authority* to *teacher perceptions and experiences of work life* acknowledges the well-established finding that teachers can derive positive feelings directly from participating in decisions that impact their work (York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

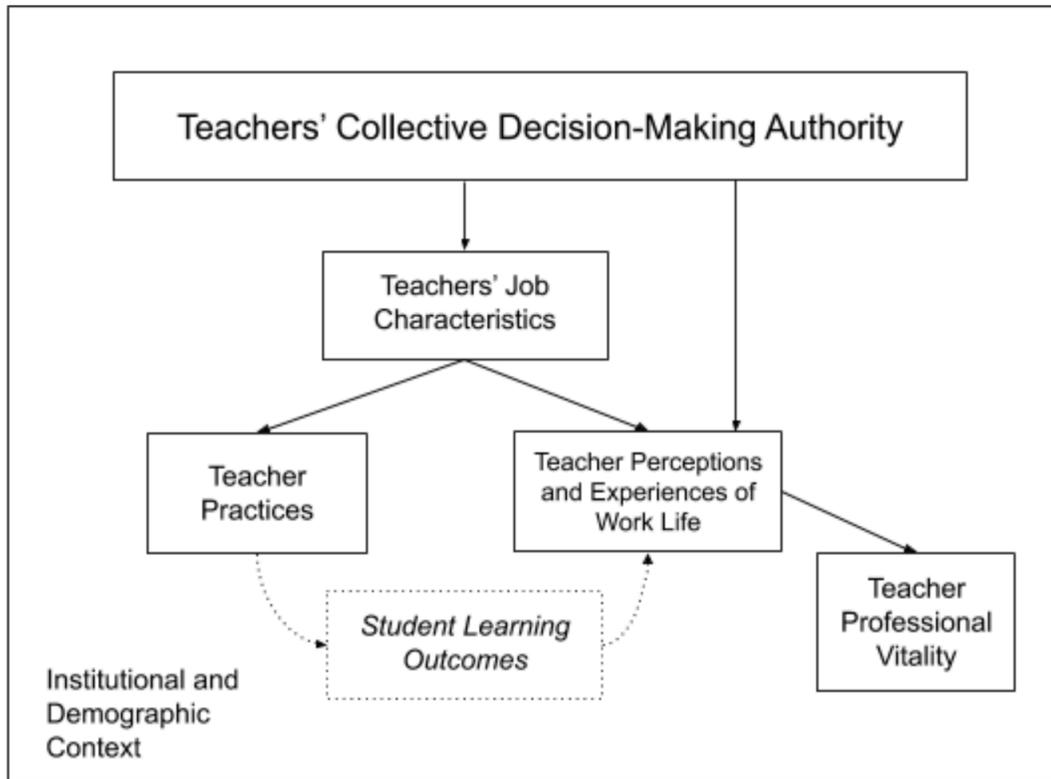


Figure 2.3. Conceptual framework.

Research questions. Based on the literature reviewed in this chapter, teacher-powered schools have great potential as sites to test the theoretical promise of teacher leadership in the (relative) absence of structural and cultural barriers. My dissertation seeks to explore the nature of the relationships proposed in the above conceptual framework. My overarching research question is: *How does collective decision-making authority (CDMA) shape teachers' professional work life in "teacher-powered" schools?* Specifically, my dissertation seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What are the basic characteristics of teacher-powered schools, and how do these compare to more traditionally-structured schools?

2. How is decision-making authority distributed in teacher-powered schools?
3. How do teachers in teacher-powered schools collectively define and measure student learning?
4. How does teacher CDMA shape teachers' job characteristics, teaching practices, and perceptions and experiences of work life?
5. What are the implications of CDMA for TPV?
6. How do teacher-powered schools' institutional settings (e.g., district pilot school versus charter school) and demographic characteristics influence collective decision-making, and to what effect?

Addressing these questions will not only help to clarify the processes by which CDMA shapes teachers' work lives, but will also lay the foundation for future research on teacher-powered schools, of which there is currently very little.

Conclusion

Why, despite countless attempts to “professionalize” teaching, do schools and districts face debilitating personnel shortages due to voluntary teacher turnover? Some scholars have convincingly argued that meaningful and lasting change to the teaching profession will require more than “silver bullet” solutions but instead the complete transformation of schools and school systems as we know them (Clinchy, 2000; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Scholars in this camp argue that while the scope, purposes, and technologies of education have changed drastically over the past century, the structures and systems governing teachers' work have largely remained unchanged: teachers continue to conduct their work in relative isolation in “egg crate” classrooms, instructing students *en masse* in 55-minute intervals, and with little true authority to determine how and with what resources to carry out an increasingly complex job. A century ago, these structures may have been effective in producing a complacent and dependable workforce

for the nation's industrializing cities, but they seriously constrict teachers' ability to meet the learning needs of the future "knowledge workers" demanded by the twenty-first century economy and earn the "intrinsic rewards" for which they entered the profession (Davenport, 2013; Lortie, 1975).

Teacher-powered schools are demonstrating, albeit quietly and on a very small scale, that long-institutionalized structures governing schooling in the U.S. can be challenged by committed teams of teachers granted the collective authority to run their schools. Teachers' decision-making authority in teacher-powered schools not only puts power into the hands of those who work most closely with students, but also, I argue, has the potential to increase teachers' motivation, commitment, and retention.

Of course, the extent to which the development of teacher-powered schools represents an effective, sustainable, and scalable solution to the many problems ailing the public education system is a question for another day and another dissertation. In the meantime, it is my goal to learn more about these schools in an effort to contribute to the continuing discussion on the role of teacher leadership in shaping teachers' work lives. How I went about doing so is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methods

In Chapter 2, I presented an argument for conducting my dissertation research on teacher professional vitality (TPV) in teacher-powered schools. This chapter will provide an overview of the study's mixed methods research design; describe the procedures used in conducting the qualitative, multiple-case study component of the study as well as the quantitative, survey component; and describe the process by which the findings from each component were integrated to conduct the analysis presented in Chapters 4 through 9.

Study Design

This study employs a mixed methods research (MMR) design consisting of a qualitative, multiple case study component and a quantitative, survey component. During the qualitative phase, I conducted week-long site visits at three Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI) schools in urban areas in three regions of the U.S. At each school, I observed the classrooms of secondary-level teachers and interviewed the same teachers about their experiences pertaining to school-level decision-making, professional work life, and school context. Five “core findings” from the qualitative phase of the study, detailed in Chapters 5 through 9, informed the development of a survey instrument for the quantitative phase of the study. The survey was designed to gauge the generalizability of qualitative findings and to capture a wider range of teacher perspectives than was possible through interviews alone. It was administered to 342 teachers working at 39 TPSI schools in 10 U.S. states. Survey results were incorporated into qualitative findings as a means of substantiating, complicating, and, in some cases, calling into question the relevance of findings to the broader collection of teacher-powered schools or to particular contexts.

Why mixed methods? The use of mixed methods is appropriate for several reasons. First, neither qualitative nor quantitative data alone would allow me to answer the research

questions posed at the end of Chapter 2 (Creswell, 2015; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). For example, the question, “How does teacher collective decision-making authority (CDMA) shape teachers’ job characteristics, teaching practices, and perceptions and experiences of work life?” invites both a qualitative, inductive analysis of decision-making processes and outcomes as well as a quantitative analysis of the extent to which qualitative findings may generalize to the larger population of teacher-powered schools.

A further rationale for using mixed methods is that it affords a multiplicity of perspectives on the characteristics of teacher-powered schools as a group (Creswell, 2015). Multiple perspectives and sources of data were presumed to increase the study’s trustworthiness among the many audiences this study seeks to address and the diversity of epistemologies they are likely to have (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). For example, furnishing both qualitative and quantitative evidence honors the subjective experiences of teachers while also attending to a more pragmatic need to meet education policymakers’ demand for “hard data” in evaluating policy alternatives.

“QUAL quant” exploratory sequential design. Specifically, this study employs an exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) comprised of a qualitative component followed by a quantitative component, represented commonly as “QUAL → quant.” Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) recommend the use of exploratory sequential design when any of the three following situations apply: “(1) measures or instruments are not available, (2) the variables are unknown, or (3) there is no guiding framework or theory” (p. 86). While there are existing instruments measuring the school working conditions and teacher experiences with which this study is concerned, the specific variables and relationships between variables worthy of analysis were unknown at the study outset because no existing theory explains how teacher CDMA influences teachers’ professional work lives. An in-depth, inductive investigation of a

small number of teacher-powered schools helped to illuminate the variables and relationships that could be further examined through subsequent quantitative analyses across a larger population of schools.

Analytical approach. I followed Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2011) recommendations for integrated data analysis for studies using exploratory sequential design. An overview of the integrated data analysis process is provided below in Table 3.1. As a mixed methods study, both qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques were used. As such, assessments of trustworthiness/internal validity and transferability/external validity were made in accordance with the specific qualitative and quantitative research traditions. For example, data triangulation was used to compare findings across the various forms of qualitative data collected and provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, I conducted member-checking to solicit the feedback of interviewees on the credibility of findings from the integrated analysis. In conducting the quantitative (survey) portion of the project, I borrowed from existing, validated surveys where possible and conducted several rounds of survey testing in order to ensure credibility of the resulting data.

Table 3.1. Data analysis steps and procedures.

<u>Step</u>	<u>Procedures</u>
Step 1. Collect the qualitative data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Observations • Document analysis
Step 2. Analyze the qualitative data using analytic approaches best suited to the qualitative research question.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memoing • Identifying codes • Reducing codes to themes • Relating categories • Drawing initial inferences • Analysis of discrepant cases • Data triangulation

Step	Procedures
Step 3. Design the quantitative strand based on the qualitative results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining constructs • Hypothesizing key relationships • Selecting analyses
Step 4. Develop and pilot test the new instrument.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey design • Survey piloting and refinement
Step 5. Collect the quantitative data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey administration
Step 6. Analyze the quantitative data using analytic approaches best suited to the quantitative and mixed methods research questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies) depending on characteristics of variables examined
Step 7. Interpret how the connected results answer the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing meta-inferences: do quantitative findings provide a generalized understanding of qualitative findings? • Member checking
<i>Note.</i> Table adopted from Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), data analysis steps and procedures for an exploratory sequential design, pp. 218-219.	

Multiple Case Study (Qualitative) Component

The overall purpose of the qualitative phase of the study was to explore, broadly, (1) how teachers in teacher-powered schools translate formal decision-making authority into school-level structures (e.g., job descriptions, schedules, committees, policies) and classroom-level practices (e.g., teaching methods, materials, assessment, collaboration), and (2) how those structures and practices, in turn, shape teachers' professional work lives. Findings from the qualitative phase of the study were used to develop an appropriate, grounded survey instrument to be used in the second, quantitative phase of the research. Data collection during the qualitative phase took place from December 2016 to March 2017.

Multiple case study methodology. Though I have chosen to characterize this project in its entirety as a "mixed methods study," the first, qualitative phase most closely resembles a *multiple case study*. As such, I draw largely from case study methodologists Merriam (1998) and Stake (2006) in developing data collection and analysis procedures. A case study approach is

helpful in this instance because the phenomenon of interest, the “teacher-powered school,” is “intrinsically bounded” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27), being both confined to a specific physical space (e.g., the school building or campus) but also comprised of a discrete and identifiable combination of people, structures, and materials that makes the school what it is. As in QUAL-quant research more broadly, case study research is a particularly useful approach when “holistic description and explanation” of the phenomenon is a primary research objective, as it is here (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Given the absence of holistic descriptions of teacher-powered schools and how they function within the academic research literature, this study benefits from the 360-degree view that the qualitative case study affords in its integration of interview, observation, and document data.

The schools within the TPSI inventory exist in widely varying institutional, geographic, demographic, and political contexts; no two schools are entirely alike. Selecting a single school for the purpose of describing the entire class of teacher-powered schools would be unlikely to lead to a nuanced understanding of how these contextual features shape the kinds of schools that teachers collectively develop. Therefore, I chose to study and compare three distinct cases of TPSI schools. Stake (2006) describes such a “multicase” approach as being particularly useful when “the official interest is in the collection of... cases or in the phenomenon exhibited in those cases” (p. vi). What features do different teacher-powered schools appear to have in common? Along which dimensions do they seem to vary most, and for what reasons? Answering these types of questions is integral to understanding the range of human capital possibilities and challenges facing teacher-powered schools, a goal that demands investigation at multiple school sites.

Site selection. Site selection for the qualitative phase of the study was purposive in that it prioritized selection of sites “from which the most could be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61) as

opposed to sites chosen randomly from the TPSI inventory. I followed Stake's (2006) guidelines for case selection in multiple-case studies, seeking school sites with three base-level criteria: (1) *relevance to the phenomenon of interest*, (2) *diversity across contexts*, and (3) *opportunity to learn about complexity and contexts* (p. 23):

(1) *Relevance to the phenomenon of interest*. In the case of the present study, the phenomenon of interest is the teacher-powered school and how teachers experience work life within it. As such, site selection was first and foremost guided by the criterion that the schools have significant teacher authority over school-level decision-making. For pragmatic reasons, I chose to limit the field of possible sites to those schools already included in the TPSI inventory. To further narrow my search, I selected only those schools with CDMA ("collective autonomy," per TPSI) in ten or more of the fifteen TPSI decision-making domains (see Appendix A for a full list of these "autonomies"). Selecting schools closer to the far end of the CDMA spectrum (i.e., those with more rather than fewer autonomies) would afford an opportunity to study schools in which teacher decision-making is a more fundamental, systemic feature rather than an isolated or occasional occurrence affecting one or only a few decision-making domains.

(2) *Diversity across contexts*. Along which dimensions do teacher-powered schools differ, and from which kinds of differences can the most be learned? The *diversity across contexts* criterion ensures that case selection affords an opportunity to both compare and contrast teachers' experiences at different types of schools. Though teacher-powered schools vary along numerous dimensions, I chose two dimensions of difference on which to focus most acutely, student demographic characteristics and schools' "autonomy arrangements." Including school sites with a range of student demographic profiles affords an opportunity to examine how student characteristics—such as race, ethnicity, special education status, and socioeconomic status—may

influence teacher decision-making and its effects on teachers' ability to meet the particular needs of the students with whom they work.

A second contextual variable likely to shape decision-making in teacher-powered schools is the way in which CDMA was established, what TPSI calls an "autonomy arrangement." "Autonomy arrangements" are the policies or agreements by which teachers at the schools have been able to secure CDMA. For example, some district schools have secured autonomy from district superintendents to be site-governed, with teachers representing a majority of a site governance council, whereas charter schools may have teacher governance written into their bylaws. Understanding differences in the ways in which teachers have secured CDMA may help to clarify differences in how teacher-powered schools work and the policies that enable or constrain them. A full list of ten "autonomy arrangements" compiled by TPSI is provided in Appendix B.

Much as quantitative research seeks to "control" certain variables in order to isolate the impact of one or more independent variables on a given outcome, I chose to limit variability between sites by selecting schools that were comparable in terms of grade level, community type, and size. All schools were inclusive of grades 9-12 to allow comparison across secondary school contexts, all are in an urban setting, and all are relatively small, having an average of 300 students in grades 9-12 with the range being 157 to 526.

(3) *Opportunity to learn about complexity and contexts.* This criterion reflects the more pragmatic needs of a researcher. Which schools are accessible and can accommodate a researcher for an extended period of time so that sufficient data may be collected that go beyond mere surface-level findings? It was important to me to secure a positive introduction to the school sites from TPSI leaders, who were in contact with and would be able to connect me with teacher leaders at each site. With few personal or professional connections to the schools within the TPSI

inventory, I depended on TPSI leaders to facilitate introductions to teacher teams. As a result, sites were selected in consultation with TPSI staff with deep familiarity with the schools in the inventory. A potential limitation of relying on TPSI leaders to introduce me to teacher teams is that site selection may have been biased somewhat toward schools that had earned the favor of TPSI leaders, whether through their accolades or participation in TPSI-sponsored activities.

I chose to prioritize schools that had been in operation for at least five years. While understanding the early life of teacher-powered schools may have provided important insight into the conditions for their establishment and survival, such a developmental focus is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, my aim was to capture cross-sectional insight into how teacher-powered schools functioned once they had achieved some degree of stabilization following the turmoil characteristic of a school's founding years. Since a primary question guiding this study is how CDMA shapes teachers' work life, sufficient time must have passed for teachers to establish decision-making structures, collegial norms, and school-wide policies instituted in response to the particular needs of the school. Selecting schools that had achieved some operational stability also ensured that staff members could attend to the logistics of hosting an outside researcher, as minimal as such logistics may have been.

In accordance with these criteria, the following three schools were selected: Explore School, a 6th-12th grade charter school in the upper Midwest with a focus on project-based learning; Young Leaders Academy (YLA), a PreK-12th grade charter school in the Northeast with a focus on developing community leaders; and High School for Human Rights (HSHR), a 9th-12th grade district "Pilot" school on the West Coast with a focus on achieving social justice and student self-actualization. The school sites are listed and described in Table 3.2, below, and described in further detail in Chapter 4.

Table 3.2. School sites.

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Explore School</u>	<u>High School for Human Rights</u>	<u>Young Leaders Academy</u>
Type	Charter school	District pilot school	Converted district-to-charter school
Grades served	6-12	9-12	PreK-12
Total enrollment	216	526	561
Year established	2001	2011	1993
Location	Mid-sized city in the Midwest, U.S.A.	Large city on the West Coast, U.S.A.	Large city in the Northeast, U.S.A.
Curricular focus	Project-based, personalized learning	Interdisciplinary learning with a social justice lens	Core studies, project-based learning, community involvement
% Students eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Lunch	29.2	84.6	73.0
% Special education students	35.2	10.3	16.0
% English learners	0	9.5	3.0
% American Indian	4.2	0.2	0
% Asian	5.6	0.2	18.3
% Black or African American	12.0	1.5	8.6
% Hispanic or Latino	4.6	95.9	58.7
% Multi-racial	0	0.2	1.1
% White	73.6	2.1	13.2
Teacher-Powered Schools “autonomies” (teachers have decision-making authority in these areas; see Appendix A)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select leaders 2. Select colleagues 3. Transfer or terminate colleagues 4. Determine tenure policy 5. Evaluate colleagues 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select leaders 2. Select colleagues 3. Transfer or terminate colleagues 4. Determine tenure policy 5. Evaluate colleagues 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select colleagues 2. Determine tenure policy 3. Evaluate colleagues 4. Set staff pattern 5. Determine school budget

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Explore School</u>	<u>High School for Human Rights</u>	<u>Young Leaders Academy</u>
	6. Set staff pattern	6. Set staff pattern	6. Determine learning program
	7. Determine school budget	7. Determine school budget	7. Determine professional development
	8. Determine compensation	8. Determine learning program	8. Determine whether to take, when to take, how much to count district/EMO* /authorizer assessments
	9. Determine learning program	9. Determine professional development	9. Set schedule
	10. Determine professional development	10. Determine whether to take, when to take, how much to count district/EMO* /authorizer assessments	10. Determine teacher workday
	11. Determine whether to take, when to take, how much to count district/EMO* /authorizer assessments	11. Make formal arrangements with district/EMO/authorizer to allow multiple measures in determining school success	11. Set school-level policy
	12. Make formal arrangements with district/EMO/authorizer to allow multiple measures in determining school success	12. Set schedule	
	13. Set schedule	13. Determine teacher workday	
	14. Determine teacher workday	14. Set school-level policy	
	15. Set school-level policy		
<p><i>Note.</i> Enrollment and student demographic data retrieved from state-level databases for most recent school year available. When not included in state databases, some fields were populated using data from school or district websites.</p> <p>*Education Management Organization</p>			

Establishing contact. I was introduced to one or more teacher leader(s) (henceforth a “site lead”) at each of the three school sites through a mutual TPSI contact via email. Site leads from all three schools expressed interest in participating in the study, and I followed up with each person individually to describe the study in more depth, plan site visits, and discuss participant recruitment for teacher observations and interviews.

Participant recruitment. At each of the three schools, I sought 8-12 participants who met the following general criteria: teachers of secondary-level (grades 6 through 12) classes, all employed at least three-quarters’ time at their schools, where possible, including 1-2 beginning teachers (2 or fewer years’ teaching experience), 2-3 veteran teachers (5+ years’ teaching experience), teachers with a range of subject assignments, and 2-3 teachers with combined teaching and administrative roles. These categories were not mutually exclusive. Additionally, the principal from each school, where applicable, was invited to be interviewed (Explore School did not have a principal).

I used public contact information on the school websites to create lists of potential participants and their email addresses. Site leads at each school notified potential participants about the study either in person or via email, emphasizing the voluntary nature of the study. Potential participants were sent a description of the study, participant expectations and time commitments, and my contact information. Interested participants responded via email to indicate willingness to participate. In a few cases, teachers approached me in person during site visits to indicate interest in participating. Interested participants were subsequently contacted to set up an observation and initial interview.

Participants. In all, 31 teachers and school leaders participated with approximately equal representation at each school. As intended, enrolled participants were teachers of secondary grade levels with varying subject assignments, leadership roles, and levels of teaching experience.

Additionally, the principals of the two schools with a designated school leader were interviewed.

See Table 3.3, below, for a summary of the staff members interviewed at each school.

Participants at two of the three schools each received a \$20 gift card, with the third school receiving a single donation of a comparable per-participant amount due to an authorizer policy prohibiting individual compensation for participation in research studies.

Table 3.3. Participant characteristics.

<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Explore School</u>	<u>High School for Human Rights</u>	<u>Young Leaders Academy</u>
# Interviewed	10	10	11
Principal interviewed	N/A	Yes	Yes
Average years employed at school	11.9	4.5	9.3
Range of years employed at school	2-16	1-6	1-22
Subject areas represented	Science, Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Technology, Special Education	Science, Language Arts, Math, Social Studies	Science, Language Arts, Math, Social Studies, Technology, Special Education
Grade levels	6-12	9-12	6-12

Data collection. I spent the equivalent of five full school days “in residence” at each of the three schools in order to familiarize myself with how the schools operated day-to-day, the kinds of leadership and decision-making roles that teachers took on, and the norms, values, beliefs, and practices that characterized each school. Specific methods used during this qualitative phase of data collection included observations of teachers conducting their normal teaching duties, interviews with the same teachers and with school leaders, and document analysis.

Observations. Observations of meetings, class sessions, and other school events not only helped me to adjust my interview protocols to reflect the specific work contexts of individual teachers, but they also enabled me to become familiar with the structural and cultural

characteristics of each school overall. During each of the three week-long residencies, I spent any time not interviewing teachers observing and taking notes in various school settings, including classrooms, hallways, work spaces, cafeterias, and staff lounges. I prioritized attending faculty, board, and committee meetings in which decisions were made pertaining to teachers' work.

During these observations, I attended specifically to school decision-making processes, procedures, and outcomes; faculty roles and responsibilities; and explicit and implicit definitions of student learning (for an observation protocol, see Appendix C).

In addition, I observed each teacher I interviewed (9 or 10 at each site) at least once prior to the initial interview. There were a few instances where it was only possible to observe a teacher after the interview had already occurred. Classroom observations focused on teachers' practice and the theories of teaching and learning that undergirded their practice, but also included generalized notes about student activities (e.g., what students were doing as a group) and the teacher's work environment. Classroom observations lasted the length of a single class period, spanning from an average of about 50 minutes at YLA to 90 minutes at HSHR. All observations were recorded in a field notebook and included observer comments.

Throughout observations, I sought to achieve a balanced stance as both an "insider" and "outsider" (Merriam, 1998, p. 102). It was important to me that staff and students felt comfortable conducting their normal activities in my presence, so I strove to be transparent and open in introducing myself to the classes and various faculty groups I observed. At the same time, given that I spent only five days in residence at each school site, time was limited to develop the relationships with staff and students necessary to become a recognized member of the three school communities. As such, I felt it would be inappropriate and disruptive to attempt active participation in school activities. I primarily sat quietly among whichever group I was observing and took handwritten notes, unless specifically invited to participate in an activity. For example,

one teacher at HSHR invited me to share a poem and its meaning to me with his Poetic Justice class; another teacher at Explore School invited me to paint a watercolor picture alongside his sixth-grade students. I saw these invitations as opportunities to build rapport with and honor the work of the teachers and students I was observing, and as such generally chose to accept them.

Interviews. The primary source of data collected during the qualitative phase of the study was one-on-one interviews with practicing teachers and, where applicable, school leaders at the three school sites. I interviewed 10-11 teachers and administrators at each school with a range of experience and leadership roles, conducting one or two interviews with each participant during my week-long residency. In a few cases, a second interview was conducted remotely by phone or video call following the site visit.

All in-person interviews were conducted in a private or semi-private location at the school site at a time that was convenient for each teacher, most often during a planning period. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for all but two participants, who declined to have their interviews digitally recorded.

Interview protocol. Following Rubin and Rubin (2012), the interview protocol was semistructured and responsive. Responsive interviewing is a form of qualitative interviewing that “emphasizes flexibility of design and expects the interviewer to change questions in response to what he or she is learning” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 7). Because little is known about how teacher-powered schools work, responsive interviews afforded me the opportunity to adjust course in light of new information and engage interview participants in an “extended conversation” (p. 95) that flowed organically. In addition to main questions, prompts and follow up questioning were used to achieve depth, nuance, and richness in the data provided.

Interview questions were written to elicit information and stories that would help to answer the research questions presented in Chapter 2. The initial interview protocol, presented in

Appendix D, was developed in Fall 2016 with input from a small group of volunteer teachers at Explore School. These teachers read and reviewed draft questions for clarity, answerability, relevance, and importance to their work. Questions were subsequently revised according to their feedback.

Each interview began with a brief introduction to myself and the study, as well as a statement regarding the voluntary nature of the study. All participants indicated consent. Then, a few background questions were asked (e.g., What is your role? What do you teach? How long have you been a teacher here? Before teaching here, did you teach somewhere else? For how long?). Following an early interview at Explore School, a question about teachers' weekly schedules was added to the interview protocol because it became clear that teachers' schedules were not only unusual but factored greatly into teachers' work experiences.

The second portion of the interview sought to unearth teachers' conceptions of how their schools defined and measured student learning. Teachers were asked to describe the kinds of goals that they and their colleagues set for students, challenges faced in achieving those goals, and how teachers' work was evaluated. These questions furnished critical information about how teachers conceptualized success in their roles and the extent to which they felt able to achieve success.

The third part of the interview dealt specifically with decision-making and was designed around a card sort task. This component was designed with two purposes in mind: first, to understand the distribution of decision-making authority in the three schools from teachers' own vantage points, and second, to collect participant stories of how decision-making authority in various domains influenced teachers' work and working conditions.

The card sort task asked teachers to sort 21 cards, each labeled with a different decision-making "domain," into one of five piles, "according to the extent to which you and/or your

colleagues make the decisions listed.” The five piles were labeled and described to participants as follows:

1. “I decide” = I make this decision.
2. “We decide” = I have a voice on the issue, but teachers make the decision collectively.
3. “They decide” = I may have a voice on the issue, but someone or some group other than the teachers at my school makes the decision.
4. “Does not apply” = The decision does not apply to my work context.
5. “Don’t know” = I’m not sure who ultimately makes this decision.

The 21 domains of decision-making included 13 domains taken from the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS 11-12) Teacher Questionnaire (7 school-level domains and 6 classroom-level domains; NCES, 2011) and 8 additional domains taken from the TPSI list of autonomies not already represented among the SASS 11-12 domains but found to be pertinent to TSPI inventory schools. The benefit of using SASS 11-12 domains is that doing so affords comparability and consistency across qualitative and quantitative study components; the same domains would later be used on the survey to determine TPSI teachers’ perceptions of decision-making influence relative to the nationally-representative sample of teachers provided by SASS 11-12 data. The addition of TPSI domains afforded an opportunity to explore the salience of decision-making domains not typically within teachers’ spheres of influence to the teachers I interviewed. The 21 domains are listed in Table 3.4, below.

Table 3.4. Decision-making domains used in card sort task.

<u>Source</u>	<u>Domain</u>
SASS 11-12 School-level domains	Setting performance standards for students at this school Establishing curriculum Determining the content of in-service professional development programs Evaluating teachers Hiring new full-time teachers Setting discipline policy Deciding how the school budget will be spent
SASS 11-12 Classroom-level domains	Selecting textbooks and other instructional materials Selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught Selecting teaching techniques Evaluating and grading students Disciplining students Determining the amount of homework to be assigned
TPSI “Autonomies” Not Reflected in SASS Domains	Transferring and/or terminating colleagues Setting staff size Allocating personnel Selecting school leaders Determining staff compensation Setting the school schedule and calendar Determining tenure policy (if any) Determining work hours

Participants were given unlimited time (which never exceeded five minutes) to sort cards into the respective piles. I allowed teachers to place domain cards in between two piles if teachers felt that ownership of decision-making in a particular domain was situation-specific.

Once all cards were sorted, I asked participants to select one card from each of the three “I decide,” “We decide,” and “They decide” piles and provide an example of a decision made in the past year that related to the listed domain. I asked follow-up questions to determine how the example decisions were made as well as the impact of decisions on participants, their students, and teachers’ working conditions, generally.

The last section of the interview dealt with issues related to the school's institutional and demographic context. I asked, very broadly, about the kinds of external factors that most influenced teachers' work lives, the particular relevance of the school's "type" (i.e., charter school, district "pilot" school, or converted district-to-charter school) to teachers' experiences, and the extent to which teachers felt that student demographic characteristics shaped their schools and their work.

Participants were thanked for their time. Each participant was interviewed for an average of 47 minutes.

Principal interviews. Principal interviews covered many of the same topics as teacher interviews but also included questions particularly relevant to the principal role. For example, I asked the two principals I interviewed about their schools' histories and what it meant to be a principal at a teacher-powered school. Both principals spoke extensively about the "boundary-spanning" work that they did as the most externally-facing members of their school communities (Goldring, 1990), which served to clarify and illuminate these schools' freedoms and constraints vis-à-vis external educational agencies.

Document analysis. Since teacher-powered schools are, by definition, designed intentionally to grant teachers the authority to make decisions impacting their work, their founding documents and other official materials should, in theory, reflect this. As such, I collected and examined a wide range of written materials including bylaws, mission statements, charter agreements, district memoranda of understanding (MOUs), board minutes, annual reports, staff and student handbooks, and other documents for examples of formalized teacher leadership roles and expectations as well as records of decisions made by teachers.

Qualitative data analysis. Data analysis began in concert with data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1998) and continued following completion of site visits. All recorded

interviews were transcribed as Microsoft Word documents and uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis program. Analysis followed Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) guidelines for qualitative data analysis, consisting of memoing, identifying codes, reducing codes to themes, relating categories, drawing initial inferences, analyzing discrepant cases, and triangulating data from multiple sources (p. 218).

Major categories from the conceptual framework and research questions introduced in Chapter 2 were established *a priori* as a way to initially organize my data. From the conceptual framework, categories included *decision-making domains*, *teacher job characteristics*, *teacher perceptions and experiences*, *approaches to teaching and learning* (i.e., teacher practices), and *institutional and demographic context*. Additional categories stemming from my research questions included *student learning goals*, or ways of defining and measuring student learning, *decision-making processes*, and *organizational structures*.

I then read and re-read interview, observation, and document text, memoing to note emerging concepts, patterns, surprises, and contradictions. I created new codes to represent new ideas, sometimes coding *in vivo* along with participants' words, sometimes borrowing codes from existing concepts identified in the research literature, and sometimes developing new codes when neither seemed to fit.

With a substantial list of codes, I began the process of collapsing like codes and reducing codes to themes. For example, *adaptability* and *data-driven* became subsumed under the emergent theme of *improvement orientation*. Similarly, the code *formal-informal paradox*—a phrase used by one participant to describe how decision-making at his school sometimes felt like a very casual affair and sometimes proceeded quite intentionally along clearly-defined procedures—became subsumed under the parent code *this is relaxed*, serving to complicate the relatively pervasive idea that teachers and administrators alike abided by norms of informality in

their work together. Most codes were eventually categorized under one of the pre-existing major categories described above (e.g., *this is relaxed* fell under the major category of *teacher perceptions and experiences*), though several other categories emerged independent of previously-defined categories, such as *teacher origin stories*, *role of administration*, and *outliers and discrepancies*.

Through the process of coding, recoding, and reducing codes to themes, I began to identify relationships between categories of data and to draw inferences about those relationships. In particular, I sought to identify patterns in how specific domains of decision making or teacher job characteristics related to teachers' perceptions and experiences. For example, a pattern of data coded under both *budget*—a child code under *decision-making domains*—and *teacher perceptions and experiences* led me to make an inference relating teachers' ability to purchase supplies and their feeling responsible for their work outcomes. Such inferences constituted a preliminary set of findings from which the five core findings described in depth in the analytical chapters of this dissertation would be drawn.

Cross-case analysis. Because I was interested in the collection of teacher-powered schools as the object of study and not just a single case, the core findings described in this study were those that emerged across the three school sites rather than at any one site alone. Not all findings were equally apparent at each site, but they were apparent at each site in degrees. I made an intentional effort to examine how each school's context shaped the nature and strength of inferences made. For example, as an independent charter school, Explore was generally afforded greater freedom and flexibility to innovate than either of the other two schools were. As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, student demographic differences across the three sites played a crucial role in how teachers defined learning goals for their respective students. Focusing the analysis in this way helps to show what variability exists between schools—and

why—while highlighting common features and experiences that relate in particular to teacher CDMA.

Five core findings. Analysis of the substantial corpus of data I had collected led to the development of many inferences relating numerous aspects of teacher-powered schools and the experiences of teachers within them. For the purposes of this dissertation, I selected five “core findings” that struck me as particularly interesting from the perspective that they challenged the dominant narratives about the teaching experience described in Chapter 2. The five findings are listed here (with corresponding dominant narratives in parentheses) because they are relevant to my description of the development of the survey instrument as described in the following section:

Teachers in teacher-powered schools...

1. ...aligned their schools’ mission, goals, and practices to students’ needs in ways that heightened teachers’ expectations of success. (Uncertainty)
2. ...built flexibility into their schedules that alleviated time pressure and allowed them to adapt to changing circumstances. (Time pressure)
3. ...created informal spaces for teachers to learn together, engendering trust and collaboration with colleagues. (Isolation)
4. ...actively participated in hiring and budget decisions, enhancing feelings of empowerment and professional responsibility. (Deprofessionalization)
5. ...prioritized students’ humanity and dignity through family-like settings and restorative discipline, fostering positive and productive relationships with students. (Conflict)

Qualitative data presented in Chapters 5 through 9 illustrate each of these five findings in detail, with quantitative and free-response data from the survey—described below—providing supporting or conflicting evidence.

Assessing the credibility of qualitative findings. I used several strategies to enhance the credibility of my findings, including analysis of discrepant cases, triangulating data sources, and member checking. As mentioned above, I created a code for *outliers and discrepancies* that served to highlight instances in the data that did not seem to fit emerging findings. I reviewed each discrepant piece of data in relation to the finding to which it contrasted, subsequently revising findings when discrepancies called into question the trustworthiness of the finding itself. For example, *small school size* emerged early on as a job characteristic about which most teachers spoke positively. However, two science teachers at two different schools felt that working in a small school limited their professional development, at times, because they were the only teacher of their subject and therefore were unable to benefit from the community of expertise afforded by a larger science department. In light of this discrepancy, I avoided making generalized claims about the benefits of small school size to teachers, instead focusing on size particularly as it pertained to teachers' ability to forge meaningful relationships with students—a link that was very well-supported in the data.

Triangulation of multiple data sources helped to ensure that findings were robust and defensible (Creswell, 2013). What gets written down in official documents, what teachers actually do, and what they are willing to say in a research setting do not necessarily align. While interviews were my primary source of qualitative data, comparing teachers' statements with documents and observations allowed me to cross-check emergent findings as analysis proceeded. For example, many teachers discussed how their schools practiced “restorative justice” in their interviews, and official discipline policies and observations of dignity-preserving practices as they occurred lent credence and nuance to teachers' testimony.

A third strategy, member checking, served to validate the accuracy of my analysis from the perspectives of participants themselves. I shared an initial draft of findings with participants,

asking them to assess the extent to which the conclusions drawn from their statements and actions were true representations of their work lives and experiences. Findings were minimally revised in light of feedback provided.

Survey (Quantitative) Component

The quantitative phase included the development, administration, and analysis of a 15-minute online survey administered to 342 teachers at 39 TPSI schools. The purpose of the quantitative phase of the study was to build on the findings from the qualitative phase, specifically to “assess the extent to which the initial qualitative findings generalize to a population” following the QUAL → quan exploratory sequential design described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p. 110). It also served to provide additional information about the population of TPSI teachers (detailed in Chapter 4) not otherwise included in specific analysis chapters. This included both teacher demographic information as well as a several of indicators of TPV.

Survey design. Survey development spanned approximately one year, beginning in concert with qualitative data collection and concluding following initial qualitative data analysis in Fall 2017. The survey was designed to cover a wide range of topics pertaining to teacher professional work life in teacher-powered schools and included questions about teachers’ backgrounds and education, degree of school-level influence and classroom control, job characteristics, perceptions and experiences, career intentions, and approaches to teaching and learning.

Measures. Given that the primary purpose of the survey was to ascertain the transferability of the five core qualitative findings to a broader population of TPSI teachers, I sought first to identify measurable constructs that would correspond with qualitative findings. For example, the finding that the teachers I interviewed experienced a strong sense of responsibility

for their students’ and schools’ success as a result of their participation in hiring decisions led me to analyze the relationship between the extent of teacher influence over hiring decisions and their perceived *collective responsibility*—their collective willingness to take responsibility for students’ learning (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Table 3.5, below, displays the five core qualitative findings on the left with key related constructs that I sought to measure using the survey on the right.

Table 3.5. Qualitative findings and corresponding measurable constructs.

Qualitative Finding	Measurable Construct(s)
1. Teachers aligned their schools’ mission, goals, and practices to students’ needs in ways that heightened teachers’ expectations of success.	<i>collective efficacy</i> (Leithwood, 2017)
2. Teachers built flexibility into their schedules that alleviated time pressure and allowed them to adapt to changing circumstances.	<i>teaching load exhaustion</i> (NCES, 2011)
3. Teachers created informal spaces to learn together, engendering trust and collaboration with colleagues.	<i>trust in others</i> (Leithwood, 2017) <i>professional community</i> (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008)
4. Teachers actively participated in hiring and budget decisions, enhancing feelings of empowerment and professional responsibility.	<i>collective responsibility</i> (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008)
5. Teachers prioritized students’ humanity and dignity through family-like settings and restorative discipline, fostering positive and productive relationships with students.	<i>looping (i.e., multiple-year student assignment)</i> ; NCES, 2011) <i>meaningful relationships with students</i>
<i>Note.</i> Citations indicate that the corresponding construct and its measure were derived from an existing survey instrument. Constructs listed without citations were defined, and corresponding survey items written, specifically for this project.	

As in the example of *collective responsibility*, above, I sought to use constructs that have been previously defined in the educational research literature and measured using accessible, validated survey items where possible. Doing so not only facilitated the survey development process and reduced the time needed for item-writing, but it also afforded greater comparability of results across studies of different populations of teachers, namely for survey items derived from the SASS 11-12 Teacher Questionnaire (NCES, 2011), for which response frequency tables were publicly available.

In addition to the variables shown in Table 3.5, the survey included a range of other variables suggested by the research literature to be pertinent to the experience of teachers working in teacher-powered schools. Since this study is largely exploratory in nature, I intended to learn as much as I could about this group of schools that could then be used to guide future research. Broad categories of questions included in the survey are listed and described in the paragraphs that follow, with a full list of measures and their sources provided in Table 3.6. A copy of the final survey instrument is provided in Appendix E.

General information. The survey instrument began with a short series of general information questions geared at understanding teachers' jobs, including their school, the length of time they had been teaching at that school, subjects and grade levels they primarily taught, whether they "looped" with students (i.e., were assigned to teach the same group of students multiple years in a row), whether they had been founding members of their schools' faculties, whether they were union members, and whether they had previously taught at another school.

Teacher influence. While all respondents worked in designated TPSI inventory schools, I wanted to understand the extent to which teachers individually felt they had a say in school- and classroom-level decisions. In other words, from the perspectives of teachers themselves, how "teacher-powered" were these schools? To allow comparability with the broader population of

teachers in the U.S., I chose to use SASS 11-12 items measuring *school-level influence* and *classroom control* in a range of domains (NCES, 2011), as described in a previous section of this chapter about the interview card-sorting task. While the SASS measure of “influence” does not fully capture teacher decision-making *authority* (i.e., CDMA) as it is described in Chapter 1, I felt that the benefits of using an existing measure that would provide comparability across populations of teachers would outweigh the costs of using an indirect measure of CDMA.

Job characteristics. Three survey items pertained to teacher job characteristics, including *work hours*, *teaching load* (time designated for teaching or supervising students), and *access to resources*. Questions related to work and teaching hours were included in response to qualitative evidence that some teachers I interviewed spent considerably less time teaching classes compared to teachers in more traditional schools. Similarly, the teachers I interviewed generally felt they were able to access teaching materials as needed, and I wanted to know if this was a pattern across teacher-powered schools.

Perceptions and experiences. This section of the survey consisted primarily of four-point agree-disagree Likert scale items asking respondents to indicate “the extent to which you agree or disagree that [a statement] reflects the actual circumstances in your school or your own personal beliefs and understandings” (instruction language borrowed with permission from Leithwood, 2017). Items in this section included several of the constructs identified from the core qualitative findings, specifically *collective efficacy*, *exhaustion*, and *trust in others*, as well as *commitment* and *satisfaction*, two measures used to gauge TPV more broadly.

Teacher professional practice. Items in this section of the survey included four sub-scales of *professional community*, including *reflective dialogue*, *collective responsibility*, *shared norms*, and *deprivatized practice* (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), as well as a scale measuring *academic press*, defined as “the extent to which the school is driven by a quest for academic excellence”

(Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002, p. 79). Evidence of all five of these constructs was displayed to varying degrees in the three schools I visited; including them on the survey was again a means of determining the extent to which this qualitative finding could be generalized to the larger population of teacher-powered schools.

Career intentions. Since measuring teacher retention directly was not feasible given the cross-sectional design of this project, three items were included as a proxy for retention, a core element of TPV described in Chapter 1. These items pertained specifically to teachers' career intentions, including their intent to remain in their current job, the expected number of years they anticipated staying in their job, and their intent to remain in the teaching profession.

Approaches to student learning. Survey items on this section of the survey were included as a means of identifying patterns in how teachers in teacher-powered schools approached their work with students. As in previous survey sections, constructs measured as part of this section were observed to varying degrees during the qualitative phase of data collection. These included *constructivist teaching*, a measure of the extent to which teachers actively involve students in the construction of meaning and knowledge (Wooley, Benjamin, & Wooley, 2004); *social justice*, a measure of teachers' collective commitment to principles of social justice in the context of teaching and learning; *democracy*, a measure of the extent to which students are taught skills that will help them participate in a democratic society; and *leadership*, a measure of teachers' commitment to preparing students as leaders of their communities.

Additionally, measures of *student-centered learning* were included on the survey, including seven subscales. These were constructed in partnership with TPSI and Education Evolving leaders, who had previously developed a corresponding framework of student-centered learning and expressed interest in understanding the prevalence of these approaches in TPSI inventory schools (see Appendix F for the Education Evolving Student-Centered Learning

framework). Subscales included *meaningful relationships with students*, a measure of the extent to which students receive regular individualized support from a caring adult at school; *student agency*, a measure of the extent to which students have input into their schooling experience; *anywhere/anytime learning*, a measure of students' opportunities to learn outside the school building and beyond the school day; *relevant/real world learning*, a measure of the connectedness of learning opportunities with students' life experiences and communities; *positive student identity*, a measure of teachers' collective commitment to affirming students' varied identities; *whole-child needs*, a measure of the extent to which teachers provide students with non-academic services and supports; and *competency-based learning*, a measure of the extent to which students are able to master learning objectives at their own pace and in different ways⁴.

Student drive. Three survey items were included as a means of determining *student drive*, or the degree to which teachers felt that their students enjoyed school and felt motivated to work hard at school. This was the only measure on the survey that looked at the effect of teachers' work on students, and is included because the teachers I spoke with in the first phase of the project made explicit connections between building strong relationships with students and student motivation. While student learning outcomes were not measured in this study, I was eager to get a sense of teachers' beliefs about how their work impacted students, especially given the proposed feedback loop between student motivation to learn and teachers' sense of accomplishment and efficacy in their roles⁵.

⁴ With the exception of *meaningful relationships with students* and *positive student identity*, survey results for measures that comprised the "Approaches to Student Learning" section of the survey were not analyzed for the purpose of this dissertation.

⁵ Survey results for the *student drive* measure were not analyzed for the purpose of this dissertation.

Demographics. Finally, the survey included several demographic questions that asked about teachers' gender, race and ethnicity, educational background, and participation in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) certification process. Questions about NBPTS certification in particular were added because many of the teachers I interviewed had participated in the certification process, and I wanted to know if that was common among teachers at TPSI schools.

Table 3.6. Survey components, variables, and sources.

<u>Survey Component</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>Source</u>
General Information	First year at school <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12 (NCES, 2011)
	Subject(s) taught <i>1 item</i>	Learning from Leadership Teacher Survey (LFL; CAREI, 2008)
	Grade level(s) taught <i>1 item</i>	LFL
	Looping <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	Founding team member <i>1 item</i>	Author
	Union membership <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	Previous school <i>1 item</i>	Author

<u>Survey Component</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>Source</u>
Teacher Influence	School-level influence <i>7 items for 7 domains</i>	SASS 11-12
	Domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting performance standards for students at this school • Establishing curriculum • Determining the content of in-service professional development programs • Evaluating teachers • Hiring new full-time teachers • Setting discipline policy • Deciding how the school budget will be spent 	
	Classroom control <i>6 items for 6 domains</i>	SASS 11-12
	Domains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selecting textbooks and other instructional materials • Selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught • Selecting teaching techniques • Evaluating and grading students • Disciplining students • Determining the amount of homework to be assigned 	
Job Characteristics	Work hours <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	Teaching load <i>1 item</i>	Author
	Access to resources <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12

<u>Survey Component</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>Source</u>
Perceptions & Experiences	Trust in others <i>2 items</i>	Teaching and Leading in Schools Survey (TLSS; Leithwood, 2017)
	Collective efficacy <i>3 items</i>	TLSS (2 items) Author (1 item)
	Commitment <i>3 items</i>	TLSS
	Satisfaction <i>4 items</i>	SASS 11-12 (3 items) Author (1 item)
	Burnout <i>3 items</i>	SASS 11-12
Teacher Professional Practice	Professional community <i>11 items for 4 domains</i>	LFL
	Domains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective dialogue • Collective responsibility • Shared norms • Deprivatized practice 	
Career Intentions	Academic press <i>3 items</i>	TLSS
	Intent to remain at current school <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	Expected tenure at current school <i>1 item</i>	Author
	Intent to remain in teaching profession <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12

<u>Survey Component</u>	<u>Variables</u>	<u>Source</u>
Approaches to Student Learning	Constructivist teaching <i>5 items</i>	Constructivist Teaching Scale (CTS) (Woolley, Benjamin, & Woolley, 2004)
	Student-centered teaching <i>21 items for 7 domains</i>	Author, with input from Education Evolving
	Domains <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful relationships with students • Student agency • Anywhere/anytime learning • Relevant/real-world learning • Positive student identity • Whole-child needs • Competency-based learning 	
Student Drive	Student drive <i>3 items</i>	Author
Demographics	Gender <i>1 item</i>	Author
	Hispanic or Latino origin <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	Race <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	Master's degree <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	Doctorate degree <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	National Board certification <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
	National Board progress <i>1 item</i>	SASS 11-12
<p><i>Note.</i> All survey items not developed specifically for this project by the author were used with permission or publicly available for research purposes. Likert-style items from other sources were modified only as needed to conform to a four-point scale. In some cases, wording was modified to ensure appropriateness for a teacher-powered schools context (i.e., changing the word “principal” to “school administrator”) and in response to feedback during the piloting process.</p>		

Open-ended items and other question types. In addition to multiple choice and short answer items, the survey included three open-ended questions written by the author to gain a

deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of participants. First, participants who answered that they had taught elsewhere previously were prompted to provide open-ended examples of how working in their current school differed from working in their previous school. This question was included to better understand how working in a teacher-powered school differed, if at all, from working in more traditional schools (though some respondents noted they had taught previously in teacher-powered or other non-traditional schools). Second, participants were asked to respond in writing to the following prompt: “Give a brief example of a time when you felt you had been successful in your job. How did you know you had been successful?” This question was included to gain insight into teachers’ experiences of self-efficacy as well as their conceptions of student learning. Third, at the end of the survey, participants were asked if they had “anything else to share” about their work in a teacher-powered school.

Lastly, one question asked teachers to select, using check boxes, the types of evidence teachers at their school used on a regular basis “to monitor how well students are doing.” This question was developed in light of qualitative data suggesting that teachers at the case study schools used both traditional and non-traditional metrics of tracking students’ progress. Options included more traditional forms of evidence such as grades and standardized academic assessments as well as less common sources of information about students, such as assessments of deeper learning and social and emotional learning. A text box was provided next to each evidence category so that participants could provide specific examples of “tests, surveys, rubrics, or other tools” their schools used for monitoring students.

Survey testing and revision. Survey testing consisted of four primary feedback and revision cycles and included expert review, cognitive interviews, and piloting.

Expert review. An early version of the survey was developed during qualitative data collection and in conjunction with my enrollment in a Survey Design, Sampling, and

Implementation course at the University of Minnesota (Fall 2016). This early version underwent review by Dr. Michael Rodriguez, a psychometrician and expert in educational survey design, who was teaching the course. As specific items and constructs to be measured were still tentative at this point in the survey development process given ongoing qualitative data collection, feedback resulted primarily in changes to participant directions (e.g., removing redundancies or unnecessary verbiage), item types (e.g., removing cognitively difficult and time-consuming ranking questions and select-all-that-apply questions, where possible), and response options (e.g., improving clarity and consistency across items).

A subsequent round of expert review with Education Evolving (EE) staff members took place in Spring 2017 following a substantive revision of the survey to account for qualitative findings. Given their familiarity with teacher-powered schools and the teachers working within them, EE leaders provided a critical perspective on how the survey would be received by participants. In addition, it was important to me to ensure that the survey results would provide useful information to EE, especially given the extent of their involvement in the project and willingness to assist with participant recruitment. Changes made to the survey in response to EE reviewer feedback included: paring down the number of items to reduce the burden on participants, revising item wording to improve respondent buy-in (e.g., one item referred to “difficult students,” which may have offended some teachers; this was changed to “students... with challenging or withdrawn behavior”), and the addition of two items relating to ways of measuring teacher success and student progress (see Survey Design section, above).

Cognitive interviews. Following revisions based on expert review, two cognitive interviews, or “think-alouds,” with former public school teachers were conducted in Fall 2017 to ensure clarity of item wording and appropriateness of the survey flow. The protocol for cognitive interviews was adapted from Willis (2004) and essentially involved having each interviewee read

and complete the survey out loud, commenting on how they arrived at their responses and what they were thinking about when selecting an answer. Several items were re-worded, instructions were revised, and technical glitches in the survey system were corrected in response to interviewee feedback.

Piloting. The final phase of survey testing involved the administration of a small pilot study. The purpose of the pilot was to test the survey in a way that would mimic the actual circumstances of survey administration. It provided an opportunity to test the effectiveness of the online survey administration tool, Qualtrics, including its email distribution service, response tracking system, and report generation. Nine current or former public school teachers from within my personal network (none of whom had worked in a TPSI school) were invited to participate in the pilot, with eight completing the survey. Analysis of pilot responses focused in particular on items written specifically for this survey, with close attention paid to the adequacy of response variation on Likert items, the accuracy and reasonableness of numerical responses (e.g., years, number of hours), and open-ended feedback, which participants were given an opportunity to provide at the end of the survey.

In general, pilot testing confirmed that the survey was working as intended and that responses to Likert-style items were adequately distributed across response options (spanning a minimum of two out of four options). Minimal changes were made to the survey in response to pilot feedback. Changes included: reordering agree-disagree Likert-type items so that items were more closely grouped by theme, revising instructions to be consistent across survey sections and applicable to itinerant in addition to classroom-based teachers, re-wording one item that was difficult to answer for teachers at the secondary level, and dividing the survey into more sections to ensure that response option labels were always visible at the top of the browser page.

Sampling and recruitment. Given pragmatic considerations such as the access afforded by TPSI staff members to schools within the inventory and the school-level data that TPSI had already collected and made publicly available on their website, the sampling frame was limited to teachers working in schools listed on the TPSI inventory as of November 1, 2017. Limiting the sampling frame in this way necessarily meant excluding teachers from schools that may have met the criteria for TPSI membership without having been identified or vetted by TPSI. Coverage error of this nature is inevitable given the limitations of my capacity to locate teacher-powered schools outside the inventory.

All TPSI inventory schools were invited to participate in the survey. Since there were only 99 TPSI inventory schools at the time of survey administration, and so much variation between schools (in terms of geographic location, community type, grades served, programmatic emphasis, student demographics, year of founding, and a host of other variables), a simple random sample or stratified random sample of TPSI schools would likely have identified a subset of schools unlikely to be representative of the total population.

Participant recruitment occurred in two stages. First, school leads (individuals designated to be a point of contact with TPSI) of all TPSI inventory schools received an email from TPSI staff describing the research project and inviting their school's participation. School leads were asked to generate a list of all teachers at their schools and their email addresses, and to give the teachers on that list 5 days to opt out of having their contact information shared for the purpose of receiving a survey invitation. School leads then sent their contact lists to me and provided the total number of teachers at their school (including any who may have opted out) for the purpose of better understanding any potential response bias. Of the 99 invited TPSI inventory schools, 40

(approximately 40 percent) returned contact lists⁶. The average opt-out rate of teachers at those 40 schools was 2 percent, with the vast majority of schools (36 out of 40) not having any teachers who opted out of receiving the survey.

The second stage of participant recruitment entailed inviting individual teachers whose email addresses had been shared to participate in the survey. Among schools that furnished a list of teachers, all listed teachers (except those who opted out) were invited to take the survey. In total, 633 teachers from 40 schools were invited to participate, with 354 teachers from 39 schools responding to the survey (a response rate of 56 percent). Of those, 12 did not meet eligibility criteria (working as a teacher, or in a combined teaching and other role, for a minimum of 20 hours per week) and were excluded from analysis, leaving 342 eligible responses. See Appendix G for a list of opt-out and response rates for individual participating schools.

Survey administration. Data collection during the quantitative phase took place in three 30-day⁷ rounds of survey administration between December 2017 and May 2018. The rationale for including three rounds of survey administration was that schools continued to submit participant lists well into the initial round. To include as many schools as possible in the study, I permitted these schools to participate in one of two subsequent rounds⁸. The survey was administered using Qualtrics, a survey tool provided free of charge to University of Minnesota students. Invited teachers received a survey preview notice email four days before survey

⁶ Chapter 4 includes a discussion of differences between participating and non-participating TPSI schools.

⁷ The first administration window included the winter holiday and was therefore extended by two weeks to accommodate teachers being out of school.

⁸ A potential limitation of including multiple rounds of survey administration is that teachers who completed the survey at different times of the school year (e.g., January versus April) may have felt differently about their work experience by virtue of the time of year. I considered this limitation, but ultimately decided that the benefit of including more schools and teachers outweighed the cost of potential season-related response bias.

administration began. On the first day of survey administration, teachers received an email including a link to take the survey. Those teachers not responding received a first reminder email after one week, a second reminder after two weeks, and a final reminder approximately one week prior to the close of the survey window.

Schools in which 50 to 79 percent of eligible teachers participated received a \$50 Amazon gift card and schools in which 80 to 100 percent of eligible teachers participated received a \$100 Amazon gift card. Recipients were told that “the gift card is intended to support the professional development of teachers at your school and should be spent in that spirit in a manner agreed upon by the collective teaching staff.”

Quantitative and integrated data analysis. As an exploratory study that sought to describe the basic contours of teacher-powered schools and to understand a wide range of possible linkages between teacher CDMA and teachers’ experiences at work, quantitative analysis relied heavily on the calculation of response frequencies and descriptive statistics. This section describes the processes used to prepare data for analysis, the selection of quantitative analyses presented in Chapters 4 through 9, and the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings.

Preparing data for analysis. As mentioned in the section above about survey sampling, a total of 354 participants responded to the survey. Twelve respondents were excluded from analysis due to ineligibility; upon indicating their school from a dropdown list, these individuals answered “No” to the eligibility question, “Do you work as a teacher at this school, or in a combined teaching and other role, for at least 20 hours every week?” The remaining 342 responses were included in the data file used for analysis. Preparing survey data for analysis included the following steps:

1. Recoding Likert-type response data to numerical values (e.g., Strongly agree = 4, Strongly disagree = 1), and recoding reverse-scored items accordingly;
2. Calculating scale scores for variables measured using multiple items and removing scale scores for any participant who left any of the component items blank;
3. Creating dummy (dichotomous) variables for all “check all that apply” items, such as grade level and subject taught;
4. Reviewing all “other” responses and recoding them as appropriate;
5. Removing inappropriate responses (e.g., several individuals entered a value below 20 for the number of hours they worked at their school per week; since working 20 or more hours was an eligibility requirement, values less than 20 were assumed to be incorrect and recoded as missing).

Incorporating school-level data. A separate file was created with school-level data for all 99 TPSI inventory schools. This file included information that TPSI had collected about the inventory schools as well as additional information I was able to collect from school websites or public databases (e.g., state departments of education or school districts). The following fields were included on the school file: state, community type (i.e., city, rural, suburb, or town), type of school (i.e., district or charter), grades served, year opened, number of TPSI “autonomies” (ranging from 1 to 15; see list in Appendix A), TPSI “autonomy arrangement” (see list in Appendix B), learning program (e.g., project-based, STEM), number of teachers, number of students, percent of students eligible for free or reduced-priced services (FRP), percent students of color, race/ethnicity breakdown, percent Special Education, percent English language learners (ELLs), and whether the school qualified as having each of the 15 TPSI “autonomies.”

Selecting analyses. Analysis of quantitative survey data centered around two main objectives: first, to describe the basic characteristics of TPSI inventory schools and their teachers along a range of structural, demographic, and perception variables (Chapter 4); and second, to verify through alternative means each of the five core qualitative findings (Chapters 5 through 9). In both cases, I calculated descriptive statistics, including means, ranges, and standard deviations, and created frequency distributions and simple bar charts to summarize and display relationships between variables. Where possible, descriptive statistics and response frequencies from the SASS 11-12 survey were incorporated into analyses as a means of comparing TPSI data to a nationally-representative population of teachers⁹.

The selection of specific analyses used to examine the robustness of qualitative findings in Chapters 5 through 9 depended on the nature of the finding. In many cases, I chose to examine the relationship between teachers' perceived influence in a particular decision-making domain and some quality of their work experience. For example, in Chapter 5, I examined the relationship between the degree of teacher influence over *setting performance standards for students* and teachers' ratings of *collective efficacy*. This allowed me to incorporate a wider range of perspectives on the qualitative finding presented in that chapter, namely that teachers' being able to align their schools' mission, goals, and practices to students' needs enhanced their certainty that they would be able to be successful in their jobs. In other cases, I presented response frequency data for a particular survey item or items in relation to SASS 11-12 national comparison data to examine whether a seemingly standout finding from the case study was

⁹ The 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey is the last administration of the survey with publicly available descriptive statistics to which survey data from the present study can be compared. Given the gap in time between survey administrations, it is possible that observed differences are an artifact of elapsed time and not of differing working conditions for teachers.

mirrored in the broader population of TPSI teachers. For example, in Chapter 8, I compared responses to the item, “Necessary materials such as textbooks, supplies, and copy machines are available as needed by the staff,” across TPSI and SASS 11-12 respondents because my case study data suggested that teachers in teacher-powered schools had unusually unrestricted access to materials by virtue of their decision-making authority in the budgeting domain. Specific analyses used with each core finding are described in the corresponding analysis chapters.

Analyzing qualitative survey data. Responses to the few open-ended survey items were loaded into Nvivo for theme analysis. Responses were read and re-read and coded using the same process and coding scheme as were used for analysis of case study data. Open-ended survey responses have been incorporated into the analysis chapters as a means of both substantiating and also challenging case study findings.

Conclusion

This chapter has described the methods used to answer the research questions posed at the end of Chapter 2. It described the merits of a mixed methods, QUAL → quant “exploratory sequential design” in investigating a phenomenon about which little is known (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Qualitative data bear the most weight in this study design, determining the substance of the arguments developed in Chapters 5 through 9. Quantitative findings are used in part as a check on qualitative findings, but also to provide important background information about the nature of TPSI schools as a group, and how this particular group of schools seems to differ from the average U.S. public school. Together, qualitative and quantitative data paint a detailed portrait of what it looks like to work in a teacher-powered school from the perspective of the teachers who lead them. In the next chapter, I will describe the three case study sites in greater detail and provide high-level background information about the 39 schools whose teachers participated in the survey.

Chapter 4: Settings

Introduction

The schools that participated in this study—three case study sites and 39 schools whose teachers participated in the survey—were vastly different in terms of their geographic locations, student populations served, programmatic emphases, and institutional contexts. This chapter serves to introduce the schools that made up the study in an effort to describe the overall contours of Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI) schools, to illuminate key similarities and differences between them, and to provide context for the analysis chapters to come. I will start with the three site visit schools—Explore School, High School for Human Rights, and Young Leaders Academy—then turn to the schools represented among survey responses.

Explore School

Perhaps the most atypical of the three case study sites, Explore School was a small, 6th-12th grade charter school in a mid-sized Midwestern city with a deep project-based learning focus and consensus-based, “teacher cooperative” decision-making model.

Location. Explore was in an industrial part of town that was undergoing considerable urban development. It was located just off a major thoroughfare that boasted a new light rail train that had begun running in 2015. Though the street had seen many changes in recent years—predominantly due to the light rail construction—there were parts of it that were permanent fixtures of an old, and sometimes worn-down Midwestern city: a medical supply shop, a uniform store, a defunct Greek grocery store. You occasionally got a whiff of wet cardboard from a cardboard processing facility half a mile to the east, a permanent fixture of the area.

Newer additions included high-end coffee shops under renovated lofts and the Somali American Center which offered community and resources for the city’s sizeable Somali population. The diversity of the area was greater here than in many other parts of town, but the

available apartments were becoming less affordable, pushing many lower-income residents of color to seek housing elsewhere. Explore's first building had actually been on this main street, in a large brick office building that now housed several other charter schools. Now that the school was a few blocks off of the main drag, one teacher noted that it had become somewhat less accessible to students relying on public transportation to get to school, which the school provided free of charge in lieu of busing. More and more families were now driving their kids to school.

Student demographics. Characteristics of the Explore student body relative to the characteristics of their peers in the surrounding public school district are provided below in Table 4.1. The students at Explore did not mirror the population of the city, much to the dismay of some teachers who felt that recruiting a more racially and socioeconomically diverse student body should be an organizational priority. In interviews, several teachers noted that the school had become more white and more affluent over the years. They attributed the whitening of the student body to several factors: first, as mentioned previously, the transportation constraints facing lower-income students of color; second, the comparatively broader social networks leading white, middle-class families to have greater access to information about schooling options, and third, word of mouth referrals from mental health professionals whose other clients had been successful at Explore¹⁰.

The high population of special education students is noteworthy, and likely also stemmed from the referrals noted above from mental health professionals or families whose children with special needs had found Explore to be welcoming and accommodating.

¹⁰ Given that white and affluent young people are more likely than their lower-income peers and young people of color to access mental health services, which are often cost-prohibitive (Bringewatt & Gershoff, 2010; Hodgkinson, Godoy, Beers, & Lewin, 2017), these referrals are disproportionately made to white, middle and upper-middle class families.

Table 4.1. Student demographic characteristics, Explore School and surrounding district.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of Explore Students</u>	<u>% of Local School District Students</u>
% Free/Reduced Priced Eligible	29.2%	71.0%
% Special Education	35.2%	15.2%
% English Language Learners	0.0%	27.9%
% American Indian or Alaska Native	4.2%	1.3%
% Asian	5.6%	35.6%
% Black or African American	12.0%	27.1%
% Latina/o or Hispanic	4.6%	13.6%
% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.0%
% White	73.6%	20.0%
% Two or More Races	0.0%	2.3%
Total Enrollment	216	18,191
<i>Note.</i> Percentages calculated out of the total grades 6-12 enrollment for both groups.		
Source: State enrollment report, 2016-2017.		

What state databases do not typically report is a breakdown of students’ learning styles or personalities. Many teachers I spoke with mentioned that Explore attracted hands-on learners and social “misfits” who had not been successful in—or felt that they belonged in—traditional public schools. From my own observations at the school, it appeared as though Explore had succeeded in attracting a group of students who were comfortable expressing their individuality, wearing mismatched clothing and sporting unconventional haircuts.

One advisor felt that the school might have attracted a broader student population if it had offered an athletics program. As a small school with a limited budget, Explore did not have the resources to fund athletics, and the surrounding school district would not accept Explore’s student athletes onto its own teams. To students for whom sports were an essential part of their middle and high school experience, Explore would not have been a good fit.

Another aspect of Explore students not identified in public reports but alluded to frequently by staff was the fact that many students at Explore identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ). Given the social and societal stigma associated with LGBTQ identification, particularly among young people, LGBTQ students may have found in Explore a place where they could express their identities freely without fear of judgment or harassment (a topic explored in Chapter 9.)

Demographically, Explore was neither typical nor particularly disadvantaged, at least from a socioeconomic or racial identity standpoint. At the same time, Explore had become a welcoming refuge for students who had not been successful in a more traditional setting, whether for social reasons (e.g., not “fitting in”) or academic ones.

Program: Project-based learning guided by student interest. What set Explore apart from most traditional middle and high schools was its project-based learning curriculum. As students progressed through the grade levels, they took on more and more substantive projects, culminating in a senior project expected to take 300 hours or more to complete. Examples of senior projects—descriptions of which were posted in the hallway outside the main office—included “creating machines for recycling plastic,” “refurbishing a 1970s motorcycle,” and “learning how to be an elementary teacher.” Projects were designed by students in consultation with their “advisor,” a licensed teacher whose primary role was to support students through the project process in a small, multi-age “advisory” group of about 18 students. Others involved in the project planning process included other advisors licensed in a content area in which the project was meeting a standard, parents, community members with expertise in the topic, and sometimes peers (seniors were required to have a junior on their senior project committees). In combination with more traditional coursework, independent project work time—which could last anywhere from 90 minutes to 6 hours a day depending on the student’s grade level and

coursework needs—allowed students to meet state academic standards in creative and personalized ways while exploring their interests and potential career paths.

History: Founding a teacher co-op. Explore School was founded in 2001 by a group of families and teachers who had become disillusioned with the educational offerings and teaching environments of the local public school systems. The founding team applied for and received a Gates Foundation grant through a local education nonprofit, which would pave their way toward replicating an existing project-based, teacher-led school that had earned a favorable reputation in a more rural part of the state. After a year of planning, the school opened its doors to 120 students in grades 9 and 10 in the fall of 2001 and had since grown to over 200 students in grades 6 through 12.

Institutional context: A charter school with considerable autonomy. As a charter school, Explore was also essentially its own school district, accountable to a charter school “authorizer” and the state Department of Education. Explore’s authorizer was a local non-profit organization dedicated to supporting and overseeing innovative charter schools in the region. Explore staff had to administer the same state exams and teach the same standards as typical district schools. In exchange for autonomy over the vision and management of the school, the school had to continue to meet certain academic and financial expectations to remain viable. In Explore’s case, maintaining adequate test scores and funding had generally not posed an existential problem.

An early adopter of charter schools, the state’s charter school advocates saw chartering as a teacher-led reform promoting innovative school models and teaching practices (Kolderie, 1990; Reichgott Junge, 2012), much unlike the common characterization of charter schools in the national discourse as bastions of educational privatization and “corporate reform” (Langhorne, 2019). Explore aligned well with the state’s original intent of charter schooling, being that it was

both highly teacher-led and quite distinct from typical district schools, having a project-based learning (PBL) focus and a unique schedule and space to accommodate that focus.

Leadership structure. As a teacher-owned “cooperative,” all major decisions at Explore were made collectively by consensus vote of the entire 37-person staff. The school did not have a designated leader. Instead, three staff members shared a “program coordinator” role that functioned as a liaison between the school and external agencies. Staff members served on a range of committees on a rotating basis, and presented proposed scheduling or policy changes to their colleagues at weekly staff meetings for a full staff vote.

The school’s governing board, responsible for upholding the mission and vision of the school and approving the school’s calendar, budget, and employment contracts, included a teacher majority as well as parents and other community members. As a result of this teacher-led governance and management structure, teachers collectively had the final authority over decisions in nearly every aspect of the school’s operation.

Teachers and staff. Explore employed 37 staff members, all voting members of the school’s cooperative. Included among those 37 were 21 teachers (including “advisors”), 9 special education assistants (EAs), 2 social workers, a special education coordinator, and a handful of administrative staff. The advisory team at Explore was overwhelmingly white, although there was more racial diversity among EAs and administrative personnel. In speaking with many of the staff members, it became clear that many of them had been at the school for many years. The tenure of interviewed advisors at Explore is provided in Table 4.2, below.

I was somewhat surprised to find that most Explore advisors were introduced to the school somewhat by happenstance. Many completed their student teaching there, or took jobs as EAs prior to being offered full time teaching roles upon completing a teacher licensure program. Advisors hired on to Explore’s staff were not necessarily familiar with the concept and practice of

cooperative school governance, but a willingness to participate and philosophical agreement with the model were prerequisites to joining the team.

Interviewed staff. Table 4.2 displays pseudonyms and demographic characteristics of interviewed staff. Seven of the ten teachers I interviewed had previous teaching experience in other schools, four in traditional district schools, two in district alternative schools, and one in a private school. Just one of the individuals interviewed, Harriet, was a teacher but not an advisor—she taught a full course-load of math classes in the morning and took on several other roles in the afternoon, from managing the school’s “Makerspace”¹¹ to serving as the Treasurer of the Board of Directors.

Table 4.2. Interviewed staff members at Explore School.

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Years at Explore</u>
Andrew	Advisor, MS Science	White	Male	11
Leah	Advisor, MS Language Arts	White	Female	12
Ann	Advisor, HS Biology	White	Female	14
Harriet	Teacher, MS and HS Math	White	Female	12
Molly	Advisor, HS Language Arts, Program Coordinator	White	Female	16
Amanda	Advisor, HS Social Studies, Program Coordinator	White	Female	16
Dan	Advisor, HS Language Arts, Technology, Program Coordinator	White	Male	8
Wendy	Special Education (Case Manager)	White	Female	2
Samantha	Advisor, MS Social Studies	White	Female	13
Matt	Advisor, HS Language Arts	White	Male	15

¹¹ A “makerspace” is an area of a school devoted to student exploration, experimentation, and “tinkering.” Makerspaces are typically stocked with various materials, machines, and other resources to inspire and support constructivist learning (Cooper, 2013).

Environment. Explore was small, which contributed to a sense of closeness and community quite different from the anonymity of a traditional middle or high school. The school itself mirrored the industrial chic of the surrounding area; Explore teachers partnered with a neighboring architecture firm to design the building several years ago. The high ceilings, exposed beams, and open workspaces adorned with student projects on nearly every wall evoked a teenage office space more so than a school. Clean white paint was tastefully supplemented with richly hued oranges, blues, and greens that were bright enough to be kid-friendly but not too bright to offend a more mature eye.

The layout of the school included a handful of traditional-looking classrooms, a multipurpose “gymnacafetorium” (or “café,” for short), a wood shop, art and music rooms, and advisory spaces—where most of the project work got done. High school advisory rooms were large, shared workspaces, each with two advisories of about 18 students led by an advisor (or, in two cases, led by two advisors who shared advising and program coordinating responsibilities). Each high school student had their own workspace. Some were cubicle-like while others were just small tables or desks with nearby cabinets or shelves where project materials, books, and personal belongings could be kept. Some students’ desks were neatly organized while others were messy and covered in days-old lunch containers, sweatshirts, project materials, and magazines. Office space partitions divided the rooms in half to demarcate one advisory from the other, but there was much movement and conversation between the two halves at any given time, except perhaps during advisory time (first thing each morning) when advisory members met only with each other. The advisors themselves had desks next to each other to facilitate communication. Some were standing desks while others were more traditional seated desks depending on the advisor’s preference.

Tucked away in one corner of the school was the woodshop, managed by a man whose daughter had graduated from Explore years ago and who had volunteered regularly at the school prior to being offered a full-time position as an EA. The woodshop housed a wide array of tools and materials, including electric saws, glue guns, power drills, and safety equipment. Students—particularly those in the high school—used the woodshop during their project work time. Products of the woodshop, like the wooden sign bearing the school’s name above the office door, were visible throughout the school.

Attendance, achievement, and graduation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct any in-depth analysis of standard measures of school success. Furthermore, an intentional part of this project has been to identify, inductively, the kinds of local measures of success that teacher-powered schools track their own progress against. However, given that schools’ performance on a range of “objective” measures bears on the kinds of external pressure or support they experience, it is worth commenting on them briefly. State departments of education calculate and report attendance, academic proficiency, and graduation rates somewhat differently, making comparison across the three schools somewhat difficult. Here and in the parallel sections about the other two case study sites, school-level indicators are provided alongside the averages of the surrounding or encompassing local school districts as a way to highlight how the school fared relative to nearby schools. Data points are provided only at the high school level to maintain some consistency in reporting across the three schools.

Attendance. In 2015-16, the most recent year for which data are publicly available, Explore 9th through 12th graders had an average attendance rate of 90.7 percent compared to 92.5 percent on average across high school grades in the local public school district.

Academic achievement. In English language arts, 92.1 percent of Explore tenth graders met state proficiency standards in 2017, compared to 60.6 percent tenth grade students

districtwide. In math, 75.0 percent of Explore eleventh grade students met state proficiency standards in 2017, compared to 51.3 percent of eleventh grade students districtwide.

Graduation. Explore students in the class of 2017 had a 4-year graduation rate of 57.6 percent, which fell well below the district average of 76.9 percent. Interestingly, Explore’s 6-year graduation rate was 93.8 percent, which exceeded the district’s 6-year average of 82.9 percent.¹²

High School for Human Rights

High School for Human Rights (HSHR) was a district “pilot” school with an emphasis on developing young social justice advocates through interdisciplinary learning. HSHR served roughly 500 9th through 12th graders.

Location. Located in a low-income neighborhood on the outskirts of a large metropolitan area on the West Coast, HSHR shared its expansive five-year-old campus with three other high schools that fell under the same school district umbrella. The founding teachers had won this coveted Mission-style campus—which the school’s principal said looked more like a “condo complex” than a school—through a competitive proposal process.

The surrounding working-class city was bordered by a series of major highways connecting a sprawling metropolis, the downtown of which was about a 40-minute drive from school (on a good traffic day). About 90 percent of the city’s 25,000 residents were Latina/o. The city had modest, low-lying houses and businesses peppering the few blocks leading up to the dry foothills of a nearby mountain range. The school was 2 miles away from North Valley High School, where the idea for HSHR had been incubated as a small learning community (SLC) just

¹² Although Explore students may have taken longer than average to complete their degrees, they did, ultimately, tend to finish. Anecdotally, Explore teachers told me that some students, particularly those that enrolled at Explore later in their high school careers, struggled to complete their 300-hour senior project in time to graduate with their class but completed it in the subsequent year or two years.

eight years prior. The large metropolitan school district that oversaw both schools was the city's top employer, with manufacturing jobs fueling a large part of the city's economy.

Student demographics. The students at HSHR resided in the surrounding neighborhood, were a majority Latina/o, and most were eligible for free or reduced-priced services. Most HSHR students were native English speakers, many were bilingual speakers of English and Spanish, and 9.5 percent were English language learners. Students were placed at HSHR through a "random computerized process" that took families' rankings of the six area high schools into account (district website). Despite the school being relatively homogenous from a demographic perspective, HSHR students had wide-ranging academic and personal interests, taking advantage of athletic opportunities afforded by the school's colocation with three other schools and other various activities offered at the school, such as Academic Decathlon, an environmental club, and a Poetic Justice group that met twice a week during lunch.

Table 4.3. Student demographic characteristics, HSHR and surrounding district.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of HSHR Students</u>	<u>% of Local School District Students</u>
% Free/Reduced Priced Eligible	92.0%	82.8%
% Special Education	10.3%	13.4%
% English Language Learners	9.5%	13.8%
% American Indian or Alaska Native	0.2%	0.3%
% Asian	0.2%	3.6%
% Black or African American	1.5%	8.7%
% Filipino	0.0%	2.5%
% Latina/o or Hispanic	95.8%	75.2%
% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.3%
% White	2.1%	8.5%
% Two or More Races	0.2%	0.7%
% Not Reported	0.0%	0.4%
Total Enrollment	526	185,981
<i>Note.</i> Percentages calculated out of the total grades 9-12 enrollment for both groups.		
Source: State enrollment report, 2016-2017.		

Program: Integrated *humanitas* curriculum with a social justice lens. Teachers at HSHR saw student self-actualization as the goal of their work, and an integrated, social justice-themed curriculum as a vehicle for engaging students toward achieving that goal. A hallmark of HSHR and a carryover from the SLC where the founding team of teachers first joined forces was the *humanitas* approach, which emphasized the interconnectedness of the human experience across time, space, and subject area. While students took classes in traditional content areas (e.g., math, language arts, science), student learning was intentionally interdisciplinary, and grade-level teams collaborated to create themed units that wove together content from various subject areas. Weekly grade level team meetings facilitated the coordination of interdisciplinary projects and alignment between subjects, providing an important space for teachers to get feedback on lessons and brainstorm new unit ideas.

History: From SLC to “pilot” school. Prior to founding HSHR in 2011, the *humanitas* SLC teachers at North Valley had felt that their interdisciplinary approach “worked,” but was diluted by the anonymity students experienced as members of a large, traditional high school and by the low expectations held by some of their colleagues. United by a passion for social justice and a shared belief in the potential of their students, the SLC teachers sought independence from North Valley so they could concentrate their model and the people that bought into it in a more intimate, family-like setting.

Becoming a pilot school. HSHR founding teachers described months of grueling workdays needed to prepare a 150-page bid for one of four coveted spots at the new campus and to become a district “pilot” school. Doing so would free them from the bureaucratic and cultural constraints faced at North Valley, and, they hoped, prove to the community what could be possible for students many others had written off. In an emotional win for the SLC *humanitas* team, their bid was accepted and they began planning for the first school year at the brand new campus in 2011.

Institutional context: “Hustling” to defend autonomy. As a district “pilot school,” HSHR had certain autonomies that regular district schools did not have, including in the areas of “budget, staffing, governance, curriculum and assessment, and the school calendar,” according to the district website. The pilot school program was first established in the district a decade ago and had expanded to include about 30 schools. The teachers at individual pilot schools collectively signed an Elect to Work Agreement (EWA), on top of their union-negotiated contract with the district. The EWA spelled out additional work demands and expectations not included in the standard contract. For example, teachers joining the staff at HSHR agreed to work longer hours and begin the process of becoming a National Board Certified teacher within five years of teaching there.

The existence of pilot schools in the district had not been without controversy. Union leaders were wary that pilot schools perpetuated a situation of the “haves” and the “have nots” as it pertained to autonomy, and had contended that pilot school EWAs undermined certain union contract provisions that had been hard-fought. District leadership’s stance on pilot schools had wavered with the coming and going of more and less enthusiastic superintendents. As such, the principal at HSHR largely took on an advocacy role—lobbying for continued protections against district infringement on the school’s autonomies and “hustling,” as Principal Miguel put it, to ensure the schools’ students and teachers had what they needed.

Leadership structure. As alluded to in the preceding paragraph, HSHR did have a principal, unlike Explore. Miguel saw himself first and foremost as a teacher and remarked that he had never intended to be a principal—though his charisma betrayed him in that respect. Miguel was a magnetic, emphatic speaker driven as much by the desire to prove “it can be done” as by his deeply-seated commitment to educational justice for his students. His role required that he negotiate meeting district demands on the one hand while being responsive to and understanding of staff needs on the other hand, a trying balancing act. Though decision-making authority in a number of areas were formally vested in the principal, who reported to district administration, Miguel leaned on his staff of teachers for policy and personnel recommendations. Since the six original teachers who had drafted the initial proposal to separate from North Valley were of equal status, at least in theory, they and their newer colleagues were expected to have and express opinions on all manner of minor and major decisions. Miguel’s administrative team included two assistant principals, who shared the various external regulatory and advocacy burdens placed on the school.

The school had a Governing Council comprised of six teachers, four parents, three students, a community member, and the principal. This group met monthly to vote on school-

level policy and formulated, proposed changes to, and ratified the EWA with input from other staff members.

Teachers and staff. There were 49 staff members at HSHR and 31 teachers on the faculty, including the original six teachers who left North Valley to start the new pilot school. Each teacher was assigned to a grade level and content area, with teachers working both vertically across grade levels in common content professional learning communities and horizontally within a grade level in interdisciplinary teams. Principal Miguel and veteran teachers had sought out outstanding, diverse talent from across the district to fill open roles, taking advantage of their pilot school status to be particular in hiring only those individuals who shared the school's commitment to social justice and critical pedagogy.¹³

Interviewed staff. Table 4.4 displays pseudonyms and demographic characteristics of interviewed staff at HSHR. All but three of the teachers I interviewed had previous teaching experience in other schools in the same school district. Four had been members of the SLC team at North Valley that founded the school in 2011. Two of the eight interviewed teachers had begun their teaching careers at HSHR.

¹³ District policy required HSHR staff to offer interviews to tenured teachers in the district's hiring pool prior to interviewing non-tenured candidates.

Table 4.4. Interviewed staff members at HSHR.

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Years at HSHR</u>
James	Instructional Coach	White	Male	1
Paula	Physics Teacher, Gr. 11	Latina	Female	3
Frank	English Teacher, Gr. 11	White	Male	6
Rajiv	Math Teacher, Gr. 9	Black	Male	3
Theresa	English Teacher, Gr. 12	White	Female	5
Natalie	Social Studies Teacher, Gr. 11	Latina	Female	3
Luis	English Teacher, Gr. 12	Latino	Male	6
Joe	Social Studies Teacher, Gr. 12	White	Male	6
Cayo	Social Studies Teacher, Gr. 12	Latino	Male	6
Miguel	Principal	Latino	Male	6

Environment. The interior of the building was much more recognizable as a school in comparison to the “condo-like” exterior, with linoleum tile floors and long stretches of hallway lined with student lockers. The classrooms were a standard size, with matching student desks or work tables in good condition. The rich, earthy browns, tans, yellows, and reds on the floors and walls complemented the larger-than-life faces of civil rights leaders and social justice advocates celebrated in murals adorning the hallways, including Caesar Chavez, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rosa Parks. These colors, Principal Miguel told me, were chosen intentionally for their warm, human quality—and stand in stark contrast to the blue, green, and white tiles that lined the floor of the neighboring Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) school. Also on proud display in the main first floor hallway were the faces of HSHR’s past student association presidents, the colleges they chose to attend, and quotes from their graduation speeches. One read, “Don’t dwell on what is, create what can be,” a philosophy reflected in the classes I observed and the interviews I had with teachers.

The climate was warm enough that students often ate, took breaks, and attended class in the outdoor courtyard adjacent to the school. The first door of the school that was visible from the

main gate of the larger complex was painted black with a large white fist raised toward the sky, emblematic of the school’s collective solidarity with marginalized communities near and far.

Attendance, achievement, and graduation. HSHR teachers took pride in their students’ unusually high attendance and graduation rates, and expected all students to graduate having fulfilled the course requirements needed to attend any of the state’s selective public universities—an expectation that went above and beyond district graduation requirements. The school had been recently recognized as being one of the ten schools in the school district with the highest college-going rates.

Attendance. While there was no public record of overall attendance rates available in the state where HSHR was located, there was a report specifically addressing “chronic absenteeism,” a measure used to gauge the percentage of enrolled students who were consistently absent from school¹⁴. In 2017, HSHR 9th through 12th graders had a “chronic absenteeism” rate of 9.5 percent compared to 16.3 percent across high school grades districtwide.

Academic achievement. In reading, 92.9 percent of HSHR eleventh graders met state proficiency standards in 2017, compared to 79.1 percent of eleventh grade students districtwide. In math, 68.1 percent of HSHR eleventh graders met state proficiency standards in 2017, compared to 49.8 percent of eleventh grade students districtwide.

Graduation. HSHR students had a 4-year graduation rate of 94.3 percent, far exceeding the district average of 84.2 percent.

¹⁴ “Students are determined to be chronically absent if they were enrolled for a total of 30 days or more at the selected reporting level during the academic year and they were absent for 10% or more of the days they were expected to attend” (State Department of Education).

Young Leaders Academy

Young Leaders Academy (YLA) served roughly the same number of students as HSHR (about 550), but had over three times the number of grade levels. It was the only Pre-K through 12 charter school in the state. As part of its vision to develop future leaders for the community it served, YLA sought to graduate young people who were “competent, powerful thinkers, engaged citizens, and life-long learners” (School Website).

Location. Young Leaders was located in a mixed-income, racially and ethnically diverse urban neighborhood in a large Northeastern city. It sat on a busy street lined with historic apartment buildings, small groceries, Columbian bakeries, law offices, and beauty salons. The neighborhood was home to numerous South American and Asian immigrant communities, with over half of the population born outside the United States. The area had begun to gentrify as housing values climbed; Gap and Banana Republic “factory stores” were taking over previously abandoned storefronts and luring a growing middle-class customer base.

Student demographics. While most schools in the same city were highly racially segregated, YLA was relatively diverse, having been recognized as such by the city’s most prominent newspaper. Demographic characteristics of the school are shown in Table 4.5, below. A majority of YLA students were economically disadvantaged and most were students of color representing the diversity of ethnic groups that lived in the surrounding neighborhood.

Significantly, YLA boasted a 3,500-student wait list. Student vacancies were filled by a lottery system, with preference given to siblings of current students and residents of the school district in which the school is located. One class of pre-kindergarteners and one class of fifth graders were added each year, leaving the vast majority of interested students seeking enrollment options elsewhere. The huge demand for student seats at YLA had prompted its school leaders to begin plans for establishing a second site at the time of my visit.

Table 4.5. Student demographic characteristics, YLA and surrounding district.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of YLA Students</u>	<u>% of Local School District Students</u>
% Free/Reduced Priced Eligible	76.5%	68.0%
% Special Education	17.9%	15.6%
% English Language Learners	6.4%	18.5%
% American Indian or Alaska Native	0.4%	0.6%
% Asian or Pacific Islander	18.0%	21.9%
% Black or African American	7.5%	6.8%
% Latina/o or Hispanic	60.7%	53.7%
% White	12.4%	15.8%
% Two or More Races	1.1%	1.3%
Total Enrollment	549	38,147
<i>Note.</i> Percentages calculated out of the total grades K-12 enrollment for both groups.		
Source: State enrollment report, 2016-2017.		

Program: Preparing future leaders and global citizens. The mission of YLA was “to foster educated, responsible young leaders who through their own personal growth will spark a renaissance in [our city].” One way in which YLA teachers developed student leadership was through an annual week-long Expedition Week that students worked together to plan and execute in the middle of the fall semester. Middle and high school students proposed themes—such as “How a City Works,” “Spanish Culture,” or “Culinary Arts and Careers,” to name a few—and then recruited other students to join them in exploring those themes through “interdisciplinary” and “multi-sensory” experiences (School Website). That year, students had been encouraged to apply a “social justice lens” to their explorations in alignment with the school’s goal to create “global citizens with an abiding respect for peace, human rights, the environment, and sustainable development.”

History: Teacher and parent empowerment in an evolving educational landscape.

YLA had been founded as a district K-12 school in 1993 after a group of committed teachers and parents successfully applied for a grant to be used toward the creation of small, collaboratively-run school. Central to the school's model was the leadership of teachers and parents. As those closest to students and closest to understanding students' particular learning needs, teachers and parents were presumed to have keen insights about the kinds of learning experiences students would find engaging, relevant to their lives, and appropriately challenging.

Its current principal, Lori, had been a part of the school community since its inception. Back in the early 1990s, Lori had been looking for a school for her young son when she was approached by the school's founding principal, Greg. Greg's vision for the school as a small, family-like community appealed to Lori, so she enrolled her son and got involved—first as a parent, then volunteer, and then operations director.

Upon Greg's retirement in 2007, Lori was asked to take the helm as Principal. With no formal teacher training other than prior experience working in museum education, but nearly two decades of familiarity with the school and a commitment to the model that saw her children through their K-12 schooling, Lori took on the role with the understanding that teachers would collectively decide most instructional matters. Her role would involve considerable external-facing work—interfacing with policymakers, funders, and district administrators—in addition to the day-to-day work of managing a school.

Becoming a charter school. In 1998, YLA had the opportunity to apply for Charter status when the state passed its first charter law. As with most charter legislation, the law came with strings attached; a promise of “autonomy in exchange for accountability.” The school would be allowed to operate independently of the district, selecting its own staff and curriculum and managing its own budget, provided it demonstrate strong academic results. Seeing the value of

being able to make local decisions for the students the school served, Greg and his committed team of teachers and parents re-opened the school as a charter school in 2000.

Institutional context: A “converted” charter school with district ties. As a charter school, YLA had secured the autonomy to select its own staff and school leader, develop its own instructional program, and expand roles for teachers, among other freedoms. It was one of just a few charter schools in the state that had applied to “convert” from a district to a charter school, which allowed the school to maintain certain ties with the school district, which was now its authorizer. The relationship with the school district meant that, unlike most charter schools, its teachers enjoyed the benefits of union membership, including a standardized salary scale and pension plan.

Having a large bureaucratic school system as an authorizer also came with constraints. Lori explained that the district consistently exerted pressure on the school to “go back to the status quo”—to abandon more innovative features of the school for safer, more traditional options. “Even though everybody knows the status quo didn’t really work,” she added. For example, district oversight personnel had begun exerting considerable influence on the school’s curricular materials and assessment strategies during the previous year’s charter renewal process.

A second source of constraint on the school’s ability to exercise full autonomy was the state’s rigorous testing program and specifically the heightened performance expectations of charter schools. Several teachers—more than at either of the other two school sites—complained about the time that was needed to prepare students for state tests, and how that precluded them from conducting their classes in a way that would best meet their individual students’ needs.

Leadership structure. YLA’s founder, Greg, shaped the principalship into what it had become, a role characterized by external advocacy and internal support to teachers carrying out the instructional goals of the school. YLA was perhaps the most hierarchical of the three schools

included in this study, with layers of leadership at the school, “cluster” (elementary, middle, and high), and subject area levels. Teachers funneled concerns and suggestions up to the senior administration (the “School Management Team,” or “SMT”) primarily through their cluster leaders or content-based Professional Learning Community (PLC) leaders.

The hierarchical nature of the school made some teachers at YLA question whether it was truly “teacher-led,” a point that came up several times during interviews. Formal authority was vested primarily in the principal, but in practice, teachers at YLA did have power to shape school-level policy, and the vast majority of teacher-crafted proposals were ultimately approved and funded. Teachers had considerable autonomy to conduct their classes and determine the content of PLC meetings in collaboration with subject area colleagues. Some teachers opted into various leadership roles as a means of furthering their professional development and earning an additional stipend on top of their union-negotiated salaries. (Just prior to my visit in early spring, a “menu” of such leadership opportunities had been circulating among the staff.) Teachers (along with parents, students, and other staff members) also had representation on the school’s Collaborative Governance Council, which “monitors the quality of life and sets academic priorities at the school” (School Charter). Both elected and appointed teachers served on the school’s Board of Trustees. The importance of teacher and parent empowerment was considered a “core premise” of the school, as reflected in the school’s charter, which acknowledged that, “schools are stronger and more viable when constituents work together to utilize each others’ strengths and talents.”

Teachers and staff. YLA’s 80-person staff included 50 teachers, 12 support staff, 9 members of the SMT, 6 paraprofessionals, 5 guidance counselors and social workers, and 4 people dedicated to parent outreach and student support (with some overlap between categories). Nearly a dozen YLA staff members identified as “Starents,” a colloquialism used for staff members who were also parents of current students. YLA staff were proud of this feature of the

school’s makeup, both because it exemplified the strength of the school’s partnership with parents as well as families’ commitment to the school.

Interviewed staff. Table 4.6, below, displays the pseudonyms, roles, and demographic characteristics of the 11 individuals (10 teachers and 1 principal) I interviewed at YLA. Like the teachers I spoke with at Explore, many YLA teachers happened upon the school somewhat haphazardly. Some had applied to several schools upon graduating from a teacher training program, and had decided that they much preferred the interview experience at YLA as compared with some of the more traditional schools they had applied to. In essence, YLA had felt more communal and inviting, whereas some of the more traditional schools had seemed cold and alienating, in contrast. Several teachers also highlighted the school’s union affiliation—unusual for a charter school—as a compelling factor in their decision to join the staff. Two of the teachers at YLA, including Henri, were alumni of the school.

Table 4.6. Interviewed staff members at YLA.

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Role</u>	<u>Race</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Years at HSHR</u>
Arnel	MS Math	Asian	Male	10
Rachel	MS English	White	Female	3
Robert	Physics, Technology	White	Male	21
Nathan	Chemistry, Biology	White	Male	6
Michelle	Special Education, Science	White	Female	1
Emily	English Language Arts	White	Female	5
Danielle	HS English	White	Female	3
Henri	Special Education, Social Studies	Asian	Male	4
Josh	Earth Science	White	Male	8
George	Special Education, Math	Asian	Male	22
Lori	Principal	White	Female	19

Environment. YLA occupied three floors of the same large brick school building it occupied as a district school in the 1990s. The building was much older than the school itself,

having originally been built as a department store. What windows it had overlooking the city streets outside were small and placed too high on the walls to actually see out of them. On the first level, all students, staff, and visitors entered through the same main door and were greeted by two security guards before heading upstairs, where the majority of elementary, middle school, and high school classrooms were located. Alternatively, visitors could pass through a second set of doors off the building entrance leading to the main office and indoor playground—entirely windowless but thumping with energy—reserved for the littlest YLA scholars.

What YLA lacked in inspiring facilities it made up for in ambiance. Student work adorned the hallways. Murals made by previous graduating classes brought color into an otherwise drab, institutional space. A small rooftop garden, created and managed by high school life science students, was a tiny oasis from the brick and concrete that covered so much of the building and neighborhood. On the second and third floors, students and staff had access to large, open multi-purpose media centers, where students and staff alike could be found working independently on Google Chromebooks or in small groups. Surrounding the media centers were individual classrooms, each with large windows looking into the building's interior space.

Attendance, achievement, and graduation. If its 3,500 student waiting list is any indication, YLA was viewed by the surrounding community as a high-performing school. The school had been the recipient of numerous grants, awards, and other accolades for both academic and operational accomplishments.

Attendance. During the 2015-2016 school year, YLA had an overall annual attendance rate of 95 percent (including all grade levels, Pre-K through 12). District level attendance rates were not publicly available.

Academic achievement. In English language arts, 90 percent of YLA twelfth graders tested at a proficient level in 2017, compared to 84 percent of twelfth grade students districtwide.

In math, 92 percent of YLA twelfth graders were proficient, compared to 86 percent of twelfth grade students districtwide.

Graduation. YLA had a four-year graduation rate of 84 percent in 2016, compared to the local school district graduation rate of 75 percent for the same class.

Case Sites: Summary

The three school sites included in this multiple case study—Explore School in the upper Midwest, High School for Human Rights on the West Coast, and Young Leaders Academy in the Northeast—were seemingly more different than they were similar. They served different student populations, espoused a range of teaching and learning philosophies, and structured their teams in unique ways. They were at different stages in their development as organizations, with YLA having two and a half decades under its belt and HSHR still in its (relative) infancy. They had to respond to quite distinct external demands and constraints, with Explore being most free of the three schools to conduct its work relatively unhindered and unquestioned and HSHR and YLA both being beholden to large, bureaucratic school systems, albeit to varying degrees.

Despite these differences, the three schools had achieved success by multiple standard measures in educating groups of students who have not tended to be successful in traditional schools—whether they be students with special needs at Explore or low-income students of color at HSHR and YLA. Their teachers, many of whom had begun teaching within a traditional school system, had largely stayed the course, shaping their schools' programs through participation in school-level decision-making and the assumption of varied leadership roles.

The analysis chapters that follow take an in-depth look at how teachers in these schools made sense of their involvement in school decision-making and how such involvement influenced the character and quality of their professional work lives. In order to gauge the extent to which these teachers' experiences mirrored those of TPSI teachers, generally, survey responses from

342 teachers at 39 inventory schools were summarized and incorporated into the analysis. The section that follows describes the group of TPSI schools that participated in the survey portion of the study and the teachers who powered them.

Survey: Characteristics of TPSI Schools and Teachers

At the time this study was conducted, there were 99 schools on the TPSI Schools Inventory, of which 39 had teachers who participated in the survey portion of the study. This section describes the basic characteristics of TPSI schools in relation to public schools in the U.S. overall and to the subset of schools whose teachers took the survey. Also included are statistics describing several demographic characteristics and perceptions of participating teachers as compared with a nationally representative sample of teachers.

TPSI schools compared to U.S. public schools. How do TPSI schools compare to the average school? Table 4.7, below, displays several characteristics of public schools in the U.S. (left column) as they compare to all TPSI inventory schools (center column) and TPSI schools participating in the survey (right column). In the U.S. column, enrollment and student demographic data were retrieved from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for the most recent school year available (2015-16 or 2016-17). In the TPSI columns, data were retrieved from state-level databases for the most recent school year available (either 2016-17 or 2017-18). When not included in state databases, some fields were populated using data from school websites.

School type. The majority of TPSI schools are district schools (62.6 percent), and 37.4 percent are charter schools. The proportion of TPSI schools that are charter schools is much greater than the proportion of all public schools in the U.S. that are charter schools (7.1 percent). This is unsurprising for several reasons: first, alternative school leadership structures (including teacher-led models) may be more likely to emerge where schools are not embedded in a

traditional, hierarchical school system, as in the charter school sector. Second, charter schools—as originally envisioned—are expected to incubate innovative approaches to schooling, which may include alternative forms of school management and governance (Kolderie, 1990).

Grades served. TPSI schools are much more likely to serve secondary (middle and high school) students (52.5 percent) than the general population of schools (24.3 percent), and also more likely to serve both elementary and secondary students in a “combined” setting (14.1 percent versus 6.9 percent, respectively).

Student enrollment. A majority of TPSI schools (60.6 percent) have enrollments of fewer than 300 students, compared to only 30.0 percent of public schools. This is somewhat surprising given that TPSI schools are also much more likely to be secondary schools, which tend to have larger enrollments overall (Hoffman, 2003). Only 1 of 99 TPSI schools (or 1.0 percent) has an enrollment exceeding 1,000 students, compared to roughly 10 percent of public schools.

Student demographics. NCES categorizes schools by poverty level in the following manner: “low poverty” schools are those in which 0 to 25.0 percent of students qualify for the federal free or reduced-price lunch (FRL) program, “mid-low poverty” schools are those in which 25.1 to 50.0 percent of students qualify for FRL, “mid-high poverty” schools are those in which 50.1 to 75.0 percent of students qualify for FRL, and “high poverty” schools are those in which 75.1 to 100 percent of students qualify for FRL. TPSI schools do not differ significantly from the general population of public schools in terms of poverty level, though TPSI schools are slightly more likely to be categorized as high poverty (30.3 percent versus 24.7 percent) and slightly more likely to be categorized as low poverty (20.2 percent versus 18.0 percent).

NCES also labels schools according to the concentration of students of certain ethnic and racial groups. TPSI inventory schools are somewhat less likely than public schools overall to have a student population that is majority white (44.7 percent versus 55.6 percent, respectively),

somewhat more likely to have a student population that is majority Hispanic or Latina/o (25.5 percent versus 17.0 percent), and about as likely to have a student population that is majority Black or African American (9.6 percent versus 9.8 percent).

On average, 17.3 percent of students attending TPSI schools receive special education services, far exceeding the 13.2 percent of all public school students in the U.S. who do. Also on average, 11.9 percent of students attending TPSI schools are English Learners, compared to 9.6 percent of all public school students.

Overall, these demographic comparisons reveal that the student populations at TPSI schools do not differ significantly from those of public schools overall, although TPSI schools tended to be more likely to enroll students from less-privileged student groups (i.e., low-income, Hispanic or Latino, special education, and English Learners).

Community type (“locale”). NCES categorizes schools using the four “locale” designations used by the U.S. Census Bureau to describe communities: city, suburban, town, and rural¹⁵. TPSI schools are more than twice as likely as public schools overall to be located in cities (58.6 percent versus 27.2 percent) and less likely to be located in suburban areas, towns, and rural communities.

Region. Geographically, TPSI schools are disproportionately located in the Midwest (44.4 percent of TPSI schools, versus 25.8 percent of public schools overall), and underrepresented in the South (6.1 percent versus 34.8 percent, respectively). The concentration of TPSI schools in the Midwest may stem from the fact that TPSI and its parent organization,

¹⁵ Definitions of these locale codes are available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/LocaleBoundaries>.

Education Evolving, are headquartered in Minnesota and may therefore have greater awareness of qualifying schools in that region.

Participating and non-participating TPSI schools. Although all schools in the TPSI inventory were invited to participate in the survey, TPSI School Leads at only 40 of the 99 eligible schools furnished lists of eligible teachers, and 39 of those 40 schools are represented among survey responses¹⁶. It is therefore important to acknowledge how the overall population of TPSI schools and participating schools may differ, and in turn how those differences may influence the distribution of responses provided by participating teachers. Table 4.7 displays the characteristics of schools whose teachers participated in the survey in the rightmost column. Relevant differences between populations of TPSI schools are described below.

School type. Participating TPSI schools were somewhat more likely to be charter schools than the population of TPSI schools overall. Survey findings may therefore be slightly biased toward the perspectives of teachers in TPSI charter schools.

Grades served. There were minimal differences in grade levels served between all TPSI schools and participating schools.

Student enrollment. Student enrollment numbers for all TPSI schools and participating schools followed a similar distribution across enrollment bands. Participating schools were somewhat more likely to have fewer than 300 students (71.8 percent) than all TPSI schools (60.6 percent). This difference may be due to differential responsiveness to the school-level survey incentive offered, which depended on percent participation among eligible teachers regardless of

¹⁶ The one school whose teachers were invited to participate but did not had only two teachers, both of whom did not respond to the survey invitation.

school size. Since school budgets for smaller schools are significantly less than those for larger schools, a \$50 or \$100 school-level incentive may be more meaningful for smaller schools.

Student demographics. Compared with all TPSI schools, participating schools were less likely to be designated high poverty or mid-high poverty (51.5 percent versus 38.5 percent, respectively), more likely to have a majority white student population (44.7 percent versus 63.9 percent), less likely to have a majority African American or Black student population (9.6 percent versus 5.6 percent), and less likely to have a majority Hispanic or Latina/o population (25.5 percent versus 16.7 percent)¹⁷. Compared to students at all TPSI schools, students at participating schools were more likely to receive special education services (17.3 percent versus 19.3 percent, respectively), and less likely to be English Learners (11.9 percent versus 9.3 percent).

Community type (“locale”). TPSI schools in rural, suburban, and town locations participated at somewhat higher rates than schools located in cities. Whereas city schools accounted for 58.6 percent of all TPSI schools, they represented only 43.6 percent of participating schools.

Region. TPSI schools in the Midwest and South participated at somewhat higher rates than expected based on those region’s representation among all TPSI schools. Conversely, TPSI schools in the West participated at somewhat lower rates than expected. The over-representation of Midwestern schools may be due to the familiarity of teachers in those states with the University of Minnesota, where research from this project was conducted, as well as the fact that TPSI manages regional networks of schools in both Minnesota and Wisconsin, perhaps making

¹⁷ Student demographic information (including race/ethnicity, special education status, and EL status) was unknown for 5 TPSI schools (3 of which had participating teachers). These schools were excluded from relevant calculations.

teachers in those states more attuned to and invested in the goings on of TPSI generally and this research, specifically.

Year opened. The oldest schools in the TPSI inventory—those that opened in 1989 and before (6.1 percent of all TPSI schools)—did not participate in the survey. The proportions of all TPSI schools and participating schools that opened in the ranges of 1990-1994, 1995-1999, and 2000-2004 were roughly the same, with participating schools being slightly more likely to have opened in 2005-2009 and in 2015 and after, and slightly less likely to have opened in 2010-2014 in comparison to all TPSI schools.

Table 4.7. Comparing U.S. public schools, all TPSI schools, and participating TPSI schools.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of U.S. Public Schools (N = 98,158)</u>	<u>% of All TPSI Schools (N = 99)</u>	<u>% of Participating TPSI Schools (n = 39)</u>
<u>School Type</u>			
Charter	7.1%	37.4%	51.3%
District	92.9%	62.6%	48.7%
<u>Grades Served</u>			
Elementary	68.1%	33.3%	30.8%
Secondary	24.3%	52.5%	53.8%
Combined	6.9%	14.1%	15.4%
Other	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
<u>Student Enrollment</u>			
Less than 300	30.0%	60.6%	71.8%
300 to 499	27.8%	24.2%	17.9%
500 to 999	32.8%	14.1%	10.3%
1,000 or more	9.3%	1.0%	0.0%

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of U.S. Public Schools (N = 98,158)</u>	<u>% of All TPSI Schools (N = 99)</u>	<u>% of Participating TPSI Schools (n = 39)</u>
<u>Poverty Level (Percent of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch)</u>			
Low poverty (0-25.0%)	18.0%	20.2%	28.2%
Mid-low poverty (25.1 to 50.0%)	27.0%	25.3%	30.8%
Mid-high poverty (50.1 to 75.0%)	25.8%	21.2%	17.9%
High poverty (More than 75.0%)	24.7%	30.3%	20.5%
Missing/school does not participate	4.6%	3.0%	2.6%
<u>Racial/Ethnic Concentration*</u>			
% of schools >50% White	55.6%	44.7%	63.9%
% of schools >50% African American or Black	9.8%	9.6%	5.6%
% of schools >50% Hispanic or Latina/o	17.0%	25.5%	16.7%
<u>Student Demographics Summary^</u>			
% Special Education	13.2%	17.3%	19.3%
% English Language Learners	9.6%	11.9%	9.3%
% American Indian	1.0%	1.5%	1.8%
% Asian/Pacific Islander	5.5%	4.9%	3.1%
% African American or Black	15.3%	15.2%	11.3%
% Hispanic or Latina/o	26.4%	31.8%	22.9%
% White	48.2%	42.0%	55.3%
% Two or More Races	3.6%	4.3%	5.0%
<u>Community Type ("Locale")</u>			
City	27.2%	58.6%	43.6%
Suburban	31.7%	17.2%	20.5%
Town	13.4%	5.1%	7.7%
Rural	27.8%	19.2%	28.2%

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>% of U.S. Public Schools</u> (N = 98,158)	<u>% of All TPSI Schools</u> (N = 99)	<u>% of Participating TPSI Schools</u> (n = 39)
<u>Region</u>			
Northeast	15.5%	16.2%	15.4%
Midwest	25.8%	44.4%	53.8%
South	34.8%	6.1%	10.3%
West	23.9%	33.3%	20.5%
<u>Year Opened</u>			
1989 and before	(Not Available)	6.1%	0.0%
1990-1994		5.1%	7.7%
1995-1999		10.1%	10.3%
2000-2004		12.1%	10.3%
2005-2009		25.3%	33.3%
2010-2014		32.3%	25.6%
2015 and after		6.1%	12.8%
Unknown		3.0%	0.0%
*There were 5 TPSI schools (center column), of which 3 participated (right column), whose student racial/ethnic composition was not publicly available. These schools are excluded from “Racial/Ethnic Concentration” percentage calculations.			
^ In the U.S. column, percentages reflect the proportion of all U.S. public school students in each student group. In TPSI columns, percentages reflect the average percent of students in each student group across schools.			
Sources: NCES, state-level databases, school websites			

Characteristics of participating teachers. A central question of this study is how the work experiences of teachers in TPSI schools may differ from the work of American teachers, generally, with an explicit emphasis on teacher professional vitality (TPV), a holistic construct characterizing the quality of teacher work life (see Chapter 1). This section presents both basic demographic characteristics of the teachers who participated in the survey as well as descriptive statistics for several indicators of TPV: tenure at school, work hours, expected additional years of employment at their school, intentions to remain in the teaching profession, satisfaction, commitment, and burnout. While these measures present only a snapshot of how responding

teachers think about their current roles and future career decisions, Chapters 5 through 9 provide qualitative and further quantitative evidence to help contextualize these figures and describe how decision-making authority plays a role in shaping teachers' experience of TPV in teacher-powered schools.

One major advantage to using survey items identical to those used on a major national survey, the Schools and Staffing Survey 2011-2012 (SASS 11-12), is that it affords the opportunity to compare the population of interest—teachers in TPSI schools—with a representative sample of American public school teachers. Comparison figures from SASS 11-12 administration—the most recent results available publicly—are therefore provided alongside TPSI figures.

Gender. TPSI respondents were somewhat more likely to be male (29.0 percent) than were SASS 11-12 respondents (23.7 percent). This may be due in part to the fact that TPSI respondents were also more likely to teach in secondary grade levels, where male teachers are more highly concentrated.

Race/ethnicity. In terms of reported race and ethnicity, TPSI respondents were remarkably similar to SASS 11-12 respondents, with differences in identification exceeding 2 percentage points in only one category (3.4 percent of TPSI respondents identified as being from multiple racial or ethnic groups in comparison to 1.0 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents).

Education level. TPSI respondents were slightly more likely to hold a Master's Degree compared to SASS 11-12 respondents (62.0 percent versus 54.5 percent) and three times as likely to hold a Doctorate degree (3.1 percent versus 1.1 percent).

National Board certification. TPSI respondents were more than twice as likely as SASS 11-12 respondents to hold National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)¹⁸ certification in at least one area (35.1 percent versus 16.6 percent).

Tenure at school. The average tenure of TPSI respondents at their current school was 7.1 years compared to 9.0 years for SASS 11-12 respondents. Given that many of the participating TPSI schools were founded in recent years, and given that no information is provided regarding the age of schools represented among SASS 11-12 responses, it is unclear whether this difference is an artifact of school age.

Union membership. Fewer than half of TPSI respondents reported being union members, compared to a majority of SASS 11-12 respondents (45.4 percent versus 73.8 percent).

Founding team members. Approximately one in five TPSI respondents reported having been on the founding teams of their current schools. (There is no SASS 11-12 comparison data for this metric.)

Previous schools. Three-quarters of TPSI respondents reported having taught previously at a different school before joining the staff at their current school. (There is no SASS 11-12 comparison data for this metric.)

Grades taught. As mentioned above, TPSI respondents were more likely than SASS 11-12 respondents to report teaching in the secondary grade levels. Whereas the proportion of respondents teaching in grades Pre-K through 6 were relatively consistent among TPSI and SASS 11-12 respondents, TPSI respondents were about 10 percentage points more likely to report teaching in grades 7 and 8 than SASS 11-12 counterparts and 25 percentage points more likely to

¹⁸ NBPTS provides a widely recognized national teacher development and recognition program. See <https://www.nbpts.org/national-board-certification/>.

report teaching in grades 9 through 12. This difference may in part be due to the fact that TPSI teachers were also much more likely to report “looping” with students (see below).

Looping. Nearly half (46.6 percent) of TPSI respondents reported “looping” with students, or teaching the same group of students across multiple grade levels, compared to only 18.5 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents.

Subjects taught. TPSI respondents taught a wide range of subjects, most common among them the traditional course areas of English language arts, math, science, and social studies. A SASS 11-12 comparison is not provided because that survey used a different item to obtain subject area information, but percentages were, unsurprisingly, also highest in the same four core areas.

Work hours. TPSI and SASS respondents worked approximately the same number of hours on average each week (51.0 and 51.4 hours, respectively). It should be noted that TPSI data exclude responses from teachers who work for less than 20 hours per week (an eligibility criteria), whereas the SASS 11-12 data do not.

Expected tenure at school. When asked to report the number of additional years they expected to teach at the same school, TPSI respondents reported an average of 11.5 years. (The same item was not included on the SASS 11-12 survey.)

Expectations for leaving teaching. When asked how long they intended to remain in the teaching profession, TPSI respondents were somewhat more likely than SASS 11-12 respondents to report intentions of staying “as long as I am able” (53.1 percent versus 46.6 percent). TPSI respondents were half as likely as SASS 11-12 respondents to report intentions of leaving “as soon as I can” (0.9 percent versus 1.8 percent).

Teacher satisfaction. TPSI respondents were more likely to somewhat or strongly agree that they and their colleagues were satisfied with various aspects of their teaching jobs compared

to SASS 11-12 respondents. For example, for the item, “The teachers at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group,” 94.6 percent of TPSI respondents somewhat or strongly agreed, compared to 75.7 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents.

Commitment. TPSI respondents reported high levels of agreement with all three commitment items. For example, 99.1 percent somewhat or strongly agreed with the item, “I volunteer to help my school colleagues when I think I can be useful to them.” (There is no SASS 11-12 comparison data for this metric.)

Burnout. TPSI respondents were less likely than SASS 11-12 respondents to report feelings of exhaustion and burnout in their jobs, according to three survey items. For example, for the item, “The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren’t really worth it,” 10.1 percent of TPSI respondents somewhat or strongly agreed, compared to 22.1 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents.

Table 4.8. Characteristics of TPSI survey participants and SASS 11-12 participants.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Participating TPSI Teachers (n = 342¹⁹)</u>		<u>Participating SASS 11-12 Teachers (n = 42,020)</u>
<u>Gender</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Female	229	70.7%	76.3%
Male	94	29.0%	23.7%
Other	1	0.3%	NA
Total	324	100.0%	100.0%

¹⁹ While the total number of TPSI participants was 342, percentages shown were calculated using the number of responses for each individual item as the denominator.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Participating TPSI Teachers (n = 342¹⁹)</u>		<u>Participating SASS 11-12 Teachers (n = 42,020)</u>
<u>Race or Ethnicity</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.3%	0.5%
Asian	7	2.2%	1.8%
Black or African American	16	4.9%	6.8%
Hispanic or Latina/o	20	6.2%	7.8%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0%	0.2%
White	264	81.5%	81.9%
Multiple	11	3.4%	1.0%
Other	5	1.5%	NA
Total	324	100.0%	100.0%
<u>Education Level</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Master's Degree			
Yes	202	62.0%	54.5% ²⁰
No ²¹	124	38.0%	41.2%
In progress	31	9.5%	NA
Doctorate Degree			
Yes	10	3.1%	1.1%
No	311	96.8%	98.9%
In progress	13	4.0%	NA
NBPTS Certified			
Yes	114	35.1%	16.6%
No	211	64.9%	83.4%
In progress	24	7.4%	NA
<u>Tenure at Present School</u>	<u>Years</u>		<u>Years</u>
Min	1		1
Max	42		53
Mean	7.1		9.0
Std. Dev.	6.0		7.6
<u>Union Member</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
Yes	154	45.4%	73.8%
No	185	54.6%	26.2%

²⁰ Item applies only to respondents who hold a bachelor's degree.

²¹ "No" category includes "In progress" respondents for all Education Level items.

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Participating TPSI Teachers (n = 342¹⁹)</u>		<u>Participating SASS 11-12 Teachers (n = 42,020)</u>
<u>Founding Teacher at Present School</u>	#	%	
Yes	70	20.6%	
No	259	76.4%	
Other	10	2.9%	
<u>Taught at a Previous School</u>	#	%	
Yes	254	75.4%	
No	83	24.6%	
<u>Grade Levels Taught</u>	#	%	%
Pre-K	5	1.5%	1.8%
Kindergarten	39	11.5%	14.3%
1 st	49	14.5%	16.2%
2 nd	53	15.6%	17.3%
3 rd	54	15.9%	17.9%
4 th	53	15.6%	17.3%
5 th	46	13.6%	17.5%
6 th	50	14.7%	15.7%
7 th	91	26.8%	17.1%
8 th	92	27.1%	17.3%
9 th	164	48.4%	23.9%
10 th	170	50.1%	26.8%
11 th	167	49.3%	27.3%
12 th	166	49.0%	26.6%
<u>“Loops” with Students (i.e., stays with a particular class for more than one year)</u>	#	%	%
Yes	158	46.6%	18.5%
No	181	53.4%	81.5%

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Participating TPSI Teachers (n = 342¹⁹)</u>		<u>Participating SASS 11-12 Teachers (n = 42,020)</u>
<u>Subjects Taught</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	
Business	6	1.8%	
Computers or Technology	40	11.9%	
English or Language Arts	159	47.3%	
English as a Second Language or English Language Development	30	8.9%	
Health or Phys. Ed.	38	11.3%	
Industrial Arts	6	1.8%	
Math	165	49.1%	
Music or Art	38	11.3%	
Science	135	40.2%	
Social Studies	134	39.9%	
Special Ed.	55	16.4%	
Vocational Ed.	6	1.8%	
World Languages	12	3.6%	
Other	51	15.2%	
<u>Weekly Hours Worked</u>	<u>Hours</u>		<u>Hours</u>
Min	20 ²²		5
Max	100		80
Mean	51.0		51.4
Std. Dev.	9.2		10.1
<u>Weekly Hours Devoted to Teaching or Supervising Students</u>	<u>Hours²³</u>		<u>Hours²⁴</u>
Min	1		1
Max	60		80
Mean	30.2		30.0
Std. Dev.	9.8		6.3
<u>Expected Additional Years at School</u>	<u>Years</u>		
Min	0		
Max	60		
Mean	11.5		
Std. Dev.	9.7		

²² Eligibility criteria for this survey included working at the school for 20 hours or more per week.

²³ Item reads, "How many hours do you spend teaching or supervising students during a typical full week at this school?"

²⁴ Item reads, "Number of hours paid to deliver instruction to a class of students."

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Participating TPSI Teachers (n = 342¹⁹)</u>		<u>Participating SASS 11-12 Teachers (n = 42,020)</u>
<u>Intent to Remain in the Teaching Profession</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
As long as I am able	173	53.1%	46.6%
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job	67	20.6%	26.9%
Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from a previous job	0	0%	0.1%
Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits	8	2.5%	2.2%
Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage)	11	3.4%	2.6%
Until a more desirable job opportunity comes along	21	6.4%	4.9%
Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can	3	0.9%	1.8%
Undecided at this time	43	13.2%	15.0%
Total	326	100.0%	100.0%
<u>Satisfaction Measures (“Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree”)</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
The teachers at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group.	317	94.6%	75.7%
I like the way things are run at this school.	300	89.8%	72.9%
I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school.	319	95.5%	90.2%
I enjoy teaching at this school more than any other job I’ve had.	310	92.5%	NA

<u>Characteristic</u>	<u>Participating TPSI Teachers (n = 342¹⁹)</u>		<u>Participating SASS 11-12 Teachers (n = 42,020)</u>
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Commitment Measures</u> (“Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree”)			
I believe strongly in my school’s values and its goals.	327	97.6%	NA
I volunteer to help my school colleagues when I think I can be useful to them.	330	99.1%	NA
I am willing to go the extra mile to help students.	330	98.5%	NA
<u>Burnout Measures</u> (“Somewhat Agree” or “Strongly Agree”)			
I don’t seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching.	87	26.0%	41.5%
The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren’t really worth it.	34	10.1%	22.1%
I think about staying home from school because I’m just too tired to go.	58	17.3%	20.4%

School-level influence. Understanding how TPSI respondents and a national comparison group differed in their perceptions of their school-level influence serves as a check on how “teacher-powered” the schools within the inventory really are, at least from the perspectives of participating teachers. As would be assumed, TPSI teachers felt they had significantly more influence over school policy than did SASS 11-12 teachers, overall (see Table 4.9, below). This difference was pronounced in all seven domains of school-level influence (setting performance standards, establishing curriculum, determining the content of professional development, evaluating teachers, hiring teachers, setting discipline policy, and deciding how the budget will be

spent), with TPSI teachers being *at least* 3 times more likely to report that they had “a great deal of influence” in each area. TPSI teachers were over 10 times more likely than the comparison group to report having a “great deal of influence” in the domains of evaluating teachers, hiring teachers, and budgeting.

It is important to note that not all TPSI teachers who responded to the survey felt that they had “a great deal of influence” over school-level policy at their schools. Between 3 and 12 percent of respondents reported having “no influence” in any given domain, with teacher evaluation and budgeting being the influence domains with the lowest reported influence overall. Given that many TPSI schools are district schools with unionized teachers, the fact that teacher evaluation and budgeting—which are often collectively negotiated by district administrators and union leaders—was less likely to be influenced is unsurprising.

The open-ended survey responses of a minority of teachers (5 of 342) also suggest a difference between the espoused teacher-poweredness of TPSI schools and the extent to which teachers perceive their schools to be teacher-powered. Several examples of responses indicating a mismatch between espoused and actual “teacher-power” are provided below.

I came in thinking that it would be a teacher-powered school and am finding it isn't at all. It's too similar to other schools where I have worked. We have a lot of disenfranchised students and while there is a lot of desire to help them, we are still finding our footing.

In our school, I think Teacher-Powered only means something when the administration wants us to do it. In other cases, the administration does what it wants without regard for teacher input. We go through a lot of process, but because we don't have the agency to make a lot of meaningful decisions, it gets frustrating and feels like a waste of our time. I might be happy to take direction, but it's not ok for us to have to go through exercises just for the sake of it. If I am putting energy into a process, then I want to have some say. It seems like to be truly teacher-powered could be incredibly messy, but at least there would be the possibility of creating something great that we all own.

I feel like I worked at some very effective public “teacher-powered” schools... in the past... I’m concerned that the school I currently work at is only paying lip service to being “teacher-powered.”

These comments, though rare among survey responses, raise important questions about what qualifies as “teacher-powered,” a point that will be further addressed in the discussion.

Table 4.9. Teachers’ perceptions of school-level influence.

<u>Influence Domain</u> <i>“How much actual influence do you think teachers have over school policy at this school in each of the following areas?”</i>	<u>Participating TPSI Teachers (n = 342)</u>		<u>Participating SASS 11-12 Teachers (n = 42,020)</u>
	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Setting performance standards for students at this school</u>			
No influence	10	3.0%	20.1%
Minor influence	30	9.0%	26.4%
Moderate influence	94	28.1%	33.6%
A great deal of influence	201	60.0%	19.9%
<u>Establishing curriculum</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
No influence	10	3.0%	17.4%
Minor influence	20	6.0%	27.1%
Moderate influence	68	20.3%	33.6%
A great deal of influence	237	70.7%	21.9%
<u>Determining the content of in-service professional development programs</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
No influence	10	3.0%	19.1%
Minor influence	36	10.8%	36.5%
Moderate influence	95	28.4%	33.2%
A great deal of influence	193	57.8%	11.2%
<u>Evaluating teachers</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
No influence	40	12.0%	54.0%
Minor influence	73	21.9%	31.0%
Moderate influence	91	27.2%	12.3%
A great deal of influence	130	38.9%	2.7%

<u>Influence Domain</u> “How much actual influence do you think teachers have over school policy at this school in each of the following areas?”	<u>Participating TPSI</u> Teachers (n = 342)		<u>Participating SASS</u> 11-12 Teachers (n = 42,020)
<u>Hiring new full-time teachers</u>	#	%	%
No influence	16	4.8%	44.1%
Minor influence	31	9.3%	32.7%
Moderate influence	118	35.2%	18.4%
A great deal of influence	170	50.7%	4.9%
<u>Setting discipline policy</u>	#	%	%
No influence	14	4.2%	23.2%
Minor influence	44	13.1%	35.3%
Moderate influence	109	32.5%	30.2%
A great deal of influence	168	50.1%	11.3%
<u>Deciding how the school budget will be spent</u>	#	%	%
No influence	23	6.9%	48.9%
Minor influence	93	27.8%	34.6%
Moderate influence	102	30.4%	13.6%
A great deal of influence	117	34.9%	3.1%

Summary. Demographically, TPSI and SASS 11-12 respondents were similar in terms of their racial and ethnic identities. They differed somewhat in terms of gender and grade levels taught, with TPSI respondents being slightly more likely to be male and more likely to teach secondary grade levels. TPSI respondents tended to have more education and were more likely to have NBPTS certification than SASS 11-12 counterparts.

Insofar as TPV is concerned, several comparisons are noteworthy. First, TPSI and SASS 11-12 teachers worked approximately the same number of hours per week—a somewhat surprising finding given that increased workload has often been listed as a barrier to enhanced teacher leadership in schools (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Second, TPSI teachers reported being more satisfied and less burnt out than their SASS 11-12

counterparts. Third, TPSI teachers were somewhat more likely to report intentions of staying in the teaching profession long-term than SASS 11-12 teachers. Fourth, though no comparison was available for SASS 11-12 teachers, TPSI teachers were highly committed to their schools and planned to continue to work there for over a decade longer, on average.

Finally, in terms of school-level influence, TPSI respondents reported having far greater influence than SASS 11-12 respondents, a finding that substantiates these schools' designations as "teacher-powered." At the same time, a small group of TPSI respondents felt their schools were more "teacher-powered" in theory than in practice.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the overall contours of a subgroup of schools united by a shared commitment to empowering teachers to make final decisions on matters most commonly decided upon by a singular school leader or administrative team. First, I described the three case study schools in terms of their geographic, demographic, institutional, and historical contexts.

Next, I compared TPSI inventory schools to public schools in the U.S., finding that TPSI schools are more likely to be charter schools and secondary or "combined" (elementary and secondary) schools. They tend to have smaller student enrollments and serve a less-privileged population of students by socioeconomic status and race or ethnicity. They have, on average, more students receiving special education services and more English Learners. In terms of where TPSI schools are located, they tend to be more concentrated in cities and in the Midwest relative to public schools overall.

Finally, I turned to the TPSI schools represented among survey responses, describing their key attributes relative to the same attributes among all TPSI schools. This comparison highlighted several differences between schools represented by survey responses and those that

did not have participating teachers, suggesting that the population of surveyed schools may not be strictly representative of all schools within the TPSI inventory.

Nevertheless, the overall diversity of schools in the inventory has meaningful implications for this study: namely, that teacher-powered schools exist in rural, urban, and suburban contexts; they exist in red states and blue states; they exist in places where most students are white as well as where most are students of color; they exist as charter schools and as district schools; they serve students in all grade levels, pre-k through 12; they serve students with special needs and general education students; they serve affluent students and students living in poverty; they are old schools and new schools. In essence, the inventory itself is not exclusive; it includes all kinds of schools serving all kinds of students.

Having a non-representative sampling frame comes with limitations regarding generalizability of survey findings. However, we can still gain interesting insight into the range of schools that were represented, which still include diverse perspectives in a wide range of environments. Since the school-level influence measures appear largely to confirm the “teacher-poweredness” of the schools surveyed, perhaps future larger scale research could relate school-level influence—as a proxy for “teacher-power”—with a host of teacher vitality measures.

This chapter has presented a substantial amount of information about TPSI schools and their teachers. Its breadth of coverage is intentional because the experience of teachers in schools is multifaceted. As described in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2.3, “Conceptual framework”), a number of factors—the extent of teachers’ influence, their job characteristics, how they go about their teaching, their understanding of success and their students’ progress toward success, whatever it may be—interact to produce a total subjective work experience that either promotes TPV or imperils it.

The subsequent chapters seek to describe and dissect a selection of these complex interactions as situated in the context of specific teacher-powered schools. They highlight five key findings of the multiple case study, leveraging survey data to provide supporting—and sometimes challenging—evidence. The first of these chapters, Chapter 5, discusses how teachers’ decisions in the area of direction-setting—their priorities and means of tracking progress toward those priorities—shaped teachers’ notions of success and collective efficacy beliefs.

Chapter 5: Weights and Measures: Defining and Gauging Success

About Chapters 5 through 9

The next five chapters each relay one of five key findings from this study of teacher-powered schools and the teachers who “power” them. Each finding is presented against the backdrop of one of the five narratives of teacher work life outlined in Chapter 2: *uncertainty, time pressure, isolation, de-professionalization, and conflict*. Given the QUAL-quant nature of this mixed methods study, findings emerged, in partial form, during the initial qualitative stage of the study. These emergent themes then informed the creation of a survey instrument, as described in Chapter 3, intended to provide further insight on the findings in terms of their relevance and generalizability to Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI) schools in other contexts.

The five key findings were common across the school sites, but not necessarily in equal measure; some predominated in teachers’ interviews at one or two schools but were less salient, if still important, in another school. Therefore, while the overall balance of analysis is maintained throughout the findings chapters between the three sites, each chapter presents one or two school in greater detail and provides evidence from the other school or schools, and from survey data, both to corroborate and to call into question the generalizability of the findings presented.

Additionally, each chapter includes sections on implications for teachers, enabling factors, and constraints. In this first analysis chapter, these topics are explored after descriptions of each school because the analyses are sufficiently distinct. In subsequent chapters, implications, enabling factors, and constraints are drawn from the three schools and surveyed schools collectively in the “Synthesis” section at the end of the chapter.

Introduction

Research question 3 asked, *How do teachers in teacher-powered schools collectively define and measure student learning?* Presumably, the goals teachers set for themselves and their

colleagues should guide their work throughout the course of the school year, helping them to determine what lessons to prioritize and what to leave out. Goals can be set internally by teachers and administrators or externally, by district, charter school authorizer, or state mandate. At their best, they are obtainable, meaningful, and motivating. At their worst, they are unrealistic, unmeasurable, and frustrating.

As described in Chapter 2, for teachers whose goals have been handed down to them from their superiors, *uncertainty* about their ability to meet those goals, track progress toward them, or about the connection between their actions and results can be demoralizing. This has been true especially for goals around raising standardized test scores (Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004). In the case of teacher-powered schools, where teachers are involved in making decisions about school and classroom-level goals, can teachers avoid this uncertainty by choosing goals that they feel confident they can achieve? Does selecting attainable goals mean a decrease in rigor? Or are external pressures too great to have control over those aims of schooling? Understanding teachers' experience of direction-setting—that is, establishing a mission and vision and setting goals toward achieving them—can help to contextualize teachers' motivations, anxieties, and decisions about what and how to teach, having profound implications both for the learning experiences of students and the teaching experience of faculty.

The rest of this chapter is dedicated to exploring the ways in which teachers in TPSI schools understood their priorities, goals, and ways of measuring their progress—the “weights and measures” of their work—and the extent to which they did or did not feel that they had the tools and resources necessary to see their objectives through to fruition. Attention will be paid to both official (as in the school's mission and goals) and unofficial ways of defining and tracking success, with the understanding that teachers may have both collective and individual notions of what student learning should look like. Implications of these collective and individual

understandings of purpose for teachers' work lives—and particularly their sense of individual and collective efficacy—are explored.

I will present data from each of the three schools separately to portray teachers' localized understandings of success, what they do in attempts to achieve it, and how the process and outcomes of direction-setting eventually affect them. I will then turn to survey findings, attending in particular to teachers' perceived influence over standards-setting in their schools, open-ended descriptions of how teachers define success, and the extent to which they experience collective efficacy.

High School for Human Rights: Self-Actualization for Marginalized Youth

Teachers at High School for Human Rights (HSHR) worked with students from a predominantly low-income, Latina/o community with a long history of experiencing discrimination and marginalization from mainstream American society but a rich history of cultural, economic, and political influence. Seeing their students as changemakers who would not only rise above their circumstances but also work to disrupt oppression in other communities, HSHR teachers worked to develop student agency and critical thinking skills while preparing them to further their education so that they could be more conscientious and active participants in society.

Defining and measuring success. The mission at HSHR is: “to achieve social justice through the development of the complete individual. In doing so, we increase our students' social capital and their humanity while creating a school worthy of our own children.” HSHR's six founding teachers wrote the mission collaboratively as part of their 156-page bid for the school building they now occupy. The mission calls on teachers to see students in terms of their potential as social justice advocates and compassionate members of a diverse and unequal society. It also

instills in teachers a personal sense of responsibility and obligation to provide the same quality of education as what they would expect their own kids to receive.

The vision of HSHR is simple: “we will achieve self-actualization.” Drawing from Abraham Maslow’s famed hierarchy of needs, HSHR staff set their sights high, with “self-actualization” being the ultimate life achievement. They understood it to mean that students would “become the very best version of who they are” (School Website).

Fulfilling basic needs first. What did progress toward this lofty of a mission and vision entail? To HSHR teachers, it depended on the student. Since the achievement of “self-actualization” required the achievement of more basic human needs—from physiological health to safety to love and belonging to self-esteem—teachers had to pay attention to where students fell on the hierarchy and set goals for them accordingly. In essence, in the words of Joe, a social studies teacher and assistant principal, “we look at the kids that are in our building and build the school around them.”²⁵

This mindset, enabled by the school’s autonomy to chart its own trajectory and curriculum, required that teachers investigate who their students were and what they needed. Over the years, teachers had developed a massive data file listing all the school’s students and a wide range of indicators of their physical, emotional, social, and academic well-being. For example, HSHR students took the Search Institute’s Developmental Assets Profile, a survey that measured students’ “internal strengths and external supports” in 40 areas referred to as

²⁵ Teacher and principal quotations come from recorded interviews with participants. Brackets ([]) are used to indicate where words have been inserted or altered to clarify meaning. Ellipses (... or) are used to indicate that a segment of the full quotation has been omitted.

“developmental assets.” These ranged from students’ own achievement motivation to the extent of their relationships with caring adults (Search Institute, 2018).

Having information on each of these 40 assets for each of their 500 plus students was powerful. I asked Luis for an example of how the Developmental Assets had been used. He replied:

We brought in a mobile health facility that comes here like once a week or something like that. And they give our students physicals, they help them out with glasses and things like that. So, yeah. We learned that our students needed health services through the surveys, so we brought things like that in.

Another example of how staff members used knowledge about their students to reduce barriers to their learning is through staffing. When Miguel discovered the extent of his students’ mental health challenges, he hired a third counselor—far exceeding the district’s average for a school that size (and ruffling some feathers at the district office in the process).

Other tools used to get to know students and better meet their needs were a multiple intelligences quiz and a “Love Languages” quiz, now widely used in workplaces and romantic relationships (Chapman, 2014; see www.5lovelanguages.com). The quiz helps takers identify and communicate their preferences for showing and receiving love²⁶. The novel use of the quiz in a school setting provided teachers with insight into how they could best engage students and communicate that they cared about them. Results from both the multiple intelligences quiz and the Love Languages quiz were recorded on HSHR’s student tracking spreadsheet.

One feature of the spreadsheet worth noting is that every student was assigned a staff member. In most cases it was the student’s advisor, but if a student had a strong connection with

²⁶ The five “Love Languages” are words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch (Chapman, 2014).

another adult in the building, that person may have been assigned to keep track of the student's progress, check in with him on how he was doing socially and emotionally, and involve other staff members when necessary.

With the help of tools like the Developmental Assets Profile and systems like the student data file, HSHR teachers had formalized processes for keeping tabs on students and tracking their progress in non-academic as well as academic domains. In referring to this "crazy document," math teacher Rajiv commented, "It's pretty obscene, but also beautiful," hinting at its value to him as a means of visualizing student progress and needs. The act of formally measuring progress toward non-academic goals made it possible to feel successful even when a student wasn't making academic strides just yet.

Teaching "habits of mind." Teachers saw basic needs such as feeling "safe and loved" as important not only for academic growth but for personal development as well, and emphasized teaching "habits of mind" as a core component of their program. The 10 habits, shown in Table 5.1 below, represent key mindsets aimed at helping students through challenges and preparing them to be active, contributing members of a diverse world. Ninth graders are introduced to the 10 "habits" upon enrolling at the school and students practice them throughout their high school experience. They were posted in all classrooms and referred to daily by HSHR teachers.

Table 5.1. HSHR “Habits of Mind”.

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Evidence: Your opinion is made stronger when supported with evidence. It is not enough to question authority you must also speak with it.2. Perseverance: Never giving up. Defining your goals and sticking to them.3. Thinking about Thinking: Being aware of how you learn best and being reflective about your actions.4. Questioning and Problem Posing: Being curious about your world and unwilling to merely accept what you are told.5. Creating, Imagining, and Innovating: Feeling free and confident to find new ways of thinking. Knowing that being original is normal.6. Gathering Data Through all Senses: Being aware of and open to the world around you.7. Interdependence: Collaboration that is rooted in respect for others.8. Service: The desire to imagine and create a more just world.9. Applying past knowledge to new situations: use what you learn.10. Empathize: understand rather than judge
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Teachers were reminded of the importance of teaching these habits of mind by copies of a letter from a holocaust survivor²⁷ that were posted throughout the school. Addressed to teachers, the letter described the horrors witnessed by the survivor in a German concentration camp: “gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses, women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.” The powerful, if disturbing, message of the letter, as emphasized in its closing line, was that “reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.” In other words, educational achievement was meaningless if students were not also taught to be critical thinkers and kind, empathetic people. There was no escape for teachers from the unsettling implications of the letter, which was also displayed at a ten-fold magnification on the wall of the teachers’ collaborative workspace (see Figure 5.1, below).

²⁷ While its author remains unknown, the letter was widely circulated by noted Israeli teacher and child psychologist Haim Ginott in his 1972 book, *Teacher and Child*.

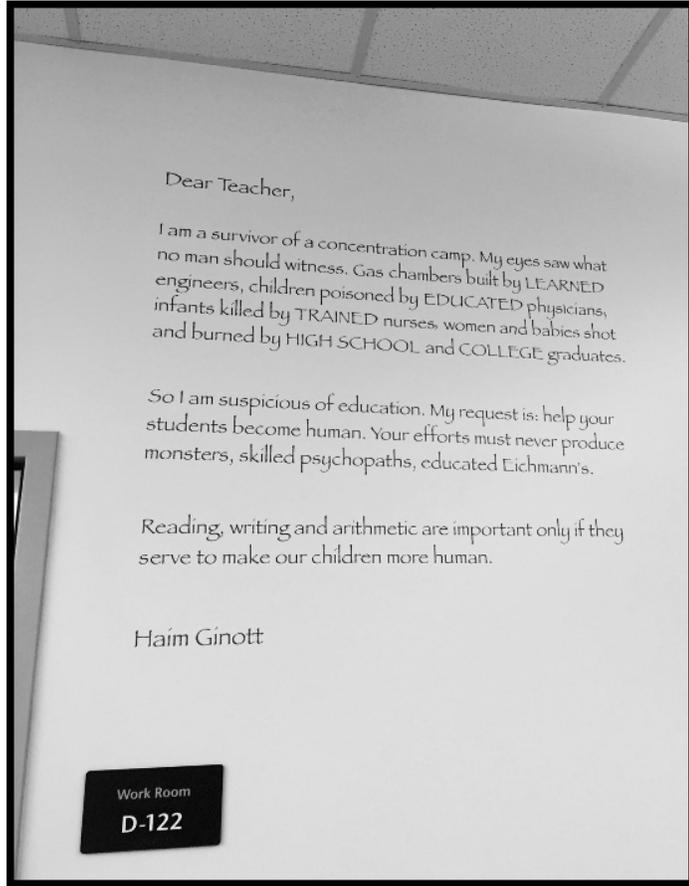


Figure 5.1. Letter to teachers from a concentration camp survivor at HSHR.

Observations and interviews with teachers suggested that the HSHR “habits of mind” were in fact incorporated into daily lessons. Cayo, a social studies teacher and self-described activist who seemed to spend nearly all of his free time working to strengthen the district’s ethnic

studies program, began each of his classes with a communal recitation of “In lak’ech,” a Mayan-inspired poem²⁸ that translates roughly to “You are my other me”:

Tú eres mi otro yo.
You are my other me.

Si te hago daño a ti,
If I do harm to you,

Me hago daño a mi mismo.
I do harm to myself.

Si te amo y respeto,
If I love and respect you,

Me amo y respeto yo.
I love and respect myself.

The poem had particular significance in Cayo’s Poetic Justice class, where students were expected to share and perform poems and spoken word pieces with their peers. *In lak’ech* was a reminder to students to demonstrate respect and compassion in the feedback they gave to others.

Cayo was explicit in his interview about his efforts to teach his students the 10 habits of mind, “everything from evidence, perseverance, to empathy.” *In lak’ech*, he said, was “another repetition of empathy.” He continued, “‘You are my other me,’ right? That compassion, that empathy, it’s amazing. I could send you a video of our whole auditorium doing it together, like 500 students doing it. It’s amazing and it connects back to our habits of mind, but through an ethnic studies interpretation of them.”

Cayo referred to teachers having “different interpretations” of the habits of mind that corresponded with their particular content area. Joe, for example, who taught AP government and

²⁸ The poem, which dates to the 1970s, is attributed to Luís Valdez, a Chicano playwright, and Domingo Martínez Paredes, a professor of Mayan thought and culture at the National University of Mexico (see [vue.annenberginstitute.org/perspectives/lak’ech-you-are-my-other](http://vue.annenberginstitute.org/perspectives/lak'ech-you-are-my-other)).

AP macroeconomics, helped his economics students make the connection between supply and demand and the habits of mind by introducing the notion of “social costs”:

When we do demand and supply in economics, we talk so much about price. I like to teach them about the cost that’s not related to money, and so I bring in this idea of “social cost” for things... [I ask,] “Why is McDonald’s so cheap?” They’re like, “Well, it’s low-grade food.” I go, “But what’s the cost you’re actually paying?” You’re paying a health cost. There’s all these other costs and sometimes those costs are [that] you get something for cheaper because someone’s paying this kind of personal cost. It’s not a financial thing. It’s child labor. It’s low wages. It’s having limited access to healthcare. [They] are all costs that someone here is paying, someone around them is paying.

At least four of the ten habits of mind were evident in this single example: he encouraged *questioning and problem posing* related to a taken-for-granted aspect of his students’ spending habits, he emphasized the *interdependence* of producers and consumers in an economic system, he appealed to students’ sense of *service* in identifying how their behavior may harm others, and he *empathized* with the laborers whose poor working conditions made our “cheap” food possible.

To Joe, focusing on developing habits of mind “changes how you teach” by lessening the emphasis on the delivery of “pure content”:

I think we really try to make sure that what and how they’re learning has some more purpose besides learning content. I don’t expect all of my students to become economists or politicians or even use the pure content knowledge that I give... but I do hope that whatever they decide to do that they’re going to be productive and empathetic and kind and have those kinds of values. I think focusing their learning on how do we learn [those values] through different lenses I think changes how you teach.

Furthermore, Joe felt that the focus he placed on values and habits of mind—rather than strictly content mastery—resonated with his students:

If I stop focusing so much on the content of economics and more on that stuff they become more engaged and they actually end up learning the content better anyways. I feel like what they're learning can be carried with them. I don't need them to remember demand and supply and tax policy, but how those things can be used to harm, how they can be used to help, and understanding... 'how do I take that and use it for good, or use it for supporting people, or for kindness?' I think that if you focus on that instead, the learning is a little bit different, but better.

Importantly, Joe's comments suggest that—ironically—his students' learning of economics actually improved the less he focused teaching content and the more he focused on nurturing students' habits of mind. To Joe, teaching habits of mind and academic content was not a zero-sum game but a win-win proposition.

Preparing social justice advocates. When students felt safe and loved enough to internalize the habits of mind described in the previous section, HSHR teachers expected them to put their education to good use through social justice advocacy. In my observations and interviews, teachers placed a great emphasis on teaching students how to advocate for causes they cared about and that impacted their communities.

Telling a story so that people will listen. One way in which English teacher Frank prepared his students to be changemakers was by teaching them how to communicate effectively and strategically. To Frank, it was important that his students—most of whom came from marginalized backgrounds—have “a platform to tell their story.” In reflecting about his and principal Miguel's decision to pursue a journalism class at HSHR, Frank said:

We realized that for our demographic, particularly, giving them a platform and the tools to really tell their story was important. And journalism, the skills of journalism, whether they go on to be journalists or not, really give you the ability to tell your story in a way that people listen to. How to make it newsworthy, how to structure what you have to say to get people's attention and, you know, there are a lot of those skills that cross over [between journalism and other subjects].

The journalism program at HSHR had grown since Frank launched it during the school's second year, and had come to emphasize the production of video content, which Frank saw as “a little

more 21st century” than the traditional school newspaper. In 2015, Frank submitted an application for HSHR to become one of just over one hundred PBS-sponsored “student reporting labs” nationwide. When the application was accepted, PBS flew Frank to Washington, D.C. for a week-long “boot camp” and had since donated thousands of dollars worth of digital media equipment, including digital SLR cameras and wireless microphones, to HSHR’s lab.

When we spoke, Frank was preparing his students for an event later that month sponsored by PBS and the regional newspaper at which two of his students’ projects would be aired for the public. The topics were “Messages for the President” and “New Americans.” The latter project told the story of an immigrant student who had achieved success at HSHR. To Frank, the event was not only an opportunity to take students out of their comfort zones but to communicate to them that their stories were worth hearing. “It’s going to be an evening event downtown at the fine arts building. We’re going to take a bus full of people to see it. It’s good to meet other students that are working on similar things, that have something in common. That gives [students] a little more support to do it [video journalism] so that they don’t feel like they’re in a complete vacuum.”

Seeing, questioning, and leveraging power. Another way in which HSHR teachers prepared students to become social justice advocates was by teaching them explicitly about power relations in society and how the powerful exploit the powerless to further their own interests. For example, 12th grade English teachers Luis and Theresa chose to teach *The Invisible Man* in part to highlight the potential of education to both empower and exploit people, particularly people of color. Students compared and contrasted the educational philosophies of W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, discussing the implications of each for students’ economic opportunities and human dignity in a society dominated by white people. Luis explained that he and his

students had studied Paolo Freire and the “banking” concept of education²⁹ the previous semester.

According to Luis:

That opened a lot of kids’ eyes in terms of how the power hierarchy is set up in schools. As a student, [you’re told to] “sit down,” “shut up,” “don’t talk to the person next to you,” “just listen to the teacher.” And it’s all a factory setting, you know. [You’re put in] the same grade level, or same age groups, and you just move on throughout your education like that. So the kids started questioning, “Yeah, why is it this way? Why do we have to learn in this specific way?” And, “the teacher is constantly fighting us for power, not allowing us to create on our own. We’re all being spoon-fed. We’re taught to memorize, we’re not actually taught to think for ourselves.” And so that was my big thing, I want them to think for themselves.

Specifically, by exposing his students to examples of institutionalized racism and education as a means of social control, Luis hoped that his students would begin to question the status quo—and their own position in society. “Then they can look at the bigger picture,” he said, “Like, ‘why do things actually happen?’ as opposed to, ‘okay, this is what it is.’”

Similarly, Cayo sought to teach students about power and politics in his Principles of American Democracy course the previous semester. Cayo began the course by introducing key concepts, like popular sovereignty, rule of law, and separation of powers—knowledge that he felt empowered students with “navigational capital,” or the ability to maneuver through social institutions that were not necessarily designed to serve them. But Cayo’s goals for the class went far beyond student mastery of “principles”:

²⁹ The “banking” concept of education was described first by Brazilian philosopher and educator Paolo Freire in his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, originally published in 1968. Freire argued that much of formal education treated pupils as passive, “empty vessels” waiting to be “banked” with knowledge by their teachers rather than active learners poised to make social change through the development of *critical consciousness*.

But really, what I love taking them to in that course is that civic component. That you have power in this society. Power exists in so many different ways and *you* have power. How can you connect your power to other power and help change things with your empowerment, right? And really looking at that on a broader scale. Who are change makers? Who are decision makers? Who could be allies? ... Asking them, “what cause do you care about? What would you like to change in this world? How can we go about changing it?”

Like his colleague Luis, Cayo was explicit in communicating with his students about ways in which systems had been designed to disadvantage them but how students could leverage knowledge and their own agency to promote changes that were important to them.

College-ready. The goal that seemed most ordinary at HSHR was the goal to get students college-ready. Preparing students for college was an explicit goal and tied into the school’s philosophy that education is key to personal liberation and social change—despite the role education has also played in maintaining an inequitable status quo. According to the school’s website, “We prepare all students to get to and through college in an effort to increase their social and political capital.” In other words, it was not college prep for individual attainment that mattered, but college prep for the broader purpose of social change.

One of the ways in which HSHR staff was intentional about helping its alumni through college was by connecting current students with alumni attending some of the state’s excellent colleges and universities. Rajiv, a math teacher, had played a leadership role in organizing the school’s annual college trip the year I visited. The freshman and sophomore classes traveled by bus to three schools each, toured the campuses, and met with HSHR alumni, who hosted Q&A sessions for the prospective students. Rajiv felt the trip was a powerful experience for his students, especially the opportunity to see past graduates succeeding in college. “I feel like they come on the trip, and they see themselves differently. I see a lot of kids shift when they go on the college trip.” In reflecting on the experience of co-leading the college trip, Rajiv commented, “I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. I didn’t know all of the work that has to go ahead of

time, but it is one of the most worthwhile things that we do here, and so I love that I do it, and I want to keep doing it.”

The college prep goal meant that teachers were intentional about nurturing specific skills—writing, presentation, research—that would help them succeed in college. When I asked her what her 11th grade team’s goal for student learning was, Natalie said, “we definitely, as a team, want them to have those critical thinking skills. We want them to be able to write those essays. I would say our goal is to prepare them for college, not just to be superstars here in a community where our average freshman comes in with a seventh-grade reading level, or sixth-grade reading level. But to actually be prepared, not just to get to college, but through college.” Again, the emphasis on getting *through* college conveyed the notion that college would be a powerful door-opening opportunity for HSHR students, many of whom would be first-generation college students.

Getting students prepared meant not only helping them with mindsets—the habits of mind described above like perseverance and evidence that would be crucial in college—but also developing their academic skills and ensuring that all of their students graduated with the required credits needed to attend the state’s competitive public universities schools—requirements that exceeded those needed to graduate high school. Many students took college-level AP classes. Additionally, grade-level teams prepared comprehensive writing exams intended to assess students’ writing proficiency and diagnose their instructional needs. Teachers acknowledged that students would need to demonstrate a wide range of competencies to be successful college applicants and matriculants.

It was especially important to Paula, HSHR’s physics teacher, to ensure her students were coming away prepared for college. Paula talked a lot about “calibration,” a practice of intentionally matching the rigor and expectations of the highest-ranked high schools in the region.

“I want to teach them at a caliber where they’re prepared for college because that’s what changed my life,” she said. To her, getting students ready for college was personal, as someone who experienced getting all A’s at a high school with low expectations, then transferring to another school—one with more privileged students—and struggling to receive B’s and C’s. She credited her teachers at the latter school for holding her to the high expectations that eventually prepared her to succeed in college, and continued to stay in touch with her high school physics teacher. “It’s really important to calibrate with other schools and other teachers, and especially the teachers that you want to be at par with,” she said.

One way Paula had worked to increase the rigor at HSHR was by advocating for the use of standards-based grading, as opposed to using the traditional “Carnegie” levels, A-F. Under standards-based grading, students were assessed strictly according to their mastery of academic skills, rather than the completion of assignments or activities. Students were assigned a grade based on the following 4-point rubric:

- 4 – I have mastered the skill and could teach it to others.
- 3 – I have mastered the skill.
- 2 – I can demonstrate the skill occasionally or with help.
- 1 – I am still working on learning the skill.
- 0 – I have not attempted to learn the skill.

Since the district required an A-F grading scale, Paula and her colleagues translated standards-based grades into letter grades: a “4” became an “A,” a “3” became a “B,” and so forth and so on. Using standards-based grading helped Paula and her students maintain focus on mastering content rather than simply going through the motions:

I wanted to make sure that I was assessing what I felt was important. I felt like a lot of the things that we placed value on was, like, the [lab] notebooks and things like that, which, it's fine. It's good. That's an organization skill, but it's not a content mastery skill. Hence, I was noticing that students were passing my class because they had nice notebooks or beautiful notebooks, but that didn't mean that they understood the content. I wanted to address that. One of the ways that I found [to do that] was we could do standards[-based grading].

Making the shift to standards-based grading was not without controversy. Both students and staff alike were initially resistant to it, and administrators were concerned that it would lead to more course failures on report cards. Paula described several "clashes" with Miguel, the principal, over the issue:

[He's] like, "the student needs to pass." I'm like, "yeah, but the student needs to meet this [standard]." It always come back to that idea of rigor. When the administrative and the teaching aspect don't come together as they should, unfortunately, because administrators have to look at the administrative aspect of it, and graduation, and all this. When the teaching isn't aligned with that, there is going to be this difficulty... Then, it becomes a conversation of, "how do we fix it then? This is *your* thing. This is *my* problem. This is *our* problem. How do we consolidate? What do we do?"

Ultimately she persuaded him and her colleagues of its merits, in part by appealing to the social justice implications of the switch:

It always comes back to the heart, to my heart. My intention. He [Miguel] knows, he understands the whole idea of why I am here: because I want to teach them at a caliber where they're prepared for college, because that's what changed *my* life. I want to teach them science and math, or get them prepared, because that's what dictated *my* future.

Due to Paula's advocacy efforts, standards-based grading was becoming the norm across the math and science departments at HSHR. "It's been a really big shift, but I really have found it really clear because students know whether they've mastered a standard or not based on a 1-4 scale." Importantly, students are given multiple attempts to reach the standard throughout the course of a semester, which keeps them motivated to keep trying and ultimately improves their grades. "It's

really, really hard to get A's in my class," Paula explained, "but it's also really, really hard to get F's."

Multiple measures. As evidenced by the above sections—from basic needs to habits of mind to the skills that will get students “to and through college”—HSHR teachers had much to accomplish and much to keep track of. Anything that could be measured—from students’ ratings of their developmental assets, to their credits toward graduation, to the mastery of academic standards, to scores on standardized tests—was measured, and reviewed regularly on “Data Days.” Data days occurred once per grading period, about every five weeks. Staff members would go through the aforementioned “obscure document,” making note of student progress and areas where they had stalled. Reviewing varied sources of data on a regular basis prevented students from slipping through the cracks and gave teachers a more holistic view of students’ learning and development.

Summary. How success was defined at HSHR was tied closely to teachers’ understanding that their students needed specific personal and intellectual supports. Since many students lacked access to health and social services, the school provided it. Since the community’s expectations of students were low, teachers emphasized habits of mind that would help them persevere through challenges while maintaining their integrity. Since their community was marginalized and silenced, teachers gave them a voice through opportunities to practice advocacy. Since many students had not seen college as an option for themselves, teachers showed them a pathway and gave them the confidence to pursue it.

Implications for teachers. What are the implications of the ways in which HSHR teachers have defined success for themselves and their students? Taking care of students’ basic needs reduced barriers to learning, but also took considerable time and resources. Some teachers talked about the student engagement benefits of focusing on “habits of mind” over “pure”

academic content. Several teachers expressed the motivational benefits of having a social justice mission and of helping their students develop agency and voice. An emphasis on college preparation challenged teachers to improve the rigor of their courses and meant considerable work to plan college visits for some teacher leaders.

In nearly all of the examples cited above, teachers could explain how their actions led to progress toward student learning goals and ultimately furthered the mission of the school. For Frank, establishing a partnership with PBS brought resources to the school to help his students learn to be effective communicators and activists. For Paula, implementing standards-based grading encouraged students to master skills they would need in college. For Joe, the freedom to prioritize habits of mind over “pure content” in his economics class improved students’ engagement and helped students internalize lessons that would serve them throughout their lives. The combination of teachers’ buy-in to school-wide priorities and their ability to adjust course to honor those priorities resulted in sense of efficacy that sustained their effort.

At the same time, having so many goals as a school, and having students who frequently were starting off with less in terms of preparation, was extremely challenging for teachers—mentally and emotionally. Natalie referred to the “emotional toll” of the work they do: “this work is fulfilling because of the emotions and the time that we invest in our kids, but that’s also what makes it so draining. So we enjoy their successes, and we feel their failures. It’s very personal.” The scope of work teachers did for and with students took considerable time and energy, and job sustainability posed a concern for almost all of the teachers I spoke with—a topic that will be treated in more depth in Chapter 6.

Enabling Factors. What factors allowed HSHR teachers to experience success? This section summarizes some of the key reasons behind teachers’ perceptions of progress toward school goals.

Autonomies allow teachers to “take the vision to the next level.” Importantly, multiple autonomies—not only the autonomy to chart the direction of the school—helped teachers see their goals through to fruition. Several teachers contrasted this experience with that of their previous schools or traditional schools in which regulatory barriers got in the way of making progress toward goals. In the below exchange, Luis, for example, compared teaching at HSHR to teaching at North Valley, where he felt teachers’ “hands were tied”:

Luis: Our hands were tied [at the traditional high school]... Without our hands tied, all the autonomies that we have—the budgeting, staffing, and stuff like that—really enables us to really take our vision to the next level, you know?

Sara: What does that mean, to take the vision to the next level?

Luis: Well, because [at North Valley] we weren’t able to offer our kids tutoring, because we weren’t able to offer them like a mentoring program over at the old site. Now, we can. We weren’t able to do advisory, we weren’t able to offer a curriculum where you can teach them how to become better human beings. So we have that through advisory, character-building lessons. College access was difficult to do there, because funding and lack of [support from] outside organizations. So here, we bring in whoever we want. And we have the facility space as well. So we give [those organizations] a place to work, and that helps us.

The combination of teachers’ strong belief in the vision of the school—made possible by their active involvement in crafting it—and the autonomies needed to “take it to the next level” made it possible for them to both sustain effort and also make progress toward its lofty goals.

External partnerships. Teachers at HSHR relied on partnerships with external organizations to support their work. Organizations including the Search Institute and PBS provided much-needed tools and resources without which teachers could not have provided the level of support or opportunity to students that they did. Again, having the autonomy to engage with these organizations without needing to break through bureaucratic red tape facilitated these partnerships.

A willing principal. Though teachers had considerable formal power at HSHR as voting members of the Governing Council, teachers sometimes depended on their principal to advocate for changes they desired at the district level. Paula’s conversation with her principal (Miguel) about transitioning to standards-based grading is one such example. Doing so would likely involve Miguel’s needing to justify students’ slumping grades to concerned superiors in the district central office—no small feat—and as such, Paula relied on Miguel’s willingness to go to bat for her and her fellow teachers.

Constraints. What got in teachers’ ways as they strove to meet students’ varied needs and foster their self-actualization? This section summarizes the constraints teachers faced in working toward school goals.

Limited time. A nearly universal constraint among teachers is limited time. This was no exception for the teachers at HSHR, who struggled to balance their many competing priorities. The topic of time pressure will be addressed in much greater detail in Chapter 6.

Traditional grading system. As alluded to above, HSHR did not have the autonomy to cast the school district’s traditional grading system completely aside. While they found a creative way to implement standards-based grading—translating rubric scores into A-F letter grades—this compromise weakened the potential impact of a standards-based grading system by limiting the time students had to master standards to a single semester and by maintaining a report card that students would likely still interpret according to the traditional grading schema.

College entrance requirements. Similarly, the need to conform to the state college system’s entrance requirements—which exceeded those required for high school graduation—meant that HSHR teachers could not abandon traditional discipline-based courses, even if they had felt that doing so would help them achieve student learning goals. The competitive state

college system required incoming freshman to have completed 15 year-long high school courses with a letter grade of C or better in 7 specific disciplines.

Wavering district support. Principal Miguel made it very clear in his interview that HSHR teachers' ability to work toward the goals they deemed most important was only possible so long as no "red flags" caught the attention of district administrators. The superintendent's ongoing support for pilot schools—and therefore their autonomy—was conditioned on them "delivering" high achievement on standardized tests. Even though HSHR outperformed other schools in the district with similar student demographics, pilot schools in general weren't "producing what [they] said [they] would," per the superintendent. Miguel spent much of his time and energy "hustling" at the district office to protect and defend his school, but needed his staff to do their part by making sure students had regular attendance and performed well on assessments. He would say to his staff:

Do the things you have to so you can do the things you want to. Let's get the data to push [the district] off, keep them at bay... so we can sit in a circle and talk about our feelings. So we can form groups about helping undocumented students. So we can have groups that create safe spaces for LGBT [students]. So we can do these things we know are important, the social-emotional part.

Supporting the aspirations of his staff while meeting the expectations of the school district was an ongoing challenge and source of stress for Miguel.

Differential "buy-in" for founders and non-founders. Not all teachers at HSHR had the opportunity to be a part of the design team that founded the school and established its mission and vision. Principal Miguel felt that founding teachers exhibited greater motivation in working toward school goals (including those imposed externally) than those who had not been a part of the process. "Really it's the ones that moved with us [from North Valley who] knew that we created something special," he said. These were the teachers who would "bust ass" to protect the school from the kind of unwanted district interference highlighted above.

Explore School: Process over Product

As described in Chapter 4, the students at Explore were demographically different from the students at HSHR in a number of ways. They were more privileged socioeconomically and racially, having a greater proportion of white students and fewer students eligible for Free and Reduced Price services. A substantial proportion of students—more than a third—qualified for special education services. And anecdotally, the students who were attracted to Explore were described as “non-traditional” learners, many of whom had been unsuccessful in their previous schools, and functioned well in an unstructured learning environment where they could pursue their own interests rather than being told what and how to learn. At the same time, Explore was similar to HSHR in terms of its developmental approach to student learning: its advisors acknowledged that there were certain fundamental needs that must be met and habits that must be instilled before students would be ready to take on challenging academic content.

Defining and measuring success. The mission at Explore is to “prepare students for college and life in a strong, nurturing community that inspires active learning, engaged citizenship, and hope for the future.” To the Explore advisors I spoke with, “preparing students for college and life” primarily meant helping students achieve personalized, developmentally-appropriate learning goals and developing their “process skills”—behaviors and mindsets critical to productive self-management—through project-based learning. There were other learning goals made explicit in school documents and inferred through the adult-student interactions I witnessed—such as the emphasis on preparing students to participate in a democracy—that are not discussed here because they did not come up in interviews as much as personalized learning and process skills did.

Personalized learning. When I asked teachers at Explore how they defined student learning, the most common response I received was, essentially, “it depends on the student.” For

example, in the following exchange, Samantha, a middle school social studies advisor, was resistant to making generalizations about her student learning goals:

Sara: Can you maybe give me an example of the kinds of goals that you and your students might set around student learning?

Samantha: I mean that's kind of a hard question to answer because everyone is so different. When I'm creating goals for students, it really is unique to what their needs are. I can give you an example of *one* student.

Samantha then proceeded to share how developing perseverance was a major goal for one of her advisees, who had been struggling in particular with feeling overwhelmed by the project process:

I would say perseverance for sure because he's in a place where the academics are coming second to him because he's really getting lost in the emotion of being behind, and not being able to catch up. So I'm trying to help him have some solid goals that he can check off. 'Do this thing right now, in this moment, and feel good about that. Then move on to the next thing and be able to do that and get this assignment in.'

Recognizing that her student was experiencing emotional barriers to completing his work, she structured her goal conversations with him in such a way as to specifically address that emotion—feeling behind—by helping him to see his own momentum.

Leah had a very similar response to the same question, stating, "I do think an essential piece of the way we approach being teachers, is that it really depends on each kid and what success looks like for them." For Leah, the individualized nature of student learning meant that describing what success *was not* was an easier task:

In a lot of ways, just for us as a group, it's almost easier to define what [student learning] is not, because it so depends on each kid... So, what learning looks like for one kid is really different from what it looks like for another kid, and that's a vital part of [what we do] here, is that we all know that, and believe that, and move towards that. But, it's certainly not test score stuff, and it's certainly not everybody meeting the same mark... They still have to meet the standards, but the way they meet the standards is really different, and that's okay.

Leah was explicit in calling out test scores as an inadequate measure of her students' learning because students are often at such different points in their learning trajectories. Leah shared one

example of a student she had in her middle school English class who was struggling even to come to class:

All I'm working on right now is building just personal rapport with the kid. In the last couple of weeks he's been coming into my class, finally, and sitting down, not right next to the door, and he's started working on a script [for a screenplay]... But, it's taken since the first day of school to get him to just even be in the space and sit for more than, I mean, literally for more than 30 seconds. So, when he sat down and started working, and then I think he called me over to ask a question about it, I was like, "Hello. This is amazing. This is so good. Let's talk about your question. Like, yes."

It is clear from this example that Leah had not yet had an opportunity to influence this student's academic progress directly, so her barometer of success for him was initially attendance, and then engagement, which she accomplished by building a relationship with the student.

Another student's learning goals centered around building friendships and socializing with peers:

We have a particular seventh grader who's never had a friend before he walked into this building, so he cannot focus on academics, because [he thinks], "Oh, my God, another child is talking to me, and they're enjoying it," and that's all he can think about. So, he, and his family too, they really don't care about his academics right now, because he's working on figuring out how to interact with other humans. So, I know I don't have to ride him too hard about stuff. We still try...but the stakes are a little bit different there. We can really focus on what is important to that kid.

Defining learning goals on an individualized basis means that Explore advisors spend considerable time meeting one-on-one with their students, which helps with relationship building and creating learning plans that are specifically catered to students' interests and needs. To Leah, the consequences of being able to customize goals and teaching approaches for different students relieved her of the pressure to advance all her students to the same stage in their learning. "It's really nice. I feel like it takes a lot of the weight off... I have the flexibility to slow all of my stuff way down, so I can meet [students] where they're at as a group and then even more individually."

Personalizing learning for individual students meant that Explore staff members' own success was relative. To Wendy, a special education case manager, it could feel "amazing" just to get a student to fill out a planner:

If I have a kid who remembers [to] sign a planner, that's amazing. I had a kid for two months who did not. He came to me at the end of the day, every day, with a blank planner. It took two months for him to get [it]. One day, he came in and his planner's full. [Now] it's full every day... That was a huge success.

Importantly, while this small win felt "huge" to Wendy, her expectations of students in general had increased since joining the Explore staff two years ago. She said she was "just blown away by what [students] knew, and how they own their education through the project process." In other words, having a planner signed could be a major win, but she had come to understand that students could do so much more. "That in and of itself was mind blowing, to see how kids, particularly special education kids, could maneuver through that process—and they do it so well. They really do."

"Process," not "product." While the goal to personalize learning for each Explore student meant wide-ranging definitions of learning and success, one consistency across staff members' definitions of student learning was an emphasis on developing the kind of *process* skills Wendy alluded to. This goal is explained similarly across multiple advisors:

Rather than looking just at the finished product, the test, or the deliverable, or the poster, or whatever, you're actually looking at, how did you [the student] organize your time, how did you overcome this obstacle that you encountered, and how did you do those, I don't know, they're sometimes called soft skills, sometimes they're called the 21st Century skills, but it's more looking at, did you figure out something about how to learn along the way? I think that is what we try to value more, and then the product could be awesome or terrible, but how did the process go, I think is as valuable as the deliverable. (Andrew, MS Science Advisor)

I think a lot of us, especially in the high school are defining learning by some of those self skills. So, like how have their problem-solving skills improved? How is their communication? Has their independence improved? (Dan, HS English Advisor)

We want them to become life-long learners outside of school. And so [that means] being prepared for college, and that means can you do research? Do you know what the tools are? Giving them the tools is part of it, too, and watching a student use primary sources, for instance... or call somebody from one of the colleges around here to get them to provide input into a project. Those are steps in learning, too, so it's kind of a ... it's not so much content as it is *process*. We look at a lot of learning as process. (Ann, HS Science Advisor)

As Andrew alludes to in the first quote, staff members used different words to convey essentially the same idea: whether they called them “process skills,” “self skills,” “soft skills,” or “21st century skills,” they all essentially referred to students’ development of meta-cognitive strategies they would need to successfully carry out challenging projects—including their 300-hour senior project, or research projects they would likely confront in college.

One major way that “process” goals played out in advisors’ daily work was in their one-on-one conversations with students, during which advisors provided guidance and scaffolding to help students brainstorm project ideas, overcome challenges, or reflect on how a project turned out after it had been completed. Describing what some of these conversations sounded like, Dan said:

Some of my questions are often more related to, like... “What did you do to get out of that [problem]?” or “Where should you have changed? What can we do different next time?” And it’s regardless of the content. It’s really about process and how they work as learner. Like, “you’re really engaged in this project. What was different about it?” “Well, I was building something.” “Oh, so no matter what your next project is, we should be building something.”

Common across my observations of one-on-one meetings between advisors and students was that the conversations were dominated by the student, whose thinking was prompted by a series of nonjudgmental questions such as these. As this example suggests, reflecting with students on their process of completing a project helped students anticipate challenges in their future work.

Sometimes, the emphasis on process over product helped advisors communicate with students about the strengths of their projects even when the final product did not meet the

student's expectations. For example, Andrew told me about a particular student's struggle with a woodworking project and the lessons he learned from it:

I have one student who really struggled with a particular project because they messed something up, and they got really frustrated because it wasn't going to get in on time, and things like that, but it wasn't so much their fault. They were doing a woodworking project, and so because they used up the last bit of wood, they weren't going to be able to finish it on time, because they would have to go get more wood, and all these things. He got really frustrated. We talked through the idea that having that finished product done on time is not as important as, "did you get started on time?" We really had the discussion about what happened along the way to prepare [him] for that moment. "Did you get started early? Did you have a good plan?" Through that discussion, we talked about how the project actually went really well, and he actually had it set up really well. It just ... He got down to the last cut on the last piece of wood and made a mistake, and, "do mistakes happen? Yes. Is it the end of your project? Am I going to grade you solely on that one mistake that you made, or am I going to take into account how everything else went?" I think it solidified for him the importance of that process, rather than that final cut, that final mistake.

This example highlights how the notion of success at Explore—both for this student and for Andrew as his teacher—is much less tied to a specific outcome (such as a final grade) than it is to a more holistic and relativistic understanding of the effort and thoughtfulness that went into the work. To Andrew, the fact that his student had demonstrated the kinds of process skills he and his colleagues hoped to instill meant that this project "actually went really well" despite its less-than-perfect outcome.

Measuring "process." How do Explore teachers grade students based on process? My interviews with teachers suggested that the grading process was an inherently subjective endeavor, given the wide diversity in the projects and the students who created them. At the same time, and partly due to pressure from the school's authorizer, Explore staff had created tools to track and assess the process aspects of project-based learning. All Explore students were required to customize a project rubric each time they proposed a new project. Each rubric included five components:

1. Goals: Extent to which project goals and related standards are met;
2. Research: Extent to which the student has sought, incorporated, and cited relevant high-quality resources;
3. Quality of product: Extent to which the project demonstrates original thought and is of professional quality;
4. Process and improvement: Extent to which the student sought feedback and made thoughtful improvements to the project; extent to which all parts of the project have been completed;
5. Project management: Extent to which the student managed his or her time wisely, documented project work hours, and communicated with his or her advisor regarding progress.

Throughout the project process, students used an online project-based learning platform to help them track progress toward their goals and track their project completion hours. Finally, upon completion of a project, students were required to write a two-page reflection about their project that included a description of the student's academic mindset (how they approached strengths and weaknesses of the project), collaboration (i.e., how well they leveraged feedback from peers and experts), critical thinking (i.e., extent to which conclusions are justified by evidence; extent to which understanding of the topic has evolved), effective presentation of ideas, what the student learned about learning, what academic content mastery the student achieved, and finally, what grade the student believed he or she should get based on the project rubric they had customized (an example of the full project rubric and reflection guide is provided in Appendix H).

While Explore advisors did assign their students grades, grades were viewed by advisors as less of a barometer of a student's achievement and more of a conversation starter. Comparing Explore's grading philosophy to what happens at most traditional schools, Andrew said, "The

grade is often seen other places as the final word, sort of, whereas here it can be a negotiation or it can be a conversation point or it can be a learning tool, rather than the, ‘Well, that’s your grade. Report card is home. It’s done.’” At Explore, students were invited to conference with their advisors once report cards were issued so that they could understand how and why grades were assigned. “Sometimes students get frustrated about whatever grade they have,” Andrew acknowledged. “The grade often leads to a conversation about how that grade got to be that way, and what they can do next time, rather than, ‘here’s extra credit to do.’ No, it’s not about doing extra credit to get your grade up. It’s, ‘what was the process along the way that led to that [grade].’” To Andrew, walking his students through this kind of postmortem analysis of their performance served as a valuable means of teaching process skills.

Summary. When asked to share how they and their colleagues defined and measured student learning, Explore advisors consistently emphasized two key points. First, advisors stressed that success at Explore was a relative concept, being defined in terms of the specific learning needs of the individual student. Second, advisors spoke about the importance of developing their students’ “process skills,” the behaviors and mindsets that would help them manage their time, energy, and resources to accomplish long-term projects. Explore’s project-based learning program facilitated the accomplishment of these learning goals by personalizing each student’s learning experience and creating numerous opportunities for students to reflect on what was working well and how they could improve.

Implications for teachers. Explore advisors’ shared belief in the importance of individualizing student learning meant that staff could experience small wins on a daily basis. For Samantha, it was a win to teach an overwhelmed student how to break his tasks down into smaller components. For Leah, it was a win to create a space welcoming enough for a reluctant, disengaged student to ask a simple question. For Wendy, it was a win when a particularly

disorganized student filled in his planner. Without the pressure of needing to meet some standardized performance benchmark, teachers could establish goals for students that felt attainable, and could “meet [students] where they’re at.”

Like the teachers at HSHR, Explore advisors were not beholden to teaching “pure content” and could devote considerable time to teaching “process skills.” The implication for advisors was twofold. First, it meant their roles were much less instructional and much more advisory. They coached students through reflective conversations that helped students understand their strengths, inclinations, and common missteps, which advisors found more fulfilling than working to raise students’ grades or test scores. “Kids weren’t feeling good about their work if it was just a test score. Teacher’s weren’t feeling good about their work if it was just a test score,” Amanda said. Second, the focus on process skills meant that students—over time—developed independence and intrinsic motivation to learn. According to Andrew, teaching students to be “really reflective learners” helped students to be motivated by projects themselves rather than the grades they earned or the test scores they achieved. “That’s a big thing that we do... It’s about trying to instill the values internally in the students rather than necessarily creating external structures that force the students to turn [projects] in,” he said.

Also paralleling the experience of HSHR teachers, Explore staff members who had been a part of designing the school felt particularly motivated by its mission and goals. Amanda, a founding member of the Explore team, felt that “seeing the foundation” of the school motivated her, in contrast to her experience working at a previous school whose mission did not speak to her as much. “As a younger teacher, you’re like, ‘Mission, blah, blah, whatever. I’m motivated by X, Y, or Z.’ But when you see the foundation of a school, it is the driver. It is something that keeps you going. You’re like, ‘this is important. This is really, really important.’”

Enabling factors. Explore advisors' ability to craft individualized goals for students and decision not to focus on classroom- or building-wide achievement goals was made possible in part due to the schools' independence as a charter school and its democratic governance model. "Our goals aren't being driven by some administrator that never sets foot in the building," Leah said, aware of Explore's freedom from the kinds of prescriptive expectations to which many traditional schools are held.

Furthermore, the school is buffered somewhat by its decent (if not phenomenal) test scores, which have generally kept its authorizer from demanding programmatic changes. Pressure to keep scores up increased in the wake of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which ushered in an era of increased test-based accountability just as Explore was getting off the ground. "For a while," Amanda explained, "it became a, kind of, 'put your head down, we'll do what we do' [situation], and our tests scores were good enough that we could keep doing what we were doing." Pressure around standardized testing had subsided, but Explore was still required to report against testing goals to remain in good standing with its authorizer. From the perspective of the advisors I spoke with, doing so did not seem to threaten their ability to make progress toward the individualized student learning goals they saw as paramount.

A third factor enabling Explore advisors to work confidently toward individualized, process-oriented goals with students was that they "looped" with students for multiple years in a row. "As an advisor, we have the time," Dan reflected. "It's four years with the kids, so we have the time to have a really solid understanding of those softer skills." Even if a student had struggled for months to develop self-management skills, for example, the advisor could maintain hope that progress would come with time, and it often did. In contrast, teachers who spend only a single year with a struggling student may not see the fruits of their effort and be able to experience success as readily.

Constraints. As an independent charter school with a relatively unblemished record, both academically and financially, Explore was generally able to pursue its nontraditional learning goals unfettered by external constraint. Even so, it was beholden to the same state standards and graduation requirements as any other public school. Ann noted that the requirement to “cover” the vast scope of state standards sometimes felt in tension with the school’s emphasis on deeper learning through a project-based model: “With the standards, there is an expectation of doing breadth.... [In] U.S. history, you’ve got to cover the Civil War and you’ve got to cover current events. You just have to cover those things, that’s part of the expectation.” Explore students had to demonstrate mastery of state standards in their courses and through the project work they completed, meaning that advisors needed to have in-depth knowledge of the standards and how they relate to each other. In my observations of advisors’ meetings with students, for example, it was not uncommon for advisors to help students design projects that would allow them to demonstrate mastery across two or more subject areas. Generally speaking, advisors did not talk about state standards as a major hindrance to their work because of the flexibility they had around curriculum. Even Ann felt that she could still achieve “depth” over “breadth” with her students: “one thing that we are able to do here by determining our own curriculum is getting more into depth, and I really appreciate the learning that goes on when students get to go in depth into something.”

A few teachers at Explore felt that the school’s authorizer could be a source of constraint. Leah acknowledged that the school has a “good relationship” with its authorizer, but that it sometimes got too involved in the school’s affairs: “It’s nice to know that there’s somebody we can talk to about our overarching goals. We also feel like they’re up in our business all day every day.” One way the authorizer had been “up in their business” was by pressuring the staff to develop a more measurable way of assessing projects. “We sort of data-fied our projects.

We have a rubric so we can have that as data for our authorizers because that part, the project work, there wasn't a way to quantify it." That way, she said, "the heart of what we do can still be reportable in a way that is not just story-driven things." Like the state standards, the authorizer's demands could sometimes feel like hoops to jump through, but generally did not preclude Explore advisors from conducting their daily work with students in the way they saw fit.

Young Leaders Academy: Preparing Proficient and Adaptable Leaders

With a more diverse student population than either HSHR or Explore School, Young Leaders Academy (YLA) founders sought to capitalize on what united its students: being citizens of a bustling U.S. city with a rich history and an ever-shifting sociocultural landscape. As stated in Chapter 4, the mission of Young Leaders is "to foster educated, responsible young leaders who through their own personal growth will spark a renaissance in [our city]." According to the school website, "Teachers use the focus of [the city] as the foundation of the curriculum," with the justification that "individuals girded in their community are best equipped to be global citizens, respect human rights, protect the environment, and advocate for peace and sustainability."

Defining and measuring success. The implication of this last quotation is that the school is working to nurture and develop students into "global citizens." While the values of respecting human rights, protecting the environment, and advocating for peace and sustainability were certainly present in the way YLA teachers taught their courses and interacted with students, these were not explicit learning goals of the teachers I spoke with. Beyond the school's primary goal for students to "meet and exceed standards," to which all staff members were held accountable, YLA teachers and school leaders each defined success in somewhat varied ways. This variation between staff members was not seen as misalignment, *per se*, but rather as an expected and actually beneficial outcome of having a staff with diverse teaching philosophies and life

experiences. Both types of goals, along with a shared emphasis on personalizing learning, are described in further detail below.

“Meeting and exceeding” state standards. Stated explicitly and chiefly in the school’s curricular overview is that “YLA expects all students to meet and exceed standards.” Since YLA’s charter renewal would be contingent on its students performing well enough on the state’s required tests in reading, mathematics, and science, “meeting and exceeding standards” was an existential matter for the school. The school’s charter, recently revised in 2015, specified six types of academic goals to which the school would ultimately be held accountable: *absolute performance*, referring to the percentage of third through eighth grade students exceeding a proficient threshold on the state exam; *value-added performance*, referring to the increase over time in a grade level cohort’s percentage of students achieving that threshold; *high school and post-secondary success*, which includes goals pertaining to passage rates on the state’s rigorous graduation exams and other college entrance exams; *graduation rates*; *college matriculation*; and *comparative performance*, which compares the percentage of students in a given grade level (third through eighth) exceeding the proficiency threshold on state exams with that of other schools in the surrounding local school district.

With goals set across tested subjects and grade levels from third through twelfth grade, the school had much to prove before the end of the five-year charter term. To special education and social studies teacher, Henri, working at a charter school meant being held to a “higher bar” by the state than other non-charter public schools:

Because we are a charter school, we’re now expected to do more than most public schools... The state expects more of the school. So, whereas... having 75, 80 percent of your kids pass this [test] is a great thing, a great accomplishment in another public school, they [the state] would expect our school to have 80 or 85 percent of kids pass. So it’s like this higher bar.

While Henri felt that having students pass required state tests was a “great thing,” he also felt that the pressure to achieve above and beyond what was expected in other schools negatively impacted teachers at YLA. “We have to go past the status quo, and I think that’s what puts pressure on teachers, and that’s what then messes with the learning goals of the students.” Instead of focusing on what students needed and what teachers felt were valuable learning goals, Henri felt that he and his colleagues were often compelled to “teach to the test.”

Similarly, Danielle, a high school English teacher, felt that testing requirements exceeded what was reasonable for teachers and students:

I do think that, something that plagues us right now is—not necessarily so much the high school, but more so like the middle school—we’re very, very plagued by—the whole city, and the whole country—are these testing requirements that kids are being forced to take, at such an alarming rate.

To Danielle, the testing “plague” was one “area of growth” she felt that her teacher-led school hadn’t yet worked to address but should:

I think that teachers would speak out against that if they knew they could change those [testing] policies. But then the administrators are also held to higher powers, because that’s tied into our charter renewal and things like that. That’s one area of growth... to stand up to things that don’t make sense for our students.

Danielle acknowledged that even her administrators had little power in curbing the weight that tests have in the evaluation of the school by its authorizer and the state, but she did see testing as one barrier she wished teachers could work together to reduce. Like Henri, who felt that testing “messed with the learning goals of the students,” Danielle saw the practice as interfering with what actually “made sense for our students.”

Varied, subject-specific aims. What did “make sense” as learning goals for YLA students, from the perspectives of teachers? Progress toward test-based accountability goals was conspicuously absent from interviewees’ responses when I asked them to describe how teachers at YLA defined student learning. Instead, I heard a wide range of responses that largely varied

based on teachers' content areas and what teachers saw students' needs to be at a particular juncture in their academic careers. To Arnel, a middle school math teacher and teacher leader, what teachers believed to constitute student learning "depends on the teachers' philosophy," mirroring my observations of differences across staff members. "Eventually, it's the teacher who decides... We have a mission statement and goals for the year that are decided by teachers in PLC, and also some directives [from administrators, per the charter]." But, Arnel felt, "at the end, it's the teacher."

Lori, YLA's principal, acknowledged that not every teacher was "on the same page" when it came to working in alignment with the school's mission and vision of student learning.

Usually, every other year, we do an exercise to look at our mission to see if we're, kind of, all under the same impression of what the mission means. And we tend to be, but not completely, because, you know, our mission, when you read it—like most missions have a lot of great buzzwords in it, [like] "global citizens." But, what does global citizen mean to me versus what does it mean to you? You know, what are the attributes of a global citizen? Do they need to know two languages? Do they need to be aware of current events? Do they just need to care about other people? What are we? And we've kind of pushed ourselves to try to think about that because obviously if we're not on the same page, we're not doing the things that we need to do. And so we've worked pretty hard to get on the same page, and we're not, we're not completely there.

Interestingly, Lori claimed that the lack of alignment of the YLA staff was, in some ways, intentional:

I think part of it is kind of a deliberate intention that, from my perspective—and I will say I don't think everybody in the management team necessarily agrees with me on this—I think there's something very rich about having an eclectic staff. I think that that's good for kids. I think it's what they're going to experience in college... Everybody knows you go to one professor, they're one way, you go to another one, they're another way. The flip side of that is, a lot of people will say, well, "kids learn better if it's consistent, if they can go into your room, and your room, and have the same rules," but I don't think life really works that way. And so I think we do a better job preparing our kids if they have to be exposed to different teaching styles. But that said, that does mean we have to work harder to be on the same page about certain things. And I think at the end, though, our kids are better prepared to deal with different types of situations, because our kids will even tell you, "Well, when I was in teacher X's class, she's so strict," or "he's so *this*," or "he only wants projects and this one only wants—" and it's like, well, that's okay, because that's how learning is. That's how jobs are going to be. So I think that we kind of foster that. So we foster [it] in a way that learning can be a little bit different in different places and that's okay. That some teachers are more traditional teachers. You know, some teachers are the ones who have all this creativity.

By fostering a working environment in which teachers can teach their classes in a manner consistent with their individual teaching styles and notions of what student learning should look like, Lori felt that students would be better prepared to meet the varied expectations of their future college professors and employers. Below are a few examples of the types of learning goals individual teachers set for their students.

Teaching independence in the writing process. As a high school English teacher, Danielle thought a lot about how to teach students to be more self-directed in their writing and less dependent on teacher feedback.

One of the things I'm working on this year, is... we're thinking about writing portfolios and trying to show progress in writing versus a grade in writing. And how paragraphs or extended response pieces are building blocks to bigger essays or papers and how you can chart your own progress. Having kids learn how to peer review one another and help one another instead of constantly waiting for teacher feedback, and that number on top of the paper. To actually look at a paper, look at a piece of writing and say, "you need *this*, *this*, and *this*."

I understood Danielle's desire for students to develop greater independence as writers from my observation of her 10th grade English class. Students were working on finalizing extended

paragraph essays comparing and contrasting two poems, each providing differing perspectives on Helen of Troy, in preparation for reading *The Odyssey*. In particular, Danielle had encouraged her students to incorporate their personal judgments about the poems, noting that “some of you feel reluctant to include your *opinion* in your writing.” Danielle had spent nearly the entire class period attending to students who had requested “conferences” to get feedback on their essays, while about one third of her students had been allowed to take loaned Google Chromebooks into the hallway (“Anyone want a quiet place outside?” Danielle had asked). It seemed that while some of her students were well on their way to achieving independence as writers, many were still very unsure of how to proceed and required their teacher’s help to articulate their responses.

Getting “the big picture” in chemistry and biology. Since chemistry and biology could feel so abstract and removed from students’ everyday experiences of the visible world, setting goals around student engagement and interest was paramount to high school science teacher, Nathan.

I think students have to like what they are learning in some way or another, because if they don’t like it, they’re not going to care about it. I think my goal as a teacher, is, in chemistry—not everyone likes chemistry, but I try to make an environment where at least you don’t hate it. Like at least, I think it’s important to look out for the students who are maybe not looking forward to coming to class, but definitely not dreading coming to class, you know.

One way Nathan worked to keep his students engaged was by focusing on the “big picture” rather than getting too bogged down in the “minutia” of scientific processes. When I asked Nathan to describe a time he felt that students had really learned something of value, he recalled a recent lesson he taught on cellular respiration:

In my AP biology class, we did a unit on cellular respiration, and how energy is extracted from sugar and turned into chemical energy that the body uses, the waste product being CO₂ that's created. And at the end of three or four days of going through all the steps and the big picture, and the minutia, but back to the big picture, and back to the minutia, one of the kids was able to put this thought together. I almost wanted to kiss him at the end of it, one of the students put this thought together, like, "when you're breathing out CO₂, you're breathing out the sugar that you had just breathed in, that you had just eaten, consumed." I was like, "yes, the CO₂ that you're breathing out is the sugar that you ate." Then, they're like, "Wait, when you exercise, and you're losing weight, you're literally turning the fat into CO₂ and you're breathing it out." I was like, "Yes, you're, like, literally breathing out the CO₂ molecules that used to be sugar molecules, that used to be fat molecules." So I was literally so happy for, like, the next hour, that this kid made this connection between the food that you eat and the chemical energy that you extract from it... and still we had gotten through all of these minutia processes, but still they didn't lose sight of the big picture of it all, because that can easily happen. Like, you spend all this time in the forest, you know, looking at all these individual pictures. But, then you still—it's easy to lose track of the big picture.

As this example illustrates, Nathan experienced success as a teacher when his students participated in creating knowledge for themselves. "I think, theoretically, students have to make their own knowledge. It has to be—you give them the building blocks and then they put that knowledge together. But you can't do the hard, heavy thinking for them."

Becoming global citizens in social studies. Like Nathan, Henri strove for his students to take ownership of what they were learning in his middle school social studies class. "I think it should be intrinsic. Unfortunately, it's not always like that. I do want this idea that the kids should learn on their own, that they should yearn to learn more," he said. One way he sought to develop students' responsibility as learners was by preparing them to be "global citizens":

As a social studies teacher, I have this idea [that] we're in a global community so they should be global citizens. For you to do that, it's just being in the know. That's why I always try to encourage current events and staying up on things... What I learned, fortunately, from going to a better college, is that there will be people from other countries that know just as much about their country as well as your own. When I say your own, I mean America, and that saddened me. So, I'm trying to instill in my students that not only are you supposed to be a citizen of this country, of the U.S., but also of the world. So, you shouldn't be ignorant to what's happening around you.

Just weeks before my visit in March 2017, Donald Trump had initiated an immigration ban in predominantly Muslim countries, which presented Henri with an opportunity to nurture his students' awareness of global issues.

When Trump was trying to impose the immigration ban towards the end of January, I had the students read an interview from two different sides. One side was this professor at the University of Toronto and why the immigration ban [was unjust], whereas this guy who was the leader of a think tank funded by Trump, said why it's necessary. The students read both sides and they were able to analyze which were the countries that were being banned. Then they realized some of those countries, only like three terrorists actually came from those countries. Whereas, other countries that he didn't ban, over 25 terrorists came from. The kids were able to deduce that. Wait, what is Trump actually doing? Why is he banning certain countries where he's not banning others?... I think that was profound for them to see, especially since there are Muslim students in there and they're able to speak their piece. But even more so, is just the idea [that] even our country's leaders, they make decisions, but [understanding] what they actually make decisions about and why they're doing that [is important].

To Henri, it was rewarding to see students developing critical thinking skills and the ability to weigh evidence from opposing perspectives.

Personalized support. While teachers each had different responses to the question of what learning goals they set for students, informed largely by their subject specialties, one commonality I heard across teachers was a focus on “personalized support.” For example, to Emily, a middle school literacy specialist, YLA offered far greater personalization than other schools in the same city. Commenting on those other schools in relation to YLA, she said:

There's a lot of things that I just don't think are the best for kids and for the education of young people. I think that YLA, on the other hand, is a really nice place for kids to get personalized support. The teachers will actually get to know the students and therefore will really get to know their needs, the needs of a group, and cater to that.

As a literacy specialist, Emily worked in small groups and one-on-one with struggling readers, which facilitated her ability to identify and “cater to” students' individual learning needs.

To Robert, a physics teacher in a more traditional classroom setting, personalizing student learning had not come naturally, but was something he had learned to value in the time he had spent on staff at YLA. In talking about what he had learned in the first eye-opening months after joining the staff as a teacher, he shared that his “most important lesson” was that he “had to respond to my students as individuals and then modify whatever I was doing for [each] one... I don’t know how long it took me to put two and two together to come up with that. But, that’s the way we all kind of work now.”

Lori, YLA’s principal, acknowledged that “for some kids [learning] just takes longer,” meaning that not all students in a single grade level cohort would be ready for certain academic content at the same time. “Some kids will take [the state math test] earlier than others, you know, some will take [it] in 8th grade. Some kids will wait until they take [it] in 9th grade. And that’s all okay.” To Lori, personalizing student learning had become even more essential as the student population at the school became more diverse:

Our population has shifted. We’ve actually gotten a more difficult population of kids in terms of more English language learners, more students with special needs. More students coming from disadvantaged households. Those kids may need a little longer in school. They may need more remediation. They may need to take Algebra over a year and a half. That’s something that we try to do.

What was primarily “difficult” about these students was that their individual needs posed scheduling challenges for school leaders who were tasked with accommodating multiple levels of a course per grade level. “Our biggest struggle is that we’re a small school and sometimes the programming we want to do is like programming for a big school,” Lori said. “So, it’s a lot of challenge for the people like Martin [an assistant principal] doing the scheduling, because we know we’re trying to do multiple [sections], because we are trying to get at those individual needs of the kids.”

Summary. Compared with teachers at HSHR and Explore, teachers at YLA were perhaps least consistent in their responses regarding how they defined and measured progress toward student learning. Since the school's charter renewal depended on the extent to which its students demonstrated proficiency on mandated state standardized tests, "meeting and exceeding standards" was a priority for the YLA instructional staff, at times to teachers' chagrin. However, teachers rarely spoke about meeting standards when describing their own goals for students, instead choosing to focus on either subject-specific learning targets or on meeting the individual learning needs of their diverse students.

Implications for teachers. One implication of having strict accountability goals based on students' standardized test scores was that teachers at YLA sometimes felt they had to "teach to the test." "I do think because we have to adhere to these tests, it does really limit the great potential that this school, that our teachers have," Henri told me. This pressure was felt at nearly all grade levels of the school:

From second grade through eighth grade, there's ELA [English Language Arts], math exams every year, and then science is added at fourth and eighth grade. Then in high school you have history exams, you have one ELA exam, you have a math exam every year, you have a science exam every year. So there's this pressure that you have to teach to the test, one because of our state results and two, because they have to pass.

Henri and his colleagues experienced pressure from two sources: the school's need to demonstrate strong academic performance in order to stay viable, and, at the high school level, students' need to pass rigorous state graduation tests in order to be eligible for certain post-secondary opportunities.

What frustrated Henri, especially, about this pressure was that it meant that teachers had less time to teach using the kind of experiential learning methods he had experienced when he was a student at YLA. "We had so much experiential learning when I was a high school student."

Henri shared an example of a time when his regular global history classes were suspended because many of his classmates had been selected to be tour guides at a U.N. function. The experience had been deemed by school leaders to be worthy of the class time lost. Now, opportunities for experiential learning were deprioritized to accommodate mandated testing:

It's not that our school can't do [experiential learning] anymore, it's because of the state's ideals of what our school needs to be, sticking to the test, and that's what kind of sucks about us going charter. It's not even just on a state level. You talk about No Child Left Behind, I think that really hampered the educational system and the climate.

Despite the pressure posed by testing requirements, YLA teachers were generally free to design their curricula in a manner that best suited their particular philosophies of teaching and content areas. Arnel felt that his administrators trusted teachers to accomplish the goals they felt personally motivated by while making progress toward the school's established goals. Lori, the principal, valued having an "eclectic staff" with different approaches to teaching and learning, which meant that teachers were largely free to conduct their lessons as they saw fit. In some ways, the variety of approaches to teaching and learning meant that staff members were not working in alignment toward a clearly defined set of goals, but staff and students alike could benefit from such variety. "Of course, I like the diversity of the students and teachers here," Emily said. "Everybody has many different things to bring to the table and that's a special opportunity for me and for the kids."

Finally, YLA's emphasis on personalizing learning meant that teachers were encouraged to get to know their students and cater to their individual needs. This helped them to make progress with students who may otherwise not have met more generic learning goals. It also posed logistical and time challenges. Having classes at multiple levels proved difficult to schedule in such a small building, and time to individualize instruction was hard to come by given pressure to "cover" a wide range of academic content over the course of the school year.

Enabling factors. What enabled YLA teachers to make progress toward collective and individual student learning goals? One factor that seemed to help considerably was the role that Lori played in lobbying for the school at the state capital and by using her political acumen to generate broad support for the school. “She knows about politics, she speaks to people a lot in that political landscape. She’s made friends, she goes to [the state capital] a lot,” Henri shared. “For our school, it’s easier. For all the public converted charter schools, not so much, because they don’t have the political acumen that Lori does, or they don’t have the connections that she does.” As a result of Lori’s work to generate support outside the walls of the school building, there was less pressure on the school to conform to state or district definitions of success. On “getting out of the building,” Lori said:

That’s really important because it helps to build people who are supporters of your school and every school needs somebody who’s going to have your back. You know, we have done a lot of work around getting people to support YLA, believe in our model, believe in our mission, believe in all the different things that we do, and stand up for us. And we wouldn’t have done that if we didn’t cultivate these partnerships. So you have to, kind of, get out of your building.

With more people in power excited about what the school had to offer in terms of its mission and model, the threat of the school being hindered or constrained by external forces decreased.

While Lori was working externally to buffer the school from unwanted state or district interference, she and her leadership team were also providing teachers with the flexibility and autonomy to determine their own goals and methods. Speaking of his administrators, Arnel said they “believe that teachers will accomplish their own goals and the school’s goals.” To Arnel, this was very different from his experience working in a more traditional school where what, how, and when he taught was predetermined. “It’s a different world... They trust you [here].” The flexibility of teachers to select and work toward their own student learning goals was in part due to Lori’s philosophical belief in the importance of exposing students to diverse approaches to

teaching. Had she been more committed to a particular definition of student learning, or to greater alignment of goals and methods across the teaching staff, teachers would likely not have experienced as much individual autonomy in selecting learning targets.

Constraints. Test-based accountability policies constrained YLA teachers from the perspective that it pressured them to “teach to the test,” which limited the time teachers could spend pursuing the learning goals they found to be most meaningful. According to Henri, authorizer and state accountability pressures and the resulting loss in experiential learning time had their roots in the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001:

Really, what it comes down to is, is it really “No Child Left Behind,” or is it, “Every Child Almost Left Behind”? Because you set this high standard for teachers and you set it for students, but really what’s happening is that the students can’t really jump. The fact is that No Child Left Behind laws and everything that was put in place, I think, were too stringent. If you gave schools a 15-year period... I think it could have worked out... These misguided expectations [are] what’s driving all this state thinks, and that’s why you see a lot of [other] states opting out. Because they know it’s failing. Unfortunately [this state] is not there yet. We’re not opting out yet.

As was referenced earlier, the school’s charter status, though it gave the school autonomy to make curricular and operational decisions, also meant that the school was held to a “higher bar” than non-charter public schools.

Frustratingly to Lori and her team, the autonomy the school had gained in exchange for greater accountability had been diminishing over the past several years. “We got a lot of flexibility, which has been slowly stripped away, which is a big frustration,” Lori said. “We continue to fight to say, ‘No, this is not something that we think we have to ask permission to do.’” One recent example was when the school had changed one of its goals, which resulted in needing to formally request a charter revision:

We changed the charter goal, for instance... And I mean it took a few months to get that charter revision through, which was just silly. I mean we had enough lead time. It was just another, kind of, to me, time-sucker ... I had to write a justification for why I thought benchmarking [a form of student assessment] was more effective than [the previous system]. And it's the type of thing that, it's a slippery slope, which is part of the problem. It's not any one thing, you know... But one thing has a tendency in the bureaucracy to lead to another and another. And we really, really, really buy into the whole idea of, if we have this higher accountability then you need to give us the autonomy to do it, because if you're not, then holding us to these standards that are, you know, "outperform this," "do that," doesn't seem quite fair.

One strategy Lori leveraged to protect YLA from unwanted intervention by the state or authorizer was to intentionally write the charter "broadly" so that the school wouldn't need to revise its charter as frequently:

Now to be perfectly honest, we try to write our charter very broadly so that we didn't get stuck with [a specific curriculum]. We also wrote into our charter that the School Management Team is flexible and is determined based on the needs of the school. Because I didn't want to have to go and do a charter revision if we decided that we needed a new position.

While writing the charter "broadly" was one workaround that buffered the school from what seemed like busywork and unwanted interference, doing so seemed antithetical to the "autonomy for accountability" bargain the school had struck with the state in becoming a charter.

Survey Findings

Examining how teachers at the three school sites defined and measured student learning affords a glimpse into several aspects of teachers' experience. First, it illuminates what learning objectives were bestowed on teachers from above and which were chosen by teachers, whether individually or collectively. This, in turn, helps to contextualize teachers' motivations. Were they driven by the determination to do what they felt was best for their students? Were they motivated by the fear of not meeting some externally-imposed "bar"? Was it some combination? And finally, considering goals in relation to teachers' pedagogical approaches—what and how they

taught—sheds light on whether they felt that their daily actions helped move them toward goals or not; it has implications for teachers' certainty that their efforts would lead to desired results.

The three case study schools varied in terms of how much teachers felt they were beholden to external expectations and to what extent these expectations seemed reasonable. Their involvement in direction-setting seemed to influence the extent to which teachers felt capable of achieving desired aims. Where teachers had more say over performance goals, they tended to express greater confidence in their ability to achieve them. Where they had less say, as was particularly the case among teachers at YLA, teachers felt torn between working toward imposed goals (e.g., increased standardized test scores) or their own goals for students, a source of some frustration.

This section turns to survey data to explore how case study findings relate to what teachers thought in other TPSI schools with respect to direction-setting. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which teachers in TPSI schools have a say in determining their schools' learning expectations for students, and whether there seems to be a relationship between their involvement in deciding expectations and their level of certainty that they can achieve them. To allow comparison with teachers in non-TPSI schools, "having a say" in determining learning expectations was captured using the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS 11-12) item, "How much actual influence do you think teachers have over school policy [in the area of]: Setting performance standards for students at this school." The collective efficacy scale was used to measure the level of certainty that teachers had that their collective effort would lead to desired outcomes.

TPSI vs SASS: Influence over performance standards. As would be expected, teachers in TPSI schools were far more likely than the SASS 11-12 cohort of American teachers to report having influence over performance standards at their schools (see Figure 5.2, below).

Strikingly, 60 percent of TPSI respondents said they had a “great deal of influence” over setting performance standards, compared to only 20 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents. On the other end of the spectrum, only 3 percent of TPSI respondents said they had “no influence,” compared to 20 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents. Despite the differences in the response distributions of these two populations of teachers, it is notable that even in TPSI schools, teachers vary in the extent to which they felt they had a say in this particular area of decision-making.

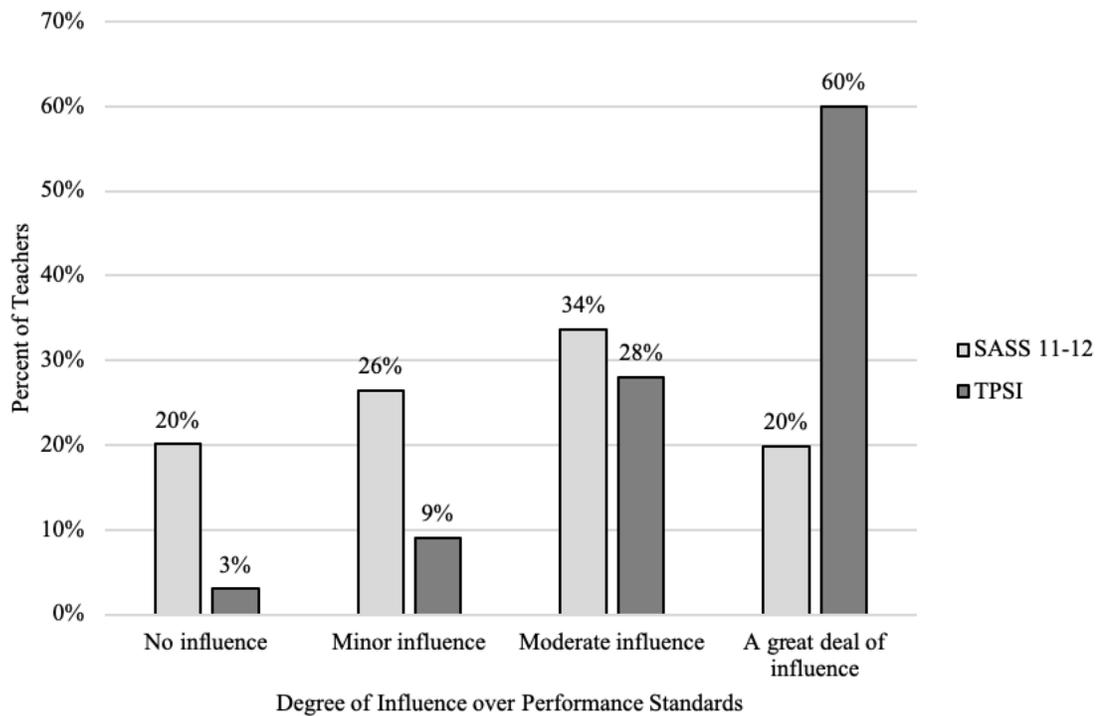


Figure 5.2. Teacher influence over performance standards: SASS 11-12 and TPSI respondents.

Note. $n = 335$ for TPSI respondents. Specific response counts for individual SASS 11-12 survey items were not publicly available. Over 37,000 eligible public school teachers completed the SASS 11-12 survey (Cox, Parmer, Strizek, & Thomas, 2016).

Collective efficacy. In order to gauge whether teacher decision-making in the area of direction-setting seemed to influence the extent to which teachers felt confident in their collective

ability to chart progress toward learning goals, I compared teachers' level of collective efficacy in relation to their reported level of influence in the area of setting performance standards. In general, TPSI respondents reported relatively high levels of collective efficacy, with a mean of 3.6 on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) and a standard deviation of 0.5. As teachers reported greater influence over setting performance standards, they also reported greater collective efficacy. Teachers who reported having a "great deal of influence" over setting performance standards at their schools rated their collective efficacy highest (mean of 3.7) and those who reported having "no influence" rated their collective efficacy lowest (mean of 3.0) (see Figure 5.3, below). Though no causal claims can be made about this relationship, results suggest that teachers who experience greater involvement in determining their schools' learning goals and expectations feel greater certainty about their staffs' collective ability to move students in the desired direction.

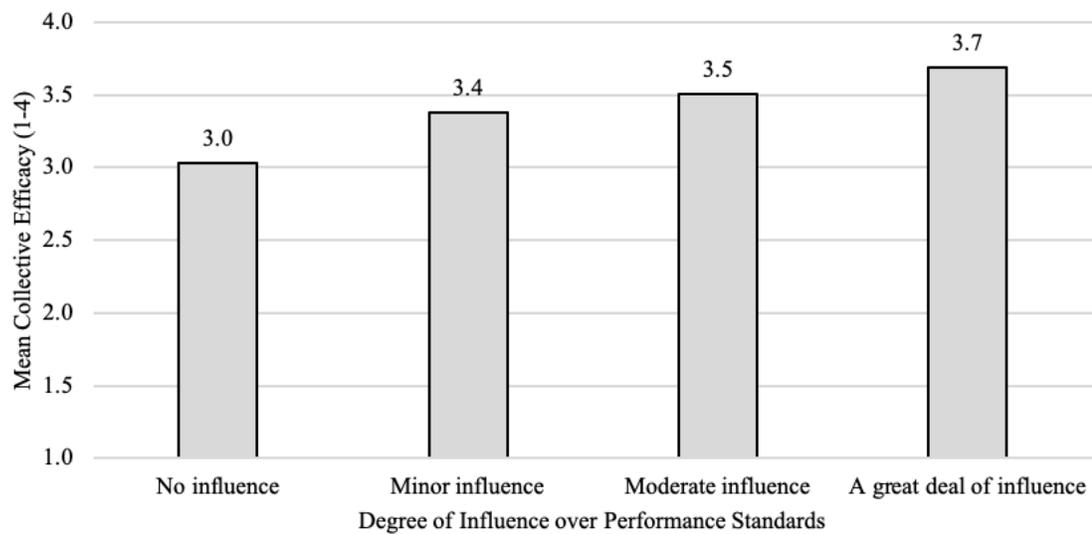


Figure 5.3. Collective efficacy by degree of influence over performance standards.

Note. $n = 334$.

Free response data. Several questions on the survey provided respondents with an opportunity to write freely about their experiences working in a TPSI school. Responses from two questions in particular pertained in some way to the discussion of how teachers define and measure student learning. A summary of these findings is provided below.

Success examples. One survey question asked respondents to “Give a brief example of a time when you felt you had been successful in your job. How did you know you had been successful?” This question was intended to generate insight into how the broader population of TPSI teachers understood what success meant in their roles and how they could achieve it. The top three themes that emerged from teachers’ responses were, in order of prominence in the data, *developing eager learners*, *engaging struggling students*, and *achieving academic progress*.

Teachers who wrote about *developing eager learners* felt most successful when they saw their students self-initiating new projects, going above and beyond expectations simply out of interest or curiosity, or explicitly expressing excitement about learning or coming to school.

Examples included:

I have had many students bring project ideas up to me and ask if they could do them. These are all at times when we had not asked them to create a project, it was just something that they thought of and would like to research. This independent research is exactly what we strive for and for them to ask for more makes me feel successful.

I thought a simulation about World War I, where students were so engaged and passionate about the lesson that they were continuing to talk about it at recess. There were negotiating treaties outside of school and coming back to class with fully written deals. I was so happy that the simulation was that engaging.

I feel successful when my students are happy and love school. When my students are engaged and working together participating, asking questions and collaborating.

As evidenced in the above quotes, these teachers experienced great satisfaction when their students had achieved some level of intrinsic motivation to learn without much prodding or

direction needed by the teacher. Many such examples involved opportunities for students to engage in project-based or collaborative learning experiences.

Teachers who wrote about *engaging struggling students* felt most successful when they saw dramatic attitude shifts in students who had previously been unengaged from school:

Recently, one of my more challenging students asked me for help with her academic work two days in a row. When she started with us two years ago, she HATED asking for help because it made her feel dumb. The fact that she is now comfortable with vulnerability tells me that I've done something right.

A student transferred to our school mid-year. I was "warned" that he needed to be closely supervised and that he would be trouble. I worked closely with the student and made sure he had the support he needed. After about a week he had not gotten into any trouble and looked up at me and said: "I am good at this!" I'm still working with him two years later and he is doing great. I could list all kinds of stories like this. It is incredible what kind of impact we have.

There was a student two years ago with a traumatic brain injury. He was adopted when he was 3 and the only connection he ever made was to his mother. Through many meetings with colleagues, opportunities to try many strategies, and a lot of patience, we were able to work with him to gain his trust and saw a transition from screaming daily to avoid any work to being able to read and write. It was truly an amazing year of growth.

Teachers who wrote about *engaging struggling students* as their success examples often referenced months or years of working closely with individual students and the sense of reward they felt when those efforts paid off. A major component of this work was earning students' trust and helping them to open up about their barriers to learning.

While less common than examples of *developing eager learners* and *engaging struggling students*, many teachers provided success examples related to *achieving academic progress*.

These examples included instances of student academic growth, development of specific academic skills or competencies, and proficiency on standardized assessments:

I feel successful when I see my students' reading skills improve through small guided reading groups.

Creating and implementing our grade level math program allows me to feel a level of instructional success. Students are given a pre- and post-assessment, and lessons and activities are developed and structured around their needs. I love when the post-assessment is given and students show and can see their own growth.

A time when I felt successful at my job was when the school set a goal to have students improve on their paragraph writing assessment by at least one point by the spring assessment. We were able to reach this goal by the winter assessment.

Over the course of three years, I was able to individually build the math AP calculus program. I was able to loop with my students from algebra 2, [to] pre-calc, and [then to] AP calculus. As a result, in the school year 2015-2016, the class became the first in school history to pass the AP calculus test. Furthermore, the students passed the test with a whopping rate of 77 percent, with five students receiving the highest score possible of a 5.

There are several measures that I can describe that have made me feel successful. Student academic growth through data analysis is huge. I just finished assessing my students for middle-of-the-year data and most of them demonstrated some level of growth, so that obviously validates my work.

For many teachers who wrote about academic successes, being able to chart progress using standardized measures of growth or achievement provided significant validation of their work with students. In several instances, teachers felt particularly successful when they had played a leadership role in developing a new academic program that led to measurable academic gains for students.

Differences from previous schools. Survey respondents who indicated that they had taught previously at a different school before moving to their current TPSI school were asked to “Give one or two examples of how working at your current school differs, if at all, from working at your previous school(s).” Responses to this question pertained to many different aspects of the teaching experience, and will be considered throughout the subsequent analysis chapters.

However, many teachers chose to comment about aspects of direction-setting relevant to this chapter, including their schools’ mission, vision, and goals.

The most common refrain among respondents choosing to write about direction-setting was that the faculties at their current TPSI schools were particularly aligned toward a common vision and mission in comparison to their previous schools. For example:

This school is vision-oriented. My other school had a vision but it was not internalized by the staff the way it is here. Here we have genuine collaboration.

Much more unified vision and cohesiveness of faculty.

More of a shared vision and mission.

There is a stronger sense of mission and community.

At my previous school, the principal changed every year. Curriculum and instruction was passed down from administration. Disciplinary model changed with each administration. Mission and vision changed with every administration.

I am 71 and continue working at [my school] because I get so much positive energy and happiness from being an advisor here. Our staff does put students first, we share a vision (I feel we really try to live our mission statement). We have some growing pains as we have gotten bigger, but I feel that we truly are making a difference with our students, and I love being a part of that.

This last quote illustrates how one teacher linked her school's alignment toward a common vision and mission to a sense of collective efficacy—that she and her colleagues were “truly making a difference with our students.”

Not only did teachers experience alignment with each other, but they also experienced alignment between the direction of the school and their own teaching philosophies and practice, in part due to their participation in the direction-setting process:

More freedom to teach the way I need to and more voice in where the school is directed.

The mission aligns directly with my beliefs and teaching philosophy.

One respondent highlighted how being part of a “teacher-run school” made it possible to see the “whole school process start to finish”:

Being a teacher in a school run by teachers has made me a better teacher because I understand the whole school process start to finish. I am not just a cog in the wheel; I know how I affect and impact the system and the students. Because of this, I am better able to guide a student through their education. I do not think I would have that understanding if I still worked in a traditional school.

For this teacher, being intimately familiar with her school's "process"—the steps intended to lead to eventual student success—has helped her to feel more certain that she could effectively usher students along that process.

Discrepant responses. While most TPSI respondents had generally positive things to say about their schools in relation to direction-setting and its relationship to their work experience, there were a few cases where teachers expressed doubt in their school's ability to work collectively toward a common aim. For example, one teacher indicated that not everyone on their school staff was in alignment toward a shared vision of student learning:

While I really enjoy my work at the school and love the fact that teachers make most of the decisions in the school, there are some areas that are not working out as well. Some teachers feel they can do what they want since it's a teacher-led school, sometimes to the detriment of student learning and needs.

In this teacher's case, teachers chose to operate independently of one another, which could take away from the power of collective effort toward a commonly held mission. Similarly, a teacher at a different school felt that teachers' empowerment to promote pet projects often interfered with the school's ability to work toward shared goals:

Teachers here each advocate for their own programs which engenders lots of conflict. After years and years of conflict, teachers take things personally and professional relationships suffer, impacting the school culture and student body. Admin needs to set priorities so there's a greater shared understanding and less in-fighting.

To this teacher, "admin"—not the teachers, collectively—was better positioned to "set priorities" for the school in order to achieve alignment toward a common goal. It is unclear what contextual and school cultural factors may have contributed to these conflicts; perhaps these were schools in

which strong norms of self-reliance and non-interference made collaborative work especially problematic. However, these perspectives convey important counter-narratives to the more prevalent opinion that teacher collective decision-making promoted the alignment of direction-setting and teacher actions in productive ways.

Synthesis

The teachers who participated in this study had vastly different conceptions of student learning that mostly reflected differences in their schools' populations and needs. For many teachers I spoke with and heard from in survey response, non-academic learning goals were paramount. These included meeting basic needs and teaching "habits of mind," as at HSHR. At Explore, advisors saw their roles largely as facilitating the learning of "process" skills, which included strategic planning, time management, giving and receiving feedback, and reflection. Among survey respondents, the top two categories of learning goals that teachers wrote about were dispositional: getting students to be self-motivated, eager learners; and helping struggling students to engage in school.

Academic goals were also important to teachers. Teachers strove to teach their students specific academic skills, improve their test scores, and prepare them for the rigor of college. At YLA more than at the other case study schools, academic goals took center stage, though some staff resented the state's testing requirements and expectations. In some ways, there existed a mismatch between teachers' negative attitudes toward standardized testing, such as at Explore and at YLA, and teachers' reliance on standardized test data for validation, as indicated by many survey respondents.

Whatever the emphasis, goals set around student learning were mostly shared by teaching faculties at TPSI schools. At HSHR, teachers were remarkably consistent in teaching and re-teaching habits of mind, though they approached the habits differently in different content areas.

At Explore, advisors were united in their quest to build students' process skills, and on dedicating significant one-on-one time to helping students achieve individualized learning goals. In both schools, having been a part of the team that founded the school gave teachers a particular sense of ownership in seeing these goals through to fruition.

At YLA, teachers' visions of student learning were less aligned with each other and more specific to their respective academic disciplines. This was due, in part, to an intentional effort among school leaders—and in particular, the principal—to expose students to different teaching styles and to honor teachers' own teaching philosophies. At the same time, YLA teachers shared a common language around providing personalized support for students and saw their small school model as being particularly adept at ensuring all students could have their individual learning needs met.

Survey responses largely indicated that teachers at TPSI schools felt their staffs were aligned in working toward a common mission and vision. Two teachers felt differently, having had teaching colleagues take advantage of their empowerment to further their own teaching agendas.

Generally, participating teachers could articulate how their actions led them to experience success with students. Autonomy to choose teaching methods and to use time with students gave teachers the flexibility to adjust course in the service of meeting an academic or non-academic goal. This finding was supported by high collective efficacy ratings of TPSI respondents overall. At the same time, as mentioned above, some academic goals, in particular, felt unrealistic to some teachers. Pressure to “teach to the test” could detract from teachers' ability to pursue other goals that felt were more important.

Teachers' motivation to pursue collective teaching goals depended in some part on their ownership over the direction-setting process. At HSHR, principal Miguel noted a difference

between the effort and dedication of those teachers who had been a part of the founding team that established the mission and vision and those who had joined the staff after the school's founding. At Explore, advisors had ample opportunities to participate in direction-setting given the emphasis on individualized learning, with advisors working with students to set short and long-term learning goals. Being able to help students chart their direction on an ongoing basis, in response to real-time needs, helped advisors see how their direct actions influenced students' own motivation and effort, a connection that served as a powerful source of efficacy.

At YLA, teachers largely spoke about goal-setting in individual, content-specific terms and expressed confidence in their ability to make progress toward these individual goals. However, where they had less say in goals—such as goals related to growth on standardized tests that were required as part of their charter—they felt less certain and more anxious. At both YLA and HSHR, the principals played important roles in buffering the school from unrealistic external demands, but couldn't completely protect them from these pressures.

Across all three school sites, and evident in several of the open-ended survey responses, having autonomy over curriculum and teaching methods was what made it possible for teachers to feel they could reliably make progress toward student learning goals. In other words, the ability to shape the goals and broader vision of the school mattered little if teachers did not also have the ability to shape what and how they taught. This is a topic that will be considered more in Chapter 8, particularly as it pertains to how teachers are able to access funding for curricular resources.

In many ways the link between being able to participate in direction-setting and sense of collective efficacy is intuitive or obvious. Why would people set goals that they did not feel confident they could achieve? Is there a danger that teachers who set their own goals will select less rigorous objectives? Evidence from teachers suggests that the motivation accrued from buying into goals outweighs any desire to keep things easy. Teachers expressed being so

motivated that sustainability was sometimes a concern, a topic that will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. Academic data and accolades from the three schools (as presented in Chapter 4) suggest that these schools are not holding students back academically, but in many ways are “beating the odds,” particularly at HSHR and YLA where the student populations are least advantaged.

Conclusion

Historically, academic writing about the teaching profession has emphasized how the uncertainty of success can be a powerful source of anguish, disappointment, and shame for teachers. Experiencing success is heavily dependent on how it is defined and what achievements are valued by one’s colleagues and leaders. If construed narrowly as meeting a certain academic benchmark on a multiple-choice test, success can be ambiguous (“Was I responsible for my students’ success?”), fleeting (“Can I count on next year’s class to perform as well?”), or even (seemingly) unattainable (“Is this even possible?”), with negative consequences for teachers’ self-esteem and motivation. If understood more broadly as encompassing a range of indicators’ of students’ social and intellectual development, opportunities to experience success multiply. This chapter has explored how teachers working in TPSI schools defined and measured success, as well as the implications of those decisions for teachers’ work and wellbeing. The teachers I interviewed and surveyed did not discount the importance of academic achievement, but also did not see it as the “be-all and end-all.” Other kinds of achievements—engaging a reluctant student or instilling “habits of mind,” for example—held enormous weight for these teachers. To differing degrees, these “alternative” views of success were motivating to teachers and influenced not only their pedagogical choices but their decisions in other domains, such as scheduling, professional development, hiring, and discipline. Chapters 6 through 9 will explore these and other areas of decision-making and their impact on teacher professional vitality (TPV).

Chapter 6: A “Different Kind of Tired”: Determining Teacher Workload

Introduction

Chapter 2 identified *time pressure* as a second significant barrier to teacher professional vitality (TPV). In the U.S., teachers are generally expected to be instructing students in academic content for the majority of the school day. They may have an hour of planning and a half hour for lunch, but for the other 5 or so hours of the official workday, they are in performance mode, orchestrating and differentiating the learning of dozens of students simultaneously. Little time during the school day is left for materials preparation, grading, collaborating, reflecting, or communicating with families, meaning that these fundamental components of teachers’ work must either be done outside of official work hours or not at all. Teachers’ workloads are generally both expansive and intense, contributing to feelings of time pressure and burnout.

To differing degrees, teachers’ workloads at the three schools I visited were not taken for granted but actively questioned and adjusted throughout the course of a school year, within the limits imposed by the schools’ institutional settings. Teachers were often able to make changes to their work schedules, whether to accommodate students’ learning needs, to reduce stress associated with a hectic workday, to make time for non-teaching responsibilities, or to fulfill personal obligations. Such flexibility in teachers’ workdays meant that teachers could adapt to changing circumstances both within the school and in their personal lives.

The workday was experienced differently by teachers at the three schools. At Explore, advisors had substantial unstructured time to supervise students’ projects and have one-on-one or small group meetings with students. At Young Leaders Academy (YLA) and High School for Human Rights (HSHR), teachers had somewhat more traditional teaching loads and course schedules alongside non-teaching responsibilities. They regularly confronted the perennial problem of not having enough hours in the day to get everything done. However, teachers

experienced “a different kind of tired” compared to the stress and exhaustion they had felt at previous schools, primarily because they felt their efforts were rewarded with impact.

This chapter concerns the nature and intensity of teachers’ workloads in teacher-powered schools. It considers how collective decision-making authority (CDMA) in the areas of scheduling and work hours can—but does not necessarily—produce a teacher work experience that differs significantly from the norm, and presents several examples of how teachers successfully advocated for schedule and workload changes that better accommodated teachers’ personal and professional responsibilities. Furthermore, I will explore various mechanisms by which teachers at the three schools shared administrative and leadership work that was critical to running their schools. Implications for teachers are discussed throughout and revisited in light of survey findings at the end of the chapter.

Structuring the Teacher Workday

How the school day is structured has profound implications for what teachers do and how they do it. This section describes how the workday was proportioned for teachers and students at the three case study schools, teachers’ role in determining their work schedules, and the impact of the school schedule on teachers’ work experiences. Since its schedule was the most distinct of the three schools and most divergent from typical secondary schools in general, Explore is featured in greater detail than are YLA and HSHR.

At Explore, a dramatically different school day by design. At first glance, the daily schedule at Explore closely resembled a typical high school schedule with six 45-60 minute periods and a half-hour lunch break (see Figure 6.1, below). The day was bookended by time spent in advisory, and students also spent 30 minutes in their advisory classrooms after lunch for independent reading. (Alternatively, students could choose to join a book club which would meet elsewhere in the building during reading time).

<u>Explore School Daily Schedule</u>
9:00-9:20am Advisory
9:20-10:05am Period 1
10:05-10:50am Period 2
10:50-11:35am Period 3
11:35am-12:20pm Period 4
12:20-12:50pm Lunch
12:50-1:30pm Book Club/Reading
1:30-2:30pm Period 5
2:30-3:35pm Period 6
3:35-3:40pm Advisory
3:40pm Dismissal

Figure 6.1. The daily schedule at Explore School.

How students spent time during the six periods depended on their grade level. The middle school at Explore—grades 6-8—operated on a fairly traditional schedule in the morning, with students attending “core” courses in language arts, math, science, and social studies during periods 1 through 4. In the afternoon, middle schoolers had one hour of independent project work time during period 5, and took physical education, Spanish, or an elective course during period 6. The structured course schedule for middle school students was intended to promote learning of basic skills in these content areas and to gradually teach students how to manage their own time during independent project worktime.

In the high school, students’ schedules were much less structured (for most students) and much more personalized according to students’ interests and needs. While students were required to take at least three years of math classes, which were scheduled daily, they fulfilled state graduation requirements in other subject areas through a combination of independent projects and

college-like “seminars.” Seminars were developed and facilitated by Explore advisors and were intended to promote “deep” learning in a specific topic (examples from the 2016-17 school year included “Climate Crisis and Social Justice,” “Non-Fiction Creative Writing,” and “Audio Production.”) Each seminar was scheduled for one, two, or three days a week, and topics rotated each 8-week block. Wendy, a special education case manager, described the high school schedule as “just a very open, loosely based system.” She noted that students’ schedules depended on their particular needs and interests: “Some kiddos have no classes, some kiddos we stack full of classes, particularly if they need a lot of structure.”

The workweek for Explore advisors. At Explore, work hours were set by the teacher-majority Board on an annual basis based on a proposal made by the cooperative. That meant that all staff members had a say in the work hours that eventually get approved. The year I visited, teachers were on duty from 8:00am to 4:30pm Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, 7:45am to 4:30pm on Thursdays (to allow for a Thursday morning staff meeting), and 8:00am to 4:00pm on Fridays.

The emphasis on project-based learning meant that students—and particularly high school students—spent less time attending class and more time working independently on the projects they designed in consultation with their advisors. Accordingly, most high school advisors spent much of their time meeting individually or in small groups with students, serving as consultants for student projects related to their content expertise, bridging students with external

community members and resources, or helping students master difficult learning standards on an as-needed basis.

During my interview with Molly, a high school advisor at Explore, I was shocked when I found out she was responsible for teaching classes (seminars) during only two periods a week. Not two periods a day, but two periods—each 45 minutes long—*a week*. Of course, this did not mean that Molly was not working during the remaining hours of the school week—she split her time between varied administrative duties, such as managing the school’s partnership with the local university teacher preparation program and leading tours of the school with prospective families, and being “in advisory” meeting with students individually and helping them to manage their project worktime. Importantly, this time was up to the advisor to schedule and was almost entirely unstructured. At times, advisors could accomplish administrative tasks while their students worked. At other times, single students in need of intensive support could individually demand a half hour or more of the advisor’s time. Meanwhile, that student’s peers would be working on projects, preparing presentations, procrastinating, or—as will be discussed later on in this chapter—simply goofing off.

This schedule was not particularly unusual for Explore advisors, either. The course loads of her fellow high school advisors were similarly light, with seminars taught two or three days a week and far greater time devoted to supporting individual students with projects and completing a smattering of administrative tasks. Exceptions included Explore’s math department, comprising

two teachers who taught classes most periods of the day, every day, and middle school advisors, who taught “core” classes for three of four periods each morning.

I observed several Explore advisors during periods of unstructured work time “in advisory,” including my hour-long observation of Amanda during periods 2 and 3 on Monday. Because she and Molly, also a high school advisor, both had significant administrative duties, they shared a high school advisory of 26 students. However, only about one third of their advisees were in advisory during my observation, the other two-thirds being in seminars, attending a weekly “senior meeting” for high school seniors, or working independently in the café (which was visible from Amanda’s desk). Of those students who were in the room when I arrived, one student was meeting with Amanda at her desk, one was watching a video on a laptop, one was nose deep in a book, one was snacking while she worked on a tablet computer, and several were chatting quietly. During the course of the hour, students shuffled in and out depending on their particular schedules and which staff members they needed to consult about projects. Amanda met formally with two students—the first for 25 minutes and the second for about 15—and circulated among the other students as time permitted, checking in on their progress and offering assistance where needed.

Wasted time? A long-term view. Amanda was not, I noticed, micromanaging students’ time; students not scheduled to meet with her were free to use their time as they saw fit with the expectation that they would meet their project deadlines and hours requirements. During this and other observations of independent project time, not all Explore students were productively

engaged in project work. In fact, students were given considerable liberty—sometimes strolling the halls, socializing with other students, or taking a snack break. I occasionally witnessed “off-task” students being respectfully but firmly redirected by staff members, but frequently—unless students were being disruptive—advisors allowed students to procrastinate, and chose not to constantly intervene in getting students back on track.

Staff members recognized they had a dual responsibility to simultaneously ensure students were progressing toward project goals while also allowing students to learn—sometimes by mistake—to manage their time wisely. Ultimately, graduation at Explore meant the completion of credits by mastery of various academic standards, many of which would be achieved through projects. If project deadlines set with their advisors came and went with little to show for the time elapsed, advisors used the opportunity to help students understand the natural consequences of their inaction: they would have to work even harder to make up for lost time, or risk taking longer to graduate. (As indicated in Chapter 4, Explore students’ four-year graduation rate—57.6 percent—is quite low relative to the surrounding school district, but its six-year rate—93.8 percent—exceeds the district’s.)

The Explore advisors I spoke with viewed their hands-off approach to managing their students’ worktime as critical to developing their independence and autonomous motivation. For example, Andrew felt that empowering students to take charge of their own education while micromanaging their time and behavior would be hypocritical. “Students have a lot of power over what they’re learning... I think that it would be strange to give them power over their learning,

but not over some of the rules of the school.” Explaining how he would address a student struggling to make productive use of time, he continued, “[I would say,] ‘I’m a great resource and I can help you, and I will do a lot to help support you, but—except in rare cases, obviously—I’m not going to sit down and force you every step.’”

Matt, a high school advisor and language arts teacher, acknowledged it could be difficult to motivate his high school students, who were sometimes driven more by social concerns than academic ones. Describing a typical Friday morning, Matt told me:

What they want to do is socialize, and catch up with each other beyond the advisory, and catch up with their friends, and they’re totally going to “get to it.” Maybe they’ll, quote-unquote, “organize their desk.” But it’s very rarely that a critical mass of them is actually getting going. So, I feel like it’s my job to say, “What are you up to today? What’s your plan?” Some kids have formal schedules that they either create or get created for them. Other kids, they’re just winging it, and obviously they’re struggling. But we’re giving them that choice.

Because teaching “process skills” was a major goal of Explore advisors, as was discussed in Chapter 5, they were intentional about coaching students to manage their own time, a skill that could take years to develop. Dan said that one of the biggest challenges he faced as an advisor was “really keeping the long-term view in mind.” He continued:

I think in the project-based model, the advisory model... can feel slow. The kids—you’re going to have them for the four years. So it’s like, keeping the big picture in mind, and not getting frustrated and not feeling like you’re micromanaging. So, trying to resist making every decision for the kid and letting them do a little bit. That’s difficult and a struggle.

When asked for an example, Dan described how he and his co-advisor, Jess, collaborated to support a struggling student through the project process:

So, right now, Jess and I are starting each day with a kid, with this blank schedule, and we are figuring out, “what should you be doing in each of these 45 minutes?” And like, that’s not something I would do for every kid—well, maybe all new kids. But the idea is they’re doing something like that on their own, like most productive adults, probably. And so it’s hard to get here (in the schedule) and not yell at the kid [for being off-task]. But just to... point them to the schedule and then leave it at that. Like, “what did you say you would be doing at 1:30?” And then they can look and they can gauge, and decide to accept the redirect on my part, or not. And then just communicating with home, like, “did not take the redirect today,” but that’s it... ‘Cause I think, when I sit next to them and yell, like, math will get done. Like their homework will get turned in, their projects will get turned in, but then there’s no option besides me sitting next to them and yelling.

In this case, Dan and Jess intervened more than they typically would with most other students, helping to craft a work plan and “redirecting” the student when they were off task. As frustrating as it may be to watch a student squander their learning time, Dan felt it was necessary, both for the student’s development of time management and for Dan’s long-term relationship with his student.

I asked Dan what he felt the consequence would be if he had chosen to “yell” at students to get their work done. He replied:

The consequence for me is that I will have to yell for the next four years. Really. Cause it doesn’t put any of the ownership on them and I think that’s a lot of the language that we try to use, with everything, is that, really, they are here to own their education, own their decisions, and you have to let them do that. And part of that is to let them own the consequences of poor decisions.

For advisors at Explore, as Dan exemplified here, teaching was just as much about *not doing* as it was about *doing*. It was about stepping back and letting students take control of their learning, a difficult but rewarding proposition with significant implications for how advisors spent their time and energy.

“It dictates everything”: *The schedule’s impact on teaching and learning.* Without my prompting them to speak specifically about the schedule, several Explore advisors referenced the

schedule as being paramount in determining what the school was able to accomplish programmatically. In the below exchange, Amanda conveyed the importance of the school schedule for students' project-based experience:

Sara: Do you have any general comments about how the decision-making being really owned by staff members at Explore affects teachers' work, teachers' working conditions, and also your students, as opposed to a system that is typically more top-down?

Amanda: Definitely. I always think of the school schedule. For most teachers [in other schools], that's just decided for them. But the school schedule really, really impacts learning, so I think by being able to set our own schedule, that absolutely impacts learning. So our schedule looks like: you could take seminar three days a week, you can be in projects all day long—you get to decide. It influences—heavily—our student experience to have ownership. You couldn't do this program in a traditional school that required seven periods a day, where kids are in specific spaces seven periods a day. You couldn't do this program. You could do project-based learning in different ways, but you couldn't do this program.

Importantly, as Amanda's testimony indicates, being able to determine the schedule as a staff served not only to empower students to take ownership of their education by creating flexible project work time, but also to enable staff members to implement their project-based learning program fully and with fidelity.

Similarly, Dan felt strongly that the school schedule—as it had been designed by Explore teachers—had an “incredible” impact on students' and teachers' experience. When I asked Dan to provide an example of a recent decision that the Explore staff had made collectively, he honed in on establishing the current year's schedule—a project he had managed as one of the school's program coordinators:

One [decision] that stands out is setting the school schedule. As I am the one that puts together the schedule, but, like, [responsible for] seeking out the feedback, I think the impact of being thoughtful about that, and coming together as a staff—like, recognizing how much the schedule, the room schedule actually defines what we do here and how the entire day is built—is incredible. Just to understand, like, “okay, I can put you guys all in classes, but we’re no longer doing projects.” So like, the impact of setting the schedule on the school culture, on the school curriculum as a whole is crazy. It really is.

When pressed for an example of how setting the schedule impacted teachers, Dan continued:

So, back in June, as one of the program coordinators, I was making the schedule for this school year and trying to figure out with the middle school teachers [when] they would be in classes. Right now, they do their core classes in the morning, projects in the afternoon. And there had been some talk to move more towards projects. So, seeking their input about the schedule really drove how much they moved into project time and away from traditional classroom seat time. And that was, I guess, their philosophy behind it and intention. But really, it was the schedule that will drive all that. So we all had input on how the classroom spaces are used, how the day is built. That definitely changes the entire nature of this school. So if they were just told their schedule, but they had no chance at all to change how they operate... But we met in the spring, did a lot of back and forth email over the summer and we met in the fall again, all looking at the schedule with the knowledge of that impact, I think.

Because the schedule determined “the entire nature of this school,” it was important to Dan—and common practice at Explore—to include staff members in scheduling decisions so they would be able to anticipate and weigh in on how changes would fundamentally alter how they spent their time during the school day.

Dan contrasted Explore’s process for determining the schedule with what was common practice in “typical public schools.” Reflecting on the impact of the daily schedule for schools beyond Explore, he said:

It dictates everything. In typical public schools, you have high schoolers starting at like 7:12 because of the bus scheduling. Like the way that impacts their day is gigantic. But I think it's often something that's just relegated to an office person that is just doing pure logistics. We're attempting, we are trying to be very thoughtful with the schedule though... there's some logistics, but we're making sure we're not just dealing with logistics. That it fits with the culture, the intent of this school.

Rather than “doing pure logistics” to determine the school schedule, advisors weighed students’ educational experience above simplification and standardization, ultimately deriving a schedule that reduced advisors’ instructional loads while enhancing their ability to implement a project-based curriculum.

While most advisors I spoke with appreciated the flexibility and learning opportunities afforded by the Explore schedule, the lack of standardization did come with costs. Wendy, a special education case manager, struggled to explain what a “typical week” looked like for her because of her students’ highly individualized schedules:

My kiddos each have a different schedule and I have to keep a binder so that if somebody comes in looking for them, I need to open it up and ideally, I know where they are. Now, there may be a situation and maybe they're out in a group that got pulled away, or maybe they're having a crisis and they're talking with somebody, or maybe they're out wandering or taking a break. It's hard to go through the every-single-day [schedule] because each one of my kids has a different schedule. It's challenging.

For Wendy, individualizing student schedules made it difficult for her to organize her own time supporting students throughout the week. “There's no one day that's the same [as another]... Every day is different. If I think one day is going to be like, ‘Okay, it's pretty smooth,’ chances are something's going to bump that and mess it up a little bit.”

At YLA and HSHR, a more traditional school day by default. Compared to Explore, YLA and HSHR had much more traditional daily schedules. Given their respective institutional contexts, these schools’ teachers had less autonomy than Explore advisors to design the day

around their teaching philosophies, which may have explained why YLA and HSHR teachers were less vocal about the importance of the schedule to their work. That said, each school maintained some degree of scheduling flexibility. Each school's workweek and course schedule is described below, in turn, along with implications for teachers.

The workweek for YLA teachers. As a converted charter school, YLA followed the local teacher's union contract on matters pertaining to work hours and teaching load. The school day at YLA ran from 8:20am-3:10pm and consisted of eight regular class periods, each lasting 48 minutes. Per the contract, teachers were responsible for teaching classes a maximum of 25 periods per week, which most teachers did. Some teacher leaders were relieved of several teaching periods a week to attend to administrative duties. Teachers were granted 5 prep periods per week, 5 periods of professional development time, and a lunch period each day. Teachers had a special schedule on Wednesday mornings, when they met for two hours in Professional Learning Communities—mostly organized by subject—to discuss problems of practice, plan events, and lesson plan. These meetings, as will be discussed in the next chapter, consisted largely of unstructured time for whatever the team deemed pertinent.

As a union matter, determining work hours was outside staff members' control and therefore viewed as nonnegotiable. During the card sort task portion of teacher interviews, many YLA teachers chose to place the "Determining work hours" card in the "Does not apply" pile because it was perceived as given—neither in teachers' nor administrators' domain. For example:

Determining staff compensation, determining work hours: union. End of discussion. (Robert)

And then determining work hours. That was in [the "Does Not Apply"] pile because it's part of the union. Yeah. Which, you know, for better or worse. (Danielle)

As Danielle's comment indicates, belonging to the teacher's union came with benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, it protected teachers from the whims of unsympathetic or unsupportive administrators—a threat that was more hypothetical than realistic, but threatening nonetheless given the official authority vested in the school's management team. While the school was founded on and operated according to principles of teacher involvement in decision-making, there was no guarantee such involvement would be as encouraged in future administrations. On the other hand, being tied to the union contract constrained how the school and its teachers could operate and the kinds of leeway teachers had to do things differently.

The teachers I spoke with either seemed to take their union affiliation for granted or saw it as a positive aspect of the job that brought with it a sense of security and stability. Rachel, who had experienced “contentious issues” at her previous non-unionized charter school, appreciated that the union contract clearly spelled out teachers' rights and responsibilities. As a result of their union affiliation, YLA teachers “don't have abuse around work hours and that kind of thing,” she said.

Arnel agreed that the union was there to protect the teachers, but that sometimes strict regulations around teacher time stifled teacher participation in leadership work. “The freedom to be teacher-led may be restricted in terms of the time spent doing the work,” he told me. For example, when a committee decided to meet after the school day, teachers had to be paid for the extra time—which wasn't always possible given budgetary constraints—and could not be compelled to attend. “The school wants to implement teacher-led stuff, but the union is sometimes restricting it. Teachers are careful about whether we're abiding by the contract.”

There were no union rules specifying that teachers needed to have a consistent daily schedule, so this was one area where YLA staff were able to be more flexible. Unlike most other secondary school schedules, the school day at YLA varied quite dramatically day to day. For

example, one section of Josh’s Earth Science class met during Period 5 on Mondays, Period 7 on Tuesdays and Thursdays (but in different rooms each day), Period 6 on Wednesdays, and Period 3 on Fridays (in a different room still). From an outsider’s perspective, the school’s unusual schedule seemed confusing, but it did not seem to bother students or staff very much.

A combination of teachers and administrators worked together to develop the daily schedule, which multiple teachers and the principal acknowledged was a challenging endeavor in such a small building with so many programs and grade levels. “It’s hard because it’s a small school. We have a certain amount of space and a certain amount of time,” Emily, a secondary ELA teacher and reading specialist, told me. “I don’t envy the people who are doing the schedule, but I think anybody who wanted to be a part of that could be. But probably, people don’t want to be.” The development and implementation of YLA’s unique schedule will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The workweek for HSHR teachers. As a pilot school, HSHR had the autonomy to determine its own schedule. However, the school district required that high school graduation requirements be met through the completion of coursework in specific subject areas, which meant that HSHR teachers did not have the same flexibility that Explore staff had to build the school schedule with anything other than discrete, subject-specific courses.

HSHR founders did choose to operate on a “block” schedule—preferred by many schools across the country for its lengthened class periods and smaller course preparation demands for teachers (Khazzaka, 1997)—instead of a traditional six- or seven-period day. The school day ran from 8:30am to 3:25pm with approximately 100-minute class periods. On Mondays through Thursdays, students attended three academic classes per day plus an hour-long advisory class devoted to community-building and developing students as “empathetic, inquisitive, and thoughtful individuals” (HSHR Pilot School Proposal). Academic classes rotated every other day,

such that students took a total of six classes during a term. To account for slight differences in period lengths, and to ensure no one course got systematically cut short for afternoon special programming, the course sequence changed throughout the week (for example, course “1” meets from 8:30-10:21am on Mondays, but from 12:38-2:14pm on Wednesdays). A basic weekly schedule is shown in Figure 6.2.

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:30	1	4	3	6	1
10:21					2
10:27	2	5	2	5	3
12:03	L	L	L	L	L
12:32					5
12:38	3	6	1	4	6
2:14					
2:20	7	7	7	7	Note: In a week with no school on Monday, we will start with a regular Tuesday (4-5-6-A), Wed (3-2-1-A), & Thurs (6-5-4-A) and Friday will be 1-2-3 with no advisory.
3:25					

Figure 6.2. The daily schedule at HSHR.

Note. Large bolded numbers 1-6 represent individual academic classes, with 7 representing advisory time.

Each year, teachers at HSHR voted to approve their work hours as specified in the Elect to Work Agreement (EWA). Because HSHR was a pilot school, teachers' work hours could exceed what was stipulated in the teachers union's agreement with the school district, but teachers could not be compensated for working extra hours. During the 2016-17 school year, for example, HSHR teachers agreed to arrive at work half an hour before the first bell instead of the 15 minutes required at non-pilot district schools. Additionally, HSHR teachers agreed to hold office hours after school for one hour per week, and to reserve one hour per week before school to meet in grade-level teams. They also agreed to attend a three-day summer retreat. The EWA did not specify when teachers' workday should end, an omission that had prompted some debate among staff and will be explored further in a later section of this chapter. After school, teachers were expected to remain available to students for a period known as "networking." During networking, students would come to teachers' classrooms to complete outstanding assignments, make up exams, or discuss academic or behavioral issues.

Most teachers at HSHR were scheduled to teach during four of the six academic course periods and were responsible for facilitating a 7th period advisory class Monday through Thursday. The remaining two periods were designated as "conference" periods. There were no "prep" periods, *per se*, but in theory, conference periods were unscheduled periods during which teachers could take care of whatever school-related business they needed to attend to. According to the EWA, however, "teachers will make themselves readily available for conference periods in excess of one to fulfill general needs including, but not limited to, doing class coverages, developing in-house PD [professional development], doing classroom observations, fulfilling grade-level needs, and providing teacher support." Like at Explore and at YLA, teachers at HSHR shared many administrative duties (a topic discussed later in this chapter), so conference time was often devoted to completing administrative tasks in addition to course-related work.

Negotiating the Schedule

To varying degrees, teachers at the case study schools had power to change their daily schedules to accommodate a range of personal and professional needs. This section explores several examples of teachers proposing and negotiating different schedules and highlights the mechanisms for making changes as well as the barriers to doing so that arose from each school's particular governance structure and culture.

“Taking good care of each other”: Work hours and schedule adjustments at

Explore. Just as Explore staff prioritized individualization in their teaching and learning, they also individualized the work experience for staff members according to staff member needs and issues that arose. For example, Leah, a middle school advisor and ELA teacher, had worked a four-day workweek for several years in order to care for her young children at home. Leah had presented a proposal to the staff to cut back to 80 percent time and pay, which staff members approved. This past year, because her children were going to be in school full-time, she made a second proposal to return to working full time. Again, staff members voted unanimously to approve the change.

Wendy regarded flexibility around work hours as important to keeping the right people at Explore. In reference to Leah, Wendy said, “There’s a time at the end of the year where we look and listen to all the proposals and read them all, and decide what we can take on. Her being here was super important, so we voted to accept her proposal to come back to full-time. That’s a co-op-type decision if we need to alter our schedules.”

In talking with Leah about this shift in her work hours, she understood how exceptional this practice was in the context of K-12 teaching. “Where else does that happen?” she asked, rhetorically. “That’s so rare. Those kinds of things are pretty magical about working in a cooperative... [The staff] could have said no, but I wrote up a proposal.” For Leah, the staff’s

approval of her requests—first to work part-time and then to return to full-time—signaled to her that her colleagues cared about her being there and cared to see her personal needs being met. “That part of being in a co-op is so amazing. We take really good care of each other.”

Another way in which the Explore staff had customized their colleagues’ workloads was by creating hybrid positions for advisors who also wanted to do grant-funded consulting work around project-based learning and teacher leadership. “I don’t think we want anyone to feel that they can’t ask or can’t change their job to be something great, or to be what they think is great,” said Harriet, Explore’s middle school math teacher.

Other changes to advisors’ workloads and teaching assignments were driven by student learning needs. Recognizing that the school’s younger students—and students newer to the school—struggled more with appropriate use of independent project work time, staff members voted a few years back to have middle school students attend more discrete classes during the day. Similarly, after trialing a project-based math program, advisors felt that teaching the state math standards would require a more standardized, sequential program. Staff members voted to adopt math classes accordingly. Harriet endorsed the shift and voted for it—but also recognized that it would increase her teaching load, a change she did not necessarily like. In describing her own teaching schedule, Harriet said, “Mine looks so traditional now. I’m not as excited about that.” She admitted that the transition from project-based to a more traditional math curriculum was “partially my own fault,” but accepted the consequences with the belief that it would support student learning.

Ann attributed the flexibility around scheduling to the school’s shared leadership model. “I love the fact that this is a flat, efficient organization and when we want to make change, we can make change quite quickly, as long as it’s not cost-prohibitive or something like that.” Ann shared an example of a time when flexibility around scheduling impacted her personally:

My biology class was way too big and the kids in there weren't getting along, there were a lot of issues. And so we went out... on a Friday night and we had this discussion and there was another staff member who had just been hired and was licensed in biology... And he said, "I can take the class." And so by Monday, we divided my class, and it was much more smooth sailing. So we each had twenty two or twenty kids or something like that. And we were able to decide that and make that happen as a group. We talked about it on a Friday night, and we met on Monday and made it happen.

In regards to the impact of the change, Ann said, "it was better for the students, it was better for me, it was better for the other staff, and the staff agreed, so that's an example of how we can make change quickly and efficiently and I like that part too."

A "malleable" scheduling system at YLA. As mentioned previously, scheduling at YLA was especially challenging given the small size of the building, the need to program for 14 grade levels, and the breadth of course offerings provided. To ensure that the school could continue to provide "programming for a big school," in principal Lori's words, the staff had developed a scheduling system that would maximize staff flexibility and use of space at the expense of day-to-day consistency (see the description of Josh's Earth Science schedule in the previous section).

Robert, the physics teacher and in-house IT consultant, designed software that would allow YLA staff to schedule classes in such a creative and irregular way³⁰. According to Robert:

We needed great flexibility in where and when classes would meet and that needed to vary throughout the year. So, in order to facilitate that I simply designed something based not so much on courses and classes and five days a week but rather on an event, in computer or software design terms. I decided an event was a place, some students, a teacher or more, and a time and a date. And, that could be simply put anywhere. The event itself could be academic, it could be teacher prep, it could be anything. Just an event. So, that was what was necessary, and it allowed us as faculty and the teachers running our own school, it allowed us to actually feel free to move things around.

³⁰ Robert acknowledged that there were now commercially available programs that worked similarly, but that they had not been around when the school had needed it—so he created one himself.

He gave a hypothetical example of how the scheduling software worked from the perspective of students:

All right. I might have a class of something called, let's say, "Global Lab." And, it unfortunately can't meet in the same room every day because various rooms are used for various other things. At the same time, it also might have a different teacher one of the days because one of the teachers was not available. And, there might be a different complement of students in it each day. But here, we can now put on a student schedule "Global Lab" and you know that you're supposed to go to this room at this time and this is who your teacher will be in that particular location. The next day it may say "Global Lab" but maybe a different hour. Different teacher, different room. It could be something like that, and the student will know from their schedule.

One major implication of the "event" approach to scheduling described here was that teachers had more flexibility to take part in leadership work because they did not necessarily have to teach a given class every day of the week.

To Robert, designing the scheduling software was just one example of how he had been involved as a teacher in creating school-wide systems to support flexibility and adaptability at YLA:

I have also, from the start almost, involved myself in maintaining, designing, and preparing our data recollection and recording systems, ID cards, transcripts, things along those lines, scheduling programming, because of the way we do things here. I think I mentioned to you once before, pretty much we haven't ever done the same thing twice one year after the other. So, all of this needs to be malleable and changeable.

Robert's experience building these various systems reflected a school culture in which teachers were encouraged and expected to be involved in problem-solving. In the case of the scheduling software, Robert's efforts had facilitated the problem-solving process itself, making it more efficient to make scheduling changes when the need arose.

In part due to the flexibility afforded by the scheduling software and the corresponding culture of adaptability, YLA teachers had considerable sway in proposing, advocating for, and

enacting changes to the school schedule and the human resources needed to support that schedule. “We all have a say in scheduling things,” Emily said, “although it’s usually brought to a group of people first and [we have to] check in with people before finalizing plans. In terms of the schedule, everybody is allowed to make recommendations and suggestions and requests.” For example, Emily had recently been involved in the expansion of a “Writer’s Workshop” program. Emily and her language arts colleagues had identified a need to provide more intensive, one-on-one writing support to struggling students, which had not been possible under the previous class schedule. She and her colleagues worked with school administrators to have more time and personnel devoted to conferencing with individual students about their writing. “We really pushed to increase Writer’s Workshop. We said, ‘This is what we want to do. This is the support we need.’” The language arts teachers’ efforts paid off: “Then, we just kept getting people,” Emily said, referring to the resulting staffing changes made to accommodate the program. Now, twice a week, Emily pushes into eighth and tenth grade language arts classes to work one-on-one with students on their writing. According to Emily, such changes to individual staff members’ positions and schedules was not uncommon, and were often initiated by teachers themselves. “In terms of positions, I think there’s a lot of opportunity for people to individually propose what it is they want to do. There’s been different scheduling adjustments made, then there’s room for more people.”

For Henri, the opportunity to advocate for a particular schedule extended beyond academic concerns into a more personal domain. He had found that “politicking” for a good schedule with administrators had helped him “get an easier Friday” in previous years so he could spend time preparing a home-cooked meal for his colleagues. In reference to setting the school schedule, Henri acknowledged that the School Management Team (SMT) ultimately decided the schedule, but that he had some sway in their decision:

Henri: Because I have close relations with certain people, I've been able to voice about what I want, whereas people don't have it in them [to say], "Oh no, I don't want to work on this day" ...I've always been able—in the past two years before this—I've been able to tell them, "I want an easier Friday. Can you please help me out, get me an easier Friday?" Because traditionally, what I used to do is, I used to cook for my co-workers on Friday. So right before lunch, I would prep the food for my coworkers and then during our lunch break, we would eat at my house. It was like a home-cooked meal... I've always fought for that, like, "Hey, can you?" Because of my complicated teaching schedule, this year they couldn't do it for me. That's what I'm saying, sometimes it helps if you're willing to, or if you know how to politic... If you voice it, sometimes you'll get it. Sometimes all it is is just asking.

Sara: But that hasn't happened this year?

Henri: It couldn't. But then they try to compensate me on a Tuesday and a Thursday. I've always wanted freer Fridays. But when they set the schedule [this year], they're like, "We're sorry, couldn't do that, but we freed up your Tuesdays and Thursdays a bit more," where in the past my Tuesdays and Thursdays were probably a bit more compact. You know, what are you going to do?

Henri admitted that his ability and willingness to "politic"—which, he had previously attested, was a skill he had learned while a student at YLA—was not something shared by all staff members, but that it had worked more often than not in improving his schedule when possible. This year, Henri's "complicated" teaching schedule meant that his Friday home-cooked meals would not be possible, but he trusted that administrators had taken his request into consideration. Emily also voiced this kind of faith in administrators to set the schedule in such a way that honored requests while balancing pragmatic and academic constraints. "In terms of what happens during what periods, they do what they can do. It's complicated because it's a crowded building."

Mission-driven scheduling at HSHR. Teachers spoke much less at HSHR than at the other two schools about their involvement in setting the school schedule or times they had proposed or effected changes to it. In theory, teachers had a voice in setting the school schedule through teacher representation on the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), though ultimately decisions about the school's scheduling "matrix" fell on the shoulders of administrators.

Principal Miguel often heard proposals from teachers about how to use staff's limited time and resources. He had worked to establish what he referred to as a "culture of yes" around such requests, ensuring staff members' reasonable suggestions were heard while communicating pragmatic constraints or opportunity costs to making changes (more on this in Chapter 8).

What was made abundantly clear in interviews with Miguel and his team of teachers was that, barring legal and pragmatic constraints, decisions about use of staff time were always evaluated in relation to the school's mission and "moral imperative" to help HSHR students self-actualize in the face of substantial barriers. In responding to staff concerns about time pressure, Miguel appealed to staff members' morality and commitment to the school explicitly:

People often want to do the least amount possible because they're tired and they have lives and so you have to keep redefining, well, "what's your moral imperative? Do what is morally imperative to you. If this is not it, then go somewhere else where it is." Without shutting people down, just saying, "make sure you're living the way you need to live. If this isn't it then go somewhere that is."

The implication of Miguel's "moral imperative" retort was that he expected his teachers to do much more than would typically be expected of teachers, just as he did much more as a principal than is typically expected of principals (for example, teaching HSHR's mentoring class, "adopting" students in need of additional support, speaking at various professional and community events, and spending one-on-one time with a particular staff member whose Love Language was "quality time").

Most staff members I spoke with were compelled by the "moral imperative" argument—a finding that will be explored in greater detail in the discussion of teacher hiring in Chapter 8. Natalie, an 11th grade social studies teacher, justified the school's culture of urgency in moral terms:

There's definitely a sense of urgency that our kids, they don't have any time to waste, because they're coming to us so far behind as it is. And so it's our, I think, definitely a sense of moral obligation to push ourselves to push our kids. It's so easy to let them hang back and settle where they are.

Similarly, Joe, who taught 12th grade social studies and took on numerous additional responsibilities as an Assistant Principal, often overextended himself but did so out of his own "personal value system." When I asked him how he managed his many responsibilities, he replied:

Poorly... I have lots of lists and things like that, but it's—we've always wanted to, kind of, more formally outline what I do, but then that takes time, and I'd rather spend that time doing the things I have to do. I think if we had someone in this position who wasn't on the design team, didn't believe strongly in the vision, which is, kind of, taking a job because they wanted to be at a school and get the school hours and the summer off and those things, minus the teaching, I think they wouldn't be doing the same job I'm doing. I think just out of my own personal value system I do what I do. I think that's almost across the board here. Counselors do more than what a counselor normally does. Our office staff do more than what office staff normally do. Not out of any directive, but out of their own personal belief in the school.

Whether motivated by a "moral imperative," "moral obligation," "personal value system," or "personal belief in the school," staff members generally bought into the culture of urgency and sacrifice that seemed to permeate the school and guide their use of time.

A natural consequence of the culture of "doing more" at HSHR was that teachers felt their jobs were not sustainable. This came up in several interviews. For example, when I asked Cayo, a 12th grade social studies teacher, about challenges he faced as a teacher at HSHR, he said, "More than anything, sustainability. Sustainability is the issue, which has me really reflecting on that next era of what it's going to be, because it's not sustainable." In addition to his full teaching load at HSHR, Cayo voluntarily led a Poetic Justice seminar during the lunch hour (which I had observed the day of our interview) and was heavily involved in activism and organizing to promote Ethnic Studies curriculum in the school district and state. "It's probably on me," Cayo

acknowledged, considering these efforts were voluntary. However, they were also encouraged by the school's culture:

It's just complex because the cultural elements, what we do, what I just did at lunchtime, right? [It was] voluntary—because I wanted to [teach Poetic Justice] during my lunchtime. It's a very cultural element of our school and it's really important, but then—I guess my bottom line, I love doing all the extra stuff and like being here off the side and doing after-school stuff. I love it all, but I think what would make it sustainable for me in that next era would be, like, teaching my classes, being able to support students outside of that, but then also doing my university work, Ph.D. work. Whatever it may be. My organizing work. To be able to have time for all of it because right now, there just doesn't seem like there's enough time for everything.

Somewhat ironically, it was Cayo's commitment to the very values undergirding HSHR's mission as a school—social justice, equity, and youth empowerment, to name several—that compelled him to take on volunteer projects that ate away at his time and energy. In a way, he was doing exactly what the school asked of him in terms of values-alignment and self-sacrifice, but he knew he could not sustain his current level of commitment.

Natalie also cited lack of job sustainability as a “huge issue” at HSHR. While she was able to dedicate long hours and weekends to the job, she recognized that not everyone could be reasonably expected to do so depending on their particular personal situation:

I think the time commitment, sustainability is a huge issue here. I've been vocal about this. On a staff of 29, there are four that have children. And three of them are male that are married males. So, that says something about the demographics of our school. Could I do this if I had kids? Could I do this if I was a single mother with kids? Could I stay here until 8:00pm last night, and probably again tonight? Probably not. There's a quality of life issue there. Does it mean that I'm less dedicated? No, but there's definitely a luxury. There's a privilege that I have that I can go on the college trip for three days, 72 hours, because I don't have to worry about a babysitter, or being away from my kids, or missing a dance recital. I don't know that it's sustainable in that sense.

Implied in Natalie's statement is that the workload expected of HSHR teachers effectively limits the school's ability to attract and retain staff members of certain “demographic” profiles, such as those with dependent family members. While Natalie does not seem to regret or resent the hard

work she puts into her job, she acknowledges that her personal circumstances—not dedication alone—allow her to maintain such a high level of involvement.

James, the school’s instructional coach, felt that the school’s work hours represented “an area of contention” for staff members. As mentioned earlier, the school’s EWA did not state when teachers’ official workday ended, leaving staff members to interpret for themselves when it was appropriate to leave for the day. As someone who straddled both the teaching and administrative domains of school life, having worked closely with all grade-level and subject-area teams as well as the ILT, James had a unique vantage point from which to understand competing perspectives on this issue. To James, the contention surrounding work hours exemplified a long-held “cultural tradition” of essentially boundless work guided first and foremost by the mission and vision of the school. James explained:

I think one of the things that I’ve noticed here is that there’s a strong, cultural tradition around some things... The school has a cultural identity that precedes its existence as a school from the time that the six founding teachers were working together as teachers in the small learning community at North Valley High School. Some of the traditions kind of hearken back to those days and we’ve heard some teachers this year share frustration about some of the aspects of their job expectations and asking questions I think really just haven’t been asked. Sort of just the question of, what time does the day end? You know, if the school day ends, if they don’t have red stamps to clear³¹ and their kids go at 3:25, can they leave at 3:25 or they need to stay until 3:45? And some of those questions have been met with—instead of the response being, “Well the contract says,” the response has been framed around, “Well our vision for the school is blah, blah, blah.” Both are important. In my opinion, both are important. Sure, we have a vision for who we want to be as a school and what supports kids need, and at the same time, there’s “what’s the contract and what does it say?”

³¹ HSHR had a “red stamp” system used to hold students accountable for their behavior, attendance, and assignment completion. A student with a red stamp in their planner would be required to attend a particular teacher’s office hours after school. Depending on the source of the stamp, teachers “cleared” stamps at office hours upon conferring with the student or confirming the completion of assignments.

Having a clearly established end to the workday could make teachers' jobs at HSHR more sustainable by establishing a contractually-sanctioned workload limit. However, a formal end to the workday would potentially come at the cost of teachers being less able or willing to provide the kind of support to students and families that the founding team of teachers had envisioned in starting the school. The existing tradition of relentless effort at any cost—being that it was essentially what was practiced and preached by the founders and leaders of the school—would persist so long as questions such as “when does the workday end?” remained unresolved.

A “different kind of tired.” Despite the heavy workload that HSHR teachers took on, they generally felt that the work they did was important and impactful. In particular, teachers who had taught elsewhere before coming to HSHR recognized that the time and effort they expended at HSHR was worth it. “We do it ‘cause we love it, and it’s just, it’s hard, but it’s good,” Cayo said. To Joe, who admitted to struggling with balancing his many responsibilities at work while raising two young children, work at HSHR made him “a different kind of tired”—words he had borrowed from a presentation given by Principal Miguel—from what he had experienced as a teacher at North Valley High School:

Teaching is just a tiring job. I was tired from doing the hard work of teaching [at North Valley], but I was a little extra tired from fighting the people around me, so I could take that energy and rechannel it into what we were doing here. I’m doing the same amount of work. I’m the same amount of tired, but like [Miguel] said, it’s just a different kind of tired.

Now that Joe is surrounded by a community of staff members who share a mission and vision and work in alignment toward that vision, he experienced less frustration and more efficacy than he had when he had felt he needed to fight against colleagues and administrators rather than working alongside them toward common goals.

Sharing Administrative Work

As teachers running their teacher-powered schools, the teachers I spoke with spent a great deal of time on non-teaching tasks and responsibilities. This section explores how teachers at all three schools shared administrative duties and the implications for teachers' workloads and experiences. At Explore and HSHR, teachers were expected to take on administrative duties as part of their work agreements. At YLA, many teachers opted to take on additional responsibilities for extra pay, while others were appointed or elected to leadership roles. In all three cases, schools had processes in place to identify administrative needs and to assign staff members to fulfill them in ways that honored individual preferences, skill sets, and availability.

Rotating roles at Explore. Because Explore had no full-time school leaders, all administrative tasks were shared—and there was ample work to go around. Staff had access to a “super big Google doc”—in Molly’s words—that listed all the various administrative duties, committee roles, and who did what. For example, Molly managed the school’s library exchange program with the local university and coordinated the student teaching program. Leah sat on the school board and the child study team. Andrew was a PLC coordinator, supporting the school’s professional learning communities (PLCs) and also the “Incident Commander,” managing and documenting fire drills and other emergency response protocols. Matt coordinated the school’s alumni database, communicating with and keeping track of the school’s alumni, and served on the Community Connections committee, which was charged with exploring and establishing partnerships with various community organizations. Over time, some administrative roles that had fallen under the job description of Explore’s part-time program coordinators have been removed from the list since those individuals have dedicated time for those functions, such as testing, technology, enrollment, and various compliance tasks.

Variety in staff schedules—and flexibility around who did what—helped to ensure teachers at Explore were not burning out. At annual staff evaluation meetings, staff members had an opportunity to reflect on their “co-op” duties (non-teaching, non-advising duties) and voice preferences regarding roles for the next year. According to Molly:

Administrative tasks are not all created equal, and some of them are more time consuming and some of them are more energy consuming. So, they [staff members] have done a pretty good job of—at those evaluation meetings—part of it is, like, what do you want to keep on your plate, and what are you ready to give up? Like really being good to each other. Especially testing has been one that has really rotated around and now it’s a paid position. Like, “I’m done. It has sucked my soul. I’m ready to give it to somebody else,” and then somebody else being like, “Okay, I got that.”

Leah had a similar experience with serving on the school’s board:

The middle school was just Samantha and I for years... So, she and I talked about one of us should be on the board and one of us should be on [the] personnel [committee] at the beginning. The board was so not interesting to me at all, not even a little bit, but it was quite interesting to her, so she was on the board forever, and I was on personnel for eight years or something like that. We both were feeling kind of burnt out with those roles, and then the staff was a lot bigger and the middle school was a lot bigger, and so then, three years ago, I was feeling like, “I need a new way to think and a new role.” There was a board opening and so I thought I would try. My term is just about up and I think I’m going to leave the board, because, after the three years, I’ve enjoyed it, but I don’t feel like I’m able to give all of what I can give to the school via the board.

Thoughtfully rotating staff roles in this way helped to ensure that staff members would continue to be engaged in co-op work and have opportunities to try out new leadership roles. This process was formally built into the annual staff evaluation process, which created space for staff to reflect on roles, leave some behind, and opt into new ones (more on evaluation in Chapter 7).

Two staff members I spoke with also spent one day per week off campus. The school received grant funding so that Amanda—one of the school’s program coordinators—could provide technical support at a nearby under-performing charter school. Two other teachers, including Molly, were also externally funded one day per week to administer a grant program for

aspiring teacher-powered schools. These experiences provided Explore teachers with opportunities to contribute to public education in different ways and to be reenergized from the daily demands at school. Amanda explained, “I will definitely always make time for talking to other schools, because it’s an energizer. Or even a researcher, for sure. This is energizing. It’s like, ‘Oh, there is a purpose!’”

Whether by interfacing with external schools and organizations, or by collaborating with internal colleagues on committee or board initiatives, all the Explore teachers I spoke with had multiple roles within the school and considerable flexibility in managing their time to complete those roles. While not all roles were “created equal,” they were generally viewed by staff members as either necessary to the school’s success or energizing ways of developing staff members’ leadership. Rotating roles made particularly onerous and time-consuming ones more palatable, and the job more sustainable.

A “menu” of leadership roles at YLA. At YLA, teachers were not necessarily bound by contract to assume leadership roles or other non-teaching duties, but they were encouraged to take on a range of leadership roles at the school. There were elected and appointed teachers on the Board of Trustees, as well as teacher representatives on the school’s Collaborative Governance Council, described in Chapter 4. Each year, a “menu” of teacher leadership roles was published and circulated by the SMT. These roles included subject-area PLC coaches and grade cluster³² teaching and learning coordinators. Teachers submitted applications for these roles, and SMT members reviewed them and made final selections.

³² YLA had three grade-level “clusters”: Cluster 1 (elementary) included grades K-5, Cluster 2 (middle school) included grades 6-8, and Cluster 3 (high school) included grades 9-12.

Some teacher leaders received stipends or course load reductions so they could devote time to leadership work. For example, Arnel was released for 2 out of his 25 periods a week to fulfill his responsibilities as a middle school cluster “teaching and learning” co-coordinator. Josh taught only 10 periods a week so he could devote time to coordinating and training the PLC coaches and serving as the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) administrator—a role that was likened to an assistant principal.

The opportunity to apply for teacher leadership roles was attractive to several teachers I spoke with, particularly those who were younger and did not have substantial family commitments. Henri, for example, was “gung ho” about taking on leadership roles at YLA, and held multiple—he was simultaneously co-coordinator of student government, PLC coach for the special education department, and PLC coach for the high school humanities teachers.

I think [administration] just saw that I was gung ho about everything. If you ask me to do something, I will do it. If you ask me to do a Saturday tutoring class, I would do it. If you wanted me to go with the kids to DC as a chaperone, I would do it. Whatever needs to be done, I was just that guy who said, ‘Yeah, I’ll do it.’

Henri recognized that his capacity to take on leadership roles rested on his not having substantial obligations in his personal life. “It definitely helps that I don’t have kids, I don’t have pets. Most of the duration of being here at the school I was also single, so I never really had a true obligation outside of work.”

Emily, also a younger teacher, saw applying to be a middle school cluster co-coordinator (a role she shared with Arnel) to be a natural extension of her previous role as advisor to the middle school student council. “My second year teaching, I started doing the middle school student council [advising] and so... the first two years I was doing that, I was increasingly becoming a more active participant in the middle school cluster and doing more things. I was like, ‘Oh, I really like doing all this, so I should continue—and why not try to do this [other]

position?” For Emily, although the co-coordinator position was “a lot of extra work,” it was a way for her to try something new that was both interesting to her and that built on her prior leadership experience.

For Nathan, who had three young children, it was difficult to weigh the financial benefit of taking on a teacher leader role against the substantial time commitment. Nathan was both a PLC coach for the science department and a teaching and learning co-coordinator for the high school, roles that came with stipends but also significant responsibility outside his regular teaching load:

I teach 25 periods a week, so I teach the contractual amount of periods. Having three little kids at home... I'm very reticent [sic] to stay late and do all the extra things that, like, younger teachers are expected to do. At the same time, it is really hard, because my co-coordinator also teaches 23 periods [and] also has a little kid at home. We sometimes have a very hard time catching each other to communicate and be on the same page... Sometimes, that makes things fall by the wayside. I think that's one of the problems being a teacher-led school, because if this is kind of an extra thing—ok, I get paid like \$3,000 to do it, but it's not a ton of money, right? I get paid enough that it's not *not* worth my while, but not that it's like this is my, you know [primary role]. So, a lot of times it's very hard because [my co-coordinator] and I will have an idea or something, but neither one of us has the time to do [it].

Because his teacher leadership work was an “extra thing” to his regular teaching responsibilities and home obligations, Nathan struggled to make time for it, even though it was ultimately “worth his while” financially.

Continuing on the subject of time constraints as a teacher and teacher leader, Nathan expressed some frustration with how the school's identity as “teacher-led” conflicted with the reality of having designated full-time administrators and teachers with full (or nearly full) teaching loads:

There's just more things that have to be coordinated—theoretically—than there is time to coordinate them. A lot of times the School Management Team doesn't want to step in to fill that role. Because they'll say, 'well this is a teacher-led school,' like, 'teachers, we want you to do this.' That's like—it sounds great, but sometimes it's like, 'No. I want *you* to do it.' Like, 'You get paid \$150,000; I make \$70,000. Like, *you* do this.' Then they are quick to offer support, they are quick to offer, 'where do you need support?' on something, but sometimes there's no time to communicate.

What Nathan highlights here is that even when administrators were supportive of teacher leaders and actively sought to involve teachers in leadership work, time still served as a major barrier for teachers who were not provided adequate course-load reductions. The salary differential that Nathan references also conveys his perception of injustice that the SMT encouraged and expected teachers to do work that would normally have fallen on administrators' shoulders in more traditional school settings without a commensurate increase in pay.

“Drafting duties” at HSHR. As part of the EWA, teachers at HSHR committed to taking part in several non-instructional job functions, including chaperoning student events (30 hours per year), attending hiring interviews (at least two per year), and participating in the school's “Logic Model”—a method of distributing leadership roles and responsibilities across the faculty. Specifically, the EWA stated that “teachers will participate in the creation of the Logic Model and will choose jobs and responsibilities based on the needs determined by the team of teachers.”

Natalie played a major role in developing the process used by HSHR faculty to assign “ad hoc” roles and responsibilities, borrowed in large part from the process she had used at a previous school:

One of the sub-committees that I'm on is actually a distributed leadership model that we're working on. We started it last year. So it came from this idea—at my old school we used to have what we called a “draft.” And so every summer, we would project [on a screen] all the *ad hoc* duties—all the responsibilities that needed to happen to make our school run, because we only had one administrator, too... We had all of our names up there, and we would just literally [say], “Okay, I'll take this one.” “Okay, this one requires more hours.” “Okay, well what about that?” So that was the idea that I had. [Another HSHR teacher] helped me put it into a visual. So we had what we called Tier One jobs, Tier Two jobs, [and] Tier Three jobs... So we started it, presented it at our retreat.

The new system not only gave teachers the opportunity to voice their preferences for what roles they would be interested in taking on, but it also encouraged an equitable distribution of responsibilities through a “tiered” system. Natalie continued, “There were a lot of questions and a lot of debate about ‘What do *you* consider a Tier One job versus what [do] *I* consider a Tier One [job]?’” Eventually, the staff came to a consensus, and in the process learned more about various jobs and the time commitment involved to complete them. In reference to the process itself, Natalie acknowledged that it was “really time-intensive, but it's only once a semester.”

One benefit to the job “drafting” process was that it made previously unrecognized or underappreciated tasks visible to the entire faculty. This was seen as an important way to counteract resentment between staff members:

So the idea was to dispel the resentment that I think festers a lot, and I do think there is a lot of resentment here amongst people. “You don't do as much as I do.” I think there's a lot that's unseen. I think we talk and we try really hard to be humane with each other and compassionate and have positive assumptions. It's much harder to do when you're exhausted and you don't see what the other person has done or is going through, or you feel like they're not pulling their weight.

By making previously invisible jobs visible, and by creating a public forum where responsibilities were clearly defined and negotiated, the distributed leadership model—though still in its infancy—promised greater mutual accountability and fewer hard feelings. Still, with much work to go around, “pulling one's weight” required significant time and energy.

Summary. Across the three case study sites, teachers and administrators developed procedures and norms around sharing administrative (non-teaching) responsibilities which diversified—and often expanded—their workloads. At Explore and HSHR, non-teaching duties were built in to teachers’ work agreements; all teachers were expected to contribute time and energy to a variety of duties without the promise of additional pay. In general, teachers seemed to accept this; however, with far fewer course preparations per week, the energy burden to Explore advisors was arguably less than it was to HSHR teachers. At both schools, teachers had developed a transparent process to list and assign non-teaching duties, giving teachers choice and an awareness of what colleagues had committed to. This facilitated role rotation among advisors at Explore and helped to limit resentment at HSHR. At YLA, teachers who applied and were selected for certain leadership roles received stipends and course load reductions as compensation for their increased workload. Depending on teachers’ capacity to work beyond the official school day, primarily dictated by home obligations, these leadership roles felt more or less manageable.

Survey Findings

This chapter has investigated several aspects of teachers’ workload at the three case study schools: how teachers’ workdays were organized, how they negotiated and built flexibility into their schedules, how they shared leadership and other “*ad hoc*” responsibilities, and the implications of these job characteristics for teacher motivation and burnout. The following section explores both multiple-choice and free-response survey data to understand the extent to which findings from this chapter parallel the experiences of teachers at a broader population of teacher-powered schools.

The teacher workday. There was some variability between the three case study schools in terms of the length of the teacher workday that had both contractual and cultural sources. At Explore, norms around “taking care of each other” meant that the advisor workday varied

depending on both personal and professional factors. At YLA, work hours were set by union contract, but many teachers took on additional responsibilities for extra pay. At HSHR, work hours were contractually open-ended, with no established end to the workday and a cultural expectation that staff members would spend whatever time was necessary to achieve the school's many lofty goals. In general, advisors at Explore spoke less than teachers at the other two schools about the length of the workday being a sustainability issue.

Given that workload is often cited as a barrier or downside to teacher leadership (see, for example, Muijs & Harris, 2003; Wenner & Campbell, 2017), understanding how teachers' workload in teacher-powered schools compares to that in traditional schools is of theoretical interest. One survey item, taken directly from the Schools and Staffing Survey 2011-2012 (SASS 11-12) instrument, asked survey respondents, "Including hours spent during the school day, before and after school, and on the weekends, how many hours do you spend on ALL teaching and other school-related activities during a typical FULL WEEK at THIS school?" As noted in Chapter 4, Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI) respondents worked an average of 51.0 hours per week in comparison to 51.4 hours per week for SASS 11-12 respondents³³. There was considerable variability in TPSI teachers' responses, which ranged from 20 to 100 hours with a standard deviation of 9.2 hours³⁴.

Teaching load. The amount of time during the workday teachers spent teaching classes also varied significantly between the three schools, with Explore advisors instructing much less

³³ The TPSI average work hours reported here (51.0 hours) excludes any teachers who reported working less than 20 hours per week at their school since this was an eligibility criterion for taking the survey. Therefore, this value is likely to overestimate the actual average weekly work hours of TPSI teachers.

³⁴ In comparison, hours worked for SASS 11-12 respondents ranged from 5 to 80 hours with a standard deviation of 10.1 hours (NCES, 2015). These figures do not systematically exclude teachers who worked less than 20 hours per week, as the TPSI figures did.

than teachers at the other two schools. Is having a lighter teaching load—defined as the proportion of the workday spent formally instructing or supervising students—common in TPSI schools? To what extent is there similar variability in teaching load across the larger population of TPSI schools? Survey data suggests that TPSI respondents spent an average of 30.2 hours per week teaching or supervising students, or approximately 60 percent of their total weekly work hours³⁵. Responses varied widely, ranging from 1 hour to 60 hours teaching or supervising students, with a standard deviation of 9.8 hours. Figure 6.3, below, displays a frequency distribution of TPSI respondents' teaching load as a ratio of teaching to work hours. This distribution suggests that the vast majority of TPSI respondents spent over half of their total weekly work time teaching or supervising students, though some teachers spent far less time doing so (presumably due to administrative or other duties).

³⁵ SASS 11-12 figures are similar, with respondents spending an average of 30.0 hours per week instructing students out of an average of 51.4 weekly work hours (also approximately 60 percent). However, the corresponding SASS 11-12 item did not include student supervision as a component of teaching time.

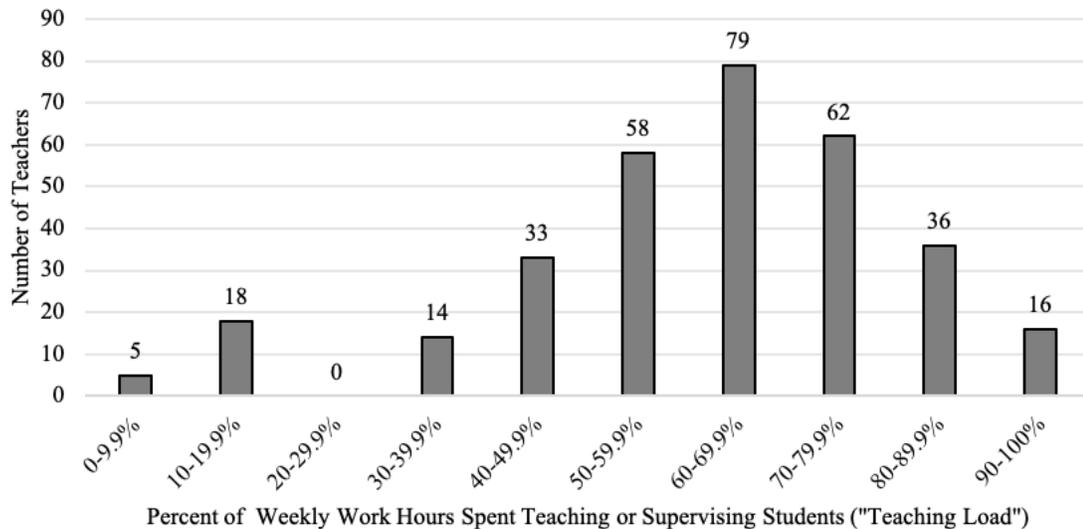


Figure 6.3. Proportion of the workday spent teaching and supervising students.

Note. $n = 321$.

Burnout. Teachers who participate in leadership functions, especially those that carry a full or nearly full teaching load, may be predisposed to suffer from job strain and burnout (see, e.g., Benoliel & Barth, 2017). Stress and exhaustion related to time pressure were present in different degrees among the teachers I spoke with at the three schools. Explore teachers generally talked about burnout as a temporary state they had been able to diminish through group problem-solving (such as Ann splitting a class with a new science teacher, or Leah and Samantha trading off board and committee responsibilities to mitigate burnout). At YLA, few teachers brought up feeling stressed or burnt out, although to Nathan—who had taken on multiple leadership roles and had significant familial obligations—not having enough time was much more of a concern. A common refrain among HSHR teachers was that the job was not sustainable from a workload perspective, but some teachers experienced a “different kind of tired” compared to what they had

felt working in previous schools where teachers were less empowered and less aligned to a common mission. To what extent did TPSI survey participants experience burnout?

As noted in Chapter 4, TPSI respondents were somewhat less likely than SASS 11-12 respondents to experience burnout. Figure 6.4 shows the response distribution for the two populations of teachers on three survey items relating to burnout. Twenty-six percent of TPSI respondents somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement, “I don’t seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching,” compared to 42 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents. Ten percent of TPSI respondents somewhat or strongly agreed with the item, “The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren’t really worth it,” compared to 22 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents. Finally, 17 percent of TPSI respondents somewhat or strongly agreed with the item, “I think about staying home from school because I’m just too tired to go,” compared to 20 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents. Given other differences in these two populations of teachers, it is impossible to conclude from this data that TPSI teachers are, in fact, less burnt out than their counterparts in more traditional schools, but these figures do appear to contradict the claim that enhanced teacher leadership necessarily implies greater time pressure and the negative emotions commonly associated with it.

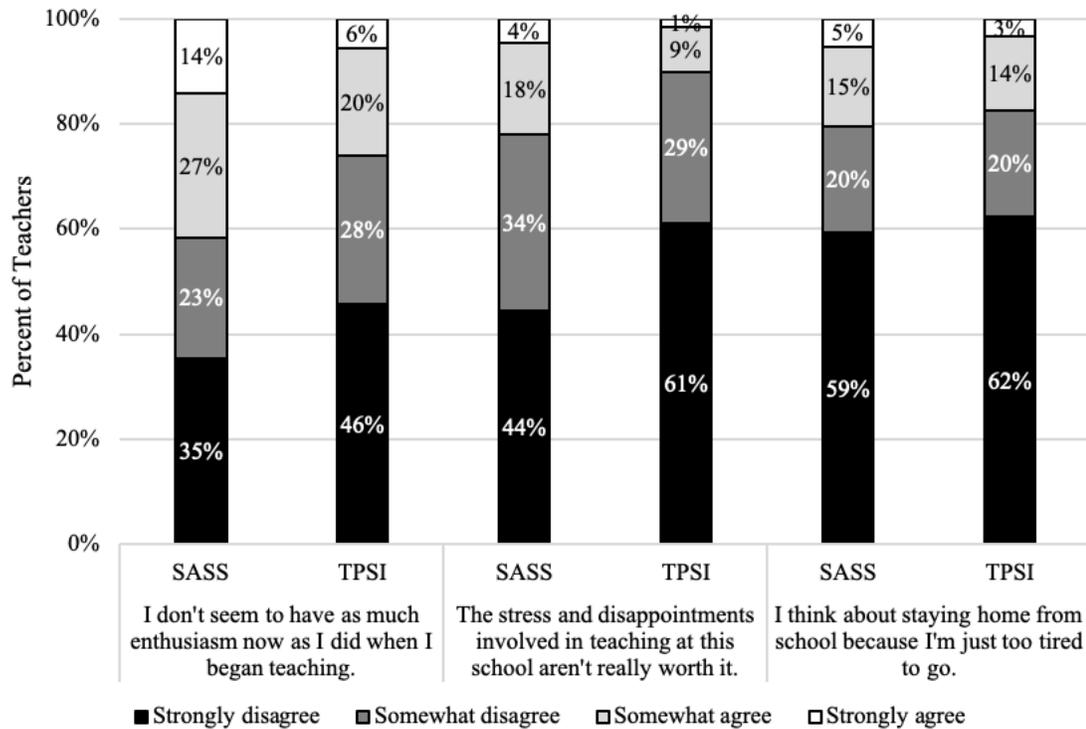


Figure 6.4. Breakdown of responses to burnout items, SASS 11-12 versus TPSI.

Note. $n = 335$ for TPSI respondents. Specific response counts for individual SASS 11-12 survey items were not publicly available. Over 37,000 eligible public school teachers completed the SASS 11-12 survey (Cox, Parmer, Strizek, & Thomas, 2016).

The relationship between teaching load and burnout. Is the relatively lower prevalence of burnout among Explore advisors somehow related to their significantly diminished daily teaching load? An analysis of TPSI respondents' reports of burnout (as measured by the three survey items identified in the preceding paragraph averaged on a four-point scale) in relation to teaching load suggests that these variables are not related; the scatterplot presented in Figure 6.5 shows wide variability in reports of burnout regardless of the proportion of the work week spent teaching or supervising students. However, since *teaching load* as a measure does not distinguish between time spent formally instructing students and time spent coaching or supervising them, this analysis may obscure a possible connection between formal instructional load and burnout.

Explore advisors, for example, spent the vast majority of their workdays “teaching and supervising” students, though they spent far less time “delivering instruction,” the verbiage used in the corresponding SASS 11-12 item.

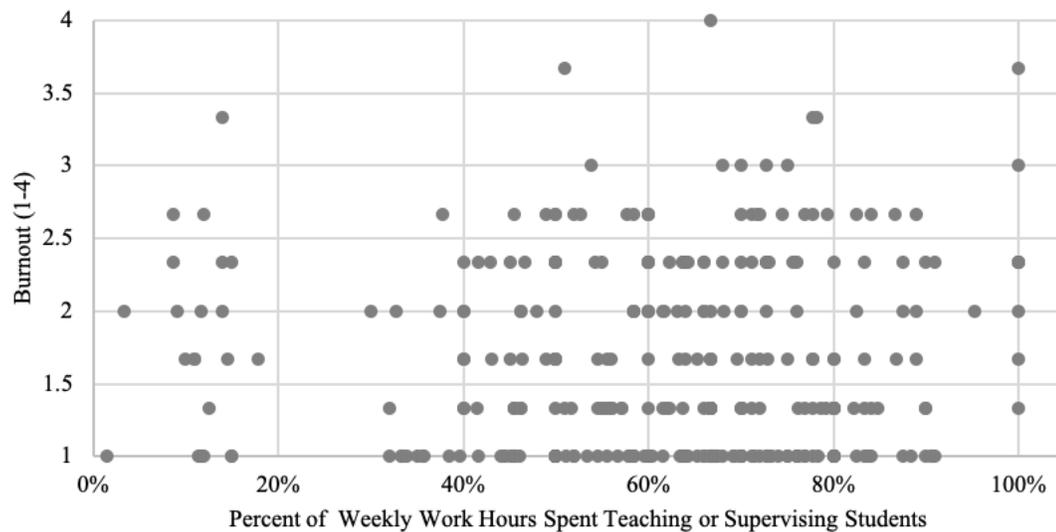


Figure 6.5. Scatterplot of burnout as a function of teaching load.

Note. $n = 321$.

Scheduling autonomy and collective efficacy. Explore advisors had significant influence over the school schedule and argued emphatically that their schedule purposefully promoted the kind of project-based learning they hoped to foster. Teachers at YLA—where scheduling decisions were primarily made by administrators, with input from teachers—felt that scheduling flexibility afforded a broad range of learning experiences (i.e., “programming for a big school”), but refrained from commenting on the impact of the course schedule on their students’ learning and their own ability to help students meet learning goals, as did teachers at HSHR. To what extent, if at all, is teacher CDMA in the area of scheduling related to teachers’ experience of

collective efficacy in a wider population of teacher-powered schools? Since no survey item directly measured teachers' perceived influence over setting the school schedule, school-level information on teacher scheduling autonomy available from the TPSI inventory was used as a proxy for this variable. As seen in Figure 6.6, below, there is very little difference in the perceived collective efficacy (measured on a scale from 1-4) of teachers at schools with and without collective scheduling autonomy. Teachers at schools with collective scheduling autonomy ($n = 315$) reported slightly higher collective efficacy (3.6) than teachers at schools without scheduling autonomy ($n = 20$; 3.5), suggesting that teacher involvement in scheduling decisions does not bear strongly on teachers' beliefs about their ability to effectively teach all students. However, the relatively small sample of teachers at schools without scheduling autonomy limits the robustness and interpretability of this finding, as does the assumption that schools designated as having collective scheduling autonomy by TPSI would be so described by all teachers working within them.

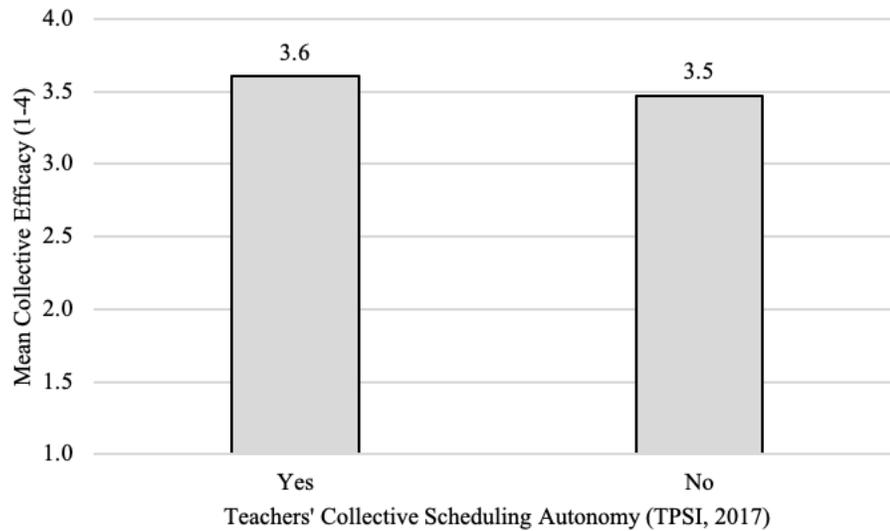


Figure 6.6. Teachers' collective scheduling autonomy and perceived collective efficacy.

Note. $n = 335$.

Free-response evidence. Several themes related to the teacher workday and teachers' experience of time pressure emerged from responses to two free response items on the survey. These items were, first, "Give one or two examples of how working at your current school differs, if at all, from working at your previous school(s)" (for teachers who had responded affirmatively that they had worked previously at another school), and second, "Is there anything else you would like to share about your work as a teacher in a school within the 'Teacher-Powered Schools' inventory?" which all respondents had an opportunity to answer at the end of the survey. Responses to both questions are considered here as they pertain to the topics explored in this chapter. Major themes included *hard but fulfilling work*, *sustainability and burn-out concerns*, and, to a lesser extent, *more flexible daily schedule*, namely at project-based schools.

Hard but fulfilling work. Numerous teachers commented on the fact that their current jobs working in TPSI schools were challenging—but they qualified this statement with a

corresponding statement about their jobs being “fulfilling,” “rewarding,” or even “exhilarating.”

Below are examples of these kinds of responses:

It is a great job—the toughest I’ve ever had but also the most rewarding. My co-workers are incredible people.

Being teacher led has been both difficult and empowering. It is a lot of work for sure. We grow through growing pains and there are many times we need to reassess how things are going. But all in all, we work really well as a school and I think we are stronger because we have so much invested.

Being teacher-powered is a lot of work, but totally worth the autonomies that we get.

Working in a teacher-powered school is an exhausting but exhilarating experience!

Teaching is a damn hard job, but in our teacher-powered school I feel more fulfilled and excited than I ever have in any other professional endeavor.

Our work is very demanding but mostly rewarding.

I get terribly burnt out throughout the year, but I’ve never been more passionate about my work.

This work experience has been incredibly rewarding but equally challenging.

While this is more work, we get to decide on what really matters for the students. We get to make decisions that directly impact our teaching that are not just ‘told to us’ by a principal.

I happen to be the oldest one at this school and I’m tired. This school is amazing and takes a lot of energy to do all that is required of us teachers. It’s been a great experience at this school and I’ve enjoyed most of the time spent here. It’s almost time for my last chapter - retirement.

In nearly all of these examples, teachers’ use of the conjunction “but” signals an acceptance of their heavy workloads and the energy demands of running a teacher-powered school on the grounds that their work is professionally fulfilling. For these teachers, effort has paid off in terms of changes they have worked to bring about or progress they have made with students. In many

ways, these responses parallel Joe’s remark that working at HSHR resulted in “a different kind of tired”—a contented tired.

Sustainability and burnout concerns. The second most common response to open-ended survey questions pertaining to the topics in this chapter was that the work involved in running a teacher-powered school was unsustainable from a time and energy standpoint. For example:

Teacher-powered schools are wonderful but are a great deal of work. There are a lot more hats that I must wear outside of instruction. My only problem with whether I would stay here is being able to balance a more than full-time job with my own family. In the end, my own kids will always come before my students.

I can’t imagine returning to a traditional school after working at [this school]. At the same time, however, burnout is a serious problem. With no administration to act as a buffer from upset parents, advisors take on the brunt of these problems.

At times, I can’t imagine working anywhere else. I love my colleges, students and families. I care deeply about them and the work I do. Teaching children is a magical experience. The staff is a tight knit group, who support each other professionally and personally. However, with the current standards and state pressures, I feel a great deal of pressure. At times this pressure is overwhelming and I wonder how long I can remain in my chosen profession.

Teacher-powered schools are incredible to work in. However, they are often unsustainable. The more work we can put forward toward making teacher-powered schools possible over long periods of time, the more the impact will be.

Love it but it’s a lot of work, late meetings, and wish we had better pay and benefits.

Specific threats to teachers’ sustainability named in these examples include administrative burden, external accountability pressure from the state, and insufficient salary and benefits. As with the examples in the preceding section on “hard but fulfilling work,” these examples all convey conflicted feelings through the use of “but” and “however.” For these teachers, the rewards of working in a teacher-powered school may not outweigh the costs in terms of workload and time away from personal matters. An exception to this theme was one teacher who

commented that “teacher burnout is much lower in our school” compared to “traditionally governed schools.”

More flexible daily schedule at project-based schools. Explore stood out among the three case study schools in terms of its flexible daily schedule characterized by large swaths of time devoted to projects—something advisors felt was instrumental to their success. While not a common response among survey participants, two teachers—both at project-based schools other than Explore—also stated that they felt a major difference between their school and more traditional schools was scheduling flexibility:

There is a more flexible daily schedule at this school and we are encouraged to get the students into the community. The traditional schools I’ve worked at were more rigid in their scheduling and self-contained.

Another main difference is the structure of the day. Working at a project-based school affords us with a huge amount of flexibility when it comes to student learning.

For these teachers, schedule flexibility promotes enriching and student-centered learning opportunities that a more rigid, traditional school day may not afford.

Summary. Overall, survey responses convey a wide range of teacher experiences relative to use of time during the workday and time pressure, mirroring the variability apparent in qualitative findings. Survey data suggests that teachers working in teacher-powered schools do not, in fact, work more hours on average than do teachers in traditional schools. Time spent teaching and supervising students as a proportion of the school day varied considerably, with a “teaching load” making up 60-70 percent of the workday being most common. TPSI respondents reported lower levels of burnout than did their SASS 11-12 counterparts as measured by three survey items. There did not appear to be a relationship between teaching load and burnout. Teachers at TPSI schools with scheduling autonomy—as published by TPSI—reported only slightly higher collective efficacy than teachers at schools without.

Several themes pertaining to this chapter emerged from open-ended survey responses. Most striking was the frequency of responses that conveyed conflicted feelings about workload and teachers' sense of fulfillment in their jobs; many teachers used "but" and "however" to signal either that the benefits of hard work outweighed the costs, or the converse. The final section of this chapter synthesizes case study and survey findings, explores implications for teachers' work and wellbeing, and describes factors that either alleviated or exacerbated teachers' experience of time pressure.

Synthesis

Time pressure resulting from a heavy workload has been shown previously to impede TPV. Teachers in the U.S. frequently feel as though they do not have enough time or energy to carry out their many responsibilities, contributing to immense stress, exhaustion, and burnout. These experiences are buttressed by decades-old, institutionalized norms dictating the nature and intensity of teachers' workloads. This chapter has sought to understand how teachers working in teacher-powered schools leverage their influence over the teacher workday and the implications of such influence (or lack thereof, in some instances) for their professional wellbeing and sustainability.

Teachers had differing levels of influence over the school schedule and workday at the three schools, with Explore teachers having the most involvement and YLA and HSHR teachers having input on the schedule but not the final authority to determine it—which in both cases fell to administrators or administrative teams. At the latter two schools, collective bargaining agreements and district policies restricted what decisions could be made.

Overall, the teachers participating in this study did not report drastically different school days than the average U.S. teacher, with one important exception. At Explore, advisors' workdays differed significantly from that of the average U.S. teacher, with far less time spent teaching and

preparing for courses and far greater unstructured time spent working one-on-one or in small groups in the advisory setting or completing administrative tasks. As an independent charter school with considerable flexibility, Explore advisors could be far more creative with their course schedules and workloads than teachers at the other two schools, which were beholden to union contracts and district expectations delimiting the teacher workday. At YLA and HSHR, the teacher workday was more traditional, with teachers teaching for large portions of the day, though many teachers had time devoted to administrative work. Their schedules were still somewhat unusual; for example, courses took place at different times on different days, whether to afford a more efficient use of space or to make time for teacher leadership work. Survey responses suggest that while most teachers have typical teaching loads, there is quite a bit of variability, with many teachers spending less time teaching and more time on administrative responsibilities, as would be expected in a teacher-powered school.

One commonality between the three case study schools was the flexibility teachers had to propose and carry out changes to their schedules to accommodate both instructional, administrative, and logistical goals. At Explore, changes could be made quickly as a result of having a “flat organization.” At YLA, teacher-designed scheduling software made for a “malleable” schedule that prioritized being able to provide more course options above standardization. One teacher in particular spoke about the political power he had to “negotiate” his schedule to accommodate both personal and professional goals. At HSHR, teachers could propose changes to the schedule, acceptance of which depended on the extent to which they furthered the school’s mission. While the survey did not directly assess the extent of teacher influence over their workday and schedule, a few teachers at project-based schools commented in open-ended responses that a major difference between their current (teacher-powered) schools and their previous schools was that their current schools’ schedules were far more flexible.

At all three case study schools, teachers were not assigned administrative duties but played an active role in selecting administrative roles that appealed to them. Explore and HSHR teachers created systems for tracking and volunteering for duties in a way that seemed fair and transparent. At YLA, teachers were given a “menu” of roles they could apply for and for which they received a small stipend. Given the element of choice, no two teachers’ schedules or work assignments were exactly the same, with some teachers spending far more time on administrative tasks than teaching and some teaching for the majority of the school day. This was also apparent in the wide variability found in survey findings in terms of the proportion of the teacher workday spent teaching.

Implications for teachers. One implication of scheduling autonomy in teacher-powered schools is that it can give teachers a sense that their time has been well-spent. At Explore, teachers viewed their unique schedule as absolutely critical to their ability to run their project-based learning program. Students could focus for long periods of uninterrupted time on large-scale projects, and advisors could meet on an as-needed basis with students requiring their support. This structure supported learning around time-management and other “process skills,” which advisors saw as essential to preparing responsible, productive graduates.

While teachers at the other two schools did not speak emphatically about the connection between the school’s schedule and their ability to do their jobs well, teacher empowerment in the area of scheduling did promote adaptation in response to student needs and interests—such as establishing writer’s workshop at YLA or leading a Poetic Justice class during lunchtime at HSHR. Survey respondents at schools with collective scheduling autonomy reported marginally higher collective efficacy than respondents at schools without teacher decision-making in this area, suggesting that there may be some connection between teacher-driven scheduling and teachers’ confidence they can do their jobs well. There are some limitations to using the TPSI

measure rather than a survey measure of scheduling autonomy since the former is reported in an interview format by a single person.

Analyses revealed some inconsistent findings with respect to teachers' experiences of time pressure and burnout. At Explore, advisors felt that having a flat organization where decisions could be made quickly and efficiently made their jobs easier; when one advisor had too much on her plate, she could share some of her burden with a colleague. The advisory model meant that advisors had four years to build influential relationships with their students, which meant teachers were under less pressure to deliver results on an urgent basis. Flexibility around scheduling meant that teachers could rearrange roles and responsibilities (and even hours) to reduce burnout and "take care" of each other.

In contrast, time pressure was felt more acutely at YLA and HSHR. At YLA, teachers who were responsible for preparing students for rigorous state exams felt an immense amount of stress and resented having to devote teaching time to test preparation, as discussed in Chapter 5. At HSHR more than the other two schools, sustainability was identified as a major problem. There simply were not enough hours in the day to provide the number and intensity of services students required and deserved, and despite their commitment to the school's mission and values, teachers did not feel they could sustain their workload for long. At the same time, teachers did feel that their work time was well spent, experiencing "a different kind of tired" than the exhaustion and frustration some had experienced in previous teaching jobs.

Overall, survey findings suggest that teachers in teacher-powered schools have lower burnout than SASS 2011-12 teachers—a finding that is somewhat surprising given the prevailing sentiment among researchers that teacher leadership comes with a great deal of stress because of the increase in workload (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). One explanation supported by this study is that the relationship between workload and stress is mediated by the

degree to which teachers feel their work makes a difference, a perspective shared by Explore advisor, Molly, who contrasted her current job with previous work in the “traditional system”: “I guess it’s hard work and it’s a lot of work, and it can be frustrating. Like there definitely have been frustrating times but the frustration always feels like you have some control over fixing it, which is very different than the frustrations I felt in the traditional system.”

Enabling factors. Where teachers in teacher-powered schools experienced lower time pressure, what contextual features seemed to allow it? The factor that probably most impacted Explore advisors’ experience of time pressure was their flexible schedule afforded by the project-based curriculum. Especially at the high school level, advisors had significant flexibility to use their time strategically to coach students and attend to administrative duties. This was possible because of state legislation that allowed students to earn high school credit through the completion of projects in lieu of coursework. Additionally, advisors at Explore had a regular process—a weekly staff meeting—by which changes to the schedule and to individual advisors’ workload could be proposed, debated, and approved. This structure meant that scheduling problems that were identified could be addressed quickly without prolonging the stress of affected staff members.

At YLA and HSHR, scheduling changes ultimately hinged on the approval of supportive administrators. Since teacher leadership was a norm at both schools, teachers felt empowered to suggest changes, but did not have the final authority to enact them. Having administrators that respected teachers’ perspectives meant that teachers did not regularly encounter situations in which their proposals went unheard—and generally teachers were understanding that administrators could only do so much.

Constraints. What factors contributed to teachers experiencing greater time pressure? As previous researchers have identified (Au, 2007; Rooney, 2015), preparation for state standardized

tests constrained available instructional time for teachers at YLA. When asked about challenges he had faced in meeting his students' learning goals, Henri said that time was "definitely a factor" and expressed gratitude that he was not responsible for preparing students for a state test:

There's just sometimes not enough time in the world. I'm just lucky because I'm not a teacher with a test in seventh grade. But in my other grades, like in ninth and tenth, especially tenth grade, there is a state exam at the end of the year. This idea that you have to keep on moving forward and if you don't, then you're going to miss out on this or that.

Although YLA teachers had considerable autonomy to design their own curricula, they still had to ensure they had covered content on which students would be tested.

At HSHR, the rigidity of the public school system to which the school was accountable was identified by some teachers as a barrier to making teachers' jobs more sustainable. For example, when I asked Cayo if he had any ideas about policy changes that would allow him to continue to teach while also continuing his advocacy work—which he viewed as a critical component of his ability to further the school's mission—he replied:

Yes, but not necessarily within our current educational system. Even as a pilot school we have our autonomies that we have, but nonetheless, we're still within the bureaucracy of [one of the largest] school district[s] in the country. And so, a lot of stuff still is top down, so I think we do our best to be an adaptive school for our teachers, but nonetheless, some things are very rigid and not adaptive. Not because of our own choice, but because we are a part of that system and so, for me, I've been doing my best to live that life [of teaching and advocacy] for the past couple of years and it hasn't been sustainable because again, of just the different presses and charges and responsibilities.

With the school system being "rigid and not adaptive," Cayo had little faith that things would get better from a sustainability standpoint; what the district expected and what HSHR teachers felt morally obligated to do exceeded the available time and teachers' available energy.

A related factor that undoubtedly influenced teachers' experience of time pressure across the case study schools was the extent to which students required significant academic and non-

academic support. At Explore, where students were somewhat more affluent and therefore more likely to have access to various supports and services outside of school, advisors may have been able to focus more attention on supporting students' academic work than perhaps they would have had more of their students arrived at school without such resources, as at YLA and particularly at HSHR.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how teachers at the three case study schools and at the teacher-powered schools participating in the survey structured and adapted their workdays, as well as the implications of teachers' workloads for teachers' sense of collective efficacy and burnout. Results suggested that teachers in teacher-powered schools do not work appreciably more hours than their peers in traditional schools, and are somewhat less burnt out. However, there was a wide range of experiences among study participants. Explore advisors extolled the benefits of a project-based curriculum that afforded significant flexibility during the day. Most advisors (especially at the high school level) spent only a fraction of their time instructing classes, instead spending most of their time working one-on-one or in small groups with students, coaching them through the project process. Rather than adopting a taken-for-granted six-period day, the staff had constructed a schedule that was purposefully designed to support teaching and learning. In contrast, YLA and HSHR teachers worked within the constraints of a more traditional school day. Even so, all three schools embodied a "culture of 'yes'" whereby teachers and administrators worked together to make scheduling adjustments where desired and where possible.

Chapter 7: “Open-Door” Collegiality: (Un)designing Professional Development

Introduction

The previous chapter described how teachers in teacher-powered schools organized and reorganized their workdays. One consistency across the three case study schools was the purposeful allocation of time for teacher-driven professional development (PD). Rather than being told what and how professional learning should take place, teachers had considerable discretion to identify and address professional learning needs and teaching obstacles as they arose, both at the individual and collective levels. In formal and informal learning spaces, ideas for classroom practice and schoolwide reforms were born, debated, and revised—often making their way to the decision-making table at the school-level. This chapter describes how teacher involvement in individual and collective improvement efforts was structured and practiced in the three schools and how such involvement influenced the kind of professional community teachers developed with their colleagues. It also presents survey data relating teacher influence in the areas of professional development and evaluation to several indicators of professional community.

Typically, academic discourse surrounding teacher PD has centered on instructional improvement as the key outcome. While instructional improvement is undoubtedly one crucial (and perhaps ultimate) outcome of PD, understanding how PD shapes the relational climate of the school is critical to understanding how instructional improvement takes place. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is those relational aspects of professional community—reflective dialogue, collective responsibility, shared norms, and deprivatized practice—in the presence of deep collegial trust, that form the foundation of sustained school improvement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Louis & Kruse, 1995).

Furthermore, to be good at one’s job, and to improve—both individually and collectively—are major sources of satisfaction and motivation to all workers, including teachers.

In other words, ease of improvement is itself a working condition. It is somewhat ironic, then, that so many efforts seem to be aimed at getting teachers to want to improve!

Chapter 2 summarized recurring evidence that teacher isolation from their colleagues limits the degree to which teachers engage in meaningful, learning-directed problem-solving, with negative consequences for teacher professional vitality (TPV). In essence, teacher isolation engenders norms of self-sufficiency, privacy, and non-interference. Instead of seeing their colleagues as trusted sounding boards for their most difficult pedagogical challenges—which we know to be crucial for meaningful professional growth to take place in schools—isolated teachers see others' intrusions as threatening to their professional self-esteem, perpetuating a cycle of stagnancy and distrust.

Next, I will turn to my research corpus to understand how participating Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI) teachers fostered trusting relationships with colleagues and the implications of those relationships for individual and collective improvement efforts as well as TPV. Importantly, collegiality and trust were not omnipresent for the teachers I spoke with, which afforded the opportunity to analyze the factors that seemed to encourage their development and those that inhibited them.

Open-Door by Design: Structures that Deprivatize Practice

There's always been an open-door policy here. (Natalie, HSHR)

We all feel free to walk into each other's rooms at any time. We can observe casually. I'm in most rooms because I go fix things. (Robert, YLA)

I think, when I was younger, I think different teaching approaches seemed threatening to me, or I felt insecure, like, "Oh my gosh, should I be doing what they're doing?" But now that I feel more comfortable about where I'm at, I can see better the strengths of the people around me. That's also part of being in a co-op. (Matt, Explore School)

Teachers at Explore, High School for Human Rights (HSHR), and Young Leaders Academy (YLA) all experienced regular opportunities to observe and interact with their colleagues regarding instructional matters on an informal basis. In some cases, informal observation and feedback conversations happened by virtue of the sharing of classroom spaces, as at Explore School. In other cases, dedicated time each week was set aside for teachers to meet with their colleagues to plan and problem-solve.

Shared advisories and open doors at Explore School. Staff members at Explore were frequently in each others' rooms, catching glimpses of their colleagues' conversations with students or learning activities. Because advisors shared so many administrative responsibilities, and because they had large chunks of flexible time during the day, they moved around a lot—whether to attend a student's project proposal meeting or to ask a colleague for feedback on a draft policy revision.

Many, though not all, advisors at Explore School shared an advisory space with another advisor. This feature not only afforded an efficient use of space in the small school, but it also promoted collaboration and conversation between advisors. As an observer, I had the opportunity to watch how advisors informally “tag teamed” certain conversations with students. For example, Matt, a language arts teacher and high school advisor, shared an advisory room with a science teacher and fellow advisor, Liz. When one of Matt's advisees needed guidance on a project he was working on about the positive aspects of life on the Autism spectrum, Matt asked Liz to weigh in with ideas on how the student might get “unstuck.”

In our interview, Matt talked about how being paired with Liz gave him professional learning opportunities he wouldn't otherwise have:

Because we're paired with somebody, because I'm next to Liz, Liz can give me feedback all the time. One of the ways, actually, that she's helping me, is—I just can observe the way she talks to students. I can observe the way she deals with difficult topics. We were talking about that yesterday.

Matt went on to describe a conversation he had with Liz about addressing student misbehavior:

I said that I needed more feedback from her, because one of the things that she's thinking about is, we would reduce the number of problems in the school if we just took a zero-tolerance approach. If we just had a "you do this, then this happens" [approach], and it was clearly posted, and everybody knew what the consequences were. There's something about me, as a person, but also as an educator, that doesn't really buy that. But she feels about it really strongly, and had used that in raising her own children. Of course, as a person who's raising his own kids, I'm thinking about what she's saying, and I'm like, "Yeah, what do kids need?" She believes that they need boundaries. I just have to think about, so, what does that mean when I'm talking with my advisory? What kind of boundaries are we talking about? That's professional development for me. That's being metacognitive. How am I thinking about the way I approach my work with young people?

Though Matt and Liz did not always agree on a philosophical level, their proximity to each other and ability to engage in conversations such as this one fostered the sharing of perspectives and reflection on professional practice.

Like Matt, Dan felt that sharing an advisory with Jess, a social studies teacher and high school advisor, had helped him to improve how he "checks in" with his advisees:

Jess is a fantastic question-asker. Especially in the advisory about projects and talking deliberately about—like [for example], "Well, when you checked in with the kids, here are the questions you were asking. I would have done this differently." And she has very conscious reasons why she's doing that.

One ritual I witnessed in Dan and Jess' advisory was "Question Wednesday," a mostly lighthearted activity in which advisors and students alike posed thought-provoking or absurd

questions that each member of the advisory would be expected to answer. Dan's advisory had been doing "Question Wednesday" before he paired up with Jess a year and a half ago, but since they started working together, this morning ritual had been refined. When some students were hesitant to participate, Dan said that "[Jess] would bring in things that help build community." For example, some quiet students in the advisory were reluctant to share their answers to more personal questions with the larger group, so Dan and Jess sometimes had a Friday game day so more reticent students could participate more comfortably. According to Dan:

I could recognize that I was having kids that have low buy-in. [Talking about feelings] is not part of their home culture... [They would think,] "so we're just going to talk about our feelings for 20 minutes and then it's group time? Are you kidding me?" So, doing Pictionary or something stupid instead really allowed [students'] different skills to shine, and that brought more kids into the group. That [change] was through conversations with Jess.

Importantly, these conversations between advisors and their outcomes depended on two factors: unstructured time to talk during the school day afforded by the unique schedule at Explore School as described in the previous chapter, and autonomy to make daily adjustments to advisory plans according to advisors' perceptions of student needs.

Not all teachers at Explore were advisors, and not all advisors shared a room with another advisor as Matt and Dan were able to. According to Samantha, for example, who led her own Middle School advisory, "I think a lot of us are isolated. We don't see what other people are doing. We have some really amazing teachers here, but we don't see it as much [as others]." Observation across advisory and classroom spaces did occur as part of a formal teacher coaching process, but not all teachers and advisors had the opportunity to observe their colleagues on a regular basis. "I think it would be really cool," Samantha suggested in our interview, "if we could

create a system where we could all observe each other somehow, which would kind of be a logistical nightmare, but maybe just once a year even, you know?”

“This is relaxed”: **Unsupervised PLC meetings at YLA.** Though teachers at YLA did not have nearly as much unstructured time throughout the school day as advisors at Explore School, they did have significant time dedicated each week to meeting in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) with department colleagues. Every Wednesday morning, YLA students attended elective classes or walked over to the nearby YMCA so that their academic content teachers could meet.

I had the privilege of sitting in on the science PLC meeting the week I visited the school. Five science teachers from the middle and high school grade levels and the elementary science specialist gathered around a table in a windowless basement lab classroom. One teacher brought donuts to share; several others brought their own coffee from the Starbucks nearby. On the agenda for the day’s meeting was a discussion of strategies for teaching science vocabulary. Teachers had come prepared having read two articles about academic language instruction—both selected by members of the science department.

Three things stood out to me about this meeting: first, the passion with which teachers delivered arguments for or against a given strategy for teaching academic vocabulary. There were no midwestern niceties in this meeting! Second, the absence of administrative influence or presence in the structure or content of the meeting. The teachers had prepared the agenda and corresponding materials themselves, unprompted by any administrative demand. Third, the ease and directness with which teachers seemed to fluctuate between mutual disagreement and understanding. While I fully suspect that some of the dynamics I witnessed had much to do with a regional culture in which directness and even interruption were considered appropriate communication norms, it was remarkable to me how open these teachers were with each other,

both about the issues they were having in class and the strategies they felt worked and those that did not.

Though I was unable to observe other subject area PLCs given that they all happened simultaneously, I did have a chance to speak with teachers outside the science department about their PLC experiences. Danielle, a high school English teacher, referred to the teacher-led PLC system as “one of the best things about this school.” Specifically, Danielle appreciated:

the way our PLC meetings work, where we collaborate with one another and we present problems or ideas, or things that we’re working on in our curriculums, and we get the advice of others and we use a SRI [School Reform Initiative] protocol in order to go through a process of unpacking things that are plaguing us or things that we really need to improve our practice about.

Danielle recalled working with the English PLC to refine an assignment rubric for her 10th graders’ thematic essay for *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

We actually went line by line. The English Department looked at each rubric category in tandem with the assignment and saw where there were things, in terms of language that I needed to change, clarify things that were confusing, things that maybe they would have done differently.

Each PLC has a teacher coach tasked with planning PLC meetings and facilitating feedback conversations. Danielle emphasized that the coach’s role was not to “solve the issue,” but rather “to make sure that the problem gets presented in a way so that we can all kind of grapple with it and figure it out.”

Like Danielle, Henri, a middle school special education social studies teacher, felt that PLCs were important settings for teachers to grapple with instructional challenges in the presence of trusted peers:

The professional learning communities, it really gives us a chance to hone our practice and our skills, and it's really a more honest thing. For some of us, we get to check ourselves and just check our teaching. It really helps us determine what could be taught in our classroom.

Henri's description of PLC time as "a more honest thing" that allows teachers to "check ourselves" parallels the kind of professional vulnerability Danielle demonstrated by asking for feedback from the English department.

Robert, a long-time physics teacher, attributes the school's open-door professional culture to these PLC meetings, as indicated by the following exchange I had with him in response to his comment that teachers at YLA "feel free to walk into each other's room at any time":

Sara: What do you think contributes to the staff's sense of that, feeling free to walk into other classrooms...?

Robert: ...What contributes to us, to our feeling that way? I think it's probably the PLC system where we do get together without management, whatever management might be... In the [PLC] room, we're on our own. Nothing leaves that room necessarily. That's kind of a mutually agreed[-upon] thing. Say anything you want. The talk was probably a bit restrained yesterday because you were in the room. That's not a problem, I'm just saying that most likely it usually is. Every once in a while, we will have what you might call "an administrator" in the room and the talk is very different. The talk is very different, especially if that administrator is an administrator who might come in and tell us how to teach.

Though what I had observed in the science PLC did not seem "restrained" at all, as an outsider to the community, my presence—like that of administrators—prevented teachers from "saying anything they want."

To Robert, a former engineer and self-described entrepreneur, the absence of a formal, administratively-imposed agenda in these meetings was what made them so productive:

I like it because it parallels the way I ran my last company. I surrounded myself with a bunch of capable people, very capable people. We could actually go into a room and sit down, no formal meeting, drink some coffee, talk about the weather, stare at each other for a little while, and about a half an hour in we would come up with a solution to the problem 'cause we'd all been thinking about it. We could just share it back and forth. I wasn't the boss. I was an equal there. Everybody was equal. And, we all just kind of sat down and did it and I like that model.

The informal and unsupervised manner in which YLA teachers used PLC time contrasted sharply with Michelle's prior experience as a teacher in a district school, which was "extremely micromanaged to the nth degree." When she first started at YLA that fall after 8 years in the district, Michelle was taken aback by the lack of structure or oversight, thinking to herself, "What the heck is going on? This is a little relaxed." But Michelle had learned to appreciate the flexibility teachers had to make changes and suggestions. "There are opportunities here," she said, "to make a difference in the department... There are no restrictions. That [the administration] is open to all of this is a wonderful, wonderful thing. [The district] is a little more, 'No.' They're afraid of being sued."

At one point, I learned, the school had tried to formalize walk-in teacher observations, which was not well-received by teachers. According to Robert:

The minute you do something like that, it's like Schrödinger's cat³⁶. The minute you do something—it's either dead or alive, right? Okay, and when it's in-between, as long as you don't try to do anything about it formally, things go on the way they are. So, if you walk in casually into a [class]room, pick up a box that you left there, or something like that, that's not something that completely destroys what's going on in the room.

Trust in colleagues and their input on matters of classroom instruction depended on the casualness of impromptu conversations and observations, which proved to be much less threatening than more formal approaches. "People are used to me rummaging around in the back of the room doing something or other and they ignore me which is fine. But, I picked up on what's going on. It's nice to be able to observe that way by having people feel free and feel comfortable with other teachers walking into the room for whatever reason."

Interdisciplinary collaboration at HSHR. Like at YLA, the teachers at HSHR had weekly opportunities to meet in teams. In their case, teams were primarily organized by grade level as opposed to subject area, which facilitated the development of the school's interdisciplinary curriculum. I had the opportunity to sit in on the team meetings of all four grade levels (9th through 12th) during my week-long research residency. While the structure of these hour-long meetings varied somewhat across grade levels, the basic agenda included checking in

³⁶ "Schrödinger's cat" refers to a thought experiment designed by Erwin Schrödinger, an Austrian Physicist and contemporary of Albert Einstein, in 1935. It entails a sealed steel container with a cat, a flask of poison, a tiny amount of radioactive material, and a Geiger counter (a device that measures radioactive decay) inside. If the Geiger counter detects a single atom of radioactive material decaying—which has an approximate likelihood of 50 percent over the span of an hour—the flask shatters and the cat is poisoned. The thought experiment is used to illustrate the interpretation of quantum mechanics that two incompatible realities may exist at the same time; the cat can be said to be both alive and dead simultaneously (see wikipedia.org article entitled "Schrödinger's cat"). Used in this context, Robert appears to be using this reference to point out that formalizing teacher observations would interfere with the instruction of the observed teacher by requiring that said instruction be labeled either good or bad.

with each other on teaching plans for the week, collaborating on longer-term interdisciplinary projects or units, and sharing updates on “adoptees” and “VIPs,” students who were in need of focused academic or social-emotional support.

Originating in the small learning community (SLC) at North Valley High School, the interdisciplinary *humanitas* curriculum was a central component of HSHR’s identity as a school. Many teachers at HSHR either were instrumental in starting the original SLC years ago, or were socialized into the model as new teachers or teaching assistants. Frank, for example, one of HSHR’s 11th grade English teachers, began his teaching career at North Valley and shared “an adjoining door” with the SLC’s social studies teacher, Miguel, now HSHR’s principal. The two teachers co-taught American History and Literature at North Valley for four or five years before initiating the move to HSHR, where the *humanitas* model would be implemented school-wide.

Frank remembers his introduction to interdisciplinary teaching at North Valley very fondly:

In that time, I became really conversant in the *humanitas* method of teaching, the strategy of using interdisciplinary curriculum, which to me seemed really powerful. It was really supportive for the teachers. It provided a road map, using history as a skeleton on which to hang your thematic units. It made perfect intuitive sense to me, and it worked. The kids were on fire.

Though he no longer shared an adjoining door with Miguel, Frank still “hung” his thematic units on the historical “skeleton” that framed the learning experience for all 11th graders at HSHR.

This historical framework was developed by the 11th grade team in their Tuesday morning meetings. In the meeting I attended, the 11th grade teachers—including 7 teachers representing 5 disciplines (English, Social Studies, Science, Math, and Art)—discussed their teaching plans for

the current unit on the Great Depression. Frank's class, for example, would be reading excerpts from *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* by Francisco Jiménez and starting John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Importantly, weekly grade level meetings set the tone for collaboration across disciplines, and planning conversations spilled out into the day-to-day, informal interactions between staff members. In his interview, Frank described a conversation he had had with Natalie, the 11th grade social studies teacher, earlier that day:

This morning, Natalie and I were talking about the timeline for the upcoming units and what we were going to keep, what we were going to have to cut in the upcoming units, how much time I need to complete the unit on the Depression—The Grapes of Wrath—that I'm doing now, when she's going to finish the Depression and move into World War Two, and she would like to spend some time talking about the political situation³⁷ right now, so we talked about what she would be doing in terms of curriculum while I'm continuing The Grapes of Wrath, and when I'm going to finish The Grapes of Wrath and start working on World War Two. Then I made the decision this year, for our Civil Rights unit which is coming up after World War Two, to do Zoot Suit as literature for Civil Rights. And she is going to now look up more social studies information around the Zoot Suite Riots and so forth that she can put in her Civil Rights unit to make it relevant and give context to Zoot Suit [literature].

These conversations between meetings enabled him and his colleagues to be adaptive and responsive, especially when current events presented learning opportunities worthy of deviation from the historical time period being studied.

The teachers I spoke with at HSHR generally pointed to the interdisciplinary nature of the school's curriculum as bolstering their professional relationships with colleagues. Twelfth grade

³⁷ I interviewed Frank the same week that President Trump—barely a month after his inauguration—announced plans for an immigration ban from primarily Muslim countries.

English teacher, Luis, referred to the interdisciplinary curriculum as “the backbone of our school.” He said, “just the fact that we’re all on the same page, and that a kid can come into my class, and I say, ‘hey, how was this lesson today over in Cayo’s class, or Joe’s class?’ It just solidifies, unifies us even more, and the kids see it, and they appreciate it.” The following exchange highlights how such “unification” occurred from Luis’ viewpoint:

Sara: How would you say that the interdisciplinary nature of the *humanitas* curriculum—what impact does that have on your working relationships with the colleagues you have here?

Luis: Strengthens it, if anything. Because we [the 12th grade team] know what we’re teaching, and I know what the 9th grade is doing, what 10th grade is doing, what 11th grade is doing, and then, I can build off of the skills, the texts that they’ve learned previously, and then make references to them in my class. So that helps out. But yeah, just relationship-wise, the fact that we know what each other is doing, the fact that we can go into the classrooms—open-door policy—and go observe one another, it’s been really cool.

In addition to weekly grade level meetings, teachers at HSHR also met periodically in content area teams, or “departments,” which spanned all grade levels, 9-12. Collaboration structures that operated both across disciplines within a single grade level and across grade levels within a single discipline, as Luis described, meant that a teacher’s work was seldom hidden from collegial view.

Summary. Overall, teachers spoke favorably about informal learning experiences they got from casual opportunities to be in each others’ classrooms, whether because they shared a space or because they frequently “popped in” to each others’ rooms to discuss curricular matters or simply to “get a box,” as Robert described. PLCs and grade level teams for teachers at HSHR and YLA were important home bases in which collegial trust could be built absent the watchful eye of administrators. Regular, unstructured time in these spaces allowed staff to get to know each other and develop a level of trust that would counteract the vulnerability experienced in confronting their own struggles. Trust-building depended a lot on informality, probably in part because informality is generally good for building relationships, but also because informality

generally meant that conversations didn't leave the room on a sheet of paper or Google Doc. In their various professional communities, there was little need to put on a show for administrators or be overly organized.

Survey data. To what degree are the qualitative findings summarized above reflective of the experiences of teachers working in teacher-powered schools more broadly? The following sections report on survey data to identify the extent to which TPSI teachers who participated in the survey reported having influence over their own professional development and perceived their schools as exhibiting deprivatized practice and relational trust.

TPSI vs SASS: Influence over professional development. As expected, compared to the national sample of teachers who participated in the Schools and Staffing Survey 2011-2012 (SASS 11-12), TPSI survey participants reported far greater influence over professional development (see Figure 7.1, below). Over half of TPSI respondents (58 percent) reported having “a great deal of influence” over professional development, compared to only 11 percent of SASS 11-12 respondents. Notably, there were some TPSI respondents (3 percent) who reported having “no influence” in this area, with 11 percent and 28 percent reporting having “minor” or “moderate” influence, respectively. These figures suggest there is considerable variation among TPSI schools in teacher collective decision-making authority (CDMA) related to professional development.

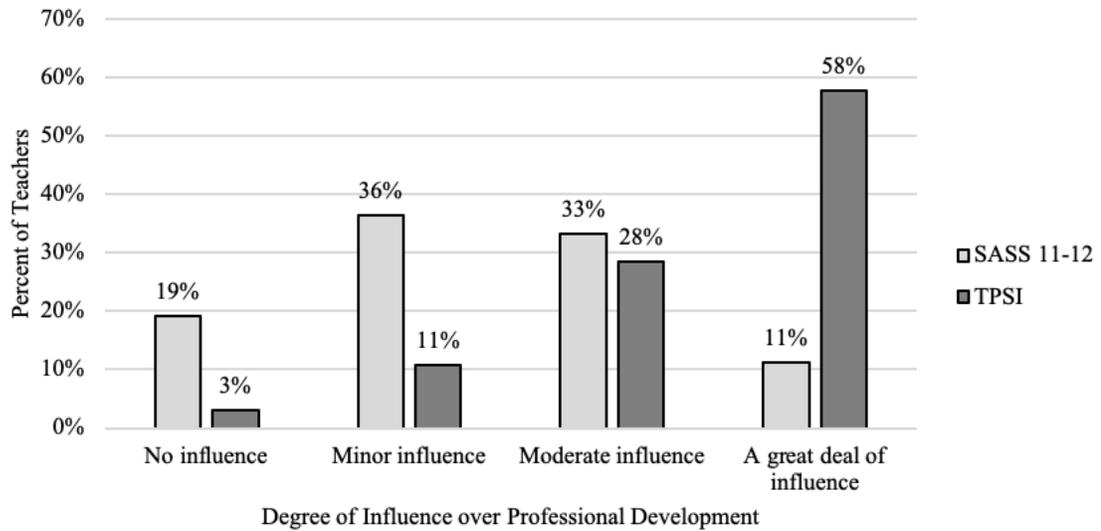


Figure 7.1. Teacher influence over professional development: SASS 11-12 and TPSI respondents.

Note. $n = 334$ for TPSI respondents. Specific response counts for individual SASS 11-12 survey items were not publicly available. Over 37,000 eligible public school teachers completed the SASS 11-12 survey (Cox, Parmer, Strizek, & Thomas, 2016).

Deprivatized practice. Figure 7.2, below, shows the average *deprivatized practice* scores of TPSI respondents reporting various levels of influence over professional development. Teachers reporting having “a great deal of influence” over professional development had the highest deprivatized practice scores, on average, followed closely by those reporting “no influence.” Teachers reporting “minor” or “moderate influence” had the lowest and second-lowest deprivatized practice scores, respectively, suggesting there may not be a straightforward relationship between the extent of influence over professional development and the emergence of

“open-door” cultural norms. Across all levels of influence, the average deprivatized practice score was 3.1 on a scale from 1 to 5³⁸.

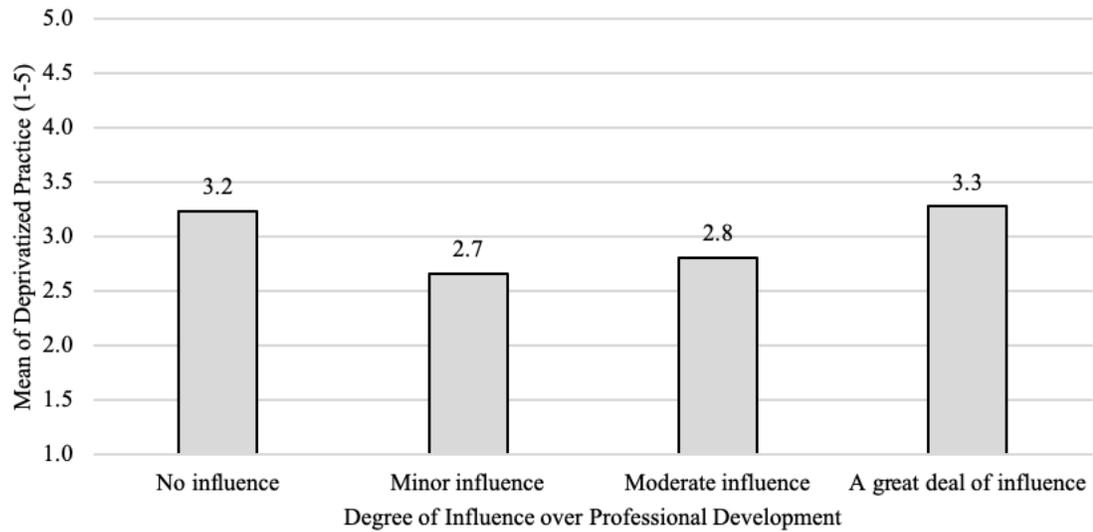


Figure 7.2. Deprivatized practice by degree of influence over professional development.

Note. $n = 329$.

Trust in others. Figure 7.3 displays teachers’ average scores on *trust in others* items for each level of influence over professional development. Teachers with a “great deal of influence” over professional development at their schools reported far higher levels of trust in colleagues and administrators (3.7 on a scale from 1 to 4) than did teachers with “no influence” (2.5). Trust

³⁸ For reference, a score of 3 on the deprivatized practice scale meant that, on average, the participant had indicated that they received meaningful feedback, observed others, and been observed an average of “3-5 times” that school year.

scores for teachers reporting “minor” and “moderate” influence fell in between these levels, at 3.2 and 3.5, respectively.

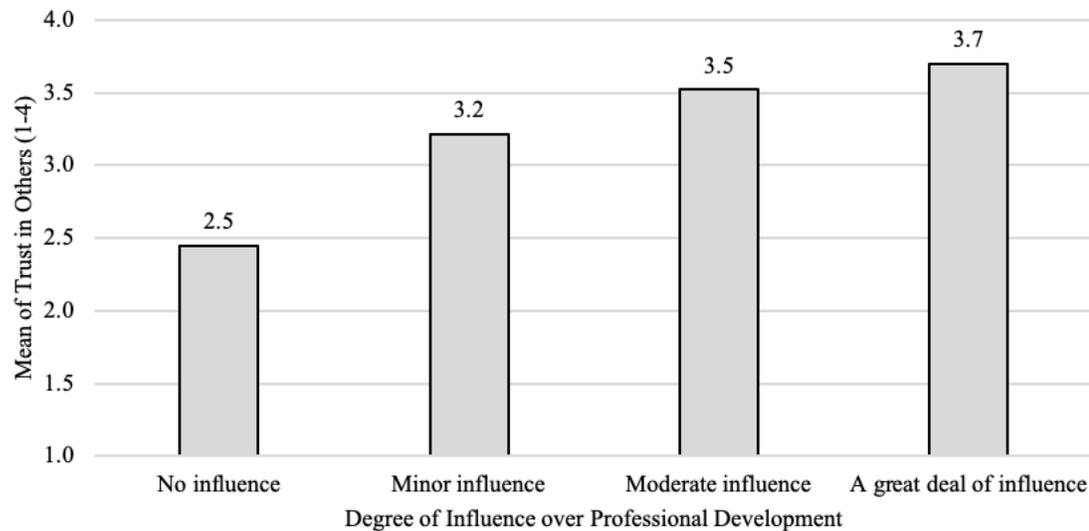


Figure 7.3. Trust in others by degree of influence over professional development.

Note. $n = 332$.

Open ended responses. Multiple responses to two open-ended questions, (1) “Give one or two examples of how working at your current school differs, if at all, from working at your previous school(s),” and (2) “Is there anything else you would like to share about your work as a teacher in a school within the ‘Teacher-Powered Schools’ inventory?” related to the topics of collegiality and professional learning. Themes among open-ended survey responses pertaining to this chapter included *improvement orientation*, *relevance of professional development (PD)*, and *collaboration*.

Improvement orientation. The following responses highlight improvement-oriented school cultures in which teachers continually sought to improve the educational opportunities their students received as well as their own teaching practice:

We teachers are all vested in our school and all strive to make it better. Not just a place to come to and do a job. That makes our school better.

All of the teachers are very dedicated to self-improvement as teachers. 7 of the teachers are currently serving as mentor teachers to graduate students at [a local university]. Of those 7 teachers, 4 are also pursuing a masters degree from [the same university] in Principal Leadership with an Administrative Credential. Of that group, one teacher already has 2 masters, one has one masters, and the other two are pursuing their first masters. There are other teachers at the school that are National Board Certified, and several others have administrative credentials.

Our school is always trying something new or different to find strategies to reach as many students as possible. When one PDSA [Plan, Do, Study, Act] cycle doesn't seem to make a change, we try another. Even if something works, we will try something else to reach other students but retain the strategy that worked.

These examples stand in stark contrast to the professional stagnancy commonly associated with the narrative of teacher isolation presented in Chapter 2.

Relevance of professional development. Several other respondents felt that PD opportunities they had at their teacher-powered schools were more relevant to teachers' learning needs than the PD offered in other schools:

[In my previous school,] I received minimal support in professional development and wasn't involved in staff meetings in any way. Here, I receive on-the-job, embedded PD and am allowed to design my own. Our staff is also committed to identifying PD opportunities through our collaborative decision-making processes, but haven't yet been able to achieve this through a formalized system.

Professional development is much more respectful of teachers' professionalism and existing knowledge base. Therefore professional development time is used well, we build upon, refine and lift teaching skills to meet new developments in educational research as opposed to reviewing material already covered or haphazardly veering off into a new direction.

These examples convey a sense that teachers' involvement in the creation of PD opportunities enhanced their engagement and investment in learning by connecting it to their lived experiences.

Collaboration. Like many of the teachers I interviewed at the case study schools, several survey respondents commented on the collaborative character of their collegial interactions and the support they experienced from such collaboration.

I feel the math team is very collaborative. I feel I can turn to my coworkers for support.

Teacher collaboration is the norm here, rather than the exception. Through having bi-weekly teacher meetings, we have created new systems and projects that never happened at my other schools.

The teachers at this school work together to support all students and truly care about the success of other teachers as it directly impacts the success of all students.

These quotations convey feelings of trust toward coworkers—trust that they will lend a hand when needed, and trust that they have the interests of “all students” in mind when doing so.

In contrast, one teacher wrote that their school felt “very sink or swim” rather than collaborative or supportive.

To be honest, this school seems very “sink or swim” compared to my previous schools. I also don’t feel like I’ve received the kinds of organized training, support or communication that I received from my previous schools.

While this response conveyed a minority viewpoint among survey respondents, it suggests that supportive, collaborative relationships are not omnipresent among TPSI schools.

Summary. In general, survey findings tend to support the qualitative finding that teacher-driven professional development was supportive of trusting relationships among teaching colleagues. Survey results relating the extent of teacher influence over professional development and the extent of deprivatized practice were inconclusive, with teachers having both the lowest and highest levels of influence in this area reporting the most deprivatized practice. However, this finding should be interpreted in light of there being only 10 teachers (out of 329 responses) reporting “no influence” over PD. Surveyed teachers did not comment as extensively as interviewed teachers about deprivatized practice (having an “open-door policy”) or informal professional learning opportunities, but open-ended responses revealed that a culture of

improvement-orientation, relevant PD, and collaboration were common experiences among participating TPSI teachers.

Giving and Getting Critical Feedback

The first part of this chapter discussed how teachers in the three case study schools created cultures in which it was normal to observe others, to be observed, and to discuss teaching practice with colleagues. This second half of the chapter is about the difficult conversations that sometimes arose from the deprivatization of teaching practice: when teachers had to give or get critical feedback. Both informal feedback conversations and formal teacher evaluation processes will be considered, with analysis centering on the mechanisms by which constructive criticism was given and received and the conditions supporting and hindering its communication.

“Warm and cool feedback” at YLA. In general, teachers at YLA talked about reflective dialogue with colleagues as “warm and cool feedback.” This phrase was used in many contexts—from informal coaching conversations in the PLCs, to evaluating the success of a new program or initiative within grade-level clusters, to the formal teacher evaluation process. Derived from a School Reform Initiative (SRI) protocol for providing feedback, warm feedback “highlights the specific areas in which the work is strong” and cool feedback “uses critical distance, which means taking a closer look to analyze, probe and discern” (SRI, 2017).

To Rachel, the regular practice of giving warm and cool feedback in the context of decision-making was what signaled to her that YLA was a “teacher-led school”:

I'll give you just one example of when I realized this was a teacher-led school. It had happened in both the clusters... and the PLC, so those are the two main structures. It happened in both. I remembered it in a cluster [meeting] where, we had done something, a trip or event, then we took the time to do warm and cool feedback after, which is kind of a pretty regular practice... No one told me at the beginning, "Oh, this is a teacher-led school"... No one told me that. I realized it wasn't set in stone that we were going to do that event again or that we were going to do it in that way. It was, [I realized,] "Oh, we're talking about this stuff so that we could make a decision about it next time," and then the next event came up, and it was before that at the [planning] meeting [we discussed,] "Ok, last year we did this and this and this. This was some of the feedback, do we want to do it this way or that way." I realized that no one from up top had told us, "You guys need to do this"... All of these things are things we're constantly revisiting. In the time that I've been here, certain things have been done the same every year, certain things have been done different[ly]... And we do have a lot of flexibility in that.

The fact that decisions were not "set in stone" or handed down "from up top," but actively and thoughtfully evaluated by groups of teachers, meant that teachers could make improvements they felt were needed to improve their school.

The School Management Team (SMT) actively encouraged teachers to give each other feedback. Principal Lori felt that teachers were better-positioned than she was to give critical feedback to their peers. She cited one example of an elementary Spanish teacher who was expressing resistance to implementing center-based learning, an expectation for teachers at the elementary level. In lieu of speaking directly to the teacher, Lori discussed the issue with the leader of that teacher's PLC. Lori asked the teacher leader what she thought of her opinion and whether she had reason to disagree. She did not, but if she had, Lori explained she would have "backed down":

I'll back down if I feel like, "okay, these are compelling enough reasons." I don't feel that just 'cause I said it, we have to do it. But she didn't disagree. She just said, "I think it's just that it's hard and I think we just need more work." And then she'd said, "You know, I think I need to model some stuff for him..." So again, it was a teacher really helping to facilitate making it happen.

By delegating feedback conversations to teacher leaders, Lori hoped to increase teachers' "buy-in" to instructional change, which she called "leading by persuasiveness." "I'm once, twice removed from some of this stuff," she said of her decision to let teachers take charge of making improvements.

Despite its usefulness in generating teacher buy-in, delegating feedback conversations to teachers came with certain challenges. Lori underscored the difficulty of teachers using warm and cool feedback with their colleagues:

It's hard because there is a negative side to [teacher empowerment]. Now you maybe have to call your colleague out on something... It's not always, you know, being sort of happy-go-lucky, going, "Hey, we're all empowered doing great things!" It's the hard work of [saying], "Hey, you know, in our cluster, we want to do *this* and we don't see that happening."

Lori noted that some clusters were "pushing the envelope a little more" than others when it came to giving critical feedback to colleagues. "We have to be willing to actually have honest conversations. I mean, then it's wonderful, and that's really really hard work."

A "gentle peer coach"? In fact, administrators' expectations that teacher leaders would facilitate "honest conversations" with colleagues sometimes clashed with teachers' egalitarian norms in their work with peers. This resulted in some role ambiguity for PLC coaches, who were primarily tasked with facilitating their colleagues' professional learning but occasionally tapped by administrators to give critical feedback to members of their PLC. Nathan, PLC coach for the science department, said of his role that:

What it's supposed to entail and what it actually entails are sometimes two different things. It's supposed to be, like, the coach to push people's thinking and people's professional work to a higher level, as, like, a gentle peer coach. In actuality, sometimes I'm a little bit confused as to what it means.

When asked for an example of what was confusing about the role, Nathan continued:

Sometimes there's a little bit of tension in my role where, if there's a teacher who the School Management Team knows needs to improve a certain type of area, they're like, "Hey, Nathan, you're the coach, why don't you mentor him?" and I'm like, "whoa, [that teacher has] been here for much longer than I've been here and I don't feel comfortable giving somebody, like, really critical feedback." So, sometimes we have to dance around an issue as friends and colleagues. Bring something to the PLC and kind of hope that the growth can come that way [without singling someone out]. So sometimes there's tension, where [an administrator] is wanting me to be, like, "Coach, have this conversation," and I'm like, "I'm just the coach, I'm not the administration, like, I'm not having that conversation that you want me to have. So that's sometimes a little bit confusing. I know sometimes when—each week if somebody is supposed to present something, what if people don't want to present something? So that's sometimes a very confusing role for me to navigate as to how to hold people accountable for something when really I'm just their colleague. I have no real positional authority.

Since Nathan rejected the notion that, as PLC coach, he had any greater authority than his fellow teachers, the suggestion of his administrator that Nathan "have the conversation" with a colleague prompted considerable anxiety and frustration. Fearing that giving a colleague unsolicited critical feedback would prove detrimental to his relationship with that colleague and trust he had built among PLC members, Nathan chose to approach the issue indirectly in the hopes that any need for improvement would become apparent to the colleague in question without being singled-out.

Of the four PLC coaches I spoke with, only Nathan expressed frustration about the role or about pressure to heed administrators' advice to intervene with a colleague, suggesting that issue may have been unique to the science PLC, or somehow related to Nathan's inexperience relative to some of his more veteran colleagues. However, it did seem clear that there were normative boundaries limiting teachers' access to each others' feedback.

Formal evaluation: "It doesn't feel like a 'gotcha.'" As required by state law, teachers at YLA participated in a formal evaluation process each year. The evaluation process was unique

to YLA, but shared some similarities with that of the authorizing department of education (DOE) and had to be negotiated with the teacher's union to which YLA teachers belonged. Like the city DOE, YLA used the Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching rubric (Danielson, 2013), but according to English teacher, Rachel, "we use [the rubric] with more fidelity than the DOE does."

The school's recent charter renewal application specified that the evaluation process was designed to be a "collaborative, professional growth-oriented evaluation model." Accordingly, teachers would first meet with their supervisor (either the principal or a director of teaching and learning) and discuss their teaching goals and what aspects of their teaching practice should be the focus of observation. The teacher would then create a lesson plan and corresponding report detailing the ways in which the lesson addressed the rubric categories and any particular areas of concern. Teachers reviewed these documents with their supervisor and discussed any recommended revisions prior to a formal observation taking place.

The teachers I spoke with about the evaluation process acknowledged that the explanatory report accompanying the lesson plan was "a lot of work" but that it provided important context that the evaluator could take into account when rating the observed lesson. For example, high school English teacher, Danielle, said:

I think that that's great because, although it's a lot of work, when [an observer] comes into a classroom, even if you're 45 minutes in, you're not a part of that living, breathing room. There's a lot that goes into it. So I think that the report explaining what went into planning the lesson gives another dimension to your practice. I think that that's important to be evaluated. It's something actually that's cumbersome but I think it's actually something that's really important, because it shows what you were thinking of. Even if you didn't get to it, even if the lesson in the room doesn't unfold in that way, it's really important to know that's what you were thinking of.

Although it was time-intensive and “cumbersome,” including the lesson explanation in the process gave the evaluation greater validity in Danielle's eyes.

After the observation, the teacher and supervisor would independently reflect on and rate the lesson in relation to the rubric levels. “You have to come up with where [in the lesson] you hit those targets and why you hit them and be prepared to explain them,” Danielle explained. Finally, the teacher and supervisor would meet once more to review post-observation reflections and reconcile any differences of opinion on rubric ratings. Danielle continued:

The two of you sit together, and we go through line by line each category and come up with an agreement. Obviously, usually what you talk about is the points of dissension, points of where things didn't work out, and you view things differently than her... It's, *they* saw something, *you* saw something. Then you decide together and talk about what they saw versus what you saw and why that discrepancy is happening and what they really want to see. Or maybe they're persuaded to feel like, “Oh, I didn't recognize that, and then I'll give you a higher evaluation.”

In this way, teachers were empowered to self-evaluate and to be a partner in shaping evaluation outcomes rather than being told point-blank how they performed.

Reflecting on this aspect of reconciliation between the teacher's and supervisor's observations, Danielle said, “I think it's really important. It's one of the most important parts of this school.” She elaborated:

I like that [aspect] because maybe she [the supervisor] wasn't realizing something you were thinking about and it's a conversation, versus this very one-sided view of what they're observing. I think that that's because of [this being] a teacher-led school that it's like that because she values you as a member of this community.

Compared to previous evaluations she had had in a traditional school within the surrounding school district, the evaluations Danielle had experienced at YLA felt more trustworthy; they incorporated teachers' perspectives, a feature of the process she attributed to the school being "teacher-led." "In other schools," she said, "you don't even see your observation until the end of the year where you're just signing a piece of paper."

Like Danielle, Rachel found the teacher evaluation process to be "helpful" and "supportive." Though she acknowledged that administrators determined and conducted the teacher evaluation process, Rachel felt it was not "a totally top-down process" and trusted her supervisor to give her the benefit of the doubt when conducting observations. When I asked Rachel to comment on how her supervisor had earned her trust, she replied:

She has never ever done anything that feels like a "gotcha" kind of situation. Never. I remember after I had a baby two years ago and I came back three months later, it was the end of the year, and she did a walkthrough one day, and it was just like... [motions "chaos"]. It wasn't because of the baby, but I was in a different classroom, and for some reason there weren't materials... And it wasn't like a horror show or anything, but she just looked, and she was like, "I think I'll come back another time." She's like, "Is that okay?" That kind of thing. She's not there to be like, "Oh, hehehe, I caught Rachel in a bad moment." That tells me that she's not in that role in order to feel powerful, to assert her power.

By avoiding "gotcha" situations in the context of teacher evaluations, Rachel's supervisor demonstrated she was not out to catch Rachel "in a bad moment," the result of which might be an evaluation that Rachel would likely deem unfair and untrustworthy. Instead, the supervisor intended to conduct an observation that Rachel would find helpful. Rachel said the feedback she received following an observation was typically in the form of "a reflective question," such as, "have you thought about doing this another way?" "It's not micro-managing," Rachel said. "It

seems to be respecting my professional discretion and just trying to be a thought partner in that. That's really important."

To one teacher I spoke with, formal evaluation was merely a formality understood as a necessary hoop to jump through to appease the DOE. Robert, a physics teacher, told me that "there is pressure on management from outside to bring teaching into fixed framework. They are tasked with evaluating teachers. And, I personally—emphasis on personally—consider that an impossible task. Can't be done." Robert felt that teaching quality was "not analyzable" and that "the only way that I feel like I could be evaluated was if I had a time machine and I could bring my students back from 10 years in the future and talk to them to evaluate myself." Robert understood that the school's administration was required to conduct formal evaluations and felt that the evaluation system was essentially "benign." "Although there's a formal Danielson regime, regular observations that I go through, they seem to have no particular impact on how I'm treated around here at all," he said. When I asked him how he knew whether he was doing a good job as a teacher, he replied, "I listen to the other teachers in the PLC is what it boils down to, as well as get feedback from my students." In other words, Robert found more value in the informal feedback he received from his teaching colleagues than he did from the formal evaluation process, though he accepted that formal evaluation was obligatory and trusted the administration not to give it much weight when making staffing decisions. "Recently, we've had more and more of these Danielson evaluations and that is because there's pressure from above on management to have more of them," Robert said. "I asked about that and I was given a straight answer, which was nice."

"This is where I bloomed." The overwhelming sentiment expressed by teachers at YLA in relation to informal feedback and formal evaluation was that these conversations were intended and expected to support teachers' professional growth. According to Danielle, "it just seems like

it's [the evaluation process] really meant to help you grow, versus being punitive," unlike the evaluation she had received and heard about in more traditional schools:

In other schools... They don't even talk to you about [the evaluation]. And there's no care or concern about you actually growing as an employee. It's not a concern of the school. They just need to get their paperwork done. Here, there's a much different focus. They care about your development as a professional. They care about wanting you to be better. And that's a great place to work because there's not many places that are like that.

To Danielle, the school's emphasis on developing teachers as professionals made it "a great place to work," suggesting that the culture around professional growth was an important factor in recruiting and retaining teachers.

Special education teacher, Henri, contrasted his experience at YLA with his previous teaching roles in the traditional district system, where he received very little support. Henri spent the first year of his teaching career at a nearby community school, where he was a teaching fellow—meaning he was teaching while taking classes at night to earn his teaching credential. Henri described being "thrown into the fire" as a first-year teacher, with a larger special education caseload than was legal and an unsupportive principal:

I had a terrible experience my first year. My principal told me in November that she didn't want me back. So, as a first-year teacher, not only does that crush your soul, but it really puts it into perspective, should you really be teaching anymore? And that was only in November. What was even more terrible is I was supposed to get a coach, someone who'd coach my teaching classes in September. I didn't get her until probably right around the time of Halloween... My principal told me in November that, "I don't want you anymore next year." So, not only did I have to deal with that for the next six months or so, it was one of those things where she would come to my classroom and basically say I'm a terrible teacher. To make matters even worse, to throw more salt in the wound, my advisor from [the teacher preparation program] came into my classroom one day and told me that, "you should probably reconsider this career choice of yours"... I never cried over my professional teaching career, but that was the day I really wanted to cry.

Henri was able to secure a different teaching job in the city over the following three years, but felt pressured to take on more responsibilities than he could handle in order to win the favor of the

principal. Henri understood that, “if you’re new and you don’t do what the principal says, you’re kind of risking your job.... So, she asked me to be testing coordinator, but never gave me proper training.” Henri described being “thrown under the bus” when he made a mistake handling testing materials. “I was just ignorant to the rules of testing coordination. I was literally given—not even a handbook—I was given a paper to try to decipher to pack these things.” While Henri felt he was able to “hone his teaching” over those three years, “there were other responsibilities that I had that really stunted my professional growth.”

In contrast, at YLA, Henri felt supported by his coworkers and encouraged to grow professionally:

It’s here at YLA where my coworkers, the admin, had complete faith in me from the beginning. It wasn’t so much, “We think you could be a good teacher.” No, “We think you can grow as a person here.” And because of that, through the years, my roles have evolved. My first year here I only taught classes. As each year went by, I took on more responsibilities.

Like Danielle, Henri felt that his colleagues at YLA were invested in his growth as a professional. One way the school administrators demonstrated this investment was by giving him time to acclimate to the new school and role; Henri appreciated how he could take on leadership responsibilities gradually as he was able to hone his teaching practice.

Middle school math teacher, Arnel, shared a similar experience of transitioning from a traditional school in the same city to YLA. Arnel had taught for 13 years in the Philippines before coming to the United States where he could earn a higher salary to support his family. Despite his many years of experience in the classroom, his introduction to teaching in the U.S. at a “regular school” in the district was difficult for him. He struggled to connect with students and families and received little in the way of support from his administrators. “I had already cried in the first week,” he told me. The administration “gave structures, not support,” and “did not help professionally.” Arnel tried for a year to get a job at YLA after hearing about the school. When he

finally started at YLA after four years of “sticking it out” at the traditional school, Arnel found that administrators supported him in being creative and experimenting with instruction in ways that allowed him to flourish. “This is where I bloomed,” Arnel said of his teaching experience at YLA. As he grew more confident as a teacher at YLA, Arnel began to earn accolades from his colleagues and was nominated for an external teaching award. “That’s an assurance,” he said. “That’s a pat on my back that ‘you’re doing fine.’ It encouraged me to do what I’m doing better.”

To the teachers I spoke with, the school’s supportive professional community was not necessarily the result of some formal decision-making process, but emerged alongside a shared belief that teachers were competent but imperfect professionals who had immense capacity for improvement. When I asked Danielle how she thought teachers’ professional growth at YLA had become a school priority, she said:

I think it was in the original design. And I think... that because it came from a place of where people were parents, they did not feel that authoritarian leadership over one another because it was a community-based school, in the very roots. That the original planning of it was, like, everybody sat down at the same table and was like, “who wants to do *this, this, and this*?”... There were people who sat side-by-side and kind just went, “how are we gonna make this happen?” That’s a very different organization than the Department of Education, [which] is very hierarchical in organizational designs.

Danielle contrasts the egalitarian, humble origins of the school with the “authoritarian leadership” of the surrounding school district. YLA founders nurtured an all-hands-on-deck mentality that encouraged mutual trust and respect among staff members—necessary ingredients to supporting colleagues in their professional development (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Instructional rounds and “data days” at HSHR. Like the teachers at YLA, teachers at HSHR valued professional learning and welcomed feedback from colleagues:

I’m constantly learning things, and I know that I could have had opinions two years ago that are totally moot now because of how much I’ve grown, and how much I know now, and I’m sure that’ll continue to change. (Rajiv, Math Teacher, 3rd year of teaching)

I'm still improving. The best teachers are lifelong learners, because if you're not learning, you're stagnant. If you're stagnant, then you're just not growing. You're not becoming any better for yourself or our students. (Natalie, Social Studies Teacher, 14th year of teaching)

I love being evaluated. I evaluate myself all the time. I went through the National Board process, I did a lot of those types of things. I like observation. (Theresa, English Teacher, 18th year of teaching)

As these quotes illustrate, the teachers at HSHR shared a belief in their own capacity to improve, even as veteran teachers. Physics teacher, Paula, said being “teachable” and “open” was something she and her colleagues looked for first and foremost when hiring for an open position. In the recent search for a math teacher, many candidates failed to demonstrate this characteristic: “There were a lot of teachers that we had when we were trying to interview the math teachers, but it just felt very, like, ‘we got this,’ kind of. I’m like, ‘this is a different, it’s a different culture. It’s a different community. There are always things to improve on.” As Paula suggests, this expectation set the school apart from other schools where teaching experience or mastery may have been held in higher regard than willingness to improve.

That ongoing professional learning was an expectation was made explicit in the school’s Elect to Work Agreement (EWA), which required teachers to commit to a certain number of hours PD. To Natalie, the PD requirement was more symbolic than it was an actual driver of her behavior: “You have to commit to a certain number of PD hours. I don’t even know what it is, because I never worry about it, because I always do so much.” Teachers must also begin a National Board certification—a rigorous process requiring teachers to open up their practice to observation and critique—within five years of joining the staff. Importantly, these requirements were decided upon by the school’s Governing Council, of which teachers comprised the largest voting bloc.

Several structures supported teachers' professional learning, including the school district's formal evaluation process, informal observation and feedback cycles, and "data days"—time set aside every five weeks to review and reflect on the extensive student data file described in Chapter 5. How these structures facilitated critical conversations about teaching practice is described in the following sections.

Formal evaluation. The formal evaluation process at HSHR was the same process used districtwide. As at YLA, HSHR teachers were evaluated using Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching rubric (Danielson, 2013). Untenured teachers were evaluated every year, whereas tenured teachers were evaluated every other year. At the beginning of the year, teachers met with an administrator (either the principal or assistant principal) to submit plans and set goals for the year based on specific areas of the rubric in which they hoped to improve. Mid-year, teachers and their assigned administrator would complete an observation cycle consisting of a pre-observation meeting, a classroom observation, and a post-observation debriefing conversation during which the administrator shared what he or she had observed and the teacher reflected on those observations. Ultimately, administrators would rate teachers as "ineffective," "developing," "effective" or "highly effective" on the selected areas of the Framework for Teaching rubric. At the end of the year, teachers and administrators would upload documentation of this process to a centralized evaluation system and "sign off" to indicate its completion.

As a district pilot school, HSHR leaders had the opportunity to design their own evaluation system, but chose to maintain the district's union-negotiated process. James, the school's instructional coach, explained that only two of the district's thirty-some pilot schools had opted to use an evaluation process different from the district's. He understood pilot schools' resistance to adopting an "alternative" process to be largely due to a "culture of fear" surrounding peer-to-peer evaluation:

The pilot schools... are challenged by the same thing that challenges every school in [the district], which is that our district-union relationship is very sour, very poor. The union has been very clear over the years that teachers shouldn't evaluate one another... The culture of fear of peer-to-peer evaluation, and that that'll breed mistrust, is pervasive... Most of the teachers have worked in other schools, and so that culture of not wanting to evaluate one another is common throughout all the pilot schools that I've worked in. And so most schools don't embark on alternative evaluation systems just because it's too... Alternative of what? Alternative of administrator [observations] would mean teacher-to-teacher observations, and that gets really uncomfortable for people really quickly.

Rather than jeopardize trusting collegial relationships by passing judgment on each other, teachers preferred to cede formal evaluation to administrators.

In general, the teachers I interviewed spoke favorably—or at least ambivalently—about the formal evaluation process as implemented at HSHR, citing its improvement over what they had previously experienced in other schools. For example, two veteran teachers who had taught previously in large comprehensive high schools within the same district described receiving evaluations based on observations that did not actually take place. “My evals were brought to me filled out already by an AP who had never been in my classroom,” Natalie told me. Theresa described a similar experience: “There was even one time at North Valley where the administrator came to me and said, ‘Let's just pretend I was there...’” In contrast, her most recent evaluation at HSHR “was great.” Theresa was evaluated by the school's Assistant Principal:

She came, she watched me. We had a great conversation afterwards about what she saw... She gave me one suggestion. She said, “Maybe if you did this, instead of that.” And I thought, “What a great idea. Of course I would do that.” I think it becomes a very fruitful process when it's an actual interactive thing. The platform [the district] has now is a good platform.

Unlike her previous evaluations, Theresa appreciated how the current process encouraged interaction and conversation between teacher and administrator.

Natalie thought that the district had “gone in the right direction” in terms of the trustworthiness of the evaluation process. During observations, administrators are supposed to

“script what the teacher and students say and do, in order to collect objective evidence” (District Website), an approach intended to reduce subjectivity and bias in the evaluation process.

According to Natalie,

I think they’re trying to make it less subjective by trying to streamline it so it can be less about, [from the administrator’s perspective] “I don’t like you as a teacher and I have it in for you,” or vice versa, [from the teacher’s perspective] “I feel like you have it in for me,” when really maybe you’re just a bad teacher.

At the same time, Natalie felt that the process’ emphasis on objective accounts of what was seen and heard limited its utility as a means of providing critical feedback. “I value constructive criticism and feedback from people I respect. [Our AP] is someone I respect. I don’t know that that’s the purpose of the [formal] evaluation, though. When you’re just recording what you can hear, I don’t know that that’s reflective of what I’m capable of, or where I need improvement.” Instead, Natalie preferred receiving feedback informally. “I have more value and respect in my colleagues and their feedback, than I do the district’s system of evaluating me.”

While teachers at HSHR may have shied away from formal teacher-to-teacher *evaluation*, teacher-to-teacher *feedback* was different, and more valuable, perhaps because it could be given without the assignment of a rating. Structures designed to promote informal teacher-to-teacher feedback are described in the next section.

Peer-to-peer observation and instructional rounds. At the time of my visit to HSHR, there had been a recent shift in how informal (non-evaluative) teacher observations had taken place. Previously, teachers participated in “peer-to-peer” observation cycles, a very informal practice in which teachers paired up twice a year to observe each other and offer feedback on what they saw. Theresa said of the peer-to-peer observations, “I got this really good feedback. That’s really cool. It was very informal, it was something that I don’t even think is in the EWA. It’s just something we all agreed to.”

Not all teachers had been eager participants, however. According to the instructional coach, James, “They would get really nervous around the peer-to-peer observations, getting feedback from one another, because of the pseudo-evaluative terms of it.” This prompted James to introduce a new protocol—instructional rounds—that year. Instructional rounds³⁹ involved identifying a common “problem of practice” within a professional learning community (typically a grade-level team or department), conducting a series of short observations during which observers recorded “non-judgmental script”—a record of what was said and done, free from interpretation—and an debriefing conversation in which participants discussed and analyzed what was observed. Ultimately, the goal was not to evaluate teaching practice but rather to define the “next level of work”—the evolution of teaching practice toward deeper student learning. Examples of “problems of practice” included improving discussion techniques in the English classroom and creating a classroom culture to promote students’ growth mindset in Math.

Despite efforts to ease teachers’ nervousness around peer-to-peer observations by introducing instructional rounds as a protocolized, “non-judgmental” improvement strategy, some teachers continued to resist the process. According to James:

Ironically... some of the pushback around instructional rounds we’ve heard recently was some teachers saying, “we prefer to do peer-to-peer observations,” even though one of the reasons we exempted them from [those] for instructional rounds is they complained about peer-to-peer observations and saw instructional rounds as a viable alternative for it.

So accustomed to observations being linked to performance evaluation, these teachers were skeptical of the intent behind the instructional rounds, which had been orchestrated by James—a

³⁹ The practice of instructional rounds in education is based on the model of patient rounding in the medical profession. It is formalized in the book, *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* (Teitel, Elmore, Fiarman, and City, 2009).

quasi-administrator himself—in partnership with the school’s Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). For many teachers at HSHR, instructional rounds represented a ‘top-down’ initiative.

Natalie, who said she had really appreciated the feedback she got from the former peer-to-peer observations, said that the new instructional rounds were “not her cup of tea.” Her critique was primarily the length of time observers spent in each classroom—only ten or fifteen minutes. Describing her own experience being observed, she said, “So if you’re going to write what I’m doing, the kids are watching a video, they’re watching a Khan Academy video, and then they’re going to follow up with practice. But you need to see the lesson in its entirety to understand the transitions, the multiple intelligences... You don’t get that from a snapshot.” To Natalie, a self-described “old school” teacher, instructional rounds reminded her of the perfunctory evaluations she experienced working at a traditional high school in the district. While there is some sense of defensiveness in Natalie’s commentary related to being observed—a concern that a mere “snapshot” of her teaching would give her colleagues the wrong impression of her teaching abilities—she ultimately craved more observation and more meaningful feedback, not less.

“From a confrontation to a conversation.” A third structure at HSHR for collaboration on instructional issues was “Data Day,” time set aside every five weeks for staff members to dig into a huge amount of student data. From the perspectives of the teachers I spoke with, scrutinizing data was a normal part of the HSHR experience. According to Paula, “We’re very data-driven, which is good and bad, I guess, but, I mean, we assess *a lot*. We assess *ourselves* a lot.” During Data Days, staff members reviewed the massive student data file described in

Chapter 5. To reiterate, this “beast of a file,” in Luis’ words, contained data on students’ GPAs, credit completion, college readiness, attendance, and other traditional metrics of school success. It also indicated which students had been “adopted”⁴⁰ and by whom, which students needed medical support they were not getting outside the school, and student survey responses in a number of different areas.

For staff members, Data Days represented opportunities to take stock of how HSHR students were doing, both overall and individually. They were also opportunities for staff to reflect on how well they were meeting students’ academic and social-emotional needs. “There’s a lot of conversation on Data Days about the performance of the students and how we can address those standards or performances when they’re not doing very well,” Paula noted. Joe spoke appreciatively about the “holistic” way in which HSHR evaluated student performance:

I think that when we do our Data Day, we’re really evaluating a student based on so much more than a single grade in a single class. I can see how they’re doing in other classes, and so if they’re failing my class and getting B’s everywhere else, I need to reevaluate what I’m doing. I think it becomes much more holistic, the way we evaluate our students.

With the data available for all to see, there was no hiding from inconsistencies in a student’s record. Joe continued:

⁴⁰ Teachers at HSHR who “adopted” struggling students agreed to check in periodically with those students to support their academic, social, and emotional development. “Adoption” is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

If you notice a student has 3.2 and is failing your class, then it doesn't mean you're wrong. It means, let's make sure we're looking at how you're evaluating. It's the same as—we're having an issue in tenth grade: the English teachers are frustrated because their kids are coming in this year with much less skill than they had in the past, but yet 98 percent of them passed ninth grade English. How did 98 percent pass ninth grade English but yet they're struggling in tenth grade? They're looking at it to make sure it's not them, but they realized that these students didn't get a great program in ninth grade... In a traditional school, there's a fear of confronting the other teacher about that, and so I think we change it from a confrontation to a conversation, so it's very collaborative and we're not judging each other. It's like, "So many of these kids passed your class last year, but I can't get them to write a paragraph. What do you think happened?"

Reducing the confrontational aspect of Data Days did not happen automatically for staff members at HSHR; it was something they had to intentionally work on. When I asked Joe how his team was able to make the shift "from confrontation to conversation," he explained:

You look at vision. You look at values. You give examples. You do training. You do coaching. I think you have the conversation with someone else first or you model it. If I can stand in front of people and say, "I made a mistake here," as one of the school leaders, then I think that they're [other teachers] more willing to [do the same]... We have one English teacher who's got a 70 percent fail rate, and you talk to them about—kind of, hold the mirror to them, let them look at their data, and say, "what do you think is happening? Is it their failing? Is there something you need to change?" Or, "what mix of that is there? What's causing the failure?" Not in an evaluative way, but in a reflective way.

As someone in an administrative *and* teaching role, Joe's modeling of the kind of vulnerability needed to deeply reflect on one's teaching performance messaged to other teachers that perfection was not the expectation, but continuous improvement was. Furthermore, by "holding the mirror" up to teachers, administrators put teachers in charge of making meaning of their own data rather than imposing a top-down interpretation. At the same time, teachers were made aware during Data Days that the quality of their teaching had school-wide repercussions, as indicated by the above example about the 10th grade English team.

HSHR administrators were careful not to tie Data Day conversations to staffing

decisions. Joe explained:

It's removing that fear that we've always had in teaching of our administrators... this, "people are going to fire us because we're terrible" [mentality], but we don't want to fire people, *per se*. We want the best team we can get and we build people, so it takes time. If you fire someone just because they had a bad year, you're starting over anyway, so why not build on what you already have?

Since teachers did not see their colleagues being fired or censured for "having a bad year," they learned to view Data Days as capacity-building rather than punitive.

"360" evaluation and peer coaching at Explore School. As a school with no designated administrators, Explore's evaluation system was distinct from that of the other two schools. Explore staff members opted to use a comprehensive "360" evaluation process that took into account input from colleagues, parents, and students via online surveys, and reflections by staff members themselves. Explore advisors were evaluated in several areas, including their job performance in their work with students, student learning as demonstrated by project rubric scores, and contributions to the co-op (e.g., committee membership or other voluntary roles).

Regarding this last piece, Molly, a high school advisor and program coordinator, said:

As part of your [written] overview that you bring to the evaluation, you reflect about what extra administrative roles you've taken on and how has that gone? What have you brought to the bigger picture of Explore? You share that with your group and they give you feedback about how that is going. Are you doing what you said you would do?

The evaluation process was managed by the Personnel Committee—a volunteer committee whose three members rotated every three years, both to protect against the emergence of unwanted power dynamics and to lessen the burden of committee work on individual staff members. Importantly, members of the Personnel Committee did not actually conduct evaluations themselves, a point which Molly made clear in her interview: "they're supporting the evaluation

process for everybody but... they are not the evaluators. So, they're the ones who are setting up meetings so that we can all set goals. They've given us guidelines for goal-setting. They're setting up our groups that we meet with to evaluate each other." The Committee was responsible for compiling the results from the three sets of surveys (colleague, parent, and student feedback) in a format to be shared with evaluated staff members. According to Matt, Committee members would "remove stuff that feels like a 'gotcha,' or completely unfounded," ensuring that the content of evaluations was based in fact and free from bias.

Once survey results were compiled, evaluated staff members would meet in Professional Development Plan (PDP) groups to review and reflect on the feedback they received. These groups were made up of about 8 staff members each, representing different grade levels, subject areas, and roles, and included one member of the Personnel Committee. At the culmination of the review meeting, the evaluated staff member would be asked if they wanted to return to Explore the following year.

Getting feedback "from the consumer." One feature of Explore's evaluation process that differed significantly from that of the local school district was its inclusion of parent and student feedback. Molly felt this was a critical step in retaining families, who she saw as "consumers" of public education. Molly spoke metaphorically about her decision to send her high-school aged children to the local public school as "consuming a product." "We don't pay [the district] anything, but we do with our feet by going there," she said. As such, it was surprising to her that the district never sought parent feedback on the education and services they provided:

They never ask for our feedback... Not once. I thought about it... My kids occasionally are asked for feedback about big picture things. The survey comes out. "Your kids will be receiving the survey." I don't really know what it's about, but it's never feedback about how their teachers are doing. It's never feedback about the climate of their school or anything like that and I have never been asked, like, "what will keep you here?" Like, you know, "what are you satisfied with? What sort of changes do you think would be intriguing?"

In a context in which the local school district and area charter schools competed for students, and in which the district in particular had been struggling to retain families, Molly felt it would behoove district leaders to request the kind of feedback she and her colleagues requested of families at Explore.

Molly suspected that the district's reluctance to request parent feedback stemmed from insecurity on the part of district teachers. In contrast, the staff at Explore felt "safe enough to ask for feedback":

I don't know if we [request feedback] here because we are in this collegial place where we all feel pretty trusted, and, like, safe enough to ask for that feedback. You know, if we were in a system that was super hierarchical, and getting the principal coming in and evaluating us and we were already so on edge about that, and it wasn't so collaborative, would we not ask for the larger feedback? But it just seems so natural for me to be like, yes, let's ask our consumers, "How are we doing? What changes would you like to see? Where are we fine now?"... [For the district] just to lose kids to charters and not figure out that we need to do some consumer [research], like, ask them how we're doing, it's crazy.

Molly felt that willingness to request feedback required trust in how feedback would be used, a sense of job security, and openness to making changes in response to feedback—ingredients she felt were present at Explore. In a more "hierarchical" context in which teachers were "already so on edge," such feedback would have been more threatening.

Ongoing peer feedback. PDP groups were designed to facilitate both the formal evaluation process and ongoing informal peer-to-peer feedback. According to Molly, PDP groups met three or four times a year "to discuss goals, whether you need support, and what you're excited about." Come spring, each PDP group member was responsible for evaluating all other staff members in the group. Andrew said of his PDP group:

I basically have a group of people who know what my goals are. We talk about them at the beginning of the year. We meet again a couple times to discuss how they're going. Then we evaluate each other on an [online survey] that asks a bunch of questions about "How are they doing on their goals? What feedback do you have for them?... How confident are you in this person's performance?" The idea is that we are rating people that we have heard from throughout the year, that we have given feedback to, that have asked for resources, and we know specifically what their goals are.

Andrew valued the fact that his group members understood his teaching goals and could observe his progress toward those goals over the course of the school year, which made him feel accountable to them. For example, Andrew had set a goal around teaching about racial justice in his science classroom, and described one PDP group meeting where:

They're like, "How are you doing on your goals?" I was like, "Well, I haven't done any racial justice stuff with my seventh graders yet. I'm going to do it next week." So I did it. I wasn't forced in. I knew I was going to do it soon. But I made a point of it and really took time with it rather than just showing the video⁴¹. I was, I think, more thoughtful about it, knowing that (A), it's important, and (B), I'm going to talk to my group about it. That kind of thing. It's a little bit of that peer pressure thing. "I told you guys I was going to do this. I should probably do it well."

Though Andrew did not feel "forced" to follow through on his goal, he experienced enough "peer pressure"—in combination with his own belief in the importance of the goal—to make progress toward it. "The idea is that it is a supportive group that gives each other feedback on how to improve their performance, rather than being a punitive group, but if somebody is not performing, we would talk about that in that group." Ultimately, Andrew's peers would evaluate him in the spring having witnessed his commitment and follow-through.

⁴¹ Andrew had shown his class a video about race produced by PBS.

In addition to the formal evaluation process, advisors were observed and given feedback by peer coaches three times a year as part of a statewide “quality compensation,” or “Q-Comp” program. Schools and districts opting into this program received additional funds for each teacher demonstrating proficiency based primarily on rubric ratings of teaching quality and minimally on student test scores. “We decided as a staff that we wanted to do it as a way to evaluate ourselves, but also kind of as a way to give ourselves a bonus,” Samantha told me. “We’re really tight with our money, so we wanted to be able to find a way to support each other and have a system in place where we can evaluate each other, but also be rewarded for that monetarily because we don’t give each other bonuses.” Schools and districts could design their own rubrics, which had to meet certain criteria and be approved by the state DOE, and could choose how funds received from the program were distributed. Explore staff decided to distribute all Q-Comp funds evenly among licensed staff, regardless of individual staff members’ performance. These coaching cycles were not intended to factor into formal evaluation, Amanda explained, though “if there was some glaring thing, you would reflect on that” in the evaluation.

Matt shared an example of how his Q-Comp coach gave him valuable feedback after an observation of his English seminar:

I’ve gotten great feedback. I was teaching *Their Eyes Are Watching God*, and I had one of the staff members come in and watch. Then he asked me afterwards, he’s just like, “So, what kind of conversation did you have around the ‘N’ word?” I was like, “We hadn’t.” That was so great that he had brought that up. I don’t think he had an agenda. He was really just naturally curious. We have a good relationship. I was able to go to a teaching assistant in the room and be like, “Hey, let’s talk this through. One, why do you think this hasn’t happened? And how do you think we can bring it up?” We talked through that, and then really got into it with students. Anyway, it was just—I really appreciated that.

For Matt, a simple question from his coach led to a challenging conversation with his students about the use of the ‘N’ word—something Matt had not thought to bring up but which he ultimately thought to be important.

For several teachers I spoke with, peer coaching was just as valuable for the coaches as it was for staff members being observed. “It’s really valuable to be a coach and observe what other teachers are doing,” Ann said. Dan agreed:

Getting to see other teachers in the classroom in their advisory actually was a much more meaningful experience for me than necessarily getting observed a couple times... I interact not at all with the middle school team, so forcing some of that cross-pollination, seeing, like, here are the things that they are doing to structure classes and even their project times because the needs of their kids are different, but actually not that different than a struggling ninth grader. So here are the supports that they’ve put in place. Here’s actually the paperwork that they are using and the prompts that they are using. And then I think just seeing the language and the questions [advisors pose].

As a mechanism that encouraged “cross-pollination,” peer observation enabled coaches to access teaching techniques to which they would not otherwise be exposed. Similarly, when I asked Samantha how the evaluation process had influenced her teaching practice, she replied:

Actually, interestingly, I’ve learned so much from my colleagues being a coach because I get to observe everybody, which I think is kind of a gift... I’ve heard other coaches say that too, that like, “Wow, I never even thought about doing that,” or something. It’s created some really cool conversations, too.

While many of Samantha’s peers shared classrooms with other advisors, she did not, as referenced earlier in this chapter; being able to observe others as a peer coach reduced her feelings of isolation and exposed her to new ideas.

Facilitating “hard conversations.” A part of staff members’ responsibilities as PDP group members and as peer coaches was to give critical feedback to colleagues when they

demonstrated a need for improvement in a certain area. Furthermore, Personnel Committee members were also tasked with addressing serious performance or professionalism concerns that staff members reported. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, some staff members at Explore were comfortable giving and getting feedback from colleagues in informal settings, such as in the context of the shared advisory. However, having “hard conversations” within PDP groups or as members of the Personnel Committee was not always easy. Amanda noted that the staff had experienced “some challenges around, how do you give constructive, helpful feedback, and how do you have those hard conversations?” Amanda spent one day per week supporting the leadership team at another charter school, where her relational distance from staff members made it easier to give critical feedback:

Because I work with another school, those conversations are so much easier there. I will tell you, “This what I see, this is what needs to happen,” or whatever, “this is what I’m observing.” You can be super direct because you’re not working with them all the time, so it’s unbelievable how [much] more direct I am in that situation than I am here. Because you do care more [here], and you know people, and there’s a cohesiveness.

As a small school, collegial “cohesiveness” was essential and unavoidable; giving critical feedback could therefore feel like delivering a personal attack.

Samantha echoed Amanda’s observations, likening the Explore staff to a “dysfunctional family” that allows issues to fester rather than address them directly:

I think one thing that I think we continue to strive for is to find a way to communicate with each other. I don't know how to say this. I think because we are like a small family, right? We're like a dysfunctional family. It's like we're, like, a married couple. It's like we've been together for so long that I think sometimes we forget how to have some of those important conversations so you hold onto something. I think sometimes in the evaluations, I've gotten weird comments or something, and I'm like, "Wait, what? *Oh.*" I think a lot of it is, how do we have those conversations before leaving it to writing it in the evaluation?

Again, the closeness of the staff made it difficult for some people to give face-to-face feedback.

Staff members largely agreed that they should be upfront with colleagues when issues arose, as difficult as it was. Matt said, for example, "you try to have [those conversations] before they would show up in an evaluation, and then I think sometimes they certainly do show up on evaluations if you feel like the person needs more feedback on that, but you should've talked to them ahead of time."

One way that Explore staff members had been working to approach difficult conversations was by using a discussion protocol known as the COIN Conversation Model⁴². COIN, which stands for "Context, Observation, Impact, and Next steps," emphasizes a focus on specific facts of a situation, the effect of the behavior in question on members of the organization, and how to move forward. Amanda said that using COIN helped her "try to keep it from being personal" but to emphasize actions and impact.

⁴² The COIN Conversation Model was developed by executive coach Anna Carroll and described in her book, *The Feedback Imperative: How to Give Feedback to Speed Up Your Team's Success* (Carroll, 2014).

The hardest conversation. Rarely, as a result of the evaluation process, Explore staff members found themselves in the difficult position of determining whether to terminate a colleague. According to Ann, the procedure had evolved somewhat over the years:

Now years ago... we used to ask on the questionnaire from the staff, do you think this person should come back next year? It was point blank. So you had to get the support of your staff members with that question. We learned that that wasn't legal. So you can't ask that question. So we took that question off.

Now, the Personnel Committee is charged with identifying “red flags” through the evaluation process, determining corrective action steps, and bringing serious, ongoing employment concerns to the full staff—minus the employee in question—for discussion and decision-making. Matt shared a hypothetical example of how serious employment concerns were addressed at Explore:

If there are red flags as part of the evaluation process, Personnel is usually picking up on them ahead of the evaluation final process in the spring. For example, let's say I'm working with Liz, and Liz's frustrated with me and feels like she can't talk to me. She can go to Personnel. Personnel will say, “Have you talked to Matt?” She'll say, “Well, that's the problem.” Then Personnel will try to either talk with both of us, or talk with me. Maybe I might be on a corrective action plan. But all of those ideas, we've all talked about and signed off on. We know that even though we're all evaluating each other, when it comes to: should someone be terminated? Usually, we're getting information from Personnel to—as a staff—make that decision.

Again, as with the evaluation process in general, the Personnel Committee played an important role in gathering and synthesizing staff member feedback and presenting employment concerns to the staff—but were not, by themselves, decision-makers. Instead, and quite atypically, the entire school staff was expected to decide by consensus.

Matt recounted a specific example of how concerns about an employee ultimately led to a termination as voted on by the entire staff:

One year, we had a very difficult staff member. We called a meeting. Personnel said, “Here's the information we've received over all this time. We've gotten to this point. We're not sure what recommendation to make. So, we would like to hear from the staff.” It got around [the room], and people just said, “Well, I'm concerned,” and “I'm not really sure.” It moved around and it got to me, and I was like, “Everything that you've told me says that this person should be terminated. You've done all the work, and therefore, unless you feel strongly that what I'm saying is completely out of line, and you want to try some other stuff, I think this person should be fired immediately.” Then, as other people shared their ideas, people would say, “Well, I think we should go with Matt's plan.” It was really weird because I wasn't trying to make it a plan, I was just offering this opinion. But it turned out that that was the opinion that ultimately led to the decision [to terminate].

Because Matt had not been closely involved in the preceding conversations with this particular employee, he could view the facts presented with fresh eyes and offered an opinion which resonated with his colleagues.

At the same time, this example demonstrates how reluctant other staff members were to directly state that the employee should be fired. “I think that that's probably one of the most difficult parts about the evaluation process,” Matt said of termination conversations. And yet, the staff had followed through on a small handful of terminations over the years when it became clear that the benefits of letting an employee go outweighed the discomforts and inconveniences. Matt continued:

We were all just like, “it sounds like we are all just going to have to take on more responsibility until we can find a replacement, and that's worth that pain, because it's better than having somebody who is very difficult to work with and incompetent... Nobody feels great. Nobody's like, “Hip, hip, hooray. We just fired somebody,” even though the person was really difficult to work with. But it was like, “if we are really going to run this place, then we're going to run this place—and no one else is going to tell us when it's time. That's really, really hard.

Not only was firing a colleague difficult because of the relational implications—no principal or district administrator was there to have the tough conversation for them—but it was also difficult from the perspective that it meant the school would be temporarily short-staffed.

Molly echoed Matt's sentiment that firing colleagues was "really hard"—so much so that she sometimes wished they had a principal to do it:

The times where most of us really wished, like *God*, wished we had a principal were times when we've had to fire someone. That has been really hard. And I think it's always really hard, you know, even for the principal, of course, but then it's not so shared. To be on the Personnel Committee, in that case, and have to be the team that leads the rest of the staff through a really painful conversation, has been the times in the last 15 years that I can think of that I personally have been, like, gosh I get why a principal would be fun right now because I can step away from that responsibility.

As painful as these conversations were, they were a necessary downside of the democratic decision-making model Explore founders had established. As Matt indicated, above—"if we are really going to run this place, then we're going to run this place"—staff members could not justify excluding the uncomfortable responsibility of firing colleagues from their otherwise sweeping decision-making authority.

Unlike when a principal or administrative team has unilateral authority to terminate an employee, Explore staff members' consensus-based decision-making model and community norms helped to ensure that no member of the staff felt disgruntled about the decision. According to Matt:

We always, especially on the really tough ones, when we walk out of this [meeting] room, we all walk out of this room together. It's not an opportunity for you to say to anybody, "You know, I didn't really want to do that with that staff member, but I just went along with it." It's like, "No, you need to say something now. Now's the time. If you're not going to say anything, then the only thing you can say walking out of this room is, "This is the decision we made together as a staff. No [one] person made that decision."

With clearly established, transparent processes in place to evaluate staff performance, provide ongoing feedback, and raise serious performance concerns via the Personnel Committee, staff members could present a united front in making the difficult but important decision to let a colleague go.

Summary. This section has explored the processes and norms surrounding teacher feedback and evaluation at the three case study schools. Feedback—both positive and critical—was viewed as essential to the teachers I interviewed. They appreciated opportunities to improve their teaching practice that resulted from feedback conversations. At the same time, teachers at all three schools acknowledged that giving critical feedback to colleagues was difficult and sometimes avoided. Structured feedback protocols, questioning, modeling vulnerability, and analysis of “objective” data sources were strategies employed by teachers to reduce discomfort associated with communicating critical feedback and promoting self-reflection.

No case study school employed strictly peer-to-peer evaluation. At YLA and HSHR, administrators conducted teacher evaluations using the same rubrics used by the local school districts. Most teachers felt these evaluations were helpful, or at least benign. Several teachers remarked that their current evaluation processes felt far less punitive or perfunctory than those they had experienced in previous schools, in large part because they trusted the administrators conducting these evaluations and felt that their professional expertise was respected in the process. At HSHR, remnants of a “culture of fear” surrounding formal peer observation and evaluation—which one staff member attributed to union rhetoric—limited teacher buy-in to such structures. At Explore, advisors’ “360” evaluations included feedback from colleagues, students, and parents—a system the staff members had developed collectively. The advisors I spoke with appreciated the evaluation process, which they found helpful and non-threatening.

Survey data. To what extent do teachers from a broader population of teacher-powered schools feel that they receive helpful feedback? One survey item asked participating teachers to report on how often they received “meaningful feedback on your performance from colleagues.” Figure 7.4, below, displays the distribution of responses to this item. Over 95 percent of respondents felt that they received meaningful feedback from colleagues at some point

throughout the school year, with over a quarter indicating they did so ten or more times. There appears to be considerable variation across respondents in the frequency with which they received feedback from colleagues, however, with the mode response being 3-5 times.

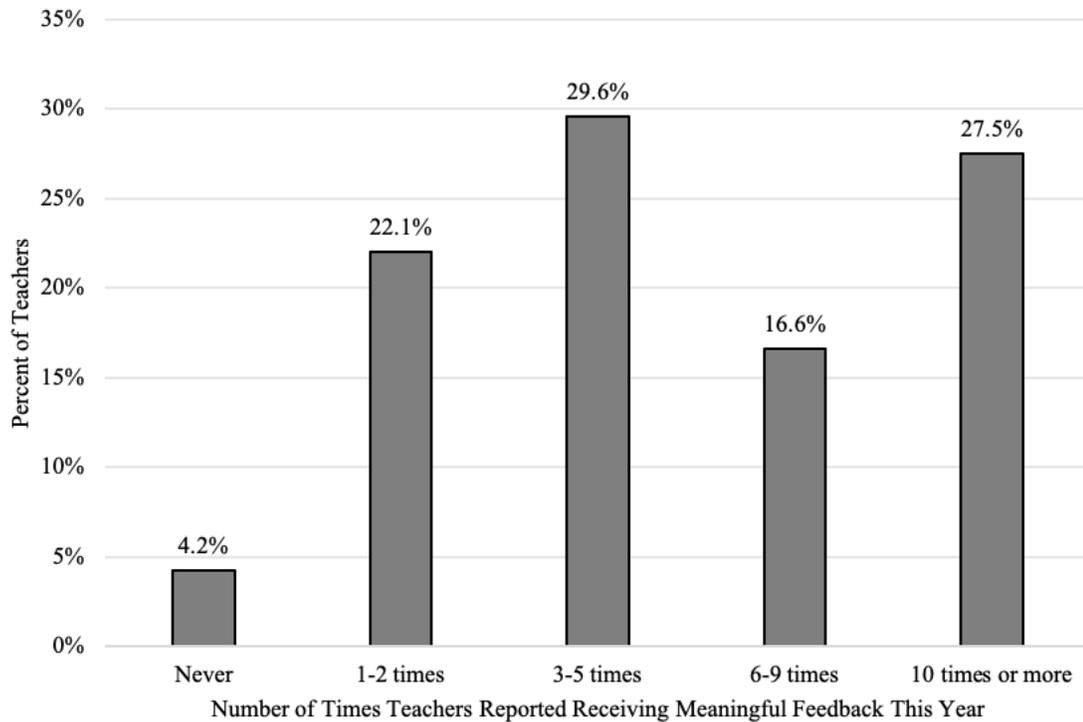


Figure 7.4. Distribution of responses to item, “How often in this school year have you received meaningful feedback on your performance from colleagues?”

Note. $n = 331$.

One way in which interviewed teachers received feedback on their performance was through formal evaluation processes. Teachers at all three case study schools had opportunities to influence what formal evaluation entailed, sometimes opting to use the same or similar evaluation rubrics as the local school district. Is teachers’ influence over evaluation procedures common across teacher-powered schools, or do teachers feel their influence in this area is limited? Figure

7.5, below, displays TPSI respondents' perceptions of teacher influence in the area of teacher evaluation relative to SASS 11-12 respondents. The difference in perceived influence over evaluation between TPSI teachers and the nationally representative sample from SASS 11-12 is striking. Whereas SASS 11-12 respondents were most likely to report having "no influence" in this area (54 percent) and least likely to report having "a great deal of influence" (3 percent), the exact opposite pattern was true of TPSI respondents, who were most likely to report having "a great deal of influence" (39 percent) and least likely to report having "no influence" (12 percent). This comparison highlights the vastly different experience of TPSI teachers in terms of the influence they have over matters typically decided by school or district administrators, such as evaluation.

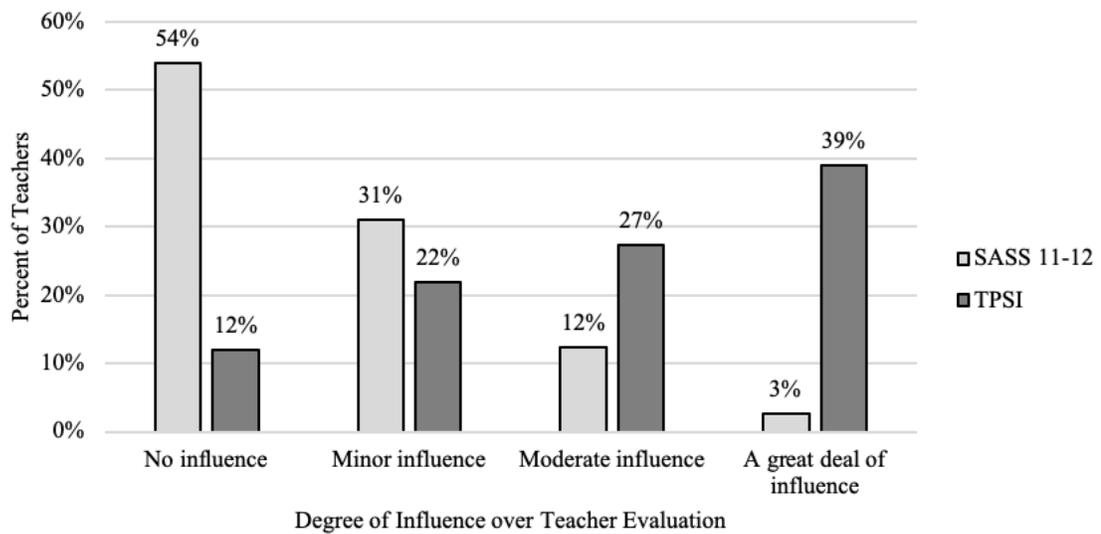


Figure 7.5. Teacher influence over teacher evaluation: SASS 11-12 and TPSI respondents.

Note. $n = 334$ for TPSI respondents. Specific response counts for individual SASS 11-12 survey items were not publicly available. Over 37,000 eligible public school teachers completed the SASS 11-12 survey (Cox, Parmer, Strizek, & Thomas, 2016).

Teachers at all three case study schools shared that the evaluation process was helpful to the extent that it encouraged them to reflect on their teaching in new ways. Does teacher involvement in developing evaluation procedures encourage the kinds of teacher evaluations that promote such reflection? Figure 7.6 displays TPSI teacher perceptions of reflective dialogue as a function of their perceived influence over evaluation. There appears to be no meaningful relationship between the extent of teacher influence over evaluation and the frequency of reflective dialogue as reported by TPSI teachers, though reflective dialogue scores are high across all levels of influence, averaging 4.3 on a scale from 1 to 5.

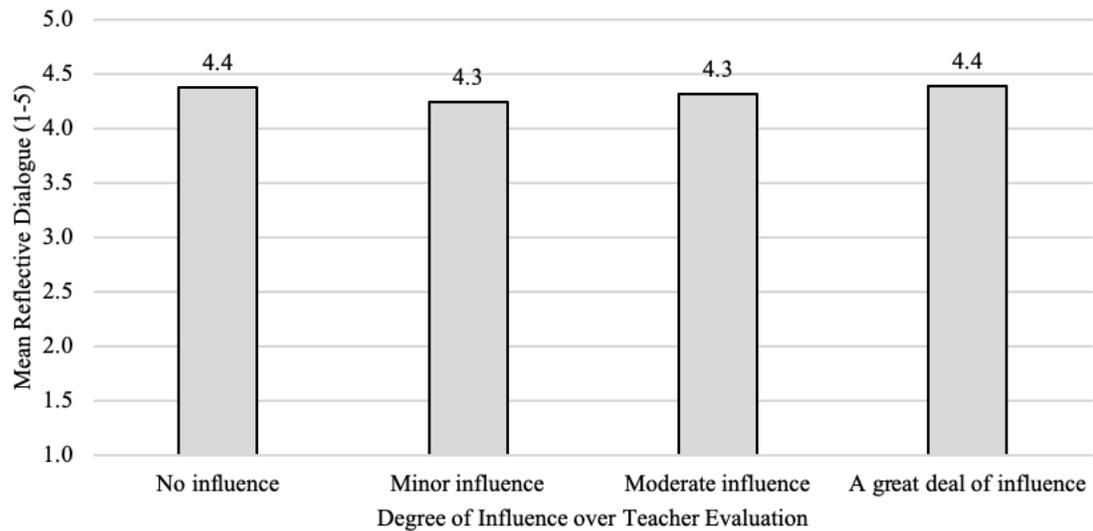


Figure 7.6. Reflective dialogue by degree of influence over teacher evaluation.

Note. $n = 328$.

Free-response data. One response to open-ended survey questions pertained to the topics of teacher feedback and evaluation:

I enjoy working in an environment where I feel like my job is not dependent on student performance or behavior. I feel like I can make mistakes and ask for advice, and whatever I decide to do, I will be supported and encouraged by the staff.

Though this singular response cannot be said to represent the perspectives of the larger group of TPSI respondents by any means, this individual's perspective parallels what Joe from HSHR had said about his team's approach of divorcing evaluation and feedback conversations from employment conversations. This respondent derived a sense of "enjoyment" from being able to make mistakes and seek feedback without the fear that doing so would cost them their job.

Synthesis

In the teacher-powered schools included in this study, teachers leveraged CDMA in the areas of PD and evaluation to establish collaborative structures to promote teacher growth and collective improvement. Whether in PLCs, co-teaching classrooms, or grade-level teams, teachers met regularly to lesson plan and discuss problems of practice. While there were a small number of teachers who reported feeling isolated from their colleagues, the vast majority of teachers experienced frequent collegial interaction and recognized its value. Some of these interactions were informal and unstructured, others—particularly those that involved critical feedback—were guided by step-by-step protocols designed to minimize hard feelings and maximize impact.

When allowed to design formal evaluation systems for themselves, as at Explore School, teachers did not shirk responsibility but embraced it. Evaluation was explicitly designed as an instrument of improvement. The teachers being evaluated played a leading role in selecting focus areas for observation and discussion with their evaluators. Where teachers and administrators collectively opted into externally-designed formal evaluation systems—as at HSHR and YLA—teachers' perceptions of such systems ranged from viewing them as "helpful," "benign," or as "a formality." At both HSHR and YLA, administrators who "signed off" on evaluations approached

them as opportunities for reflection for their teaching staffs. Except in very rare cases involving gross incompetence, teachers at all three schools found evaluation to be “non-punitive,” meaning it had essentially no bearing on teachers’ employment or pay.

Survey responses confirmed that teachers working in teacher-powered schools had unusually high levels of influence over PD and evaluation compared to a nationally-representative sample of U.S. teachers. Measures of *deprivatized practice* and *reflective dialogue* for respondents ranged from moderate to high (averaging 3.1 and 4.3, respectively, on a five-point scale), though these variables did not seem to covary consistently with teachers’ perceived influence over PD and evaluation, respectively. On the other hand, teachers who rated their perceived influence over PD highest also rated *trust in others* highest, with a consistent drop in trust at lower levels of influence in this domain. This finding coincides with qualitative evidence that teachers who were actively involved in determining the nature and content of PD—practically all the teachers I interviewed—reported high levels of collegial trust. Some possible explanations for this apparent relationship are provided in the “enabling factors” section, below, but first I will turn to the implications of these findings for teachers, and specifically, for TPV.

Implications for teachers. The decisions teachers made surrounding PD and evaluation generally fostered collaboration and reduced teachers’ feelings of isolation, a key detractor from TPV as discussed in Chapter 2. Not only did teachers reap the social benefits of regular collaboration, but they also had countless opportunities to learn from each other. The teachers I spoke with found these learning opportunities to be professionally fulfilling because, as one YLA teacher put it, they allowed teachers to “hone their practice” with the support of trusted peers. Another teacher said PLCs were “one of the best things” about her school.

The benefits of collaboration within PLCs, co-teaching classrooms, and grade-level teams extended beyond the performance of the individual teacher. As vulnerability and help-seeking

became the norm in collaborative spaces, teachers witnessed their colleagues giving and asking for meaningful feedback. These exchanges encouraged reciprocity of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) as collegial bonds were strengthened. Numerous participants—both interviewed and surveyed—commented on their colleagues’ commitment to the learning of *all* students, not just their own—which meant that they were willing to go the extra mile to support their teammates. When teachers raised concerns that others shared, teams would work together to address them, sometimes bringing school-level issues to a leadership team or an administrator. Improvement begot improvement because it increased teachers’ collective efficacy that they could grow and change as a faculty.

Enabling factors. What factors contributed to teachers’ development of strong professional communities in teacher-powered schools? First, structural factors such as weekly team meeting time and co-teaching classrooms (or shared advisories at Explore) increased the frequency with which teachers interacted. Importantly, teachers highlighted the value of “casual,” “relaxed,” and “informal” interactions with no administrative interference. Teachers largely controlled the agenda of PLC meetings. As Robert at YLA stated, “nothing leaves that room.” Collaborative spaces therefore felt safe enough for teachers to speak freely about difficulties they were having.

A related factor were the norms and beliefs teachers and administrators shared relating to teacher professional growth. Paramount among these was the belief that teachers were essentially competent; that teachers had their students’ best interests at heart and could be trusted to carry out their responsibilities without much (if any) administrative supervision. A second belief was that teachers were essentially imperfect; they were never “done” honing their teaching skills and relied on those around them to continually improve their practice. Third was a shared belief in teachers’ capacity for growth. Teachers who had begun their careers being told they weren’t cut

out to teach found support and encouragement at YLA; an award-winning, veteran teacher at HSHR sought feedback from lesser-accomplished colleagues; an advisor at Explore welcomed suggestions and new teaching approaches that would have made him feel “insecure” at his previous school. These shared beliefs appeared to have emerged early on in the case study schools’ histories, shepherded by the teams of visionary teachers and reluctant school leaders eager to see their fledgling schools improve and succeed.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, which considers teacher involvement in hiring decisions, the fact that teachers were as open to improvement and growth as they were is probably not exclusively the result of shared norms and teacher socialization, but also a product of the schools’ intentional hiring practices. Several teachers noted that willingness to learn and coachability were considered essential criteria for new hires. Teachers who joined the schools’ staffs may therefore have been more likely, at baseline, to want to participate in formal and informal collegial learning opportunities.

Constraints. What factors limited the development of professional community in participating schools or prevented them from breaking out of the isolationist paradigm of teaching? One of the greatest difficulties the teachers I spoke with encountered was giving critical feedback to their colleagues. Since teachers tended to know their colleagues well, they worried that critical feedback would threaten the positive relationships they had developed, though teachers recognized its importance. Avoidance of feedback conversations meant that some teachers did not receive the feedback their colleagues felt they needed. At all three schools, however, teachers dealt with the stress associated with feedback by using structured observation and feedback protocols, which helped critical conversations feel less personal.

Several teachers at the two schools with designated administrators saw administrative involvement in matters of professional learning as unwelcome. In one case, a teacher leader felt

pressure from his administrators to deliver critical feedback to peers, which conflicted with his own perception of his role as a “gentle peer coach” and caused considerable frustration and role ambiguity. In another case, a teacher felt that administratively-organized “instructional rounds” were perfunctory and superficial. One teacher admitted that the tone and content of his PLC meetings changed dramatically when an administrator (or researcher) was present, stifling creative, informal problem-solving conversations.

On the other hand, at Explore—where there were no designated school leaders—advisors confessed that they sometimes wished they had a principal to have difficult conversations with staff members. This was particularly true when an employee was being terminated. As difficult as it was, Explore staff members felt supported and empowered by their colleagues to carry out these conversations when merited.

It is noteworthy that the teachers I interviewed did not complain about externally-imposed requirements vis à vis professional development and evaluation. In some cases, states and districts provided guiding frameworks and tools (such as rubrics) that the schools adopted. They did not necessarily choose to “recreate the wheel,” but adapted existing tools, sometimes using them “with more fidelity” than the traditional schools that were required to use them.

Conclusion

Decades of research on teacher work life have affirmed the importance of collegial relationships to teachers’ commitment to their workplaces and to their ongoing professional development. And yet, isolation of teachers from their colleagues persists in many schools, supported by the physical design of schools (i.e., “egg crate” classrooms) and deeply-seated cultural norms of privacy and noninterference. Chapter 2 highlighted the costs of isolation to teachers, including professional stagnancy, diminished motivation, reduced organizational commitment, and increased likelihood of quitting.

This chapter discussed the professional relationships of teachers working in teacher-powered schools and their bearing on teacher development and, ultimately, on TPV. The analysis traced the presence of strong professional communities among teachers to a careful balance of informality and structure. “Open-door policies” and “relaxed” meetings fostered deprivatized practice and collegial trust. At the same time, structures such as designated meeting times and depersonalized protocols supported regular problem-solving conversations.

For the teachers I spoke with, getting better at their jobs was a huge source of motivation and satisfaction. As in Chapter 5, which found that teachers who could set their own goals and design pathways to meet them experienced a sense of self- and collective efficacy, this chapter relayed the critical importance of teacher ownership over professional learning to their belief in their own capacity to improve.

Chapter 8: Power to Choose: Collective Autonomy in Hiring and Budget Decisions

Introduction

Chapter 2 presented *deprofessionalization* as a fourth prevailing narrative of teacher work life and threat to teacher professional vitality (TPV). I described *deprofessionalization* as the stripping away of the teacher's ability to use professional judgment on behalf of her students. Innumerable aspects of today's public education systems deprofessionalize teaching, from standardized curricula to centralized purchasing of materials to mandated professional development.

Deprofessionalization threatens TPV in both direct and indirect ways. It is directly threatening in that it signals to the teacher that she or he is incapable of making good decisions on behalf of her students—a message that may be humiliating, especially to teachers with decades of experience and advanced teaching degrees. It is also demoralizing because it precludes teachers from exercising creativity in their work, which can frustrate especially innovative teachers. It is indirectly threatening because, in denying teachers the opportunity to make decisions on behalf of students, deprofessionalizing teaching subtracts one of the best sources of insight on student learning—the teacher—from the decision-making process, thereby leading to decisions that may be ill-advised.

Teacher-powered schools would presumably be places where teachers are unlikely to feel deprofessionalized. By definition, these are schools in which teachers *do* make the decisions that impact what, how, and with whom they teach.

When asked to speak about the kinds of decisions teachers made as a staff at the three school sites, and how those decisions impacted them, participating teachers spoke most often about decisions in two key areas: staffing and budget. To the teachers I interviewed, having a meaningful say in the human and material resources the school invested in was instrumental to

how they did their work and with whom. The decisions themselves—and teachers’ participation in making them—had profound implications for teachers’ willingness to collaborate and the responsibility they felt for creating conditions conducive to learning in their own classrooms. This chapter is about teachers’ daily opportunities to exercise power over the selection and use of human and material resources and the implications for that power on teachers’ work lives. I will begin by describing teacher involvement in staffing and budgetary decisions in the three case study schools (a discussion touched on in the previous chapter with respect to staff termination at Explore), followed by a presentation of related survey findings. As in the preceding chapters, this chapter ends with implications of collective decision-making authority (CDMA) in staffing and budget for TPV as well as the context-specific factors that enable and constrain decision-making in these areas.

Collective Autonomy over Hiring

As discussed in Chapter 2 and expanded upon in the previous chapter, positive collegial relationships are crucial—both to workplace satisfaction and to the professional learning that builds a teacher’s confidence in her craft. How those relationships are formed—the extent to which staff groupings are intentional, with attention to composition and compatibility—seemed to matter a lot to the teachers I spoke with. Since many teacher groupings were position-related—for instance, grade level teams or subject area departments—the compositions of those groups depended a lot on who was hired for what positions.

Hiring practices at the three school sites. At all three schools, teachers spoke extensively about their ability to participate in the hiring process for prospective colleagues and the impact of that participation on their schools’ relational climate. While each school differed somewhat in the process by which teachers engaged in the hiring process for new teachers, each included significant teacher involvement and say. A brief overview of the teacher hiring process

at each school is provided below. Then, I will use teacher interview data to make two primary assertions about teacher involvement in hiring: first, that teachers participating in the hiring process prioritized candidate “fit” above other considerations; and second, that teacher participation in hiring served inadvertently as a recruitment tool, attracting specifically those teachers who sought a collaborative professional community in which their voices would be included in school-level decision-making—not just a teaching job.

Hiring at Explore School. At Explore School, all new hires had to be approved unanimously by the entire school staff. The three-person Personnel Committee managed the hiring process, identifying open positions, posting openings, establishing hiring committees for each opening, and supporting the work of hiring committees in ensuring that the hiring process aligned with school policy and human resource law. In addition to staff members, students and parents were active participants in the interview process.

In reviewing applicants, hiring committees—generally comprised of the staff members, students, and parents who would work most closely with the prospective hire—paid close attention not only to applicants’ credentials and experience but also to their enthusiasm for being part of a co-op and the duties that went along with co-op membership. All staff members at Explore were expected to serve on at least one school-wide committee; many served on multiple committees and took on other responsibilities as individuals (as described more fully in Chapter 6).

Hiring at High School for Human Rights. As a Pilot School, High School for Human Rights (HSHR) staff had considerable autonomy over hiring decisions, though they could only hire candidates who had passed through the district’s HR screening, and had to agree to interview any interested teachers with greater seniority than top applicants from the district’s overall hiring

pool. Luis, who has been with HSHR since its inception, felt that this requirement, while a nuisance, generally wasn't a barrier to hiring whomever staff felt were the best candidates:

If we want to hire a first-year teacher, we have to exhaust that pool [of higher-seniority teachers] first. So, we call those 30 people in the pool and see if they want an interview. And then, if they decide "no, it's not for me," cool, then we cross their name off; we keep going down the list. And then once that's exhausted, then we can hire the teacher that we had in mind in the first place, for the most part.

The school's Elect to Work Agreement deters some applicants because of its requirements for extended work hours and the expectation that teachers take on significant responsibilities beyond their teaching duties.

Teachers at HSHR had to undergo a "rigorous" interview process consisting of multiple phone and in-person interviews, as well as a sample lesson in most instances. Current teachers were highly involved in the hiring process. According to Paula, now a third-year teacher, "almost every single teacher that I was probably going to work with" participated in her interview process. In my conversations with teachers, I heard of anywhere from 4 to 20 teachers being involved in the hiring of a single staff member. Teachers would filter in and out of interview panels as their schedules allowed, primarily during "conference" periods. Teachers' participation in at least one interview per year was a required part of their job description as stated in their Elect to Work Agreement. According to Theresa, "Most of the time people are really interested [in participating in teacher interviews] because they want to be able to learn about the people that are potentially going to be our colleagues."

Despite teacher involvement in hiring decisions, per the Pilot School agreement, "staffing decisions ultimately rest with the principal who retains the final authority." Teachers recounted several examples of Miguel, the principal, playing an active role in recruiting teachers for the school, often being candidates' first point of contact (e.g., at a job fair or conference) prior to the

formal teacher-led interview process. However, not one teacher I interviewed indicated that any of their hiring recommendations had been overruled.

Hiring at Young Leaders Academy. Teachers at Young Leaders Academy (YLA) went through a somewhat standard application, interview, and model teaching process prior to being offered a position. A Hiring Committee was established for each opening, generally comprising three to four teachers, an administrator, and parents if possible. As at HSHR, the principal at YLA also had the final, official say on new hires, but in practice consistently honored teachers' recommendations. Henri, a special education social studies teacher who had taken part in a hiring committee for an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher, explained that "ultimately, they [administrators] are the ones who decide but it's through our [teachers'] advice that they ultimately decide."

Hiring theme: choosing "right fit" colleagues. To the teachers I spoke with, one of their highest priorities with regard to hiring was finding teachers who would be the right "fit" for the school's mission, model, or current staff composition. While teachers at the different schools spoke about "fit" differently, it was of major concern—perhaps more so than experience, education, or other accolades.

At HSHR, committed to the mission. At HSHR, "fit" was primarily related to commitment to the school's mission to advance social justice through rigorous academic preparation and development of the "complete individual." Since the school worked primarily with low-income students of color, teachers were passionate about ensuring that their future colleagues were attuned to issues of race and class and would incorporate social justice teaching in their classrooms. English teacher Theresa felt that her presence in hiring interviews helped to ensure that people who did not share the school's commitment to social justice did not make it past the interview stage:

There's been times where I've been in an interview with someone and thank gosh I was there... I remember asking, "So what's an important social justice issue to you?" I think one of the guys said, "Well, you know, I had a black roommate in college." I just thought, "Oh my gosh." ... We've asked [the same question] before and people have said, "I'm not really sure what a social justice issue is." You sit there and go, "Oh." Things like that you can at least weed through.

In contrast, some candidates truly stood out at the interview stage because of their commitment and enthusiasm for being a part of the HSHR community. Theresa continued:

Then we have people that have done so much research and you can tell they are so hyped to be here, and they really want to be a part of our school and they're all in. That is such a good thing to know, especially coming from North Valley when you were just kinda placed [haphazardly] together with people.

When I asked what the impact of her participation was on her work at HSHR, she replied, "I think it's huge. I mean, no one can predict what someone's going to be [like] after you meet them, but I think 80 percent of the time it's worked out really well." One example Theresa pointed to was the hiring of a novice social studies teacher a few years ago:

I was part of that interview, and I just remember afterwards that I said, "If we don't hire him, we are insane..." He was a first-year teacher, but he was so positive and so passionate and every question he had amazing answers [to]. Then he says, "Oh, by the way, I have a philosophy degree and I can teach philosophy." I thought, this is the best thing ever. You come across those people and I don't think you have the opportunity to have that all in a comprehensive high school.

For Theresa, positivity and passion for teaching were more important than experience, or even personality. "You might not know what someone's personality's like, and everyone's gonna have personality rubs, but you know when someone is passionate about being an educator. That's really something you can pick up on in an interview."

Paula, a third-year physics teacher, felt that asking prospective teachers “the social justice question” gave the hiring team insight into how the candidate would approach working with HSHR students, who often arrived at the school behind academically.

[We ask,] “why are you in education?” There’s always that question. “Why do you want to teach *here*? What would you do if you had to... if you realized that you have to reteach a lesson?” It’s how they respond to that [question] that really makes a big difference because we *will* have to reteach a lot in most situations, and we just want people that are willing [to reteach]... Sometimes, they’ll say, “I want to teach high school because I’m done teaching fractions and decimals with middle school.” I [say], “No, you *will* have to teach fractions and decimals. Are you okay with that?”

Since teaching at HSHR came with the added challenge of catching students up to grade level and promoting their “self-actualization”—no small feat—it was important to teachers that their future colleagues were up to the task.

Both Theresa and Paula’s comments about what they looked for in a potential colleague suggested that candidates’ commitment to working hard to advance the mission of the school and the students it served were more important than their prior teaching experience. In lieu of experience⁴³, Paula identified “teachability” and “openness” as other core criteria she and her colleagues sought in prospective colleagues—indicative of an expectation that teachers would strive to improve their teaching practice with the support and guidance of colleagues.

At Explore, a “cooperatively-bred” person. To advisors at Explore, assessing a prospective staff member’s fit was also about their mindset and less about their particular

⁴³ That is not to say that experience was *not* important in making hiring decisions. Many of HSHR’s new hires were, in fact, highly experienced teachers.

expertise in a content area or teaching experience, *per se*. Specifically, staff members sought colleagues who would thrive in a co-op setting and be willing to take on a wide range of responsibilities beyond teaching. For example, Leah, who had spent 8 years on the personnel committee before transitioning off to become a board member, said, “We don’t hire people who only want to teach, or who want a boss, because it just doesn’t work. We’ve had those people before and we’ve also let those people go, like, it just doesn’t work in a co-op.”

At times, finding the right fit meant deprioritizing teachers’ subject area expertise, even if it meant hiring someone in a different licensure area. At the time of my visit, the staff had recently added a physics position and chosen to hire one of their Educational Assistants who had a teaching license in life sciences. Molly justified the decision in large part because the new hire was, as she described, a “totally cooperatively-bred person”:

This was a big decision last year, hiring a new full-time teacher. Sean [an advisor] had figured out how to fit an extra Advisory into the system, so that was interesting in itself [because] we could get bigger, and no one else had seen that... So we had, all of a sudden, the opportunity to hire someone new, and we had this person on staff, Ryan, who’s been a licensed teacher. He’s got his Master’s but he’s in a field we already have covered. He’s a life science person by license. But he knows us. He’s a totally cooperatively-bred person. So, he’s like a perfect guy for the job who loves project-based learning, has this vision for how to do more science more often as projects, because we still do have some traditional classes, and so on. So, he looks like this perfect person for the job except for we actually really need a chemistry or a physics teacher because Liz’s load is really heavy having to teach both of those [classes] and Andrew and Ann are both life science already. [We had] those conversations with the staff, of like [whether to choose] the person because of the experience and the training [at Explore] over an outsider with a different license. We created a hiring committee. We did post [the position] for physics and chemistry. We did interview those people and interviewed Ryan. And so it seemed in the end, I think, everybody’s super excited about the fact that we brought Ryan in. To watch him with his Advisory and to watch him introduce this new level of projects in science has been great.

To Molly and her colleagues, having the autonomy to choose Ryan over someone with the correct licensure for the position came with two major benefits: first, it relieved the staff of needing to onboard someone new into their dramatically different model, since Ryan was a current staff member. Second, it infused a “new level” of project-based learning into the science department.

Since the point of adding the position was to ease Liz’s burden of covering all the physical science coursework and projects, Molly also addressed the impact of the decision on Liz:

I think Liz has felt like her workload has decreased because he’s taken on some of the physical science stuff that she has done. I think it was hard because on paper it looked like a stupid decision, and not very supportive of Liz. But she got to be on the committee, and she got to look at the other people, and she got to have a strong voice in who we hired. I think if she had blocked [the decision], if she had just felt really strongly that, “I need the support of a physics or chemistry person,” we would have done that. When we looked at who else was out there, and Ryan had to come in and interview alongside them... Liz was able to see that getting this person who knows what we’re doing already and not having to onboard someone fresh, that’s going to be better in the long run. But it was not easy.

This example highlights the care and deliberation that went into what was a difficult hiring decision, and the extent to which staff members weighed how well candidates fit with the school’s model above his paper qualifications. While Ryan’s application might have been rejected off the bat in most traditional schools, at Explore, it was seen as a way to further the goals of the cooperative.

At YLA, a good complement. As discussed in Chapter 5, the goals at YLA and the approaches to teaching and learning to accomplish those goals were considerably broader than those at HSHR and Explore, prioritizing the exposure of students to a wide range of teaching styles and engaging them with project-based and experiential learning on top of preparing them

for the difficult state tests they would need to pass in order to attend college. Perhaps because of this, YLA teachers were least specific of the three schools about the qualities and characteristics they sought in making hiring decisions—although the outcomes of those decisions were evident in the diversity of teachers that taught in the school.

From the responses teachers gave about hiring decisions, it seemed as though assessing “fit” was a fairly subjective quality determined on a situation-specific basis by a teacher-majority hiring committee. According to Principal Lori, who was sometimes—but not always—a member of hiring committees, the question, “What’s the kind of person that we want here?” was a common practice that called on teachers to name the qualities and characteristics they sought in a potential future colleague.

Since committees were primarily made up of the teachers from the department doing the hiring, teachers cared about the personalities and potential contributions their future colleagues would make to their weekly Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, which, as described in Chapter 7, were an integral part of YLA teachers’ experience. Therefore, “liking” the person was important. Nathan, in describing Michelle’s hire the previous year, said: “there was myself and two other teachers, with Josh [on the committee], and we watched two of the model lessons, and then we all spoke about which [candidates] we liked the most.” The committee then made a recommendation to the principal, who had the ultimate authority to draw up a contract—an administrative hurdle that did not seem to diminish Nathan and his team’s sense of responsibility for the hiring decision: “At the end of the day, the principal had to actually sign the

contract, but the principal wasn't even at any of these hiring [events]. She just said, "whoever you want to hire, we'll basically hire."

In recalling his own hire six years ago, Nathan felt that the involvement of the other science teachers in the hiring decision made him feel more attached to his science PLC than he might have felt had the decision been entirely administratively made. "It gave me a much stronger bond." The "bond" was in part a result of his feeling somewhat of a debt of gratitude for his colleagues who were responsible for hiring him: "I was like, 'Oh, wow, I have my job because of you guys, like, I love you guys now.'"

Intentional hiring as a selling point for prospective teachers. Like Nathan, multiple teachers at each school spoke about their own journey to being hired. Beyond the "bond" and sense of loyalty that they may have felt toward colleagues who had chosen them above all other applicants, teachers felt that faculty investment in hiring—apparent during their own interview experiences—was a major reason behind their wanting to teach at the school. For example, to Paula at HSHR, seeing so much teacher involvement in her interview process helped her feel confident that this was a school that really "took care of the details." Below is my exchange with her about her "rigorous" interview experience:

Paula: It was one of the most rigorous interviews I've ever gone through.

Sara: Really?

Paula: But I actually really liked it. I liked that process. I liked the fact that they gave us that challenge. And if they're being that detailed and intricate about the interview process, it's because they're really taking care of the details. I don't know. It just felt like they're really looking out. I had students in the interview... I remember the interview took so long... I basically talked to every single teacher... I definitely was interviewed by the principal again... [the science department chair]... all the 11th grade teachers because that was the grade that I was going to be part of, except the math teacher...

Sara: Wow. Were these individual interviews or were they all together?

Paula: No. It was here, this room. I walked in. This table was actually there [pointing]. I sat on this side, and they were all there [on the other side].

Sara: Oh my gosh.

Paula: Then, one would walk out, [thinking] "okay, I've heard enough to leave," and then another, like whenever they would come in—

Sara: They would sort of filter in and out?

Paula: Yeah, as they were getting free from whatever thing that they were doing. Now, I know why. They were [in] office hours, or they were doing other things. They would just kind of pop in. I don't know. And then after that, I guess because I was a new teacher, they had me do a sample lesson. It was with all the 10th grade teachers, and also students were involved in the sample lesson. Then, it was just waiting and then yeah. They called me back... I was like, "Yay. I'm in."

Paula noted that not all teachers—particularly teachers who were more experienced—went through the same rigorous process as she did. But it was the extensiveness of the process itself that made Paula feel confident about her decision to accept the offer when it came.

I just remember it was such a process, but there was something about it [that] I really appreciated because then, I was like, I can see myself being on the other side, and not being hard on, but being very particular with who we want to interview and who we'd want to take into our team... It made me want to be a part of it even more. I don't know why. I'm just crazy like that, but yeah. I really did. It really was like, "Yeah. I want to be a part of this now."

Even as a novice teacher, Paula was sensitive to the fact that the staff composition of a school mattered to its success, and to her own professional development. "Being very particular"

signaled not only that Paula was a catch for the school—which probably made her feel good—but it also gave her the confidence that such decisions were not made haphazardly.

To Ann at Explore, the interview experience was very different from the top-down hierarchies she had experienced in previous jobs, both in education and in the corporate sector.

Students interviewed me, parents interviewed me, and I thought this place was really different. And I was really impressed by the questions that the kids asked, and I just had this gut feeling [that] this is a place I'd like to be a part of. And I didn't know enough about teacher power, teacher led, or project-based learning. I accepted that that was an interesting way to do it.

Ann's testimony serves as somewhat of a contrast to Ryan's hiring experience because Ann lacked familiarity with the cooperative, teacher-led model, whereas Ryan was "totally cooperatively bred"—but the interview process conveyed just what collaborative decision-making could look like if done well. While to some teachers this may have been a turn-off to see the amount of community involvement in one hiring decision, to Ann, it was inspiring, and ultimately a deciding factor in accepting the offer.

Similarly, Rachel at YLA felt that the collaborative hiring process and the sense of community she perceived from it played a role in her decision to accept the job:

I really liked the vibe of the school, it feels like a community. Something I liked when I interviewed here, [was that] it was a team that interviewed me, and watched my demo lesson and everything, and that team included the principal, at least two teachers and a parent... That was neat. That sent a message to me, and also made for a nice and productive conversation.

Like Paula's "something about it" and Ann's "gut feeling," the "message" Rachel took away from her interview experience was difficult to articulate, but powerful. These examples collectively illustrate that these teachers were attuned to the "vibe" of the schools as much as they

were attuned to any specific job characteristic. Collaborative, teacher-led decision-making appeared to inform that “vibe” quite a bit.

Natalie, a 14-year teaching veteran who had been recruited by Miguel to interview at HSHR three years ago, immediately recognized that the high teacher interest and influence over the hiring process she experienced meant she was in the right place:

I walked in, and I kid you not, I think there were 20 teachers... [and] five kids. I'm sweaty, I'm hot, I'm in heels. And I'm like, “Hey, all right then. Let's do it.” But it also let me know right away that this is exactly where I want to be. When you have that much interest in that many people who want to make sure that you get the right fit, it's a good sign that it's that intense. And so I came on, yes, I came on. This is my third year now.

The ability of the three staffs to “be particular” about hiring had mattered so much to these then-prospective teachers because it portended something—a collaborative school culture, an intentionality around decision-making, a thoughtfulness about aligning people with the purpose and process of schooling.

To Natalie and other teachers who had come from more traditional district schools, the interview process at HSHR stood in stark contrast to the perfunctory hiring process to which they were accustomed. Theresa, for example, was surprised when she was asked to interview for her English position, especially since she had worked with many of the staff members previously at North Valley:

I remember Jessica [a fellow English teacher at HSHR] said, “So your interview...” I was like, “Interview?” Because when I got hired into [the district], I went there [district headquarters] and someone looked at my resume and said, “You have a master's degree in English? We don't even need to talk to you.” So, I was just [placed] in a school. [Jessica] said, “come [to interview],” and I said, “Well, I know all of you, what are you talking about?” But I sat down, and I had an interview, and it was really cool.

To Theresa, the autonomy of the staff at HSHR to hire their own teachers—as compared with her earlier experience of being placed at a district school without having interviewed there—meant they were able to be intentional about the hiring process. While the district required them to interview eligible teachers in the hiring pool, it never was a problem, in part because of the principal’s influence. “I know because of Miguel’s advocacy we’ve never had to have a ‘must-place’ here,” Theresa said. “We’ve always been able to hire our own. Sometimes it didn’t work out, but then we had the ability to hire other people.”

Survey findings on teacher hiring. Was involvement in hiring decisions common across Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI) schools? Figure 8.1, below, compares TPSI respondents’ influence over teacher hiring decisions to that of Schools and Staffing Survey 2011-2012 (SASS 11-12) teachers. Again, as in Chapter 7, the difference between the two populations of teachers is pronounced, with TPSI teachers reporting far greater influence in this area than their SASS 11-12 counterparts.

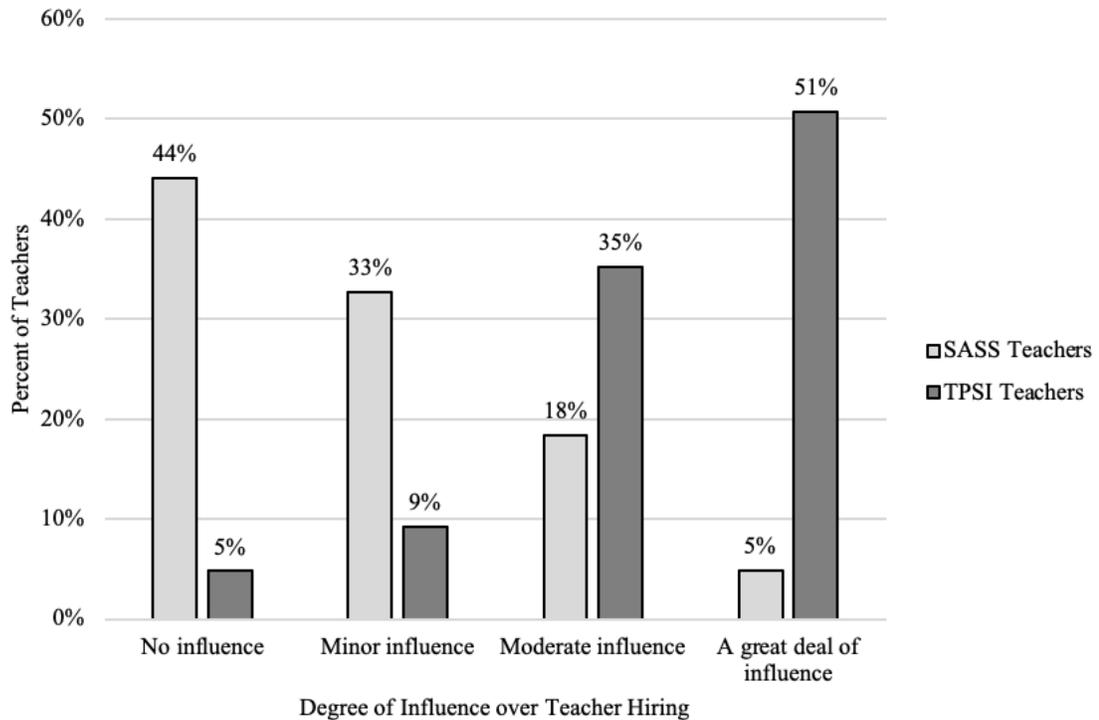


Figure 8.1. Teacher influence over hiring decisions: SASS 11-12 and TPSI respondents.

Note. $n = 335$ for TPSI respondents. Specific response counts for individual SASS 11-12 survey items were not publicly available. Over 37,000 eligible public school teachers completed the SASS 11-12 survey (Cox, Parmer, Strizek, & Thomas, 2016).

To the teachers I interviewed, having the collective autonomy to hire teachers promoted teachers' sense of collective responsibility for their school's success because it helped them feel confident that they were selecting people who were the "right fit" for their teams. Additionally, on the other side of the hiring equation, prospective teachers were impressed with the faculty investment apparent in the hiring process and honored to have made it through extensive interview processes, leading them to feel more committed to the school and their future colleagues. These findings were largely supported in the survey data: teachers who reported having "moderate influence" or "a great deal of influence" over hiring decisions were more likely to report both high collective responsibility and high commitment than teachers who reported "no

influence” or only “minor influence.” Figures 8.2 and 8.3, below, show a clear positive trend for both variables.

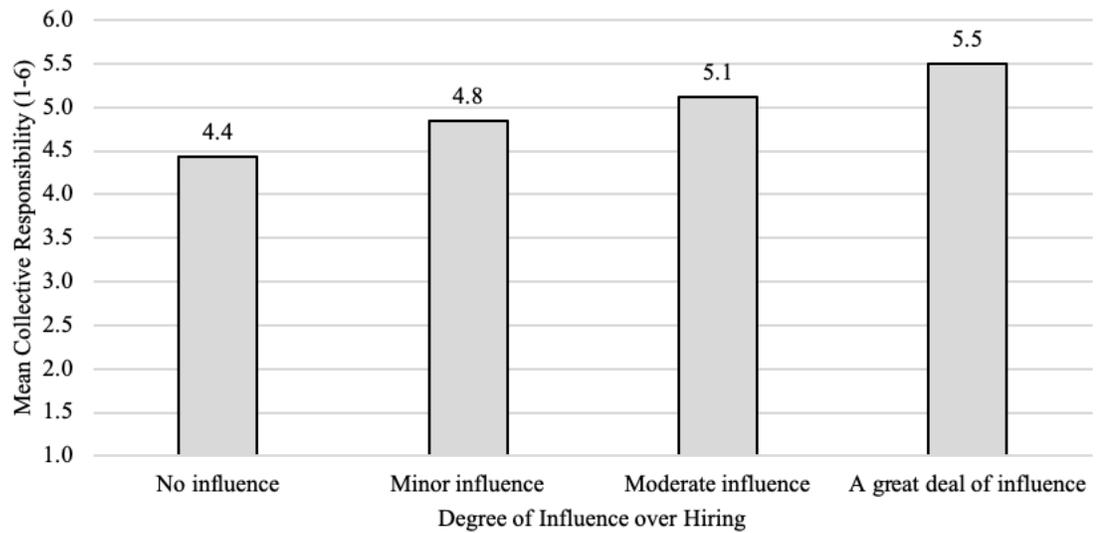


Figure 8.2. Collective responsibility by degree of influence over hiring decisions.

Note. $n = 330$.

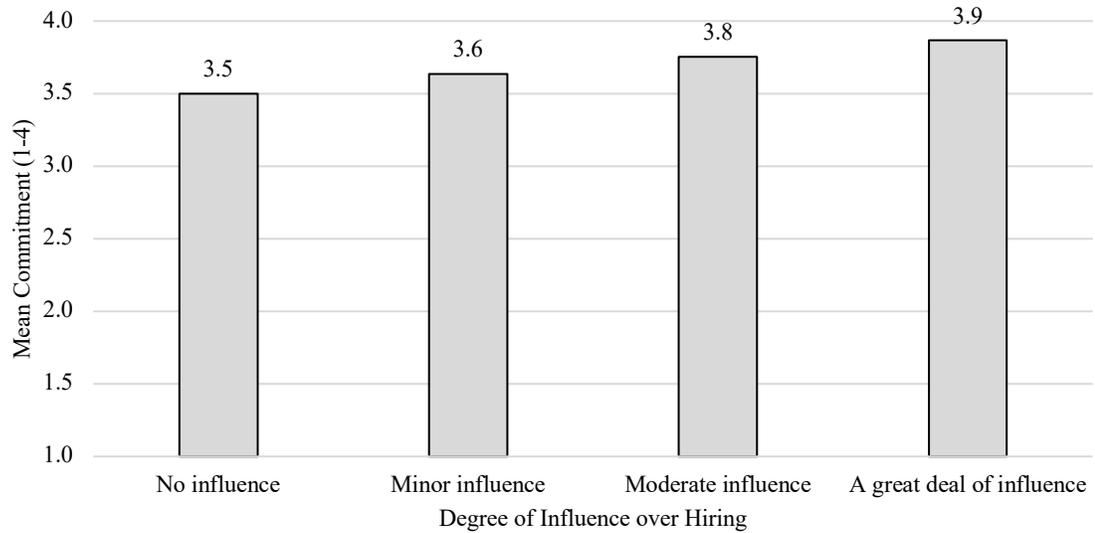


Figure 8.3. Teacher commitment by degree of influence over hiring decisions.

Note. $n = 332$.

Collective Autonomy over Budgetary Decisions

As with hiring decisions, teachers at the three school sites had considerable influence over how funds were allocated, including for personnel, professional development, and classroom materials. This section will first describe how financial decisions were made at each of the three school sites, and then go into detail about two themes that surfaced at all three schools related to how budgetary decisions impacted teachers' work life: first, the extent to which teachers felt that budgetary influence empowered them to teach in ways consistent with their professional expertise, and second, the extent to which CDMA around budget required that individual teachers work to "champion" ideas among their colleagues—further reinforcing their interdependency and alignment toward a common mission.

Financial decisions at the three school sites. Each school had somewhat different processes for allocating funds and managing the budget, but one commonality across sites was

the accessibility of funds for teachers to use on an as-needed basis. How each school approached financial decisions is presented in the paragraphs that follow.

Budgeting at Explore. At Explore, all budgetary decisions—including the approval of the annual budget by the school’s teacher-majority board of directors—were agreed-upon collectively by the school’s entire staff. Special education case manager, Wendy, put it simply: “We all have a say in our budget. All, always.” This included decisions about staff salaries and annual raises, something that distinguished Explore from HSHR and YLA, where teachers did not have input on their salaries. Harriet—math teacher and the treasurer of the board—described how the budget, including staff compensation, got drafted, vetted by staff, and eventually approved:

Amanda [a program coordinator] and I will ask [our financial manager] to run some numbers, looking at how many students that we’re going to have next year and then giving ... What he’s really looking at is, can we give ourselves raises? That’s the main question. Can we even do the standard cost-of-living one? Can we do something more than that? We have him run numbers and then we bring those numbers back to the staff and start looking at, with the budget as it is and with how the numbers run, are we comfortable with what it looks like? As a staff we can vote, “yes, this looks great,” or “no, we shouldn’t do this.” We do the zero, one, or two percent raise or something like that and have the staff be able to give input on that. Then that goes to the board and the board usually says yes because it’s a teacher majority board.

The school has not always been able to give staff annual raises—even a cost of living adjustment. Due to a state-level holdback of funds for public education several years ago, Explore had significantly less funding than in most years and had to cut its budget by about \$80,000. “We were okay by a hair, but that was a really hard decision,” Harriet said. Teachers voted not to increase salaries and had to cut the amount of health insurance paid by the school so they could spare staff members’ jobs.

Besides staff salaries, the school set aside considerable discretionary funds for use on an as-need basis. I had the opportunity to observe several staff meetings where staff members voted to approve—for example—the purchase of a new 3D printer for the school’s new Makerspace

and a large order of disinfecting wipes (Harriet, who proposed the purchase, made sure to find the best deal on these). Individual advisors often crafted proposals for classroom materials—such as a set of graphing calculators or a classroom set of textbooks.

Budgeting at HSHR. As a pilot school, HSHR also had considerable budgeting autonomy so long as spending stayed within the guidelines provided by the school district. District guidelines stated that “Pilot Schools will use their monetary allocation to build a budget that meets the needs of their school’s instructional and operational program within the constraints of State and Federal laws, court orders and consent decrees, Personnel Commission rules, and Collective Bargaining Agreements.” Staff compensation was determined at the district level with relevant bargaining units and was therefore non-negotiable, but most other expenses were determined at the school level. The school’s annual budget was approved each year by the teacher-led Governing Council with input from the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), comprised of grade level team leads, department chairs, and administrators. Individual departments received their own budgets each year to use as they pleased to purchase materials.

According to budgeting guidelines for pilot schools published by the school district, “While the Governing School Council approves the annual budget, the Pilot School principal is the final budget manager and assumes responsibility for ensuring that the budget is available to support staffing requests and all other costs for a fiscal year.” In his capacity as manager of the budget, Miguel received requests for supplies and services on an ongoing basis from staff members. Like at Explore, the budget was flexible enough to ensure that unanticipated expenses could be covered throughout the course of the year, and Miguel had a reputation at the school for being very accommodating—if scrupulous—in reviewing requests. Teachers had to be prepared to provide a strong rationale for the request and, when discretionary funds were not available, be able to justify reallocation of funds from another area of the budget.

Budgeting at YLA. Of the three school sites, the determination of the annual budget at YLA involved classroom teachers least, though teachers did have a voice in the process through their minority representation on the school’s Board of Directors and Collaborative School Governance Committee. The Board was charged with “monitoring the fiscal integrity of the school” and was ultimately responsible for approving the annual budget, which was developed collaboratively by a Board Finance Committee with significant input from the Director of Operations and Finance and School Management Team (SMT). The Finance Committee was open to all members of the school community, except when personnel and real estate matters were being discussed. The Director of Operations and Finance is responsible for managing the budget with support from the SMT.

Like at HSHR, staff compensation at YLA was determined by the unions to which the school’s employees belonged, a somewhat unusual feature of a charter school, but one that the teachers I interviewed tended to appreciate. Rachel, for example, felt it was “kind of relieving” to be paid according to a collectively-bargained agreement, even if it meant there might not be opportunities for big salary bumps:

In my previous school, where there was no union contract... there were contentious issues. It’s kind of relieving [to have the union contract]; although there is no way to get paid a whole lot more, for example, it is what it is. That conversation is off the table. And there’s something that is freeing [about that] because then we can focus our attention and dialogue around the issues of student learning. For me it’s a compromise.

Teachers were eligible for additional stipends for taking on leadership roles at the school, such as PLC coach or cluster leader, but were otherwise paid according to their education level and years of service.

At the classroom and department levels, teachers at YLA had significant influence over the budget for curricular materials and professional development. According to Lori, requests

from teachers and teams came to the SMT, where “99.99 percent of the time, [requests] are approved.” For math teacher Arnel, this meant he could order a new document camera and register to attend professional conferences, including the national Teacher-Powered Schools conference that took place in Los Angeles in 2017. To Michelle, it meant being able to use the same workbook she had become accustomed to in her previous school. To Emily, it meant ordering a classroom set of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s bestselling novel, *Americanah*. Nathan described requesting teaching materials as “a very pain-free process.” He said, “If I want to buy something, I just email them [the SMT, saying], ‘I’m buying this, I’m going to put it on my credit card, you’ll pay me back?’ [And they reply,] ‘Yes, we’ll pay you back.’” These examples demonstrate that while teachers may not have been as involved as teachers at either Explore or HSHR in the annual budgeting process, they did have access to funds to be used as needed and in accordance with their professional judgment.

Budget influence “empowering” and “engaging” to teachers. What was the impact of teachers’ budget influence on their work lives? One theme that emerged across all three school sites was that it was empowering in the sense that it allowed teachers to try new things when doing so meant purchasing new supplies or attending an off-site training that had expensive registration fees.

For example, at HSHR, Theresa related a conversation she had had recently with Principal Miguel about her attending an upcoming training overseas:

I applied for this scholarship to go to an AP summer institute, but it’s \$1,000. I was [also] looking at one in Oxford [England]; it’s \$2,000. Then there is plane fare. I was on the bus with Miguel and I said, “Yeah, I know I’m going to go to AP by the Sea in San Diego because there is one in Oxford, but I can’t [afford it].” He’s like, “Well, let’s work it out. Let’s figure out how to do it.” I haven’t talked to him beyond that, but... that idea of being able to do things to advance my learning to be able to help the kids is something that—100 percent—would never happen outside of a place [where] you have the ability to figure your budget to see how that stuff can happen.

This example contrasted with Theresa's experience requesting funds for a classroom set of white boards while she was still teaching at North Valley years ago: "I got denied and I thought, 'Okay, it's a white board. It's really a material, it's not [the same as] me going to a conference or doing something for my own class.' I said, 'I'll share with Math class.' I still couldn't get it." In contrast, at HSHR, "any time we've had any kind of shortfall there's always a way to work it out and figure it out... The budgeting [autonomy] has helped us all grow in so many different ways."

Similarly, Henri at YLA talked about how easy it had been for him as a PLC coach to secure funds for professional development. "If we want something to get done, like, 'Oh, we want this guest teacher to come in,' I shoot [the idea] to admin, [and] it gets done." The SMT's willingness to honor teachers' requests led to a powerful professional development experience for Henri and his social studies PLC the previous year. Upon realizing in a PLC meeting that the author of the article they had been discussing was the very same history professor who had written his colleagues' social studies textbook, Henri advocated for the school to fund the professor to come in to speak with the PLC.

I was like, "Wouldn't it be crazy if we got him to come and then do a PD [professional development] for us?" So they're like, "Oh, you should do that!" So... I called him and I emailed him. He got back to me. We kept exchanging emails, then we got to exchanging phone calls. I ask [the Director of Teaching and Learning], she's like, "This sounds great. Let's make it happen." He came in at the end of the year to do a PD for us, and it all came from us reading an article. It was one of those "maybe" ideas. "Oh, wouldn't it be nice?"... So from that little comment to me saying we should try to get him, to me asking [the DTL], to her getting the money for it, to him coming in. It's like, wow. That happened because we still have some power. The funny thing about that is he then came in to do a PD for our elementary school at the beginning of this school year because [the DTL] was so impressed by his work with us last year. So, those ideas can go that far, just given the right push. And I appreciate that.

To Henri, this experience not only produced a meaningful learning experience for the social studies PLC, but also it sent him the message that his opinion as a representative of that PLC was

truly respected by the administration, and that he was assumed at baseline to be the authority on what the PLC needed to advance their practice. Despite there being a norm around asking for permission from his administrators, teachers “still had power” to sway the school’s spending.

Other than professional development, some teachers talked about how budgeting flexibility allowed them to try new things in the classroom to enhance their students’ learning experiences. At Explore, for example, Andrew talked about how being able to request funding for supplies was directly tied to his ability to choose what and how to teach:

The things that I buy for my class—like I bought some sugar to make rock candy for geology—I have to get approval for it, but nobody is going to say, “Oh, you really shouldn’t teach it that way,” or, “You shouldn’t use that lab,” or, “That’s a bad activity.” People might say, “We don’t have money for it,” but they wouldn’t tell me to do a lab differently. Unless it happened to be the day that I was observed and they saw something that day and said, “Hey, maybe next year you should do it like this.” Other than that, I select textbooks, or I select what labs we do... I select how wild and engaged I am.

When I asked Andrew what the ability to select materials and activities for his classes meant for him, he responded:

The feeling of autonomy is one of the greatest things about working here. The idea that I can choose what I teach and I get the consequence if it goes poorly, or I get the joy of seeing the looks on the students’ faces... when they really get something. That’s what’s really fun, is that it’s ... I get to try new things. Sometimes they work and sometimes they don’t, but it’s fun to try things. It’s fun to sometimes have labs blow up in my face (not literally). It really is a lot about what makes teaching here really fun, is that I get to try cool things. I get to go try shooting off rockets with Harriet, or whatever. We figure out how the science and math work. We do fun things that are engaging for us, and since it’s engaging for us, it’s engaging for the students.

The fact that he “gets the consequences” if a lesson goes poorly—and reaps the benefits when it goes well—suggests that Andrew feels responsible for the decisions he makes on behalf of students.

Luis at HSHR agreed that the autonomy to purchase materials for his English classes improved his teaching experience: “the feeling that you have a voice—and if I wanted to do

something else, I could—it's open opportunity, and it's fun. It's liberating, empowering. We build our capacity through a bunch of different lenses. So I like the challenge of that." Luis' and Andrew's testimonies both reflect an element of risk-taking or challenge made possible by the autonomy they experienced.

To Harriet at Explore, the benefits of teacher autonomy and budget flexibility made tough decisions around teacher compensation more palatable. When I asked Harriet how budgetary decision-making had affected teachers' work at Explore, she replied:

We here at Explore, we know that we don't make as much as our peers at other schools. We could make a ton more if we would just go to a big district and stick there for a while. We also know the benefits that we have here, that we have this awesome staff... When it comes down to it we're doing awesome things with students. It's a cool job... If you really buy in to how we do decision-making, I think it directly flows into how you work with students and parents. It's about everyone having voice.

Even though Explore teachers made less than their peers in the larger school districts nearby, it seemed as though they were compensated in other ways—through enjoying their work and through the satisfaction of knowing that their efforts (and risk-taking) had paid off in student engagement.

Ultimately, the teachers I spoke with recognized that not everything on their funding wish lists could be fulfilled, but they trusted their administrators (or their colleagues, in the case of Explore) to do their best to honor teachers' professional judgment by funding their requests. "Sometimes they [administrators] say they don't have money, and I understand that. [But] they find resources," Arnel told me, referencing his school's willingness to get him the classroom furnishings and supplies he needed. Comparing YLA to the previous traditional school where Arnel had taught, Arnel said, "There's more autonomy here. You're treated like a professional."

To Rajiv at HSHR, having the supplies he felt would support his students' learning was a professional right, not a privilege: "It shouldn't be difficult for me to ask my administrator about

buying calculators. That shouldn't be a difficult process, and it's literally as simple as saying, 'Miguel, I need calculators, here's the Amazon link.' It's done."

Survey findings on budget: Access to resources and classroom control. The teachers I spoke with felt empowered by their ability to request and receive funds for their classes and their teams. Access to funds made securing resources easy and facilitated creative teaching, which ultimately made teachers' jobs more satisfying and even "fun." This section turns to survey findings to see whether these themes were true of the surveyed population of TPSI teachers.

First, I compared TPSI teachers' and SASS 11-12 respondents' perceptions of influence over budgetary decisions (see Figure 8.4). Although TPSI teachers tended to report less influence over budgetary decisions than they did in other decision-making domains, they did report substantially higher influence in determining how their schools' budgets would be spent than their SASS 11-12 counterparts.

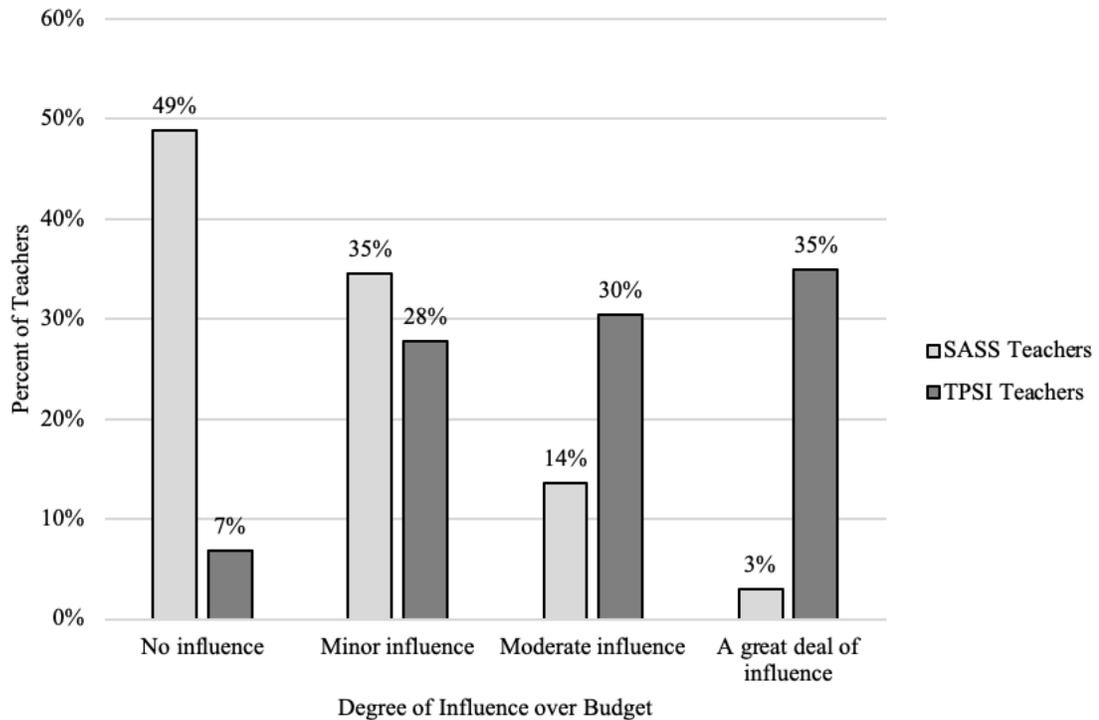


Figure 8.4. Teacher influence over budget decisions: SASS 11-12 and TPSI respondents.

Note. $n = 335$ for TPSI respondents. Specific response counts for individual SASS 11-12 survey items were not publicly available. Over 37,000 eligible public school teachers completed the SASS 11-12 survey (Cox, Parmer, Strizek, & Thomas, 2016).

Then, I compared the distribution of survey responses for TPSI teachers and teachers who took the SASS 11-12 on items pertaining to access to resources and classroom control. These comparisons are shown in Figures 8.5 and 8.6, below.

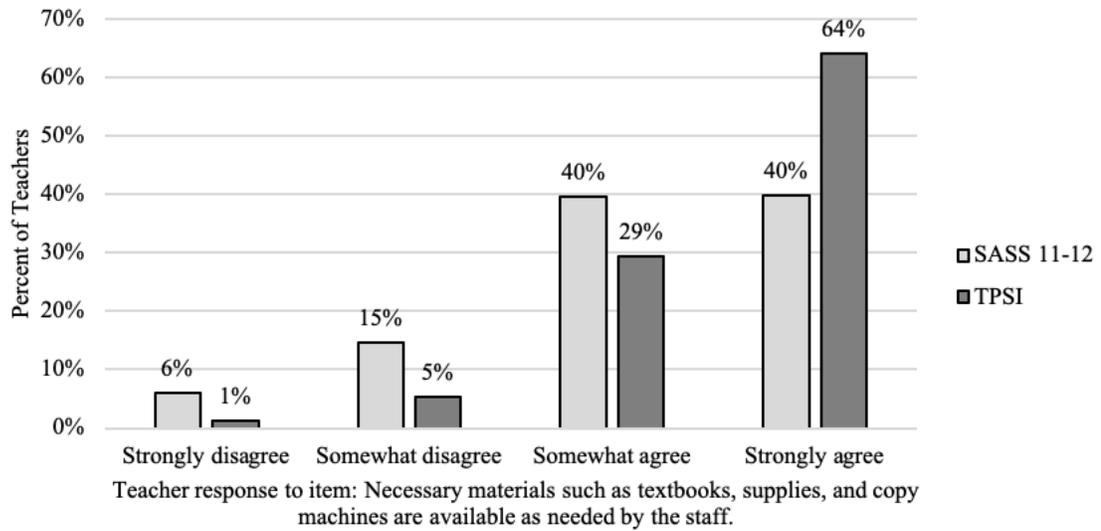


Figure 8.5. Access to resources: SASS 11-12 and TPSI respondents.

Note. $n = 335$ for TPSI respondents. Specific response counts for individual SASS 11-12 survey items were not publicly available. Over 37,000 eligible public school teachers completed the SASS 11-12 survey (Cox, Parmer, Strizek, & Thomas, 2016).

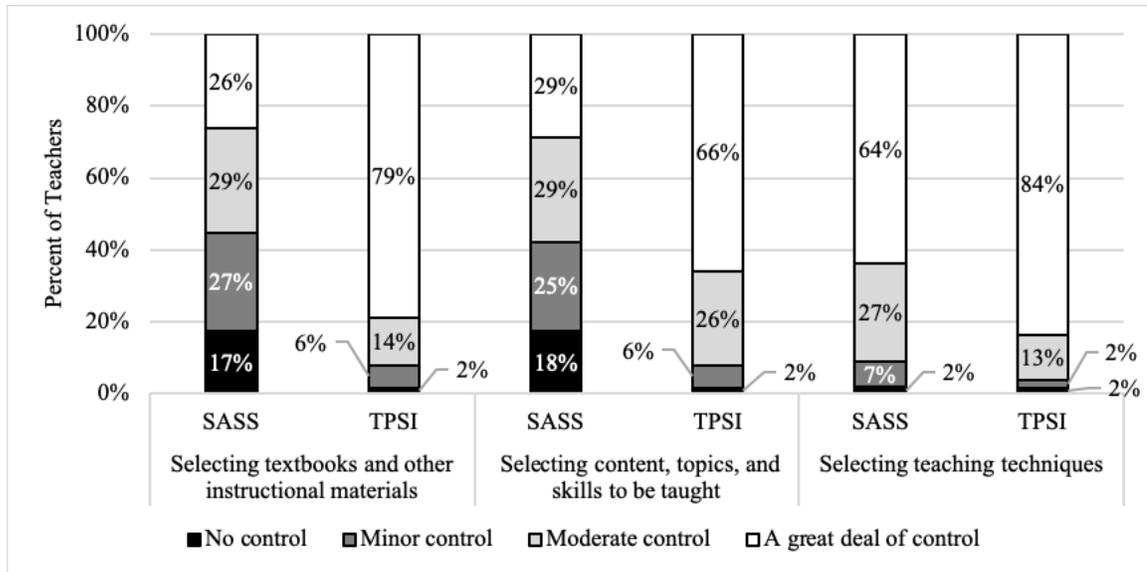


Figure 8.6. Classroom control items: SASS 11-12 and TPSI respondents.

Note. $n = 334$ for “materials” and “content” items; $n = 333$ for “techniques” item for TPSI respondents. Specific response counts for individual SASS 11-12 survey items were not publicly available. Over 37,000 eligible public school teachers completed the SASS 11-12 survey (Cox, Parmer, Strizek, & Thomas, 2016).

These comparisons largely support qualitative findings that teachers working in teacher-powered schools were able to access resources they needed to conduct their classrooms as they see fit. Notably, TPSI teachers were much more likely to strongly agree with the statement, “Necessary materials such as textbooks, supplies, and copy machines are available as needed by the staff” than were SASS 11-12 respondents (64 percent versus 40 percent, respectively). TPSI teachers reported having far greater classroom control than did SASS 11-12 teachers in all six control domains, including *selecting textbooks and other instructional materials*, *selecting content*,

topics, and skills to be taught, and selecting teaching techniques⁴⁴. The average difference in “a great deal of control” responses between the two groups was 37 percentage points across the three domains of control mentioned here.

Comparing the distribution of responses between TPSI and SASS 11-12 respondents provides important insight into differences in how these two groups perceive aspects of their work lives, but does not necessarily suggest any relationship between these areas. The following three figures (8.7 to 8.9) explore potential correlations between teacher budgetary influence and access to resources, classroom autonomy, and teacher satisfaction, respectively.

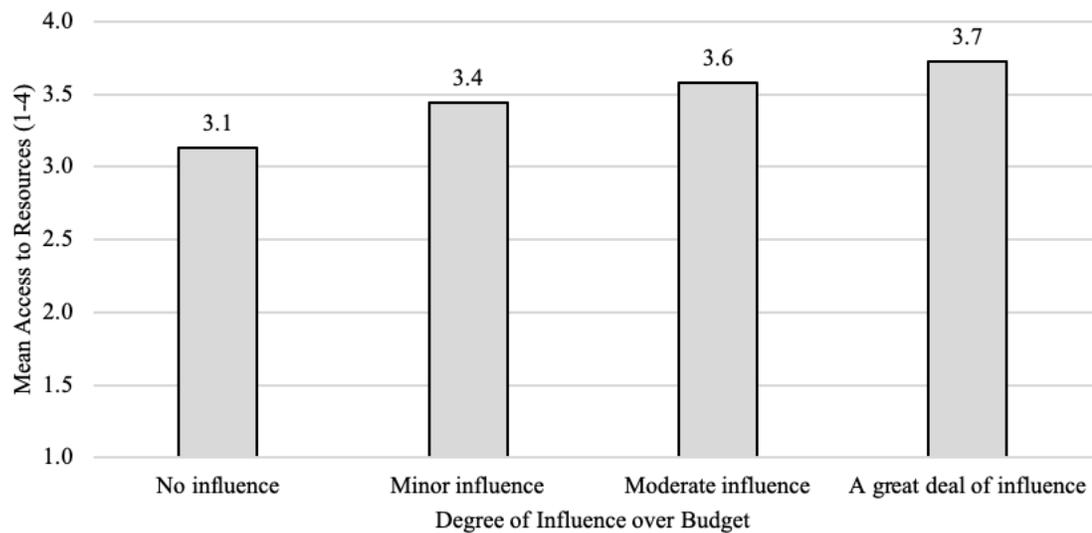


Figure 8.7. Access to resources by degree of influence over budget decisions.

Note. $n = 334$.

⁴⁴ While TPSI teachers also reported higher classroom control than SASS 11-12 respondents in the other three domains (*grading, discipline, and homework*), I chose to highlight the control domains of *materials, content, and techniques*, specifically, due to their relevance to the preceding qualitative findings and the likelihood that these domains are presumably more likely to be affected by budgetary influence than are the other three.

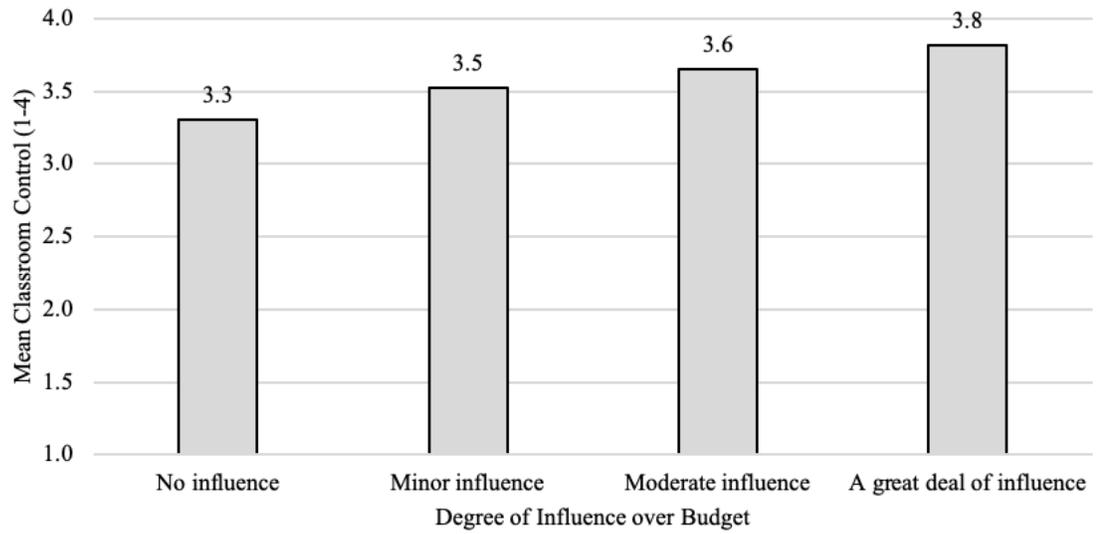


Figure 8.8. Classroom control by degree of influence over budget decisions.

Note. $n = 331$. Classroom control is a composite measure consisting of control ratings in the six classroom domains of materials, content, techniques, grading, discipline, and homework.

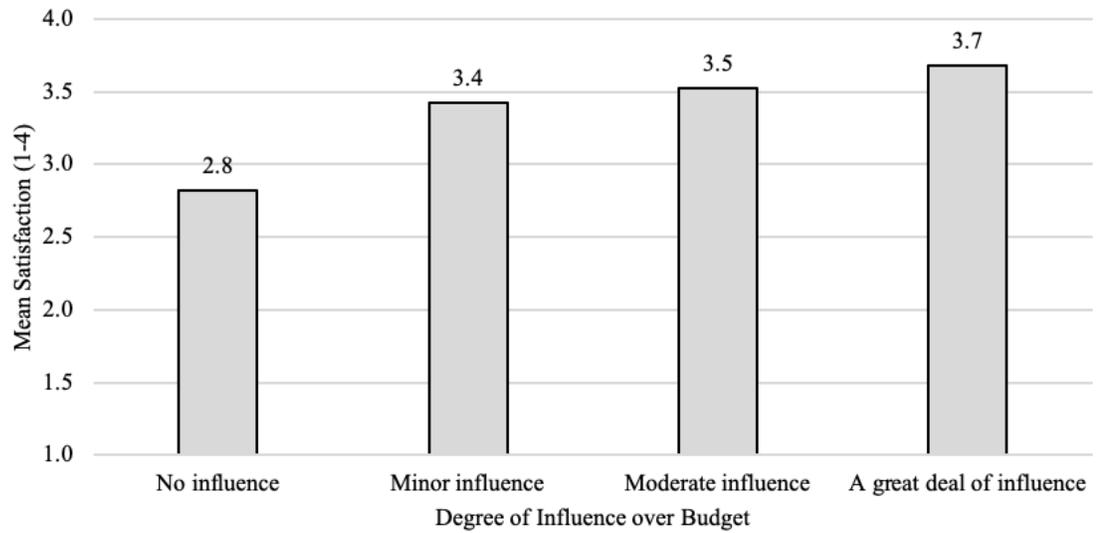


Figure 8.9. Job satisfaction by degree of influence over budget decisions.

Note. $n = 333$.

The above charts show that in each case, teachers who reported greater influence over budget decisions at their schools also experienced greater access to resources, greater overall classroom autonomy, and greater job satisfaction. This suggests that teachers who feel that they can influence the budget may be more likely to have access to the materials and training opportunities that gave teachers at the three case study sites a sense of empowerment and satisfaction.

Power Imbalance

On the whole, the teachers I interviewed felt that they had much more power to influence school-level decisions than peers at traditional schools. This finding is supported with evidence from Chapter 4 that TPSI teachers far exceeded a nationally representative sample of teachers in their ratings of decision-making influence in seven school-level domains (setting performance standards, curriculum, professional development, evaluation, hiring, discipline, and budget). At the same time, the teachers I spoke with did not always feel that power was distributed evenly among their peers, or that all teachers had equal influence over the hiring, budgeting, and other school-level decisions in which teachers played a role. This was true at all three schools, albeit in different ways. This section explores teachers' and school leaders' awareness of power imbalances and unwritten rules around staff "politics," as well as how such imbalances shaped teachers' work experiences. There were three primary ways in which power became unevenly distributed in the case study schools: formally, by role; informally, through experience; and informally, through collegial organizing.

Role-based power. In all three schools, individuals occupying specific positions accrued disproportionate influence by virtue of those roles. At HSHR and YLA, principals were vested with formal authority to make certain decisions—such as having the “final say” on teachers’

hiring and budget recommendations. At Explore, program coordinators, though they lacked decision-making authority, had power by virtue of their access to information and role in the agenda-setting process.

At YLA, power imbalance was explicit in the school's organizational structure: teachers reported to cluster leaders, who reported to the SMT, which was led by the principal. In general, teachers were at peace with the hierarchical nature of the school because it provided a clear structure for decision-making and allowed teachers to focus on teaching and learning as opposed to taking care of administrative duties like managing a budget. Arnel commented, "The hierarchy is good for me. It makes my life easier. They're [the administrators] there to facilitate what I need, and what my students need." To Arnel, administrators were instrumental in securing resources for his classroom and the middle school cluster.

As a researcher who chose to include YLA as a case study site specifically because of its inclusion in the TPSI inventory, I was surprised to find that some teachers I interacted with did not see the school as being "teacher-powered," and were unaware of the school's affiliation with TPSI. The dissonance between the school's TPSI designation and some teachers' denial of it had led Arnel and Nathan to embark on their own survey of teachers' perspectives of teacher leadership at YLA, in part to inform a process for training teachers about what it means to be teacher-powered. According to Nathan, "I think a lot of people are maybe like a little bit blissfully ignorant as to how teacher-led it is. Also, how good they have it, being teacher-led, because sometimes, a lot of times, being teacher-led means a lot of gridlock... Well, would you rather gridlock or a tyrant?"

It is easy to understand that, at a surface level, the school's clear hierarchy would make it seem like the school operated under a somewhat traditional top-down management structure. At the same time, the school's founding documents and ongoing philosophy promoted collaborative

leadership, and specifically teacher leadership—which was widely lived out by the principal and SMT. Principal Lori emphasized that teacher leadership was crucial to the school’s success in her interview:

We [the SMT] can sort of say, “You have to do this.” Yes, technically, I have the power. “You must do this.” ... Is it gonna happen with fidelity or is it gonna happen with the passion you want? It’s not really gonna happen if you don’t have teachers who are bought in. And then you’re just kind of running around, sort of yelling at people all the time, [saying] “You’re not doing—you know.” As opposed to having people go, “I really want this.”

Even though Lori “has the power” to tell her staff what to do and how to teach, she recognized that from a management standpoint, having teachers who were “bought in” to a specific initiative ultimately led to more faithful implementation. Teacher buy-in occurred most readily when teachers were the ones advocating for the change in question.

Like Lori, Principal Miguel at HSHR had the power to make final decisions when it came to hiring and budget. In practice, however, he nearly always honored teachers’ recommendations and actively sought out teachers’ perspectives matters of school policy. In one meeting of the ILT, the agenda Miguel had prepared included several items that had been annotated with, “How do you want me to handle this?”—sending the message that he would be take responsibility for next steps, but wasn’t going to do it without the support and guidance of other teacher leaders at the school.

Miguel saw his role as enabling teachers to do whatever they wanted—what he called establishing “a culture of ‘yes’”—under the condition that they demonstrate results and understand any tradeoffs that accompanied reallocating funds:

[I ask,] “What do you need from me?” Then creating the culture of yes... [Staff say,] “Miguel, I really [need this or that].” [I say,] “Yes. And those scores have to go up. Our attendance needs to be submitted, but yes, we *can* do that field trip and yes, we *can* start that club, and yes we *can* buy that textbook and... yes, every teacher can have five conference periods and only teach one period. Absolutely. We have to get rid of seven teachers to do that. Is that what you want to do?”

Miguel was not shy about leveraging the social and political capital he gained from approving everything to demand strong results from his staff. As someone keenly aware of forces outside the school working to undermine it, demanding that “scores go up” and “attendance be submitted” in exchange for honoring teachers’ requests was not so much a *quid pro quo* arrangement as it was a means of protecting the school’s autonomy from district administrators who might be wary of the school’s non-traditional ways of operating. In other words, Miguel demanded strong results so he could “provide cover fire.” He told teachers, “make sure every hour your attendance is submitted so there are no red flags. There’s no reason for us to be looked at... We don’t want to end up on any red lists. Get that stuff done so I can provide cover fire.” Clearly, although the autonomy the school had was a crucial part of what allowed the school to operate the way it did, such autonomy did not always feel secure, making it feel all the more crucial that they stayed off any “red lists.”

While both Lori and Miguel were quick to recognize the importance of teacher leadership to being able to successfully manage the operations of their schools, the formal power their positions bestowed upon them did mean that they had a crucial role to play in guaranteeing the teacher-powered status of their schools. Theresa noted that some teachers she had spoken with who were hoping to start their own teacher-powered schools had asked her, “What if the principal says no?” Her response to them was, “If you have the autonomies and you have the right person it’s possible,” suggesting that the fate of teacher power (ironically) depends on the principal’s willingness to endorse it.

One teacher at HSHR expressed disappointment that he had begun to hear less “us or we” and more “my or I” in reference to the school’s leadership. He compared this development to the process of drafting the initial proposal for the school years ago, which he had described to me as having been more “collegial”:

Everybody was equal. It was very much a team. It wasn’t one person’s vision. One of the things that disturbs me and disturbs me deeply is it started to look that way, and if there are any regrets that I have it’s that it’s changed from that original plan. It was always very much an “us” or “we.” Tend to hear more now the “my” or “I,” which disturbs me. It couldn’t have been done without each person doing their thing, their role, putting in that extra unpaid time. Some people were better being the face, being the spokesperson. Some were better being the writers behind the scenes, working out of the spotlight, but they were equal in value. That’s changed a little bit.

Miguel may have established a “culture of yes” among his faculty, but this teacher perceived an emerging status differential between the administration and the staff. The evolution away from the democratic origins of the school to a less egalitarian staff dynamic troubled him greatly.

At Explore, positional power was minimal because the school had intentionally not designated a leader, although the three “program coordinators” took on many administrative duties for which school leaders are often responsible. Program coordinators’ positional power above that of their colleagues was essentially limited to their role in agenda-setting and in drafting proposals for staff members’ review.

To teachers at Explore, the lack of a principal was mostly a source of pride but sometimes a source of stress. Molly relayed an incident involving a lunch meeting she and the other program coordinators had had with representatives of the school’s authorizer in which the people they were meeting with were “dumbfounded” by the school’s lack of a designated leader:

They put down their forks, and they’re like, “No, really, who’s in charge?” We’re like, “We are all in charge.” “No, but really who makes the decisions?” I felt like they almost wouldn’t approve the reauthorization of us because they were so completely dumbfounded that no one was actually in charge.

Although Molly recalled this incident with a hint of humor and pride, she also acknowledged that not having a principal came with certain drawbacks, especially when it came time to tell someone they were being let go (as discussed in Chapter 7).

The growth of the school and the opportunities that its staff has had to participate in external efforts (particularly in association with TPSI) had prompted serious discussion about whether the program coordinator role should be purely administrative instead of inclusive of advising and teaching, and the implications of that for the co-op model. This was under debate when I visited, with several teachers commenting that it made logical sense but that there was concern it would create a hierarchy that the staff hoped to avoid.

Tenure-based power. While Explore existed without a designated formal leader, staff widely recognized that there were power dynamics at play at weekly staff meetings, largely determined by staff tenure. Andrew felt that certain “power players” who had been at the school since its inception had “more capital in terms of which decisions are heard” than other staff members, a reality he referred to as “*de facto* principal-ness”:

There are some people who are new, trying to change some of the systems... and it's met with a lot of resistance, because I think some of the school leaders⁴⁵ have a vision about how things should work moving forward, and they see some of these system changes as trivial things, and these people should be spending their time focused on something else, and it sort of seems like little bit of *de facto* principle-ness. Even though we all have the power to stop and change and do all these things, it's also [that] the decisions are sort of predetermined [by senior staff members] in some cases. You could stand up and try to fight it, but it's probably not going to work.

⁴⁵ Andrew's use of the term “school leader” here is ambiguous. Since there are technically no designated school leaders at Explore, he may be referring to the three program coordinators, specifically, or more generally to the group of “power players” who have been at the school since its founding. Regardless, it is interesting that he chose the term as it does suggest a power dynamic or, in his words, a “*de facto* principal-ness.”

Andrew shared this sentiment in the context of a recent debate surrounding staff meeting facilitation. With the staff size increasing—having doubled in size over the past decade—some of the newer staff members at Explore had been feeling left out of conversations at staff meetings, and were hoping that training facilitators to lead them would provide for a more inclusive experience. In the existing system, facilitation duties rotated through the entire staff throughout the course of the year. Without trained facilitators, Andrew argued, “the people who have been here a long time just talk over everybody, there is not the space for conversation, the space for dissent.” He felt this was true even though decisions were made by consensus: “Sure, we’re voting, but what’s the point when, if I speak up and have a different opinion as some people, I will be perhaps embarrassed in front of everybody? Or that kind of thing.” Andrew described this issue as being the source of some “saltiness” for him.

Several staff members I spoke with at Explore independently confirmed this tension staff felt between privileging experience and being inclusive of newer staff members’ perspectives. Matt, for instance, understood how some newer staff members could feel shut out from conversations, but had also grown tired of what he called “reinventing the wheel”:

We certainly have empowered people who haven’t been here for very long. I just think one of the challenges is that because some of us had been around for so long, some conversations can feel like, “We had that conversation.” Yeah, we did, but *this* person didn’t. Or maybe we need to have this conversation again because we’re concerned about it. But sometimes, there’s a little bit of the “why are we reinventing the wheel?”

Dan, one of the program coordinators, felt that the tension had increased in recent years as the gap in tenure between founding and new staff members had grown:

Now you have people who have been here 15 years and people who have been here for one. And trying to figure out, do they really have the same voice, whether formally or informally, and where *should* they and where *shouldn’t* they [have a voice], is hard.

Here, Dan appears to question whether Explore's egalitarian, consensus-based model of decision-making necessarily made sense in all contexts in light of there being staff members with such disparate levels of experience at the school.

To Wendy, who had joined the Explore staff just the previous year, having any voice at the decision-making table was quite a shift from her previous teaching job in a more traditional setting. In describing what it had been like to participate in staff meetings, Wendy said:

It is definitely a process because I was so used to—for 14 years—going to somebody higher up. It was a revolutionary concept, too. One of the first things they said, our first meeting of the first day we were here, was, "I may have been here for 15 years but your voice is the same as my voice and vice-versa," and that, "I have no more power over you than you have over me, even though you're day one in and I'm 15 years in." It's like everybody's on equal footing... I'm still finding my place in the co-op. A lot of that is just me. I have a hard time speaking to the group, and that's just my own thing. I'm learning in the small group, I open up a lot more. That really needs to start to go over into the staff meetings [with me] being able to speak up more. I think that's just me being more comfortable here. I just really sat and absorbed the first year, and I'm still sitting and absorbing and listening. They say it takes people sometimes two, three years before they find where they fit, but everybody has their thing, their area. That's where I'm trying to put my foot in the door.

Wendy felt personally responsible for increasing her participation in the co-op, and took to heart the guidance she received at orientation about being on an "equal footing" with more veteran staff members. At the same time, her testimony does reveal that she did not feel quite comfortable inserting herself into staff meeting debates, at least not yet.

The topic of experience-based power differential came up only once in my interviews with staff members at HSHR, but was very similar in theme. According to James, the six founding members of the school who remained there had "a certain sort of gravitas" when it came to decision-making. After staff turnover occurred three years ago, James felt the staff had fragmented into two groups, old and new:

In terms of how I see the cultures of school, there's the founding group of teachers and then there's a group of mostly new teachers who joined three years ago. The nature of some of the conflicts is that people who are new to the school but don't have as much say in how things are done with some of the founding teachers who have just a lot of social capital and whose voices are heard really loudly. So, some of those conversations have been about helping individuals who are newer to the school find an approach or language to have some conversations with folks who they don't feel like they're on an equal footing with.

Like at Explore, there wasn't necessarily anything bad about veteran teachers having and sharing their experience at decision-making junctures, but the combination of espoused democratic norms with a detectable *de facto* hierarchy seemed to breed resentment among newer staff members and their advocates.

Teachers at YLA did not discuss power differences between newer and more veteran staff members, which may have had something to do with the fact that power differences were more explicit at YLA. At the same time, Henri acknowledged that some teachers "have more pull" in making decisions than others: "I'll be honest, some teachers have more pull. I'm not saying I'm one of those teachers, but I do know that some of my administrators do consider my word to be a good word."

Power in number. What individual teachers lacked in "social capital," they made up for in the political capital they could amass by organizing around a cause with their colleagues. In all three of the case study schools, teachers and school leaders alike discussed examples of teachers working to win approval from colleagues for various kinds of proposals.

Since all staff members at Explore had a vote in all decisions, it was especially important to "sell" ideas to colleagues before they went up for a vote. Harriet described her approach to "selling an idea." She said, "you check in with your buddies... or, like, your closest colleagues and say, 'Do you think this is a good idea?' Try to tease it out a little bit. Then you go to the next level of seeing... what type of feedback you're getting from people." Sometimes, feedback from

colleagues would temper a “crazy idea” into something that might actually get passed. For any proposals that were self-serving, Harriet felt it was important to communicate with colleagues the rationale behind the idea and “why that’s supportive of the co-op and the school and the kids.”

Similarly, at YLA, teachers relied on each other to build momentum for a proposed initiative. Henri talked about “politicking” as a way to see ideas through to fruition: “In the basic sense, if you want something to get done, you talk about it with your group, and then you ask admin, and they’ll make it happen for you, more than likely... it goes back to politicking.” Nathan explained that he and one of the high school social studies teachers had worked together to amass support for an after-school study center so that students could receive extra support with homework and content they were struggling with:

We identified a need for kids to have a place after school to study. But, that need wasn’t really being met, and nobody really wanted to take that upon themselves. So, [my colleague] and I, we were able, we just basically brought this idea to the School Management Team, that we wanted them to pay one person each day for an hour and a half to be there from 3:15 to 4:30 or 4:45. They agreed, and then we got different teachers to sign up to take different days, and then at the end of this whole thing we kind of created a rotation of teachers who would man this after-school study center...So, that was an idea that came from the cluster, and then after like a month or two it was implemented after we kind of ironed out a lot of the kinks.

Nathan and his colleague had to negotiate with both the SMT and their fellow teachers in order to “iron out the kinks” in the plan, but ultimately succeeded in coming up with a feasible solution.

As mentioned previously, Principal Lori actively encouraged the kind of teacher leadership that Nathan and his colleague had demonstrated in the above example—what she referred to as “teachers pushing teachers.” She described one example of a math teacher who wanted to encourage her colleagues to use more inquiry-based teaching methods:

She came and talked to me, and I said, “Well, you know, have those conversations in your PLC, have them with your cluster.” And she basically went around sort of recruiting and championing for her cause and really selling why it was good. And she got a few people who were onboard with her. And interestingly enough, she got somebody onboard who was originally like, “No, I don’t want it...” And then this person jumped onboard, which was really helpful because that person then brought other people onboard, because they were in the opposite camp. And so that really happened from teacher leadership. That happened from, you know, the teacher persuasion. And yes, there was the support on the School Management Team to say, you know, “Yes, we’ll fund that. Yes, this is an important initiative.” But it really happened teacher to teacher.

In both this example and in Nathan’s example above, the support of the SMT was seemingly less difficult to secure than the support of fellow teachers. However, what Lori recognized was that if the teacher had not “championed” the idea with her colleagues and the SMT had approved it anyway, implementing the program would have been more challenging.

Synthesis

Whereas the other analysis chapters of this dissertation have explored the “whats” of teacher decision-making—the resulting mission and goals of the school, teachers’ use of time, and professional development opportunities—this chapter has taken a closer look at the “how” of decision-making. I focused on teacher hiring and budgetary decisions, specifically, because these were two areas that teachers spoke most about when asked to provide examples of the kinds of decisions that they and their colleagues had made together.

With teacher hiring, teachers chose to focus more on candidates’ “fit” for the school—whether this meant the extent to which they were passionate about the mission, were committed to collective decision making, or would be generally good matches for the people they would work most closely with. Testimony about teachers’ own hiring experiences revealed that the comprehensiveness of the interview process and the involvement of many teachers and other stakeholders was instrumental in their decisions to accept their jobs. While some teachers had a hard time articulating why they saw this as a draw, it seemed to send teachers a message that

these were schools that operated with intention and that had high expectations for the teachers who would work there. It probably attracted teachers who were themselves interested in collaborating and helping to shape their schools as teaching and learning communities. Survey results suggested that teachers reporting greater influence over hiring decisions were more likely to also report higher collective responsibility and commitment.

With respect to budgetary decisions, teachers at the three schools described examples of leveraging their budgetary influence to secure classroom materials, pursue professional development opportunities, and staff an after-school study center. While the schools differed in how funding decisions were made—with principals at both YLA and HSHR having “final say” over funding decisions in comparison to Explore, where all staff members voted on all funding decisions—teachers nearly always had positive results when they advocated for resources. Sometimes, resources simply were not available, which teachers understood. Survey findings supported qualitative evidence that budgetary influence is positively related to the level of classroom autonomy that teachers experience, their access to resources, and their satisfaction in their jobs.

Another key point that this chapter highlighted was that despite these schools being “teacher-powered” and despite operating under very democratic principles, they were not always egalitarian in the way that teachers’ voices were heard during decision-making procedures. Power differences existed because of both explicit hierarchies (formal roles) and implicit hierarchies (differing tenures), with unspoken forms of power imbalance engendering the most disgruntlement from staff members.

Implications for teachers. The most common word teachers used to describe their involvement in hiring and budget decisions at their schools was “empowering.” It not only made them feel valued as members of their school communities, with important insight worthy of

consideration, but it also led them to take responsibility for addressing problems, trying new approaches to their teaching, and ensuring that their future colleagues would do right by the school.

One implication of teachers' empowerment to try new things in the classroom was that it made their jobs more interesting to them. It added variety to their teaching methods with the introduction of new texts and materials. It allowed them to design courses that aligned with their own interests. It also gave them opportunities to learn and grow as professionals. Some teachers commented that the engagement they experienced was contagious in the sense that it seemed to engage students as well.

Teachers recognized that they operated in political organizations where power differences existed between staff members. Some teachers—particularly at Explore—felt tension between the espoused value of all staff members having “equal voice” and the reality that some teachers—primarily the most senior—carried greater influence. This tension was upsetting and, to some degree, undermined the strength of collaborative decision-making by silencing newer members who may have had opposing viewpoints.

At HSHR and YLA, role-based hierarchy made some teachers question how truly “teacher-led” their schools were. At the same time, the principals were philosophically aligned with the concept of teacher leadership enough that their authority never seemed to overturn a good idea. This meant that the person in the position of principal mattered, and if they had been replaced with someone who hadn't been as aligned, teacher voice may have been compromised.

Finally, teachers discussed how their ability to influence decisions encouraged them to “champion” new ideas and “sell” them to their colleagues. Teachers who were politically savvy and willing to build coalitions generally saw their efforts pay off. One interesting implication of this is that it essentially forced teachers to work together and come to consensus in advance of the

formal decision-making process. It also meant that implementing new programs or policies was easier because teachers were “bought in” before decisions were made.

Enabling factors. Several factors made it possible for teachers to participate in important decision-making opportunities related to hiring and budgeting. First, having time during the day away from student duties made it possible for teachers to participate on interview panels and play a role in “championing” ideas among their colleagues. Second, school-level autonomy to make local decisions was a necessary prerequisite for teacher involvement in decision-making. This was true for both charter schools and for the one district pilot school, which had secured autonomy to make decisions locally in the areas of budgeting, staffing, governance, curriculum and assessment, and the school calendar. Third, formal hierarchy at YLA actually paved the way for some teachers to have influence over decision-making because it created efficiencies around accessing resources; teachers didn’t have to do the grunt work of securing resources or managing the budget. And at HSHR, having a principal who would “provide cover fire” with the school district enabled teachers to continue to work in innovative ways. So long as the school stayed off any “red lists,” Principal Miguel could keep skeptical district administrators at bay.

Constraints. Teachers generally did not express much concern about constraints over hiring. Teachers at HSHR were perhaps the most inconvenienced of the three schools because they were required by union contract to offer interviews to tenured teachers in the district’s hiring pool before offering a job to an untenured teacher. While this was somewhat an annoyance, Principal Miguel had worked to ensure that they not have any “must-place” teachers at the school.

Budgetary constraints were recognized by teachers at all three schools, as they are in just about any organization. Not every teacher request could be granted simply for lack of available funds. In the two schools with unionized teachers—HSHR and YLA—budgets were a bit more constrained because collective bargaining agreements demanded that teachers be paid in

standardized increments regardless of the school's financial situation. At Explore, teachers could choose to reduce or increase teacher salaries, depending on their own financial situation, and did actually choose to cut teachers' benefits one year when the state held back funds from public schools.

Both YLA and HSHR relied on the goodwill of their principals—who had formal authority to sign off on hiring and budgeting decisions—to honor teachers' advice and recommendations. These principals recognized that doing so would ultimately serve them and their schools well, but their hands-off approach was in no way guaranteed or without risk. As others have pointed out, ceding control to teachers in the context of shared decision-making can be challenging work for principals, whether because they are held chiefly responsible for school outcomes or because they experience “inner conflicts about letting go and controlling others” (Blase & Blase, 1999, p. 489; Glickman, Allen, & Lunsford, 1994). Had these schools had different principals, teachers' collective decision-making power could have theoretically been diminished.

In contrast, teacher CDMA at Explore did not rely on the goodwill of a singular school leader, but it did depend on staff members being willing to come to consensus on hiring, budgeting, and other decisions. “Sometimes, the decision-making takes longer when it's consensus as opposed to having somebody tell you... this is what you're going to do,” Ann told me. “Instead we have to have a long lengthy conversation as we work through it. So the consensus model might be less efficient and more time consuming.” While Ann ultimately felt that Explore's decision-making process was “empowering” and worth the extra effort, she acknowledged that “it gets harder as the staff gets bigger,” a sentiment shared by several other advisors I spoke with. Specifically, some staff members worried that as the number of decision-

makers increased at Explore's weekly staff meetings, the number of active participants in discussions actually decreased, particularly among newer faculty members.

Conclusion

Overall, the teachers I spoke with were tremendously empowered to make decisions and use school resources in ways that would further their student learning goals. Unlike the prevailing narrative of the teacher who is demoralized by gridlock and resigned to teaching a standardized curriculum, teachers felt liberated to teach creatively in ways that would engage them and their students. Although formal power imbalances and informal status differences existed, no teacher I spoke with felt that they could not pursue a course of action when they saw a need, or felt that their chances of succeeding were not worth the effort.

Chapter 9: Human First: Fostering Student Belonging and Preserving Dignity

Introduction

This chapter considers the relationships that teachers formed with students as a result of the decisions they made about some of the social aspects of schooling—such as student grouping, student-teacher pairings, and discipline practices. Chapter 2 identified student-teacher conflict as a fifth prevailing narrative surrounding teacher work life. I described conflict as an “incompatibility” between student interests and teacher interests that weakens their relationship. I discussed the prevalence and sources of conflict in schools, from the inherent tensions arising from the involuntariness of the student-teacher relationship to large, impersonal school settings, to cultural differences and racial bias. While research examining the consequences of student-teacher conflict is (justifiably) focused on student impacts, conflict was shown to have serious implications for teacher professional vitality (TPV).

Two features of the teacher-powered schools included in this study that seemed to contradict the patterns of conflict in more traditional school settings were the intentional establishment of family-like structures and norms, made possible in part by the schools’ small sizes, and the use of flexible discipline policies that emphasize restoring relationships as opposed to punishing student misbehavior. These findings will be explored in turn along with survey findings related to student-teacher relationships and discipline.

“We are family”: Structures that promote belonging and mutual respect

At all three school sites, teachers referred to their schools as a “family,” “village,” or “community.” They felt the schools’ small sizes made it possible to know all students and all faculty, and prioritized the development of strong relationships with staff and students alike characterized by caring, trust, mutual respect, and sometimes “tough love.” Belonging in a school family, teachers felt, was a prerequisite to academic learning. This section talks about how the

three different schools were intentional about the development of community through the creation of family-like structures and reinforcement of community norms.

“Intentional community” at Explore. Explore’s website states that “At Explore, community is everything. We strive to maintain a strong, democratic learning community in which students are not only accepted for who they are as individuals, but also for their passions, interests, and talents.” At Explore, the primary family unit was the advisory. Students stayed with the mixed-age advisory in grades 6 through 8 and again in grades 9 through 12, meaning that they got to know their peers and their advisors quite well. Advisors discussed how much the advisory program helped students feel a sense of belonging and also helped advisors develop strong one-on-one relationships with students that made it easier to support students through the project process.

Advisory structure promotes belonging. Each student at Explore started out their day in advisory, meeting as a whole group. During this 20-minute⁴⁶ period, advisors took attendance and led their advisory through a “check-in” activity or discussion. Ann, who advised high school students, spoke about the range of topics that came up in advisory during her interview, and how her class had discussed hate speech that day:

Sometimes it’s lighthearted... We always have a check-in question so every student has a voice... Everybody has a chance to speak. But today I brought up the topic of hate speech, and my gosh, it was a very emotional, heartfelt discussion and those happen sometimes and they're wonderful. So the morning can be lighthearted like you observed. Or it can be really heavy and we get into heavy issues. But we work to become a community. I think the community feel here is really important.

⁴⁶ Advisory meetings were 20 minutes long, except on Mondays, when they were only 5 minutes long to accommodate the all-school, student-run meetings in the café.

Like Ann, Dan explained that advisory could be a time for both serious and lighthearted discussions. Mornings in advisory, Dan said, were for “very deliberate community building.” “Question Wednesday,” the weekly advisory activity that was introduced in Chapter 7, was one way he and Jess, his advisory partner, built community and engaged all students. Advisory members posed questions to their peers—anything they could think of, from the most mundane (“What’s a movie you’ve seen recently?”) to the downright bizarre (“Would you rather all babies look like muffins, or all muffins look like babies?”)—and the activity wasn’t over until everyone had had a chance to answer at least one question. According to Dan, “Question Wednesday” and the occasional “Game Day” on Fridays helped to ensure that his quieter advisees “that really don’t feel comfortable talking about their feelings... have a different way to engage with the group.”

To Ann, the inclusiveness of morning advisory meetings ensured that all students had a place to belong and to “be heard”: “I think sometimes in big schools students can go through the whole day and never say anything, and this is the chance for them to be heard and get to know everybody. I really like that part of advisory,” she said.

Since Explore students spent considerable time in their advisory rooms throughout the school day while they were working on independent projects, completing coursework, and studying, “community building” was not limited to the first 20 minutes of the day. For example, Dan spoke about how he intentionally included one of his advisees into a math study group⁴⁷ I

⁴⁷ Even though Dan was a licensed English teacher and teaches language arts seminars at Explore, he and his colleagues were generalists in the advisory setting, providing academic support to students in various subject areas as needed.

had observed, not because she needed the academic help, but because she was struggling to belong:

One thing that you may or may not have seen with that math group, is that one of those students doesn't really need math help. But at conferences she had really talked about feelings of loneliness and isolation in the advisory, so one of our goals was that she would just join the math group. And so we did that for about two weeks and we checked in after. And I think, to me, I think that she's feeling part of the group, [she] is putting herself out there.

Dan noted that the "forced interaction" between this student and her peers had been "really hard," but that her inclusion in the group had helped her both to relate to peers and to understand her value to the advisory:

I think she's learning that she can be a resource for math, that she has some really solid skills... The difference in her in those two and a half weeks we've been doing it is remarkable. She's a ninth grader. She's meeting other new ninth graders because it's Algebra I and so half the reason we made the group was to support some [students] that needed extra help and also to build in, at the same time, some of those other goals.

From a structural standpoint, Dan's ability to provide support for this particular student hinged on both the school's unusual, unstructured schedule—as discussed in great detail in Chapter 6—as well as the complete autonomy Dan had to respond as needed to his students' academic and social needs.

Advisory model facilitates trust through long-term, one-on-one relationships. In addition to providing students an opportunity to "be heard" each day, the advisory structure also afforded ongoing opportunities for advisors to get to know students in one-on-one and in small group settings. Advisors felt that long-term relationships with students facilitated trust-building that was needed to provide the kind of academic support that to which students would be receptive. To middle school advisor, Leah, this was especially important for students who had not had positive relationships with teachers at previous schools. "[It's] pretty rare, but there's always a small handful in the building every year that just, for all kinds of different reasons, just can't

[trust teachers]. They really, really struggle with trusting teachers,” Leah told me. “We tend to be able to undo that pretty quickly, just that anti-teacher thing.” I asked Leah to explain what she and her colleagues did to “undo” negative feelings about teachers. She replied:

We get the opportunity to have really long relationships with them, and we get to know them as people. But then, I think, almost more importantly, they get to know us as people, too. So, I have kids in the middle school for three years, and then, if they stay in the high school, I know them for seven years, really well, and I know their families.

To Leah, the duration and depth of the relationship with her students mattered to her being able to secure their trust.

Similarly, Ann felt that the long-term relationships she had with her advisees made it possible for them to trust her with sensitive information about challenges they were experiencing in their personal lives:

I pretty much know the names of [students’] brothers and sisters and pets, and a lot of times, although some students share more than others, what issues they’re facing. We have a number of trans students here, and gay students, students with high anxiety, and they know I’m there for them. I think it takes time and having kids for four years in an advisory starting in 9th grade and going on. You really learn to build up trust... I work hard on not being judgmental and I think that that leads to trust too.

Had Ann not had years to get to know her students, it is doubtful they would have felt as willing to open up about their struggles and seek her guidance in addressing them.

“Not being judgmental” was something that several advisors I spoke with strove for in their interactions with students. It meant showing students respect and understanding, even when they made questionable decisions or behaved in inappropriate ways. To special education case manager, Wendy, mutual respect made the difference between a student responding to feedback and disregarding it. “You have to have defined that level of respect. They have to know they can trust you, and they have to know they can respect you and that you can respect them.” Like Leah

and Ann, Wendy saw the development of strong, trusting relationships—characterized by a willingness to “let the wall down”—as being a long-term proposition.

That relationship-building piece is, I think, crucial, particularly in the smaller community. Super, super important... and it takes time. It takes a long time to get that for some of them. Some of them still barely let the wall down. I’m a year and a half in and I have one [student] that I’ve seen every single day for a year and a half. The wall is still there. It’s better, it is much better, but he may be a junior before it goes down. I don’t know. It’s just how he operates.

Unfortunately, Explore advisors were not always able to secure their students’ trust, even with time. With respect to her students’ “anti-teacher” attitudes, Leah sometimes felt at a loss as to what to do:

For some kids [distrust] is a lot more pervasive in their lives than [what we can affect]. We can only do what we can do in the building, the confines of the building. I didn’t use to think that. I used to think we could always fix it, but they have so much life outside of here that we don’t know about and we can’t touch, really, but we can try to make it okay here.

To Andrew, there was sometimes a racial element to students’ hesitation around “letting the walls down” with their advisors. With a majority white staff and student population, Explore could provide little in the way of affinity spaces and mentorship for its students of color (though such spaces existed—such as the Black Student Caucus that met weekly during independent reading time). “Sometimes students of color don’t trust white teachers, for lots of reasons,” Andrew said. “That’s not to say that they can’t, it’s not to say that they don’t. They do here, a lot of times,” but the staff composition limited the extent to which strong relationships—which he felt were crucial to the success of the school—could be formed between students of color and their white advisors.

School-wide norm: “Be yourself.” Avoiding judgment and working to secure students’ trust sent the message to Explore students that they could be safe expressing their true selves. More than either of the other two school sites, Explore students—as referenced in Chapter 4—were perhaps the quirkiest. They wore their hair in odd, colorful styles, embraced offbeat interests

(the Dungeons and Dragons club being one example), and, as Ann mentioned, were open to expressing nonconforming gender identities and sexual orientations. To Wendy, this acceptance of difference was one thing she appreciated most about working at Explore in comparison to her previous school, which was more traditional:

One of the other things here that was very different than the [traditional] public school system is just how our community is very nurturing and caring... and just everyone for the most part is just widely accepting of one another in their differences. That, for me, was very lovely to see, people being able to express who they are without fear, or with less fear, I guess. That was just a very beautiful thing to see, coming from just regular old teaching in a middle school and high school, where kids are very limited in what they can express and how they can be themselves to coming here. Here, they can be who they need to be or who they are.

Such acceptance of difference was refreshing to see after Wendy's experience working in a more oppressive school environment.

To Harriet, what "called to her" most about working at Explore was the fact that the school provided a safe haven for students who did not "fit in" in a traditional school setting:

[What] really calls to me about why this is a good school [is] the safety of our LGBT youth and families, and all these great things that we have that are supportive of students who aren't fitting into a big district. I think [that] is why I feel this charter is here for a reason.

Norms of unconditional acceptance and caring for all students at Explore not only provided a foundation on which trust could be built between staff and students, but it was also a motivating factor for staff members who felt they were providing an invaluable service to youth by encouraging them to be themselves.

It takes a "village" at Young Leaders Academy. "Young Leaders Academy, as a village, nurtures hearts and minds." This statement was the first of four "premises" underlying the school's approach to teaching and learning, as posted to its website. The paragraph that follows stated:

Deep human bonds can be nurtured within a village that values respect and kindness. Students build open and trusting friendships with each other; staff members move beyond cooperation to the level of collaboration; staff members take on the role of mentors to students; parents are honored; and each level of the school communicates with each other. Minds open as hearts open.

To the founders of the school, the creation and maintenance of a village-like atmosphere was foundational to achieving academic goals. Through the inclusion of students ages four to eighteen in a small school setting, the intentional involvement of parents (some of whom were staff members themselves), and daily programming intended to foster students' sense of belonging, YLA teachers and school leaders prioritized the development of community and the nurturing of "deep human bonds."

A unique Pre-K through 12 model. YLA was the first of only a few charter schools in the city to serve pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. Several teachers spoke about this feature in describing their decisions to work there, noting that the wide grade span contributed to a sense of community at the school. The below exchange with Rachel highlights this finding:

Sara: I want to follow up on something you had said just now talking about your decision to teach here and that the vibe of the school felt like a community, can you just say more to an outsider, what does that mean to you?

Rachel: First the fact that it is Pre-K to grade 12 in one building, it's unique and kind of felt that when you just take a walk through the building, you see the playground. There's some real limitations to the space that we have, but I like that we have this media center, and upstairs it's a multi-purpose space and you see kids using it and adults using it and there's something... a little less siloed [about it].

Like Rachel, Danielle pointed to the "strong community build" of the school when discussing her decision to teach at YLA. "To have a Pre-K through twelve school is a very interesting dynamic here," she said. Even though the teachers I spoke with were exclusively middle or high school teachers, just "seeing the playground" and working among students of all ages promoted a sense of familiarity that they may not have felt at a more traditional school.

Interestingly, Rachel appreciated not only the diversity in students' ages but the diversity in teachers' ages as well:

There's a pretty good range of the ages of the teachers which I think is important because I've worked in some schools where everyone is too young, too brand-new and that doesn't work, actually. There are some drawbacks, [but] it's good to have a range. You also don't want everyone to be very veteran because then you're not having enough newer perspectives. Here we really have a good range of beginning, middle, and veteran [teachers]. So beginning teachers can be supported, and [for] middle teachers there are a variety of roles you could take on, and people to learn from still. Veteran teachers—it's a family. They've been here for a long time.

From the tiniest preschoolers to the most veteran staff members, the range in ages of the entire YLA community made it feel all the more like a village.

Having a small school with such a wide range of ages served did come with some drawbacks—namely limitations in the programming and courses the school could provide given fewer economies of scale. Additionally, Henri felt that the huge grade level span sometimes required that the school operate in a more hierarchical, and therefore less teacher-led way. While YLA was small relative to traditional middle and high schools, it felt big to Henri relative to some of the teacher-powered schools he had gotten to know through the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI) that served only three or four grades: “We're working with an insane beast. Before we were K through 12, now we're Pre-K through 12. So you can't have the same expectations [for teacher leadership] as these other [teacher-powered] schools that are smaller.”

Parents, “starents,” and alumni staff members. Another aspect of the school that contributed to its sense of community was the strong relationship that parents of students had to the school. Several staff members talked about how parent involvement had been part of the school since the beginning. According to Danielle, YLA is “an interesting school because it was started originally by parents. There's a lot of that, that still seeps into the building now.” In other words, there was parent involvement in all aspects of the school's operation. Parents occupied

formal seats on the Collaborative School Governance Committee as well as the Board, participated in the school's Parent Teacher Association, sat on staff hiring committees⁴⁸, volunteered in numerous capacities, and attended educational programming for parents on topics such as bullying, the college application process, and English as a foreign language.

To the teachers I spoke with, the high involvement of parents was part of what drew them to the school initially and kept them there long term. Danielle, for example, was drawn to the school's parent-driven origins from the outset but only in time understood the pervasiveness of parent involvement in the school culture: "I knew it was started by parents, but I did not know the strong community build until I got here, which was a pleasant surprise." Similarly, Emily was struck by how much the school's sense of community was reinforced by the presence and involvement of parents:

I really like how it genuinely feels like a community. I think every small culture has its own community, every school has a community, but I really felt like [this was] a family. I learned quickly that many people in this school who work here, started as parents, as students. Some people were even just volunteers and then they just grew to become working full time here. Some weren't even teachers and then went back to school just so they could be a part of this. I think that you can really sense that. Even if I hadn't known that people are personally invested in the community, it's nice that everybody knows everybody and people know the history. Of course, there's new people so there's not just all only people who have been here forever. I like that feeling. I think that's really special for kids to have.

Since parents were a part of the school's founding, they had been invested in the school's success since the very beginning. Referring to the school having been started by parents, Danielle said, "There's a lot of interest there in terms of the school developing." Parents had an interest in improving the school not only because their children attended it, but also because they genuinely

⁴⁸ In fact, all hiring committees at YLA must have at least one parent member.

“want[ed] to be a part of” it, in Emily’s words. This is perhaps no more evident than in the fact that the school boasted a waitlist of over 3,500 students at the time of my visit.

The transition from being a parent volunteer to working full time at the school as a staff member was such a common occurrence at YLA that the staff developed a word for this group: “starents,” for “staff members who are parents.” Even Lori, the principal, was a self-described “starent,” having first learned of the school—then only an inkling of an idea—while looking for a “progressive school” for her three-year-old son to attend, come kindergarten. Lori recalled an informational meeting she attended led by the founding principal of the school, Greg⁴⁹:

He was really smart because he had this bagel breakfast. He hosted it and said all the things about what I was hoping for a school for my kid would be. The school wasn’t even off the paper yet, but he was like, you know, “These are the different things that we want to do. These are the things we’re interested in.” And I’m like, “I’m on board,” like, “I want to do this.”

So eager to help make YLA a reality, Lori started volunteering for the school even before her son was old enough to enroll. She continued:

So, from that I got involved in the school. I was one of their first community members on their Collaborative School Governance Committee, so I kind of helped to frame some of those ideas and thoughts. When my son became a student here, I was on the PTA, so I was PTA Co-President and then worked my way into a job in the office because they really didn’t have any idea how to, kind of, run anything in an office. And then when the Charter Law came about, I helped write the Charter application and then moved into the position of Co-Director for Operations. And so, it’s been... I’ve worn a lot of hats in this school. It’s a little crazy.

All three of Lori’s children had attended YLA, with her youngest in high school there the year I visited. Of course, being a parent of a current student while also being a principal came with certain challenges, but the “starents” had worked together to create guidelines to govern their

⁴⁹ I later learned that Greg became principal of the school somewhat by happenstance, and somewhat begrudgingly, because he was the only one of the five founding teachers to have a principal credential.

behavior and ensure that favoritism did not interfere with teachers' evaluation of students' learning. Though she acknowledged that her role as both a parent and principal was particularly "complicated," Lori said:

I think for the most part, most of the people who are parents, you know, we really respect the teachers in this building and, you know, I think the majority of people really have the best interests of kids [at heart]. So honestly, if my kid didn't get a good grade they probably didn't deserve a good grade.

No teacher I spoke with expressed frustration with the role that parents and parents played at YLA, with many emphasizing the positive effects of parent involvement. "There's a lot of staff members who have children here, friends [of staff] who have children here, so it creates a very strong community," Danielle explained.

Another factor contributing to the interwovenness of the YLA "village" was the fact that three staff members were actually alumni of the school, including Henri. This was a point of pride for a number of staff members I had the opportunity to talk to because it signaled to them that students developed a lasting affinity for and investment in the school.

Advisory as a safe "home base." Though less central to YLA's programming than it was at Explore, an advisory program at YLA was also designed to enhance students' feelings of belonging in school and provide them with learning opportunities outside of the traditional subject areas. According to the school's most recent charter renewal application, "the advisory program has focused on creating a safe space where advisors can enhance student social-emotional development and work on team building." Lessons for advisory time—which took place each morning for 20 minutes—were written collaboratively by an advisory planning committee. The lessons were intended to be flexible so that teachers could cater them to their students' particular developmental needs. When I asked Rachel, who was a member of the advisory planning committee, to tell me about the purpose of advisory, she said:

Well there are a few purposes. So one is just to really have a home base for the students. So a small group that they begin the day in, and also to have an adult that is also their go-to person, their advocate or somebody that knows them... Also, we have a curriculum and so it's a program, not just a place to be, and we're trying to support social and emotional development of the students and also their academic development not so much in terms individual subject areas but overall study habits, things that would be more across-the-board, like how they're approaching school, their relationship with school.

Rachel said that the curriculum for advisory was “very dynamic,” and allowed advisors to go “off script” to respond to current events or to issues impacting the school. For example, the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and news coverage surrounding his boasting about sexually assaulting women had prompted conversation on the topics of sexual harassment and body image insecurity among the school’s female-identifying students. “We addressed it with everyone, we created space for that,” Rachel said. I was able to observe an advisory session with Rachel’s sixth, seventh, and eighth grade group, where students discussed cyber bullying—an issue that had been plaguing the middle school—and what they might do about it. “The students actually wanted to do something,” Rachel told me, “so we’ve been going a little bit off-script and discussing what we could [do]... It’s really nice to have that [space].”

Norms of informality: “On a first-name basis.” In addition to the school’s multi-aged, “village-like” environment, the presence of parents and “starents,” and the advisory program, a norm of informality between members of the school community further contributed to the sense of family at YLA. One major example of informality was the fact that staff and students were on a first-name basis. To Robert, this cultural norm helped students feel more comfortable approaching teachers for academic support:

We have a very casual relationship, all of us. There are some students who are almost unreachable but most students are reachable, approachable in some way. And, because we’re on a first-name basis here, they feel free to come in and sit down and tell you what’s wrong. “I didn’t understand that stuff, you’re just going too fast,” or “you’re using big words. Slow down a little bit.”

To Robert, informality was part of what made the school successful. If his students felt comfortable sharing their academic challenges with him, he could provide more directed, personalized support. “It’s a causal relationship all the way around, and that’s what’s good about this place. The family.”

Josh, in recalling his interview experience at YLA years ago, noted this informality and flexibility around curriculum as being one reason he chose to accept the offer to work there: “I really enjoyed coming here. I enjoyed the interview, I liked the students. It felt like just this small building where everybody knew each other. I liked the first-name basis thing.” The feeling he got at YLA contrasted sharply with what he experienced at another school where he had also received a job offer: “It was huge, it was massive, I got lost. I was a little concerned about, just the staff that I had met with. They seemed a little, like, tired. It was very weird. It was just a different feel.”

With their different personalities and teaching styles, teachers at YLA had different approaches to creating caring classroom communities. In some classrooms, teachers leveled the playing field in their classes by apologizing to students when something didn’t go as planned. Some teachers took on more parental roles, showing care through more directive approaches⁵⁰. One teacher at YLA literally broke bread with his students on a regular basis to build stronger relationships with them. All of these approaches contributed to the “village” quality of YLA.

At High School for Human Rights, “you are your brother’s keeper.” Because learning goals for students were premised upon meeting basic human needs first, as discussed in

⁵⁰ It is important to note that showing care is very much culturally-mediated. For some cultural groups, caring is experienced as demanding and protective, whereas in others it is experienced as liberating and nurturing (see, e.g., Walls, 2017).

Chapter 5, High School for Human Rights (HSHR) staff devoted considerable attention to supporting each individual student in a holistic way. Teachers had created several mechanisms by which HSHR students—and particularly those who were struggling—could be matched with specific staff members and peers to ensure that no one fell through the cracks. This was described eloquently by James, the school’s instructional coach: “I think that’s one of the most powerful things that this school does in its work, is that the adults build really meaningful relationships with the kids one-on-one, and know their students well.” Two such mechanisms, “adoption” and a peer mentoring program, are discussed in the following sections as sources of familial ties between staff and students. This section concludes with a description of two norms that pervaded the language staff members used to talk about and with students: love and vulnerability. Together, these structures and norms fostered alignment between the school’s values and practices and helped teachers communicate with students directly—even when they have critical feedback (i.e., “tough love”).

“Adopting” students. One column of the massive student data file described in Chapter 5 was devoted to indicating whether or not an HSHR student had been “adopted” by a staff member, and if so, who adopted him or her. HSHR teachers adopted students when they felt that the student could use regular one-on-one contact with a caring adult at school, and may have a few “adoptees” in any given year. Teachers filled out an Individualized Pupil Education Plan, or “IPEP,” collaboratively with their adoptees, which involved recording information about the student’s academic and social history and asking the student a series of interview questions intended to help the adopting teacher support the adoptee. According to Rajiv, “it’s like their GPA, their [love] languages, all the data on it, and we go through it with the kid and help them see, ‘These are the things we know about, these are the things we see in you.’” At the same time

as the process was intended to keep close tabs on students in danger of falling behind, it was also a chance for the teacher to communicate directly with the student about his or her strengths.

Beyond completing the IPEP, adopting a student was an informal, if serious, commitment to ensuring that they would not slip through the cracks. “It’s just checking in, [asking] ‘How are you doing?’” Theresa said of adopting a student. At the same time, adopting students was not always easy with an already substantial workload. Teachers had to problem-solve ways of finding time for check-ins, and had agreed to use part of their Friday afternoon professional development time to do so—a sacrifice they were willing to make given the importance they ascribed to one-on-one time with adoptees. Theresa continued, “I feel that [adoption] is a big thing that’s also challenging to do with every one of the students, but it is something we have to do.” Being adopted messages to students both that they would be held accountable for their academic responsibilities but also that they had a parent figure—as implied by the meaning of “adoption”—at school who would listen to and advocate for them.

Peer mentoring. Another initiative designed to foster an inclusive and family-like environment was the peer mentoring program. Each year, about 40 HSHR tenth through twelfth grade students signed up to be mentors and received training through a weekly “mentor class” which Miguel and a colleague co-taught. Upon enrolling at the school as a ninth grader, HSHR students were assigned to a tenth-grade mentor. Tenth graders were assigned to eleventh-grade mentors, eleventh graders were assigned to twelfth-grade mentors, and twelfth graders mentored themselves.

The mentoring program originated in the small learning community (SLC) at North Valley High School eleven years ago before HSHR became a separate school. Miguel recalled the origins of the program:

I just noticed that the kids I was sending to Joe for 12th grade would come back and help the 11th graders anyways. They saw it more as cheating. Like, “Yeah, [Miguel’s] picky. Make sure you do this, do this, do this.” I’m like, “What if we had mentors?” I just asked the principal... “Look at our graduation rate. We got a problem. Well, here’s a possible solution...” She gave me a period [for the class]. I got 25 of my [SLC] students and they mentored the other ones.

Rather than admonish students for passing along tips to their younger peers, Miguel seized on the opportunity to formalize students’ helping instincts, going so far as to charge them with the *responsibility* of seeing to it that all students had such support. Miguel referred to this mentality as “I am my brother’s keeper⁵¹,” noting that the strategy had caught on districtwide since he and his SLC colleagues had implemented it:

That was a long time ago and I can’t think of a school [in the district] that doesn’t have a mentoring program now. I’ve presented all over the district and it just made common sense. There’s different degrees of fidelity, of course, but the idea was the same: that I am my brother’s keeper.

By messaging to students that they were responsible for their peers at HSHR, Miguel sought to reinforce the metaphorical “safety net” that the adoption program created between staff and students. He was specific and emphatic in describing how the “net” ensured the protection of all students, including mentors themselves:

The mentor program has been important because if you fall ... The mentors have mentors. Indiscriminately, I divide the school into 13 teams. Well, mentors are in that. They get caught in that net as well, because I don’t separate the mentors then divide the school. I divide the school by 13. Then I assign the mentors. I just try to make sure they don’t have themselves. Really, that’s it.

⁵¹ The origin of “I am my brother’s keeper” is biblical, stemming from Cain asking God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” after having murdered his brother, Abel. Although Cain’s question is clearly sarcastic, the declarative reinvention of the phrase has come to denote one’s commitment to helping those facing similar challenges to overcome adversity. A prominent example is the My Brother’s Keeper initiative, launched by then-president Barack Obama in 2014 to close opportunity gaps for men and boys of color (see <https://www.iammbk.org/>).

One example of how the mentor program had served as a literal safety net was when a mentor had texted Miguel over the weekend about another student making suicidal threats via social media. Although the mentors were trained in confidentiality, they understood that there were exceptions. Miguel recalled praising this particular mentor for her courage, telling her, “That girl is alive this morning because you called me. You knew what to say. If nothing else, you chose love and you let her know this isn’t confidential and that girl knew it wasn’t confidential, that you were going to tell me, because she wanted help.” This anecdote serves as a powerful example of how caring for others was an expectation of students and staff alike at HSHR.

Norms of love and vulnerability. While the adoption and mentoring programs described above were important mechanisms by which HSHR students could feel cared for at school, teachers strove for more than caring in their interactions with students. At HSHR, the word “love” rolled off teachers’ tongues easily when talking to and about their students; it was omnipresent and unapologetic. This was initially jarring to me, as someone who had spent considerable time among teachers and administrators wary of overstepping lines of appropriateness with students. But love took on very much a familial, matter-of-fact tone at HSHR.

The teachers I spoke with saw love as a crucial condition for learning. For example, when I asked Natalie how she felt HSHR teachers defined student learning, she said:

I know it sounds super cheesy, but I really feel like this is why we're so special. It's prefaced with the student feeling loved and safe. When they feel safe and they feel loved, then they're willing to read out loud when they may not read so well. They're willing to turn in that graphic organizer when it's usually not so high on their priority list. Sometimes it's not even about the written work... We were just talking last night about a particular kid that I don't know that he's getting so much academically out of being here, but I know emotionally we're feeding his soul, and he loves being here. So if you're talking about academically, I think it's helping them progress to a higher level than where they're at, wherever that may be. And knowing that they have the support to fall and get back up again, that there's a system in place. A system of their peers, a system as an advisory, a system amongst their teachers.

The examples Natalie provides highlight at least two specific benefits to love: it helps students feel safe to take risks in class, and it also creates a sense of obligation among students to complete assignments.

Principal Miguel was unabashed in modeling the kind of love he hoped his staff would demonstrate toward students, and direct in the way he discussed it with prospective hires. Rajiv, a math teacher, recounted his initial meeting with Miguel at a hiring fair, noting his surprise at how open Miguel was about "loving kids":

It was just a great conversation, where I was like, man, this principal is talking about loving kids, and he's talking about, "I'm sure that you're great at math and stuff, but if you can't teach humanity at the same time, then what's the point?" I was hearing a *principal*... I've heard teachers say these things all the time, and I'm like, "Okay, you're the teacher there, of course," but to hear the administration say something like that, I was very moved.

To Rajiv, Miguel's emphasis on love stood in stark contrast to previous examples of principals he had known whose focus on achieving academic results seemed to overshadow the relational work involved in motivating students. This interaction impressed Rajiv, and was one of the reasons he decided to accept the offer to join the HSHR team.

Like Rajiv, Natalie was impressed and humbled by the love her colleagues showed to students. It was this characteristic of her colleagues that most led her to respect them—all of them—as evidenced by the following exchange I had with her:

Natalie: I've been at a lot of schools, and I would say that I don't know of any other school that I've been at, or many other people who can say that I genuinely respect every teacher on campus. I may not connect with them personally, or what not, but I think our kids are better off for having gone through all of their classrooms. That's rare.

Sara: So if you could summarize, I don't know if it's possible to summarize, but what makes it possible to respect the teachers as much as you do? What is it that you see in them?

Natalie: They love our kids. They love our kids, and I mean that they're willing to love them enough to give them a shoulder to cry on. They love them enough to give them a kick in the ass when that's what they need. They love them enough to understand that they are already at a disadvantage because they are a poor community, because they're marginalized, because they are students of color, and that they have to catch up that much more to be successful in a global society. And that they have to overcome so many traumas of poverty that we have to love them first before we can expect them to learn anything.

Natalie respected her colleagues for the sacrifices they made for students, both emotionally and in the form of time and energy needed to catch students up. Importantly, there was an element of toughness to Natalie's depiction of staff love for students. She continued:

But I don't mean we baby them. We don't say, "Oh, poor thing. It's okay, you don't have to do it." No, it's like, "Poor thing, go to the restroom. Collect yourself, come back, and then get to work. And if you need extra help, come see me after school, I'll be here with you."

To show their love for students, HSHR staff members chose to be vulnerable with them.

Vulnerability—like love—was a school-wide norm modeled and reinforced by teachers and administrators alike, starting on the first day of school. According to Paula:

I think if you were to come in the beginning of the year, you would hear a lot of the teachers' stories and what they're sharing to the students. The students know your backstory... There's a lot of sharing back as well... They don't have to share, but if they do, then they add to the culture of this vulnerability, this transparency, where it's like, "I feel safe to share." I'm inviting you to share as well if you want to.

Staff members talked about using vulnerability as a way to "invite students in" to the school's culture. I asked Paula to describe what that entailed:

Sara: One thing that you said that I just wanted to ask you to say a little more about is that sometimes, you have to “invite students into the culture” here. What does that look like? How do you invite them into the culture?

Paula: I think mainly through example. We can say a lot, we could talk to them all we want, but then it’s when we share and when we’re vulnerable. One of the things that Miguel brings up a lot is being vulnerable... That was the other thing that was brought up in [my] interview, and I was so nervous about that. What that means is sharing something about you that, like your social justice [cause]. It’s a really scary thing because you’re giving them power to use that against you later, but in being transparent and being very clear with your intentions and giving them a little bit of your backstory, the good, the bad, and the ugly, it really invites them into, like, “this how we do things.” We are transparent. We share. We care for each other, and “this is why I’m here”—it’s inviting them to do the same. We believe this in this school, and we want you to participate.

As Paula’s testimony suggests, willingness to be vulnerable with students was such an important cultural norm at HSHR that it was assessed during the interview process. Paula indicates that while it was difficult, and nerve wracking, to express vulnerability, it helped to put staff and students on an even playing field. It meant sacrificing a power differential to gain students’ trust, and in turn, secure students’ participation. Paula continued:

We invite them to share as well... They don’t have to, but we invite them. For the most part, they’ll come along. They’ll feel uncomfortable in the beginning, but then with enough [time], they start participating, and then it becomes what we do. We share... Once that happens, it’s just like you get to know the person, and once you know their heart, then it’s again, it builds that community... If I understand your perspective and I understand where you’re coming from, then it makes all the other stuff, like, okay. I could see why *that* [behavior] happens, and you’re just more, you’re understanding. I guess that’s the thing.

Paula acknowledged that there were some students who never accepted the invitation to be vulnerable with staff and peers. “There’s students that never participate,” she said. “You invite them, and those are the students that you work really hard with. You try, and they just never want to share, or they just won’t do it.” “That’s okay,” she said of students who don’t choose to share:

They're still functioning, and they're still part of it. They won't be mentors... Things like that, which is fine, but I mean, at the end of it, they understand that that's how things are done here. We treat people with respect. We love people. We care for them, and at least the teachers, they know that the teachers care for them and love them. I think that's enough sometimes.

By showing vulnerability and love but not demanding it in return, staff members' love for students has an unconditional, parental quality to it. It messages to students that even when they mess up—which they do—they will not jeopardize their inclusion at the school. What happens when students mess up is the subject of the second half of this chapter.

Of course, taking time out of the school day to share personal anecdotes and build rapport with students means less time can be devoted to purely academic pursuits. One staff member I spoke with did sometimes feel that the emphasis on developing caring relationships with students overshadowed the importance of rigorous academic instruction. James, the school's instructional coach, had observed teachers “focusing extensively on the nature of their relationships with their students,” but that “they vary in terms of their focus on the products of student work.” This showed up in teachers' use of “activity-based” grading, which emphasized participation over true demonstration of learning⁵². “I think that's one place where the school maybe overemphasizes relationships,” James said, noting that he hasn't heard as many conversations about demanding improved quality of work as he had about developing stronger relationships. “Usually it's [the case that] if you build good relationships, then kids produce work,” he acknowledged, but that wasn't always the case with HSHR students. “And I haven't seen the conversations [between staff members] shift from there. The conversations tend to stay in the relationship realm.” As an

⁵² At the same time, James acknowledged that teachers—particularly STEM teachers—were working hard to implement standards-based grading, which involved assessing students for their mastery of academic standards as opposed checking off whether or not they completed an assignment.

instructional coach, James' perspective was unsurprisingly focused on learning, with student relationships being somewhat less salient given that he did not do as much direct work with students.

From “adoptions,” to mentors, to love and vulnerability, HSHR staff chose to establish structures and model norms that supported strong student-teacher relationships. For the most part, staff viewed this as a prerequisite for academic content. (From Rajiv's perspective of his first interaction with Miguel, “if you can't teach humanity at the same time, then what's the point?") To the teachers I spoke with, “love” was a quality of the school that teachers appreciated when making the decision to join the staff, a source of respect for colleagues, and an unwritten contract with students, subtly compelling them to work hard and trust their teachers.

Survey findings. Overall, the qualitative findings relating to student-teacher relationships and the establishment of family-like school communities seem to suggest that teachers in the three schools prioritized and appreciated the interpersonal bonds that they forged with colleagues and students. This was evidenced in how teachers chose to loop with students at Explore, how they created a “village” at YLA, and how they unabashedly “loved” their students at HSHR. I conducted several descriptive analyses to investigate whether the prioritization of relationships was common throughout the TPSI inventory schools and differed in marked ways from the average school.

Looping. Do teachers at TPSI schools choose to “loop” with students more often than decision-makers at traditional schools? Does there appear to be a relationship between the extent of teacher collective decision-making authority (CDMA) and whether teachers report looping? As reported in Chapter 4, TPSI survey respondents were far more likely than Schools and Staffing Survey 2011-2012 (SASS 11-12) respondents to report looping with students (46.6 percent versus 18.5 percent, respectively). Figure 9.1, below, compares responses to the looping question

between teachers working at TPSI schools with varying numbers of TPSI “autonomies” (see Appendix A for the full list). There does not appear to be a straightforward relationship between the extent of CDMA and looping decisions. Teachers working at schools with the “most” autonomies (i.e., either 14 or 15 of the 15 total) were most likely to report looping (61 percent), teachers at schools with only “some” autonomies (between 5-9) were somewhat less likely to report looping (40 percent), and teachers at schools with “many” autonomies (between 10-13) were least likely to report looping (34 percent). Interpreting this U-shaped finding is somewhat difficult. Perhaps having one or more specific autonomies that are directly tied to looping decisions—such as “setting staff pattern,” for example—is more relevant than the overall extent of CDMA in predicting whether a school’s teachers will loop with students or not. If those specific autonomies are no more prevalent among schools with “many” autonomies than they are among schools with only “some” autonomies, we should not expect to see much difference in those groups’ respective likelihoods of adopting looping.

This curious U-shaped pattern aside, the extent of looping among TPSI schools in general is noteworthy. One possibility is that TPSI teachers are more likely to loop with their students because their schools are small and because combining students of different grade levels is practical in the face of financial and space constraints. It is also possible that TPSI schools are more likely to establish looping structures intentionally, as advisors at Explore did, to promote long-term student-teacher relationships.

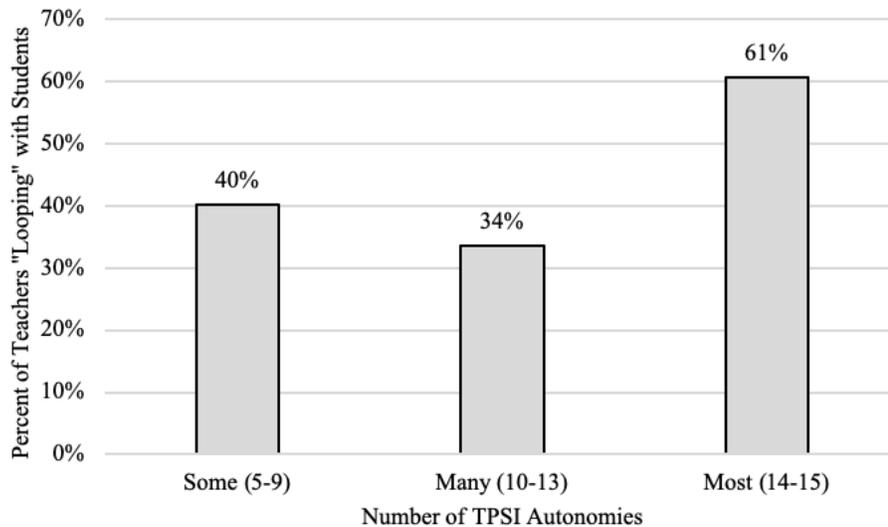


Figure 9.1. Teacher “looping” by number of TPSI autonomies.

Note. $n = 339$.

Quality of student relationships. Is the emphasis on building trusting, supportive relationships with each student common across the population of TPSI schools? Two four-point agree-disagree survey items measured teachers’ perceptions of their relationships with students:

1. Nearly every student has a meaningful relationship with at least one adult.
2. Struggling students receive adequate individualized support.

Overall responses for both items were very high across survey participants. The average score for the “meaningful relationship” item was 3.7, and the average score for the “individualized support” item was 3.4—both falling between the “somewhat” and “strongly agree” labels on the four-point scale.

Is there a relationship between the extent of teacher CDMA and the quality of students’ relationships with teachers? The possibility of establishing and maintaining meaningful, supportive relationships with individual students likely depends on the extent to which time is

afforded for one-on-one meetings with students during the instructional workday. Therefore, it stands to reason that decision-making in the area of curriculum—what is taught, when it is taught, and how—should bear on how teaching time is used and whether or not relationship-building gets prioritized. For example, if teachers are required to maintain a strict pacing schedule on a mandatory reading curriculum, they may have less time to provide individualized support to students. It is also possible that the emphasis on relationships among the three case study schools with substantial CDMA in the area of curriculum was anomalous among the population of TPSI schools.

Figure 9.2 displays teachers' responses to the two "student relationship" items described above disaggregated by the extent of teachers' perceived influence over curriculum. For both items, there is a general upward trend in teachers' agreement with the relationship items as they report greater influence over curriculum, with the exception of a dip in their rating for the "individual support" item among respondents who had "minor influence" over curriculum. Although ratings for the two items are high overall, this pattern would suggest that there may be a slight positive correlation between level of curricular influence and emphasis on building strong relationships with students.

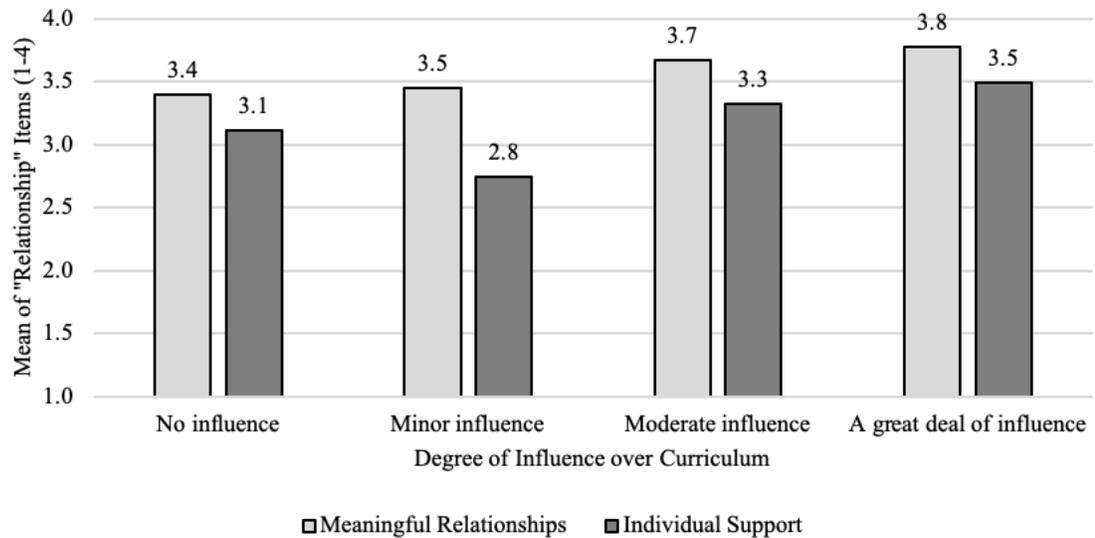


Figure 9.2. Student relationship item means by degree of influence over curriculum.

Note. $n = 334$ (“Meaningful Relationships”), $n = 329$ (“Individual Support”).

Development of positive identity. Like relationship-building, generally, themes around wanting students to belong, to feel accepted and appreciated for their differences, and to generally “be themselves” came up among the teachers I interviewed at the three school sites as high priorities for teachers’ work. To what extent are such themes common among TPSI schools generally? Three four-point agree-disagree survey items measured the extent to which teachers felt their schools emphasized these student outcomes, which I have collectively labeled “Positive Identity” items:

1. Teachers work hard to ensure that students of all backgrounds feel like they belong at school. (“Student Belonging”)
2. Students are given regular opportunities to explore aspects of their personal identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender) in class. (“Personal Identity”)
3. Students are encouraged to be themselves. (“Be Themselves”)

Overall, respondents rated their agreement with all three items very highly, with responses averaging 3.7, 3.4, and 3.8 for the three items, respectively—all falling between “somewhat” and “strongly agree.”

Following the same logic as in the preceding section, teachers’ responses to “positive identity” items were broken down by level of teacher influence over curriculum. For all three items, there was a general upward trend in agreement as teachers reported greater curricular influence. This trend was most dramatic for the “personal identity” item, which appears to suggest that teachers with more curricular influence were far more likely than those with less influence to feel that their schools created space for students to make connections between their various identities and their life experiences.

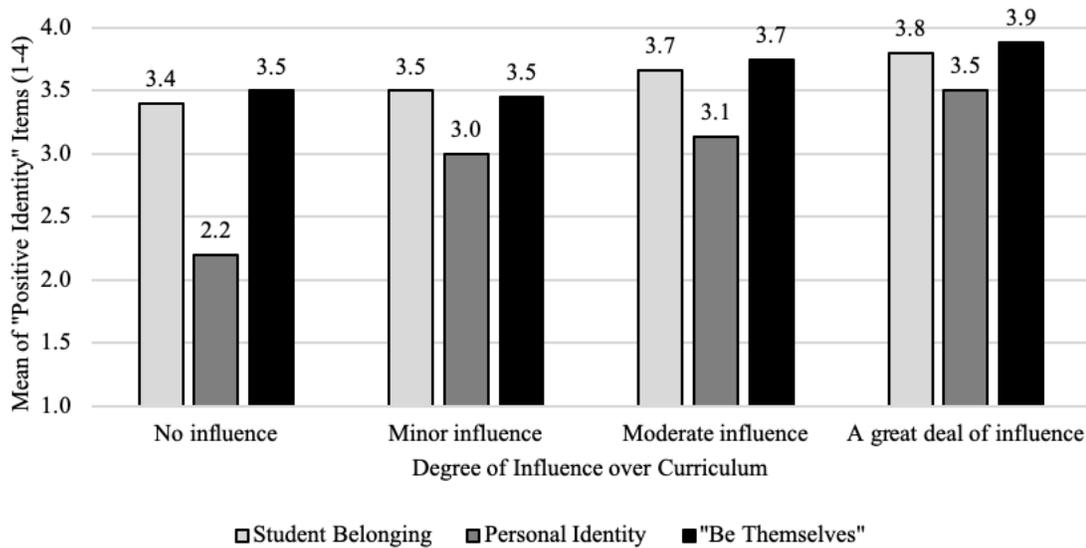


Figure 9.3. Student positive identity item means by degree of influence over curriculum.

Note. $n = 334$ (“Student Belonging”), $n = 332$ (“Personal Identity” and “Be Themselves”).

Free-response evidence. Teachers' responses to free-response survey items seem to support qualitative evidence that TPSI teachers develop structures and norms that foster relationship-building and community. Several examples are provided below of how teachers felt working at their current (teacher-powered) schools differed from their work in previous schools:

At my previous school (traditional), I taught over 100 students a day and did not know them nearly as well as in our project-based charter school. Now I see the same kids all day, every day, and really know them quite well.

We have multi-age advisories and focus on building community and developing relationships with our students and their families.

[At my previous school,] I worked with a lot more different students for less time and now I work with less students for more time each day. Which really allows me to get to know my students better.

I have worked at a wide variety of other settings. I would say the respect and camaraderie between everyone (staff/students/admin.) is much greater [at my current school].

This school cares more about the students we serve [than my previous school]. Working at this school, we are given more autonomy and encouraged to address social and political issues that concern the students and their community. We focus on developing positive identity for students and explore social justice issues.

Furthermore, some teachers chose to provide unsolicited input regarding the community aspect of their schools in the final question of the survey, which asked them to add "anything else" regarding their work in a teacher-powered school. These responses in particular highlight the impact of close-knit school communities on teachers.

I love my job and school community/family. I couldn't imagine a better place to work.

This is a community-based school with lots of parent involvement and support. Having teachers make joint decisions takes more time but in the end the decisions are beneficial to the school. Most staff have their own children attend our school. Our facilities are not great but the spirit of the school is strong. We have a long waiting list of potential students who apply annually.

Staff supports staff and students. Students support students and staff!

This is probably the most difficult job that I have ever had, but it is also the best job I have ever had. I work with a group of people that I have grown to love and are a part of my family. We have developed a community at school that allows students to feel comfortable in their own skin and realize who they are, what their talents are, and why it is so important for them to use their uniqueness in life. I am proud of our students. They come up with wonderful projects that amaze me daily. I am often blown away by the information they learn about and the information they seek out. I really like that being a part of a teacher-powered school as well because I have a say in what we do in every level. I am part of a much larger “thing.” I really do love my job, the people I work with and the students I work with every day.

Teachers connected the sense of community in their schools with feeling supported as professionals, deeply attached to their school “families,” and satisfied in their careers.

When Kids Act Out: Flexible, “Restorative” Discipline

As in all families, there are times—even in the most “loving” of school settings—when students choose to act in ways that conflict with the norms and values of the school. How teachers respond to such violations can have profound implications for their relationships with students, their self-efficacy in addressing behavior challenges, and how students comport themselves subsequently (Ashley & Burke, 2009; Brouwers & Tomic, 1998). Discipline policies and approaches to “classroom management” often work to control and punish student (mis)behavior rather than to understand and address its root causes, which often leads to students feeling alienated from their teachers and undermines feelings of mutual respect and trust.

At the three school sites, teachers described the adoption of “restorative justice” approaches to student discipline—an approach that prioritizes identifying the root causes of unwanted behavior, its effects on members of the school community, and ways in which relationships harmed as a result of that behavior may be restored (Ashley & Burke, 2009). It is an inherently relational philosophy around discipline that is also inherently situation-specific. While the schools did not universally—or always faithfully—apply the principles of restorative justice

(whether because they were externally constrained by a districtwide discipline policy or because of slow or incomplete implementation), teachers did talk about how their participation in establishing discipline policies and practices helped to mitigate relational damage from incidents and reinforce trust between staff and students. Approaches to discipline at the three schools are addressed in turn, followed by findings from the survey that serve to expand on qualitative findings.

“We have a conversation”: **Discipline at Explore.** Disciplinary offenses at Explore were handled “on a case by case basis,” with resulting consequences being “solely within the discretion of the school,” according to my conversations with teachers and the school’s student code of conduct. This meant that teachers could be responsive to the particular needs of the student and the conditions of the situation rather than taking a one-size-fits-all or “zero tolerance” approach. The teachers I spoke with primarily talked about “having a conversation” with students whose behavior strayed from what staff expected of them. A typical sequence of events in response to a minor offense, Matt told me, would be as follows for any of his own advisees: “A kid will do something, a staff member will come and tell me about it. I will ask the staff member, ‘Well, what would you like to see happen? What are you looking for?’ Then I will talk with the student and figure it out.”

Understanding impact and restoring relationships. “Figuring it out” with the student often involved two components: an educational component, including “instruction on appropriate school behavior,” and also a “focus on the restoration of relationships affected by the student behavior,” per Explore’s code of conduct and in alignment with the tenets of restorative justice. To Wendy, this meant helping the student understand how others may have perceived their behavior, explaining, “I understand what you’re trying to do, but this is not what it looks like to

the community around you. *This* is what it looks like.’ It’s really having those kinds of conversations.” In Matt’s hypothetical example above, he would prompt the student to consider:

What’s one way to make a clean breast of it, [so] that you have squared things away? Maybe you do something for that person that’s really helpful, like clean the science room; like organizing papers; like tutoring a student in the advisory... What’s something you really could do that would be helpful?

By posing these questions to the student rather than demanding a specific outcome, Matt could help an advisee quickly repair damage caused to another staff member (or student) without stripping that student of their own agency in doing so—thereby preserving his own relationship with the student and the relationship between the student and the other staff member at the same time.

Finding a balance between preserving a relationship with an advisee while also holding them accountable for negative behavior was not always easy. As a special education case manager, Wendy frequently received complaints from staff members regarding the behavior of her students, and often found herself feeling like the “bad guy,” even though she approached the situation from a restorative lens. “I think that’s really challenging, trying to get them to understand, to see that it may look like I’m the bad guy, but I’m really the one that’s trying to help you and I’m trying to get you to follow your plan so that you can continue to stay here and learn the way you want to learn.” I asked Wendy to explain how she navigated being the “bad guy” with her students:

Sara: What do you do to communicate that to the student? To navigate that tough line between “I’m here to support you” and “I’m also here to hold you accountable”?

Wendy: Just have that real conversation with them. Pull them aside, take them in, have a conversation in my office or in a quiet space or a space where nobody is around, but just have that conversation with them. The kids are very capable of understanding. If you have that talk with them, most of the time they are very eloquent [in] how they can speak back to you. They'll even say, even if they're really mad at you, "I know. I know you're not the bad guy. It looks like you are but I know you're not" ...But I always try to point out, to let them know that what they value is important, that I understand what they're trying to do, because we have that relationship that they may not have with somebody else.

Since Wendy has no positional authority over any of the other staff members, she must rely on the influence she has gained with the student from getting to know them well. In Wendy's words:

Because we don't really have that system of authority, it is more challenging for [the student] to see that *you* are the person dishing out the consequences. It's hard for them to see there's no principal... There's really no level of authority. It is more challenging with some of the kiddos who see that, and they're like, "Well, I can do whatever I want to do because there's nobody here who's going to [punish me]."

To Wendy, the best way to achieve the kind of influence that would result in changed behavior was to show that she truly cared about her students and understood what drove them to do the things they did. "That relationship-building piece is, I think, crucial, particularly in the smaller community," Wendy concluded. "Super, super important."

"It's always all of us": Addressing major incidents. How Explore staff responded to behavioral infractions—and who was involved in those responses—was "situational," according to Leah. "If it's a big issue, then it's always all of us... If it's just little—like somebody threw a pencil, you know—like, I talk to the kid." While the code of conduct outlined specific criteria for dismissing a student from class or from the school (i.e., suspension) for more serious offenses, decisions on consequences for a major incident were always made collaboratively and depended on a number of factors. Samantha explained the process as follows:

So if there's an issue that comes up within the school as a discipline issue, let's say... if there's a fight, for example, then initially it would be broken up. Then the advisors would be called, and we'd separate the students. Then they [the advisors] would do the initial contact with families, but generally our policy is the students are separated and stay separated, and we usually send them home, kind of depending on what the fight is, right? Then we meet after school as a staff to talk about what to do... We walk through the whole situation. Whoever saw it, whoever was involved will walk the staff through the whole situation and give them all the facts. All the facts are laid out, and then we kind of discuss together what would be the best way to move forward or what would be the best discipline decision... Then generally we'll make a decision together at that point about, okay, maybe do they need to be suspended? Was it serious enough that we need to do it at a certain amount [of time]? Do we need to do some sort of mediation, restorative measure, things like that? We try to use that process as much as possible just so that the whole staff is part of that. Then it kind of takes the pressure off one or two people making the decision.

The whole staff—or as many as can come—attends these after-school discipline meetings. To Samantha, the involvement of the larger staff in making discipline decisions “took the pressure” off the advisor:

[As] the advisor, it's good for us to be able to kind of step away sometimes. We can, say, give background and give facts as to maybe why this student acted this way or did this certain thing, but it's also nice for us to sometimes be able to pull back because we get too close to it... I think when I've been in that situation, I've been able to say, “This is what I would like to see happen, but right now I need an outside perspective,” or “I need somebody who is not involved in this situation, has no emotional involvement [to weigh in].” I think because we get so emotionally involved with our students because we're so close to the families, we're so close to them that sometimes we need to pull ourselves away a little bit when it comes to discipline.

Even though the advisor is ultimately the one who must deliver news of the staff's decision to the student and the student's family, it was relieving to Samantha to know that a thoughtful, unbiased decision was made with the backing of nearly the entire staff.

There were times when staff felt that the most appropriate response to a behavioral infraction or a persistent behavioral issue was to involve students in what was called a “restorative justice circle.” “Circles” had been used at Explore for years as a way for school community members to share their perspectives and feelings on an issue and to brainstorm ways

of healing any harm done to individuals or relationships. According to Samantha, a circle could be used for a number of purposes. “It can be used for mediation. It can be used for discipline to kind of bring [together] the person that, not ‘committed’ the act, but—you know—and then the people who were on the opposite end of it, and try to talk about the effects the behavior can have on a community and things like that.” Samantha’s hesitancy to label a student as having “committed an act” reflects the restorative justice practice of repairing harm and restoring responsible students’ standing in the school community instead of punishing “bad” behavior and shaming the student⁵³.

Conflicting disciplinary philosophies. To Matt, having a flexible, relationship-based approach to discipline as opposed to a clear “if-then” policy coincided with his personal philosophy. He explained:

I also am not a person who goes, “Okay, this kid did X, now we suspend him.” I’m never really up for suspensions. I don’t think suspensions solve a lot of problems. I know you could say, “Well then, how does the kid know [he or she did something wrong]?” I’m like, “I don’t know, other than I talked to the kid. I express disappointment. I say, “you should really work it out with this staff member. You should have a real conversation with them.”

However, Matt also acknowledged that not every staff member at Explore felt the same way as he did. Matt shared that his partner advisor, Liz, felt that students would benefit from more of a “[if] you do this, then this happens,” approach rather than the situation- and discussion-based approach (this particular disagreement and its implications for Matt’s own professional development were described in more depth in Chapter 7). Nevertheless, Matt felt strongly that “having a conversation” with students in response to an incident was more in line with the school’s underlying principles:

⁵³ See “Restorative Justice Circles,” <https://oscr.umich.edu/article/restorative-justice-circles>.

I understand Liz's point... Liz has been here many years, and [she] still, I think really in her heart of hearts, believes that the way that we approach individualizing students based on their behavior... I think she really believes that that's not a good idea. That's where I feel like, I still respect her, I still admire her, I still think she had really good ideas, but it's like, here's this whole culture. You kind of have to buy into it.

In other words, traditional school discipline that clearly and consistently delineates a system of progressive consequences for student misbehavior seemed, to Matt, to run counter to the culture of the school that emphasized personalization of the student learning experience. This disagreement highlights how staff members at Explore actively debated and negotiated how the school should be run through their day-to-day conversations.

Support, not punishment: Discipline at YLA. Teachers at YLA volunteered less information about how the school handled discipline, perhaps because discipline issues were not particularly salient to their experiences. Anecdotally, serious disciplinary incidents were very rare at YLA; however, the state DOE reported that 6 percent of YLA students (about 1 in every 16) were suspended at some point during the year I visited.

The school's discipline policy, crafted with input from all major stakeholder groups, called out the "rights and responsibilities" that members of the school community must have to keep the "village" strong and cohesive:

YLA is a village and, as such, can prosper only when everyone takes full responsibility for its safety and well-being. Everyone, regardless of his/her age, has certain rights and responsibilities, and it is mutual respect for all that holds the community together. In that regard, YLA believes that student behavior shall reflect the standards of good citizenship expected of members of a democratic society. High personal standards of courtesy, decency, proper language, honesty, respect for others, and morality shall be maintained. (Discipline Policy)

In emphasizing that every member of the community has rights and responsibilities, students and staff members alike are recognized as contributing members worthy of having those rights protected.

Student support. Serious disciplinary matters are taken up by the school’s Student Support Team (SST), led by an Administrator of School Culture & Student Support. SST serves three primary purposes: (1) “provide support for students to help prevent disciplinary infractions,” (2) “investigate incidents and determine the appropriate consequences for students who violate the student’s discipline code,” and (3) “assist The Learning Center⁵⁴ with in- and out-of-school suspensions” (YLA Family Handbook). The SST promotes an educative response to disciplinary infractions, according to the school’s Discipline Policy:

Student Support has at its philosophical core the belief that any disciplinary action is meant to educate the student to understand why his/her conduct was inappropriate and to guide the student in a way that will help him/her avoid committing future infractions. Discipline is not a punitive response, but rather one to promote self-reflection and responsibility for one’s actions. Student Support’s primary function is to provide the student with a program that supports his/her academic achievement at YLA while addressing the inappropriate behavior.

Words like “educate,” “guide,” “help,” and “support” suggest that discipline at YLA is a nurturing act rather than a retributive one. Actions meriting “discipline” are assumed—at least by this philosophy—to have been committed out of misunderstanding rather than ill intent.

Restorative justice and peer-to-peer accountability. In recent years, the school had begun to take a restorative justice approach to school disciplinary incidents. According to charter renewal documents, school leaders conducted an in-depth study of restorative justice and had introduced several new practices aligned with the philosophy. “Youth Court,” in which students review disciplinary incidents and decide appropriate consequences for their peers, is one such example. The SST also organized the Peace Studies and Peer Mediation programs, both of which

⁵⁴ According to the school’s website, The Learning Center (“TLC”) is a “a ‘managed care’ program for students who either need remedial help or who wish to accelerate or enrich their studies.”

were intended to engage the student body in taking responsibility for maintaining a healthy and inclusive school environment.

Restorative justice at YLA was still somewhat of a new concept at the time of my research residency, and I noted a few contradictions in the way it was described and practiced. For example, Youth Court was charged with “sentencing” students to “community service or other appropriate consequences” (YLA Charter Renewal Narrative). A group of student leaders in the middle school wore neon safety vests and matching trucker hats labeled with “Peace Patrol” and were charged with patrolling the hallways for disciplinary infractions. As the Peace Patrol coordinator, Arnel’s job was to teach students “how to reprimand classmates not following the middle school routine.” While these students were told to do their reprimanding “in a nice way,” I noted some parallels between how Peace Patrol officers and Youth Court judges were taught to operate and the criminalizing of behavior that restorative justice, as a philosophy and practice, is intended to diminish. While these programs certainly empowered student leaders and reduced the role of staff members in addressing behavioral concerns, they perpetuated a more or less traditional, behaviorist approach to policing student conduct.

The “sheriff in the classroom.” Henri was one of the only teachers to talk about the school’s approach to student discipline as an example of shared decision-making as part of the card sorting task. From Henri’s perspective, the overall discipline policy is “set up” by the School Management Team (SMT), “but at the end of the day, I’m the sheriff in the classroom and I decide what happens.” He continued, “There are certain things [in the policy] I think are ridiculous, I’m not going to have to ask kids to do. I know technically if a kid’s cell phone falls out of their pocket, you’re supposed to take it, but I’m not going to make your day even worse or have your mom or dad come because your phone fell out.” To Henri, autonomy over discipline in

the classroom domain allowed him to respond empathetically and leniently to students who technically broke the rules but did so without causing a major incident.

Sometimes, Henri's special education background helped him use consequences judiciously and recognize where a rule may be inappropriate for a student. The gum policy was one such example:

We kind of decide—technically, they're not supposed to chew gum. Am I going to check a kid for having gum if you're being clean and you're not throwing it on the floor, putting it under the seat? For some kids, and this is my special ed background, it helps them function... I mean, I'm all about rules. At the same time, there are certain things you have to really look at. So, that's why I say on the gum policy, there's one in my class, yes, there's one overall in the whole school, but I kind of say what goes at the end of the day.

Being the ultimate authority “at the end of the day” meant that Henri could weigh the policy that the school leaders established in consultation with teachers and parents with his own professional judgment of what a particular student needed.

Henri's ambivalence toward the official discipline policy stemmed from his philosophical alignment with the school's mission to prepare students for the realities of life beyond YLA, as discussed in Chapter 5. For example, while the official policy stated that students were supposed to sign out on a sheet when leaving the classroom, Henri felt that enforcing this policy conflicted with the school's goal of preparing independent and responsible young leaders who could function in a variety of contexts:

We're supposed to have a sign-out sheet and whatnot. When we talk about the real world—and that's what we're supposed to do, right? Develop skills for the real world—there is no sign-out sheet for the real world. It's kind of one of those things, if you want to waste time at your job, that reflects poorly on you, and that's what I tell the students. When you get to the real world, when you get to college, your bosses, your professors, they notice when you leave class. They notice when you leave your desk. They notice how many times you go to the bathroom. That falls into your quarterly report, your bi-yearly report with your bosses. That [influences] your professor, whether or not he or she wants to give you a bump up or a bump down [on your grade].

Since there was no uniform way in which employers or college professors enforced their policies, Henri felt that students should be prepared to walk into each setting knowing there may be a different set of written or unwritten rules and comport themselves accordingly.

As evidenced by the few teachers who chose to discuss it, discipline at YLA did not seem to be something that regularly troubled teachers. Autonomy to address incidents in the classroom setting meant that teachers could be thoughtful and responsive to students' needs in applying any consequences, with little threat of being overruled by administrators. On the whole, it seemed, discipline was an area where staff members at YLA were not all quite on the same page, but Henri rationalized this diversity of approaches in light of the school's collective interest in preparing students for the variability of the "real world."

Preserving student dignity: Discipline at HSHR. Like at Explore and YLA, HSHR staff employed a restorative justice approach to discipline, and were early adopters of the philosophy in the school district. Whereas the discipline policy at YLA stressed the educative function of discipline as a means to help a student understand why his or her actions were wrong, the policy at HSHR treated misbehavior as a "symptom" of an underlying issue that merited investigation and attention in its own right. According to HSHR's "Student Behavior Support and Restorative Discipline Policy":

Behavior is the symptom of greater conditions, and like any symptom we need to attend to the underlying causes. Our goal is not to dole out consequences for misbehavior, but rather to identify and address the causes of it and to create supportive environments to remedy it.

Rather than "dole out consequences" automatically, teachers and school leaders took on a more curious and caring stance, choosing to assume that the problem implicated poor acculturation to the school on the part of staff members, not malice on the student's part. In Paula's words, "we try to figure out what's wrong and how we can help them." Teachers strove not to "impugn,"

“humiliate,” or “degrade” students, which they felt helped them to pull straying students closer to the school and its culture of caring, not push them further away.

Empathy over “zero tolerance.” Staff members at HSHR took pride in their unusually low suspension and expulsion rates, which they often attributed to their intentional—and sometimes defiant—rejection of “zero tolerance,” one-size-fits all disciplinary responses that were typical in other schools in the district. In the year I visited, according to state suspension data, only one HSHR student was suspended. James, the instructional coach whose position and past working experience in other district schools gave him some added perspective on how HSHR compared to other schools, said that HSHR went “out of its way” to reduce or eliminate consequences that would take students out of school.

One thing that’s unusual compared to many schools, is they’ve been an early adopter of restorative justice and restorative practices... A typical stance for a lot of schools who serve similar demographics is sort of, you know, ‘We know kids experience a lot of trauma, we want to support them all. *These* kids we don’t know how to handle, and we use traditional discipline procedures with them.’ And basically force them out as a result. Here, the school has gone out of its way to include every student in staying in school.

James acknowledged that some of the restorative responses to incidents were controversial, being perceived by parents and district officials as too lenient, but that the school staff was steadfast in protecting students’ inclusion in the school:

Even in things that are controversial, you know; if a child brought a weapon to school, but for fear of needing it for self-defense, do you expel that student? Or do you focus on restorative justice, restorative practices. Even in those instances the school has chosen restorative practices instead of suspension or expulsion. And that can be controversial, because a parent might say, you know, ‘A child brought a weapon to school!’... The school has responded with tremendous empathy towards all students, given the demographic and the characteristics of the students here.

Here, James alludes to the fact that HSHR’s low incidence of exclusionary discipline was highly unusual given the school’s student population; suspension and expulsion rates were significantly

higher in other district schools with similar demographic characteristics (i.e., predominantly Latina/o students from low-income households).

There were times when the district’s discipline policy—or the law—could override the school’s policy. Theresa told me it was rare, but that occasionally an infraction would be punished with “no questions asked.” Selling drugs was one straightforward example. “If you get caught selling drugs on campus, there is nothing we can do to save you,” Theresa said, as if the staff would have chosen to protect the student from the long arm of the law if they could have. “Most of the time,” she continued, “we do restorative justice and it’s our choice of what we’re going to do with a student.”

The very nature of the restorative justice model meant that dialogue between staff members about incidents of any serious nature was necessary to fully grasp the situation, much as it was at Explore. According to Frank:

We’re continually having conversations about what fits in—as a staff—to the restorative model, what’s punitive, and strategies to support that. How to speak to the student, how to group around the student, enable that student to learn. Why the action was not appropriate without impugning the student himself.

Importantly, for teachers at HSHR, the discipline policy was never really complete, or set in stone, but a constant work in progress as each new situation challenged prior approaches. Such an approach may have been unnerving for the staff member, student, or parent who prefers to know in advance exactly what will happen in response to a given incident, but the teachers I spoke with—many hired specifically for their “heart” as evidenced in Chapter 8—recognized the need to be responsive to each new situation and to each individual student.

I asked Frank how developing and implementing the discipline policy collectively as a staff has affected his work at HSHR. He told me, “I think it’s one of the things that makes the school what it is, gives it the character that it has. It’s been very effective in my classroom. It’s

been effective school-wide.” Frank listed three main reasons why the restorative justice model worked so well, from his perspective: first, it “accelerated” how quickly a student could return to learning by removing the humiliation so often associated with disciplinary responses; second, it minimized students’ time out of class; and third, it empowered students to take ownership of their actions as “healers”:

I think the reason we have so few suspensions, and the expulsion rate is single digits where everybody else on the campus is easily double digits, [is]... it allows the student to learn what they did without being degraded or humiliated, which accelerates the learning time. The other thing it does very effectively, which is different than traditional discipline, is it doesn’t separate the student from his education or her education. Traditionally, disruptive students who are asked to leave the classroom, you’re removing that student from their education. That’s not effective. They’re here to learn primarily. So, if you can neutralize a disruptive behavior by calling attention to the action without humiliating the student, you have more chance of that student ceasing that behavior and without removing him or her from the educational process. And depending on the situation that looks different. It also gives the students ownership of their own discipline policy so they become players in the discipline process, those who are—not the *perpetrators*, necessarily, [but disruptive students]—then become part of the healers. It boosts their commitment to the community, their engagement. And it makes the school community as a whole stronger. That’s been my experience.

Rather than make an example of student “perpetrators” (though he did not like the term) by making them outcasts of the school community, HSHR teachers essentially did the opposite—they messaged to students that they wanted them to be a part of the community, or—in Paula’s words—teachers “invited them in.” In doing so, students seemed to develop a sense of commitment to the school and to their teachers that prevented them from acting out subsequently. In Frank’s experience, discipline became less and less of an issue with these students, making life in his own classroom more pleasant and productive.

“*VIPs.*” A further example of how HSHR teachers defied traditional behaviorist approaches to discipline was by collectively rallying behind particular students who were struggling to demonstrate alignment with the school’s behavioral norms. They referred to such

students as “VIPs”—Very Important Persons. When a student demonstrated consistently negative or troublesome behavior, or struggled repeatedly to participate in academic and social domains, a VIP meeting would be called where the student, their teachers, parents, and sometimes counselors or other administrators would come together to address the problem. “We don’t structure it as a punitive thing, necessarily,” Paula said of the VIP meetings she has attended. “We structure it, again, like a restorative justice thing.”

Setting a restorative tone was the first priority at VIP meetings. All members of the “council” had to begin the session by saying something that they appreciated about the student. “Everybody shares, and we have to talk *directly* to the student,” Paula told me, about the assets they saw in them. “Even the student has to say something about themselves. Like, ‘I know that my biggest strength is blah, blah, blah,’ because that way, they focus on the good as well.” Paula felt that the parent’s turn to share with the student was “the hardest” due to the emotional work needed to reconcile anger or disappointment with love and pride. With the tone set, the council would work with the student to unearth any underlying issues and develop a plan for meeting the student’s needs in ways that better aligned with the school’s culture and norms.

VIP meetings could result in remarkable progress for individual students even in the direst of circumstances. Paula gave one example of an eleventh-grade student who had been teetering on the edge of expulsion as a ninth grader, and “basically should’ve gone to jail.” The student was identified as a VIP and closely supported through his tenth-grade year. “Now, he’s a junior, and we love him, and he’s great.” But Paula also acknowledged that such a dramatic turnaround for students with “legal issues” was rare. For students tied up in illegal activity, it was difficult to influence their behavior through the VIP process. “We could have continuous VIPs and then behavior doesn’t change, and then at that point... something will happen. They’ll get caught, or there’s an issue in their community, and then they’re basically taken away from us,

right, so there's nothing we could do." As much as HSHR staff sought to protect students from the grips of the criminal justice system, they were beholden to the law, which sometimes meant losing their VIPs to other—less forgiving—institutions. "We try to keep communication with them as much as we can," Paula told me.

These examples demonstrate that, while all three case study schools leveraged restorative justice practices (to varying degrees) in response to behavioral challenges, the objectives of discipline-related conversations with offending students differed somewhat at HSHR in comparison to the other two schools. Disciplinary meetings at Explore and YLA were more educative—helping the student, through conversation, understand why their behavior was problematic. In contrast, the assumption underlying VIP meetings at HSHR was that behavioral challenges resulted less from ignorance of the written and unwritten rules of school and more from the expression of unmet needs which councils sought to remedy.

Teachers at all three schools chose not to rely on behaviorist, one-size-fits-all discipline policies to induce "good behavior." Students' transgressions would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and would rarely result in consequences beyond "conversations" with relevant faculty and affected others. In making the commitment to restorative justice, teachers chose to relinquish the convenience of "carrots and sticks" to shape student behavior, instead depending on the social contracts they entered into with students to encourage their cooperation. Students' acceptance of the terms of such contracts required substantial relationship-building work on the part of their teachers, work that teachers felt paid off in the mutual respect it engendered. Mutual respect, in turn, diminished conflict.

Survey findings. Across the three school sites, several things were notable about how teachers chose to approach discipline. Even if they had administrators who would take care of certain aspects of discipline, all schools had opportunities for teachers to be involved in and

weigh in on—if not decide—how a particular incident should be addressed. Teachers seemed to have latitude to address disciplinary incidents in the classroom. Common across all three schools was a commitment to restorative justice—that discipline as a practice should be about repairing harm done to relationships and helping the student better integrate into the school community. Also, teachers generally felt that their disciplinary strategies worked to curb problem behaviors and create more time for learning—in other words, they enhanced teachers’ collective efficacy. This section turns to survey findings to illuminate broader patterns in how TPSI teachers perceived their involvement in discipline and the impact of such involvement on their work with students. Specifically, I analyzed the relationship between teacher influence over discipline policy and the degree of control teachers felt they had over disciplining students. Then, I examined the relationship between the extent of influence over discipline policy and three variables: focus on *meaningful relationships with students*, development of *positive student identity*, and teacher *collective efficacy*.

Teacher control over discipline in the classroom. It is of theoretical interest whether teachers who make school-level discipline policy collectively choose to standardize responses to disciplinary incidents or maintain individual discretion in responding to and enforcing behavioral expectations in the confines of the classroom. On one hand, teachers may prefer that their schools have a unified code of conduct and standardized approach to addressing student discipline challenges so that students will experience consistent responses to disciplinary infractions across different classrooms, or so that they can rely on their colleagues and administrators for support in enforcing behavioral expectations. On the other hand, teachers may collectively choose to maintain classroom autonomy over discipline decisions (with possible exceptions for more major infractions) on the grounds that it gives them the freedom to use professional discretion and consider the needs of the student and the context of the situation alongside the student’s behavior.

Figure 9.4, below, displays averages of TPSI teachers' perceptions of their "actual control" over disciplining students in their classrooms, broken down by the level of influence teachers had over the discipline policy at their schools. It describes how teachers with varying levels of school-level influence over the discipline policy experienced autonomy to discipline students according to their own professional judgment within the confines of the classroom (or whatever their teaching domain may be, if not a classroom). There is a pronounced increase in teachers' sense of control over disciplining students as teachers report having greater influence over the school-level discipline policy. This would seem to suggest that teachers who collectively determine the discipline policy opt to maintain individual autonomy to address disciplinary issues that occur under their watch.

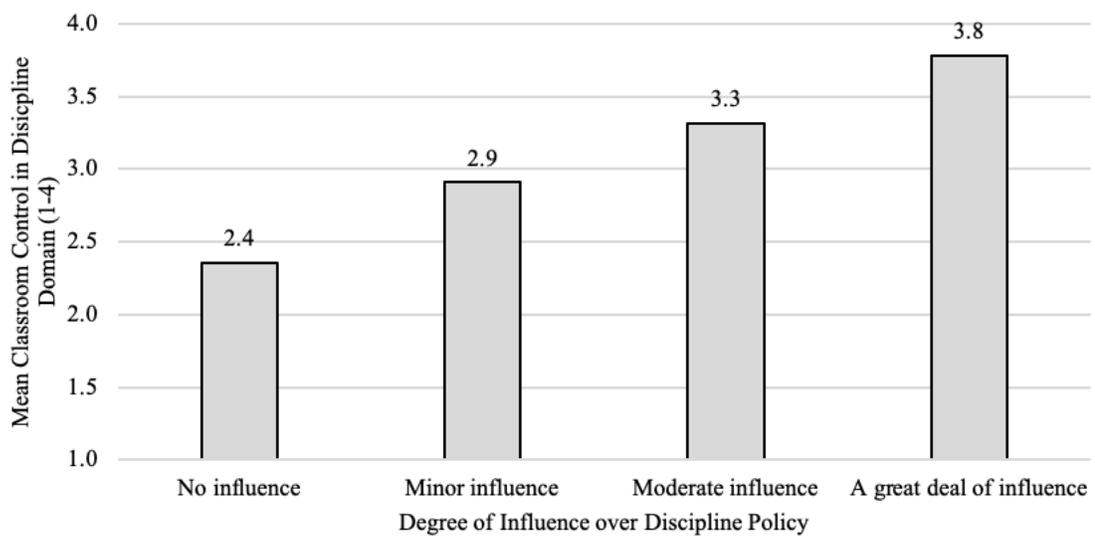


Figure 9.4. Classroom control over disciplining students by degree of influence over discipline policy.

Note. $n = 334$.

Discipline policy influence and emphasis on student relationships. The first half of this chapter discussed the extent to which surveyed teachers’ perceived influence over curricular decisions—the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching—related to the degree to which students had close and supportive relationships with teachers. Figure 9.5, below, displays average responses to the same *meaningful relationships with students* items broken down by level of influence over discipline policy instead of curricular decisions. This analysis follows a similar trend to that displayed in Figure 9.2, with greater influence being associated with higher ratings of relationship items. This suggests that teachers who have greater influence over school-level discipline policy are also more likely to prioritize forming meaningful relationships with students—perhaps, as the qualitative data in this chapter suggest, because they recognize the important learning benefits of mutual respect.

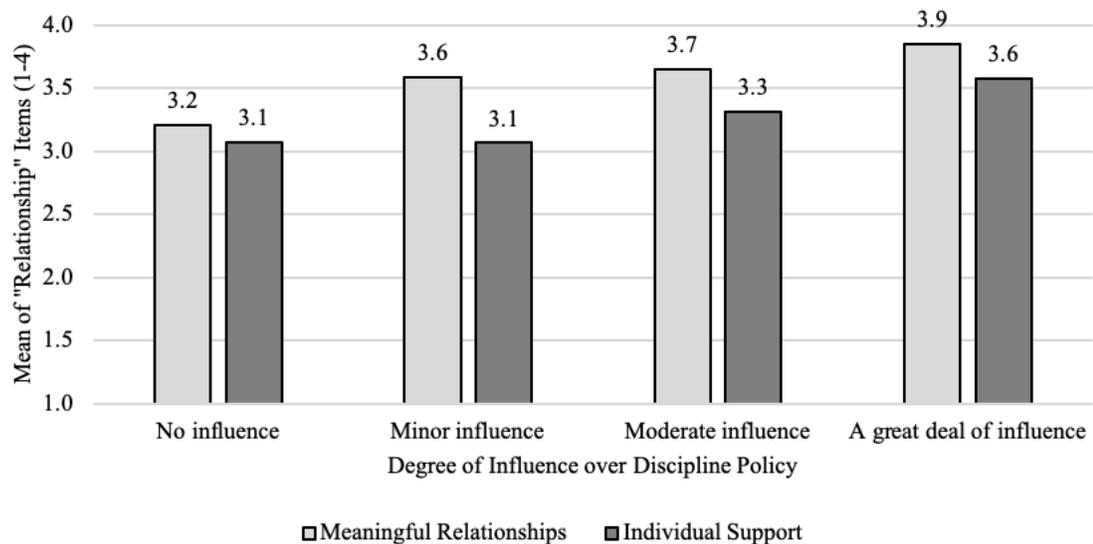


Figure 9.5. Student relationship item means by degree of influence over discipline policy.

Note. $n = 334$ (“Meaningful Relationships”), $n = 329$ (“Individual Support”).

Discipline policy influence and positive student identity. Similar to the trend identified in Figure 9.3 earlier in this chapter relating the encouragement of positive student identity to teachers’ influence over curriculum, Figure 9.6, below, highlights the same trend but for influence over the discipline policy. For all three *positive student identity* items, there is a slight increase in teachers’ ratings as their perceived influence increased. This seems to demonstrate a shift toward more emphasis on developing students’ positive identity—their sense of belonging in school, understanding of themselves, and freedom to express themselves—as teachers have more say over the discipline policy. This corresponds with qualitative findings, particularly at HSHR where teachers sought to reintegrate students with behavior challenges into the school community, and at all three schools, where teachers emphasized supporting students rather than punishing them.

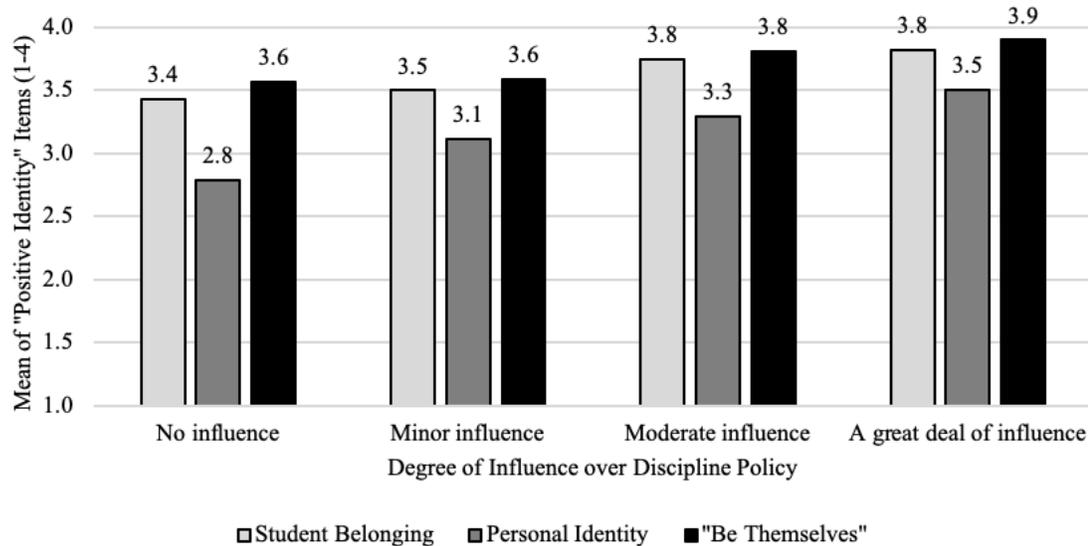


Figure 9.6. Student positive identity item means by degree of influence over discipline policy.

Note. $n = 334$ (“Student Belonging”), $n = 332$ (“Personal Identity” and “Be Themselves”).

Discipline policy influence and collective efficacy. The teachers I spoke with at the three schools mostly felt that the way their schools approached discipline supported teaching and learning; it fostered teachers' sense of *collective efficacy*. Looking to the survey data, there is a marked increase in teachers' collective efficacy ratings as their involvement in determining discipline policy increases (see Figure 9.7). Teachers' intimate knowledge of their students and why they act out may promote discipline policies that address those reasons specifically, thereby diminishing disruptive behavior and its negative impact on teachers' ability to teach.

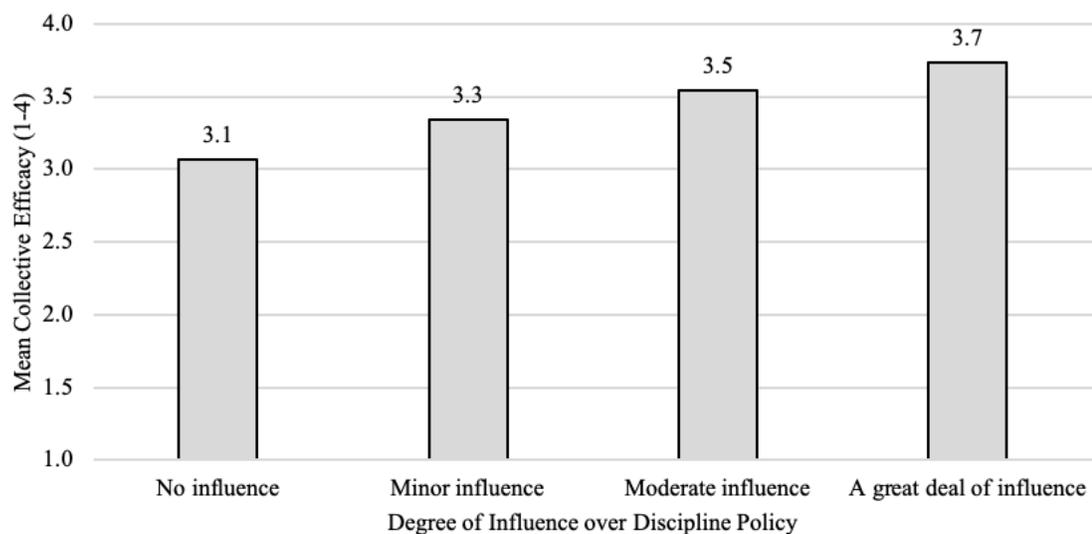


Figure 9.7. Teacher collective efficacy by degree of influence over discipline policy.

Note. $n = 334$.

Free-response evidence. There were no open-ended survey items asking specifically about discipline, but a few—though not many—teachers did comment on the subject when reflecting on how their current schools differed from schools in which they had taught previously. Like the teachers I spoke with at the case study sites, the teachers that did write about discipline

referenced it in terms of strengthening and preserving relationships with students. One teacher wrote that her current teacher-powered school had “less ‘rules’ in general. [And] more focus on student relationships,” which seemed to mirror the “have a conversation” approach to discipline at Explore where each situation was addressed on a case-by-case basis. Another respondent described her school’s emphasis on the “whole child” rather than approaching behavior in a “strictly disciplinary way”:

My previous school addressed student behavior problems in a strictly disciplinary way. My present school has a well-thought-out approach to conflict resolution. We consider the whole child, giving opportunities for children to speak and be listened to, in addition to asking them to listen to others. I am frankly amazed at what I’ve seen in terms of children’s growth in maturity as they learn to work through conflicts in a constructive, non-threatening way.

Like Explore’s use of restorative justice “circles” and YLA’s emphasis on helping the student to understand the impact of his or her behavior on the school community, this teacher’s school appeared to prioritize social and emotional development over a more standardized, punitive response to misbehavior.

One secondary teacher felt that her current school’s small size and advisory-like structure in which students spent most of their day working with one teacher supported relationships and helped her hold students accountable for their behavior:

At my previous school, I taught over 100 students per day in a classroom setting, but I only saw each student for 45 minutes per day. It was impossible to really build relationships with students in such a limited time, especially because of the content I needed to cover during each period. In addition, it was difficult to keep students accountable for their behavior. If a student was misusing their cell phone, their teacher could give them a warning. However, when they switched to the next class, their next teacher would not know that the cell phone had already been an issue that day, and so they could only give a warning. This made it difficult to support students in following the school’s expectations. At [my current school], I work with the same group of 12-18 students all day, every day on all of their coursework. This allows me to build relationships with them and also help them stay accountable with both their academics and behavior.

Of the three schools I visited, only Explore had a structure that enabled teachers to have such close contact with the same small group of students throughout the day. Like this teacher, Explore advisors cited their close relationships with students as being critical to supporting them in making good decisions. However, Explore advisors had not emphasized the “accountability” benefits of the advisory structure in the same way; as discussed in Chapter 6, advisors would often choose not to “micromanage” students behaving unproductively on the grounds that doing so would prevent them from learning valuable lessons about time management through the natural consequences of their inaction. While subtle, this difference in how teachers understood their roles with respect to influencing student behavior highlights the diversity of teaching philosophies enacted at different teacher-powered schools.

Synthesis

This final analysis chapter has focused on the human side of schools. Whereas traditional schools are often characterized using industrial metaphors that emphasize standardization and efficiency, the teachers powering the schools included in this study intentionally strove to promote values of community and belonging. They enacted these values by creating structures—such as advisory and “adoption”—and by establishing norms—such as informality, love, and vulnerability—that helped students see their teachers as trustworthy guides rather than overbearing supervisors. The schools chose restorative justice as a model for responding to disruptive and inappropriate behavior, which prioritized relationships and root problems over automatic, dehumanizing, and isolationist consequences. Survey findings generally supported qualitative findings and suggested that relationship-centric and situation-specific approaches to discipline were more likely to be present in schools in which teachers had greater collective influence over curricular decisions and discipline policies.

Across case study and survey components, schools differed in the specific ways in which they chose to establish and reinforce community and belonging. Explore, with its project-based, advisory model, functioned as a series of interconnected but distinct small family units. YLA's "village" operated more hierarchically, with both older and younger members of the school's extended family contributing to the strength of the whole. And at HSHR, with its "adoption," peer mentor, and "VIP" programs, teachers and administrators cast wide and overlapping nets to ensure that even the most disengaged students would not slip through the cracks.

Implications for teachers. Many of the teachers I spoke with felt that their schools' attention to staff-student relationships and to humanizing approaches to discipline were motivating factors that made them feel connected and committed to their schools. Several teachers talked about how relationships and a sense of family had been factors in their decisions to stay at their schools. To Theresa, the "human" side of working at HSHR made the hard work of operating a teacher-powered school in an under-resourced community sustainable. "Just knowing every kid and them knowing us and then having that sense of community is really what keeps me here," she said, "because there is a whole lot of extra stuff."

Strong, trusting relationships with students and discipline policies that sought to support, rather than impugn, students who violated their schools' codes of conduct also reduced the kinds of disruptive behaviors that made teaching difficult and that often resulted in exclusionary discipline practices. Teachers attributed the low incidence of serious disciplinary problems at their schools to collective efforts to build community, efforts that were rewarded with more time for teaching and learning.

For some teachers, it was difficult to articulate the impact of a humanizing educational environment on their work lives, perhaps because this impact was more emotional and

psychological than it was observable. One survey respondent, however, captured very eloquently what I felt some of the teachers I interviewed had struggled to articulate:

Working at [my school] offers an empowering atmosphere. Some of my previous schools felt limiting and highly oppressive. There is something truly special about allowing teachers to lead the journey of creating a school community. When I followed directives that went against what I knew my students needed [at a previous school], I became part of a dysfunctional school community. This damaged the positive energy I could offer my students in the classroom. Dedicated teachers are resilient, though, [and] so was I. I found ways to provide what my students needed, but was still limited by mandates and lack of resources. At [my current school], I've been able to apply all my experience and positive energy into working with my colleagues to build a unique school community that truly cares about students and works tirelessly to make sure they receive all the services they need. The cherry on top is the opportunity to do this in a democratic inclusive way.

What this teacher highlights is the energy cost of values incongruence—the dissociation between a teacher's own beliefs about student learning and the practices to which she is beholden by a higher authority. For teachers who derive motivation from human connection, schools that deprioritize relationships in favor of efficiencies can seem like impersonal, frustrating, and “oppressive” places. In contrast, where teachers' values *become* schools' values by virtue of teachers' involvement in establishing policies and norms, the motivational benefits are high.

Enabling factors. What factors promoted strong relationships and family-like atmospheres in TPSI schools included in the study? First, school size seemed to determine the extent to which teachers felt they could know their students well. This is not surprising given the existing research demonstrating the benefits of small schools to student-teacher relationships (Phillippo, 2010; Zane, 1994). Second, “looping” with students—or staying with them for multiple years—allowed teachers to capitalize on time spent getting to know a child in order to earn their trust and respect. Sometimes, as Ann, Leah, and Wendy at Explore described, it may take years for mutual trust to emerge. Third, flexible discipline policies that allowed for situational factors and students' individual needs to play into discipline decisions meant that hard-

earned trust and students' self-worth would not instantly be diminished by the administration of an automatic, one-size-fits-all penalty. Finally, establishing and maintaining a strong school community depended in part on individual staff members' buy-in to the values and norms of the organization—a factor teachers sought to ensure in the hiring process, as described in Chapter 8.

Constraints. Several factors made it difficult to preserve relationships and students' sense of being a part of the school community. At Explore, Andrew talked about how the teaching staff's racial composition—being largely all white—made it more difficult, but certainly not impossible, to earn the trust of students of color who attended the school and who had valid reasons—both historical and personal—to be cautious in accepting the guidance and direction of staff. Values differences between HSHR staff and their students' families posed challenges when it came to serious disciplinary infractions, which many parents felt merited harsher punishment and a more decisive administrative response than what a restorative justice approach would entail.

Parents were not the only stakeholders putting pressure on HSHR staff to employ more punitive disciplinary practices. Teachers there bemoaned that “there was nothing they could do” for students whose actions merited expulsion from the eyes of the school district, to which they were ultimately accountable. As implied by its name, the “pilot” status of the school—the label that gave it autonomy to operate largely independently of the district's control—felt disquietingly impermanent to staff. James articulated this sense of vulnerability in his interview, saying that teachers at HSHR were

...appreciative of the fact that they're at a school that's small and gives them support, and is very humane. And then I think there's also a bit of fear or vulnerability that ... Pilot schools here have only existed for eight years now? Nine years? And sort of happened at the whim of the district and the union, and it can all be taken away with a round of contract re-negotiations.

With their entire existence hinging on the “whim of the district and the union,” HSHR teachers did not take their autonomy to choose compassion over consequences for granted.

Conclusion

It has long been acknowledged that schools ought to be caring places. However, large, impersonal schools “organized on the authority principle” are not the kinds of places that easily foster caring teacher-student relationships (Waller, 1932, p. 9). Teachers typically do not spend more than one year getting to know students, and, especially at the secondary levels, may spend no more than an hour a day instructing them—mostly in large groups. In the absence of the mutual respect that comes from knowing a person well, and in the context of competing interests and rigid hierarchies, conflict between students and teachers is almost inevitable.

Of course, there are numerous counterexamples of schools relatively void of conflict, instead characterized by amity and mutual regard. What this chapter has suggested is that schools in which teachers are collectively charged with making decisions about school policy are perhaps more likely to be the kinds of schools that put aside authoritarian norms for more communal and democratic ones than are schools structured according to the traditional, top-down paradigm. For teachers, working at a school that functions as a community built on strong relationships can make for a much more rewarding and values-aligned work environment.

Chapter 10: Discussion

I truly enjoy working at teacher-powered schools. When administration says to teachers, ‘this is in your domain, you figure it out,’ teachers really want to create the best solution possible. (Survey Respondent)

Teaching as a career in the United States is rife with challenges. Some of these challenges—such as the challenge of influencing developing young minds—are inherent to the profession (Lortie, 1975). Others are particular to a “grammar of schooling” (Tyack & Tobin, 1994, p. 454) or “common script” (Metz, 1989, p. 76) that has solidified over the course of the past hundred-plus years: the frenetic six-period day, the isolated “egg-crate” classroom, and the limitations of a standardized curriculum, to name a few (Goldstein, 2015; Tyack, 1974). Despite these persistent challenges, teachers have emerged in the educational research literature as the single most important factor in determining outcomes for students (Coleman, 1966; Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011). And yet, as a system, public education continues to allow teachers to burn out and take their talent, motivation, and experience elsewhere.

The consequences of teacher burnout, turnover, and attrition from the teaching profession include lower student achievement, organizational instability, a demoralized teaching force, and a high cost to taxpayers (Carroll, 2007; Guin, 2004; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). As discussed in Chapter 1, these consequences hit schools in lower-income areas and in communities of color particularly hard.

It is clear from several decades of research into the teacher retention problem that school working conditions factor greatly into teachers’ career decisions (Ingersoll, 2001; Ladd, 2011; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). This is good news, because working conditions are more amenable to change than, say, salaries, state testing requirements, or the availability of jobs in other fields (not to discount the importance of these things). Furthermore, school leadership has

been shown to be one of the most important determinants of teachers' satisfaction with their working conditions (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011). This finding makes sense because principals typically have the final say on scheduling, professional development, hiring, purchasing of materials, and disciplinary policies—all of which shape the day-to-day work experience of teachers.

A parallel finding from turnover and retention research is that teachers who leave their jobs desire more school-level influence (Ingersoll, 2001; Ingersoll & May, 2011, Simon & Johnson, 2015). These two findings—that principals have considerable influence over school working conditions and that teachers want more influence over school-level matters—beg the question: where teachers have more school-level influence, do their working conditions differ appreciably from teachers who have less? If so, do those teachers tend to stay in their jobs longer or be more motivated?

The emergence of teacher-powered schools on the public education scene represents an important opportunity to explore these questions. Absent the all-powerful principal, what do teachers choose to do with their limited time and resources, and what are the implications for their professional work lives? When the principal is not the gatekeeper of empowerment, but a coordinator of leadership activity spread across the organization, what happens?

This mixed methods dissertation sought to explore the nascent terrain of teacher professional work life in the teacher-powered school—where teachers have collective decision-making authority (CDMA) in both instructional and non-instructional domains of school life. Specifically, I sought to explore the implications of teacher CDMA for what I have termed *teacher professional vitality* (TPV)—a holistic concept made up of teacher motivation, commitment, and retention. To review, my overarching research question was: *How does CDMA shape teachers' professional work life in "teacher-powered" schools?* Sub-questions included:

1. What are the basic characteristics of teacher-powered schools, and how do these compare to more traditionally-structured schools?
2. How is decision-making authority distributed in teacher-powered schools?
3. How do teachers in teacher-powered schools collectively define and measure student learning?
4. How does teacher CDMA shape teachers' job characteristics, teaching practices, and perceptions and experiences of work life?
5. What are the implications of CDMA for TPV?
6. How do teacher-powered schools' institutional settings (e.g., district pilot school versus charter school) and demographic characteristics influence collective decision-making, and to what effect?

In this final chapter, I will review and integrate the central findings of this exploratory study, revisit the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 2 in light of these findings, discuss implications for key stakeholder groups, and present several avenues of future research.

Characteristics of Participating Schools

Given that little academic research exists on teacher-powered schools, as a group, one purpose of this study was to investigate the basic characteristics of schools that make up the Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative (TPSI) inventory. A basic finding of Chapter 4 (“Settings”) is that teacher-powered schools come in all shapes and sizes. About 60 percent of the schools in the TPSI inventory are district schools and 40 percent are charter schools. They exist in urban, suburban, and rural communities. They have many different programmatic and curricular emphases, including project-based learning, social justice, and community leadership. Some schools serve highly privileged populations of white, middle-class students, while others serve mostly students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and students of color.

When comparing TPSI schools to all public schools in the U.S., certain notable differences emerged. First, TPSI inventory schools are far more likely than the average public school to be charter schools. As “incubators of innovation” (Obama, 2012), charter schools are fertile ground for the emergence of alternative management structures, including teacher collective decision-making. That said, the presence of TPSI schools in traditional school districts suggests that school type need not be a barrier to teacher CDMA. District “pilot” schools are examples of how some school districts have created opportunities for teachers to develop schools that have greater autonomy while still benefiting from the economies of scale and union benefits that come with district affiliation.

Second, TPSI schools are more likely to be both secondary schools or “combined” elementary and secondary schools than the population of public schools overall. Perhaps it is at the secondary level that the failure of traditional schools to effectively educate some students becomes most apparent, driving demand for alternatives. In fact, the need for alternatives to the large comprehensive high school motivated the teachers who started Explore School and High School for Human Rights (HSHR). At Young Leaders Academy (YLA), teachers talked about how having a Pre-K through grade 12 school afforded certain advantages, such as a family-like atmosphere and stronger curricular alignment across grade levels. Perhaps where teachers have more say in the design of schools, they are more likely to prioritize these kinds of features over the efficiency and developmental specialization that comes with a narrower age range.

Third, TPSI schools are far more likely to be small schools than the average public school. Smallness was a feature that teachers at all three case study schools referenced as being critical to their ability to build strong relationships with students. This finding parallels what advocates of the small schools movement—a decidedly teacher-led movement—found in the late 1980s and 1990s (Meier, 1995; Raywid, 1996). Many schools are intentionally small to promote a

family-like atmosphere where “everyone can know everyone else and no student can ever get lost” (Clinchy, 2000, p. 211); such a school would also presumably promote a strong staff culture where collective decision making could flourish. Additionally, at the case study schools, smallness facilitated democratic decision-making, particularly at Explore—the smallest of the three case study schools, where all staff members had an equal vote in school management decisions. As Explore grew in size, advisors wondered whether their whole-staff consensus-based decision-making model could remain effectual, as discussed in Chapter 8. Smallness also came with disadvantages, such as not being able to offer an athletic program at Explore and not having subject area colleagues at YLA.

Fourth, TPSI schools tend, on average, to serve less-privileged students in terms of family income, race/ethnicity, disability status, and English proficiency. While there are certainly examples of TPSI schools that serve mostly middle-income and white students (including Explore School), the fact that there are so many TPSI schools enrolling a majority of low-income students and student of color (including HSHR and YLA) is encouraging. It suggests that families that have been traditionally underserved by the public school system are finding homes in TPSI schools, which are nearly all “schools of choice,” whether in the charter or district sector. It also suggests that the teachers who left their previous schools to found teacher-powered schools were not “repelled” by students from more disadvantaged backgrounds—as has been suggested by several economists (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2011, p. 429; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004)—but were instead motivated to provide the same students with a different kind of education. While this study makes no claims about the quality of TPSI schools, these findings suggest that teacher-powered schools may be important places to examine issues of equity and opportunity gaps in education.

Fifth, TPSI teachers are more likely to “loop” with students year after year than the overall population of U.S. teachers—which may both be an artifact of schools’ small size and multi-grade classes but may also be related to an emphasis on relationships as discussed in Chapter 9. Looping in the advisory was an intentional feature at Explore because it allowed advisors to get to know students very well over the course of three or four years.

Finally, TPSI participants were less likely to be union members than Schools and Staffing Survey 2011-2012 (SASS 11-12) teachers (45.4 percent versus 73.8 percent). This is unsurprising given that TPSI schools are much more likely to be charter schools as compared with schools sampled for SASS 11-12. I heard a range of perceptions about union membership; a majority of union member teachers I spoke with were glad of the protections and guarantees that union membership entailed, though some voiced frustration with the restrictions that went along with union membership.

The “spectrum” of teacher power. The second research question dealt with how decision-making authority is distributed in teacher-powered schools. Survey findings confirmed that teachers at TPSI schools experienced much greater “influence” than the population of U.S. teachers do. But schools varied in terms of how decisions got made and who was involved in making them across different domains. Some schools, to the teachers working in them, were more “teacher-powered” than others; schools could be said to exist along a spectrum of teacher power.

On one end of the spectrum, at Explore, all staff members had a say in all school-level decisions. On the other end, according to some survey respondents, teacher power was more theoretical than actual, with the principal exercising decision-making authority. The other two case study schools, HSHR and YLA, fell somewhere in the middle; both had principals whose official authority was limited (e.g., through the use of multiple-constituent governing councils)

and whose faculties had *de facto* authority by virtue of a culture and expectation of teacher leadership.

As emphasized by TPSI, “teacher-powered” does not mean “no principal”; in fact, most TPSI Inventory schools have a principal or designated leader. According to the TPSI website, “leaders are not there to ensure teachers’ compliance to outside decisions; instead, they work to facilitate the team in carrying out their group decisions and shared purpose” (see teacherpowered.org).

Whether the schools designate a school leader or not also obscures other important differences in what CDMA means for a given school. A leader may or may not have ultimate decision-making authority in some domains of decision-making. Lars Esdal, Executive Director of Education Evolving (the parent organization of TPSI), distinguishes between three forms of “collaborative leadership” that exist in teacher-powered schools in a 2017 blog post. “Direct” collaborative leadership occurs when teachers “make most decisions as a full group.” In “distributed” collaborative leadership, “most decisions are made by subgroups of the full teacher group,” such as committees or teams. Finally, “representative” collaborative leadership implies that a designated leader has “decision-making authority in a defined area, but [is] charged with making decisions consistent with the full teacher group’s shared purpose and values.” Importantly, a “representative” leader “often assume their position either by being elected by the full group or by volunteering” (Esdal, 2017). “Distributed” and “representative” forms of collaborative leadership were present in all three case study schools for at least some decision-making domains. “Direct” collaborative leadership was practiced only at Explore School. Which models and combinations of decision-making structures are often determined, at least in part, by a school’s institutional environment. In the case of district schools, for example, interaction with a

district bureaucracy may necessitate certain forms of representative authority (for example, an administrator needing to sign off on a teacher evaluation).

Across participating TPSI schools, formal decision-making structures interacted with unwritten norms governing staff members' actual behavior and participation in decision-making. Even if teachers had a formal right to participate in decision-making, they did not always do so, whether for lack of time, lack of interest or awareness, or in a few cases, because they did not believe their participation mattered. In other words, "teacher-powered" by name did not guarantee teacher influence as actually experienced by teachers. The opposite was also true in some schools; though a designated school leader may have had "official" authority to make some decisions, they may have based those decisions entirely on teachers' input.

The various combinations of structural and normative forces governing the enactment of teacher participation in decision-making in TPSI schools meant that "teacher power" entailed very different things in different schools. At the same time, what distinguished these schools as a group from traditionally-structured schools was the formal decision-making authority vested in teachers in at least some domains. As a whole, this study suggests that this is a meaningful distinction.

Defining and measuring success. One way in which teachers in participating teacher-powered schools exercised CDMA was in establishing their school's mission and vision for success, as well as measures for tracking progress toward learning goals. This was the subject of Research Question 3, which was explored in Chapter 5. I was interested in understanding how teachers in TPSI schools defined and measured success because, in theory, those decisions should shape all other choices teachers make, from the nature of the curriculum, to the qualities of new hires, to the type and quantity of materials.

Direction-setting varied significantly across the three case study schools. HSHR teachers viewed student self-actualization as their ultimate goal, which they hoped to accomplish by meeting students' basic needs, developing their "habits of mind," teaching them to be social justice advocates, and preparing them to succeed in college. Teachers collected data on a wide range of measures—both academic and non-academic—to track progress toward these goals. At Explore School, advisors leveraged project-based learning in an effort to "prepare students for college and life." Student learning, to these educators, was highly individualized and therefore difficult to measure in a standardized way. Project rubrics emphasizing "process skills" served to monitor student progress to some degree. The mission at YLA was to "foster educated, responsible young leaders." In a high-stakes testing environment, the school prioritized "meeting and exceeding" state academic standards over other purposes, though individual teachers pursued learning goals specific to their content areas and perceived student needs. At all three schools, direction-setting and establishing learning targets was influenced by the student populations as well as the extent of district, state, or authorizer pressure.

Survey findings similarly revealed a wide range of learning goals and corresponding measures of success. Three broad themes emerged for how teachers in participating schools collectively defined success: as developing eager learners, engaging struggling students, and achieving academic progress.

Across interview and survey data, the extent to which teachers in participating schools prioritized non-academic learning goals is noteworthy. From "habits of mind" at HSHR, to "process skills" at Explore, to "initiative-taking" described by some survey respondents, non-academic skills and mindsets were viewed by teachers as critical outcomes of their work.

Having reviewed some of the basic characteristics and desired outcomes of teacher-powered schools, I will now turn to a discussion of how CDMA shaped teachers' working

conditions and the implications for TPV, revisiting some of the research literature from Chapter 2 to situate findings within the context of existing scholarship.

CDMA Influence on Teacher Work Life

At the outset of this exploratory study, I sought to understand what professional work life looked and felt like for teachers in TPSI schools, how it came to be that way, and the implications for TPV. While I had conceptualized TPV (and its absence) as being a product of the job characteristics and teaching practices that emerged from teachers' CDMA (see Conceptual Framework, Figure 2.3), I did not specify in advance the decision-making pathways by which this might occur. Research Questions 4 and 5 led me to uncover those pathways most relevant to participating teachers.

What emerged from the qualitative phase of this mixed-methods study were five examples of how CDMA translated into work experiences for teachers that defied typical narratives of teacher work life in the U.S.—narratives of *uncertainty*, *time pressure*, *isolation*, *deprofessionalization*, and *conflict*. Such experiences were not shared universally across schools or across teachers at any given school, but provide compelling evidence that teachers with CDMA often choose to “do school” differently, with important implications for TPV. These findings informed the development of the survey instrument used in the second phase of data collection, which sought to gain further insight into how widespread and generalizable case study findings might be. The five findings, explored in detail in Chapters 5 through 9, are summarized below.

Finding 1: Teacher direction-setting promotes alignment and efficacy. This study revealed that CDMA in the area of direction-setting—establishing the mission, vision, and learning goals for the school—facilitated alignment between teaching aims and practices that

helped teachers feel confident in their ability to be successful. The following are key highlights from Chapter 5:

- Participating teachers had vastly different conceptions of student learning—and corresponding learning goals—that mostly reflected differences in their schools’ populations and needs.
- For many teachers, non-academic learning goals were of paramount importance.
- Participating teachers could articulate how instructional and other autonomies gave them the flexibility to adjust course in the service of meeting goals.
- The extent to which teachers felt successful in their work depended in some part on their ownership over the direction-setting process and the motivation that resulted from such ownership.
- Pressure to “teach to the test” detracted from some teachers’ ability to pursue other goals they felt were more important.
- Survey findings revealed that teachers who reported having greater influence in the area of setting performance standards had higher average collective efficacy scores than teachers with less influence in this area.

In many ways, these findings contrast with the typical narrative of teaching as uncertain and ambiguous work. While “endemic uncertainties”—such as the ever-changing nature of developing children (Lortie, 1975)—are as inherent to teaching in teacher-powered schools as they are in traditionally-structured schools, other uncertainties are diminished. Empowered to develop indicators of success based on their professional knowledge of learning and students’ individual needs, participating teachers applied their effort toward goals they felt were meaningful yet attainable.

Finding 2: Flexible scheduling and varied roles reduce time pressure, burnout. In any workplace, time is a critical resource. For teachers in particular, work requirements far exceed available time, with negative consequences for teacher wellbeing (Fernet, Guay, Senècal, & Austin, 2012; Johnson, 1990; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). This study found that CDMA to shape the teacher workday and course schedule had profound implications for teachers' workloads, roles, and the quality of their work lives. Findings from Chapter 6 included the following key points:

- The allocation of staff and student time was not taken for granted throughout the course of a school year but actively questioned and revised by teachers, within the limits imposed by the schools' institutional settings.
- Individual teachers exhibited considerable influence over their work schedules to better accommodate students' learning needs, family obligations, and their own requirements for professional fulfillment.
- At Explore School, the teacher workday differed substantially from the norm, with significantly less time spent instructing students.
- Teachers were not assigned administrative duties but played an active role in selecting administrative roles that appealed to them.
- Work sustainability was identified as a major concern for teachers at HSHR in particular, predominantly as a result of the wide range of academic and non-academic goals to which teachers held themselves accountable.
- Although teachers were exhausted by their workloads at HSHR, one teacher said he experienced "a different kind of tired" because his efforts were rarely in vain.
- Survey findings showed that TPSI respondents worked an average of 51.0 hours per week compared to 51.4 hours per week among a nationally representative sample of teachers.

- TPSI respondents were somewhat less likely than the national comparison group to experience burnout.

This study unearthed possible teaching schedules that differed dramatically from the traditional six-period school day. For teachers with CDMA to decide the course schedule and teacher workday, there was still never “enough” time, but what time was available tended to be used efficiently and purposefully, fueling teacher motivation. Like CDMA in the area of direction-setting, the influence teachers had in the area of scheduling had important implications for self- and collective efficacy.

Finding 3: Teacher-led professional learning fosters collegiality and trust. Having high quality relationships with teaching colleagues has been found to improve teachers’ on-the-job learning as well as job satisfaction and commitment (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012). CDMA in the areas of professional development and evaluation shaped participating teachers’ collegial relationships in largely positive ways. Selected key findings from Chapter 7 are provided below.

- Teachers had considerable discretion to identify and address professional learning needs and teaching obstacles as they arose, both at the individual and collective levels.
- Teachers spoke favorably about informal learning opportunities they derived from having “open-door” policies and unstructured meeting time.
- Teacher-led professional development (PD) activities fostered trust among colleagues and allowed teachers to engage in critical conversations about teaching practice.
- Trust among teachers was not omnipresent; some reserved skepticism regarding formal evaluation and observation practices, particularly when conducted by staff members in administrative roles.

- TPSI teachers reported far higher influence over decision-making in the areas of PD and evaluation than their SASS 11-12 counterparts.
- TPSI teachers who reported having more influence over PD also reported having greater trust in their colleagues and administrators.

In contrast to the “norms of privacy and noninterference” that have characterized the teaching profession for decades (Little, 1990, p. 530), norms emphasizing help-seeking and collaboration were prevalent in the three case study schools and evident among open-ended survey responses. Participating teachers appreciated such norms because they facilitated their own development. For many teachers I spoke with, the ongoing experience of professional improvement was a major source of TPV.

Finding 4: Budgeting and hiring discretion promotes collective responsibility.

CDMA in the areas of budgeting and hiring were extremely important to the teachers I interviewed. The teachers participating in this study did not take decisions around the allocation of material and human resources lightly because the outcomes of those decisions dictated how they would work and with whom. Findings from Chapter 8 are summarized, below.

- In making hiring decisions, teachers prized applicant characteristics such as coachability, team orientation, and mission alignment above experience or expertise.
- The comprehensiveness of the interview process and the involvement of many teachers and other stakeholders was pivotal to some teachers’ decisions to accept their jobs.
- The principals at HSHR and YLA had the “final say” over funding decisions, whereas all staff members voted on all funding decisions at Explore.
- Regardless of how final funding approval was granted, teachers nearly always had positive results when advocating for learning materials and experiences for their students.

- Teachers who reported having greater influence over hiring decisions were more likely to report both high collective responsibility and high commitment than teachers with less influence in this area.
- Teachers reporting greater influence in the area of budgeting reported higher scores for both access to resources and perceptions of classroom control.

In contrast to the teacher disempowerment and deprofessionalization narratives that pervade much of the existing research describing teachers' work lives, the teachers participating in this study felt empowered to make hiring and funding proposals that they viewed would improve the education provided to students. Such empowerment was fueled by repeat experiences of success advocating for staffing and purchasing decisions.

Finding 5: Teacher-powered discipline puts student relationships first. It is incontrovertible that the relationships students have with their teachers impact their ability to learn. Teachers viewed CDMA in the areas of student grouping and discipline as instrumental to developing positive and productive relationships with their students. Chapter 9 included the following key findings:

- Case study teachers intentionally strove to promote values of community and belonging, establishing structures and norms that helped students see their teachers as trustworthy guides rather than demanding supervisors.
- All three schools chose restorative justice as a model for responding to disruptive and inappropriate behavior.
- Teachers attributed the low incidence of serious disciplinary problems at their schools to their collective efforts to build community, efforts that were rewarded with more time for teaching and learning for teachers and students alike.

- Survey respondents largely agreed with the item, “Nearly every student has a meaningful relationship with at least one adult,” with responses averaging 3.7 on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
- Teachers reporting greater influence in establishing discipline policy also reported far higher collective efficacy, on average, than those reporting less influence in this area.

Incompatibility between student and teacher interests makes conflict a regular occurrence in many schools. Though conflict and student behavioral challenges did occur in the three case study schools, teachers generally characterized their relationships with students as mutually caring, respectful, and conducive to learning. They attributed positive relationships to their intentional focus on caring for students in family-like, humanizing school settings. This focus was a boon to TPV; according to one teacher, “just knowing every kid and them knowing us and then having that sense of community is really what keeps me here.”

Synthesis. In combination, findings from this study convey the sense that CDMA can produce a qualitatively different workplace for teachers. When teachers have collective say over decisions impacting their work, they often choose to do things differently. They prioritize different outcomes and use different measures of success. They structure learning and meeting time differently. They take on different roles. They hire different colleagues, buy different materials, and build different relationships with students. These differences are subtler in some schools than in others; vestiges of a decades-old “grammar of schooling” persist in some cases. However, participating teachers talked about their working conditions brought about by CDMA as being meaningfully different from work life in more traditional school settings.

A common thread among teachers was their emphasis on what CDMA meant for their perceived ability to meet students’ learning needs. Being “teacher-powered” was meaningful to the extent that it made teachers’ work more doable—to the extent that it supported teachers’ self-

and collective efficacy. The fact that teachers had a collective role in creating the conditions they viewed as conducive to student learning was an empowering “cherry on top,” in the words of one survey respondent.

Importance of context. Research Question 6 asked how schools’ contexts influenced the ways in which CDMA shaped teachers’ work lives. Context mattered for the teachers in this study in at least two important ways. First, the *institutional context* determined the limits of CDMA at a given school. As a small, independent charter school, Explore was the freest from institutional constraint. Its staff claimed all 15 decision-making “autonomies” as defined by TPSI. HSHR and YLA—a district “pilot” school and a converted charter school, respectively—had fewer TPSI autonomies and were beholden to both the school district and the teacher’s union. Survival for these schools rested upon their ability to successfully navigate a bureaucratic, hierarchical system. A principal at both schools played a critical role in buffering their schools from unwanted external interference while advocating for policies and resources that would serve their staffs and students well.

Second, to a certain degree, *student context* shaped the purpose and character of the schools’ learning programs. “We build the school around the students,” Joe at HSHR had told me. With most of their students living in poverty, HSHR teachers focused first on ensuring that their basic needs were met. Since students were mostly from a disenfranchised ethnic background (predominantly Latina/o), teachers developed a social justice pedagogy that emphasized student agency and empowerment. Explore School served a disproportionately high population of special education students and “independent learners” for whom a project-based curriculum worked especially well. With the most diverse student population of the three case study schools, YLA also had the most varied and perhaps least student-specific learning goals. However, a more

constraining institutional context—namely external pressure to perform well on state standardized tests—limited the extent to which the learning program could reflect the student population.

Enabling factors and constraints. In each of Chapters 5 through 9, I identified factors that enabled teachers in participating schools to exercise CDMA in ways that furthered their schools’ missions and teachers’ professional wellbeing as well as factors that constrained them in achieving these aims. Many of these factors were shared across decision-making domains and between schools, while others were more specific to one or two schools. Overall, the schools’ institutional contexts—and specifically, the degree to which they were beholden to larger and more powerful institutions (such as districts and unions)—largely determined the kinds of factors that were most relevant at each school.

Figure 10.1, below, summarizes those factors that were most salient to the teachers I spoke with. The top row presents “mostly enabling factors,” or factors that teachers mostly talked about as helping them work toward their teaching and professional objectives. The bottom row presents “mostly constraining factors,” or factors that teachers mostly talked about as hindering their work or limiting their CDMA in given areas. The middle row displays factors that teachers talked about as being enabling in some contexts and constraining in others. The leftmost column includes factors that were most salient for schools in less independent, more bureaucratic institutional contexts (in this case, both HSHR and YLA), the center column includes factors that were common among all case study schools, and the rightmost column includes factors that were most salient for Explore school as an independent charter school that existed outside the jurisdiction of the surrounding school district.

	Factors mostly for <u>less</u> independent schools (i.e., HSHR, YLA)	Factors for <u>all</u> schools, regardless of independence	Factors mostly for <u>more</u> independent schools (i.e., Explore)
Mostly <u>enabling</u> factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal advocacy Principal “buffering” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple domains of CDMA Ample non-teaching time Small school size Shared values and norms Intentional hiring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexible teaching schedule “Looping” with students
<u>Both</u> enabling and constraining factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative decision-making Contractual stipulations (e.g., pay, work hours) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent of student needs Availability of funding State academic standards Teacher autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consensus-based decision-making No principal
Mostly <u>constraining</u> factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsupportive district or union leaders Inflexible workload Bureaucratic red tape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Test-based accountability Norms inhibiting critical peer feedback Implicit power imbalance 	

Figure 10.1. Enabling and constraining factors as shaped by institutional context.

Several patterns are notable. First, many of the enabling and constraining factors appeared to be common across teacher-powered schools and not limited to those in particular institutional environments. Having teacher CDMA in multiple domains, ample non-teaching time for professional development and administrative duties, small student enrollments, shared values and norms, and intentional, teacher-driven hiring practices were seen as crucial to teachers’ work across the three case study sites. Oppositely, test-based accountability and resulting pressures to “teach to the test,” norms inhibiting critical peer feedback, and implicit power imbalance proved to be common impediments across schools. Second, principals played a crucial role in the two schools that were least independent and most beholden to external institutions, whereas a singular school leader was not necessary at Explore (though the idea of one was occasionally attractive to some advisors I interviewed). Third, Explore faced many fewer constraints overall than HSHR and YLA as a result of its relative freedom from bureaucratic and contractual restrictions and its

non-reliance on the support of transient district leaders. Such freedom was not, in itself, any guarantee that teachers would effectively leverage their far-reaching CDMA to the benefit of students and staff, but it widely expanded the universe of possible decisions they were able to entertain.

Implications of CDMA for TPV

The five analysis chapters of this dissertation described specific pathways by which CDMA influenced teachers' work lives in teacher-powered schools. What were the implications of such influence for teachers' motivation, commitment, and retention—the three components of TPV?

Motivation. Motivation concerns the degree of energy and enthusiasm teachers put toward their work day-to-day. Teachers having greater motivation are more likely to seek to improve their teaching practice, attempt new teaching strategies, and put in extra work to meet the many and varied needs of their students. In general, the teachers I spoke to and heard from via the survey described being motivated. They spoke with enthusiasm about new PD opportunities and external partnerships they were pursuing. In observing classes, teachers were engaged and engaging. They were passionate about what they taught and eager to be better.

A key contributor to teachers' motivation was classroom autonomy and empowerment to make instructional changes on the fly. Whether they hoped to alter the curriculum, teach a new class, or purchase new materials, teachers thrived on the freedom they had to cater to student needs and interests. The following quotes from survey respondents emphasize this point:

I am empowered to improve my school in any way I see fit, as long as I am supported by my teaching community. Therefore, I work harder. (Survey Respondent)

Since teaching in this school, I feel more valued and empowered to make changes that I believe are crucial to student success... It's not a perfect place, but with each year, we identify issues and work hard to find solutions. I feel excited about what my students are learning... This is what education should look like.
(Survey Respondent)

Teachers' behavioral and emotional responses to professional autonomy are largely consistent with previous scholarship on workplace motivation, particularly among "knowledge" workers—including teachers—whose work is not easily routinized (Davenport, 2013; Deci & Ryan, 2014).

There were some teachers who expressed concerns about their ability to maintain the level of energy required to succeed in their roles. This was especially true at HSHR and YLA, where performance expectations and time demands were particularly high. This finding points to the need for schools, districts, and charter school authorizers to strike a careful balance between holding teachers to high expectations and ensuring the sustainability of their workload.

While motivation was not measured directly on the survey, a burnout scale—described in Chapters 4 and 6—provided an inverse proxy for motivation. Relative to the most recent national sample of SASS 11-12 teacher respondents, TPSI survey respondents reported feeling moderately less burnt out.

Commitment. Commitment concerns the extent to which teachers feel a particular allegiance to and sense of responsibility for their school community as a whole. From a teacher's perspective, having a sense of commitment to one's school gives teachers a feeling of greater purpose and belonging. From a school success standpoint, commitment is important to the extent that it fosters organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) toward colleagues and colleagues' students—actions that go above and beyond teachers' individual role expectations to further the interests of the school and the student body at large (Somech & Bogler, 2002).

Teachers participating in this study expressed a high degree of commitment to their teacher-powered schools. Survey participants' average commitment score was 3.8 on a four-point

Likert scale. Case study participants demonstrated their commitment through a range of actions. They voluntarily took on a number of non-teaching roles at their school—from leading committees, to sitting on governing councils, to coordinating fire drills, to servicing tech equipment. HSHR teachers “adopted” students who needed extra support—even students who were not in their own classes. At all three schools, teachers devoted considerable time to supporting their colleagues through problems of practice in professional learning communities.

The multitude of roles teachers took on was especially striking at Explore, where the staff was smallest and therefore the need for distributing operational and leadership tasks greatest. Attending Explore staff meetings, I was surprised at how quickly staff members jumped at the opportunity to pitch in where needed.

What made teachers so willing to “go the extra mile” for their colleagues and schools? For many founding teachers, commitment grew out of the strong desire to see the schools they had helped to build flourish, to see their visions through to fruition. For some more recent hires, commitment stemmed from gratitude felt for the colleagues who had selected them after a grueling hiring process. For others, having choice in “drafting duties” induced responsibility toward the team. Norms of collaboration, transparency, and vulnerability replaced norms of privacy, non-interference, and self-defensiveness. Not threatened by the kind of arbitrariness and opacity typical of many teacher evaluation systems, teachers felt little need to compete for their jobs or bonuses. To help others would only help the collective.

The following quotations from survey respondents further exemplify the generally high level of commitment that was common among participating teachers:

I have tremendous teacher voice at my current school which makes me feel much more connected and valued. (Survey Respondent)

I am more involved in the whole operation of the school [than I was in my previous school], my voice is heard. I am more invested at my current school, I am behind the philosophy of the school and am willing to do whatever it takes to see it succeed. (Survey Respondent)

These quotes highlight how having “voice” in school-level decision-making fosters these teachers’ investment in their schools’ success.

There were a few instances when teachers expressed wavering commitment to their schools or colleagues—almost exclusively in the context of perceived betrayal of democratic or egalitarian values. An advisor at Explore was “salty” about more senior members of the staff dismissing proposed changes by newer staff members on the grounds that they had been tried before. A teacher at HSHR expressed dismay in hearing more “I” than “we” coming from his administration. A teacher at YLA was reluctant to agree to more administrative tasks when his salary was considerably less than that of the principal. One survey respondent expressed considerable disillusionment in their school because “the administration does what it wants without regard for teacher input.” Frustratingly, the respondent felt that teachers were put through the “exercise” of participating in decision-making “just for the sake of it.” In each of these cases, teachers’ diminished enthusiasm and disappointment stemmed from a mismatch between espoused and actual parity between roles. Importantly, what bothered these teachers was not necessarily that teacher CDMA was not exhaustive, but that it was falsely advertised.

Retention. Schools characterized by high teacher retention employ teachers who choose to continue working there year after year. As discussed in Chapter 1, retention is important because of the stability and continuity it affords. Retained teachers have more experience and more enduring relationships with students. Turnover, on the other hand, is both costly and disruptive.

Anecdotally, teacher retention was high at all three schools in the year I visited, though turnover had been a problem at HSHR several years prior. Survey data summarized in Chapter 4 revealed that 53.1 percent of TPSI respondents intended to remain in the teaching profession “for as long as I am able,” compared to 46.6 percent of SASS 11-12 participants. TPSI respondents were half as likely as SASS 11-12 participants to report intentions of leaving “as soon as I can,” and had higher levels of agreement with all three satisfaction items. Furthermore, 92.5 percent of TPSI respondents somewhat or strongly agreed with the item, “I enjoy teaching at this school more than any other job I’ve had.”

Teacher retention appeared to be particularly high at Explore School. Direct questions about teacher retention were not a part of the interview protocol, but multiple Explore School advisors independently addressed the topic in their interviews, unprompted:

I guess it’s still hard, it’s still exhausting but I think the ownership and the empowerment is rewarding enough to keep me here for 15 years and make me think, like, why would I want to go back [to the traditional system]? If I want to stay in education, I want to stay in a place like this. I can’t imagine going back to where you have so little voice. (Molly, Explore School)

I do truly love working here, probably more than I have any other place, ever. (Amanda, Explore School)

I’ve never been happier in my working life than I have been here... I think we’ve got a little gem on our hands. (Ann, Explore School)

These quotations and findings from Chapters 5 through 9 demonstrate that teachers’ job satisfaction and intent to remain in their schools stemmed from two major sources: first, a strong belief in the school’s mission and learning program; and second, having voice in making ongoing school policy decisions *to the degree that their voice mattered*. Even when the work required to be “teacher-powered” was substantial, teachers stuck with it because their involvement was rewarded with improved working and learning conditions. It was not CDMA alone that mattered

to teachers, but what came of it. This strongly parallels Bandura's (1982) view of the importance of self- and collective efficacy to human agency and "staying power":

The strength of groups, organizations, and even nations lies partly in people's sense of collective efficacy that they can solve their problems and improve their lives through concerted effort. Perceived collective efficacy will influence what people choose to do as a group, how much effort they put into it, and their staying power when group efforts fail to produce results. (p. 143)

The biggest threat to retention identified in this study was workload, at some schools more than others. This was especially true at HSHR, as discussed in Chapter 6 and in the motivation section, above. One teacher at HSHR became preoccupied with "the next era" of his career as sustainability in his current role seemed less and less achievable. Another HSHR teacher recognized that meeting the high demands of her job would be impossible if she had children of her own. A survey respondent questioned whether he would be able to stay in his school due to competing work and family commitments. In contrast, several advisors at Explore School talked about ways their school accommodated staff members' needs for work-life balance to promote sustainability. "None of us want any of the rest of us to feel badly about being here," one advisor told me. "That's really a real thing. Like, if we know somebody is having a complete shit year, we try to help them out and we try to refigure things a little bit, because it's important." As a small team, under less external pressure to perform, and with more expansive CDMA, Explore staff could be especially nimble; but they also chose to prioritize sustainability in a way that the other schools did not.

More CDMA, more TPV? It bears repeating that to be included in the TPSI school inventory, teachers at a school need to have secured *only one* of the fifteen "autonomies" listed in Appendix A. Though most inventory schools have far exceeded this threshold for inclusion, there is substantial diversity within the inventory in terms of the *extent* of CDMA. Did schools with more CDMA experience greater TPV? This question was not a focus of this dissertation and

therefore cannot be answered in any definitive manner here, but the data would suggest that the relationship between these constructs is not necessarily straightforward. There were times when the complete collective authority of Explore staff members felt uncomfortable and draining. They sometimes wished for a principal who could make a tough call. At YLA, teachers did not universally accept that the school was truly “teacher-powered,” and did not necessarily object to their principal and School Management Team making some decisions unilaterally. At HSHR, some teachers took comfort in not being responsible for the formal evaluation of their peers, though they were willing to provide informal feedback.

What appears to have mattered more to the teachers in this study was whether their expectations surrounding their participation in school-level decision-making were met. Teachers played a role in establishing decision-making structures at all three case study schools. They chose those structures for a reason—some being more democratic (in the context of a small, independent charter school), and some being more hierarchical (in the context of schools needing to navigate a large bureaucracy). Teachers evaluated their participation in decision-making in light of their schools’ founding documents and stated policies. Their disappointment was greatest when they felt that certain individuals or factions had betrayed agreed-upon decision-making norms. This finding is largely in line with Conway’s (1984) finding that *satisfaction* with participation in decision-making matters just as much to workers as the extent of it. One implication of this is the importance of teacher involvement in the initial development of a school’s governing documents such that agreement and clarity surrounding decision-making structures can be achieved. In which domains of decision-making is teacher CDMA truly critical for optimal teacher wellbeing and performance? This is a topic meriting further study in the context of teacher-powered schools, and particularly in schools transitioning from a more traditional structure to a teacher-powered one.

Revisiting the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework proposed in Chapter 2 (see Figure 2.3) depicted TPV as emerging from CDMA directly, through a psychological process, and indirectly, through its influence on teachers' job characteristics and practices. This framework was helpful in guiding the analysis presented in Chapters 5 through 9 in that it drew attention to the ways in which specific instances and domains of CDMA shaped teachers' jobs and experiences. At the same time, the findings of this study suggest that isolating cause and effect in a more or less linear fashion obscures an important feedback mechanism by which the outcomes of decision-making—the experience of desired change—refuels teachers' interest in future participation. Having experienced previous success ushering a decision through the collective decision-making process, and having experienced positive changes to their work lives resulting from that decision, teachers in this study were more motivated both to initiate change and participate in decision-making subsequently. Conversely, teachers who felt that their participation in decision-making “didn't matter”—primarily due to power imbalances among decision-makers—were discouraged from future participation.

A revised conceptual framework that incorporates this feedback mechanism is presented below in Figure 10.2. Instead of viewing TPV as an expected outcome of CDMA, as was implied by the original framework, this model suggests that the relationship between CDMA and TPV is dependent on teachers *experiencing repeat success enacting desired changes*. A simple electromagnet serves loosely as a guiding image for the model: CDMA is the “battery” that powers the system, ensuring that teachers have opportunities to participate in school-level decision-making in the first place and boosting the likelihood that their participation will be meaningful. Each instance of participation in decision-making is a “coil” wrapped around the “core” of teacher experience. Each coil represents a cycle by which participation in decision-making (P) leads to desired changes in teachers' working conditions (C), resulting in teachers

feeling empowered (E) to re-engage in the decision-making process again. (Here, “empowerment” reflects a kind of efficacy belief specific to decision-making.) Just as the number of coils of an electromagnet strengthens the magnetic field it produces, the relationship between successful participation in decision-making and TPV is additive. The more examples of successful participation teachers experience (or witness among their peers), the more willing they are to participate, the more decision outcomes will reflect their input, and the more the conditions of their work will support their professional wellbeing.

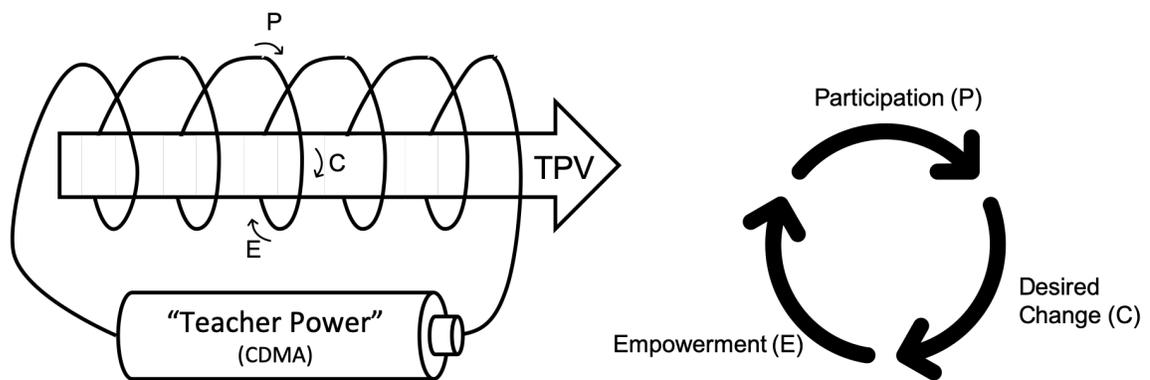


Figure 10.2. An “electromagnet” model relating CDMA and TPV.

That teacher participation in decision-making would be self-perpetuating is unsurprising in light of what is known about the role of self-efficacy in motivating human behavior. According to Bandura (1977), “efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences” (pp. 193-194). Expecting to have impact on decisions that would affect them as a result of positive past experiences, most teachers in this study chose to be active in the decision-making process—whether by making proposals, serving on committees, or voting in faculty meetings. Furthermore, teachers learned to see their colleagues’ participation in decision-making as normal and expected

as well. From an organizational leadership lens, this finding parallels Pfeffer's (1981) stance that "the exercise of authority, far from diminishing through use, may actually serve to enhance the amount of authority subsequently possessed" (p. 278).

Several studies in the field of education are relevant to the present discussion. Taylor and Tashakkori (1997), for example, found that teacher *instructional* self-efficacy predicted their participation in school-level decision-making. This study, in comparison, suggests that self-efficacy specific to *participation* itself (what I have termed "empowerment") is an important factor determining willingness to engage in future decision-making, a topic meriting future research. Extending beyond the teacher to the organizational level, Goddard (2002) found that collective efficacy positively predicted variation among schools in the level of faculty influence. These results underscored the importance of structuring schools for collective agency. "For groups to make a difference, they must have a means to do so," Goddard observed. In contrast, "when group voice is silenced, people are likely to see the events around them as outside their control" (p. 181). CDMA, the present study suggests, is one means of enabling the kind of faculty influence that enhances teachers' shared belief in their ability to bring about positive changes to their schools.

Teacher professional vitality as a concept. One contribution of this dissertation is to coin the term "teacher professional vitality," or TPV. TPV serves to capture, holistically, how teachers feel about their jobs and the effort they put forth relative to their potential. Defined in Chapter 1 as the combination of teacher motivation, commitment, and retention, TPV acknowledges that teachers' total work experience, and the decisions they make about their careers, is multifaceted. A highly motivated teacher who does not buy into the school's mission may work hard to obtain personal goals but decide to change organizations to achieve greater values alignment. A teacher who is highly committed to her school's mission and values may be

so totally overwhelmed by her responsibilities that she burns out. A burnt-out teacher who is professionally stagnant may stay at a school indefinitely if he feels he has few better options to support his family. If we are interested in maximizing human capital in schools, we should see all of these scenarios as problematic.

It is tempting to use single, easy-to-measure variables (take retention or satisfaction, for example) as proxies for the organizational strength of schools. Much of the existing research literature about these and related topics is quantitative in nature because educational leaders and lawmakers so often depend on “hard numbers” in making decisions impacting hundreds or thousands of students. However, isolating variables in this way obscures the complex interplay of factors that inform how teachers feel about and respond to their working conditions. This study reaffirms what education researchers have long pointed out: that schools are complex ecosystems comprised of complicated human beings whose behaviors and decisions are context-dependent (Huberman, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1991). Qualitative evidence and mixed methods provide a more holistic view of the quality of teacher work life to understand what makes teachers “tick.” As compared to “retention” or “satisfaction,” TPV is both conceptually richer and conceptually muddier. Attention to it promotes a different kind of focus—a focus on the overall work experience of teachers rather than a simple bivariate assessment of “did they leave, or not?”

Despite its usefulness in capturing the quality of teachers’ work experience holistically, the concept of TPV needs further development. Its three components—motivation, commitment, and retention—are certainly not the only meaningful signatures of a teacher’s professional wellbeing and potential. Other constructs, such as *self-efficacy*, *collective responsibility*, and *resilience* similarly convey psychological states that predict productive and prosocial teacher behavior. Determining which constructs fit under the TPV umbrella, and which do not, merits further inquiry. TPV can be helpful only to the extent that it can guide decision-makers in

identifying and rectifying threats to teachers’ professional wellbeing, an outcome this project did not address.

CDMA and Teacher Leadership

As a study that investigates school-level decision-making as carried out by teachers, this project is fundamentally about teacher leadership. How it speaks to the existing research literature concerning barriers to, domains of, and conceptualizations of teacher leadership is discussed in the paragraphs below.

Barriers. Chapter 2 identified 8 barriers that have been consistently shown to interfere with the enactment and appeal of teacher leadership (see Table 2.1). Table 10.1, below, revisits these barriers in light of findings from this study. Specifically, it summarizes how CDMA may or may not affect the salience of each barrier to prospective teacher leaders.

Table 10.1. Revisiting barriers to teacher leadership implementation under CDMA.

<u>Barrier</u>	<u>With CDMA</u>
1. Lack of principal support for teacher leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier is irrelevant in schools with no designated leader • Barrier is diminished in schools with a designated leader where governing documents and norms presuppose teacher leadership functions
2. Lack of role clarity for teacher leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier remains a concern in some schools, especially where administrators design and assign roles • Barrier is diminished in schools where teachers can readily propose changes to roles
3. Insufficient time to conduct additional leadership responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier remains a concern in some schools, especially in cases of external constraints or performance pressures • Barrier is diminished in schools where teachers can readily make scheduling adjustments
4. Insufficient training for teacher leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier remains a concern in some schools, especially where teachers do not

Barrier	With CDMA
	determine the content of professional development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier is diminished in schools where teachers decide the content of professional development
5. Culture of egalitarianism in which teacher leadership is distrusted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier is diminished because teacher leadership is the norm, not the exception
6. Culture of individualism and isolation in which collaboration is avoided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier is diminished because founding teachers establish collaborative work norms
7. External accountability pressures leading to increased administrative control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier remains a concern in some schools, especially in cases of external performance pressures • Barrier is irrelevant in schools with no designated leader
8. Inauthentic opportunities to participate leading to teacher disillusionment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barrier remains a concern where teachers perceive espoused and actual power relations as incongruent • Barrier is diminished in schools where teachers perceive espoused and actual power relations as aligned

This study did not find that membership on the TPSI school inventory *necessarily* entailed fewer or less substantial barriers to teacher leadership. However, barriers seem to have been significantly diminished in most participating TPSI schools, especially where one or more of the following conditions were true: (1) teachers possessed true collective *authority* (as opposed to “influence”), as stipulated in governing documents and as legitimated through its practice; (2) teachers established cultural norms supportive of collective teacher leadership (collegiality, collaboration) *at the school’s founding*; (3) designated leaders (if any) internalized their role as facilitating or coordinating decision-making processes, rather than *being* decision-makers; and (4) overseeing agencies (e.g., charter school authorizers, school districts) largely “got out of the way,” serving primarily a supportive function.

Of course, it is important to point out that this study did not attempt to pass judgment on the *quality* of teacher leadership that emerged in teacher-powered schools in terms of its impact on teaching and learning. Focusing specifically on “teacher-powered” schools did, however, demonstrate that there is analytical leverage in investigating the potential of teacher leadership in schools where barriers to it are significantly reduced. Researchers concerned with teacher leadership impacts might take advantage of this leverage in future studies.

Decision-making domains. A major debate that has characterized research on teacher leadership is whether teachers ought to (or even want to) have control in non-instructional domains of decision-making. Teachers in this study reaffirmed previous research that suggests that teachers desire control over what transpires in their own classrooms (Conley, 1991; Smylie, 1992). However, they also articulated how decision-making in non-instructional domains facilitated their work in important ways. For example, teachers valued their influence over the school budget because it allowed them to secure materials and other resources they felt their students needed. They valued their influence over hiring decisions because it determined with whom they would collaborate and from whom they would get critical feedback on their teaching. They valued their influence over the school schedule because it shaped what they could reasonably be expected to accomplish during a class period. They valued their influence over the discipline policy because it impacted their relationships with students, which impacted student behavior and learning. In each of these cases, “non-instructional” decision-making *influenced instruction*, albeit indirectly. Discerning between instructional and non-instructional decisions, therefore, presents somewhat of a false dichotomy.

That said, not all teachers wanted to be involved in all decisions. The three case study schools all had processes (whether formal or informal) by which teachers could “opt in” to leadership opportunities that were of interest to them. Though participation of the full staff was

expected in decision-making at Explore, proposals generally came from smaller committees. Teachers could consider their particular interests and skills when determining where to apply their energies. In cases where teachers' leadership was needed but where teachers did not necessarily want to participate, such as sitting on the Personnel Committee at Explore, staff members would rotate roles. That way, onerous but essential tasks could get done without risking too much in the way of teacher burnout.

As with the enabling factors and constraints section, above, what made sense in terms of what staff were involved in what decision-making domains depended not only on interest but also on the institutional context. In the two case study schools that were embedded within a sometimes-overbearing district bureaucracy (HSHR and YLA), having a principal (and other administrators) who acted as point person and decision-maker for all manner of external-facing work—whether advocating for resources or fulfilling accountability requirements—was not only practical, but appreciated by staff members whose work lives at school remained relatively buffered from external concerns. At Explore, as an independent charter school existing outside the district bureaucracy, there were fewer external demands and pressures, which meant both that there was relatively less administrative work to begin with, and that staff members felt relatively less overwhelmed and therefore more willing to engage in administrative decision-making when it was necessary. That said, three “program coordinators” at Explore shared the work of corresponding with the charter authorizer and other external entities, fulfilling state testing and reporting requirements, and understanding state education policy. While any major decisions were brought back to the staff for a full vote, program coordinators did occupy a privileged position in their access to external people and information. Not all staff members were entirely comfortable with this division of labor, but most seemed to recognize it afforded certain efficiencies.

Another factor that affected the degree of democratization of decision-making was school size. At Explore School, the smallest of the three case study schools, several of the advisors I spoke with acknowledged that as their staff size had grown, consensus decision-making had become more difficult (though not impossible). At HSHR and YLA, which were both about twice as large as Explore in student population, teachers generally felt that representative forms of democracy—such as the Instructional Leadership Team at HSHR and the School Management Team at YLA—were more efficient structures for decision-making in particular domains than involving the entire staff in all votes.

Conceptualizing “teacher leadership.” One common thread among researchers who study teacher retention and satisfaction is that teachers desire greater classroom autonomy and greater participation in school-level decisions. Initiatives aimed at empowering teachers do not, however, have professional vitality as a central aim; teacher leadership initiatives are primarily concerned with improved teaching and learning (an understandable and worthy goal!). This line of research has encouraged leaders to empower teachers by giving them “influence,” mostly in areas of curriculum and professional development. In theory, empowered teachers will make decisions about teaching and learning that reflect their experience and firsthand knowledge of students. Feeling good about their jobs is considered a nice byproduct.

I have argued that thinking of teacher leadership narrowly as a means for improved teaching and learning without leveraging its potential for improving the broader conditions and culture of work in schools is misguided. If teachers can select the curriculum, but can’t readily access funds for books and supplies, they may default to using materials that have been purchased centrally. If teachers can decide how to use professional development time, but can’t hire their colleagues, they may struggle to develop the professional relationships needed to push their teaching practice to new levels. If teachers can choose what instructional practices to use, but

can't determine the schedule, they may avoid pursuing more innovative approaches such as project-based learning. These limits to teachers' collective autonomy are not only frustrating, but they stymie attempts at improvement.

The principal and “distributed leadership.” To make room for teacher leadership in the school leadership space, education scholars have largely rejected the “charismatic head” notion of the principal as singular school leader, instead conceptualizing leadership as a “distributed” property of schools, spread across the organization and consisting of practices, not formal roles (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). In that context, it is somewhat paradoxical how prevalent rhetoric is that identifies the principal or formal leader as key to successful distributed leadership. For example, in reviewing the evidence surrounding distributed leadership, Harris (2013) writes, “if distributed leadership is to make any difference at all, one thing is clear—those in formal leadership positions have a substantial and integral role to play in making it happen” (p. 552).

The stated importance of the principal makes sense in the context of school improvement within the traditionally-structured (i.e., principal-led) school. However, except in rare cases (see, for example, Louis, Mayrowetz, Smylie, & Murphy, 2013), principals have demonstrated reluctance to cede power in any meaningful way. According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), “there is evidence to suggest that principal support of teacher leadership is more readily espoused than enacted” (p. 274). Moreover, it would seem that principals are not particularly adept at gauging their own efforts to “empower” teachers. A recent Education Week survey of U.S. principals and teachers found that 69 percent of principals “completely agree that teachers at their school feel empowered to bring problems to them,” but that only 25 percent of teachers “completely agree they feel empowered to bring problems to their principal.” Similarly, the survey found that 86 percent of principals “completely agree they support teachers who start

innovative work or new initiatives,” whereas only 45 percent of teachers “completely agree their principal supports teachers who start innovative work or new initiatives” (“How Teachers View Their Principals, 2019).

The schools participating in the present study achieved distributed leadership not because of empowering school leaders, *per se*, but because they were intentionally designed and founded upon principles of democratic decision-making⁵⁵. The case study school with the most empowered teachers had no designated school leader at all. In the other two case study schools, a reluctant principal emerged from among the founding teachers because one was necessary to exist within the educational bureaucracy of which they were a part. These principals’ roles were important, but their power was limited from the beginning. Teachers with CDMA got used to making proposals and decisions. Doing so became part of the fabric and culture of the school.

“Authority” vs. “influence.” In rejecting the “charismatic head” notion of leadership, leadership scholars in recent decades have also turned away from describing leadership as having *authority*, viewing it as too limiting in light of the range of individuals within an organization who may participate in leadership activities. Instead, leadership has come to be described as a form of *influence*. In line with this theorization of leadership, as stated in Chapter 2, York-Barr and Duke (2004) defined teacher leadership as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (pp. 287-8). Others have conceptualized teacher leadership in terms of authority.

⁵⁵ That said, such principles were not always enacted fully or faithfully in all contexts, as discussed in the “Power Imbalance” section of Chapter 8.

For example, Muijs and Harris (2006) wrote that teacher leadership “implies a redistribution of power and a re-alignment of authority within the organization” (p. 962).

Securing teacher influence *without* authority is certainly not impossible, but teachers without authority are facing an uphill battle to secure such influence. Numerous scholars have described examples of teacher leaders whose influence has been effectively denied by administrators who have the final say (Friedman, 2011; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000; Weiss & Cambone, 2000). Principals invite teacher involvement in discussions, but then decisions are made behind closed doors that seem to disregard teacher input. From the teacher’s perspective, it does not matter whether the principal, *in fact*, carefully considered their input if, at the end of the day, the decision made does not reflect that input. The teacher feels snubbed. When this happens repeatedly, teachers lose faith that their participation matters. Worse, they may come to view principal requests for their involvement as disingenuous and disrespecting of their time.

As Anderson (1998) has pointed out, the “discourse of participation” in schools has, ironically, become a mechanism by which school administrators can exert even greater control over their faculties. Principals often invite teacher participation in decision-making to the degree that it fosters their buy-in and sense of ownership over pre-determined goals and priorities and to the extent that it supports their institutional legitimacy. To be fair, Anderson claims, “I am not arguing that this cooptation of participatory discourse for nondemocratic ends is always done with Machiavelian intentionality” (p. 586), and that, “in many cases, attempts at increased participation are sincere but poorly conceived and implemented or caught up in a larger institutional and societal logic that is antithetical to norms of participation” (p. 586). Regardless of intent, the effect of such “inauthentic” invitations to participate is the silencing of dissent and the reinforcement of the status quo. To many teachers, particularly those who went into teaching to upend an educational system they view as unjust, such disenfranchisement is intolerable.

“Authentic participation,” Anderson (1998) argues, involves broad inclusion and actual authority:

There is general agreement that authentic participatory structures should provide participants with broad jurisdiction, policymaking authority (i.e., not limited to an advisory function), equal representation of relevant stakeholders, and training provisions. In this regard, authenticity can be thought of as the extent to which participatory structures are fully and successfully implemented. (p. 590)

If we think of teacher leadership and participation merely as “influence,” without defining it in terms of authority, its implementation and interpretation lie in the hands of those who do possess true authority—namely principals. While some principals are keen to grant their faculties meaningful influence, many others are reluctant to cede control. This study presents compelling evidence that the “authentic participation” of teachers is more likely (though not guaranteed) where teachers have CDMA.

Implications for Education Stakeholders

Whereas decades of school reform have done little to reshape the “grammar of schooling” in the U.S., the schools described in this study depart dramatically from the norm. At the source of this departure, to a great extent, is teacher CDMA. Is teacher CDMA for everyone? Does it represent a scalable reform? The following section explores the implications of CDMA for various stakeholder groups in light of findings from this study.

For teachers. Previous sections of this final chapter have been devoted to describing the implications of CDMA for teachers’ work lives and TPV in teacher-powered schools. But what do the findings mean for teachers working in traditionally-structured schools? Should teachers stage a coup, *en masse*, and demand CDMA from school and district administrators? Is a teacher-powered model for everyone?

For teachers working in traditionally-structured schools, the scope of this study is insufficient to suggest that transitioning to a teacher-powered model is easily accomplished; the

three case study schools were essentially started from scratch and survey questions did not touch on this subject. Anecdotally, there have been traditionally-structured schools pursuing a teacher-powered model that have “slid back” to more traditional forms of management; Alexander Kolokotronis is investigating this phenomenon in his political science dissertation at Yale (A. Kolokotronis, personal communication, August 12, 2020).

That said, there are takeaways that teachers in traditionally-structured schools may glean from this study, namely that it is potentially worthwhile to advocate for greater teacher involvement in school-level decision-making—particularly in arenas that touch on teachers’ working conditions—on the grounds that it supports TPV. This study suggests that decision-making involvement in the areas of hiring and budgeting for curricular materials was particularly important to the teachers I spoke with, though many appreciated having voice in other decision-making domains as well.

For teachers starting or thinking about starting new schools, the obvious implication of this study is that teacher CDMA is a management model worth considering. There are now numerous examples of teacher-powered schools that have demonstrated that CDMA can be sustained and can lead to radically different school experiences for teachers and students alike. TPSI has a growing compendium of resources for schools at the “forming” and “storming” stages of school creation (see teacherpowered.org/guide).

Some may justifiably point out that there are teachers who are uninterested in working in or founding a teacher-powered school. That there is diversity in teacher desire to participate in school-level decision making has been long-established (Rowan, 1990; Smylie, 1992; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1997). However, research comparing the outgoing and incoming generations of teachers in the U.S. has found that new teachers are becoming “less accepting of top-down hierarchy,” and “hope for opportunities to advance in their work and to exercise greater influence

in their schools and profession” (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 252). New teachers are increasingly expected to demonstrate teacher leadership competency as part of their licensure requirements (Rogers & Scales, 2013), and to a certain extent, new teachers have come to expect hybrid teacher-leader roles, at least as their career progresses (Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016). The human capital context may be shifting in favor of greater teacher involvement in decision-making.

For students. This study did not include student interviews or analysis of student academic performance, so implications for students are theoretical. To the extent that CDMA fosters teacher working conditions that are amenable to TPV, as this study demonstrates, it is likely to benefit students as well. Prior studies have suggested that teacher well-being and retention are beneficial to student learning (Dicke, Marsh, Parker, Guo, Riley & Waldeyer, 2020; Klusmann, Richter, & Lüdtke, 2016; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Furthermore, recent evidence suggests that teachers’ perceptions of school-level influence is positively related to student academic achievement (Ingersoll, Sirinides, & Dougherty, 2018). Teachers who are driven by a common mission and able to make changes to their practice in response to students’ needs may be more likely to persevere with students who might otherwise disengage from school.

In light of glaring and longstanding achievement and opportunity gaps between white students and students of color, and between middle-income and low-income students, an important question is whether teacher CDMA might have differential impact in teacher-powered schools with different racial and socioeconomic profiles. Findings from this study support the notion that CDMA fosters differentiation of school programming according to the student population. What effect this has on historical disparities in educational outcomes remains to be seen. That said, the academic performance of the two case study schools with the most racially and economically disadvantaged student populations was strong relative to other schools in the same communities. At Explore School, where students were relatively more advantaged, advisors

were explicit about their commitment to supporting students from marginalized backgrounds (for example, creating a safe learning environment for LGBTQ students or posting a Black Lives Matter sign in the entrance).

For principals. As the ultimate decision-makers in most traditionally-structured schools, principals have substantial power to determine the extent of teacher influence over school-level policy. Teacher CDMA may not be a practical fit for existing schools with established hierarchies, but this study suggests that inviting—and *honoring*—teacher input in matters affecting teachers’ working conditions can be a powerful strategy for building a motivated and committed faculty.

Previous research has shown that some principals promote “distributed leadership” in an effort to motivate teachers to comply with top-down directives (Hargreaves & Fink, 2009). Their inducements are not always calculated; as stated in the previous section on teacher leadership, principals often believe they are sharing power with teachers when in fact teachers feel quite disempowered (Anderson, 1998). This study suggests that teachers must experience the impact of their involvement to perceive their influence as genuine. They must bear witness—repeatedly—to changes that *they* helped to bring about through identifying and analyzing work-related problems. One implication for principals is to do the uncomfortable but potentially enlightening work of requesting feedback from teachers on their perceptions of influence and their ability to confront and address challenges they face at work.

If teachers are being invited to participate in decision-making but are choosing not to, why not? Is it a time issue? Is it because in the past their participation has been overruled or has not felt “worth it”? If teachers are denied influence in some domains, what is the reason? Are they not knowledgeable enough or lacking the tools to participate? (see Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992). What would it take for them to have the requisite knowledge and skill to thoughtfully

participate? These are questions school leaders should ask themselves when evaluating the extent and character of teacher involvement in decision-making at their schools.

Some school leaders may argue that their teachers are not all up to this task; that they have neither the interest nor the expertise necessary for meaningful participation in decision-making. Another important takeaway is that the teachers “powering” the schools in this study did not necessarily arrive at their schools with impressive credentials or exceptional talent. Many were passionate educators who, sometimes by accident, happened upon their teacher-powered schools and learned to thrive there. If we are to acknowledge that impactful teacher leaders are made, not born—just as we are to foster a “growth mindset” among young people (Dweck, 2006)—then we ought to be willing to invest time and resources in their development.

A final and crucial takeaway for school leaders is that the principals of the teacher-powered schools in this study played critical leadership roles as advocates and facilitators, if not decision-makers. They strove tirelessly to remove external constraints so that their faculty could better serve students. They fought for and secured scarce human and material resources. They surfaced issues, posed uncomfortable questions, exposed risks, and played devil’s advocate—but refrained from calling the shots. “What do you want me to do?” Miguel, principal at HSHR, would ask his teachers. Sometimes teachers did not want the responsibility of solving the problems they identified. Miguel saw it as his role to “stand up” to staff members evading responsibility for the issues they raised:

We [school leaders] have to stand up to our own staff first. That’s where the battle really is won or lost... Somebody said this the other day, my math teacher said this. He and [the assistant principal] were talking about me and they said, “Miguel has this way of presenting the problem, letting you know you’re the solution, and then making you a hero in your own narrative.”

By making teachers “the hero in their own narrative,” Miguel reinforced teachers’ self-efficacy in tackling problems and celebrated their contributions. Principals seeking to empower their

teaching staffs must similarly make room for teachers to solve their own problems. Doing so may require removing obstacles and supporting decision-making processes, but refraining from solving the problem themselves.

For district and state leaders and charter authorizers. One major, if obvious, implication of this study for district leaders and charter school authorizers is that teacher CDMA requires school-level autonomy. To the teachers in this study, the ability to adapt in real time to changing conditions and student needs was of paramount importance. Their school-level autonomy ensured such adaptability. Explore School was an independent charter school authorized by a non-profit organization that was relatively hands-off. HSHR was a district “pilot school,” authorized by a memorandum of understanding between the district and the local teacher’s union to maintain site-based autonomy over budget, staffing, governance, curriculum and assessment, and the school calendar. YLA had converted from a district school to a charter school authorized by the local school district. In each case, the school staffs had secured wide latitude to make decisions they felt were best for students, without which their teacher-powered models would have been impossible.

Despite the case study schools’ site-level autonomy, some teachers (particularly at HSHR and YLA) occasionally felt that their “hands were tied” by the district in certain decision-making domains. District leaders in districts with site-based decision-making would do well to understand such barriers to autonomy and, where possible, work to redress them. Some school districts have dedicated liaisons between central office bureaucrats and autonomous schools for this reason; the importance of such personnel to protecting schools’ autonomy and advocating for their needs has been explored by Honig (2009).

Even at Explore School, which was the most independent of the three case study schools, teachers sometimes felt that the institutions to which they were accountable—the state

Department of Education and their authorizer—expected them to have named a singular school leader. This is understandable given that most schools *do* operate with a singular school leader, but it also exposes an institutional pressure to conform to the prevailing grammar of schooling in which having a principal is largely taken for granted. Leaders of these institutions should work with schools to identify situations in which the assumption of a single school leader proves to be a barrier to CDMA.

For policymakers. Teacher-powered schools exist in many different policy contexts under a range of different “autonomy arrangements,” according to TPSI (district pilot school agreements and charter school bylaws being among them; see Appendix B). Policy need not be a barrier to CDMA. In fact, TPSI identifies several schools that have secured teacher decision-making authority informally, through what they have termed “leadership goodwill.” The TPSI website describes such schools as follows:

None of the schools in this group have any formal agreement granting the teachers authority to make decisions, although teachers working in them seem comfortable that their authority is secure. Teachers’ authority rests on the goodwill of a superintendent, principal, and/or governing board.

However, such “leadership goodwill” may be short-lived as supportive superintendents, principals, and boards come and go. Formal arrangements are more likely to ensure that CDMA can be sustained and that collective decision-making processes can be honed over time.

Policymakers should ask what barriers to such formal arrangements impede teacher CDMA. For example, is a singular school leader necessary in order to establish a new school? Could the legal and procedural expertise normally possessed by principals be shared among a small group of teachers? How can teacher-powered schools fit within the existing bureaucracy that so often assumes that schools have a singular school leader?

Lastly, this and other studies point to the need for policymakers to attend not only to student outcomes in the policymaking process but also to positive teacher working conditions and TPV as instrumental to student learning. Policymakers can do well to understand the connections between CDMA, TPV, and school quality, and make sure they are considering the data on all of these factors when drafting and debating education policy.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study is its emphasis on breadth over depth. I chose to pursue an exploratory study to investigate the relatively understudied topic of teacher work life in teacher-powered schools, not quite knowing what I would find. Interviews intentionally covered a wide range of topics, the salience of which varied across the group of teachers with whom I spoke. Many different themes emerged that, in my view, merited inclusion in this dissertation. A cost of this decision, I recognize, was a certain loss of specificity. Findings are therefore provisional, and need to be revisited in greater depth. Entire studies could be conducted to examine each of the five major themes of this dissertation in greater detail.

A second limitation of this study is that the three case study schools were perhaps more exemplary than typical insofar as the population of teacher-powered schools is concerned. Two of the three schools, for example, had been selected as tour sites at back-to-back Teacher-Powered Schools national conferences. With no personal connection to TPSI inventory schools, I relied on the input and connections of TPSI staff members in selecting case study sites. While I believe that my TPSI colleagues put in a good faith effort to recommend three very different schools, all of which met the criteria I delineated (as described in Chapter 3), I cannot claim that these schools are representative of the inventory as a whole. That said, there are benefits to exemplary site selection, if in fact the three schools were in any way exemplary, such as being able to show what is possible and under what conditions.

A third and related limitation is my reliance on the TPSI schools inventory for identifying eligible schools for inclusion in this study. As was evident both at YLA and in a handful of survey responses, some teachers questioned whether their schools were truly “teacher-powered.” While TPSI furnished an invaluable “inventory” of schools using a thoughtful set of inclusion criteria, there are undoubtedly schools that should be on the list but are not, and perhaps schools that are on the list but should not be.

Finally, the survey sampling method limited the strength and type of quantitative analyses. All schools within the TPSI inventory were invited to participate, and all teachers at participating schools were given the opportunity to submit a survey. As might be expected, not all did. Comparisons between participating and all TPSI schools presented in Chapter 4 suggest that participating schools were somewhat more likely to be charter schools, less likely to be located in cities, less likely to be designated high poverty, and more likely to have a majority white student population than all TPSI schools. Survey data must be interpreted with these differences in mind, limiting the extent to which survey findings can be generalized to the population of teachers working in teacher-powered schools.

Future Research

There are numerous opportunities for further research concerning teacher professional work life and TPV in teacher-powered schools. Several promising directions are listed below:

- More rigorous statistical analysis of motivation, commitment, and retention as a function of CDMA. The schools in this study were all designated as “teacher-powered”; including traditionally-structured schools would allow for direct comparisons.
- Further qualitative studies examining collective decision-making structures, processes, and norms in teacher-powered schools, as well as their implications for collegial relations and organizational power dynamics. For example, what are the drawbacks and benefits of

decision-making by consensus versus by majority vote or by some form of representative democracy?

- Ethnographic studies of new hire onboarding in teacher-powered schools. How are new teachers socialized? What factors contribute to their successful integration into decision-making structures? What challenges do they face that are particular to the teacher-powered setting?
- Narrative inquiry into the meaning of CDMA for teachers working in teacher-powered schools. For example, how do teachers make sense of CDMA in light of their original motivations to teach? In what ways does CDMA support or hinder teachers' professional self-actualization?
- Thematic analysis of the kinds of pedagogical approaches being implemented in teacher-powered schools and implications for TPV.
- Research investigating how teacher-powered schools originate and evolve over time. Why do some teacher-powered schools seem to “backslide” into more traditional forms of management? What factors protect other teacher-powered schools from backsliding?
- Case studies of principals or other singular school leaders at teacher-powered schools. How were they selected for the job? What is their job description? What roles do they play in decision-making processes? What is it like to be a principal in a teacher-powered school?
- Further conceptual development of TPV and development of a sound measure.
- Further development of appropriate and meaningful measures of success for teacher-powered schools and analysis of the impact of such measures on teachers' self- and collective efficacy.

- Social network analysis investigating the role of formal initiatives (i.e., TPSI) and informal networks in idea-sharing and professional learning between teacher-powered schools.
- Quantitative or mixed methods analysis of personality characteristics of teachers choosing to work in teacher-powered schools. For example, prior research suggests that individuals with an internal locus of control (i.e., those who believe they have influence) may be more likely to thrive in contexts of participative management than individuals with an external locus of control (Spector, 1982). Does teacher locus of control vary between schools that are teacher-powered versus those that are not?
- Quantitative or mixed methods analysis of career stages of teachers choosing to work in teacher-powered schools. Teacher commitment and retention have been shown to vary across the career span (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Is the same true in teacher-powered schools?
- Research examining how teachers in teacher-powered schools have adapted to distance learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures beginning in March of 2020. How has CDMA shaped schools' responses to the pandemic and teachers' experience working from home?
- Research examining how teachers in teacher-powered schools have responded to urgent calls for racial justice in the wake of the recent murder of George Floyd and countless other Black men and women at the hands of law enforcement officers. For example, to what extent have teachers at teacher-powered schools prioritized the recruitment and retention of staff members of color? In what ways might teachers in teacher-powered schools perpetuate systemic injustices through their adherence to white supremacist

cultural values (e.g., sense of urgency, avoidance of conflict, quantity over quality; see Okun, 2000)?

These suggested research topics pertain primarily to the teacher experience given the present study's focus on TPV. However, *the importance of research considering the student experience in teacher-powered schools should not be understated*. Ultimately, the viability of CDMA as an educational reform rests with its impact on student learning and its role in closing persistent academic achievement and opportunity gaps. Promising recent research suggests that students achieve more on standardized tests where teachers report having greater influence (Ingersoll, Sirinides, & Dougherty, 2018), and the teachers in this study generally felt that CDMA shaped the education they were able to provide students—particularly students who had struggled in the traditional school system—in positive ways. A key assertion of the teacher-powered schools movement is that CDMA translates into more “student-centered” learning (see, for example, Farris-Berg & Dirkswager, 2012). However, much more independent research is needed to substantiate this claim and to understand the mechanisms by which this occurs. Perhaps most importantly, further research is needed to gauge the educational and social justice implications of CDMA for low-income students and students of color who have suffered disproportionately from the failure of school systems to attract, motivate, develop, and retain effective teachers.

Conclusion

If, as a nation, we are going to agree that “teachers matter”—that students’ educational success depends on good teaching and strong, improving schools—we must create the kinds of conditions in schools that allow and encourage teachers to do their best work. Reforms aimed at “professionalizing the profession” with quick fixes—such as raising salaries or increasing entry requirements—are not bad ideas, but they are not sustainable if we do not also fundamentally change the experience of teachers in schools. Too many teachers begin their careers bursting at

the seams with intrinsic motivation to “make a difference” in young people’s lives, only to encounter innumerable impediments to doing so. Success is hard to come by, frustration and demoralization mount, and many teachers choose to apply their energies elsewhere.

Educational researchers and leaders have recognized the many costs of a transient teaching force. Countless initiatives have sought to plug the holes in the “leaky bucket” of teacher retention. Few of these initiatives, however, are designed to account for the myriad interrelated reasons for voluntary teacher turnover. As Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) wrote in their review of research on teacher retention, the search for one “essential lever” is misguided:

Surveys of teachers conducted by an array of individuals and organizations over a number of years reveal that many factors of the teachers’ workplace influence their decisions about whether to enter and remain in teaching... Given this array of factors, school officials and policymakers cannot choose what they believe to be an essential lever—for example, increasing salaries or repairing a facility—and expect to substantially influence teachers’ career decisions. From the perspective of teachers, these factors are all important. Moreover, they are interdependent... How a teacher is hired can influence how much collegial support he will find on entry... Whether her classroom has adequate equipment and supplies may determine whether a teacher can use a new curriculum... How a principal makes decisions— unilaterally or involving the staff—may decide whether students throughout the school benefit from a teacher’s ideas and talents. Thus, a complex set of factors must be taken into account in any effort to support and retain good teachers. (pp. 2-3)

The implications of this perspective are daunting. It points to the need for a hyper-localized, school-specific approach to examining and addressing the many interrelated causes of teacher burnout, disaffection, and turnover. Few, if any, schools and districts have the discretionary funding or time necessary to conduct such an examination. Even if education leaders were fully able to grasp the wide spectrum of factors interfering with teachers’ ability to effectively and sustainably conduct their work, addressing them would require overcoming longstanding institutional and cultural forces—the so-called “grammar of schooling”—that have shaped schools into what they are today.

What this study suggests is that teacher CDMA can serve as a viable mechanism to disrupt these forces, with positive implications for TPV. Part of the power in CDMA as a reform lies in its agnosticism; it does not presuppose a solution to problems facing teachers so much as it provides a framework for addressing them that honors teachers' professional and situational expertise. A further strength is that it is context-neutral. It can flourish in rural charter schools and in urban district schools, elementary schools and high schools, schools with primarily low-income students of color and schools with primarily middle class white students.

Teachers who cannot be responsive to the particulars of their situations are no less constrained—and should be no more responsible—than doctors unable to customize a treatment plan for a particular patient or an architect unable to customize a building for a particular site. The complexity involved in influencing young people—who are unique, often reluctant, and always changing—is arguably much higher than the complexity of treating an illness or designing a house, calling for more discretion, not less.

Some skeptics will worry that putting decision-making power in the hands of teachers will mean they work less hard or that their standards will be lowered. One important point from this study is that teachers with authority do not work less. The teachers in this study worked exceptionally hard, held exceptionally high standards for themselves, their colleagues, and their students.

Participants also dispelled the notion that there is a zero-sum game between what teachers want and what students need. At all three case study schools, teachers voluntarily took on extra duties because they viewed them as critical to their ability to foster student success. Anti-union, pro-charter rhetoric often portrays teachers as self-interested and lazy, with parents and students lobbying to take back control over their own education. I by no means wish to diminish the role that families play in advocating for better and more equitable schools. And certainly,

there are some incompetent teachers—as there are incompetent practitioners of other professions. However, I feel that this perspective ignores why most teachers join the profession in the first place. Ultimately what motivates teachers is the desire to do right by students, to accurately perceive their needs and to guide them toward the best versions of themselves. Students need teachers who can be responsive, and teachers need schools that allow them to respond. It is only when teachers lack the confidence that they have the flexibility and resources to meet students’ needs that their only recourse is to either protect themselves from being fired for reasons they perceive as out of their control, or leave their posts.

Not *just a teacher*, but a *teacher*. Teachers in the United States are suffering from a crisis of worth. They are simultaneously lauded as heroes and treated like factory workers. They are expected to demonstrate consistent “value add” on students’ test scores and masterfully differentiate instruction for students with diverse academic and social needs, but they are not trusted to decide when, how, and with whom to do the work required. These mixed messages spoil teachers’ sense of impact and fulfilment. As Theresa at HSHR implies in the below quote, the prevalence of the phrase “just a teacher” among her teaching colleagues in other schools is emblematic of a collective sense of powerlessness among teachers and resulting erosion of responsibility.

A lot of teachers throughout the United States feel totally powerless. One of the things Miguel... always says is, “A lot of people say, ‘I’m just a teacher.’” He’s like, “You’re not ‘*just a teacher*,’ you’re a *teacher*.” There’s something in that. We’re the ones that are doing everything. You’ve got to give them some [power].

Theresa’s principal—himself a teacher—understood that the work demands of teachers far surpassed society’s regard for them. To Miguel, teachers should not feel that the only way to advance in their profession is by becoming a principal or district administrator—that staying a teacher somehow implies professional stagnation. Instead, the choice to teach should command

respect in light of the profession's inherent challenges, situational exigencies, and sheer importance. Endowing teachers with ownership of decisions that affect their work is one way that educational leaders can live up to the hackneyed but indisputable assertion that "teachers matter."

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Appendix A: List of Teacher-Powered Schools “Autonomies”

To be included in the Teacher-Powered Schools (TPS) inventory, schools must demonstrate that their teacher teams have “final authority” in one or more of the following decision-making areas, known as “autonomies” (see teacherpowered.org).

1. Selecting colleagues
2. Transferring and/or terminating colleagues
3. Evaluating colleagues
4. Setting staff pattern (including size of staff; allocation of personnel among teaching and other positions)
5. Selecting leaders
6. Determining budget
7. Determining compensation, including leaders
8. Determining learning program and learning materials (including teaching methods, curriculum, and levels of technology)
9. Setting the schedule (of classes; of school hours; length of school year)
10. Setting school-level policies (including disciplinary protocol, homework, etc.)
11. Determining tenure policy (if any)
12. Determining professional development
13. Determining whether to take, when to take, and how much to count district/EMO*/authorizer assessments
14. Assessing school performance according to multiple measures (not only a mean proficiency score)
15. Determining work hours

*Education Management Organization

Appendix B: List of Teacher-Powered Schools “Autonomy Arrangements”

This list of autonomy arrangements characteristic of TPSI schools and corresponding descriptions were adopted from Teacher-Powered Schools (see teacherpowered.org).

- (1) **Provision in collective bargaining agreement between district and local union**
“In 2009, teachers in Hughes STEM High School in Cincinnati, Ohio secured collective autonomy to run an existing school via the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) structure negotiated in the collective bargaining agreement between Cincinnati School Board and Cincinnati Federation of Teachers. Two-thirds to three-quarters of ILT members are teachers, and other team members include 2 classified employees, 2 parents, and the site principal. The ILT authority is broad, as nearly anything that affects instruction can be voted up or down by that body, and the principal does not have veto power. The ILT structure is available to all schools in the Cincinnati Public School district.”

- (2) **Innovative Public Schools Act**
“The Howard C. Reiche Community School in Portland, Maine initially converted to a teacher-powered governance structure in July of 2011, after receiving approval from the Portland Public School’s Board of Education. The school board approved a school proposal that outlined their proposed governance structure: the school can have a team of lead teachers (instead of a principal), who will represent the school on the district’s Administrative Team. The site teachers can also select the lead teachers. Reiche teachers follow district policy and collective bargaining in the areas of teacher evaluation, professional development, learning program, school policy, and school site budget. The allocation of discretionary funds is determined by the lead teachers with input from the staff and leadership team.”

- (3) **MOU between school, district, and union local + Waiver from state statute**
“The Math and Science Leadership Academy (MSLA) in Denver, which opened in 2009, has an MOU with the teachers union, through the Denver Public Schools school board, to have a lead teacher instead of a principal. Denver Public Schools also, specifically for MSLA, requested and received a waiver from the state of Colorado so the lead teacher has autonomy to manage the school, deal with suspensions, and do teacher evaluations. De facto the lead teacher approves decisions made collectively by MSLA teachers. This model was replicated by the Denver Green School in 2010.”

- (4) **Instrumentality charter contract**
“Since 2001, the Milwaukee Public School board has authorized instrumentality chartered schools that it knows will be run by teacher cooperatives. Much of the autonomy for the teacher cooperatives is arranged via the charter contract between the

school board and the school. Before the end of collective bargaining in Wisconsin in 2011, teachers in these cooperatives remained employees of the district and members of the union. Schools also had a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the district and union local that provided waivers from aspects of the collective bargaining agreement. However, with the end of collective bargaining in the state, these MOUs are no longer necessary.”

- (5) **Contract between chartered school board and teacher professional partnership**
“EdVisions Cooperative, established in 1994, enters into contracts with chartered school boards across the state of Minnesota, accepting accountability for school success in exchange for its teacher-members’ authority to make decisions about the school. With their authority the teachers determine curriculum, set the budget, choose the level of technology available to students, determine their own salaries, select their colleagues, monitor performance, and sometimes hire administrators to work for them.”
- (6) **Chartered school contract and/or chartered school bylaws**
“States, counties, and school districts authorized chartered school contracts knowing that the contracts were written to formally authorize teacher autonomy. For some chartered schools autonomy is not granted via the contract but is instead made formal via the schools’ governing bylaws.”
- (7) **Pilot school agreements (Boston and Los Angeles)**
“In 1994, Boston Public Schools designed “pilot schools” in an effort to retain teachers and students after the Massachusetts legislature passed a state chartering law in 1993. Under the pilot agreement, the BPS Superintendent delegates authority to pilot schools’ governing boards to try new and different means of improving teaching and learning in order to better serve at-risk urban students. The potential exists for the boards to informally transfer that decision-making authority to the group of teachers at the school. Some boards have done this, to varying degrees.”
- (8) **Site-governance agreement between district school board and district school**
“In 2009, with support from Education|Evolving and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers the Minnesota Legislature passed the Site-Governed Schools law, allowing for the creation of schools inside districts that enjoy the same autonomy and exemption from state regulation as chartered schools. San Francisco Community School has similar autonomy through their Small School By Design agreement with San Francisco Unified School District. In Los Angeles, the Woodland Hills Academy has been operating under the similarly organized Expanded School-Based Management Model.”
- (9) **The goodwill of superintendent, principal or governing board (informal)**
“None of the schools in this group have any formal agreement granting the teachers

authority to make decisions, although teachers working in them seem comfortable that their authority is secure. Teachers' authority rests on the goodwill of a superintendent, principal, and/or governing board."

(10) **PROSE Agreement**

"PROSE (Progressive Redesign Opportunity Schools for Excellence) was negotiated into the 2014 teachers' contract by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and the New York City Department of Education (DOE) as a way for schools that had a history of collaborative management and innovation to have more freedom to achieve their goals. The idea came from union leaders seeing that teachers had creative ideas in their schools, but teacher teams needed an opportunity to share those within and across schools and more space to experiment with new ideas."

(11) **Unknown arrangements**

"EducationEvolving does not yet know for sure whether or how a number of schools included on our list offer decision-making authority to teachers. They are included on our list because we have heard about them from various sources, including the press. We are still in the process of connecting with teachers in these schools to learn more about their arrangements."

Appendix C: Observation Protocol

NOTE: This observation protocol refers to research questions that were subsequently revised following the first qualitative phase of the study. As such, they differ somewhat from the research questions posed in Chapter 2.

Research question	Observation evidence to look for (both schoolwide and in classrooms)
<p>Umbrella: How do teachers in teacher-powered schools translate formal authority over key management decisions into practices that allow them to pursue collective student learning goals?</p>	<p><i>NOTE: These represent general guidelines. Due to the exploratory nature of the proposed study, there may be additional elements of school life that become salient through the course of conducting field work. However, all observations will be specifically related to teachers' work and any observations of students will not identify individual students but will consider student actions in general or as a group.</i></p>
<p>Sub 1: How do teachers in teacher-led schools collectively define and measure student learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do teachers and other staff members talk about student learning and progress toward it? ● What types of student actions or outcomes do teachers praise? ● What types of student learning are celebrated in faculty meetings or assemblies? ● What goals do teachers set both schoolwide and in their classrooms around student learning? How is progress measured?
<p>Sub 2: How does teacher decision-making authority in various school management domains shape teachers'</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How does decision-making for schoolwide matters occur? ● Who makes what decisions?
<p style="text-align: center;">structural job characteristics?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What does school look and feel like? ● How do teachers spend their time? ● What do teachers' daily responsibilities consist of?

<p>perceptions and experiences of collective work life?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do teachers discuss their work experiences in faculty meetings?
<p>teaching practices?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do teachers structure their lessons? ● How do teachers describe the anticipated outcome(s) of their lessons to students? ● What teaching strategies or learning theories are evident?
<p>Sub 3: How do various school-level "autonomy arrangements" (i.e., the policy or set of policies granting teachers in the school decision-making authority) and student demographic characteristics influence collective decision-making in teacher-led schools, and to what effect?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In what ways are teacher decisions and actions responsive to student demographic characteristics? ● How do teachers talk about the broader policy context of their work in faculty meetings?

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview questions

(Intro)

1) Thank you for sitting down with me. I'm going to start with just a few introductory questions about you and your work.

What is your role?

Tell me your weekly schedule. [*Added after first interview at Explore School*]

What do you teach?

How long have you been a teacher here?

Before teaching here, did you teach somewhere else? For how long?

2) Tell me about your decision to teach at ____ school.

(Defining and measuring student learning)

3) Educators have many different perspectives on what "learning" looks like in schools. How would you say teachers at ____ school define "student learning"?

4) What goals do teachers at ____ school set around student learning?

5) Tell me about a time in the past week when you felt a student or group of students had learned something of value in your class.

How did you know they had learned something?

What did you do that led to this learning?

6) What challenges have you faced in achieving your school's student learning goals?

Please give an example.

7) Describe how teachers' work is evaluated at ____ school.

Who evaluates your work?

What kinds of evidence are used to evaluate teachers' performance?

8) Think about the last evaluation you had.

What was it like to participate in the evaluation process?

How did the evaluation influence your teaching practice, if at all?

(Decision-making authority)

9) Card sort: Please sort these cards into one of three piles according to the extent you and/or your colleagues make the decisions listed.

Piles:

“I decide” = I make this decision.

“We decide” = I have a voice on the issue, but teachers make the decision collectively.

“They decide” = I may have a voice on the issue, but someone or some group other than the teachers at my school makes the decision.

(Also “Does not apply” and “Don’t know”)

Decision cards:

(From Schools and Staffing Survey, 2011-2012)

School-level NOTE: Will not be categorized as school/classroom-level in card sort.

Setting performance standards for students at this school

Establishing curriculum

Determining the content of in-service professional development programs

Evaluating teachers

Hiring new full-time teachers

Setting discipline policy

Deciding how the school budget will be spent

Classroom-level

Selecting textbooks and other instructional materials

Selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught

Selecting teaching techniques

Evaluating and grading students

Disciplining students

Determining the amount of homework to be assigned

(From TPS list of 15 autonomies NOT represented among the above)

Transferring and/or terminating colleagues

Setting staff size

Allocating personnel

Selecting school leaders

Determining staff compensation

Setting the school schedule and calendar

Determining tenure policy (if any)

Determining work hours

Follow up questions:

Choose one card from each pile, and give me an example of a decision related to that topic made in the past year.

How was the decision made?

In what ways did the decision affect you and your work, if at all?

In what ways did the decision affect your students, if at all?

In what ways did the decision affect working conditions for teachers, generally, if at all?

(Policy and demographic context)

10) What factors or people outside the school community influence your work at _____ school?
Can you give me an example?
What do you see as the effect of that influence?

11) I'd like to know more about _____ school as a (charter / district pilot) school. Do you think that the (charter / district pilot) status of _____ school matters to your ability to achieve your school's student learning goals?
If so, how?
If not, why not?

12) Finally, I'm interested in understanding how the student demographic makeup at _____ school influences the work you and your colleagues do. What do you think might be different about working at _____ school if it served a very different student population?

Appendix E: Survey Instrument

Teacher Work Life in Teacher-Powered Schools

Introduction

Q1.1

Thank you for sharing your perspective on your work at a school in the "Teacher-Powered Schools" inventory. Results from this survey will be used to inform local and state-level policymaking around school decision-making and teacher leadership in an effort to improve teaching, learning, and professional work life in U.S. public schools.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and your responses will remain confidential. The survey should take approximately 15 minutes. You will have an opportunity to provide open-ended comments at the end of the survey.

By clicking the ">>" button below, you indicate your consent to participate in the survey.

Eligibility

Q2.1 Please select the school where you currently work using the drop down menu below.

▼ [Select] (1) ... Other (94)

Display This Question:

If Q2.1 = 94

Q2.2 Please enter the name of your school here.

Q2.3 Do you work as a teacher at this school, or in a combined teaching and other role, for at least 20 hours every week?

Note: If your school uses a word other than "teacher" (e.g., instructor, advisor) to describe the role that would typically be performed by a licensed or certified teacher, and you have such a role, please select "Yes."

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:
If Q2.3 = 2

Q2.4 No further information is needed from you. Please click ">>" to record your response. Thank you for your time.

Skip To: End of Survey If Q2.4(1) Is Displayed

General Information

Q3.1 What grade(s) do you primarily teach?

Mark all that apply.

- Pre-Kindergarten (1)
- Kindergarten (2)
- 1st (3)
- 2nd (4)
- 3rd (5)
- 4th (6)
- 5th (7)
- 6th (8)
- 7th (9)
- 8th (10)
- 9th (11)
- 10th (12)
- 11th (13)
- 12th (14)
- Other (15) _____

Q3.2 What subject(s) do you primarily teach?

Mark all that apply.

- Business (1)
 - Computers/Technology (2)
 - English/Language Arts (3)
 - English as a Second Language or English Language Development (14)
 - Health or Physical Education (4)
 - Industrial Arts (5)
 - Mathematics (6)
 - Music or Art (7)
 - Science (8)
 - Social Studies (9)
 - Special Education (10)
 - Vocational Education (11)
 - World Languages (12)
 - Other (separate multiple subjects with commas) (13)
-

Q3.3 In what school year did you begin teaching at this school?

Use format "YEAR-YEAR," such as "2010-2011" or "2004-2005." Note: Do NOT include time spent as a student teacher.

Q3.4 Were you a member of the team that founded this school?

Select "Yes" if you helped to open the school OR if you began working at this school during its first year of operation.

- Yes (1)
 - No (2)
 - Other (Please explain in the box below.) (4)
-

Q3.5 Are you a member of a teachers' union or an employee association similar to a union?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q3.6 Are you intentionally assigned to instruct the same group of students for more than one year (e.g., looping)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Previous school

Q4.1 Before becoming a teacher at this school, did you teach at one or more other school(s)?

- Yes (5)
- No (6)

Display This Question:

If Q4.1 = 5

Q4.2

Give one or two examples of how working at your current school differs, if at all, from working at your previous school(s).

Please limit your response to 100 words.

Control & Influence

Q5.1 How much actual control do you have in your classroom(s) at this school over the following areas of your planning and teaching?

	No control (1)	Minor control (2)	Moderate control (3)	A great deal of control (4)
Selecting textbooks and other instructional materials (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Selecting content, topics, and skills to be taught (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Selecting teaching techniques (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evaluating and grading students (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Disciplining students (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Determining the amount of homework to be assigned (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5.2 How much actual influence do you think teachers have over school policy at this school in each of the following areas?

	No influence (1)	Minor influence (2)	Moderate influence (3)	A great deal of influence (4)
Setting performance standards for students at this school (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing curriculum (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Determining the content of in-service professional development programs (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evaluating teachers (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Hiring new full-time teachers (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Setting discipline policy (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deciding how the school budget will be spent (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Agree-Disagree 4-pt, Section 1

Q6.1 For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that it reflects the actual circumstances in your school or your own personal beliefs and understandings.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
My school sets high standards for academic success. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most teachers in my school are confident they will be able to motivate their students to learn. (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic progress is recognized and acknowledged by my school. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe strongly in my school's values and its goals. (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most teachers in my school truly believe every child can learn. (19)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In our school we have well defined learning expectations for all students. (24)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most teachers in our school share a similar set of values, beliefs, and attitudes related to teaching and learning. (23)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers expect students to be the future leaders of their communities. (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers share a commitment to advancing social justice in our school's community. (22)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6.2 For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that it reflects the actual circumstances in your school or your own personal beliefs and understandings.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
Necessary materials such as textbooks, supplies, and copy machines are available as needed by the staff. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers support each other in enforcing school rules. (19)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I volunteer to help my school colleagues when I think I can be useful to them. (24)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most teachers trust school administrators to provide the support we need to do our work well. (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In my school, most teachers can count on each other for support. (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most teachers in my school are able to build relationships with all students, even those that have challenging or withdrawn behavior. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers work hard to ensure that students of all backgrounds feel like they belong at school. (23)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our staff makes sure that students' basic needs (e.g., clothing, food, shelter, healthcare) are met. (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Nearly every student has a meaningful relationship with at least one adult. (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6.3 For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that it reflects the actual circumstances in your school or your own personal beliefs and understandings.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
The teachers at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like the way things are run at this school. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren't really worth it. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I am generally satisfied with being a teacher at this school. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think about staying home from school because I'm just too tired to go. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think about transferring to another school. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am willing to "go the extra mile" to help students. (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy teaching at this school more than any other job I've had. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Work Hours

Q7.1

Including hours spent during the school day, before and after school, and on the weekends, how many hours do you spend on all teaching and other school-related activities during a typical full week at this school?

Please report to the nearest whole hour; do not record fractions of an hour or minutes.

Q7.2

How many hours do you spend teaching or supervising students during a typical full week at this school?

Please report to the nearest whole hour; do not record fractions of an hour or minutes.

Agree-Disagree 4-pt, Section 2

Q8.1 For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that it reflects the actual circumstances of your work with students.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
I make it a priority in my classroom to give students time to work together when I am not directing them. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I invite students to create many of the posters or displays in their learning spaces. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I involve students in evaluating their own work and setting their own goals. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I prefer to assess students through observations and conferences rather than through tests or quizzes. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often design learning activities based on the students' interests and ideas. (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8.2 For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that it reflects the actual circumstances in your school or your own personal beliefs and understandings.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
Students try hard to improve on previous work. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students are expected to work toward solving real-world problems. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students learn to take responsibility for their own education. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students are mostly assigned to classes based on their age, not on their ability. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students have opportunities to learn across multiple content areas during a single class period (e.g., math and art, science and social studies). (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers inspire students to work hard. (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students are encouraged to learn at their own pace. (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students are given regular opportunities to explore aspects of their personal identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender) in class. (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students learn skills that will help them participate actively in a democratic society. (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students are encouraged to be themselves. (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8.3 For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that it reflects the actual circumstances in your school or your own personal beliefs and understandings.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
Students spend more time working on projects than listening to teachers deliver instruction. (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Students are taught to recognize examples of discrimination in society. (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students have a say in what and how they learn. (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students regularly discuss current events. (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students have regular opportunities to express themselves creatively. (19)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students use technology purposefully to support their learning. (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student participation in school-wide decision-making is encouraged. (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Struggling students receive adequate individualized support. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students like coming to school. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students are encouraged to take risks. (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students get time to practice skills needed for many types of jobs. (22)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students have enough down time to relax and socialize. (23)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8.4 For each statement below, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that it reflects the actual circumstances in your school or your own personal beliefs and understandings.

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Somewhat agree (3)	Strongly agree (4)
Teachers give students opportunities to master learning standards in different ways. (23)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers create regular opportunities for students to learn outside the school building during the school day (e.g., on a field trip, at an internship). (24)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning activities are designed with students' life experiences in mind. (30)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers model the leadership skills needed to solve collective problems. (36)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Frequency & Number Likert Questions

Q9.1 How often in this school year have you...

	Never (1)	1-2 times (2)	3-5 times (3)	6-9 times (4)	10 times or more (5)
Had conversations with colleagues about managing classroom behavior? (1)	<input type="radio"/>				
Had conversations with colleagues about what helps students learn best? (4)	<input type="radio"/>				
Received meaningful feedback on your performance from colleagues? (5)	<input type="radio"/>				
Had conversations with colleagues about the goals of this school? (6)	<input type="radio"/>				
Visited other teachers' classrooms to observe instruction? (7)	<input type="radio"/>				
Had colleagues observe your classroom? (8)	<input type="radio"/>				

Q9.2 How many teachers in this school...

	None (1)	Less than 25% (2)	Less than half (3)	More than half (4)	More than 75% (5)	All (6)
Feel responsible to help each other improve their instruction? (1)	<input type="radio"/>					
Take responsibility for improving the school outside their own class? (2)	<input type="radio"/>					

Assessment & Performance

Q10.1 You are nearing the end of the survey! This next section asks about how teachers at your school think about success.

Q10.2

Which of the following types of evidence, if any, do teachers at your school collectively review on a regular or ongoing basis to monitor how well students are doing?

Types of Evidence

Check all that apply. (1)

Specific Tools Used

If you know of specific tests, surveys, rubrics, or other tools your school uses (e.g., NWEA MAP, Fountas & Pinnell, The Hope Survey, Advanced Placement tests), please type them in the space provided. Separate multiple tools in each category using semi-colons. (1)

- Grades or GPA, credit accumulation, grade-level promotion, and/or on-time graduation (14)
- Attendance and/or disciplinary incidents (2)
- Assessments of academic progress and/or achievement (e.g., reading level, standardized tests, teacher-created assessments) (1)
- Deeper learning, critical thinking, and/or problem-solving (11)
- Social and emotional learning (e.g., persistence, resilience, self-control, building relationships, decision-making) (6)
- Student engagement in learning (3)
- School culture and/or climate (8)
- Student physical and/or mental health (9)
- College enrollment, persistence, and/or graduation (12)
- Other (13)

Q10.3 Give a brief example of a time when you felt you had been successful in your job. How did you know you had been successful?

Please limit your response to 100 words.

Closing

Q11.1 Not including this year, for how many MORE years do you anticipate working at THIS school?

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60

Give your best estimate by sliding the bar to the nearest whole number of years. (1)



Q11.2 How long do you plan to remain in the teaching profession, whether at this school or at another school?

- As long as I am able (1)
- Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from this job (2)
- Until I am eligible for retirement benefits from a previous job (3)
- Until I am eligible for Social Security benefits (4)
- Until a specific life event occurs (e.g., parenthood, marriage) (5)
- Until a more desirable job opportunity comes along (6)
- Definitely plan to leave as soon as I can (7)
- Undecided at this time (8)

Demographics

Q12.1 Finally, we would like to ask you a few questions about your background and how you choose to identify.

Q12.2 What is your gender?

Mark one or more gender(s) to indicate what you consider yourself to be.

- Female (1)
- Male (2)
- Other (3)

Display This Question:

If Q12.2 = 3

Q12.3 If you selected "Other," you may enter your gender in the space below.

Q12.4 Are you of Latino or Hispanic origin?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q12.5 What is your race?

Mark one or more races to indicate what you consider yourself to be.

- American Indian or Alaska Native (7)
- Asian (5)
- Black or African American (4)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (6)
- White (1)
- Other (8)

Display This Question:

If Q12.5 = 8

Q12.6 If you selected "Other," you may enter your race in the space below.

Q12.7 Do you have a Master's degree?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- No, but I am pursuing one (3)

Q12.8 Do you have a Doctorate or first professional degree (e.g., PhD, EdD, MD, JD, DDS)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- No, but I am pursuing one (3)

Q12.9 Are you certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in at least one content area?

- Yes, fully certified (1)
- No (2)

Display This Question:

If Q12.9 = 2

Q12.10 Are you working toward certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Anything Else

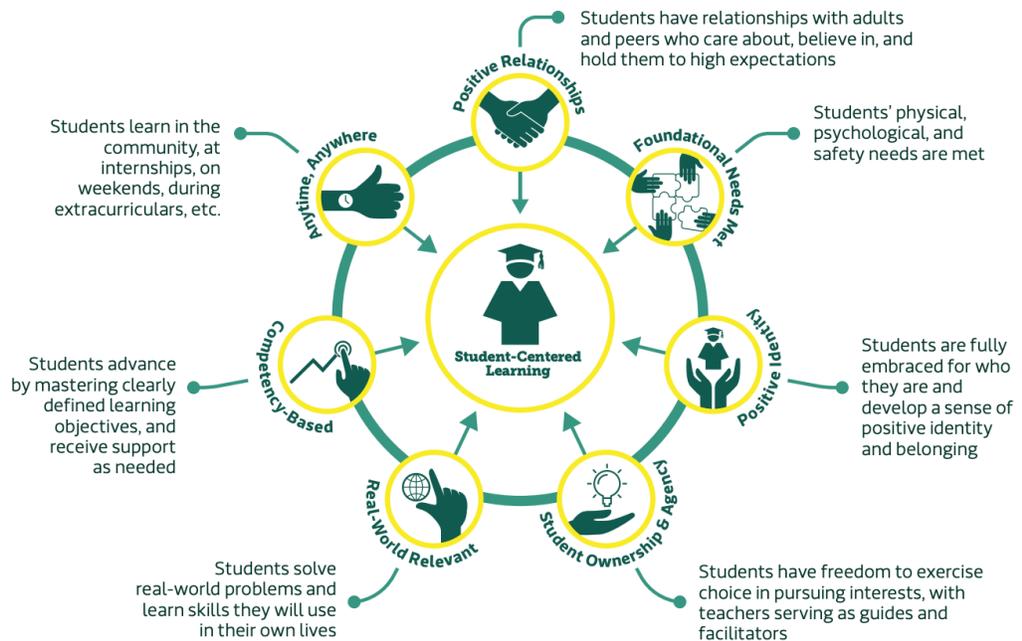
Q13.1 Is there anything else you would like to share about your work as a teacher in a school within the "Teacher-Powered Schools" inventory?

Q13.2 You have finished the survey. Please click the ">>" button to submit your responses.

Appendix F: Education Evolving Student-Centered Learning Framework

Education Evolving's Seven Principles of Student-Centered Learning

Positive Relationships • Foundational Needs Met • Positive Identity
Student Ownership & Agency • Real-World Relevant
Competency-Based • Anytime, Anywhere



Source: "Evidence for Student-Centered Learning" (Kaput, 2018)

Appendix G: Survey Opt-Out and Response Rates for Participating Schools

<u>School</u>	<u>Total Teachers</u>	<u># Opted Out</u>	<u>% Opted Out</u>	<u># Invited</u>	<u># Responded</u>	<u>% Responded</u>
1	5	0	0%	5	4	80%
2	21	0	0%	21	4	19%
3	19	0	0%	19	8	42%
4	12	0	0%	12	12	100%
5	26	2	8%	24	20	83%
6	23	1	4%	22	13	59%
7	1	0	0%	1	1	100%
8	22	0	0%	22	7	32%
9	30	0	0%	30	12	40%
10	11	0	0%	11	6	55%
11	6	0	0%	6	6	100%
12	14	0	0%	14	10	71%
13	2	0	0%	2	2	100%
14	4	0	0%	4	2	50%
15	7	0	0%	7	7	100%
16	11	0	0%	11	10	91%
17	14	0	0%	14	12	86%
18	2	0	0%	2	0	0%
19	2	0	0%	2	2	100%
20	37	0	0%	37	20	54%
21	34	9	26%	25	16	64%
22	10	0	0%	10	9	90%
23	3	0	0%	3	3	100%
24	11	0	0%	11	10	91%
25	21	0	0%	21	11	52%
26	16	0	0%	16	11	69%
27	4	0	0%	4	4	100%
28	17	0	0%	17	13	76%
29	17	0	0%	17	11	65%
30	20	0	0%	20	1	5%
31	29	0	0%	29	19	66%
32	27	0	0%	27	23	85%
33	23	0	0%	23	9	39%
34	4	0	0%	4	4	100%
35	45	0	0%	45	3	7%
36	30	0	0%	30	22	73%
37	7	0	0%	7	6	86%
38	48	24	50%	24	14	58%
39	28	0	0%	28	3	11%
40	6	0	0%	6	4	67%
Total	669	36	5%	633	354	56%

Note. All 99 Teacher-Powered Schools Initiative schools were invited to participate. Forty (40) such schools furnished lists of teachers. Teachers from 39 of those schools participated in the survey. The “# Opted Out” column represents the number of teachers who declined to share their email address and therefore did not receive a survey link. The “% Opted Out” column reflects the percentage of teachers who opted out among all teachers at a given school. The “# Invited” column reflects the number of teachers who received a survey link at each school. The “% Responded” column reflects the number of teachers who responded to the survey divided by the total number of teachers who received a survey link.

Appendix H: Explore School Project Rubric and Reflection Guide

Name _____

Project Title: _____

Adapt this rubric to describe *your* project.

Expectations	Exceeded (Professional Quality)	Achieved (A/B High School Work)	Met (B/C High School Work)	Attempted (Low/Poor Quality Work)
Goals	<p>Student addressed all areas of project proposal thoroughly, specifically meeting stated goals.</p> <p>All standards mentioned in proposal, well addressed in project.</p> <p>Project purpose made very clear.</p> <p>Student exceeded goals of project.</p>	<p>Student mostly addressed areas of project proposal, specifically meeting stated goals.</p> <p>Standards mentioned in proposal addressed.</p>	<p>Student somewhat addressed most areas of project proposal.</p> <p>Student addressed some parts of standards mentioned in proposal.</p>	<p>Project is loosely related to project proposal.</p> <p>Standards mentioned in proposal not addressed or not well addressed.</p>
Research What are the best resources for this project?	<p>All resources are properly documented with both citations and bibliography; notes are present.</p> <p>Attention to quality of resources is apparent.</p> <p>There is a variety of sources</p> <p>People resources are a main part of the work produced.</p> <p>The most recent and valuable sources used.</p> <p>Student goes outside the Avalon environment to do research.</p>	<p>Student documented most sources with citations and bibliography, kept notes.</p> <p>Student demonstrated some attention given to quality of sources.</p> <p>Bibliography showed variety of sources (with a limited use of internet sources).</p> <p>Student connects with an expert (not including advisor or family).</p> <p>Student is able to find at least 2 primary sources.</p>	<p>Bibliography of all sources and notes are present.</p> <p>Quality of sources is acceptable.</p> <p>Project shows a limited variety of sources.</p> <p>Only internet sources are used.</p>	<p>Student documented a few sources used and kept some notes.</p> <p>The quality of sources is not addressed.</p>
Quality of Product How will we all know that this is a high quality deliverable?	<p>Professional quality product shows originality, creativity, and in-depth study.</p> <p>Student generated own idea.</p> <p>There is proof of feedback from experts.</p> <p>Product is delivered to specific audience in the real world.</p>	<p>Student adapted ideas from others for the product.</p> <p>Student got feedback from a number of students and/or adults as shown through drafts or notes.</p> <p>Product created for a specific audience.</p> <p>Signs of Quality Work: 1) 2) 3)</p>	<p>Typical High School work.</p> <p>Student followed someone else's idea for the product.</p> <p>Product is intended for a specific audience.</p>	<p>Poor High School work.</p> <p>No personal interest in final product.</p> <p>No demonstration of awareness of audience.</p>
Process and Improvement What do you need to do in order to turn in your best work?	<p>All parts of the process are completed.</p> <p>Student asked, answered great questions.</p> <p>Student sought out feedback, made appropriate improvements, and can explain creation process.</p> <p>Student shows detailed understanding of information, demonstrates significant thoughtfulness (especially in reflection), and uses information at a high level.</p> <p>Reflection is thoroughly revised and at least two pages.</p>	<p>All parts of project process are completed.</p> <p>Student asked and answered strong questions.</p> <p>Student sought feedback and made key improvements.</p> <p>Most appropriate information is present and understood; student demonstrates thoughtfulness through reflection.</p> <p>Reflection is revised and at least one to two pages.</p>	<p>Some parts of the project process are completed.</p> <p>Student asked and answered questions.</p> <p>Student recognized some things to improve, made some of them.</p> <p>New information was gathered and some thoughtfulness shown in the reflection.</p> <p>Reflection is revised.</p>	<p>A few parts of the project process are completed.</p> <p>Student asked and answered some questions.</p> <p>Student did not seek out feedback for work.</p> <p>Little new information is gathered but no thoughtfulness shown.</p> <p>Reflection is unrevised and less than a page.</p>
Project Management How will you stay on track for this project?	<p>Student always on track w/ deadlines.</p> <p>Learning and time use are precisely documented.</p> <p>Student effectively communicated project progress with advisor.</p>	<p>Student often on track, met most deadlines.</p> <p>Student finished project within one week of finalization deadline.</p> <p>Learning and time use are mostly recorded by student.</p>	<p>Student met some deadlines.</p> <p>Some learning and time documented.</p> <p>Student did most parts of the project process</p>	<p>Student is infrequently on track with time but met final deadline.</p> <p>Learning and time are poorly documented.</p>

Appendix H, *continued*.

EXPLORE SCHOOL REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Title of Project	Student Name	Advisor

Documented Hours	Actual Project Credits	Grade

Rubric: (4=Exceeded, 1=Attempted)

Goals	Research	Quality	Process	Management

Minnesota Graduation Standard/Profile Fulfilled:

(Please list the specific graduation standards you fulfilled.)

Reflection/Evaluation of Work:

(Please spend some time reflecting on your project. While you should address the questions below, please feel free to include any other thoughts you have - the questions are designed to help get you started. Proper reflections should be at minimum two paragraphs and should at least fill the rest of the page. Please send reflection to advisor for edits and feedback BEFORE finalization meeting. Finally, please delete this paragraph and the questions when you are finished with your reflection.)

Questions to consider:

- 1) INTRODUCTION:
 - a) What did you do in the project?
- 2) ACADEMIC MINDSET:
 - a) What are the strengths and weaknesses of your project? or What parts were you excited about or concerned about?
 - b) In what ways did you struggle or overcome a challenge?
- 3) COLLABORATION:
 - a) Whom did you collaborate with on this project and in what way?
 - b) How did this add to the overall quality of your work?
- 4) CRITICAL THINKING:
 - a) What kind of relevant evidence (RESEARCH) did you investigate and what conclusions did you come to? *(continued on next page)*

- b) Can you name one or more ways in which your thinking evolved or changed your understanding of the topic?
 - c) Please attach bibliography or link to works cited.
- 5) EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION:
- a) How did you show what you learned?
 - b) How did you get feedback along the way?
- 6) LEARNING HOW TO LEARN:
- a) How did you do with the process of this project, specifically following tasks you set in your plan and following the project process? What kind of modifications of the plan did you make along the way and how did they work out?
 - b) Based on what you have learned through this project, how will it affect your next one?
- 7) MASTERY OF ACADEMIC CONTENT:
- a) How did you earn graduation standards for this project? (you can mention here or above where they are listed.) You do not need to go into detail about each standard if you can summarize the curriculum areas you addressed and explain how you communicated with an advisor or teacher assigned to that curriculum area.
 - b) Based on your rubric, what grade did you earn, and why?

Student Signature	Advisor Signature	Advisor Signature	Date

Advisory Team Comments: