

**Bringing Parent and Community Engagement Back into the Education  
Reform Spotlight: A Comparative Case Study**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my brother Jeremy who gave me the gift of life. I love you very much and am forever grateful!

## **Abstract**

In this study I argue that educational practitioners and policy makers cannot solve the problem of increasing student learning and growth by organizationally isolating the work of schools from communities. The purpose of this study was to explore which organizational conditions have enabled and which have hindered schools and communities from successfully working together to help students learn and grow. In addition, I explore why some districts and schools continue to struggle with engaging outside stakeholders despite their efforts. I used a comparative case study design and chose to investigate three districts and two schools within each of those districts in order to see how district engagement policies and practices filter down into schools. I used neo-institutional and organizational theories as conceptual tools.

Results showed that district level engagement efforts were loosely-coupled with school level policies and practices. Policies that did exist around engagement were vaguely worded and weakly monitored. In addition, formal policies for engagement were weak and few innovative approaches existed to actively engage outside stakeholders. This study confirms the neo-institutional framework and its usefulness in examining engagement policies and practices.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

*Lest they, like their predecessors, become 'too intramural' and thereby neglect public understanding and participation, reformers who want to change the grammar of schooling today need to enlist the support of parents, school boards, and the community more generally...in a democracy, fundamental reforms that seek to alter the cultural construction of a 'real school' cannot succeed without lengthy and searching public dialogue about the ends and means of schooling.*

*--Tinkering Toward Utopia, Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 109*

Increasing community and parent involvement in education has been a reform theme for the last 30 years. Although the United States has an historical commitment to localized public education that is based on the concept of schools as extensions of communities (Kaestle, 1983, Brunner, 1998), policy makers and educators have differed on the answer to the question, how public is public education? The organization of the U.S. school system is reflective of the underlying democratic assumptions of the public school crusaders and is unique in that the community “owns” the schools. However, even though schools were envisioned as close knit community entities, organizationally and politically, they were formed to exclude (not include) outside stakeholder influences. At the turn of the century, John Dewey attempted to situate the work of schools as extensions of and reinforcements for democratic communities, but with limited success (Dewey, 1915). Educational philosophers, researchers, and reformers repeatedly revisit

the issue of public school “ownership” and what that means for schools organizationally. Even though creating greater links between parents, communities and schools continues to be a struggle it is a recurring theme because it is the responsibility of not just teachers, but also of parents and the larger community to create educated and responsible citizens. How these responsibilities are negotiated, however, differs based on the organizational boundaries that separate schools and communities.

As Tyack and Cuban (1995) remind us, educators run the risk of being ‘too intramural,’ and thus policies have surfaced to attempt to bridge the gap. Most recently, No Child Left Behind required districts and schools to be more open and transparent in their operations, to communicate more often with outside stakeholders, and to partner with parents in the learning process. For example, NCLB defines parent involvement as:

The participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that parents play an integral role in assisting their child’s learning; that parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child’s education at school; that parents are full partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child...” ([www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinvguid.doc](http://www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinvguid.doc))

The policy also required districts and schools to publicly reveal any achievement gaps or areas where academic growth was stagnant.

In addition to NCLB, the US Department of Education (2002) included a parent and community involvement provision in their 11 components of Comprehensive School

Reforms, which states that a CSR program: “Provides for the meaningful involvement of parents and the local community in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities” (Borman, et.al, 2003). As several scholars suggested, however, these reforms, in the majority of cases, were tolerated “only to the extent that participation enhance[d] institutional legitimacy without extracting too many costs” (Anderson, 1999, p. 194; Weiss & Fine, 1993; Blase & Blase, 1999). Therefore, despite the reform rhetoric and policy push for schools to actively engage with families and the community, most schools and districts continue to operate with traditional involvement structures that have not lead to legitimate or meaningful involvement practices (Malen & Ogawa, 1988, Malen, 1994, Anderson, 1998, Driscoll, 1998, Herr, 1999). Many scholars have argued that engagement components of these reforms have not been successfully implemented because districts and schools as organizations have institutionalized a disconnection with their community (Schutz, 2006; Driscoll, 1998; Crowson, 2003).

## **Problem**

With the advent of No Child Left Behind and calls for greater accountability in schools, the problem of increasing learning for all students has taken on greater urgency. Although conflicts, politics, and other dilemmas, have impacted the relationship between families, communities, and schools (Ogawa, Crowson, & Goldring, 1999), I argue in this study that education practitioners, reformers, researchers, and policy makers cannot solve the problem of increasing student learning, growth and achievement by organizationally isolating the work of schools from communities. I base my argument on strong cases

made by existing research that reveal increasing parent and community participation and engagement with schools leads to beneficial outcomes for both schools and communities. For example, several scholars have shown that increasing family and community engagement leads to increases in student achievement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Feuerstein, 2000, Jeynes, 2003, 2007). In addition, other scholars have shown that schools that collaborate and communicate well with their communities have more social capital (Putnam, 2000; Crowson & Boyd, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Chang, 1997; Goldring & Hausman, 2001; Driscoll & Goldring, 2005; Abrams, 2002), a vital component of successful schools. Putnam's (2000) work, for instance, revealed that social capital is highly correlated with student retention rates and standardized test scores.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore which organizational conditions have enabled families, schools, and communities to work together to help students learn and which conditions hindered that process. I used neo-institutional and organizational theories as conceptual tools to explore district and school policies and practices around community and family engagement aimed at increasing student learning. The reason I chose this topic was because I believe schools have always been the most visible organizations that glue families together with their communities. The strength of the glue, however, has always depended on the relational and institutional forces (Arum, 2000) that act on the environment between schools and communities.

## **Research Questions and Significance**

In this study, therefore, I addressed the following research questions:

1. What organizational and institutional structures (culture, policies, and practices) exist at the school and district level that foster or hinder community and parent engagement?
  - a. How do previous experiences with parent and community stakeholders affect current district and school practices?
  - b. How does community involvement fit into the larger reform efforts of districts?
2. Why do some districts and schools continue to struggle with engaging families and community stakeholders despite their efforts?

Answers to these questions are significant for two important reasons. First, the findings help fill several gaps in the literature. Most studies exploring family and community involvement focus narrowly on one or two micro-level strategies such as partnering with a community business or a particular parent involvement program. In this study, I look systemically at existing organizational and institutional policies and practices aimed at increasing engagement between schools and their communities. Because of this, I chose to investigate family and community engagement at the macro- or systems-level by studying districts and schools embedded within those districts. In doing so, I was able to look at how district policies and practices influenced school level

policies and practices. In addition, I was able to explore how other external institutional forces affected the relationship between schools and their communities. As Adams and Forsyth (2007) argued “the literature is not nearly as replete with evidence on effective organizational conditions that enable families, schools, and the community to work together in the educational process” (p. 3). In addition, several studies explored engagement from only one or two stakeholder perspectives – from the parent perspective or from the teacher perspective, for example. In this study, I looked at engagement policies and practices from a variety of outside and inside stakeholder perspectives including community members, business owners, school board members, parents, as well as district and school level staff.

Second, this research is significant because it aims to help inform policy makers and school practitioners about the organizational conditions necessary for improved relationships between schools and their communities, as well as the institutional roadblocks that prevent successful partnering. Several scholars have suggested that there is relatively little research regarding boundary spanning successes and challenges between schools and their external environments (Griffiths, 1979; Hoy, 1982; Ogawa, 1994; Honig, 2003). Third, this descriptive and exploratory comparative case study provides several bases for further research.

### **Study Delimitations and Assumptions**

In any study of this magnitude, a researcher must decide what is included in the scope of research and analysis. In my case, this was especially true because my research



was one sub-study of a larger research study involving several colleagues from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto. The aim of the larger study was to investigate the link between leadership and student achievement and was funded by the Wallace Foundation. In order to distinguish my focus from the larger study, I chose to investigate three districts and two schools within those districts rather than on the complete data set available from the larger study (18 districts and 44 schools). In addition, I chose to focus primarily on answers to interview questions specifically pertaining to school and community relationships.

Because I chose to focus primarily on interview data, with some additional document analysis, I assumed that interviewees were truthful in their responses to the questions. However, I am aware that each person has a unique perspective on situations and therefore compared and contrasted individual answers to questions to look for common themes or outlier responses prior to describing and analyzing each case.

### **Introduction to Conceptual Framework**

In institutional theory, organizations are studied as whole systems that persist over time and adapt to the external environmental forces and influences that act upon them.

According to Selznick (1996),

Institutional theory traces the emergence of distinctive forms, processes, strategies, outlooks, and competences as they emerge from patterns of organizational interaction and adaptation. Such patterns must be understood as responses to both internal and external environments (p. 270).

Institutional theory, then, deals with the relationship between the institution and the environment. Meyer and Rowan (1997) argued that “formal organizational structures arise in highly institutionalized contexts” (p. 530). The premise of neo-institutional theory, on the other hand, is that the rhetoric, policies, and stated practices of an institution do not necessarily mirror the behavior of the individuals within that organization. The organization survives by meeting external demands and by exhibiting a believable myth or façade that legitimates the behavior within that organization. Essentially, organizations maintain a gap between the internal work of the staff and the formal policies and structures set in place by the organization. Arum (2000) also claimed that institutionalists “argued that schools had their own organizational culture and were encapsulated by, or only loosely-coupled to, other organizations in their environment (Meyer & Rowan 1997; Sarason 1971; Weick 1976; Arum, 2000, p. 397-398). I describe neo-institutional theory in more depth in Chapter Two.

## **Definitions**

The following terms were used throughout this study:

**Formal organization.** According to Meyer & Rowan (1983) formal organizations “are generally understood to be systems of coordinated and controlled activities that arise when work is embedded in complex networks of technical relations and boundary-spanning exchanges” (p. 530).

**Organizational environment.** Pfeffer & Salancik (2003) outline three levels of the environment. The first level encompasses all of the organizations and individuals in

the entire system that are connected to or affected by the primary organization. The second level comprises the individuals and organizations that are only in direct contact with the primary organization. This is the level that Pfeffer & Salancik (2003) say that the primary organization experiences their environment (p. 63). The third level of the environment consists solely of the perspectives of those who operate within that organization. Ogawa, Crowson, & Goldring (1999) make a good argument, however, when they say for schools as organizations it is unclear at times “where [the] organizations end and their environments begin (p. 287).

**Organizational boundary.** Ogawa, Crowson, & Goldring (1999) define schools and their relationships to their communities as an organizational boundary. They say that the term boundary conveys “a threshold to be crossed, a difference between something in and something out” (p. 287). They argue that “because organizations are social collectivities or bounded networks of social relations (Scott, 1992), they do indeed have boundaries that set them apart from other social systems. However, the location of those boundaries is at best ambiguous” (Ogawa, Crowson, & Goldring, 1999, p. 287).

**Social Capital.** According to Putnam (2000), social capital “refers to the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Social capital is intricately tied to the notion of civic virtue and how it is embedded within closely tied networks of individuals and organizations (Louis, 2003; Sarason, 1995; Putnam, 2000). In his work, Putnam (2000) distinguishes between “bonding” and “bridging” forms of social capital. He argues that

Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity...Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion...Moreover, bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves (p. 22).

Crowson & Boyd (2001) called this focus on social capital a new conceptual framework of understanding the place schools play in their communities and vice versa. For social capitalists, schools play a vital role in the development of civic minded individuals who see value in the transparency and sharing of vital information and social resources.

### **Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter Two, I provide a review of empirical studies that helped to frame and focus my research. I organized the review using Riley & Louis's (2004) identified reasons why schools and communities should be more intricately connected. In addition, I review the major tenets of neo-institutional and organizational theorists that helped frame my analysis.

In Chapter Three, I provide a detailed description of the methods I used to undertake this study. In this chapter, I describe my research design, sampling procedures, data collection strategy, data analysis procedures, instruments used in the study, and a description of the study limitations.

Chapter Four comprises my results section. This chapter contains three cases of a district and two schools within that district. In the cases, I describe the role that leaders

played in shaping the organizational culture. In addition, I describe the formal structures that existed in each district and school, how the district and school engaged with the community, and the level of influence the community had on the district and school. Furthermore, each case has a description of the level of organizational transparency and communication between district, school and the public. Finally, I describe any partnerships the district and school had with community groups or agencies.

In Chapter Five, I provide a detailed cross-case analysis. First, I compare each case along the dimensions listed above and highlight my findings. Then, I reveal what these cases add to current understandings of neo-institutional and organizational theory.

In Chapter Six, I summarize the study, answer the research questions listed above, provide a general discussion of my findings and suggest areas for further research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **Introduction**

Schools and districts have always tried to manage their boundaries with their communities and with institutional forces in various ways. In this chapter, I review the relevant empirical research on community and parent engagement. In addition, I discuss the organizational and neo-institutional theories that helped frame my research in more detail. This review of research highlights the most current and relevant research to date on how districts and schools have managed their organizational boundaries and engaged outside stakeholders in the educational process.

#### **Organizing Framework**

I organized the research reviewed in this chapter using four of the five emerging themes identified by Riley & Louis (2004). They categorized their quick review of existing research according to theoretical justifications or educational purposes for why schools as organizations should be more closely linked with their communities. Five primary themes surfaced from the existing literature: (1) Parent/community involvement as a means to increase student achievement, (2) schools as agencies for democracy, (3) linking schools and communities as a way of building social capital, (4) linking schools and communities as a moral basis for society, and (5) linking schools and communities as a mechanism to boost school self-interest. Similar to their findings, the fourth category – linking schools and communities as a moral basis for society – did not yield research-

based empirical literature but did yield theoretical/philosophical treatises. Because of this, I used the four remaining categories as organizational themes for the review of empirical research. In their work with community members, students, and school staff in London, Riley & Louis examined participants' core beliefs of why schools and communities ought to be more closely linked. The researchers provided participants with statements of belief that fell into one of the above categories as a means of discussion and as a research tool for analyzing underlying assumptions. The themes and statements used by Riley & Louis (p. 5) are reproduced below (Table 1), minus category four, to give context to the categories used for this review of research:

**Table 1: Assumptions underlying the Organizing Framework**

<b>Focus/Theme</b>	<b>Statements:</b> Schools and communities need to be more closely linked so that
<b>Student achievement:</b> Improving student achievement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. children learn to become more responsible adults.</li> <li>2. teachers understand more about where children come from and what motivates children.</li> <li>3. the curriculum will be more relevant for pupils.</li> <li>4. teachers and parents can work together more closely and help pupils to achieve.</li> </ol>
<b>Schools as agencies for democracy:</b> Making schools more accountable and increasing democratic involvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. schools will be more accountable to their local community.</li> <li>6. local people can have more of a say in important decisions about their schools.</li> <li>7. they can come together to plan for what they want for children.</li> <li>8. young people have more opportunities to be involved in decisions about their lives.</li> <li>9. children have a sense of belonging in their community.</li> </ol>
<b>Building social capital:</b> Building social capital within communities, by encouraging schools to collaborate to promote community well being (e.g. healthier and safer communities)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. vandalism and anti-social behavior among young people is reduced.</li> <li>11. the local area is safer, healthier and more attractive.</li> <li>12. adults as well as children are encouraged to learn.</li> <li>13. parents will feel included in their child's education.</li> </ol>
<b>School self-interest:</b> Promoting schools' self-interest	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>18. discipline and behavior within schools is improved.</li> <li>19. schools will employ more people who understood the local</li> </ol>

through the development of good public relations	community. 20. people will have more information that could help them choose a school.
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(Riley & Louis, 2004, p. 5; see also Kruse & Louis, 2009, p 136.)

I added a final section outlining my theoretical foundation for this study which elaborates neo-institutional and other relevant organizational theories.

In this literature analysis, I found that researchers differed on the primary audience and/or actors identified as the focus of the study. I also found that researchers assumed the school or the district to be the main initiator for engaging with the community. A few of the studies, however, focused on outside organizations as agents for change (Collignon, Men, & Tan, 2001; Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002; Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman, 2005). The literature varied, therefore, on the target audience for change.

## **Methods**

I used an iterative process in locating relevant literature for this review and searched until I reached the point of saturation (Merriam, 1998). I first consulted several existing reviews of literature to focus in on particular articles, themes, and identifying phrases (Schutz, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Riley & Louis, 2004; Tinkler, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). After identifying articles and searching for relevant literature in the reference sections, I then searched first in ERIC using such phrases as “parent involvement,” “community involvement in schools,” “participatory reforms,” “school-community relations,” “school governance,” “school stakeholder,” and “school partnerships.” Parent involvement, not surprisingly, constituted the largest number of hits



in each search engine, with over 11,000 matches, followed by school partnerships (8,000+), community involvement in schools (6,000+), school governance (4,000+), school-community relations (400+), and lastly, school stakeholder, (300+). I used these same phrases to search in Google Scholar, EBSCO (Education Full Text), JSTOR, and Web of Science.

I narrowed my search by focusing only on peer reviewed, empirically researched articles in well-established journals and books that had been written in the last 15 years. In total, my search produced over 500 sources. I furthered narrowed my search by choosing only articles that were methodologically sound and well-argued or theoretically insightful. Additionally, I screened abstracts and skimmed articles first to make sure that they fit the focus of this review – those that linked to family and community engagement for the purpose of school improvement and effectiveness and increased student learning. I eliminated most documents as they did not fit the peer-reviewed criteria, and eliminated other journal articles that did not meet my criteria. In total, I examined 77 sources for this review. Eleven of the 77 sources did not meet my timeframe criteria (Goldring, 1986; Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Malen, 1994; Epstein, 1988; Epstein & Dauber, 1991, Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, Coleman, 1991; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993; Malen, 1994). I included them, however, in this review because they were either cited numerous times in the other literature that I was reviewing, or they contributed greatly to the overall framework of family and community involvement in education.

Next, I put the 77 sources into the following categories: (1) parent involvement, (2) business/community partnerships, (3) school-linked services, (4) community schools, (5) governance structures, and (6) administrator's role in outside stakeholder involvement. I decided to merge the business/community partnerships with both school-linked services and community schools because they all focused on bringing outside community organizations or stakeholders into the school and because the categories were too small to justify reviewing separately. Next, I thoroughly read each article and took notes, and summarized the findings. Finally, I sorted my notes and summaries into the five primary organizational categories, (1) student achievement, (2) schools as agencies for democracy, (3) building social capital, (4) school self-interest, and (5) theoretical framework.

### **Student Achievement**

Twenty-eight of the 77 sources reviewed fell under the thematic category of increasing parent, family, and community involvement for the sake of improving student achievement. The majority of articles that called for increased school-community links as a way to boost student achievement focused primarily on parent involvement. A few researchers used the terms "community" and "parents" interchangeably, while several authors combined them into such categories as school-community-family partnerships, even if the research focused solely on partnerships with parents (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; and Sheldon & Epstein, 2005, Sanders, 1998). Most researchers did not specify broader community engagement, but examined school-parent relationships exclusively

(Feuerstein, 2000, Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007; Fan, 2001, Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Kesler-Sklar, & Baker, 2000; and Patrikakou & Weissberg, 1998; Lee, & Bowen, 2006; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Although the research that fell into this category focused mostly on making a case for increased parent and community involvement as a means to boost academic achievement, many also focused on the reasoning, mechanisms, and obstacles that inhibit schools from reaching out to parents. Furthermore, research was school-centered; meaning that the findings were generated for the benefit of school level personnel seeking to create or bolster parent involvement programs and parent-community-family involvement in school level decision making.

One of the pioneer researchers in the field of parental involvement is Joyce Epstein. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, she produced manuals, articles, and books in which she described a typology of six ways that schools partner with parents and communities. Epstein's framework centered on what she termed her theory of "overlapping spheres of influence of families and schools on students' learning and development and on family and school effectiveness" (Epstein & Dauber, 1991, p. 289, Epstein, 1988). Involvement of parents in their children's education, according to Sheldon & Epstein, (2005) could happen in one or more of the following ways:

1. **Parenting:** Helping all families establish supportive home environments for children;
2. **Communicating:** Establishing two-way exchanges about school programs and children's progress;
3. **Volunteering:** Recruiting and organizing parent help at school, home, or other locations;
4. **Learning at home:** Providing information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related materials;

5. **Decision-making:** Having parents from all backgrounds serve as representatives and leaders in school committees;
6. **Collaborating with the community:** Identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs (p. 197).

Research on schools that are members of the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) revealed that decision-making and collaborating with the community rarely occurred in the schools involved in the NNPS compared to the other types of involvement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Sheldon, 2003). Several researchers used Epstein's framework and model of overlapping spheres as their justification for seeking greater links between schools and communities (Feuerstein, 2000, Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007; O'Connor, 2001; Sanders, 1998; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; and Sheldon, 2003). Thus, Epstein's work served to frame much of the parent involvement empirical research to date.

Using Epstein's typology, many studies looked at the ways parents become involved in their children's schools. For example, the table below from the National Center for Educational Statistics 2002-03 indicated the percentage of parents involved in education at schools in varying forms from attending school meetings to participating in fundraising activities. The numbers point to the importance of socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity as factors impacting parental involvement in schools. For example, Vanden-Kiernan & Chapman (2005) indicated in their NCES study that higher income parents with children in schools at all grades levels reported that the school made it easier for them to be involved than parents who were below the poverty level (See Table 2).

**Table 2: NCES Data from 2002-2003**

Characteristic	Number of students in K through 12 (thousands)	% of parents who attended a general school meeting	% of parents who attended regularly-scheduled parent-teacher conference	% of parents who attended a school or class event	% of parents who acted as volunteer or served on school committee	% of parent who participated in school fundraising.
Above Poverty Level	41,418	90	78	73	45	66
Below Poverty Level	9,970	79	75	57	27	46
White, non-Hispanic	31,931	89	76	74	48	67
Black, non-Hispanic	8,165	89	79	63	32	59
Hispanic	8,250	83	78	61	28	45
Asian or Pacific Islander	1,453	89	78	65	34	61
Other	1,588	87	78	72	40	57

Source: Vaden-Kiernan, N., & Chapman, C. (2005)

Even so, the numbers reported by NCES appear to be quite high for most types of activities, other than the percent of parents who acted as a volunteer or served on a school committee and the percent of parents who helped the school raise funds. In addition, the data appears consistent across groups for the other types of activities such as attending school conferences and general school meetings.

Researchers also explored which factors influenced a parent’s involvement in their children’s education. Several studies revealed that the role construction of parents, or the ways that parents view their role in their children’s learning affected their involvement in their children’s education. For instance, parents that actively believe they have a role to play in their children’s education are more likely to be involved than parents who do not believe or are unsure of the role they can play in helping their

children learn (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005; Sheldon, 2003; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). The role construction of parents was also tied to parental self-efficacy or how parents view themselves – whether they think of themselves as skillful and able to contribute meaningfully to their child’s education or not (Green, et al., 2007). Yet, while parental self-efficacy was a good predictor of whether or not parents were involved in helping their children learn at home, it had a weak and surprisingly negative affect on school-based involvement. Motivations for school-based involvement, on the other hand, were influenced by student and teacher invitations to become involved, and not by a parents’ self-efficacy, even while controlling for parental socioeconomic status (Green, et al., 2007, p. 540). This same study revealed that specific invitations to become involved in school-based activities did not predict parent involvement. However, Green, et.al, (2007) argue that “...parents’ interpersonal relationships with children and teachers emerge as the driving force behind their involvement in children’s education. This finding is important because it highlights the reciprocal nature of parent-child and family-school relationships” (p. 541).

With the accountability movement in full swing, researchers shifted focus from keeping track of instances and types of parental involvement to finding empirically based evidence linking specific parental involvement activities with increased student achievement. The claims made for the importance of increasing parental involvement in education were varied. For example, Henderson & Mapp (2002) argued that students who have involved parents are more likely to (1) earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher-level programs; (2) be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits; (3) attend

school regularly; (4) have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and (5) graduate and go on to postsecondary education (p. 7).

Although most of the articles in this review make the claim that raising student achievement was the primary reason for increasing parent and community involvement in education, the causal evidence was relatively thin (Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994; Mattingly, Prislun, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002). The problem of finding strong causal evidence was exacerbated by the fact that researchers have used a mixture of achievement measures – everything from grades and G.P.A. to standardized test scores to NAEP and other national scale scores as measures of student learning. The findings were further muddled in that some researchers focused solely on one subject such as math, reading, or science, while others focused on aggregated scores. The use of different outcome variables to measure achievement has made it difficult for researchers examining the literature to draw definitive conclusions. For some researchers, different learning outcome measures have led to different results. For example, one researcher found in two studies that using G.P.A. scores as a measure of student success showed greater gains than did standardized test scores (Jeynes, 2003). Jeynes, however, could not theoretically or statistically account for the differences. Similar to his 2003 study, in 2007 Jeynes found that grades and other measures of achievement had more statistically significant results than the studies that used standardized test scores as an outcome measure. This finding could be attributable to grade inflation and so further investigation into this discrepancy is warranted.

Several researchers found correlational evidence for the relationship between parent involvement and increased levels of student learning and achievement (Jeynes, 2003, 2005, 2007; Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993; Hill & Craft, 2003; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Mitchell, 2008; Sheldon, 2003, Fan, 2001; Lee & Bowen, 2006). For instance, Jeynes (2003) examined 21 studies that were specific to minority parent involvement using four different measures of student achievement. He found that parental involvement did, in fact, affect academic achievement for all minority groups under the study but in different ways. Parental involvement appeared to benefit African American and Latino students more than Asian American students. In addition, Jeynes found that “the extent to which a parent read with a child both in the past and in the present positively influenced academic achievement” (p. 210).

Jeynes second meta-analysis (2007) included 52 studies focusing exclusively on urban secondary students. Overall, his analysis indicated that parental involvement does have a significant influence on student achievement for secondary school children. He found that, “parental involvement as a whole affects all the academic variables under study by about .5 to .55 of a standard deviation unit” and “that the positive effects of parental involvement hold for both white and minority children” (p. 82). Even though the effects were positive and significant in this particular study, several researchers concluded that certain forms of parental involvement had a greater impact on student achievement than others. For example, what Jeynes termed subtle aspects of parental involvement such as parenting style and parent expectations had a greater impact on student outcomes than more concrete forms such as parent attendance at school



conferences and other school functions, or enforcing rules at home regarding homework (Jeynes, 2007, p. 100). Similarly, Sheldon (2003) found that activities involving learning-at-home was the only type of activity directly related to higher achievement scores in mathematics. Furthermore, Fan's (2001) and Lee & Bowen's (2006) research concluded that a parent's expectation or aspiration for their children and their own academic success in school were central factors positively associated with academic growth. Feuerstein (2000) rightly indicated that many of these subtle forms of parental involvement were not easily influenced by schools or school level variables.

Lee, Bryk, & Smith, (1993), in their review of factors that influenced children's learning found that parental contributions included "enforcing normative standards concerning education and exhibiting specific behaviors directly connected to learning" (p. 190). These behaviors included tutoring or hiring tutors for children who were struggling, monitoring homework and making sure that distractions were kept at a minimum during homework time, and active engagement in educational choices and programs. All of these parental behaviors contributed to increasing student achievement (Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993, p. 190).

Hill & Craft (2003) found in their study that parental ethnicity was a factor in parental home involvement and the affects that involvement had on student achievement. For example they found that

... for student reading achievement, academic skills mediated the relation between involvement and achievement for African Americans and Euro-Americans. For math achievement, the underlying process differed across ethnic

groups. For African Americans, academic skills mediated the relation between school involvement and math performance. For Euro-Americans, social competence mediated the impact of home involvement on school achievement (Hill & Craft, 2003, p. 74).

In another longitudinal study, Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit (2004) found a positive relationship between parent academic involvement and student's academic aspirations and behavior and achievement but in different ways depending on parents' socioeconomic status. Overall, they found that when parents were involved in their seventh grade children's school, there was a negative effect on eighth grade behavioral problems, but a positive effect on eleventh grade student aspirations.

However, among parents who had a higher level of educational attainment themselves, they found fewer behavior issues overall, which was in turn related to higher aspirations and achievement for students. They also found that for parents with less education, involvement was positively linked to aspirations, but did not have the same affect on behavior or achievement. Furthermore, parent involvement was not statistically significantly related to student achievement for Caucasian parents but was for African American parents. The results of their research suggested that parent socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnicity have different affects on students' behavior, aspirations and academic achievement and that the relationship between parent involvement and student learning and growth was complex.

Several studies in this review focused on ways to strengthen school-community ties and/or partnerships because of the existing evidence that doing so might lead to

increases in student learning (Sheldon, 2003; Feuerstein, 2000; and Kesler-Sklar & Baker, 2000). In this way, research shifted from finding a link between parent involvement and student achievement to examining the quality of school, family and community partnerships on student learning. In Sheldon's (2003) analysis of 82 elementary schools, he found that after controlling for school level characteristics, "the degree to which schools were working to overcome challenges to family and community involvement predicted higher percentages of students scoring at or above satisfactory on state achievement tests" (p. 149). Even though the results were positive, Sheldon fell far short of finding a strong or causal relationship between a school's program outreach and student achievement. Jeynes (2007) found that parent involvement programs positively impacted student achievement. However, the effect sizes for the impact of parent involvement programs on student achievement were smaller than the effect sizes for general or voluntary parent involvement. His research, nevertheless, is encouraging for school staff, parents, and researchers involved in the push for programmatic approaches to increase parent involvement in schools.

A recent evaluation of the evaluations of parent involvement intervention programs have shown, however, that many of the programs geared toward increasing parent-school-community partnerships as a way to bolster student achievement were based on weak evidence (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002). These researchers found "little empirical support for the widespread claim that parent involvement programs [were] an effective means of improving student achievement or changing parent, teacher, and student behavior" (p. 549). The researchers, however, did

not claim that these programs were ineffective; rather they found serious design flaws in the research and evaluation pointing to increased student outcomes. Mattingly, Prislín, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, (2002) claim that “there is not substantial evidence to indicate a causal relationship between interventions designed to increase parental involvement and improvements in student learning” (p. 572). These researchers cautioned against using the evidence of some of these evaluations as justifications for increasing parent involvement.

Grolnick & Slowiaczek (1994) studied how parent involvement affected not only student achievement generally but also how it affected children’s development and motivation in school. They tested “children’s ‘inner motivational resources’ as a mediator between parents’ behavior and children’s school performance...” (p. 238). They found that although parent education was strongly related to children’s intellectual and cognitive factors, it was unrelated to the educational involvement behaviors of mothers, although weakly yet significantly related for fathers. In addition, they found for mothers, direct involvement in school level activities and a cognitive or intellectual involvement in their child’s education predicted children’s motivational resources and their perceived competence in school. In addition, they found that there was a feedback loop with children’s academic performance; the better grades children received, the more parents were involved in their children’s school. Other factors affecting parent involvement in schools included issues such as race, SES, family size, parent self-efficacy, geographic location of school, educational attainment of parents, and grade level of child (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Feuerstein, 2000; Fan,

2001; Lee, & Bowen, 2006; Crispeels & Rivero, 2001; Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007).

Mitchell (2008) argued that “the requirements for parental involvement rest on the premise that schools and school districts will not change unless they receive outside pressure to do so, and that parents acting as informed advocates are key to holding schools and school districts accountable” (p. 2). The current policies at the federal (NCLB) and state levels give legitimacy to this claim in that they mandate parental involvement in education but fall short on describing specific actions for districts, schools, or parents. The next section describes the literature that investigated policies and programs aimed at viewing schools as organizational agencies for democracy.

### **Schools as Agencies for Democracy**

Thirty of the 77 sources theorized that linking schools and communities was necessary to foster democratic principles and mechanisms in schools. This renewed interest in creating more democratic structures in schools was a response to the practice of seeing parents and community members as outsiders or as visitors within the schools, and not as legitimate members of the school community. One mechanism researchers and policy makers used to reframe the relationships between schools and their communities was to hold schools more accountable to their clients (parents and the larger community). According to Riley & Louis (2004), these kinds of arguments were closely tied to the new public management ideology (p. 9). A school that holds itself accountable to their

community, then, must reflect local values and customs, have visible and well communicated indicators of success, and allow parents the choice to leave the school if they are not satisfied with the service (Riley & Louis, 2004; Anderson, 1998, 1999; Mawhinney, 2004). Many theorists, however, have cautioned against equating choice with democratic principles (Anderson, 1998, 1999; Apple, 1995; Lauder & Hughes, 1999; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998). For instance, Anderson (1999) distinguished between participation as consumerism and participation as democratic citizenship. For the purpose of this review, I chose not to focus on literature that equated school choice policies with participation in a democratic society.

Other reformers have argued that schools should not only keep community members and families informed of what happens at school, but schools should also open their doors to more substantial involvement of stakeholders in school decision making. Some saw democracy in action with the recent movement toward devolution of power and authority from the state down to local schools, culminating in outside stakeholder involvement (Anderson, 1998, 1999; Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000). For example, many of the arguments around site-based management, community control of schools, community schools, and school choice are closely tied to this ideology (Riley & Louis, 2004; Driscoll, 1998; Anderson, 1998, 1999; Crowson & Boyd, 2001; and Keith, 1999).

Much of this literature fell under three broad categories justifying parental and community involvement in schools on democratic principles: (1) creating and sustaining democratic communities: (Miretzky, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Goldring & Sims, 2005); (2) community group organizing to put pressure on schools for increased school

accountability (Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, Seema, & McAlister, 2008); and (3) greater accountability by increasing community voice in school decision making – shared power and leadership (Opfer, & Denmark, 2001; Malen & Ogawa, 1998; Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994; Malen, 1994, 1999; Hess, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Leithwood & Prestine, 2002; Møller, 2006).

Miretzky (2004) argued that fostering greater communication between teachers and parents was necessary in order to create and sustain a democratic community as well as to support school improvement efforts. Outcomes of this research suggested that “while parents and teachers did not espouse ‘democratic communities’ per se, the values they expressed as important – investment in the school community, direct and honest communication, trust, mutual respect and mutual goals – all reflected the ‘communication requirements’ of such communities” (p. 814). The results of this particular study suggested that some teachers and parents desired democratic community connections but lacked the necessary language or support to sustain such relationships. The ideals of democratic community, then, are “lived,” according to research, when there are mutual feelings of responsibility, communication, collaboration, ownership, respect and support from school and community leaders (Miretzky, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Giles, 2006).

Another important variable, trust, was found to be a significant factor for collaboration among school staff and with the greater community. Tschannen-Moran (2001) found that “there was a significant link between collaboration with the principal and trust in the principal, collaboration with colleagues and trust in colleagues, and

collaboration with parents and trust in parents” (p. 308). In addition, she found that when schools and communities shared a sense of purpose and exhibited greater levels of trust, there was more outside stakeholder influence in school decisions. Furthermore, Adams & Forsyth’s (2007) research revealed that:

An organizational environment that uses collaboration to bring parents from the periphery of schools into the operating core was a powerful predictor of parent trust. Redesigning the operational framework of schools to overlap the spheres of influence in students’ lives can lead to the type of synchrony within and between role groups necessary for trust...Policies and practices that relegate parents to the periphery of the operating core and that neglect the affective needs of students could have long term consequences on parent-school trust (Adams & Forsyth, 2007, p. 20).

Other research indicated that strong leadership played a pivotal role in the formation of collaborative partnerships between schools and other community agencies and in creating and sustaining legitimate shared decision making (Goldring & Sims, 2005; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Anderson, 1998; Opfer & Denmark, 2001). In 2005, Goldring & Sims found in their study of the Principals Leadership Academy of Nashville “that cooperative inter-organizational relationships can take firm root and flourish under an innovative leadership structure that is grounded in principles of shared power and shared learning” (p. 223). Opfer & Denmark (2001) found that school superintendents largely influenced the relationship between the school board and the surrounding community. In addition to strong support and direction from leaders,



Goldring & Sims (2005) found that “the bridger role” or “boundary spanner” was central to the process of creating successful partnership structures that promoted democratic inter-organizational relationships (p. 245). Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach (1999), furthermore, found that leaders who were committed to facilitative or distributed forms of governance tended to have stronger, more influential school councils. Similarly, Anderson (1998) found in his research on authentic participation that

Principals who were seen as honest, communicative, participatory, collegial, and supportive provided institutional spaces in which a micropolitical culture of authentic deliberation was sustained. On the other hand, with more control-oriented principals, teachers responded with micropolitical strategies of avoidance, defensiveness, and self-protection (p. 593).

In schools that have not taken part in the democratization process of schools, some community groups have banded together to push for more porous walls and greater representation in schools. For example, a more recent wave of community organizing surfaced in an effort to hold schools accountable for their performance, to challenge existing power structures of schools, and to demand more power and voice in school decision making (Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, Seema, & McAlister, 2008). Most community organizing groups focused on low-performing schools or schools that had not been responsive to community demands, and most were affiliated with larger organizing entities that had histories of working to improve communities generally (Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002). In their examination of 66

community organizing groups around the country, Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis (2002) found that:

School reform organizing plays a significant role in creating the political context in which change can happen. Organizing groups focus schools on critical issues, identify and build support for key interventions, and establish a stronger sense of accountability between schools and communities (p. 10).

In a more recent analysis of community organizing groups, Mediratta et. al. (2008) found that educational organizing helped schools expand their capacity to create greater equity in resources, respond to imposed reforms, generate more meaningful community, parent, and youth engagement aimed at increasing student learning.

Educational scholars such as Seymour Sarason (1995) questioned educational institutions that isolated themselves from the larger public and kept relevant stakeholders on the periphery. He argued that greater community involvement was necessary if we as a democratic society adhered to the political principle: “when you are going to be affected, directly or indirectly, by a decision, you should stand in *some* relationship to the decision-making process” (1995, p. 7). Failing to follow larger democratic principles of inclusion and participation, some theorists and researchers argued, has led to the failure of many school reforms – a practice equated to embracing collusion over collaboration (Anderson, 1998, 1999, Sarason, 1995, Louis, 2003). Despite the push for shared power and decision making researchers found a wide gap between the participatory reform agenda and actual practices in schools (Malen & Ogawa, 1988, Malen, 1994, Anderson, 1998, Driscoll, 1998, Hess, 1999; Leithwood & Prestine, 2002). In spite of the formal

policies aimed at increasing parent and community members in decision-making at the school and district levels, researchers found that site-based management, school site councils, and school leadership teams involving parents and community members were not reaching the desired goal of shared power and leadership in schools (Opfer, & Denmark, 2001; Malen & Ogawa, 1998; Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994; Malen, 1994, 1999; Hess, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999).

According to Leithwood & Prestine (2002), the policies and reforms that call for decentralized forms of decision making have underlying assumptions for the roles of the principal and other school leaders. They claim that the community control model of site-based management:

assumes that the school leader's role is to "empower" these people [parents and community members] and to actively encourage the sharing of power formerly exercised by the principal. School leaders, it is assumed, will act as members of teams rather than sole decision-makers, teaching others how to make defensible decisions and clarifying their decision responsibilities. School leaders will also embrace the belief that through participation in decision making, teachers and parents will be more committed to the results of such decision making, and the decisions themselves will be better. The school leader becomes the keeper of the process, not the outcome of the process (p. 46).

Researchers examining formal site-based decision making councils, however, found that establishing structures alone did not bring about shared power and decision making with few exceptions (Møller, 2006; Malen & Ogawa, 1988; Malen, 1994, 1999;

Hess, 1999). Anderson (1998) claims that, “In most management and leadership models, participation is not used to create or challenge goals but to incorporate members into existing ones” (p. 579). Therefore, even though parents and teachers were given authority over certain school decisions, administrators retained control (Malen & Ogawa, 1988, Malen, 1994, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2001, Hess, 1999). In councils that included parents, Malen (1999) found protective politics in that the principal remained in control of decision making regarding the whole school and that teachers remained in power to make decisions over curriculum and instruction. Studies indicated, however, that it was easier for traditional power structures to remain in place when environmental factors remained stable and congenial (Malen & Ogawa, 1988, p. 265). Contrast this finding with the community organizing research mentioned above that found that organizing had the most effect on low-performing schools that were not meeting the needs of students (Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002) and thus had more fodder for challenging existing power structures.

Mitchell (2008) argued that one of the most difficult shifts for schools has been this notion of sharing power by creating strong bonds and partnerships with families and parents. One reason, he claimed, was that schools and districts do not view parents as partners in children’s’ learning. Even though some school personnel may understand the importance of parental involvement and its relationship to student learning, they do not know how to actively engage families and community members in the true partnership process. According to Mitchell, “the foundation of true parent involvement is shared leadership which is often difficult to establish,” (p. 4).

In an analysis of the survey data from the larger Wallace funded research study (of which this research is a sub-study), Gordon and Louis (2009) found that in schools that had more diversity of membership on their building teams or site councils, principals were more open to engaging parents and community members. In addition, principal's personal attitudes and behaviors towards parents and the outside environment in general were strongly related to whether or not parents were involved in decision-making structures within the schools. Finally, results of the research revealed that teacher's perceptions of the level of principal engagement with outside stakeholders mattered; in schools with greater perception of parent involvement, math achievement was higher. Even though the relationship was correlational, results suggest that principals play an important role in creating a culture of shared leadership with teachers and parents which could have an effect on student achievement.

One of the main problems inhibiting schools from creating and sustaining democratic community structures was the tendency for researchers, school professionals, and policy makers to define community as concentric and assume "that as community size decreases, communities become more stable and insular" (Opfer & Denmark, 2001, p. 102). Researchers of community schools in particular assumed that smaller, more homogenous communities were more stable and were better able to operate in more prescribed ways (Opfer & Denmark, 2001; Coleman, 1991). Opfer & Denmark (2001), however, argued that policy makers and researchers needed to broaden their understanding of community and encourage a more eccentric view of schools because "The placement of schools within larger districts, cities, counties, and states makes them

vulnerable to these larger arenas” (p. 102). This idea suggests that participatory reforms based on assumptions of community as narrowly defined may have created policies that are not based on the realities of today’s school system. Social capital theory further illuminates what has led to the gap between practitioners’ and researchers’ conceptions of community and the reality of shifting demographics, and is discussed in the next section.

### **Building Social Capital**

Twenty-one of the 77 sources included the notion of linking schools with communities as a way to build social capital between schools and community groups and agencies. According to Chang (1997), “Social capital is critical to the well-being of any community because its presence increases people’s ability to work together to solve problems that cannot be addressed by individuals working in isolation” (p. 141). Social capital theory suggests that the job of schools is too complex and that pressures from the community are too strong for school staff to go it alone (Crowson & Boyd, 2001; Fullan, 2001). In addition, scholars argue that schools and communities that are mutually invested in building social capital tend to be committed to a common goal and understand that the community is an asset to the schools and that the schools are assets to the community (Chang, 1997). Other prominent social capital theorists view social capital as intricately tied with issues of educational inequality and unjust economic distribution (Shuller, Baron, & Field, 2000).

In his work, Putnam (2000) distinguishes between “bonding” and “bridging” forms of social capital. Bonding refers to homogenous, like-minded groups of people,

and social capital in this way serves to reinforce the homogeneity. Bonding, then, can “build strong ties, but can also result in higher walls excluding those that do not qualify” (Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000, p. 10). Bridging refers to the practice of heterogeneous groups connecting and collaborating together. Although more fragile, the social capital taking the form of bridging is more likely to lead to practices of inclusion (Schuller, Baron, & Field, 2000). The literature for this section includes both bonding and bridging conceptions of social capital and falls into three categories: (1) social capital theory fostering greater relationships between schools and communities by means of capacity building and extending a sense of ownership; (2) social capital theory as a way to illuminate the gap between schools and their communities – mismatch in cultures (i.e., the relationships between predominantly white, middle-class school structures and predominantly poor, minority, and or immigrant populations); and (3) schools building social capital by linking community services and schools (school-linked services or schools as part of community development or community schools).

Researchers see promise in using social capital theories and practices to engage parents and communities to build capacity for partnerships and in creating and sustaining a broad sense of ownership in school improvement efforts (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman, 2005). Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George (2004) claim that “parental engagement ought to be thought of as the mediation between space and capital” (p. 3). These scholars believe that situating parental engagement in terms of the relational phenomenon of activity networks, schools will better understand their successes and failures with engaging parents (p. 3). Giles (2006),

found in her research on the principal's role in fostering parent-community involvement in school the centrality of the notion of ownership. Principals who see parents as equal partners were able to not only foster a greater sense of accountability toward the community, but also able to engage parents and community members in the ownership of the school process. In her cases on exemplary, transformational leadership, Giles found that the principals had "the sheer determination...to foster capacity-building by involving both teachers and parents in activities that directly, or indirectly, impacted student achievement" (p. 278).

Abrams's (2002) research looked at the contested nature of schools in a pluralistic society. He found that:

school interventions seeking to change established practices and ideologies concerning parental involvement can become contested terrain, mediating power relations between parent groups and exposing competing needs and concerns about children's education (p. 384).

Even so, Abrams suggested that schools can help bridge competing groups by developing collaborative structures and working towards involving parents in shared decision making at the school and thus building social capital.

Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau (2003) focused on parental networks as examples of social capital in practice. These researchers found that the social class of different parental networks was a significant variable in determining how parents and schools interacted in problematic situations. More specifically, they found that "middle-class parents...tended to react collectively, in contrast to working-class and poor parents"



(Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003, p. 319). Working-class and poor parents, on the other hand, exhibited “a form of intergenerational closure that is often circumscribed or delimited by kinship” (p. 344). The authors suggest using a “resource-centered conception of social capital” in order to reach all families (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003, p. 319).

Crispeels & Rivero (2001) found in their research on Latino parents that much of the divide between Latino parents and schools stems from a “lack of knowledge of the U.S. system,” and the belief that the practice of teaching is the sole responsibility of schools” (p. 160). Similarly, Delgado-Gaitan (1991) found that “Schools facilitate the exclusion of students and parents by (consciously or unconsciously) establishing activities that require specific majority culturally based knowledge and behaviors about the school as an institution. Frequently, these ideas are assumed and are not made explicit” (pg. 21).

In other words, changing demographics, the influx of non-native English speaking parents, cultural and racial assumptions, and stereotyping low-income and minority parents all lead to the disengagement of parents. Scholars believe, however, that this mismatch between schools and certain lower SES ethnic communities can be bridged by increasing the social capital of parent groups (Crispeels & Rivero, 2001; Peña, 2001). Schools engaged in empowerment activities, rather than involvement activities with parents helped to build the social capital of disengaged groups (Crispeels & Rivero, 2001, Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Peña, 2001). As Delgado-

Gaitan (1991) claimed, “Where sociocultural congruency exists between home and school settings, children have a greater chance of succeeding in school” (p. 21).

To help schools build social capital and bridge the divide between parents, communities, and schools, researchers have looked at the central roles of bridging entities, networks or groups. For example, Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman (2005) found that intermediary organizations play a critical role in building capacity for school-community connections. Intermediary organizations tended to work directly with parents or community-based organizations and effectively worked to foster greater participation in schools. These types of organizations bridge the knowledge gap between parents and schools by providing tools to build parental efficacy so that they are able to advocate for their child’s success in school (Lopez, Kreider, & Coffman, 2005). Similarly, in their research of Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese families, Collignon, Men, & Tan, (2001) found that community based organizations helped parents to better understand the assumptions of U.S. based schools as contrasted with their experiences in their homeland, thus building the social capital of these groups in their efforts to improve relationships with schools.

The third way that schools were engaging in building social capital was by linking outside agencies such as health care centers, community agencies, or other social needs agencies either inside schools or through partnerships (Driscoll, Boyd, & Crowson, 1997). According to Keith (1999), practitioners, researchers and policy makers that call for school-linked services, coordinated-services, integrated services, or community schools should be cautioned in that several, oftentimes competing, discourses linking

schools and community services exist including first, “a deficit perspective of the community as clients devoid of assets and needing services” (p. 225); and second, “Pro-change that saw neighborhood residents as agents for change” (Keith, 1999, p. 225). Linking schools and community services under the first assumption has drawn much criticism. For example, Sanders (2003) found that there had been a lack of involving families and communities in the planning and participation of creating school linked services. In addition, she stated that “contrary to popular belief...there is no evidence that such initiatives are more cost-effective than traditional methods of service provision” (Sanders, 2003, p. 171). One researcher actually found that management costs are increased when schools try to coordinate services (Crowson & Boyd, 1993). Furthermore, Eilers (2002) found that duplication of services was still a problem in schools with linked agencies particularly because a new layer of bureaucratic control was instituted to coordinate schools and services.

The model of community development as a mechanism to link schools and communities was viewed as another facet of schools building social capital (Mawhinney, 2001). According to Blank, Melaville, & Shah (2003),

Using public schools as hubs, community schools knit together inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, volunteers and community partners. Health and social service agencies, family support groups, youth development organizations, institutions of higher education, community organizations, businesses, and civic and faith-based groups all play a part. By

sharing expertise and resources, schools and communities act in concert to transform traditional schools into permanent partnerships for excellence...(p. 2).

Although the research on community schools was extensive, Driscoll & Goldring (2005) were quick to point out that much of it was based on small scale evaluations of individual projects that may not work in different settings. As they indicated, more research on these kinds of schools and school-linked services must be done in order to see the connections between them and improvements in parental involvement, teaching and learning, and student outcomes.

### **School Self-Interest**

The last group of research literature proved less fruitful than the others and dealt with research around linking schools and communities simply as a way of developing good relations with parents and community groups. Although many of the researchers in this category provided rationales such as increasing student achievement, or increasing outside stakeholder involvement in decision-making in schools, their research did not empirically test these assumptions. Instead, these studies focus mainly on linking schools and communities for improving school functions and relationships (Bauch, & Goldring, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Griffith, 2001; Sanders, & Harvey, 2002; Patrikakou, et. al. 1998). Eleven out of the 77 sources fit these criteria. The literature in this section fell into two categories: (1) teacher and other school staff work life and how it impacts parent perceptions, and (2) the role of leaders in creating a school and district culture that is conducive to greater parental and community involvement.

In their study on teacher work life, Bauch and Goldring (2000) found that “creating a caring atmosphere and requiring parent volunteering seem to have a large effect on promoting parent participation as viewed by teachers. Specifically, as expected, teachers working with higher income parents indicate that their schools offer more opportunities for involvement at school than do teachers working with lower income parents” (p. 14). In addition, their research suggests that if the school itself is a supportive environment for teachers to work in, teachers are then more likely to provide parents with information. Therefore, parent involvement is affected by the organization and culture of the schools.

Socially constructed norms institutionalize relationships among teachers, administrators and schools that often lead to negative teacher reflections of parents who are not involved, at least visibly, in the development of their child’s education (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Peña, 2001). According to one study, not only can parental involvement in schools help students, it also has a beneficial effect on parents (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogal, 2001). The role that parents can play in the development of their child in school is shown to enhance the parent’s attitudes about themselves, their child’s school, as well as the school staff (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogal, 2001).

Although negative perceptions persist from some principals and teachers that low levels of parental involvement reflect parents’ low interest in their child’s education, evidence indicates the opposite, that parents, including inner city, low-income parents, generally display positive attitudes toward their children’s educational development (Patrikakou, et. al., 1998). The gap between perceived educational importance by parents

and the lack of direct involvement of some minority and low-income parents indicates that policies, pressures, and programs to fill this void are inadequate.

Some studies suggest that parents do not know how to be productively involved in their children's education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Many believe that it is the job of the districts and schools to inform parents, and organize school and family connections to foster increased involvement. But with the low levels of parental and community involvement in some districts, it can be argued that most parents need direction and help from the schools in order to know how to be productively involved in their children's education (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). The difficulty lies in finding the best possible ways for school teachers and administrators to reach out meaningfully to parents to increase the connection between parents, schools, and the broader community.

Griffith (2001) did a study on principal behavior as it relates to parental involvement. The study suggests that different role constructions of principals matter in terms of parent participation when school student population is taken into consideration. He argues that:

The instructionally oriented role of master teacher and the outward, interpersonally-oriented role of missionary appeared more effective in involving parents among schools having more disadvantaged students. In schools having more FARMS [free and reduced meal students] and ESOL [English for speakers of other languages] students, the role of master teacher appeared more effective in having parents help their children with homework and increasing feelings of empowerment among parents (Griffith, 2001, p. 182).

Furthermore, Griffith found that school context and community characteristics call for different role constructions of principals. Therefore, principals who move around or switch districts most likely need to change their role construction based on context if they want to foster greater parent involvement.

According to Fullan (2001), the role of the principal is increasingly fundamental to the success of any reform. He argues that “the principal has always been the “gatekeeper” of change, often determining the fate of innovations coming from the outside or from teacher initiatives on the inside” (p. 59). Similarly, Louis (2003) posits that leaders were crucial in effectively facilitating community involvement without taking away stakeholders true democratic voices. Crowson & Boyd (2001) and Driscoll & Goldring (2005) call for a rethinking of distributed, shared, and instructional leadership that embraces a broader construction of school and community connections.

Of the research that has examined administrator roles, most looked at the kinds of concrete leadership roles and structures that led to the creation and sustainment of legitimate shared decision making in schools (Goldring & Sims, 2005; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Anderson, 1998; Opfer & Denmark, 2001). Another study focused on the ability of principals to foster a sense of shared ownership of school success, both inside and outside school walls (Giles, 2006).

In his research, Sarason (1995) found that administrators who do seek participation and are successful at creating democratic participatory structures in schools, hold deep underlying assumptions and values about the vital nature of such practices. He states that “in every case respect for the [political] principle was not a matter of formal

policy of the school *system* but rather an unusual and refreshing array of people for whom the principle was, so to speak, second nature” (p. 34).

Sanders and Harvey (2002) found that district actions, policies, and contexts matter in building successful school community partnerships. First, they identified three factors that schools exhibit when they have successful programs that build bridges to the community:

(1) the school’s commitment to learning; (2) the principal’s support and vision for community involvement; (3) the school’s receptivity and openness to community involvement; and (4) the school’s willingness to engage in two-way communication with potential community partners about their level and kind of involvement (Sanders & Harvey, 2002, p. 1345).

Importantly, the research indicated a strong link between a district’s focus on partnering and a principal’s ability to prioritize school-community relationships. In this particular case study, the district committed resources and professional development to help foster support for principals to engage in partnering with communities. More research needs to explore the role of districts in fostering greater community and parent involvement in schools.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Meyer and Rowan (1983) asserted that formal organizations such as schools and school districts are complex systems in which controlled activities are coordinated and bounded. Organizations contain networks of actors that must carry out responsibilities



that are technical and involve boundary spanning (p. 530). They illustrated that schools and districts as organizations are also highly institutionalized. For example, they wrote that

...organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society. Organizations that do so increase their legitimacy and their survival prospects, independent of the immediate efficacy of the acquired practices and procedures (p. 530).

In other words, schools as organizations continue certain practices and procedures that have become institutionalized, even if those practices are not useful, are not efficient, or do not create the desired outcomes. Furthermore, institutions maintain legitimacy and conformity to rules by buffering their “formal structures from the uncertainties of technical activities by becoming loosely coupled, building gaps between their formal structures and actual work activities” (March & Olson, 1976; Weick, 1976; Meyer and Rowan, 1983, p. 531). Organizational theorists also assert that these institutionalized actions affect not only what happens within the walls of the institution but also affect the organizational environments and communities surrounding the institution. Arum (2000) further argued that because schools are organizational communities they are inherently institutional (p. 396). In addition, he stated that what happens inside schools are not only the product of the teachers, administrators, and students working inside the schools, but also involve the larger organizational fields surrounding the school such as state agencies, other public schools, unions, and so on (p. 396). He argued that school policies and

practices may be more influenced by these institutional structures than by the surrounding community or neighborhood.

Neo-institutional theorists in particular assert that a gap exists between the formal structure of an organization and the actual day-to-day activities that happen within that organization. Policies aimed at achieving goals, along with rational theories for how activities are supposed to be carried out, are given formally or informally; yet the activities and actions by people within that institution usually do not fit “the blueprint.” In addition, actors within institutions do not always follow institutional rules; coordination of activities may not be clear or rational, and policies may not be implemented with fidelity or at all. Meyer and Rowan (1977) further argued that formal organizational structures such as schools act out the assumptions and perpetuate the “myths of their institutionalized environment” (p. 341).

Another tenet of institutional theory states that schools across the country have little variation because they tend to be isomorphic or mimic similar organizations in their institutional environments. In other words, schools tend to have similar characteristics with only minor variations in structure and activities. Meyer and Rowan (1983) suggested that institutional isomorphism has consequences for organizations such as:

- (a) They incorporate elements which are legitimated externally, rather than in terms of efficiency;
- (b) They employ external or ceremonial assessment criteria to define the value of structural elements; and
- (c) Dependence on externally fixed institutions reduces turbulence and maintains stability (p. 539).

Bidwell (2001) claimed that there are strong implications for the key role of school and district level administrators since they are the key actors who adhere to and perpetuate the organizational myths within their intuitions by setting the tone and culture, by adapting to the environment and by creating institutional legitimacy.

Using institutional theory for this study helped frame the reasons why schools have adopted many different efforts for engaging with parents and community members that may have not lead to shared power and decision making or to productive partnerships between schools and community members. Even though most comprehensive educational reforms involve a community and/or parent engagement element, most school systems have continued to maintain the legitimized structures as the primary or even only formal or informal policies for engaging with parents and community members. As Ogawa, Crowson, & Goldring (1999) stated, organizations often “respond to the institutional environment by adopting structures that reflect their symbolic compliance with societal values” (p. 290). These policies have included maintaining structures such as a parent teacher organization or a school site council that do not fulfill the goal of engaging more family and community members at the schools level. Instead, many policies and practices continue to relegate parent and community efforts to the periphery of the operating core. Thus, using organizational and institutional theories allowed me to analyze the data and look for organizational structures, policies and practices that are similar in many contexts and persist over time even though the goal to increase parent and community engagement in schools may not be met.

## Summary

This review of literature highlighted empirical research findings of programs and policies aimed at increasing parent and community engagement with schools. Some researchers showed that increasing parent and community involvement may lead to increases in student achievement (see: Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; and Henderson & Mapp, 2002, for example). In addition, several scholars argued that schools that do not collaborate or communicate with their communities do not perform as well as schools that do because they lack the necessary social capital (see: Putnam, 2000; Crowson & Boyd, 2001; and Goldring & Hausman, 2001, for example). Unfortunately, research and evaluation show that these kinds of programs have only moderately increased collaboration and communication between schools and the broader public (see Bauch, & Goldring, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; and Griffith, 2001, for example). School reform researchers have concluded that there is a wide gap between reform agendas involving parents and community members and practices in schools (See: Malen & Ogawa, 1988, for example). Failing to follow larger democratic principles of inclusion, it is argued, has led to the failure of many school reforms (Anderson, 1998, 1999, Sarason, 1995, Louis, 2003).

Existing research in the area of community and parent engagement is far from comprehensive. As mentioned above, the majority of studies exploring parent and community engagement focus more narrowly on school strategies or programs aimed at increasing involvement. Because of this, I chose to investigate outside stakeholder engagement at the macro or organizational level. Adams & Forsyth (2007) argued that

there was a gap in the literature on “effective organizational conditions that enable families, schools, and the community to work together in the educational process” (p. 3). Therefore, I attempt to fill this gap in the literature by answering the following research questions:

1. What organizational and institutional structures (culture, policies, and practices) exist at the school and district level that foster or hinder community and parent engagement?
  - a. How do previous experiences with parent and community stakeholders affect current district and school practices?
  - b. How does community involvement fit into the larger reform efforts of districts?
2. Why do some districts and schools continue to struggle with engaging families and community stakeholders despite their efforts?

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Methods**

In this chapter, I present the research methods used in this study. I used a qualitative descriptive and exploratory case study research design and chose to have multiple comparative cases to investigate district and school organizational practices and policies around community and parent involvement. This study also explored the organizational boundaries and barriers that helped or hindered greater participation of outside stakeholders in schools. Case study methodology was particularly useful in providing a holistic and rich description of different district and school level policies and practices aimed at engaging parents and community members.

#### **Research Design**

In this study, I used a multiple or a comparative case study design which involved qualitative fieldwork methods and naturalistic or interpretive inquiries (Merriam, 1998). In addition, because qualitative researchers look for meaning in context I used an interpretive lens when analyzing the fieldwork data (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). Qualitative research takes place in a natural setting so that the data collected mirrors accurately what is happening in reality and is used as a method to understand complex social phenomenon (Yin, 1994; Creswell, 1998). Case study inquiry, then “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion...and benefits from prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data

collection and analysis” (Yin, 1998, p. 13). Therefore, I collected many forms of data including interviews from multiple stakeholders, and document analysis, in addition to analyzing both school and district websites for relevant information. Also, I used neo-institutional and organizational theories to provide direction and a kind of blueprint for my analysis, but I did not use the theory restrictively so that any questions or themes of the research could emerge from the ground up (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The data were coded and then triangulated in order to help increase the external validity or generalizability of my findings. In addition, some researchers believe that multiple case study designs are more robust than single case designs (Yin, 1998).

According to Merriam (1988), “a qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). Case studies are examinations of bounded systems and researchers focus on the processes in context rather than on outcomes of specific events (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). In this study, I focused on the bounded system of the educational community with three districts and two schools embedded within each of these districts. Thus, my unit of analysis was at the organizational level, but included any outside institutional forces pressuring or interacting with the district or school organizations. The data for the case studies were collected over a period of four years, 2005-2008, so in that sense my cases were bounded within a four year time period. In general, Yin (1994) argues that case study methodology is best used to answer “how” and “why” questions but can also be used to answer “what” questions. In addition, Yin (1994) argues that using a case study

methodology is advantageous when “a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control” (p. 9).

### **Role of Researcher**

Merriam (1998) argues that qualitative researchers must be sensitive enough to understand “how biases or subjectivity shape the investigation and its findings” (p. 23). Qualitative researchers also must be keen observers, extremely tolerant of ambiguity, and highly intuitive (Yin, 1998; Merriam, 1998). However, all researchers carry biases which can limit their ability to see data through multiple theoretical and conceptual lenses. This is especially true in qualitative methods because the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data. In my case, I approached this research from the vantage point of a pragmatist and social constructivist; in other words, I used an interpretive lens (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 1998, Patton, 2002). According to Merriam (1998):

...in interpretive research, education is considered to be a process and school is a lived experience. Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from an inductive, hypothesis- or theory-generating (rather than a deductive or testing) mode of inquiry (p. 4).

I attempted to limit some of my biases by using data that were collected from multiple sources over a period of four years, but also interviewing the same people multiple times, and by triangulating the data in order to increase generalizability.

For pragmatists, knowledge is derived by focusing attention on the social, historical, and political contexts that surround the problem; the world is not viewed as an



absolute entity. I believe that knowledge is not absolute, but socially constructed (although I am highly reluctant to put myself squarely into the post-modernist camp, I do admit that I have post-modernist tendencies). According to Berquist (1993), constructivists believe that there are “specific communities that espouse their own unique ways of knowing” (p. 478). Although I am a constructivist, I am aware of the dangers of extreme relativism. I do believe that we can gain knowledge about contexts, situations and experiences as they are lived by the participants that can help inform policies and practices.

### **Sampling Procedures**

This study comes from a larger study that investigated the link between leadership and student achievement, entitled, “Learning from District Efforts to Increase Student Learning,” funded by the Wallace Foundation. Several researchers from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto were involved in this larger study. For this larger study, school districts and schools were stratified and then randomly selected from across the U.S. to ensure variation in size, student diversity (e.g., race/ethnicity, family income), and district trends in student performance on state accountability measures. School samples included a mix of elementary, junior/middle, and high schools. The case samples for this particular study were derived from a larger pool of districts and schools that were previously sampled from the larger study.

For my sampling, I looked at both the first rounds of principal and teacher survey data [we surveyed 4-5 schools per district] by aggregating the questions having to do with

community and parent involvement and creating a variable called Community Focus. I then identified specific districts by filtering out any that had a Community Focus composite less than 4 (on an Agree-scale). The filter produced a total of 22 districts (eight site visit districts). After narrowing my analysis to specific districts, I then asked all of the senior researchers involved in the larger study to nominate examples of districts with rich data about their efforts to engage communities and families. Three districts were nominated by the researchers because they had been to those districts and believed that they would make interesting and rich cases to examine for community and family engagement. In order to cross-check the nominated districts, I also looked at the composite district level Community Focus scores within each of the nominated districts. All three of the districts had a total composite score of 4 or greater. However, only one of the site-visited schools within those districts scored mid to high on the filtered Community Focus variable for both the principal and teacher surveys. This suggested that although the nominated districts are making efforts to increase parent and community involvement overall, most of the schools we visited to collect data within those districts reported lower levels of engagement.<sup>1</sup> In my sample, then, I analyzed three mid-to-large sized districts (each district resides in a different state) with one elementary and one middle school in each sampled district. I chose to investigate three districts and two schools within each of those districts in order to explore how policies and practices filter

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<sup>1</sup> I found that other, survey-only schools within the nominated districts scored higher on the Community Focus variable, which increased the district composite score. Also, teachers and principals differed on the level of agreement for variables having to do with parent and community involvement. In most cases, principals scored school efforts lower than teachers.

down into schools and how principals and other school leaders made sense of district level policies.

My sample was both purposive and intensive because I wanted to select cases where the most information about community and parent engagement could be learned (Merriam, 1998). Patton (2002) says that intensity samples consist of “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely” (p. 243). This kind of sampling is done when a researcher is looking for rich examples of the phenomenon under study.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

As stated above, this dissertation is part of a larger study conducted by several researchers from the University of Minnesota and the University of Toronto investigating the link between leadership and student achievement. Interviews were conducted at each site over a two to three day period for three consecutive years with the exception of one of the districts in my sample. North White Pines County<sup>2</sup> was recruited late in the study and therefore data were collected in person twice in two consecutive years. Each site visit was an intense examination of leadership in schools and districts and interviews were conducted with a variety of internal and external stakeholders (please see Appendix A for a complete list of interviewees per site visit). During the site visits, researchers met after each day of data collection to talk about the interviews and compare site visit experiences and perceptions. Although I was not personally involved in each site visit for my sampled schools, I did visit and conduct interviews and observations in each of my sampled sites

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<sup>2</sup> Names of schools and districts are pseudonyms.

during the third round of data collection. For one of my sites Glenhurst School District, I served as the lead site visit coordinator and researcher for all three years. For the second round of data collection, the researchers focused on a sub-set of interviewees that included the superintendent, the principal at each school, and various community stakeholders. Classroom observations were only conducted in rounds one and three of data collection.

In addition to conducting interviews and classroom observations, researchers also collected relevant documents such as district strategic plans and school improvement plans, brochures, lesson plans, and any other relevant district or school level data. These documents complimented the interview data and were used in cross-checking observation and interview data (Creswell, 1998). In addition, the conversations among site visit research teams about their experiences after each day at the site served as a kind of validity check on the qualitative interview and observation data and helped enhance each researcher's interpretation and understanding of the site (Creswell, 1998, Miles and Huberman, 1994). Research teams then shared their perceptions of the site with other team researchers in formal and informal meetings. In addition, when each site visit was completed, each research team member helped compile notes and wrote a summary of their experiences in site visit memos that were linked to the overall conceptual framework of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). One piece of the conceptual framework of the larger study – investigating the role and influence of outside stakeholders (unions, community groups, parents, businesses, and the media) on school leadership and school and classroom conditions – served as the catalyst for my study.

For the larger study, principal and teacher surveys were also administered during the first year and the last years of data collection to a larger sample of districts and schools. The first round survey data served as one of the mechanisms used to help select my cases, as mentioned above in the sampling procedures.

## **Procedures**

Prior to data collection, districts were recruited to participate in the study through a formal letter invitation followed by a personal phone call to the superintendent at each site. In sites where the superintendent agreed to participate in the study, written permission was obtained. Site visit recruiters also asked for a site visit coordinator or contact person at each site to help set up the site visit schedules. Site visits were then scheduled at each sampled district and corresponding schools. Research assistants also helped with preparation of site visit materials and logistics for each site visit. During round three of data collection, district office personnel were sent copies of interview themes in order to prepare for the interview. Structured in-person interviews were conducted by a team of one to four researchers at each sampled site (a site included one school district and two to three schools within the district) in the 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 school years. A more structured interview approach was used as opposed to a less structured approach in order to reduce variability since there were multiple researchers conducting interviews in multiple sites (Creswell, 1998). Although protocols were structured, all of the interview questions were open-ended and participants were encouraged to elaborate and give examples. In addition, researchers were also

encouraged to ask probing questions when necessary to elicit more information about any of the outlined topics or themes as time allowed.

Prior to each interview, participants were given an overview of the research study and asked to sign a written consent form to be interviewed and tape recorded. In order to meet Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, interviews were kept confidential and interviewees were promised anonymity. Using a participant-observation approach, each site visit researcher not only tape-recorded each interview, but also took notes during the interview and made observations about the school and classroom settings (Creswell, 1998).

Each site visit lasted approximately two days and was an intense examination of leadership policies, practices, behaviors, and relationships. In a typical site visit, one researcher interviewed district level personnel and other district level stakeholders, and two researchers conducted interviews and classroom observations in one of the schools per day. Interviews were conducted with district administrators, school administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders such as teacher union representatives, school board members, community members, education reporters, and business leaders. I analyzed a total of 149 interviews in my study. For the Glenhurst School District case and their corresponding schools, I analyzed a total of 49 interviews. Similarly, for the Atlas School District case and their corresponding schools, I analyzed 56 interviews. Lastly, I analyzed 44 interviews in the North White Pines County District and their corresponding schools. I did not use three interviews in the Atlas Case or five interviews in the North White Pine County District case because questions about parent and community

engagement were not asked during the interviews due to time constraints or other factors. Although I read each interview in its entirety, only a few questions had relevance to my study in particular. Please see Appendix A for a complete list of the number of interviews conducted at each site by interviewee role (parent, business member, teacher, etc.) for each school year of data collection.

Interview topics for the larger study included questions about leadership roles, practices, and behaviors, larger reform efforts, school and district improvement efforts, specific policies and practices aimed at increasing student achievement, and relationships with internal and external stakeholders. For the purpose of my study, research questions were added to each interview protocol, each data collection year, that asked about the level of influence of outside stakeholders in school improvement efforts, the role of the school in the community and vice versa, as well as questions pertaining to school-community interactions, relationships, and engagement practices. See Appendix B for a complete list of interview questions linked to each of my research questions outlined in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

My data analysis process for this study was multi-phased. First, I created a preliminary coding framework based on my theoretical framework and related literature themes. Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend creating a “provisional start list” of codes prior to analysis that has been derived from the conceptual framework and the list of research questions and other themes and key variables from the literature (p. 58).

Codes “are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The provisional list of codes included both descriptive and interpretive codes. Descriptive coding involves “attributing a class of phenomena to a segment of text;” whereas interpretive coding involves interpretation of underlying motives of actions (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 57). Some of my descriptive codes included such things as (1) organizational characteristics, (2) democratic structures, (3) parental/community involvement activities, (4) leadership style, and (5) partnerships. Some of the interpretive codes I used included (1) norms and expectations, (2) external pressures, (3) trust, (4) organizational transparency, and (5) dilemmas.

Next I began reading through each interview and document and coded for themes and sub-themes based on my coding framework, while allowing for themes that I did not identify a priori to emerge from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Allowing themes to bubble up from the data helped me make sure that I was not missing new information or themes that did not fit into the codes derived from the theory and existing research.

Another advantage of using both a prescriptive and an open data analysis approach was that I was able to avoid narrowing a topic too prematurely. I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program to code each interview and document. After coding the first set of interviews for one of my cases, I discovered that I had too many codes and double-coded too often. I reevaluated my coding framework and collapsed some of the coding categories. See Appendix C for a list of final codes used in this study.



Next, I Identified recurring themes across each case and came up with five themes that cut across all of the data. These themes included, (1) role of leadership in shaping organizational culture, (2) formal structures, (3) community and parent engagement and influence, (4) organizational transparency and communication between district/school and public, and (5) partnerships. Then, I looked for patterns and themes across each of the cases. First I conducted a within-case analysis and then I did a cross-case analysis by each of the emergent themes. Lastly, I looked for patterns that either fit or did not fit with organizational and neo-institutional theories and analyzed the data based on the conceptual framework.

According to Yin (1998), internal validity has to do with establishing causal connections or relationships and is most appropriate for causal studies or explanatory studies. Although my research questions do not address issues of causality, I attempt to explain why some districts and schools struggle to engage parents and community members, despite their efforts. In order to enhance the internal validity of my study, I used multiple interviews and sources to cross-check my analysis and I triangulated the data. In addition, because this study was a collaborative effort with many researchers interpreting the data and comparing notes about the site visits and observations, the internal validity of my findings were enhanced (Merriam, 1998, p. 205).

### **Instruments for the Study**

For the larger study and for my sub-study, structured interview protocols were used for each interview. For the first round of data collection, nine different interview

protocols were developed corresponding to the different roles of respondents. For each site, the following interview protocols were used: (1) district business and community member, (2) district school board member, (3) superintendent and other district staff, (4) district union member, (5) school principal, (5) lead teacher, (6) teacher, (7) parent representative, (8) school support staff, and (9) community representative. In round two of data collection, three new interview protocols were developed for the superintendent, principal, and community stakeholder. Lastly, in round three, new protocols were again developed; one for the superintendent and other district level staff, one for principals, and one protocol for teachers.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Using case studies as a research design has both strengths and limitations. This study was delimited not only by the larger study sampling mechanisms and by the districts that agreed to participate in this study but also by choosing to focus on only three districts and their two corresponding schools.

As Creswell (1998) pointed out, limitations of any study denote potential areas for weakness in both the design and analysis. There were several limitations in this study. First, even though I used survey data to help select my cases, the sample was purposive in that I also asked lead researchers in the study to nominate districts that would provide rich descriptions of parent and community engagement policies and practices. Therefore, the findings of my study were limited in their external validity or generalizability. However, as Merriam (1998) argued, "...a single case or small nonrandom sample is

selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (p. 208).

Second, the study is further limited in that most of the community and parent level informants were nominated by district and school level staff. In the first year of data collection, researchers asked each district and school to choose parents and influential community members for researchers to interview. Since district and school level contacts chose the community level interviewees, the data may be skewed more positively in favor of school or district engagement policies and practices. In many of the cases, for example, the parents chosen to participate in this study were existing members of school governance structures such as PTO/A, school improvement committees, or site councils. Furthermore, the community and business contacts were ones that already had a relationship with the district or school in some way. However, during year two of data collection, researchers did invite several business or community group members that were not interviewed during the first round to participate in the study. These included community or business members that were mentioned by interviewees during the first round interviews as being influential at an organizational or a policy level. However, not all of the people that were contacted agreed to participate in an interview. Therefore, the number of outside stakeholder interviews varied by site.

In Chapter Four, I present the results of this study and tell the stories of three districts and two of their schools in their efforts to engage parents and community members in the educational process. The first case is Glenhurst School District, Rawls

Elementary, and Heritage Middle School, located in a western state. The second case is North White Pines County, Maple Island Elementary, and Country Grove Middle School, located in a Southern state. Lastly, the third case is Atlas School District, Sentinel Elementary, and Butler Middle School, located in a Midwestern state.

## Chapter Four

### Results

In this chapter, I present the results of three case studies of district and school efforts to engage with parents and community members. Each case consists of one district, one elementary school and one middle school within that district. The following demographic information provides a contextual framework for the cases under study:

**Table 3: 2006-2007 District and School Demographic Information**

<b>Demographics</b>						
	<b>Case One: Glenhurst School District [Western State]</b>		<b>Case Two: North White Pine County School District [Southern State]</b>		<b>Case Three: Atlas School District [Midwestern State]</b>	
<b># Schools</b>	51		33		64	
<b>Enrollment</b>	37,719		23,351		32,934	
<b>% Minority</b>	40%		39%		21%	
<b>% FRPL</b>	30%		42%		33%	
	<b>Rawls Elementary</b>	<b>Heritage Middle</b>	<b>Maple Island Elementary</b>	<b>Country Grove Middle</b>	<b>Sentinel Elementary</b>	<b>Butler Middle</b>
<b>Enrollment</b>	458	980	385	551	280	844
<b>% Minority</b>	52%	48%	73%	42%	25%	34%
<b>% FRPL</b>	63%	37%	69%	48%	46%	40%

Sources: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and state departments of education websites

The first case takes place in the largest school district, Glenhurst, located in a Western state with the greatest percentage of non-white students (40%), but with the lowest percentage of students on free or reduced price lunch (30%) in the sample. Although this district serves the greatest number of students, they have a smaller number of schools with larger enrollments than the second largest district in the sample, Atlas (Case Three). Case Two's North White Pine County, on the other hand, takes place in a Southern state and is the smallest district in this sample, but has the highest percentage of students living in poverty (42%). Case Two's Maple Island Elementary School has the highest

percentage of minority students (73%) and the highest number of students living in poverty (69%) of all of the schools in the sample. Although Country Grove Middle is the smallest middle school, it has the largest number of students on FRPL (48%) of the sampled middle schools. Lastly, Case Three's Atlas School District is located in a Midwestern state and has the lowest percentage of non-white students (21%) in the sample, but a comparable percentage of students living in poverty (33%) as Case One's Glenhurst School District.

I organized the following cases using the recurring themes from the theoretical framework and the literature review that cut across all of the data. I first give an overview of the case and the major themes that emerged. Next, I analyze the case along the following dimensions: (1) role of leadership in shaping organizational culture, (2) formal structures, (3) community and parent engagement and influence, (4) organizational transparency and communication, and (5) partnerships. Lastly, I summarize each case and present the major findings. In the next chapter, I present a cross-case analysis of the three cases.

## **Case One: Glenhurst School District, Rawls Elementary, and Heritage Middle School**

### **Overview**

In the following case, Glenhurst District and Rawls Elementary School were organizationally open to greater parent and community involvement. Each leader emphasized accessibility, communication, visibility, and transparency. At Heritage

Middle School, on the other hand, the principal was satisfied with the status quo of working with a small group of elite parents and did not prioritize increasing parent and community engagement, except when she needed to wear her public relations hat. Overall, neither the district nor their two corresponding schools put much effort into partnering with businesses or community groups and as a whole struggled with engaging larger and more diverse groups of parents.

At the district level, when Superintendent Brad Cameron<sup>3</sup> came on board in 2003, Glenhurst went through a lengthy process of sense-making and self organizing around the mission and goals: to increase student literacy in reading and mathematics. The superintendent opened the district up to greater outside stakeholder influence by creating avenues for parents and community members to get involved in formal governance structures, although the level of power and influence of these groups varied tremendously. In addition, the superintendent and other staff reached out to and communicated with community groups and parents on a regular basis. The community itself became active and involved in decisions primarily when they disagreed with district programs or policies. Although the district had several ways for parents and community members to get involved, they struggled with engaging low-income and minority parents and lacked productive partnerships with local businesses.

At the school level, Rawls Elementary went through one principal turnover during the three year span of this research. The first principal, Howard Murphy, was neither good at nor interested in engaging with parents. Because of this, the level of trust both within the organization and out in the community was low. When the new principal, Margaret Quinn, came to the school, however, the level of trust improved because she

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<sup>3</sup> As with district and school building names, names given to school personal are pseudonyms.

made increasing parent engagement a priority, communicated often with parents, and instituted new practices aimed at bringing more parents into the school. Even though the new principal made inroads in increasing engagement, the school still struggled with involving more diverse parents. In addition, the school did not partner with businesses or community groups.

Heritage Middle School, on the other hand, was thought of as the district's "ghetto school" and so when the current principal, Susan Collard, came on board in 02-03, she worked on changing the culture by selling the school to its clients and by always wearing her public relations hat. Inside the organization, however, decisions were relegated to a select few and some teachers called the process secretive. Teachers also said that the principal only listened to the elite parents who were part of the Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO), and did not do a good job of communicating with parents generally. Heritage, like Rawls, did not have school partnerships with community groups or businesses.

### **Role of Leadership in Shaping Organizational Culture**

In this case, the role of the superintendent and of the principal proved critical in setting the tone and culture of the organization for increasing engagement with parents and community members. At the district level, the superintendent changed the culture of Glenhurst when he first came on board. One district administrator described the culture of Glenhurst as "engaged," "lively," and "a little chaotic." One of the first organizational shifts occurred when he transferred power from the district level down to the school, giving principals more power than they had in the past. Although this shift in power made



some principals nervous at first, many reported that they felt empowered to take on greater roles in setting policy agendas. Because of this organizational shift, however, the responsibility for engaging with communities and families was left exclusively to principals and teachers. Although the superintendent recognized this, he said he hoped his modeling of outreach and visibility set the tone for the schools and encouraged the principals to engage in the same kinds of activities.

According to one administrator, the level of trust in the district increased when Superintendent Cameron joined the district. During the previous administration, staff was afraid to state their opinions, but with the change in leadership staff reported that the district was more relaxed and open. Interviewees used such words as collaborative, open, visible, and accessible, to describe Superintendent Cameron.

Trust in the district improved not only within the district but also in the schools. According to one community business stakeholder, word spread throughout the community that the superintendent was spending significant time in the schools, “really getting in there, getting his hands dirty, lots of time in classrooms, and understanding the true capacity and challenges the staff were dealing with.” Several community level interviewees spoke highly of the superintendent’s hands-on approach and reported he was well respected in the community because of his willingness to be visible and accessible in the schools as well as in the greater community.

At the school level, the role of the principal also proved essential in building trust and in creating an environment conducive to parent and community engagement. For example, at Rawls elementary, a critical shift occurred in the culture when an old principal left and a new one came on board. The previous principal, Howard Murphy,

was not skilled in connecting with or reaching out to parents and community members. Under his leadership, membership in the PTO shrank to only a handful of parents and teachers, and community distrust of the school was at an all-time high. One teacher said, “He is terrible. He is maybe the worst administrator at making community connections you will ever see in your life.” Teachers said that Principal Murphy’s ineptitude made their work to engage with families harder. The dynamic between the principal and parents created a contentious environment for teachers that felt compelled to defend the principal for the benefit of the organization as a whole. Principal Murphy was removed from the school after only two years as principal.

With the hiring of the current principal at Rawls, Margaret Quinn, relations between parents, community members, and the school improved dramatically. Teachers reported that she was visible and involved in all school events, especially those that included families. During her tenure, membership in the PTO increased and trust within the organization improved. Teachers praised Principal Quinn’s communication style, her openness, and her efforts to restore trust both within the school and with parents and community members, creating a more inviting school culture. For instance, one teacher described the new culture as “welcoming with plenty of opportunities for continued growth,” “free of cliques,” and a “risk taking” environment. In another teacher’s words, Principal Quinn “created an open communication line” between the district, school, and families.

At Heritage Middle, on the other hand, when Principal Collard was hired, the school had a reputation of being a “ghetto school,” and was one of the lowest achieving schools in the district. The principal’s primary goals were to change the culture and

reputation of the school and increase student achievement. Interviewees reported that the principal focused on accountability and used student achievement data to set improvement goals. Although the principal set a tone of urgency for the school to increase student learning, she did not include parents or community groups in the process.

Principal Collard reported that historically teachers in the school were resistant to change and especially to outside influences. She said that in the past the school was reluctant to try and “sell itself” to the public and that changing the school was a difficult and ongoing task. Even though the principal set out to change the culture of the school, several teachers were mixed on the principal’s ability to create a trusting and inclusive school environment. One teacher said that the decision-making structure in the school was not democratic, and called it “secretive.” For example, all teachers reported that Principal Collard did a poor job of engaging parents and teachers in decisions about staff cuts. Because of this, there was a backlash both within the school and out in the community. In general, teachers reported that the principal tended to only listen to a small group of parents that were on the PTO and did not consider the opinions of the whole staff or parents generally.

The assistant principal also reported that Principal Collard did not communicate her vision and goals for the school well either within the organization or out into the community. Another teacher said, “I think that is the main complaint of most teachers in terms of how we deal with our principal. Communication is key, [but] it doesn’t always happen as much as we’d like it to happen.” Unlike at the district level or at Rawls, the

middle school principal did not create an open and trusting environment that was conducive to increasing parent and community engagement and trust in the school.

### **Formal Structures**

Glenhurst had three formal ways for parents and community members to get involved at the district and school levels: Elected Local School Committees (LSCs), Elected Site Councils, and Parent Teacher Organizations. Every two years, three community members were elected to the LSC through county government elections. The superintendent described the LSCs as “mini school boards” that helped run the school. Superintendent Cameron met with the LSCs approximately every two months to talk about their work and to listen to their concerns. Although several district level players reported that the primary role of the LSC was to review applications for and manage district facilities use, some said their influence extended beyond facilities management. For example, members of each LSC provided input into district issues such as construction bonds and boundary changes for schools with capacity problems. Although members of the LSCs did not have a formal role in policies relating to curriculum or instruction, they used their position and power to influence the district and the schools in various ways. For instance, the LSCs of all schools banded together to complain about a district math adoption. According to the superintendent, the LSCs:

have some pretty good governance power at their local school sites....probably of all groups, that is the one we [at the district] are most concerned about doing something [about their concerns] and I find at the end of those meetings, I’m pretty exhausted compared to some of the others.

The LSCs made recommendations directly to the superintendent and district policy stated that it was the superintendent's responsibility to respond to the recommendations of the LSCs.

In addition to the LSCs, the district mandated that each school have an elected site council (50% teachers and 50% community members) that was involved in setting direction for school improvement. According to district level staff, both the state and the district put a lot of time and effort into giving the elected site councils credibility and making sure that they had community representation. One district staff member said of the site councils, "... you have to maintain a democratic public education system; you have to have the public involved." By state law, site councils were responsible for staff development as well as school improvement planning, including setting goals for increasing student achievement. Superintendent Cameron met quarterly with all members of the site councils to listen to their ideas and concerns and to have them update him on each school improvement plan process.

Aside from the formal elected LSCs and site councils, every school was mandated to have a parent teacher organization designed to include parents in the operation of schools. The influence of the PTOs, however, varied tremendously. Although the district did not try and control the level of influence parents had in schools, district interviewees talked about the importance of involving parents in school improvement efforts and in helping to increase student learning. In addition the district created a formal community involvement office, with a full-time district level administrator who worked with community and business agencies, PTOs, and individual parents. The administrator for community involvement said that it was district policy to provide training, albeit

voluntary, for leadership on how to organize and generate more parental involvement at individual school sites.

Despite district efforts, the level of influence of these formal structures varied at the school level. For example, At Rawls under Principal Murphy's tenure, the PTO involved only approximately 10 parents, even though, as the principal stated, about five of the parents shouldered 90 percent of the work for the organization. In his view, the PTO was strong, had a good foundation and was normal for a PTO, and so he did not make much of an effort to reach out to more parents. During his tenure, the PTO focused mostly on organizing holiday parties and other social events for the school.

Things changed when Principal Quinn came on board. She devised a strategy for increasing formal involvement by tying family night to PTO meetings and by serving dinner. The principal reported that once a month, the school invited families to dinner and after dinner offered math and literacy classes for parents. After the classes, the PTO met and all parents were invited to stay for the meeting where they served dessert as an incentive for parents to stay. Members of the PTO worked with the principal on school improvement issues.

The site council at Rawls elementary worked with the principal to create and revise the school improvement plan every year using district guidelines. The members of the site council spent a lot of time reading current research and working the findings into their school improvement plan. In addition, the council focused their efforts on linking curriculum to district and state standards and then incorporating that into the classroom. The local school committee, on the other hand, was comprised of elected parents and

community members whose only job it was, along with the principal, to manage school facility use.

At Heritage Middle, the main responsibilities of the PTO were to raise funds for the school and then award mini grants or request for funds (RFFs) to teachers that applied to use the funds for various classroom and whole school projects or activities. In addition, the PTO coordinated parent volunteering in the school. Teachers perceived the PTO as fairly influential because of their power to award RFFs and because the members kept up with how the school was doing academically. The Heritage PTO president, however, reported that she and other members mainly spoke with the school secretaries, occasionally interacted with teachers for the coordination of volunteers and RFFs, but that they only interacted with the principal on occasion. PTO parents were used as support for staff in helping with newsletter mailings and calling absent students.

Although the site council at Heritage was in charge of working on the school improvement plan, one teacher reported that the council had very little influence in the school. Once plans were created, they were never revisited again and were not used on a regular basis. Similar to Rawls, the primary responsibility of the local school committee at Heritage Middle was to be in charge of facilities use and building management only. Overall, the level of power and influence of these formal governance structures were minimal at the two schools. The LSCs had the greatest amount of influence at the district level because they banded together as one cohesive group to protest district programs that they did not support, but their influence at each school site was minimal.

## **Community and Parent Engagement and Influence**

Glenhurst and the two schools within the district all tried different ways of engaging with parents and community members but with varying success. For example, to gauge community perceptions of their progress, the district sent out evaluation forms to parents, randomly selected every other year. During the off years, the district hired telephone interviewers to get feedback from parents. The evaluation results were given to district executive administrators who sat down with each principal to discuss areas for improvement. One executive administrator said they used the evaluation forms as one way of comparing what was happening in the schools with the perceptions of the district's customers. In addition to the annual evaluations, Glenhurst school district invited the community to weigh in on all curricular adoptions. Furthermore, the district website featured postings seeking parent and community input on district programs and planning.

Although the district sought community level input, staff did not always know what to do when outsiders exerted their influence. For example, the assistant superintendent mentioned that more affluent parents often banded together if they did not like something and bombarded the district with phone calls and e-mails. She said that [district staff] "really have to listen to parents that are unhappy...They tend to form these e-mail vigilante groups behind the scenes. They will just really bombard you with extremely threatening messages." Even though this kind of community organizing could be intense and narrowly focused, the assistant superintendent said that all community member concerns should be heard and vetted in order for the district to improve student



learning. Referring to the turmoil around the math adoption that was mentioned above, the assistant superintendent said:

I'm starting to work with them [the community] a little differently...Part of it is in training the school community in how to be collaborative and how to make decisions together... I am forming task forces of these parents who are concerned and upset...They are helping frame or inform our program evaluation and then the interventions we selected.

Another district leader described the community as very demanding but in a positive way. Because of the external demands, the assistant superintendent said that the district was doing "more outreach than ever before." The school board vice chair said that the democratic process of allowing all voices to be heard was valued by the district, even though it slowed the process down.

Although most district staff and school board members viewed having a vocal and influential community as favorable, a leader of the teacher's union said that the amount of external stakeholder power had a negative effect on the district. In her experience there was little protection or buffering from that pressure. When asked about the level of influence of parents, she said, "When parents get on the warpath about a single issue or a single teacher, they can draw a lot of attention to someone and make them really uncomfortable." She said she would rather have parents organize around such things as parent volunteering, or other areas that in her view were more supportive of the schools. Despite some backlash from the teacher's union, the district tried hard to work with several competing interests.

On the policy front, Glenhurst District had several policies about engaging parents and community members – some generated more recently because of the No Child Left Behind Act, and other policies around parent volunteering dating back to the 1970s. However, the policies were vague. Despite some instances of community organizing, the district struggled to bring in a representative group of community members centrally to help guide district decisions. The stakeholders that had the most power and influence came from more affluent, white, and middle- to upper-class communities.

Organizationally, the district responded to this problem by creating a welcome center for families who did not speak English. The welcome center offered interpreters for the majority of the languages spoken in the district as well as transportation and childcare for parents who wanted to attend district and school level meetings. The welcome center also functioned as a kind of social service agency by providing help for families looking for housing, medical attention, and other services. The superintendent admitted, however, that the center was not used as much as they hoped, especially by the Hispanic population.

Somewhat similar to district practices of eliciting input, Principal Quinn at Rawls Elementary School regularly monitored how well the staff believed they were doing with engaging families and creating a parent friendly school environment. She did this through an evaluation survey she gave to all administrators and staff. Results showed that the principal rated the school much lower than the rest of the staff. She used the results as a discussion tool to brainstorm new ways of engaging families. Based on the evaluation results, the principal decided to add a morning coffee for parents in addition to the dinner

event tied to the PTO meetings. Her goal was to create an environment where parents felt welcomed and comfortable enough to have informal chats with her and with staff.

To try to engage more families, Rawls Elementary also hosted family education nights five to six times per year. The purpose of these nights was to help teach parents the skills they would need to help their children learn at home. One teacher explained what they did on literacy night:

We specifically talked about what they [the parents] can do and we modeled it. We have these document cameras so we modeled different levels of text; how they could skip a word and come back to it and how they could sound out a word. We assume these parents know these things but we don't know unless we teach it to them.

Individual groups of teachers also came up with innovative ways to educate parents so that they could work with their child at home. For instance, a group of teachers made a DVD that featured one-on-one lessons in which the teachers talked to the camera and explained exactly what they were doing so that parents could follow along. The teachers also gave parents a packet of materials to work along with the DVD.

Despite these engagement efforts, the same groups of middle- to high-income, predominantly white parents came to volunteer at the school. One teacher said that the principal made it clear to teachers that they should not interpret the lack of parent volunteering or helping with homework as a sign that parents did not care. Rather, her message to teachers was to keep parents informed about what was happening in the school and let parents know how their child was doing academically on a regular basis.

At Heritage Middle, Principal Collard struggled to communicate with demanding parents. She said that when she first became principal at Heritage, she was very

intimidated by the parents because they put a lot of pressure on her and wanted to know what she was going to do about some of the major problems at the school. She said that, “there must have been 60 parents here for this coffee and they were very demanding.” Because of the demands, Principal Collard reported that she had to wear “her PR hat” and “sell the school” to the parents. She said that her goals for her first year as principal were formed by the demands of the parents at the morning coffees. When speaking about the kinds of parents who attended these coffees, the principal said that many of them were white and affluent and that they were a very close network. Although not all parents were able to attend these meetings, Principal Collard used the morning coffees as her way of communicating school issues to parents.

Besides the parent coffees and the more formal governance structures mandated by the district, Heritage Middle tried to engage parents by hosting family nights where they served spaghetti dinners. These nights were primarily social gatherings and a way for staff and parents to communicate informally. Heritage also hosted some family education nights where teachers pre-taught math to parents so that they could help their child at home. The turnout for the education nights, however, was low. In addition, the school switched from having traditional conferences to having student-led conferences in an effort to engage more families. Principal Collard said that she believed the student-led conferences changed the relationship between the school and the community and made the two more “interconnected to each other.”

Principal Collard and Heritage teachers also tried to recruit more parent volunteers for the school but admitted they had a hard time recruiting more low-income and minority parents. One of the problems was that many of the teachers equated

volunteerism with parental caring about the school and about their own child's education. One teacher said, "We have had very few parent volunteers... But the majority of parents, I don't hear from [them]. And it's almost kind of distressing with the parents you really wish would reach out a little bit more, and they don't." Principal Collard reported that her teachers had a low level of understanding about the difference between parents caring about their child's education and having the ability to be volunteers or communicate frequently with teachers. There was no evidence, however, that the principal was working hard at combating the misconception. The level of parent engagement, according to teachers, was left up to each individual teacher and varied widely throughout the school. Communication usually happened when students were in trouble behaviorally or academically. By the third year of this study, Principal Collard was still talking about ideas she had for engaging more families, but had not put anything into practice.

### **Organizational Transparency and Communication between District, School and Public**

The superintendent and the principal at the elementary school worked hard at communicating with the public and maintaining transparency within the organization. At the middle school, however, the principal maintained a more closed system and did not engage in effective communication strategies.

At the district level, the superintendent worked hard at organizational transparency and open communication between the district, schools, and the public. He met with several stakeholders throughout the year to discuss district directions and goals

and to gather public input. For instance, the district held regular meetings with “key communicators” every two months. The key communicator meetings included a broad spectrum of community patrons, such as business leaders, retired employees of the district, retired citizens, past superintendents, and a small group of parents. During these meetings, district leaders brought up any burning issues from around the district and gathered stakeholder input and advice. According to the superintendent, the key communicator meetings were open to any person as long as they committed to being a member and attended the majority of meetings. He said that the district had been adding people consistently to the group and in the last year had approximately 60 members. Besides meeting regularly with the key communicators group, the district superintendent also met regularly with a community clergy group as well as different ethnic groups of parents every month.

Furthermore, Superintendent Cameron, along with other district leaders, held regular listening sessions in the community. The meetings took place in different parts of the district and were open to anyone. The superintendent stated that the listening sessions created a venue for the district to present to the public what was happening and for district leaders to hear community members’ issues and concerns. He said, “It’s that communication piece that’s so essential...and you’re just taking notes and you’re not saying, we’re going to solve every problem that gets brought up, but at least the problem has gotten some airing.” When asked how he mediated all of the different stakeholder needs, Superintendent Cameron responded that:

A lot of times the people aren’t exactly expecting you to do something, but they do want you to hear. So I think my job is really to listen and get the pulse. Then

look at what changes and improvements can we make based on that. To gain more understanding, to gain more trust... It's important enough for the superintendent to hear you or the assistant superintendent or the principal...A lot of it is about being a really good listener...it's another night of learning more about the community.

The superintendent was also committed to a 24 hour turn around policy for community e-mails to keep communication flowing. According to the school board chair, "The biggest thing is not just his [the superintendent's] transparency in what he does, but that he spends so much of his time out in outreach mode." This kind of outreach was not present in the previous administration. The board chair reported that, "The communication lines are much more open and free where people can go ahead and run something up the flag without getting too worried about getting their head slapped."

The local education reporter noticed a shift in the organization as well. He said the media were very involved, and welcomed, in the district. Many district level leaders said that the media reporters worked hard at finding the positive stories happening in the district. From the media's perspective, the transparency and communication within the organization improved dramatically with the new administration.

At the school level, communication among staff and between staff and parents improved dramatically at Rawls under Principal Quinn's leadership. When she first came she held informal open houses with parents where they served food to get parents to come and to try and get to know her better. The principal said that after word spread, more and more parents came to the open houses and dinners. One teacher said that Principal Quinn "understands the community as a whole. She is very well in touch...She is constantly on the phone with them and e-mailing [them]."

Increasing communication was a key goal for the whole school. Teachers said that the principal's expectations for parent engagement were clear and that she did a good job of keeping them informed about her expectations. Teachers were required to send newsletters to parents at least one time per month, but many of the teachers communicated more frequently by e-mail and phone.

At Heritage Middle, on the other hand, expectations for engaging with parents and community members was not always clear. During the first two years of this study, several teachers were unsure what policies or practices the principal had about communicating with or engaging with families besides the parent coffees and governance structures. By the third year of this study, however, teachers reported that Principal Collard had clearer expectations for her staff on the best ways to communicate with families. For example, taking a cue from the superintendent, she asked each team of teachers to elect a key communicator that would be in charge of informing parents about what was going on in their classrooms. Another teacher, however, said that the expectations held by the principal were not set in stone as formal policies, but she communicated her expectations by informally modeling parent engagement to her staff. For example, teachers reported that the principal expected them to keep up with Homework Hotline, a place where teachers record the homework for the night so that parents could call to get assignments. In addition, teachers were encouraged to e-mail parents regularly with information that was happening in their classrooms.

Even though Principal Collard encouraged teachers to communicate with families, the actual level of communication between school staff and parents varied by teacher. Throughout the principal's tenure, the primary communication with families was through



formal meetings like the PTO and the site council and less through more general forums open to every parent and community member.

## **Partnerships**

The district as a whole did not emphasize community and business partnering. Therefore the level of community and business group involvement in Glenhurst was minimal. One example was an active Glenhurst Education Foundation (GEF) that helped to fund initiatives aimed at increasing student achievement. One of the many responsibilities of the foundation was to raise enough money every year for summer and after-school programs—resources the district lacked.

Although the community was home to two large business corporate headquarters, only one of the companies worked regularly with the schools. According to one district administrator, this business promoted employee involvement in the schools and supported district initiatives actively. Although the district had a business partnership program since 1986, building successful and meaningful partnerships was not easy. More than half of the district staff interviewed felt that old partnerships were not productive. The assistant superintendent said that the district needed to open itself up to not only listen to business stakeholders more often but also to invite them to the decision-making table. According to her, in the past many of the partnerships either did not work or were in her words, “for show only.” She reported that:

There have been old partnerships that were not necessarily productive. Somebody went to meetings and had a nice lunch...I could tell from my budget that we were expected to contribute tens of thousands of dollars just to make things happen.

That's not the kind of partnership I'm looking at. We need expertise. And we need people at the table when we develop new innovative programming. We're not asking for money. It's more, 'what do you need?' 'How can we work together?'

One of the superintendent's goals was to create greater dialogue with the business community on what they expected of the district and to share with the business community what the district needed.

Teachers at Rawls elementary reported that the two large corporations provided volunteers in the school who read to students and helped with tutoring. The business volunteers also played games and helped out with other sports related activities, but on an informal and sporadic basis. Principal Quinn did not push for a greater level of partnering with community agencies or businesses. Heritage Middle School, on the other hand, did not have any partnerships with local businesses or community groups at the time of this study. Teachers and the media coordinator organized a community drive with local businesses to donate money or gifts during the holidays, but did not partner with them on a regular basis.

## **Summary**

The superintendent in Glenhurst District opened the district up to greater outside stakeholder involvement by creating open communication lines and being visible in the community. The district also had several mandated governance structures for parents and community members to get involved, but these groups had varying degrees of influence. Parents and community groups were also actively involved in pressuring the district when

they disagreed with policies or practices. Overall neither the district nor the two schools put much effort into partnering with businesses or community groups and as a whole struggled with engaging larger and more diverse groups of parents. At the school level, the Rawls Elementary School principal was accessible, visible, and communicated regularly with the community. She tried several ways to engage more parents but with varying success. At Heritage Middle School, the principal worked on changing the negative culture of the school, but really only engaged a small group of elite parents and did not actively work on increasing parent involvement, except when she needed to wear her public relations hat.

## **Case Two: North White Pine County District, Maple Island Elementary, and Maple Grove Middle School**

### **Overview**

North White Pine County District had stable leadership and good community relationships. Both the previous superintendent and the new one that was brought up through the ranks were open, approachable, and communicated often with the public. Prior to implementing new reforms or initiatives, the district went “on the road” to solicit outside stakeholder input. This practice helped the community feel a part of the process and created a broad sense of ownership. Although the district was heavy on policies pertaining to community and parent engagement, these policies were vague and not enforced. Because of this, parent engagement at the school and district levels was sporadic. However, because the district was labeled as “low wealth,” the superintendents

and other district leaders often turned to the community to work together to navigate and meet state level mandates. The district emphasized partnering with community groups and agencies and had an active public relations department. There was an expectation in the district that all staff would connect with and give back to the community.

At the school level, because Maple Island Elementary had a large low-income population, Principal Bemis spent a great deal of time educating her teachers about working with children in poverty. The principal and teachers made frequent home visits, worked on linking families with social service agencies, and even gave families money from their own pockets. Teachers thought the principal was doing a good job of communicating both with teachers and with the community more generally and reported that they liked working under her leadership. In order to try and increase parent involvement, the principal disbanded the “cliquey” PTA and in its place instituted PLOT (parents lending out their time) meetings. Despite the new title, the goal of the PLOT team was to bring parents in to volunteer – a traditional approach. Even though the school tried many new avenues to engage parents, they continued to struggle.

Country Grove Middle School, on the other hand, had a history of focusing on sports and athletics over student achievement. The current principal, Mary Marcelle, worked to change that emphasis by instituting a no excuses policy and by buffering teachers from parental distractions. The school at first did not have a PTA. The principal attempted to start one but without success. In her own words, parental and community engagement was “low on her priority list.” In addition, some teachers and the principal said that most of the parents in the community just “didn’t get it.” Because of the low level of involvement, the principal changed her stance from believing that parents needed

to be involved and work with her as a team to believing that it was the school's responsibility to educate and parent the children while they were at school.

### **Role of Leadership in Shaping Organizational Culture**

In general, North White Pine County District staff successfully navigated the demands and challenges of being in a military community with high mobility. Leadership at the district level was stable compared to other districts in the state and around the country. Superintendent Samuelson, who retired after the 2006-2007 school year served the district for 16 years, and the superintendent before him served for 19 years. Because district level leadership remained stable for so long, the staff was able to work through issues and challenges in a very systematic way, while maintaining a high level of community trust. After the 2007-2008 school year, Superintendent Samuelson, along with three other district level leaders, retired and a new superintendent, Sheila Wauters, took over the district. Superintendent Wauters was brought up through the North White Pine County District ranks and so was already a part of the district when she took office. The culture of the district, therefore, remained fairly stable. The district director of secondary education said that the culture shifted from district centered to student and family centered around 1996, when the district became involved in Total Quality Management. She said that the district began to “look at what the customer wants more than what we [the district] want.”

Superintendent Samuelson built a coalition with the community business leaders and the Chamber of Commerce through frequent communication of the district's goals and strategies for increasing student learning. The district conducted focus groups with

business and community leaders, as well as parents and staff members around district goals. He asked these groups to tell the district “what [should] kids...know and be able to do by the time they finish their journey through this school system?” Through that input, the district created their strategic goals. Periodically, district leaders went back to the groups to ask them if the goals were still relevant or if the district needed to shift focus. The assistant superintendent described Superintendent Samuelson as “a quiet leader who was highly respected.”

District policies and initiatives were piloted first by schools on a focused and invitational basis before they were adopted system wide. The motto at the district was to start new initiatives and reforms slowly before they fast tracked them into the system. Superintendent Samuelson explained:

Rather than racing in and then you have to back up and race out again, we have tried to fine-tune and refine what we are working on so that as someone sees the value of that and buys into it, it is already a product that fits us and fits our needs. For example, prior to making a decision on redistricting, the superintendent, the district’s director of community affairs (DCA), and the person in charge of public relations took their ideas on the road to every school and neighboring district that would be affected by a decision. They asked the public for input and suggestions and made sure that every voice was heard before a decision was made. For example, one of the redistricting plans was revamped because of a parent’s suggestion. Although going out into the community to talk about such a controversial topic as redistricting was in the words of the DCA, “not always fun,” he said that the community appreciated the chance to give input. Because of their strategy to gather input and gain buy-in before making decisions, the DCA said that

the district had “not been afraid to take things on... We put all our effort into making sure the community was involved and they understand. Whether they show up or not, they were given the opportunity to express their opinions.”

When Superintendent Samuelson first came to the district, he asked the school board for the power to hire all administrators, including principals, making the district decentralized, similar to Glenhurst. Because of that, the district had a more hands-off approach with the schools, and only got involved when “there was a problem.” For example, the district intervened when parents complained about one school’s new administrative team who were less responsive to outside voices than the previous administration. The district worked with the new school leaders and with parents to reestablish a working relationship.

The DCA’s job was to encourage civic participation and good citizenship from staff, students, and community members. For example, the DCA talked about going out into the community and running into business partners and other influential community leaders and parents on a regular basis. He said, “you have to know people and you have to be approachable... We are all very approachable.” According to a member of the Chamber of Commerce, district leaders seemed open and partnership minded. In the district office, increasing student achievement was viewed as a community effort. Superintendent Wauters told the community that they had an obligation to make sure that the district and the community provided students every opportunity they needed to be successful. After Superintendent Wauters first year, she was recognized as “woman of the year” at the State of the Community address.

Although district leaders reached out and partnered with community groups, leadership at the school level varied. At Maple Island elementary, on the one hand, Principal Bemis said that she was “a very transparent leader.” One teacher reported that the school felt like a community and that the principal had an open door policy for them and for parents. The principal often went out to different areas of the community to promote the magnet school program and talk to parents. Because of the low-income population, she said it was important for the school to be invested in families and in the community. The principal and teachers, however, struggled with the amount of poverty in the community and would sometimes personally pay bills or buy things like groceries for particular families. To help families, the principal worked with community groups, local churches, and with the school social worker to find support and services.

Teachers reported that the former principal was not as good with engaging families and the community, nor was he as respectful of teacher ideas. She said that the culture of the school changed when Principal Bemis came on board because she respected teachers as professionals and “promoted the leadership ability” of all teachers. Other teachers described the culture of the school under Principal Bemis’s leadership as “caring,” “supportive,” “like home,” “like a family,” and a place where you saw “parents interacting with teachers in a positive manner.” In fact, a few teachers reported that they wanted to come to work for Maple Island Elementary school because of the reputation of Principal Bemis. Another teacher said that “parents here adore her.”

Relationships with parents at Country Grove middle school, on the other hand, were not as positive. For example, when Principal Marcelle became principal, she adopted a “no excuses” policy. She reported that one of the first things she said to



students and parents was that “we [school staff] will not take excuses from you, your children, our staff or me. If you hear an excuse from me, you need to call me on it. If I hear an excuse from you, I’m going to call you on it.” According to several teachers, parents at first were intimidated by Principal Marcelle and thought that she was a little “crazy.” However, teachers said that after awhile, parents got used to her style and felt that she was doing what was in the best interests of students.

One of Principal Marcelle’s first goals was to change the culture of the school because it was focused more on sports than on academics. The principal and other teachers reported that it was difficult to change the mindset of many school staff and parents. In fact the principal blamed the community for allowing the school to let athletics overshadow academic progress. She explained that she has:

Taken the cussing and the fussing from the parents and whoever because they didn’t quite get it or didn’t quite like it but I knew it was what was right for those kids at the time. I will not let my teachers take that. I will not let them take that fussing and cussing.

Teachers reported that at times the principal came across as “my way or the highway.”

But a few teachers said that she was willing to listen to teachers’ ideas and input.

Other teachers described Principal Marcelle as “a strong disciplinarian,” “exactly what we [teachers and the community] needed,” “committed,” and “strong and decisive.” The principal reported that she built trust with teachers by buffering them from parents who were angry or distracting to instruction.

## **Formal Structures**

There were three formal ways for parents and community members to get involved in North White Pine County, besides being elected to the school board. First, outside stakeholders were encouraged to participate in school level advisory councils or school improvement teams. Every school improvement team at each school was mandated to have 50% parent representatives on the teams. Second, the district maintained an advisory council or system-wide strategic team that included parent representatives, members of the local community colleges, business leaders, as well as central office and building level personnel. Third, schools were encouraged, but not mandated, to have parent teacher organizations.

The district had formal, but very general and weak policies aimed at engaging parents and the community. For example, one policy stated:

The board recognizes that the public schools are an integral part of the community and that the public has a vested interest in having students develop into productive members of the workforce and society. The board encourages the community to be involved in the schools and to help the schools in attaining board and school goals for student success (North White Pine County Website -- school policy governing parent organizations).

The school board policy also stated that it had established its commitment to families and the community through its creation and maintenance of policies around the transparency of public records, having open board meetings, allowing community use of school facilities, and allowing visitors to the schools.

Formally, the school board and the superintendent encouraged schools to develop and maintain parent organizations that were aimed at supporting the schools and its goals. In addition, another policy stated that the board supported parent organizations and viewed them as effective structures for engaging families in the school. According to the policy, “The superintendent and school officials are expected to educate such organizations on the goals of the board and individual schools, especially as it relates to improving student success.” The school board also established conditions for creating parent organizations, including PTOs, PTAs, as well as booster clubs. Each parent organization was required to provide the district with a document describing their purpose and a description of how they planned to operate.

How these policies played out at the school level, however, differed in the two schools. For example, at Maple Island Elementary, the school had a PTA prior to principal Bemis, but she dissolved it after a couple years because she felt there was not a good relationship with the parents involved. She reported that those parents that served on the PTA were “cliquey.” She said they did not understand the culture of poverty and were not making good decisions that were in the best interests of all students. Instead, Principal Bemis created a PLOT (people lending out their time) team that met monthly. The purpose of the team was not to govern or help with decision-making, but to participate at the school level and be engaged with the school more generally. Principal Bemis said:

We told parents we recognized how busy they were. Any time that they can come to our school we appreciated it. Since I dissolved the PTA we use every last chair we’ve

got for our meetings, because...It's whoever can help in whatever way is needed at any given time. So we have tremendous parental support in that regard.

Some of the ways that the school tried to involve parents in the PLOT meetings were by giving out gift cards to local grocery stores. In addition, at the PLOT meetings, teachers informed parents about what their children were learning in the classrooms and various ways that parents could help their child set goals and learn at home. Furthermore, the school had students perform or sing for parents that attended the meetings.

Maple Island Elementary also had a strategic planning team that was comprised mostly of school leaders but had a few parents on the team. This same team worked on the school improvement plan every year and made sure that the school met all of its yearly goals.

In comparison, Country Grove Middle School did not have a PTA or any parent organization at the time of this research, but Principal Marcelle expressed interest in creating one. Instead, the school had a few parents serve on the building leadership team (BLT), also known as the strategic planning team. The team was made up of a grade level teacher and another from each subject area, the principal and assistant principal, the media coordinator, and a few parents. Only seven to eight parents served on the building leadership team. Those who served were white, affluent, and did not have to work during the day.

The building leadership team broke off into smaller teams or task forces throughout the year and worked on issues such as school safety, learning goals, as well as increasing parent and community involvement. At the building leadership team meetings, parents asked questions about school level decisions or processes or about what lessons

students were learning in the classroom or they made suggestions for school improvement. Principal Marcelle said:

It's great to have parents on the BLT because we make decisions sometimes that make no sense to the regular people in the world. They are like 'What is wrong?' For them to go out as the mouthpiece for us and say 'Look I know this sounds crazy but this is why they are doing it.' It makes it so much nicer.

Although the goals were set for the site councils or building leadership teams at the district level, each school created different strategies to meet those goals.

### **Community and Parent Engagement and Influence**

At the district level, both Superintendent Samuelson and Wauters reported that they were held accountable to the school board and to the taxpayers. District office personnel believed that their message about being child-centered, and open to community input helped with issues such as the passing of bonds, including a recent one that passed by over 70 percent. Also, the DCA said that families and community groups in North White Pine County District were not afraid to step forward and didn't "mind speaking up." According to the district testing and data coordinator parents were very influential in the district. For example, a group of parents petitioned for a six-week report card in elementary and middle schools versus a nine-week report card so that they could get more frequent feedback about how their children were doing academically. The director of secondary education, however, said that the board did a good job of buffering the school district from parental complaints. She said that "if a parent calls them they don't

automatically jump on the bandwagon of the parent. They...present it to [a district staff member or the superintendent] as an FYI.”

District staff asked for input and feedback from students, parents, colleges, businesses, and community partners, including faith-based groups and the military base, annually on school and district programs and practices. The testing and data analysis coordinator summed up the district philosophy about inviting stakeholder input when he said “we don’t sit on this little island and make the decisions. We seek and value our stakeholder input.” When asked what contributed to maintaining positive relationships with the community, he said that it came down to the leadership, both at the district and school levels. In North White Pine County District, he said that reaching out to the community and valuing the input of outside stakeholders was “second nature” and “just the culture that we have.”

Although North White Pine County District staff said that parents were important stakeholders, there were only limited opportunities for parents to be involved at the district level and only vague policies around engaging parents. The DCA said that the district needed to do more to get parents involved and keep them informed. Others had a very traditional approach to parental involvement. For example, one school board member said that almost every school had a booster club for athletics that was fairly strong, but that they were happy that the parent clubs were “not meddling, but really raising money” and that “they understood their place.”

District staff also acknowledged that schools struggled with parental engagement. According to the DCA:

The challenge with any school system is parental support, but I think that we have made great strides in that area. It's never 100%. I don't care if it is the athletic boosters or the band boosters, but I think I can tell you that our schools generate a lot of support and you just keep doing and finding strategies to get more parents, whether to come in to volunteer or just come in for a parent conference and so forth... but nothing is better than having a parent actually come in physically and tell the principal or ask the principal what can I do?

Superintendent Wauters said that although schools had trouble engaging families, especially minority and low income parents, the district encouraged every school to minimally send communications in multiple modes home to parents to inform them about what was happening at their child's school. The district and schools tried to utilize various forms of technology to keep parents informed including websites and personal e-mails. However, the superintendent reported that "short of just having special programs where the kids are performing, it's very difficult to get the parents to come out, and they will do one-on-one kind of things with you and that kind of thing but as far as things outside of that, it's difficult."

Community and parent direct influence in school level decision-making was not evident in either school. For instance, at Maple Island Elementary, Principal Bemis tried many avenues to engage parents in the school such as the PLOT meetings discussed above, and having staff go to individual student homes to talk with parents. The principal worked hard at combating stereotypes that teachers and other parents had about the community not being engaged or caring about their children because they did not volunteer or come to school meetings. Another way Principal Bemis tried to involve

parents and help out the community was by partnering with a local company that bought the school a washer and dryer. If a student came in with dirty clothes, a staff member washed their clothes so that they went home with clean clothes. The principal invited parents in to wash their own clothes for free and many times teachers used that time to talk to parents about their children's academic progress. Despite the invitation for parents to come to the PLOT meetings or wash their clothes and talk with teachers, very few parents took advantage of the opportunities. However, the principal was proud of the fact that very few families complained to her or had problems with specific teachers. In her words, families "trust us to do what's best."

Also, Maple Island had a few parent education classes in which teachers worked with parents to teach them such things as how to do fractions, what students were learning in writing class, and how to help their child prepare for the state tests. Each grade level had different classes for parents depending on what was happening in the classroom at the time. One teacher said that "we [the teachers] are showing the parents what is going on or we just get them involved so that they see what we are doing in the classroom." The school also provided free transportation and food all summer and for the after school programs.

Despite the principal's efforts to educate teachers and other staff on the issues facing economically disadvantaged families, the school continued to struggle with engaging parents that were representative of the community population. The parents that did get involved in the school directly had negative views of parents that were not involved. For example, one parent said that the school had issues with other parents thinking that attendance was "optional" or did not teach their children "socially



appropriate behavior.” The involved parents tended to be the white, more affluent parents. The kinds of parental involvement that did exist were more traditional and ranged from such things as baking cupcakes for the students, chaperoning on field trips, organizing the school carnival, and raising funds. As one parent who did come to the PLOT meetings and served on the school advisory team said, it was important for parents to be involved without being “overly intrusive.”

Country Grove Middle School also struggled with parent engagement, although they had great attendance at athletic events. Principal Marcelle said that Country Grove was the most challenging school she had worked at in terms of engaging families and getting parents to trust her, despite her efforts. The school invited parents to report card information night, spring and fall festivals, parent information nights, AVID nights, and various open houses, but did not have good parent turnout at these events.

Interviewees attributed the low level of involvement to the make-up of the community and the fact that many parents were not educated or were low-income and were unable to get involved because of work schedules. Principal Marcelle said she thought parents might feel unwelcome at the school and that it was “going to take me and my teachers knocking on doors and calling and actually going out to the community” to change the culture. However, at the time of this research, there was no evidence from the principal or teachers that there were efforts to knock on parent doors or be more visible in the community.

In an effort to try and increase parent and community involvement, Principal Marcelle decided to start a PTA during the last year of this study. Administrators, teachers and a few parents spent the year trying to come up with different strategies for

getting more middle school parents involved. Even though the school started the process, one teacher reported that the PTA efforts “did not go” this year. She stated, “I don’t know what happened to it. We are starting small and getting bigger. With parents in this area, especially, they work all different hours and times so it’s really hard to pick a time of the day that they are going to actually be here.” Another reason why the PTA did not get off the ground may have been that the principal said the PTA was “low on my priority list for the first year.”

Over the years that Principal Marcelle worked at Country Grove Middle, her expectations for parent engagement changed. She explained:

Honestly, when I started this job they were really high, like I really thought I needed those parents in here and we were going to do this as a team. It had to be them and me or it wouldn’t work...I approach it a little bit differently now. I really take the law to heart when they say I am these children’s parents when their parents are not around. That is basically how I run this building. If I can get the parents in here, it’s great and I want to give them all the information and all the support and encouragement and any help I can give them. If I can’t get them in here, I am still going to do the same thing for that child and probably overextend because it’s about me educating their children. Sometimes I believe some of the parents just don’t get it...I don’t think that they don’t care, I just don’t think they get it.

## **Organizational Transparency and Communication between District, School and Public**

North White Pine County District leaders reported that regular communication with the community was vital in order to maintain trust and support in the district. A member of the Chamber of Commerce reported that the district did a good job of communicating with businesses, and she felt that the district and schools were open and accessible. She stated that the Chamber and the school district were interconnected so that when “they have initiatives that they need help on, I think that they feel comfortable calling us to get the business community involved.”

Superintendent Wauters said that because the previous administration did such an excellent job working and communicating with families and the community, she wanted to make sure that she continued their policies and practices. The district had a team of federal auditors come, and they concluded that the district was doing an excellent job of making sure that all stakeholders knew what was happening and where the district was headed. Superintendent Wauters said that the auditors feedback was “the most valuable thing than anyone could tell me.”

Annually, the district partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to do a State of the Community address to the public. At these addresses, the district explained national policies such as NCLB as well as district and school policies that were related. They also explained how the policies worked and how the schools were affected by the policies. Superintendent Wauters partnered with community members and engaged with university and community college partners to help navigate the changing state policies. She said, “We’ve pulled all those people in and said look this is what the state is telling us. We

know we don't do it in isolation. How do we do it together?" She said that district staff spent a lot of time having a healthy dialogue with schools and the community around state testing and accountability measures.

Despite good relationships with businesses and community groups, media relations in the district were not always positive. Prior to Superintendent Samuelson, the previous superintendent had a lot of issues with his board and there were several negative commentaries and editorials in the local media. Superintendent Samuelson reported that at first the previous administration's negative publicity hurt his prospects of partnering with community agencies, but he took a lot of time building collaborative relationships and rebuilding trust with outside stakeholder groups. Superintendent Wauters reported that the media continued to be a challenge for the district. She explained:

So we are the biggest news in town and unfortunately a lot of times bad news sells better than good news for media. So we have had some challenges with getting them to recognize that there are some things we are just not going to talk about.

Even though they had some bad press, Superintendent Wauters said that the community supported the district. For instance, at times the community stood up to the media and wrote editorials or letters to the editor defending the district and schools. Overall, however, the superintendent described the media scrutiny as "overwhelming."

At the school level, communication between teachers and parents varied and was dependent upon the clarity of principal expectations. For example, According to the majority of teachers, Principal Bemis at Maple Island Elementary expected them to communicate with families by sending out regular newsletters, or notes to parents,

making calls, and sometimes making home visits. One teacher said that the principal expected teachers to be involved with each parent, to speak with them often and keep them well-informed about what was happening academically with their child.

Furthermore, teachers were expected to keep portfolios for every child and share those portfolios with parents when they came in for conferences, or if a teacher made a home visit.

Principal Bemis at Maple Island Elementary also communicated regularly with the public when she lobbied for the school to become a magnet school. She explained that even after the decision was made to become a magnet school, she and other school staff had to present themselves in the community and do what she called “road shows.” She explained that they “had to go to various areas in the county and present our products, our wares, what we were going to do; why you should apply for your child to come to Maple Island.” Principal Bemis said that district leaders valued the amount of research and community outreach that she and her staff did to sell the magnet program.

At Country Grove Middle, teachers said that the principal’s expectations for communicating with parents were also clear. Teachers reported that the principal expected them to contact parents regularly through various mechanisms such as letters, e-mails, newsletters, and calling them. Teachers maintained a contact log with parents and were responsible for calling every four to six weeks. However, the principal and teachers reported that they had a hard time conveying school and district level policies to parents. For example, the district instituted a new attendance policy for elementary and middle schools, but school staff and the principal struggled to get parents to understand and to follow the new policy. Despite the struggle, Principal Marcelle held several meetings at

different times to explain the new policy to parents. She broke the policy down and translated it into simple language so that parents could understand. Also, the principal and staff spent a lot of time calling individual parents to teach them about the policy.

## **Partnerships**

At the district level, partnering with local community groups and with other county personnel was a necessity for North White Pine County District because of its “low-wealth” status and because the central office was understaffed. The stability of district level leadership helped make the vital connections with community groups. Superintendent Samuelson often worked with the county manager, and during his tenure, the district networked and partnered often with the local universities and community college faculty and staff to provide teacher training and certification. For example, the district partnered with math and science professors to create a program to help build teacher math and science skills.

In addition to partnering with local universities and community colleges, the district also worked with other community agencies such as the rotary club, which sponsored leadership activities for students, and 4H and extension services that provided affordable before and after school programs for students. Furthermore, a local power company sponsored leadership training for principals and gave awards for academic achievement to teachers and students. In addition, the Chamber of Commerce provided leadership training for district leaders. A retired DCA explained why the district had to partner with so many community agencies:

One thing we found out a long time ago when the first big budget cuts started happening around the country everybody realized that we need to work together.... We get things in North White Pine County District other people don't get and they don't cost us anything.

The district also had a 17-year-old business relationship program called BASES (Businesses Assisting Schools in Educating Students). The program created networks between business and industry with the schools in a formal way and promoted broad community level ownership in the success of the school system. Essentially, BASES provided a foundation for business and industry in the community to get involved in the schools, primarily through funding, but other avenues as well. For example, businesses were encouraged to adopt a school, finance mini-grants, sponsor scholarships, provide employee time for training to better help their child learn, donate equipment or materials to the schools, serve on school level committees, sponsor field trips, serve as tutors or mentors to students, and participate in joint Chamber of Commerce and district initiatives. As Superintendent Wauters stated, “[our district has been] trying to look at what role can the education system play in the support of economic development in a skilled workforce.” The underlying assumption behind the BASES program was that:

Through the combined efforts of educators and the community, instruction and curriculum improvements will be enhanced to better prepare students for employment and the responsibilities of citizenship. Our youth will be ready to successfully meet the challenges of a free society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (BASES brochure).

The school district kept score on how often and how many employees participated in the program. Every year, the district held a recognition ceremony for those businesses or industries that contributed the most to the schools. In making these valuable connections with the businesses, the district felt they had allies in the community that would support them. The DCA stated that the district was successful with its partnering because they maintained open communication and made sure the community was aware of the districts' challenges and needs. At the same time, the district encouraged employees and students to give back to the community. For example, the school system was the largest contributor to the local chapter of the United Way and all of the schools were actively involved in the Relay for Life. As one director stated, "that is a message in the community that the school system has invested in its community and the quality of life in this community."

Even though the district put a heavy emphasis on partnering, school level partnering with community groups and businesses was low. Maple Island Elementary had few partnerships with local businesses. For instance, the local electric company provided Maple Island and other schools around the county small grants to help publish student writing. Every classroom wrote a book for the year and got it published at a local publishing company, paid for by the electric company grants. The books were presented to the whole school and to parents at the end of the school year.

Country Grove Middle School did not partner with many organizations except for some local businesses during the holiday season. For example, teachers and the media coordinator organized a community drive with local businesses to donate money and



gifts. If the school received monetary donations from businesses, the teachers themselves shopped for gifts for the economically disadvantaged students.

## **Summary**

North White Pines County District staff worked hard at maintaining existing strong community relationships. District leaders were open to outside stakeholder influence and spent a great deal of time communicating with the public. However, even though the district had several policies on community and parent engagement, the policies were unclear and weakly monitored. Because of this, parent engagement at the school and district level was sporadic. Even though the district emphasized partnering with community groups and agencies, partnerships at the school level were weak or non-existent. Although the principal at Maple Island Elementary school tried several ways to engage parents, engagement was low. Similarly, parent engagement at Country Grove Middle School was also low and the principal admitted that increasing parent engagement was low on her priority list.

## **Case Three: Atlas School District, Sentinel Elementary, and Butler Middle School**

### **Overview**

In Atlas School District, the previous superintendent did not have a strong public persona or engage with the community, so board members looked for and hired Superintendent Sorensen, an “avid communicator,” to replace him. During her first couple of years, she spent a significant amount of time out in the community building

relationships with stakeholders, creating trust, and restoring the reputation of the district. Superintendent Sorensen also promoted partnerships and collaboration, and maintained openness and transparency in the organization. In doing so, she was successful at creating a mutual sense of ownership for improving student learning and in rallying community support to pass a bond. Organizationally, under her leadership, the district became more centralized. However, the responsibility for engaging parents and community members was unclear. The district had several vaguely worded policies encouraging engagement, but these policies were weakly monitored. Therefore, parent and community involvement varied greatly by school.

At the school level, Sentinel Elementary had a longstanding principal who was described by teachers as a good communicator, although her leadership style was labeled as “rigid” and “dictatorial.” Parent involvement at the school was low, and the parents who were involved in the PTO focused on traditional activities such as having bake sales. Principal Baker did lobby hard to get a community learning center (CLC) housed in the school, which served as the primary mechanism for involving parents in activities. For example, the CLC hosted a small number of parent education programs and family centered activities that were aligned with what was happening in the classrooms.

Similarly, teachers at Butler Middle School said that the principal was good at soliciting input and listening to a variety of stakeholder voices on school improvement. Principal Shimon worked hard at communicating with different groups, but the school as a whole struggled with parent engagement. The principal had several ideas, however, for improving involvement and spoke with parents about the importance of being partners in the educational process. One of the principal’s goals was to focus more on building

relationships with parents and giving parents more purposeful tasks. The school also had a teen center housed in the building that offered enrichment and after school programs. However, the collaboration between the teen center director and the teachers was sporadic and informal. Although relationships were considered good overall, the activities at the center were less aligned than at Sentinel Elementary.

### **Role of Leadership in Shaping Organizational Culture**

At the district level, Superintendent Sorenson communicated regularly with community stakeholders about district and school progress, and was described as open and accessible. The previous superintendent, on the other hand, was less effective in reaching out to the community and not skilled in public relations. During the mid-1990s public concerns were expressed in the media about student reading scores. The superintendent at the time led and facilitated district initiatives to address the needs but did not communicate effectively with the public or the media about the changes the district was making. As one parent explained:

Personality-wise, he was not the type who was comfortable at the Rotary club or at the Kiwanis luncheon...I think that he led many of the businesspeople in the community to have a real standoffish attitude...but I think there [was] a lot of animosity in the business community in the sense of what they saw as unnecessary, unjustified spending for public education.

Because of this, Superintendent Sorenson made a concerted effort to reach out to the business community to smooth over relationships with groups that previously felt ignored and began the process of rebuilding trust between the district and the community.

Members of the business community praised the superintendent's efforts. For example, one business interviewee said of the superintendent that she "walked in and provided such leadership, leadership that the community had not seen in its school district for a very long time."

During the previous superintendent's tenure, the district was site-based managed, and largely remained that way. There was an organizational shift with Superintendent Sorenson when she transferred primary decision-making to the district level. Similar to the Glenhurst and North White Pine County District cases, the primary onus for engaging families, however, was left on the principals. The executive vice president of a local children's foundation said that the leadership of the schools was strong but that parental involvement varied by building level. According to her, some schools made great efforts to reach out to the community and business groups, but others did not engage at all. Although new roads were paved for parental and business involvement, most district level decisions did not involve these groups. Consistent with traditional site-based management, different parents and businesses expressed varying degrees of influence at the school level.

The culture of Sentinel Elementary was considered open, for example, but only a few parents actually participated at the school level. Parents were more involved in activities at the community learning center than at the school itself. Principal Baker worked very closely with the PTO, attended most of their meetings, and listened to parent ideas. However, the PTO was small and had mostly white, affluent parents involved. A member of the PTO described the principal's leadership style as "top-down," but said she was a strong, effective leader and "an excellent communicator." According to the

principal, parents were comfortable with her leadership style and were open to coming and talking with her anytime. A teacher, however, described the principal as “dictatorial” and “the boss” and said that what she says “is pretty much how it goes.” Principal Baker echoed these sentiments when she said that she reserved the right to make any final decisions but that she does allow staff and parent input.

When the district first began partnering with community groups to create community learning centers (CLC), Principal Baker lobbied hard at both the district and the federal levels to get one at Sentinel Elementary. The effort was successful and the school partnered with the Department of Parks and Recreation to create the Sentinel community learning center.

At Butler Middle school, on the other hand, the principal tried to open several avenues for staff and parents to give input and feedback about school programs. When asked about the culture of the school, the principal said he tried to create an environment that promoted cooperation and respect through such structures as a climate committee that included staff and groups of parents. Teachers reported that their opinions were valued and that the principal “does a phenomenal job” of engaging with parents and community members. Principal Shimon was described by teachers and the teen center director as “forward thinking,” and open to listening to all stakeholders. He reported that he worked hard to make sure that every stakeholder “had a voice.” For example, he met regularly with African-American and Latino parents to ask them how best to serve their children. When it came to making decisions for the school, Principal Shimon reported that he worked hard to reach consensus with different staff, students, and groups of parents prior to making a final decision.

Similar to the Sentinel case, Principal Shimon lobbied hard to get a teen center housed in the school. Like the community learning center at Sentinel, the Butler teen center was a collaboration between the school and the Department of Parks and Recreation. The teen center offered before and after school care and enrichment activities for students and parents.

### **Formal Structures**

Atlas School District established a formal Community Curriculum Council that met monthly and had up to two parent representatives per school that served on the council. Approximately 30 parents attended these meetings, although it varied. As one parent explained, the Curriculum Council offered an opportunity for parents to meet with other parents around the district and to discuss relevant district level issues that were mostly related to curriculum. According to another parent, the official role of the council was “to advise the curriculum department on parents’ views on different curriculum issues as well as to be educated by the curriculum department on what [was] going on with the curriculum.” More importantly, according to one parent, the council was a source of information for the district’s associate superintendent of instruction and a chance for her to connect with parents on a regular basis. Another parent said that the Curriculum Council “has an official role but the unofficial role is a two-way street of communication for every administrator and parents.” During Curriculum Council meetings, parents looked at data and any kind of information that was presented to them by the district so that they were able to give informed opinions.

Parent organizations were not mandated by the district, although the district had a vaguely worded policy encouraging schools to have one. Similar to the North White Pine County District case, Atlas School District felt it was up to the discretion of the principal whether or not their school had a PTO/PTA or a site council. One parent, who served on the district Curriculum Council, said that it was an expectation of the district for parents to share the information they received at the council with their school's PTO, but that it varied considerably. One member of the Chamber of Commerce thought that the PTOs were doing a good job of coordinating the volunteer activities within the schools. According to a parent, the PTO or PTAs usually did not have any decision-making authority at the school sites, but they could in some schools serve as a kind of advisory council. However, as one parent explained, "as far as practical decision making authorities, they [the PTO/PTAs] don't have it...but any kind of organization has to run at some level of consensus."

The level of formal parent and community engagement varied at the two corresponding schools. For example, Sentinel Elementary had a parent teacher organization that was made up of a small but committed group of parents who were mostly white and affluent. The main job of the PTO was to raise funds for the school and get more families involved in school activities and volunteering. One PTO member stated, "I think our main purpose is fundraising. We spend an enormous amount of time fundraising." The PTO usually raised money by selling pies. In the words of Principal Baker, the role of the PTO was to help "get things for the school that [are not] in the budget," and to be the parental voice for the school so that other parents could ask them questions about the school. One parent reiterated this when she said:

At PTOs I think parents get opportunities to speak with [Principal Baker] and get our feelings about programs and things like that. Whether that impacts on the final decision about programs, it may or may not. I don't know. But as far as the curriculum and things like that and general education, I would say the PTO or myself in general do not have a lot of say in that.

In addition to fundraising, the members of the PTO worked with the director of the CLC to coordinate volunteers for the learning center and the school library. According to the assistant principal, the PTO had low levels of parent involvement because the community "had low interest" in volunteering or in serving the school in that way. Furthermore, parents were not involved in the school improvement team. Principal Baker said that it was hard for the school to get parents to participate in general and much harder to get them to participate in an effective way. She indicated that one of her goals was to get more parents involved and to help teach them how to be effective members of the school improvement team. The principal and teachers tried to invite more parents to serve on the PTO and even offered childcare, but the school still struggled with bringing more parents on board.

In addition to the PTO, parents at Sentinel Elementary could also serve on a school neighborhood advisory committee made up of the CLC site supervisor, the principal, several teachers, a few students, and representatives from community based organizations such as the Atlas City libraries, local family health departments, other community centers, and the Department of Parks and Recreation. The purpose of the group was to inform the direction of the school-based community learning centers and to put together an annual plan. The plan included designated family activities and different



programs that were offered at the learning centers for the year. In addition, the advisory committee helped tap into outside resources to keep the learning centers active and running at full capacity.

The formal PTO at Butler Middle School, on the other hand, was called the Parent Review Group and was made up of a core group of about six to 12 parents and the principal. Two meetings per year were devoted to school improvement planning. Parents and the principal discussed different educational topics or school level issues as well. During these meetings, the principal shared data with the parents and together they discussed goals for the following year. However, these meetings were described by Principal Shimon as “awkward.” He acknowledged that the group was very small and said he was not satisfied with the level of formal engagement. He reported:

...for the parent thing, we can never do enough; we just can't do enough things...So I think we need to be creative about finding ways to involve parents in school and have them be the experts on things in different regards and we've got to keep doing that.

### **Community and Parent Engagement and Influence**

During the previous superintendent's tenure in Atlas, the primary source of community influence and pressure came from small businesses, especially over issues of funding. One local business association put pressure on the district to be more transparent and lobbied for fiscal conservativeness and responsibility. The head of the business association said that the group thought of itself as a “community watchdog” and lobbied on several fronts, although it was at odds with the Chamber of Commerce. Once the old

superintendent left the district, the business association changed its stance and began to open up the communication lines with the new district administration and with the rest of the business community. One reason for the shift may have been that the district hired a director of business affairs who went out into the community and began doing regular forums on the budget to break it down into terms that the business community and other important stakeholders could understand. In addition to fiscal information, the district also made an effort to inform the community about the latest trends in research and practice and often shared district level data. The district director of evaluation and assessment said that “you have to be willing to educate and you have to be open to that and you need to be a resource of information.” He said that he and his staff went out regularly to external groups that wanted information about the district and talked with them about the data.

Another way the district actively engaged stakeholders was by recruiting approximately 60 people from various community groups and parents to help the district lobby for a bond measure, which passed. The assistant superintendent explained “that all of the work that led up to the successful bond election had a lot to do with the very effective involvement of community stakeholders.” The local newspaper opinion writer said:

...it was a pretty remarkable community event I think because we had this broadly based group that devoted a lot of time. I mean this is kind of part of Atlas’s social fabric, there is always some sort of citizen group studying something or other and people devote a lot of volunteer time to it.

As noted above, Atlas collaborated with a variety of stakeholder groups around various educational and community issues. For example, the district created a task force for housing and facilities that included parents and other community members. The task force was charged with looking at what the community needs were and issues of overcrowded schools. Principals asked parents from their schools to be a part of that committee so that each school could be represented.

Even though the district did a good job of engaging community groups and businesses, parental engagement at the district level varied. Similar to the other districts, the parents who were involved at the district level tended to come from white, more affluent communities. The district had several committees that parents were invited to serve on as parent representatives, such as a calendar committee and the above mentioned Community Curriculum Council. However, when asked how the district was doing with actively engaging families in supporting student learning, the superintendent responded that the district had a lot of work to do in that area. She explained:

I think that is an area that we have to give more focus to. I'm not very satisfied with that. I think we've made some progress because it really starts with an attitude, that you value that and that support. I believe we, as a school district, struggle with engaging refugee and immigrant parents into the mainstream of the school. We tend to segregate them into the bilingual program or the Native American parent group.

We struggle with that. I believe a big part of that is our attitude.

Varying opinions existed in the district office on the issue of parent engagement. For example, the assistant superintendent said that the district did an excellent job of engaging with families and the community but that it was up to the individual schools to

do the same. However, she admitted that many of the engagement activities that happened at the school level were more “surface level things.”

As mentioned above, Sentinel Elementary school had little active parent involvement. Most parents attended parent-teacher conferences, but the school struggled with bringing in a large representative group of parents on school “fun nights.” The primary responsibility for engaging families was through the Community Learning Center programs for parents. In fact, more parents were involved in CLC sponsored activities than school sponsored activities. For instance, the CLC held a student/parent book reading event and also engaged parents in learning activities, which were well attended. In addition, the CLC had a successful before and after school program that offered academic and physical education and enrichment programs for students and parents. According to the CLC site coordinator, the goals of the CLC were to help increase student academic achievement and development, plus strengthen families and neighborhoods. The CLC provided educational and enrichment opportunities for families more often than Sentinel Elementary itself.

Principal Baker and the assistant principal acknowledged that many parents did not know how best to support their children academically. She said “it’s our job to help the parents know how to help their child.” Both administrators, however, acknowledged that the school did not have any active mechanisms for helping parents. During the last year of the study, school staff had several ideas that they wanted to begin trying to help them engage more families. For example, the school had a fun night and changed the time of the activities to try and solicit more involvement. In addition, the principal talked about pairing up the PTO meetings with speakers who would talk about topics that were

of interest to families. One of the PTO parents said that the school was trying to “mix things up, try different things to see what works.”

At Bulter Middle School, on the other hand, Principal Shimon said that parent attitudes and their relationship with the school shifted in a positive direction in the last few years. He explained why:

I think that comes from us doing proactive things to build relationships and get to know parents and let them know that we really care about their kids doing well and not operating in a punitive mode but more of an instructional teaching mode.

I feel pretty good about the relationship that we have with parents [now].

More recently, the principal sent out a newsletter to parents at home telling them that he and the teachers thought of them as “partners” in their children’s learning.

Several opportunities existed for parents to be involved in school activities at Butler Middle School. For example, in addition to the parent review group, the school held regular school meetings with the feeder elementary school parents. In order to engage more parents, the principal said he wanted to move away from just having an open meeting approach for parents to come in and discuss a topic to more of a task or purposeful approach to engaging parents. Principal Shimon also worked with several different ethnic groups of parents including an African-American parent group and a Latino parent group. He reported that the school started separating the groups because he felt that the traditional way of trying to bring all parents together was not working. Although the meetings were successful according to the principal, he wanted to begin holding some of the meetings out in the community to increase attendance.

Butler Middle also had two parent-teacher conferences per year, although these were not well attended. On the other hand, several teachers and the principal reported that family nights where food was served were well attended. These family nights oscillated between strictly social events to more parent information and education oriented nights. For instance, the school held a math and science night where they focused on specific terms being used in the classrooms.

Despite all of the opportunities offered for parents to engage with the principal and other school personnel, all interviewees reported that Butler Middle School had low levels of parent engagement. The assistant principal said that the school did not have a lot of parent involvement because of the numbers of low-income and working families. Other teachers and administrators attributed the low levels of involvement to middle school students not wanting their parents to volunteer at the school or be seen with them. Principal Shimon, on the other hand, said that he spoke with staff and teachers about not blaming outside forces for low levels of parent involvement and more importantly for students not learning and that it was up to the school to find creative ways to increase involvement.

### **Organizational Transparency and Communication between District, School and Public**

An executive vice president of a local children's foundation said that Atlas School District improved in the areas of openness and inviting community interest and critical thought into the discussion about how the district operated. For example, the superintendent focused on being visible by giving approximately 80 presentations to

community organizations the first year she took office in the summer of 2005. She spoke to civic, community and business groups, and attended Rotary lunches.. The increased visibility led to increased levels of trust between the district and various community groups and parents, according to both district and community interviewees. In order to build the relationships and gain trust as well as communicate the needs of the district, the superintendent brought as many stakeholders as possible to the table to get them involved in district efforts.

Superintendent Sorenson said that it was an important part of her leadership to maintain transparency at the district level and to continually communicate with the public. In addition to communicating what the district was doing, the district also brought people in on important district-level initiatives so that stakeholders felt part of the process. Also, the district mission and goals were well known both inside the organization and out in the community. One district staff member said about Superintendent Sorenson:

I think she's much more visible in the community. She's much more involved with communication with the community; personally involved. Because of that visibility, I think that has strengthened the perception of the school district with our constituents, with our community.

The assessment and evaluation specialist in the district also said that she spent much less time in the district office than the previous superintendent.

When working on passing the bond mentioned above, the superintendent said that she had to strategically plan for her campaign out in the community. She gave several talks to various community groups about the district and also listened and learned about

what was important for community members in terms of education. Throughout the process, Superintendent Sorensen said, “We [the district] made sure that the rest of our community knew what they [the bond measure task force] were doing... We invited the press in... There were no secrets.” The task force went out and did community engagement themselves and also held public meetings to get a feel for community reaction. According to the superintendent, the bond passed largely because community members from all over felt that they had a sense of ownership in the process, and also felt that their opinions were valued.

Information dissemination was also important to Atlas district staff. Annually, they prepared and distributed a report to all residents that included information such as test scores, results of follow-up studies from graduates, assessment results about the learning climate, financial information, and school demographic characteristics. Despite all of the efforts at the district level to communicate to the public and practice transparency in the organization, one member of the local children’s foundation said that the school board continued to be viewed by the public as a closed system that was not inviting and at times appeared defensive. She explained that although the board had maintained a good quality of education, “there wasn’t that kind of good interplay that needs to take place in a community with the Atlas Public Schools.” At the same time, she thought that the community could do more to understand what happened at the schools and to lobby on their behalf.

Expectations for communication with parents and organizational transparency at the school level varied. For example, at Sentinel Elementary, Principal Baker expected teachers to communicate with parents through newsletters, on the website, and by calling



home. In addition, the principal sent home a newsletter once a month. There was a general consensus, however, that the principal and teachers did not believe that most parents read the newsletters or consulted the website for information. Teachers were encouraged to call parents when their children did well in school or early and often when there were problems. Teachers were also expected to make a phone call to all parents at least once a quarter. One teacher said that Principal Baker clearly communicated her expectations and modeled how she wanted teachers to interact with parents.

Teachers and other school staff communicated well with the Sentinel CLC coordinator and activities and programs were aligned. The principal and assistant principal played a key role in helping to set the annual goals of the CLC. Also, the CLC site coordinator said that he discussed specific students with teachers so that they could coordinate services such as tutoring in specific subjects or sharing behavior management techniques. The CLC coordinator also reported that teachers understood the program and assisted him when he asked for help. For instance, he said that teachers were “much more understanding of our program, and what we’re trying to do to assist them in improving student learning and achievement.” The school appointed several teacher liaisons to help coordinate activities and meet with the CLC staff on a regular basis to share ideas about how the CLC could help reinforce what was being taught in the classroom. Teachers also gave the CLC staff tips on discipline issues, pedagogical techniques, and how to keep student interest in activities.

In addition to communicating with teachers and other school staff, the CLC site coordinator thought that the school communicated well and often with community groups, community residents, and area businesses, despite the large geographical span of

the school community. However, he also said that he and other CLC staff had a hard time communicating with parents.

At Bulter Middle School, all interviewed teachers said that the principal's expectations for engaging with parents were clearly communicated. For instance, one teacher said that she's heard what he expected "since day one." According to her, the principal expected teachers to keep parents in the loop about what was happening in the classroom; send out memos and newsletters, and make frequent phone calls. In addition, the principal suggested delegating parent communication to different teacher team members if they shared the same student so that parents heard from different teachers about their child's progress. Another teacher said that the principal and the teachers talked a lot about partnering with parents to help with student learning. Principal Shimon also communicated with parents through a monthly principal's newsletter as well as updating the school website with information about what was happening at the school. Furthermore, Principal Shimon came up with an idea for teachers to send postcards to parents of students that were doing exceptionally well in the classroom once a month.

Butler's teen center director said that he communicated with school administrators and staff on a regular basis. He also said that he felt part of the school and interacted with staff, students, and administrators often. However, the coordination of services was, according to the director, "in its infancy" and informal. For instance, he said that he and school staff never had regular formal meetings about aligning services, and he did not sit on any academic leadership teams at the school level. On the other hand, Principal Shimon served on the board of three of the partnering organizations in the community.

## **Partnerships**

Partnering with community organizations was a major emphasis in Atlas School District. Besides partnering with the Department of Parks and Recreation to run independent community learning centers that were housed in the schools, the district also partnered with local family service agencies, the YMCA, senior centers, faith-based organizations, and a local children's foundation that worked with homeless students and helped the district deal with truancy issues. In addition, the schools partnered with a very active human service federation that was made up of about 115 agencies. According to the executive vice president of the children's foundation, all of these agencies interacted with one another to help with issues in the community. In her view, it was an expectation in the community that groups and agencies collaborated with one another.

The district also created a partnership program with businesses called the "Ventures in Partnership" (VIP) program. The program was designed to get students involved in the businesses and the businesses involved in the schools in a more formal way. Some activities included tours of businesses, business representatives speaking in the classroom, as well as businesses giving gifts to students who did well academically. The independent business association was involved in the VIP program for several years, and they provided some of the funding for teachers to attend an AP summer institute. In addition, they had a youth committee awards system and gave out scholarships to high school students for higher education. Although the district viewed the VIP program as successful, the local newspaper opinion writer said that he did not think the program had much substance. He said:

My impression is that those things don't really have that much [substance]... but I see it as there might be a restaurant and the kids went to a field trip to the restaurant or something and learned how to make bread or whatever. Maybe that's a bigger deal than I think it is.

The local university was also a big partner with the schools. They had joint projects such as an entrepreneur focus program and math and science grants. The superintendent met on a regular basis with the dean of the college of education and with key staff members to talk about collaborations. The director of evaluation also helped the universities put together an assessment training program for experienced teachers. At the time of this study, however, the district was working on creating better communication between the district and the two large universities.

At Sentinel Elementary, the CLC director coordinated all of the partnerships with various community groups and agencies to make sure that the services were delivered. The ultimate goal of Sentinel's CLC was to bring in as many services to the center and to create as many partnerships as possible; making the school a hub for community enrichment activities. Both the principal and the CLC site coordinator worried, however, that the quality and variety of enrichment activities offered at the CLC would be in jeopardy if the funding from the state was severely cut or ceased altogether.

In addition to the CLC, Sentinel Elementary also had a VIP program with a local restaurant as well as a local Starbucks. The coffee house displayed Sentinel student artwork, and employees came to the school to volunteer periodically. According to the principal, the VIP partnerships were a "P.R. thing." The local restaurant partnership was specifically about helping raise funds for the school.

Similar to the community learning center at Sentinel Elementary, Butler Middle School's teen center was paid for by grant funds and by the city of Atlas. The teen center offered approximately 15 different enrichment programs that were made possible through partnerships with various community agencies. For example, different community organizations came in to help with tutoring and other programs. However, one of the challenges of the center was communicating with parents and getting information out about all of the programs and services offered.

Besides the teen center, Butler Middle also had a VIP program with various local businesses. Essentially, different neighborhood businesses raised funds for the school and sponsored dance and music programs and other school activities.

## **Summary**

The current superintendent of Atlas School District was a good communicator, spent a great deal of time out in the community building support for district initiatives and creating collaborative partnerships. Although the district was successful in rallying broad level community support to pass a bond, they did not do well in the area of parent involvement. The district had several unclear policies that encouraged schools to engage parents, but district leaders did not hold schools accountable to following the policies. Because of this, the level of parent and community involvement varied from school to school.

At Sentinel Elementary, for instance, parent involvement was low. The parents who were in the PTO focused on more peripheral and surface level activities such as coordinating bake sales. The principal was involved actively, however, in creating the

school's community learning center which did host a small number of parent education programs and family centered activities that were aligned with the school's curriculum.

Similarly, although the principal at Butler Middle School worked hard at communicating with different parent groups, the school had low parent involvement. The principal tried several different ways to improve involvement, such as giving parents more purposeful tasks, but with limited success. Butler also had a teen center that offered enrichment and after school programs for students. However, activities at the center were not well aligned with what was happening at the school.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

#### **Introduction**

In the following section, I compare and contrast each case, look for patterns and themes across the cases, as well as illustrate any differences. In addition, I highlight examples that appear to support the organizational and neo-institutional theories used in this study and areas that do not fit the framework. (See Appendix C, Tables 1 and 2 to view a summary of district and school level results across themes).

#### **Role of Leadership in Shaping Organizational Culture**

Leadership at the district level was critical in all three cases for creating and maintaining an open culture conducive to parent, business, and community engagement. In two of the three cases, Glenhurst and Atlas, previous superintendents operated in a closed system and did not prioritize outside stakeholder relationships, resulting in disengagement and distrust of the district. The new superintendents, therefore, had to spend significant time in outreach mode rebuilding relationships and trust in the district. In the North White Pine County Case, on the other hand, because the longstanding superintendent built strong relationships with community and business groups through the years, the new superintendent did not spend as much time creating new relationships or earning trust. Instead, she continued to work at maintaining and strengthening existing ones, but was not as active as the other two superintendents in seeking creative ways to engage external stakeholders.

The locus of responsibility for parent, business, and community involvement, however, was unclear in all three cases. None of the district leaders held principals accountable to engaging with outside groups or building partnerships. All three superintendents took a “hands-off” approach to the schools and said they did not want to “mandate” school level engagement. Thus the onus for engaging with parents and community members was on schools. Even though all three superintendents said they modeled community engagement through their partnering, their willingness to listen to public concerns, and their efforts to include families and communities in district level committees, engagement with parents and other external groups varied significantly at each school. For example, in Glenhurst, the assistant superintendent said that the district relied on their principals to set the tone for engagement and communication, but admitted that she was not sure if they engaged them or not. These findings are consistent with prior quantitative analysis done on the district role in parent and community engagement in the larger Wallace Learning from Leadership study noted in Chapter Two. In that study, we found that although there was a correlation between district support for more involvement and diversity of membership on site councils, districts did not have a strong impact on the level of principal openness to parent and community engagement (Gordon and Louis, 2009). Thus district level engagement efforts were loosely-coupled with school level policies and practices.

The role of the principal in mediating unclear expectations from the district level was critical. The level of parent and community engagement was dependent primarily upon the leadership style of the principal. Three of the six principals created open and inviting environments for engagement (Rawls Elementary, Maple Island Elementary, and



Butler Middle School), while the other three maintained the status quo of keeping parents and community members at the periphery (Heritage Middle, Country Grove Middle, and Sentinel Elementary). The principal at Rawls Elementary, for example, had clear expectations for teachers to engage parents and modeled engagement practices for her teachers. Similarly, at Maple Island Elementary the principal nurtured relationships with students and families, and teachers said she was a model for how to engage. Also, the principal at Butler Middle viewed parents as partners in their child's education, and emphasized the importance of gathering input from stakeholders to help improve the school.

On the other hand, the principal at Heritage Middle said she had a hard time changing the culture of the school, so she took more of a public relations approach to try and "sell" the school to the community. However, she only focused on the parents that could come to the school during the day, and got mixed reviews from staff on her communication style with parents. The principal at Country Grove Middle admitted that parent engagement was not a priority and often buffered teachers from any kind of parental distractions. Although she created a PTA, she only did so to appear legitimate in the eyes of the district and community and did not put any time or effort into engaging parents in meaningful ways. Lastly, the principal at Sentinel Elementary was called a good communicator by teachers, but her leadership style was labeled as "rigid" and only engaged with 12 or so parents on the PTO.

## **Formal Structures**

Formal organizational structures designed to include parents and community members in decision-making processes were mandated by the district in only one of three cases (Glenhurst). The other two districts relied on several vague policies that encouraged schools to have formal structures to include parents in the educational process, but did not require them. Even so, all three districts and six schools had some kind of formal mechanism or groups such as site councils or building leadership teams, parent/teacher organizations, or school improvement teams. Formal policies for democratic engagement, however, were weak. Few innovative approaches existed to actively engage outside stakeholders, with the exception of Glenhurst's Local School Committees (LSCs). Although Glenhurst put a lot of effort into making their policies clear and "legitimate," the way the LSCs operated in practice at the school level did not match the policy language. More specifically, the purpose of the Local School Committees (LSCs) as stated in the policy was to assist and direct schools in order to ensure effective operation, but their actual role at the school level was to manage facilities use.

All three districts had formal ways for parents to give their input. For instance, North White Pine County had a district wide Quality Council, Atlas had a district wide Community Curriculum Council, and Glenhurst had the Local School Committees that met with the superintendent regularly. In each case, the district expected the parents that served on these councils/committees to communicate the information shared at the meetings to the rest of the parents at their schools; a weak strategy for information dissemination. Furthermore, districts did not keep track of whether or not information was shared.

Written policies regarding parent and community engagement were both unclear and weakly monitored. Neither North White Pine County nor Atlas School District mandated formal structures. Instead, both districts had several vaguely written policies encouraging schools to involve parents and community members in the educational process. Glenhurst, on the other hand, mandated three separate governance structures for parents and community members to get involved, but policy intentions did not match actual practices in schools. In all three cases, these policies did not give direction to schools on how best to engage parents/community members nor did they specify different ways of involving external groups. Also, because the policies were not monitored or only weakly monitored, practices in schools varied. In North White Pine County, for example, one of the policies encouraged schools to engage parents in such a way that helped increase student learning. However, both Maple Island Elementary and Country Grove Middle had parent groups that focused more on volunteering or fundraising; surface-level activities that did not have to do with helping to increase student learning. Overall, this finding on formal structures is consistent with neo-institutional theory which asserts that organizations survive and meet external demands by demonstrating a believable myth or façade that legitimates the behavior within that organization. In effect, a gap exists between the internal work of the staff and the formal policies and structures set in place by the organization.

Some principals experimented with formal structures to involve parents, but were largely unsuccessful. For example, at Rawls Elementary, the principal tied parent social and educational nights with the PTO meetings, but was disappointed with the PTO turnout. At Maple Island Elementary, the principal disbanded the old PTO because it was

“cliquey” and instead created a new group called “People Lending out Their Time.” The purpose of the group was to try and bring in parents to not only help with decision-making, but also to help the school in general. However, the actual roles given to parents on PLOT were more traditional such as volunteering and fundraising, rather than activities involving governance or giving input on decisions. Similarly, the principal at Butler Middle School tried several new avenues to involve parents in decision-making roles. He created a Parent Review Committee with the purpose of having parents take on a greater role in school improvement, but the group did not work out as he hoped. Despite this, the principal continued to try new ways of engaging parents that were more productive and meaningful. On the other hand, Heritage and Country Grove Middle, and Sentinel Elementary all had governance structures that functioned in a very traditional way, with parents in charge of surface-level activities such as fundraising and coordinating parent volunteer programs.

### **Community and Parent Engagement and Influence**

Outside of the formal structures mentioned above, districts tried several informal ways to engage outside stakeholders such as seeking their input on district policies and practices, and collaborating with them to help with specific district or school level needs. At the district level, leadership was vital in all three cases in determining whether or not outside stakeholders had any influence on district goal setting, programs and/or policies. However, engagement practices were uneven, even though all three superintendents reported that engaging with external stakeholders was a vital part of their job and necessary to the success and survival of the organization. In Glenhurst, for example,

leaders said engagement was important for maintaining democratic processes, understanding community expectations, and building networks of supporters and collaborators, but they did not have clear mechanisms for involving outside stakeholders in decisions. Because of this, community leaders organized to protest decisions they did not agree with and forced the district to listen to dissenting voices. Glenhurst was the least effective of the three districts in engaging the business community. In Atlas, the superintendent talked about creating ownership in the educational process with all stakeholder groups as well as creating a network of supporters and collaborators when they needed support to pass a bond measure, but they acknowledged that the district did not involve business or community groups in decision-making on a regular basis. On the other hand, in North White Pine County District, the superintendent solicited input from all “clients” prior to implementing new policies and initiatives, which resulted in buy-in from schools and the public, and created a sense of ownership in the educational process. However, asking for input from stakeholders and actually partnering with them to improve learning are not synonymous.

The degree of external pressure and influence varied across the cases. At the district level, Glenhurst had the highest amount of outside pressure, primarily from affluent white parents. This same degree of external pressure from parents was also evident at the school level. For example, at Rawls Elementary the first principal was ousted because he did not engage well with parents and the principal at Heritage Middle was pressured by parents about curriculum. The degree of external pressure in Atlas District, on the other hand, was moderate at the district level, and came primarily from the business community. Before the current superintendent came on board, the business

community pressured the district to be more open, more collaborative, and more transparent with their finances. Relationships with the business community were improving with the current administration, and the district felt less pressure from them. Pressure from outside stakeholder groups was low at the two school levels (Sentinel Elementary and Butler Middle Schools). In contrast, because of North White Pine County District's history of gaining buy-in for programs prior to launching anything new, they experienced less pressure from the community than in Glenhurst or Atlas. There was no evidence of external pressure at Maple Island Elementary or Country Grove Middle.

Parent involvement at the school level was narrowly defined and not tied to specific learning goals or initiatives, with the exception of parent education nights that were purposely tied to classroom curriculum. Overall, only three of the six principals put significant time and effort into creating ways to involve more parents. For example, Rawls Elementary held several parent education nights tied to specific lessons and served food to try and bring in more parents. Similarly, the principal at Maple Island Elementary hosted several family nights, served food, and provided a washer and dryer for parents to use. At Butler Middle school, the principal created a Parent Review Group and hired interpreters for different groups of parents to try involving more diverse families. Despite these efforts, parent involvement was inadequate at all six schools. The other three schools put minimal effort into engaging parents or community members beyond the traditional ways such as hosting social gatherings, asking for volunteers, and recruiting parents to help raise funds.

Low income and minority parents were least involved at both the district and school level. In all of the cases in this study, schools and districts had a hard time

engaging parents from more diverse backgrounds. Only one school principal (Rawls Elementary) took the time to assess the level of parent and family engagement and discuss the assessment with staff. One of her goals was to increase parent engagement and improve the comfort level of staff and parent interactions. In Table 4 below I summarized the level of openness of the organization to greater public involvement, the level of trust in leadership, the clarity of leadership expectations for engagement, and the level and types of community and parent engagement at each site.

**Table 4: Summary of degree of openness to engagement, clarity of expectations, degree of trust in leader, and levels and types of parent and community engagement**

	<b>Glenhurst School District</b>	<b>Rawls Elem</b>	<b>Heritage Middle</b>	<b>North White Pine County</b>	<b>Maple Island Elem</b>	<b>Country Grove Middle</b>	<b>Atlas School District</b>	<b>Sentinel Elem</b>	<b>Butler Middle</b>
Degree of openness	Open	Open	Closed	Open	Open	Closed	Open	Closed	Open
Clarity of expectations	Unclear	Clear	Unclear	Unclear	Clear	Clear	Unclear	Clear	Clear
Degree of trust in leader	High	High	Low	High	High	Low	High	Low	High
Level of parent engagement	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Medium
Type of parent engagement	Gov. Structures; Soliciting input; Community Organizing	Gov. Structures; Educating Parents; Volunteers	Gov. Structures; Public Relations; Volunteers	Gov. Structures; Soliciting input	Soliciting input; PLOT; Volunteers	Gov. Structures; volunteers	Soliciting input; Community Curriculum Council	Fundraising (bake sales); Volunteers	Soliciting input; Educating Parents
Level of community engagement	High	None	None	Medium	Medium	None	High	High	High
Type of community engagement	Soliciting input; Collaboration	N/A	N/A	Soliciting input; Collaboration	Linking Social Services	N/A	Soliciting input; Collaboration Community Centers	Linking Services; Collaboration CLC	Linking Services; Collaboration Teen Center

Degree of openness: Open = organization was open to greater public involvement; Closed = organization not open to greater public involvement; Clarity of expectations: Unclear = mixed responses from interviewees; Clear = all staff knew expectations of leader; Levels of trust in leader: High = interviewees said they trusted leader; Low = interviewees were mixed or said that they did not trust leader; Levels of engagement: Low = few parents; 0-2 community groups; Medium = larger core group of parents, greater attendance at school functions; 3-5 community groups involved; High = Significant numbers of parents participating and attending events; working with multiple community groups



## **Organizational Transparency and Communication between District, School and Public**

Organizational transparency and communication with external stakeholders was an essential component for maintaining good relationships, especially because of increased accountability pressures. All three districts worked hard at transparency. In addition, all three placed a heavy emphasis on good communication with the public, and were considered open systems. For example, in Glenhurst, the superintendent was viewed as accessible because he held regular “key communicator” meetings and “listening sessions” out in the community, and responded to all e-mails. Similarly, in North White Pine County District, the old and new superintendent did a good job of communicating what was happening at the district level to both the schools and to the public. For example, Superintendent Wauters engaged the community more widely in helping explain and navigate state and federal policies. Likewise, the superintendent in Atlas School District made several presentations out in the community on district level goals and on existing school and district data. She wanted to be as open, visible, and transparent as possible with the community.

Schools within districts, however, were more variable in their level of communication and transparency. For example, at Rawls Elementary, the communication inside and outside the school improved dramatically when the new principal came on board. She talked about hosting “listening sessions” with parents; similar to what happened at the district level. Furthermore, teachers reported that expectations for engagement and communication with families were clear. At Heritage Middle, on the

other hand, teachers were not sure what the principal expected of them in terms of engagement, although the expectations became clearer by the third year of this study. The principal herself had trouble communicating with parents and reported that she did not like attending the morning coffee sessions where she had to listen to and communicate with parents.

At Maple Island Elementary the principal was viewed by teachers as a good communicator with parents and with teachers. Also, the principal went out into the community to “sell” the idea of the school becoming a magnet prior to petitioning the district for the change. In addition, Maple Island was the only school where teachers did home visits to communicate with families who they thought were not getting important information. The Butler Middle school principal was also viewed by teachers as a good communicator and open. At Country Grove Middle and at Sentinel Elementary, on the other hand, the principals and the teachers had a difficult time communicating with parents, especially about district level policies. Most of the schools had traditional mechanisms for communicating with parents such as sending home newsletters with students, making periodic phone calls, sending e-mails, and updating websites.

### **Partnerships**

Partnerships were seen as vital in two of the three districts, but varied at the school level. In addition, partnering was viewed primarily as a way to increase resources and revenue and not necessarily as a way to create a joint venture in helping to increase student learning. For example, North White Pine County District partnered with several businesses and community groups, primarily because of its “low-wealth” status. District

leaders collaborated with businesses, social service agencies, local colleges and universities, as well as the military base. North White Pine County District staff viewed these partnerships as essential to the survival of the organization and as a means of building social capital. For example, the BASES program emphasized businesses giving time and money to the district and schools, but the district also stressed the importance of employees giving back to the community. At the school level, Maple Island Elementary partnered with one local business that gave the school grants for children to “publish” their own books. Country Grove Middle, on the other hand, did not have any partnerships with local community groups and had no longstanding partnerships with businesses, except when staff raised funds for students during the holiday season.

In the Atlas School District case, partnerships were important, but difficult to achieve and sustain. For example, district leaders partnered with community groups to create community learning centers that were housed in the schools. Although the community learning centers were viewed as successful by district and school staff, several interviewees expressed concern about the long term viability of the centers because they were funded by grant and state money. Also, in Atlas, the Ventures in Partnership program was an effort to get businesses involved in the schools, but opinions varied on how successful the program was at actually creating productive relationships between businesses and schools. Both of the respective schools in the Atlas School District housed community learning centers that were products of partnerships with the state’s department of parks and recreation. Only one of the centers, the Community Learning Center at Sentinel Elementary, had aligned the activities and services offered at the center with what was happening in the school. The teen center at Butler Middle, on

the other hand, provided before and after school care and enrichment programs, but they were not directly aligned with what was happening at the school.

Lastly, in the Glenhurst School District case, the superintendent was visible and included community voices on district level teams, but had no collaborative partnerships with businesses, even though the community housed two large corporations. Although the district recognized the need to connect with businesses, they did not put much time or effort into formal partnerships. At the school level, evidence pointed to a great deal of buffering and gate-keeping. For example, members of the Chamber of Commerce reported that they tried to contact school principals to ask them if they were interested in partnering with businesses, but only five principals in the whole district returned their phone call. Often, business leaders reported they were unable to get past the school secretaries. There was a lot of controversy in the school community concerning corporate involvement in the schools and there were a couple of influential groups in the community that did not want “corporate anything” in the schools. In addition, there was a lot of resistance to business influence from teachers who believed in a liberal arts education and did not want the business community to influence the curriculum taught in the schools. In Table 5 below I indicated whether or not an organization was open or closed to outside stakeholder influence, the level of transparency in the organization, and the level and types of business engagement at each site.

**Table 5: Summary of organizational transparency, level of communication between organization and public, and level and type of business engagement**

	<b>Glenhurst School District</b>	<b>Rawls Elem</b>	<b>Heritage Middle</b>	<b>North White Pine County</b>	<b>Maple Island Elem</b>	<b>Country Grove Middle</b>	<b>Atlas School District</b>	<b>Sentinel Elem</b>	<b>Butler Middle</b>
Organizational Transparency	Transparent	Transparent	Opaque	Transparent	Transparent	Opaque	Transparent	Opaque	Transparent
Level of Communication	High	High	Low	High	High	Low	High	Low	High
Level of business engagement	Low	Low	None	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Medium
Type of engagement	Volunteering	Volunteering		Fundraising Collaborators/ Partners	Fundraising	Fundraising	Fundraising Collaborators/ Partners	Fundraising	Fundraising

Organizational transparency: Transparent = outsiders knew what was happening in the organization; high degree of data sharing; leaders and other staff accessible, Opaque = outsiders were not clear what was happening in the organization; leaders and staff did not share data with outsiders;

Level of communication; High = frequent communication with public and communication in various forms; Low = infrequent communication with public; communication relegated to a select few;

Level of business engagement: Low = 0-2 businesses involved; Medium = 3-5 businesses involved; High = partnerships with multiple businesses

## Summary

In sum, the cross-case analysis revealed several important patterns and themes that fit across the cases. First district leadership was vital for opening up the organization and creating an environment favorable to outside stakeholder engagement. All three superintendents worked hard at transparency, were open, visible, accessible, and communicated often with the public. Although district level leadership was strong in these areas, district level policies for engaging community members and parents were weak. Only one district had formal structures mandating schools to include parents and community members in decision-making roles. However, the level of power and influence given to these groups varied. The other two districts had only vague policies that encouraged schools to have formal structures, and these efforts were largely unsuccessful. Furthermore, none of the districts monitored how well, or even if schools adopted the policies into practice.

In addition, the locus of responsibility for community involvement was not clear in any of the cases. Therefore, the role of the principal was vital in both interpreting unclear district expectations and in creating and communicating school level expectations for parent engagement. Although some principals in the sample tried different ways to engage parents, most relied on traditional mechanism such as fundraising, volunteering, and hosting social gatherings at the school, with the exception of a few schools that had parent education nights tied specifically to classroom curriculum. As expected, low income and minority parents were least involved at both the district and school level.

Lastly, even though partnerships were seen as important in two of the three cases, operationally partnering was viewed as a way to increase resources and revenue and not necessarily as a way to create joint efforts to improve student learning.

In the following section, I summarize the study, discuss the findings and answer the research questions listed in the first chapter.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Summary, Discussion, and Conclusion**

In this chapter, I first present a summary of this study, answer the research questions and discuss the major findings. Next, I relate the findings to the theoretical framework and existing literature on parent and community involvement in education. Then, I suggest areas for further research and discuss the implications of the findings on district and school policies and practices. I also discuss the limitations of this research and how these limitations may have influenced my findings. Lastly, I present the conclusions that were generated from this research.

#### **Summary of the Study**

In this study, I set out to investigate what organizational conditions fostered or hindered successful and productive working relationships between districts, schools, and community stakeholders. Neo-institutional and organizational theories guided the study because of the increasing consensus that districts and schools have, over time, created, through policies and administrative behavior, an increasingly detached relationship with their communities (Schutz, 2006; Driscoll, 1998; Crowson, 2003). However, in recent years, external pressures on districts and schools have steadily increased with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, placing a greater degree of urgency on educational organizations to not only increase learning for all students, but also to be more open and transparent. NCLB as well as comprehensive school reform models (like Accelerated Schools, Core Knowledge, High Schools That Work, and Success for All) have a



parent/community involvement component that defines parents as partners in children's learning and includes parents and community groups in the school improvement process. The degree to which districts and schools have complied with the parent/community involvement component of these reforms has varied greatly.

In this study, I used case study methods to investigate three districts and two schools within each district that were selected because they had information-rich data for examining community and parent engagement practices. The data for these cases were collected over a period of four years, 2005-2008 and came from a larger study that investigated the link between leadership and student achievement, entitled, "Learning from District Efforts to Increase Student Learning," funded by the Wallace Foundation. Data from all interviews were analyzed and coded based on the literature review and theoretical framework. Results were presented in three separate cases and reported along five dimensions that cut across all the data: (1) role of leadership in shaping organizational culture, (2) formal structures; (3) community and parent engagement and influence; (4) organizational transparency and communication between district, school and public; and (5) partnerships. The previous chapter included a cross-case analysis and a broad discussion of findings across each theme. Below is a general discussion of these findings and their implications.

Several questions drove both the methods chosen and the analysis that I have presented in the previous chapters:

1. What organizational and institutional structures (culture, policies, and practices) exist at the school and district level that foster or hinder community and parent engagement?

- a. How do previous experiences with parent and community stakeholders affect current district and school practices?
  - b. How does community involvement fit into the larger reform efforts of districts?
2. Why do some districts and schools continue to struggle with engaging families and community stakeholders despite their efforts?

The findings are summarized by research question, and then I discuss their overall meaning in light of the study's intent to illuminate the broader issue of productive relationships between communities and schools.

### **Answers to the Research Questions**

In this study, I sought out to answer two main research questions and two sub-questions:

- 1. What organizational and institutional structures (culture, policies, and practices) exist at the school and district level that foster or hinder community and parent engagement?**

Organizational conditions such as collaborative and open cultures, trust both within schools and with external stakeholders, and visible and highly communicative leadership generally fostered greater outside stakeholder involvement. Organizational conditions that generally hindered community and parent engagement included unapproachable leadership, vaguely worded and weakly monitored policies, and cultures and structures that kept parents and community members on the periphery of the operating core. In addition, this study revealed that formal policies for democratic

engagement were weak. Structures and policies alone did not lead to increased or meaningful parent and community engagement; a finding consistent with other research

**a. How do previous experiences with parent and community stakeholders affect current district and school practices?**

When previous leaders in this study created cultures that were not conducive to parent and community engagement, new leaders had to spend significant time out in the community creating new relationships with external stakeholders and reestablishing trust with the district/school. Therefore, previous leaders who ignored the public, or who kept outside stakeholders at arm's length, had an effect on the behaviors and activities of the new leader of the organization.

**b. How does community involvement fit into the larger reform efforts of districts?**

In all instances, engagement was viewed as peripheral or tangential to the larger reform efforts of districts and schools. This is consistent with neo-institutional theorists who assert that organizational survival depends on the extent to which organizations can meet external pressures and demands by demonstrating a believable myth or façade that legitimates their behavior. District and school level leaders can say that they believe in the importance of parental engagement and can point to these policies as the evidence of their sincerity and commitment, even if actors within the organizations do not act on these policies and even if they are not linked to the larger reform efforts. This study reveals that even though our educational system has gone through extensive

comprehensive reforms because of external pressures and NCLB, we have no clear comprehensive policies at the district or school levels aimed at increasing parent and community engagement, nor a clear vision or strategies.

## **2. Why do some districts and schools continue to struggle with engaging families and community stakeholders despite their efforts?**

In all of the cases in this study, districts and schools struggled in one way or another to engage parents, community groups, and businesses despite some instances of concerted effort. Most notably, all districts and schools struggled to involve large groups of parents in meaningful ways, especially parents with diverse backgrounds. Some of the districts and schools tried many different tactics to engage more families, but with varying success. Even though some school and district personnel understood the importance of parental engagement and its relationship to student learning, the strategies they used to try and engage more parents were traditional and surface-level.

One reason was that district level policies, expectations, and modeling did not “trickle down” to the school level. Because of this, policies existed at two separate levels, with little connection and no accountability. Another reason is that in most instances, schools and districts continued to use the same kinds of mechanisms and strategies to engage parents despite the fact that these strategies did not result in increased parent engagement. This finding is consistent with neo-institutional theory which asserts that organizations tend to incorporate practices and procedures that have been defined by existing “rationalized” concepts of how organizations ought to work and behave in society (Meyer and Rowan, 1977), even if they are not effective or produce the desired

results. Organizations that do incorporate policies such as having a PTO/A, site council, and hosting social family/dinner nights increase their legitimacy simply because these are the traditional prevailing practices and policies for how schools “get parents involved” in the educational system.

### **General Discussion of Findings**

This study revealed that leadership matters at all levels of the organization. In particular, leadership at the district level was critical for creating and sustaining a district culture that fostered parent, business, and community involvement. Certain leadership behaviors were consistent with increased levels of engagement such as a willingness to be open to greater outside stakeholder influence, having frequent and clear communication with groups external to the organization, and being visible and accessible to the public. More importantly, district level leaders who did extensive networking, partnering, and collaborating appeared to generate more social capital. This finding is consistent with Goldring & Sims’s (2005) research that revealed “the bridger role” or “boundary spanner” was critical to the creation of successful partnership structures. This finding suggests that when there is leadership turnover at the district level, especially in districts with weak or negative relationships with external groups, the new superintendent may have to take on the bridger or boundary spanner role in order to create new partnerships and rebuild trust in the organization.

However, the impact of district level initiatives to increase external stakeholder engagement was limited. Even in districts with leaders who were open, transparent, and visible, engagement practices were uneven, especially in the area of including external

stakeholders in decision-making. One explanation for this finding could be that district leaders did not see partnering with external stakeholders as vital to the survival of the organization or as necessary components for improving student learning and maintaining a democratic system. This finding suggests that districts leaders who want to meaningfully engage parents and community groups need to move past simply viewing external stakeholders as “clients” who deserve information about what the district is doing, and actually start viewing parents and community stakeholders as vital partners in the learning process.

There was a disconnection between district level policies, practices, and behaviors – and school level policies, practices, and behaviors. These results deviate slightly from Sanders and Harvey’s (2002) research that showed a strong link between a district’s focus on partnering and a principal’s ability to prioritize school-community partnerships. One explanation for the disconnect may be that districts had vague and noncommittal parent/community involvement policies, which resulted in varied school level engagement practices. This finding is consistent with the quantitative analysis from the larger Wallace-funded study that revealed that district support for greater involvement at the school level did not impact principals’ openness to parent and community involvement (Gordon & Louis, 2009). This finding also suggests that if districts want schools to engage with parents and community members in productive and meaningful ways, then they need to not only create clearer policies and strategies for schools to follow, but they also need do a better job of monitoring engagement practices and holding school leaders accountable to engaging with outside stakeholder groups. Vaguely written policies, encouragement and even expectations alone will not work, unless

districts specify clear strategies, actually monitor the level of implementation, and hold school leaders accountable.

This study is consistent with other research that found that formal policies for democratic engagement are weak and structures and policies alone do not lead to increased or meaningful parent and community engagement. These cases elicited several examples where governance structures and policies (and the intentions of these policies) did not reflect actual practices in the organization; a finding consistent with neo-institutional theory. Although the purpose of having these mandated governance structures was to maintain a democratic school system, the actual school level practices were more “ritual” than democratic. As stated above, this finding is consistent with the literature on school governance structures. Despite the existence of formal policies aimed at increasing parent and community members in decision-making, research revealed that site-based management, school site councils, and school leadership teams did not actually produce the desired goal of shared power and leadership in schools (Opfer, & Denmark, 2001; Malen & Ogawa, 1998; Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994; Malen, 1994, 1999; Hess, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999).

At the school level, the role of the principal proved critical in interpreting unclear expectations from the district level and in creating school cultures that fostered or hindered greater parent and community involvement, at least to a degree. Although some principals mediated district level expectations and experimented with formal structures to involve parents, they were largely unsuccessful. This finding is consistent with Fullan’s (2001) assessment of the principal as the “gatekeepers of change.” It is also consistent with Louis’s (2003) assertion that leaders are crucial players in the effective facilitation

of community level involvement. Furthermore, these findings corroborate Anderson's (1998) findings that principals who were perceived to be honest, communicative, supportive and collegial provided organizational spaces where authentic engagement and deliberation with teachers and outside stakeholders could be sustained. On the other hand, he found that in schools where principals were more top-down or control-oriented, teachers (and one could argue parents, as in the Rawls Elementary case) often responded to this behavior with defensiveness and self-protection, making authentic participation nearly impossible. Overall, parent involvement at the school level was narrowly defined and not tied to specific learning goals or initiatives. This finding suggests that principals viewed engagement policies and practices as peripheral, meaning involvement policies and practices were not tied to other school reforms.

This study also found that leaders have different perceptions of district and school organizational boundaries. The superintendents in these cases viewed the boundaries as porous and worked to bring outside stakeholders into the educational process. Some school level leaders, on the other hand, viewed schools as closed systems where "education" happened and the outside environment as a distraction to the educational process. These findings coincide with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) theory that leaders either perpetuate organizational myths or they try to change them.

This study also revealed that low income and minority parents were least involved at both the district and school level. This finding is consistent with the literature that the level of parent involvement varies across different demographic groups (Mitchell, 2008; Crispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). One explanation for this might be what Delgado-Gaitan (1991) suggested which was that schools exclude low income and



minority parents either consciously or unconsciously because the majority of activities “require specific majority culturally based knowledge and behaviors about the school as an institution. Frequently, these ideas are assumed and are not made explicit” (pg. 21). This finding is consistent with the cases and suggests some school and district personnel understood the importance of parental engagement and its relationship to student learning, but the strategies they used to try and engage more diverse parents tended to be traditional majority culture based and surface level activities like hosting social nights, serving food, PTO/A, fundraising, and asking for volunteers.

### **Implications for Research**

This study reveals several areas for further research. First, more rigorous research and evaluations must assess the existing programs and policies aimed at increasing parent and community involvement, so that those programs that are successful are promoted at the school level. This is especially important since many of the interviewees in this study indicated that they do not know how to effectively engage parents and community members in helping improve student learning. Second, further research is needed to explore schools that have had successes with parent and community involvement programs. What are the variables that make these contexts successful? How do leaders behave and operate in schools that have authentic engagement? Third, more research needs to be done on the extent to which schools and districts are engaging with communities for legitimating reasons versus genuine beliefs that engagement leads to increased student learning and increased community level ownership in the educational process. Fourth, researchers, practitioners and policy makers need to examine shared and

disparate assumptions underlying most existing formal and informal policies to increase parent and community engagement. How do we reformulate and open up our conception of community – a necessity if we want our conception to reflect the majority of urban heterogeneous settings and movements toward globalization? Fifth, what are effective strategies for how schools and districts negotiate and mediate the competing goals of different parent and community groups? Sixth, scholars need to engage in more international and comparative research in this area to better understand the impact of regional, political, social, and economic contexts and cultures on parent and community engagement with schools. Lastly, this study is unique in that not much research has been done on the role of the superintendent and other district leaders in creating district level parent and community engagement policies and practices, except in the area of creating successful partnership structures. More research needs to be done on the importance of district level engagement of outside stakeholders and the impact that engagement has on the organization.

### **Implications for Theory**

This study confirms the neo-institutional framework. Implications of this study for theory suggest that using broader organizational and neo-institutional theories to frame studies of parent and community engagement practices helped reveal the disconnection between districts and schools and informed the reasons why schools as organizations continue to struggle with building and maintaining meaningful engagement practices with community stakeholders. Many of the findings of this study are consistent with neo-institutional theory. For example, all of the districts and schools had practices

and policies (such as governance structures, PTO/A, and site councils) that were defined by established rationalized ideas of how organizations work in a highly institutionalized society. It is also true that organizations that adopted the traditional structures increased their level of legitimacy, especially in the eyes of the public. In addition, practices at the district level were loosely-coupled from practices at the school level. The findings of this study are also consistent with Bidwell's (2001) claims that neo-institutional theory has strong implications for the role of school and district level administrators since they are the key actors who adhere to and perpetuate the organizational myths within their intuitions by setting the tone and culture, by adapting to the environment, and by creating institutional legitimacy. I also believe, however, that this study revealed some instances of leaders trying to break free of the mold and transcend their organizational myths.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

This study shed light on organizational and institutional policies and practices of engaging parents and the community more broadly in the educational process. I found that districts did not have a strong impact on how open principals were to community and parent engagement. Because of this districts should do much more than is typical to encourage openness to community and parent involvement among those in schools. While districts typically create policies requiring certain levels of outside stakeholder influence in decision-making, these policies have only a weak and indirect influence on creating more participatory and open environments in schools. Superintendent modeling of engagement behaviors also did not do enough to encourage schools to engage the public in the educational process. In addition, I found in this analysis that even where

districts emphasized public engagement, the policies and preferences tended to “trickle down” to schools only in the form of mandated representation on school councils or other formal structures—a weak strategy for engaging stakeholders or creating shared leadership. Without better models and support, principals will focus on the daily pressures of running the school, and not on creating a more democratic ethos.

To increase their principals’ openness to community and parent involvement, district leaders need to engage in dialogues with principals about what openness to community and parental involvement means in practice, beyond merely establishing policies and structures. Pertinent topics for such discussions would include the value of partnering with parents and community members in school-improvement efforts, parents as vital partners in the learning process, the importance of shared leadership, and the critical role that the community plays in every child’s life.

Districts should also take an active role in teaching principals, teachers and other school staff how to effectively involve parents and community members in the educational process. This effort could include providing informational and instructional sessions about shared governance, how to create open and trusting school cultures, how to effectively communicate with parents and community groups, and effective means of outreach.

Furthermore, principals need to engage teachers and other staff members in similar discussions focused especially on ways to involve parents in roles beyond the superficial tasks often allocated to them (e.g., coordinating social events, fundraising through bake sales). Many parents feel marginalized because they are given tasks that do not reflect the crucial role they could otherwise play in support of their children’s

education. Parent participation as tutors, mentors, helpers at home, or in other forms of educational support are as vital as the roles they take on in site-council activities.

Lastly, district and school leaders need to be more proactive in teaching parents and community members how to be meaningfully engaged in the educational process.

## **Conclusion**

At the beginning of this study, I argued that education practitioners, reformers, researchers, and policy makers could not solve the problem of increasing student learning, growth and achievement by organizationally isolating the work of schools from communities. I based my argument on the strong cases made by existing research that revealed that increasing parent and community participation and engagement with schools led to beneficial outcomes for both schools and communities. I made the case that increasing family and community engagement in schools was essential for increasing student learning and should be seen as essential components of whole school reforms because:

1. Increasing accountability pressures and stress on schools not only from the public, but from the national and state governments makes it clear that today's schools "can't do it alone;"
2. Schools that fail to join forces with their communities face increasing public alienation and a lack of vital social capital, an essential component for school success;

3. Schools that are truly focused on increasing student learning should be actively connecting and engaging with parents and community members to help increase student achievement; and
4. Despite our country's commitment to public education and adherence to the ideal of schools as extensions of local communities, school organizations have become "too intramural" and have kept outside stakeholders, including families, in the dark about what happens behind school walls.

Although these cases revealed a few innovative approaches, districts and schools continue to view parent and community involvement as peripheral to larger educational reform efforts and thus relegate engagement activities to the back burner.

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## Appendix A

**Chart of Interviewees (N=149)**

Location	Round 1 (05-06)	Round 2 (06-07)	Round 3 (07-08)
<b>Glenhurst School District (N=49)</b>			
<b>District Office</b>	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent Executive Administrator School Board Chair School Board Vice Chair Union Leader	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent Executive Administrator Community Coordinator	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent
<b>Community</b>	Business Representative President of Chamber of Commerce Elementary Parent Middle Parent	Newsprint Media Reporter	
<b>School Level</b>	Elementary Principal Elementary Counselor 7 Elementary Teachers Middle Principal 2 Middle Vice Principals 6 Middle Teachers	Elementary Principal Middle Principal	Elementary Principal 4 Elementary Teachers Middle Principal 5 Middle Teachers
<b>Atlas School District (N=56; 3 not used)</b>			
<b>District Office</b>	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent 2 Board of Education members Director of Curriculum Director of Evaluation School Improvement Supervisor Union Leader	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum Assistant Superintendent of Government Relations Director of Curriculum Director of Evaluation Director of School Improvement	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent Director of Curriculum Director of School Improvement
<b>Community</b>	2 Members of Parent Curriculum Council Elementary Parent Middle Parent Director of Community Learning Center Director of Teen Center	Business Representative Foundation Representative Chamber of Commerce Newsprint Media Reporter	Director of Community Learning Center Director of Teen Center
<b>School Level</b>	Elementary Principal Elementary Assistant Principal	Elementary Principal	Elementary Principal 5 Elementary Teachers Middle Principal

	6 Elementary Teachers Middle Principal Middle Assistant Principal 6 Middle Teachers		4 Middle Teachers
<b>North White Pine County District (N=44; 5 not used)</b>			
<b>District Office</b>	Superintendent Assistant Superintendent 2 Board Members 2 Directors of Community Involvement Director of Personnel Director of Staff Development Coordinator of Testing and Data Analysis 2 Directors of Vocational and Secondary Education 2 Curriculum Directors		Superintendent Assistant Superintendent Director of Community Involvement
<b>Community</b>	Member of Chamber of Commerce Elementary Parent 2 Middle Parents		
<b>School Level</b>	Elementary Principal Elementary Literacy Facilitator Elementary Speech Language Pathologist Elementary Tech Coordinator 6 Elementary Teachers Middle Principal Middle Assistant Principal Middle Assistant Principal Intern Secretary 4 Teachers		Elementary Principal 4 Elementary Teachers Middle Principal 5 Middle Teachers

## Appendix B

### Protocol Questions Linked to Research Questions

District Level	Round One (2005-2006)	Round Two (2006-2007)	Round Three (2007-2008)
<b>Superintendent/ District Level Staff</b>	Which external stakeholder groups are most influential in this District? In what ways do they affect district improvement efforts? (Q1a, Q1b)	Last year, we talked about your district's partnerships with the following groups [list groups]. What impact, if any, does this relationship have on school improvement initiatives in the district? Who is providing leadership with these partnerships? Are there new partnerships directed at school improvement? Who is providing leadership for those? (Q1, Q1b)	What examples can you give of actions that you and other district leaders are take to build community trust in district improvement efforts? (Q1, Q2)
	What has contributed to productive relationships among stakeholders? What events or factors have hindered these relationships? Probe for examples. (Q1, Q1a, Q2)	The last time we were here we asked about district relationships with influential community stakeholder groups, and those that were mentioned included ... [list stakeholder groups]. Has anything significant happened in the district's relationships with these stakeholder groups? What implications have that had for district/school improvement efforts? Your role in that? (Q1, Q1b)	In your district what policies, practices or expectations exist for actively engaging families in student learning, beyond those concerned with parent participation in school or district governance? Implications for you and other district leaders? (Q1, Q1b)
		What policies or practices does this district have that address parent or community involvement at the district level? At the school level? (Q1) How effective are these policies or practices? What is the status of parent involvement? How responsive is the community to these initiatives? (Q2)	

		<p>Which local media sources (newspaper, TV, radio) give the most attention to education? (Q1)</p> <p>What images or messages do the local media send to your community about the district and schools? What is your relationship with the media? How do you interact with them? (Q1)</p>	
<b>Union/Business/ Or Community Representative</b>	Do you work with school district leaders? If yes, ask for example. Do you work with school board members? Example? (Q1)	What's your position/role and in what ways are you and the organization you're associated with involved with the work of the school district and schools? (Q1, Q1b)	
	What has been the role of the (external stakeholder) over the last few years to help build district leadership and improve student learning? What role have you played in this regard? [Probe for examples of external stakeholder involvement with schools, principals and teachers] (Q1b)	Does this district do anything in particular to promote and enable school and community partnerships? Explain? (Q1, Q1b)	
	What is the role of parents in this district? Are there other stakeholders who are influential in this state? In what way are they involved? (Q1)	Overall, What role does the community play in helping schools improve and sustain the quality of education in this district? Is this the role it should play? Explain? (Q1b)	
	What has contributed to productive relationships among these stakeholders? Ask for examples of cooperation and collaboration. (Q1, Q2)	What influence, if any, does your group/organization try to have on education improvement goals and activities in the district and schools? Examples of things you've attempted to influence and how? Results? (Q1b)	
	What events or factors have hindered productive relationships among these stakeholders? Probe for	What other community groups/organizations are exercising significant influence, positive or	



	examples of friction or conflict. (Q1, Q1a, Q2)	negative, on district and school improvement goals and activities? Your relations with them? (Q1, Q2)	
		Overall, how would you characterize the role of the school district in this community? And the role of this community in the school district? (Q2)	
<b>School Level</b>	<b>Round One (2005-2006)</b>	<b>Round Two (2006-2007)</b>	<b>Round Three (2007-2008)</b>
<b>Principal</b>	What would you highlight about the community served by this school? What special needs or challenges does it present? Comparisons to other schools in the district? (Q2)	How if at all does the district encourage or support you in building community partnerships? (Q1)	Historically, what has been the nature your school's relationship with parents overall? PROBE: Issues, challenges, examples of collaboration? (Q1a)
	How are parents involved in this school and what is their influence on principal and teacher efforts to improve student learning? Existence and role of PTA/School Council (Q1, Q1b)	Last time we were here you talked about partnerships between your school and groups in the community that relate to your school improvement efforts. (List....) What notable changes or issues, if any, have occurred in school-community partnership arrangements and activities that are affecting school improvement efforts? Implications for your actions as principal? New partnership ventures? (Q1, Q1b)	What are your expectations for parent engagement in supporting student learning? (Q1b)
	What strategies do you use as a school administrator to communicate and interact with parents and families of all backgrounds? Challenges? (Q1)	Overall, how would you characterize the role of THIS school in THIS community? And the role of the community in your school? (Q2)	Are there current school initiatives that depend on parent involvement in order to be successful? Please explain.

			(Q1b)
	How does your school interact with the broader community, and how does this relate to student learning and improvement? Implications for your work as a school administrator? (Q1, Q1b)		Tell us how you have explained state initiatives to the public. (Q1)
<b>Teachers</b>	How are parents involved in this school and what is their influence on principal and teacher efforts to improve student learning? (Q1, Q1b)		What does your principal expect of you in terms of parental engagement? How does he/she communicate that expectation? In what ways does he/she support you in actively engaging parents? Examples? (Q1)
	What would you highlight about the community served by this school? What special needs or challenges does it present? Comparisons to other schools in the district? (Q2)		
<b>Parent Representative</b>	What are the greatest needs that students have at this school that should be addressed by parents? What challenges have you or other parents faced in working within this school? (Q2)		
	Are you currently engaged in any school improvement efforts involving other members of the school community (people who		

	are concerned about and active in the school, whether paid or unpaid)? If so, please describe the focus of this work and your role. (Q1, Q1b)		
	What responsibilities does your group/team carry out? Do you recommend changes in school policy or organization related to student learning? Do you help with implementation of new reforms or programs? If so, in what way? What opportunities, if any, do you have to influence how or what children are taught at this school? (Q1, Q1b)		
	What do you do as a parent representative? Do you advocate for (or intervene on behalf of) students? Do you help carry out teachers instructional work? Other? (Q1, Q1b)		
	With whom do you interact in this school? What is the nature of this interaction? (Q1)		
	How does your school interact with the community? In general, do community members approach the school or does the school reach out to the community? In general, who initiates these connections? (Q1)		
<b>Community Representative</b>	What community agency/group do you represent? What's its purpose and what role does your community agency/group interact with		

	the school? (Q1)		
	How did your community agency/group get involved with the school? Who key players in getting this relationship going? (Q1)		
	What is your position and role in this school-community partnership (collaboration)? With whom do you interact in this school, and in what ways? What challenges have you faced in working with this school? How addressed? (Q1, Q2)		
<b>Student Support Staff</b>	Are there avenues for parental involvement? In decision making? In helping to direct their children's school experience? (Q1, Q1b)		
	What conception do you have of the role your school plays within the surrounding community? (Q2)		
	How do you, as a student development professional communicate and interact with parents? (Q1)		

## Appendix C

### Coding Framework

<p><b>A. Organizational Characteristics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Informally organized systems/practices</li><li>b. Formally organized systems/policies</li><li>c. Organizational Goals</li><li>d. Intermediary organizations</li><li>e. Resources</li><li>f. Leadership Style (shaping organizational culture)</li></ul> <p><b>B. Neo-Institutional Theory</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Transparency</li><li>b. Norms and expectations (state regulation, regulations, legitimacy, obligations, symbols, artifacts)</li><li>c. Networks (social and professional ties)</li><li>d. External pressures (adaptation, uncertainty, ambiguity, internal expertise)</li><li>e. Dilemmas</li><li>f. Bounding (between organization and environment, buffering, loose-coupling)</li></ul> <p><b>C. Parent Engagement Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Parents attending school meetings</li><li>b. Parents attending conferences</li><li>c. Parents helping at home</li><li>d. School communication of student progress</li><li>e. Volunteering</li></ul>	<p><b>D. Formal Structures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Participatory Structures – SBM, PTO, Site Council, etc.</li><li>b. Community organizing</li><li>c. Shared Leadership – Teachers</li><li>d. Shared Leadership – Parents/community members</li><li>e. Ownership</li><li>f. level of Influence/decision-making</li></ul> <p><b>E. Social Capital</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Educating Parents</li><li>b. Responsibility for surrounding community</li><li>c. Relationship Building (Bonding and Bridging)</li><li>d. Partnerships (Community - School Partnerships; Integrated Services)</li><li>e. Trust</li></ul> <p><b>F. Public Relations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. School Choice</li><li>b. Public Hearings or Meetings</li><li>c. Communication</li></ul>
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## Appendix D

### District and School Cross-Case Summary Charts

**Table 1: District Cross-Case Summary Chart**

	<b>Glenhurst School District</b>	<b>Atlas School District</b>	<b>North White Pines County</b>
<b>Leadership and District Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District is principal-led, onus for community engagement on the principals and teachers at school level</li> <li>♦Superintendent models openness, visibility, communication, accessibility, approachability, and collaboration with staff, families and the greater community</li> <li>♦ New superintendent openness is contrasted with previous superintendent who was more closed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District is site-based, which leaves community engagement to the discretion of the principals</li> <li>♦Superintendent models openness, visibility, and values above all, collaboration and communication of district vision and mission to public – best represented in the passing of a bond</li> <li>♦ New superintendent openness is contrasted with previous superintendent who was more closed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Leadership very stable, which allows for the building of community relationships and trust</li> <li>♦District takes time to roll out new programs to create buy-in from every stakeholder</li> <li>♦Superintendent has good relationship with school board</li> <li>♦Leaders “open” to parent and community input, but not as active as other two districts in seeking ways to engage</li> </ul>
<b>Formal Structures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Elected Local School Committees (LSCs); mini-school boards</li> <li>♦Elected Site Councils (50% parents; 50% school staff)</li> <li>♦Mandated, but quality of PTO/A varies by building</li> <li>♦Elected School Board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Community Curriculum Council – two parents from every building sit on this council (around 40 members)</li> <li>♦PTO/A or having a site council varies by building (no district mandate to have either one)</li> <li>♦Parents invited to be on other district level task forces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Elected School Board</li> <li>♦Advisory councils (school improvement teams) at every school – district mandated certain % of parents on council</li> <li>♦Parents invited to be members of the district Quality Council</li> </ul>
<b>Community and Parent Engagement and Influence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Families and students are able to give feedback through an annual school report process</li> <li>♦Influential groups of parents often ban together to form opposition groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Small business group, the local Independent Business Association put pressure on district to be more open about spending habits</li> <li>♦Families are able to give feedback yearly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District created before and after school programs in response to parental influence - to fit parent work schedules</li> <li>♦District views community and</li> </ul>

	<p>and bombard district with calls and e-mails if they disagree with a decision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District feels that the community holds them accountable to follow through on mission and goals</li> <li>♦The district has a Welcome Center for new families</li> <li>♦Policies around parent engagement limited to NCLB, but clear sign of informal invitations to give input</li> <li>♦Parental engagement at school level is sporadic and dependent upon principal</li> </ul>	<p>through a family survey</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Significant pressure from community/business organizations for district to be more transparent – so when new super was hired, the community was “deeply engaged” in the decision-making process</li> <li>♦Parents are invited to be on a district Community Curriculum Council to give input</li> <li>♦Parental engagement at school level is sporadic and dependent upon principal</li> <li>♦No clear district level policies around parental engagement, but a clear sign of informal invitations to give input</li> </ul>	<p>parents as their “clients” and are held accountable by them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Tourist industry lobbied successfully to change school schedule</li> <li>♦Parents are able to give feedback through annual climate surveys</li> <li>♦Limited amount of parent engagement at district level</li> <li>♦No clear district level policies around parental engagement, but several vague policies that encourage involvement</li> <li>♦Parental engagement at school level is sporadic and dependent upon principal</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Transparency &amp; Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District mission/goals are well known inside organization and out into the community</li> <li>♦Several avenues for communication with public, e.g. “listening sessions”, and “key-communicator” meetings</li> <li>♦Administrators are visible, open, and accessible to parents, community members, and media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District mission/goals are well known inside organization and in community</li> <li>♦Significant change from old admin to new admin in organizational transparency – goal of new admin is increased communication with public</li> <li>♦Administrators are visible, open, and accessible to parents, community members, and media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District mission/goals are well known inside organization, but transparency with public is uneven</li> <li>♦District leaders are approachable and accessible (stability of leadership)</li> <li>♦District spends a lot of time in public relations mode and lobbying for support (such as bond issues) from businesses and legislature</li> <li>♦Relationship with media variable</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Active Community Education Foundation that helps with fundraising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Ventures in Partnership (VIP) program to actively partner schools with local</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District has longstanding partnerships with local</li> </ul>

	<p>but is also a liaison between district and business community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Two large business corporate headquarters; one business has larger role in district and schools than the other</li> <li>♦Some buffering and gate keeping between the district/schools and the business community</li> </ul>	<p>businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District convened a Student Housing Task Force with members of all community/business groups and parents to help pass the bond measure</li> <li>♦District partnered with local community organizations (such as park and rec) to run independent community learning centers that are housed in the schools for student to get tutoring and serve as before/after school care</li> </ul>	<p>businesses and the Chamber of Commerce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District created a program to recognize business contributions to education – BASES (Businesses Assisting Schools in Educating Students)</li> <li>♦District has strong relationship with military base</li> <li>♦District and military base are the largest employers in the area; District contributes to local charities such as the United Way and encourages civic engagement</li> </ul>
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**Table 2: School Cross-Case Summary Chart**

	<b>Glenhurst School District</b>		<b>Atlas School District</b>		<b>North White Pines County</b>	
	<b>Rawls Elementary</b>	<b>Heritage Middle</b>	<b>Sentinel Elementary</b>	<b>Butler Middle</b>	<b>Maple Island Elementary</b>	<b>Country Grove Middle</b>
<b>Leadership and Organizational Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Old principal did not have good relationship with parents</li> <li>♦New principal engages parents and is working on more open school culture</li> <li>♦New principal has very clear expectations for engaging parents and models that engagement herself</li> <li>♦New principal is described as caring and heartfelt towards the community; community trusts her</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Principal does monthly coffee meetings with parents; she wears her PR hat during these meetings</li> <li>♦Parent believes that the principal is very open and accessible to community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Principal lobbied hard with parents and community groups to get a Community Learning Center (CLC)</li> <li>♦When working on school improvement and deciding on a school focus, the principal involved parents for input – mostly through the PTO</li> <li>♦School staff describe the principal as “rigid” and “dictatorial”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Principal describes the culture of the school as “relationship-oriented”</li> <li>♦Principal serves on the board of the two partnership community organizations that run the Teen Center at the school</li> <li>♦Principal was integral in securing the partnership with the Parks and Rec department for the Teen Center</li> <li>♦Principal views parents as partners is children’s learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Principal went on “tour” of county to talk to different groups of parents</li> <li>♦Principal and staff help families out economically which is done periodically “as needed”</li> <li>♦Principal is open and accessible; works with the families out in the community and in the local churches</li> <li>♦Principal successfully lobbied to become a magnet school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Principal created the theme of “no excuses” for the staff, students, and parents</li> <li>♦School staff and parents describe the principal as a tough and strong leader; she sometimes comes off as “my way or the highway”</li> <li>♦School has had high principal turnover prior to current principal</li> </ul>
<b>Formal</b>	♦Elected Site	♦Elected Site	♦School	♦ Parent	♦PTA was	♦Building

<p><b>Structures</b></p>	<p>Council          ♦Elected Local School Committee          ♦PTO tied to family night, parent education, and dinners; mostly social, although there is a parent education component</p>	<p>Council          ♦Elected Local School Committee          ♦PTO in charge of raising funds and parent volunteering; fairly influential</p>	<p>Neighborhood Advisory Committee comprised of school staff, students, CLC staff, community groups and parents          ♦PTO has between 12 and 20 parents at one time; works with the CLC, coordinates volunteers, raises funds</p>	<p>Reviews Group is their formal PTO - the school will have a topic and parents can come in and discuss that topic or lead a discussion about that topic with the principal – but teachers are not part of this group; about 6-14 parents come to that – principal said that the group does not function the way he wanted it to          ♦The school has a separate group for Hispanic parents with interpreters          ♦Tried having parents on the school improvement team, but ended that because -- they want to rethink this</p>	<p>dissolved first year of principal's tenure; she replaced it with PLOT (People Lending out Their Time); parents are asked to be representatives on a variety of school level teams</p>	<p>Leadership Team (BLT) – like a strategic planning team          ♦Small number of parents serve on the BLT          ♦Members of BLT also serve in teams and each team has specific goals aligned with district goals; one goal is to increase parent engagement          ♦No PTO/PTA first two years of study, but goal of principal to start one; when they did start one it did not go well and the principal said that parent involvement was not a priority</p>
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<p><b>Community and Parent Engagement and Influence</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Significant pressure from community with old principal because he was not liked by parents; only lasted two years as principal</li> <li>♦Limited amount of community influence or pressure with new principal</li> <li>♦Volunteering limited to white, affluent parents, but trying to change that</li> <li>♦School has classes for parents on math and literacy and other subjects</li> <li>♦By tying PTO to family nights they get parents to attend events and they stay for PTO by serving dessert at that time</li> <li>♦Family nights are focused on</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Principal says that she feels pressure at the monthly coffee meetings with parents and hinted that these were not her favorite meetings; the parents are very demanding</li> <li>♦These parents are called the “key communicators” who will get word out to other parents</li> <li>♦Family nights are held where they serve dinner - mostly a social event</li> <li>♦Expectations for communicating with parents is not clear</li> <li>♦School has had math nights to pre-teach math to parents so that they are able to help their children at home; not well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Limited pressure from the community</li> <li>♦School has a parent-family involvement liaison</li> <li>♦The CLC coordinates a small amount of parent education nights such as financial or retirement planning classes</li> <li>♦The CLC also coordinates monthly book readings with parents and their children and has activities around that book at the CLC</li> <li>♦PTO recruited parent volunteers to help staff the school’s library /media center; but school has problems recruiting more parents and more diverse parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Limited amount of parental influence or pressure</li> <li>♦School has Family Nights – some of the nights are purely social, such as bingo night; other nights are more about parent education where the school will highlight math and science lessons that their students are learning</li> <li>♦Some ideas in round one about having parent group meetings out in the community (especially the Hispanic parent group) so that it is not so school-centered</li> <li>♦Teen Center also invites parents to join</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Limited amount of parental influence or pressure</li> <li>♦One example is that small group of parents did protest during redistricting</li> <li>♦Another example is that a parent suggested having classes for parents that mirror what their child is learning in school and it was implemented</li> <li>♦A washer and dryer were donated to the school by a local business; if kids come in with dirty jackets or clothes, the staff washes them. The washer and dryer is available for parents to use as well – to engage them and get them to the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Limited amount of community influence or pressure</li> <li>♦Very low parent involvement at school, but high turnout at conferences and sports events</li> <li>♦Expectations for reaching out to parents is well communicated by principal</li> </ul>
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	<p>increasing student learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Working on improving engagement with ESL parents</li> <li>♦Expectations for communicating with parents is clear</li> </ul>	<p>attended by parents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦School has student-led conferences to more actively empower students and engage parents – well attended</li> <li>♦Volunteering limited to more of the white, affluent parents, but trying to change that</li> </ul>	<p>to volunteer and attend PTO meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦The school had information night on computer safety and only a few parents came</li> <li>♦Expectations for communicating with parents is clear</li> </ul>	<p>their children for enrichment activities and they provide food, but still struggle with parental engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Every quarter the school has a “celebration of excellence” for parents to come and see student work</li> <li>♦Parent attendance at conferences is below average</li> <li>♦Expectations for communicating with parents is clear</li> </ul>	<p>school , but has had limited success thus far</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦School gives out incentives (such as gift cards for groceries) and teachers give presentations about what they are teaching that month so parents can help at home</li> <li>♦The school periodically serves breakfast and invites parents to come and eat with kids</li> <li>♦Expectations for communicating with parents is clear</li> </ul>	
<b>Organizational Transparency &amp; Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Monthly newsletters are sent home</li> <li>♦Did a staff survey on how school rated in parent engagement; principal rated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Homework hotline is updated regularly and parents can access</li> <li>♦Principal has these monthly coffee talk with parents, but teachers do not</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦School communicates and coordinates with the CLC to make sure that the programs and services offered are closely aligned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Monthly newsletters are sent home and the website is updated with information for parents</li> <li>♦School communicates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦When the school was lobbying to become a magnet school, groups of teachers and the administrators went out into the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦School has a media coordinator (librarian) that works on communicating to the public as well as parents and informs</li> </ul>

	<p>the staff lower than the staff did themselves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦School had a hard time communicating the homework expectations to parents</li> <li>♦Small amount of home visits by school staff</li> </ul>	<p>know what happens at those meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Principal asked her teacher teams to elect a “key communicator” for group to keep parents informed about classroom activities</li> <li>♦It is up to the discretion of the teams how often they communicate with parents (via newsletters, e-mails, etc.)</li> </ul>	<p>with what happens in school – through teacher liaisons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦School sends out parent newsletters, both a principal and teacher newsletter, and they update their website regularly</li> </ul>	<p>and coordinates with the Teen Center to make sure that the services and tutoring offered is closely aligned with what is happening in the curriculum</p>	<p>community to promote the idea and generate buy-in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Mission of school is clearly stated and known throughout community</li> <li>♦School sends out monthly newsletters to parents</li> <li>♦School staff call and make home visits</li> </ul>	<p>them about what happens on the building leadership team meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦District instituted a new attendance policy and it is confusing to parents; teachers and principal spend a lot of time going over the rules for parents</li> <li>♦Regular letters are sent home; school also has an automated phone system to inform parents of events</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Limited partnering with businesses;</li> <li>♦Staff buffering and gatekeeping when it comes to business partnering because they don’t believe in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦No information about partnerships with local agencies or businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Partnership with Park and Recreation and Willard Community Center to host a Community Learning Center (CLC) at the school site for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department to run a Teen Center is the school building which provides before and after school care and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦School has partnership with the local electric company – where the company gives grants so that every child can publish a book that they write</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦Limited partnering with businesses</li> <li>♦One year school staff solicited donations from local businesses for their families that do not have</li> </ul>

	<p>it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Limited amount of local businesses sending volunteers to help tutor kids</li> </ul>		<p>enrichment and before/after school program; their goals are to increase student learning and developing stronger families and healthier neighborhoods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ The CLS also integrates services and partners with many community agencies</li> <li>♦ The CLC has licensed teachers who teach students and the lessons are aligned with what is being taught at school – tutoring is free to parents and paid for by the CLC</li> <li>♦ The CLC does a parent survey every year</li> <li>♦ School has a</li> </ul>	<p>enrichment programs as well as tutoring for students; tutors are local college students majoring in education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ School does have a VIP program with local businesses</li> </ul>		<p>enough money to buy gifts for the holidays</p>
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			Ventures in Partnership (VIP) program with their local restaurant and with Starbucks			
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## Appendix E

### Factors Influencing Level of Engagement

	<b>Glenhurst School District</b>	<b>Rawls Elem</b>	<b>Heritage Middle</b>	<b>North White Pine County</b>	<b>Maple Island Elem</b>	<b>Country Grove Middle</b>	<b>Atlas School District</b>	<b>Sentinel Elem</b>	<b>Butler Middle</b>
Level of Parent Engagement	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Low
Level of Community Engagement	High	None	None	Medium	Medium	None	High	High	High
Level of Business Engagement	Low	Low	None	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Medium
Type of Policies	Three Mandated Gov. structures	Three Mandated Gov. Structures	Three Mandated Gov. Structures	Several vague policies; No mandates	PLOT	BLT PTO	Several vague policies; No mandates VIP	PTO VIP	Parent Review Group
Policies/ Rhetoric ≠Practices	Governance Structures: LSCs supposed to be mini-school boards but function as facilities managers	LSCs focused on facilities use only	School Improvement plans created by site council not used operationally  LSC focused on facilities use only	Encouraged PTOs to focus on achievement over social activities; Neither school parent team focused on academics; Member of school board	Created to replace traditional PTO, but practices mirrored the traditional focus on volunteer and fund raising	One goal of BLT to increase engagement ; but not seen as a priority for school  Set up a PTO in final year of study, but	Centralization of district power and greater involvement in holding schools accountable; except in area of parent and community engagement	Tried to invite more parents to serve on PTO and try new things, but no evidence that they tried anything	Set up parent review group as a means to include parents in decision-making, but did not



				happy that parents did not “meddle”		did not put effort into it; said parent engagement low priority	VIP not substantive	new; VIP:PR only	happen
Openness/ Transparency	Open	Open	Closed	Open	Open	Closed	Open	Closed	Open
Level of Communication	Frequent/ Clear	Frequent/ Clear	Infrequent	Frequent/ Clear	Frequent/ Clear	Infrequent	Frequent/ Clear	infrequent	Frequent / Clear
Level of Trust in Leader	High	High	Low	High	High	Low	High	Low	High
Loose-Coupling	Between districts and schools			Between districts and schools			Between districts and schools		Between School & Teen Center
Buffering/ Gatekeeping	With Businesses; Between teachers union and parents	With Businesses	With Businesses Between parents and principal			Between parents and teachers, between parents and principal		Between principal and parents	
Degree of External Pressures	High	High	High	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low	Low
Clarity of Expectations for Engagement	Unclear	Clear	Unclear	Unclear	Clear	Clear	Unclear	Clear	Clear
Level of Networking	High	Low	Low	High	High	Low	High	High	High

Location of Power/ Decision-Making	Decentralized "Principal-led"	Shared with teachers	Top-Down Secretive	Decentralized Site-based management	Shared with teachers	Top-Down	Centralized; but onus for engagement at school level	Top-Down	Shared with teachers Attempt to share with parents
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