

Where y'all teachers at when we need you? Expectations of city public school teachers beyond the schoolhouse

Keith E. Benson

Camden City School District

In the late hours of January 7, 2016, a sixteen-year-old girl shot a thirteen-year-old boy, Nathaniel Plummer, Jr., to death in Camden, NJ. “Lil Nate” was an eighth-grade student and was the first person to die in the city in 2016...

Following Plummer’s murder, an outcry of public sorrow and calls for change to “take back the community” momentarily took over Camden, a city that often appears accustomed to bloodshed and struggle. Perhaps what made the response to “Lil Nate’s” murder different was the fact that his father, “Big Nate,” is a city celebrity of sorts, primarily for the basketball skills he exhibited during his state-championship days at the city’s flagship high school, Camden High.

“Lil-Nate” was also well-known in his own right and roundly adored by his many family members and peers spanning every corner of the nine-square-mile city. Certainly, the ages of both the victim and suspect caused many in the Camden community to collectively ask introspective questions like, “what’s happening to our youth?” and “what do we need to do to improve the realities in our community?”

To residents’ credit, many took action. Some, informally, to be more present and accessible in the lives of Camden’s youth, and others committed to take more formalized ac-

tion. As a direct result of “Lil Nate’s” death, a new Camden civic organization was formed. It’s called The Village, deriving its name from the oft-repeated proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child.” The Village is a grassroots organization comprised entirely of Camden community members and expatriates. Some members lead their own local activist civic organizations. Some members are youth athletic coaches. Others are simply concerned residents looking to improve the lives of their neighbors.

The Village holds weekly meetings where community-based concerns and plans for solutions are communicated. Thus far, the organization hosted the “2.4 Mile Walk” in efforts to expose Camden City School District officials and state lawmakers with the reality of how far some Camden school children must walk to and from school—often contending with inclement weather and traversing dangerous neighborhoods. The Village has also facilitated the first citywide spelling bee for elementary and high school students, held a symposium on human trafficking, and conducts a weekend camping trips in the summer for nearly eighty city children as an expression of familial love to the city’s youth.

Though “Lil Nate” was one of the seemingly countless Camden victims of violence, and other embodiments of oppression (including chronic under-employment of residents, poor housing conditions, predatory urban development policies, and abusive policing), not only was he a Camden citizen, he was also one of the nearly 10,000 students attending Camden’s public schools.

Every day, thousands of students, like Plummer, walk into Camden’s public schools where city teachers, presumably, are there to educate, care for, and mentor the city’s young people. Despite the narrow role with which some city teachers approach their profession, deliverers of course content and facilitators of classroom events, research frames teaching as inherently political, with educators either push-

ing back against normalized oppression and marginalization, or passively sustaining it. And while Camden residents following the death of Nathaniel Plummer Jr. mobilized to find answers and chart a path forward in their struggle against violence as well as sociopolitical and economic marginalization, Camden's public school teachers have largely been absent from the community's fight for greater social justice—a void long noticeable to Camden's citizenry.

Research suggests racial, cultural, social, and linguistic disconnects between urban schools and communities that yields adversarial relationships between urban public school systems and their communities.

As urban educators are often referred to as “change agents” and Dreamkeepers,¹ Camden's public school teachers need only look out the classroom windows for abundant opportunities to engage in needed, meaningful community-centered social justice activism.

While the geographic focus of this article is Camden, the needs of urban communities and marginalization of its residents are universal. The concerns of Camden residents, safe streets, quality housing and education, and access to decent employment, are nearly identical to those of Harlem, Liberty City, East St. Louis, Compton and everywhere in between. Thus, this article is not so much a conveyance of Camden's unique deficiencies and residents' unreasonable expectations of its educators in helping to facilitate local change, as it is intend-

ed to spur conversation in education literature that highlights urban residents' expectations of their local educators, in the similar fashion in which expectations are communicated to them.

Camden Context

Camden, New Jersey is a post-industrial city directly east of Philadelphia that, since the 1950s, has struggled with sustained middle-class flight, sustained concentrated poverty, hyper-ghettoization, and high crime rates. With a population of nearly 77,350 residents, Camden is overwhelmingly non-White with Black and Hispanic residents comprising 48% and 47% percent of the population respectively. 38% of the city's population is under 18.² With an average annual household income of about \$25,000 in 2015, Camden is the poorest city in the nation, with 42% of its residents living below poverty.³

Conversely, however, the median salary for a Camden public school teacher is \$61,000.⁴ The divergent socioeconomic realities between the majority of Camden's low-income and working class children and residents and the middle-class teachers working here are stark. Additionally, with an overwhelming majority of Camden school teachers living outside the city in middle class suburbs, with children who attend or attended school outside Camden's public school system, city teachers here have little

² US Census (2016).

https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk.

³ Epstein, J. (2015, January 15). *America's Worst School System Will Soon Be Dead. Will What Replaces it be any Better: The Remaking of public education in Camden, New Jersey*. Retrieved from

<http://reason.com/reasontv/2015/01/27/camden-school-choice>.

⁴ Sterling, S & Clark A. (2016, April 20). *What's the Median Salary for Teachers in Your District?*

http://www.nj.com/education/2016/04/whats_the_median_salary_for_teachers_in_your_district.html.

¹ Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass.

substantive connection with the surrounding community aside from working within Camden school buildings. And, despite Camden teachers possessing greater socioeconomic and political capital, they, overwhelmingly, are absent from community-centered struggles, leaving Camden's minority low-income residents to fight against various embodiments of alienation and oppression on their own.

Expansive literature explores the divergent cultures between urban teachers, their students, and the communities in which they work.⁵ Research suggests racial,⁶ cultural,⁷ social, and linguistic⁸ disconnects between urban schools and communities that yields adversarial relationships between urban public school systems and their communities.⁹ Conversely, other research points to the positive impacts of urban teachers employing critical pedagogy for their traditionally marginalized students;¹⁰ school-based activism's potential for improving academic outcomes and feelings of agency among low-income minority students;¹¹ and the potential

for urban teachers to practice social justice advocacy on behalf of their students.¹²

What is less explored, however, is the concept of urban educators advocating for societal change beyond the walls of the schoolhouse to resist oppressive conditions present in the communities where they teach—for the betterment of the outside community. The impact community environments have on local school quality and student outcomes is well documented in education research,¹³ yet what is much less explored is what community residents expect of their educators in positively impacting the school's community in non-school-bound efforts.

The aim of this article is to explore and unpack the role of urban teachers as partners and advocates in community efforts toward social justice—from the residents' perspectives. And in highlighting Camden residents' views, this research seeks to explore, whether or not, in economically and sociopolitical depressed urban areas like Camden, is teaching, alone, enough?

What responsibility do urban educators have to the surrounding community? And what role, if any, do urban educators have in community-based advocacy?

School-Bound Educator Resistance

While educators, specifically public school teachers, are not commonly thought of as a rebellious lot, literature does suggest school-based reforms deemed unfair and ineffective can yield

⁵ Duncan, G., Kahlil, A., Magnuson, K., & Murnane. (2014). *Two policies to boost school readiness*. Innovating to End Urban Poverty. Flory, S., & McCaughtry, N. (2011). Culturally relevant physical education in urban school: Reflecting cultural knowledge. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 82, 49-60.

⁶ Ispa-Landa, S. (2013). Gender, race, and justifications for group exclusion: urban black students bussed to affluent suburban schools. *Sociology of Education*, 86(3), 218-233.

⁷ Cotton, K. (1989). *Educational time factors*. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Portland, OR.

⁸ Wright, W. *The disparities between urban and suburban American educational systems: A comparative analysis using social closure theory*. Weber State University. The National Conference on Undergraduate Research. Ogden, UT.

⁹ Barth, R. (2006). Improving relations in the schoolhouse. *Educational Leadership*, 63(6), 8-13.

¹⁰ Barton, A. (2001). Capitalism, critical pedagogy, and urban science education: An interview with Peter McLaren. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 38(8), 847-859.

¹¹ Norris, J. (2003). Looking at classroom management through a social and emotional learning lens. *Theory into Practice*, 42 (4), 2003.

¹² Teasley, M. (2005). School social workers and urban education reform with African-American children and youth: Realities, advocacy and strategies for change. *The School Community Journal*, 19-39.

¹³ Coleman, J., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A., & Weinfeld, F. Y. (1966). *Equality of Education Opportunity*. US Office of Education, US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare: Washington, DC.

resistance from teachers. Individually, and through harnessing the power of the collective, teachers do confront policies they find harmful to their classroom pedagogy and sense of professional responsibility and ethics.¹⁴

Research communicates the general conception that teachers can be resistant to new ideas and changes impacting their normal routines and that teacher reliance on long-held habits is a labor saving approach.¹⁵ The accepted assumption, however, is that most new top-down policies that are pushed into classrooms by those in decision-making positions, such as politicians and district administrators, will be resisted by teachers overtly or subtly.¹⁶ Such perceived encroachments, driven by “elements beyond the school perimeter of the classroom walls,” are often “considered to be near intolerable and counterproductive to the schooling process.”¹⁷

While there is a sizeable population of teachers that will steadfastly comply with new directives without opposition, there are segments of the profession, especially within the current era of standards-driven reform and accountability, who feel their professionalism and classroom autonomy are being encroached up-

on, and in return demonstrate conscientious resistance.¹⁸

Teacher pushback, however, should not be considered a “guarantee,” when new procedures and policies are enacted. Waugh and Punch (1985) suggest teachers, initially, are relatively open to system-wide changes, provided new policies are easy to implement and have positive impact.¹⁹ Some educators are prone to exhibit principled resistance²⁰ to reforms when they are enacted without the inclusion of teacher and student perspectives and realities;²¹ are seen as driven by outsiders who are oblivious to the workings and milieu of the schools; run counter to teachers’ sense of professional and moral standards;²² and are perceived to be simply the latest in a long line of temporary and irrelevant policies.

While teachers acting individually may practice resistance within their classrooms by “blocking out” mandates enacted by reformers and championed by administrators in their districts, teachers working collectively as professionals has a wider effect. Some suggest that teachers find collective solidarity in exhibiting resistance by working together in refusing to comply with directives such as refusing to administer mandated standardized assessments;²³

¹⁴ Santoro, D. (2013). "I was becoming increasingly uneasy about what was being asked of me": Preserving integrity in teaching. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 43(5), 563-587. Santoro, D. (2011). Good teaching in difficult times: Demoralization in the pursuit of good work. *American Journal of Education*, 188(1), 1-23.

¹⁵ Welner, K. (1999). They retard what they cannot repel: Examining the role teachers sometimes play in subverting equity minded reforms. *Journal of Negro Education*, 68(2), 200-212.

¹⁶ Gitlin, A. & Margonis, F. (1995). The political aspect of reform: Teacher resistance as good sense. *American Journal of Education*, 103(4), 377-405.

¹⁷ Leonard, P., & Leonard, L. (2001). Assessing aspects of professional collaboration in schools: Beliefs versus practices. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 47(1), 4-23.

¹⁸ Tyack, D., & Tobin, W. (1994). The "grammar" of schooling: Why has it been so hard to change? *American Education Research Journal*, 31(3), 453-479.

¹⁹ Waugh, R., & F., P. K. (1985). Teacher receptivity to system-wide change. *British Educational Research Journal*, 11(2), 113-121.

²⁰ Santoro, D. (2013). "I was becoming increasingly uneasy about what was being asked of me": Preserving integrity in teaching. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 43(5), 563-587.

²¹ Gitlin, A. & Margonis, F. (1995). The political aspect of reform: Teacher resistance as good sense. *American Journal of Education*, 103(4), 377-405.

²² Santoro, D. (2011). Good teaching in difficult times: Demoralization in the pursuit of good work. *American Journal of Education*, 188(1), 1-23.

²³ Croll, P., Abbott, D., Broadfoot, P., Osborn, M., & Pollard, A. (1994). Teachers and education policy: Roles and models. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 42(4), 333-347.

withdrawing from participation in, and opposing, the drafting of national standards;²⁴ overtly calling for greater teacher creativity in lesson planning; and by fighting perceived injustices in school curriculum. Additionally, teachers, collectively, have also become more politically active by working on candidates' campaigns, drafting petitions, and phone-banking, and looking to attack policies and politicians they view as responsible in forwarding intrusive education reforms.²⁵

Educator Resistance: Advocacy Beyond the Workplace

Rich literature highlights ways in which teachers mount school-based opposition to policies they deem unethical to their moral and professional standards. Additional research describes methods in which teachers also engage in non-school-bound, social justice resistance pedagogies within their classrooms, thereby challenging societal inequities.

Due to the inherent political nature of the teaching profession, urban teachers, through their connections with students, are uniquely positioned to demonstrate solidarity with their school's community through direct advocacy.²⁶ Yet, for reasons including personal fear, feelings of powerlessness, professional paralysis, and insufficient training within teacher education programs on the need to be community advocates, many urban educators withdraw from such social justice resistance opportunities.

In *Clinical Social Workers: Advocates for Social Justice*, McLaughlin extolls the need for social workers to extend their advocacy beyond the client-specific framework of the workplace, and connect their practice with broader social justice resistance movements.²⁷ Similarly, Cann and DeMeulenaere communicate the need for teachers to be aware of their DuBois-ian “double consciousness:” as both agents of the status quo and as potential transformative intellectuals who must take their message of equity and social justice from the classroom and to the streets, challenging and fighting against normative inequity.²⁸

In short, teachers “cannot simply advocate for change or combat social injustice from a podium or a computer, as actually doing activist work not only legitimizes what teacher preach in the classroom, but grounds and informs it.”

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The public nature of the teaching profession lends itself to public advocacy that can take a variety of forms. From testifying at city

²⁴ Weiner, L. (1995). Democracy, pluralist, and the teaching of english. *English Education*, 27(2), 140-145.

²⁵ Brickner, R. (2012). Becoming political: Teachers activism in the face of Michigan's public education crisis. Retrieved from <http://www.rc44labour.org/wp-content/ISApapers/brickner.pdf>.

²⁶ Phillip, T. M. (2012). Desegregation, the attack on public education, and the inadvertent critiques of social justice educators: Implications for teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 39(2)29-40.

²⁷ McLaughlin, A. (2009). Clinical social workers: Advocates for social justice. *Advances in Social Work*, 10(1), 51-68

²⁸ Cann, C. & DeMeulenaere, E. (2010). "Forged in the Crucibles of Difference—Building Discordant Communities," *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 7(1), 41-53.

²⁹ Cann, C & DeMeulenaere, E. (2010). "Forged in the Crucibles of Difference—Building Discordant Communities," *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 7(1), 41-53.

council meetings, blogging about community resistance, marching in rallies,³⁰ tweeting about community-related equity issues,³¹ to more formal organizing efforts that influence policy, what matters is that urban classroom teachers model their ideals: espousing social justice through resistance action in their school's community.

Schools' Expectations of Urban Parents

Quite often, when topics emerge highlighting the deficiencies among urban schools compared to their suburban counterparts, knee-jerk suppositions concerning urban pathologies are offered as explanations. Often, blind generalizations are made regarding urban students' fractured families, absentee or incarcerated fathers, overworked or apathetic mothers, generations of undereducated family members, and parents' sustained low-expectations with respect to their child's education.

In efforts to improve both student performance in schools and the appearance of that school's effectiveness in educating children, urban parents are often preached at in respect to how parents can help schools. Such parents are instructed to read to their children for an hour every day, show up to every conference regardless of the time, participate in school PTAs, attend local board of education meetings, and generally "get involved" to improve their child's performance in school. Parents are expected to instill discipline practices at home that correlate with school expectations and guidelines, purchase school uniforms as an ex-

pression of acceptance of school norms, keep up with school's increasing reliance on technology—which often yields the teacher expectation that every household has working computer, with internet, and a printer—with ink.

To be sure, many of the expectations schools have of parents are objectively reasonable, research-based, and, arguably, well intentioned. Few would argue against the idea that parents ought to take an active interest in their child's education and support the entities tasked with educating their child in every way possible. At the same time, however, one might assert that such expectations, though ideal and the general norm in certain localities, is more difficult for others, particularly with economic struggles, to achieve.

For example, many in our society today know that simply because both child's biological parents may not reside in the same domicile, it does not inherently constitute a "broken family" or mean a father is derelict in his child-rearing duties. Further, many understand that the appearance of parent apathy may not actually be apathy at all, but may require more complex inquiry into why some parents refrain from actively participating in their child's education as the school may hope. Are there transportation issues preventing parents from attending conferences? Are there language or linguistic barriers? Did they have negative experiences in school when they were students? Are there scheduling conflicts at work preventing parents from showing up at Board meetings?

Are parents and community members tacitly excluded from participation?

Regardless of the intent behind schools' expectations of urban parents' participation in helping them educate their child, it is apparent that both education research and local school district communications, too often, advance the expectations of one entity—the school—while virtually ignoring the possibility that urban parents, too, have expectations of their educators.

³⁰ Deem, R., Hilliard, S., & Reed, M. (2008). *Knowledge, higher education and the new managerialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³¹ Santoro, D. A. & Rocha, S. D. (2015). The Beautiful Risk of Teaching: Review of Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 34(4), 413–418.

Here, I attempt to scratch the surface and investigate what expectations Camden residents have of their local educators beyond the schoolhouse.

This ain't Haddonfield or Cherry Hill! If you teach here in our schools, with our kids, dealing with all the things they have to deal with, you gotta expect to do more—to go above and beyond.

Urban parents and community-members, so relied upon by schools to “do their part” at home and in their communities to help improve both student and school performance, are rarely asked what expectations they have of their local educators to help improve the urban communities wherein they teach. I, therefore, a Camden public school teacher and resident, set aside time to speak to a local activist civic group, Save Camden Public Schools (SCPS), to gain perspective on their expectations of city educators outside of teaching exclusively.

This ain't Haddonfield or Cherry Hill!

Founded by local education activists Gary Frazier, Vida Neil, and Moneke Ragsdale in 2012, SCPS is singularly focused on the performance and functioning of Camden's public schools and its students. As Camden's public schools endure continued school closures, staff layoffs, erosion of residents' democratic rights, and the increasing proliferation of state-imposed CMO-operated charter schools, SCPS's mission is to protect the right of Camden residents and students to an effective and accountable public school system. SCPS have been steadfast in

their fight for the return to local control of Camden's all mayoral-appointed school board through canvassing, direct petitioning of residents and filing lawsuits.

Throughout the two-and-a-half hour conversation with SCPS, members were of the unanimous opinion that Camden educators must do more for the Camden community outside of just teaching. The emergent theme in members' perspectives responses were that because of Camden's widespread poverty, impacting both residents and students, and because teachers have the resources and know-how to advocate in ways most residents do not, Camden teachers must do more for the community than simply teach.

During a focus group interview of Camden residents in Centerville, Larry F, an African American Camden activist in his late 30s remarked:

This ain't Haddonfield or Cherry Hill! If you teach here in our schools, with our kids, dealing with all the things they have to deal with, you gotta expect to do more—to go above and beyond. Some of these kids ain't eatin...some don't have a good home life...mom is out working, or strung-out, or ain't around. Dad might not be around or is locked up... these issues are stuff kids deal with that have nothing to do with curriculum or classroom lessons at all...but they do.... Yall need to find a way to help find some solutions to the shit these kids face.

In mentioning neighboring affluent suburbs Cherry Hill and Haddonfield, where median family incomes are \$70,600 and \$86,000 respectively,³² Larry's comments not only highlight the difficult situations faced by many Camden youth, but connects larger Camden issues of

³² Point 2 Homes. (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.point2homes.com/US/Neighborhood/NJ/Haddonfield-Demographics.html>.

poverty and incarceration to what teachers deal with in their classrooms.

To Larry, and others attending the group interview, negative issues impacting the Camden community at large are directly related to students' behavior and academic performance. For example, Ida, an African American woman in her 50s, agreed, commenting:

Just the other day, some girl, matter of fact it was two of them, knocked on my door, and basically told me they was hungry and didn't have no food. I went to the PriceRite [supermarket] and spent about \$100 dollars to get them some food...it wasn't a whole lot, but it's enough to get them through the week. But lemme ask you this? Where the hell were the teachers? Now this is not to knock Camden teachers or anything because I love our teachers for dealing with all they have to deal with and all and I respect them overall, I really do...but they gotta know these kids here, hell the people here live completely different lives than they do.

Ida's comments in focusing on two young girls who were without food connected that circumstance to a perceived obliviousness residents believe Camden teachers have pertaining to the dire circumstances impacting their students, specifically, and the city, generally. In rhetorically inquiring, "where were the teachers," Ida's comments communicate that city teachers, in her mind, have a role to fulfill in helping ensure the needs of Camden's young people are being met beyond the delivery of course content.

Many people understand it is not in any teacher's job description to feed students, but given the location and context in which Camden teachers work, like most other urban educators, the expectations of community members is that everyone with the ability to help the community, ought to.

Lydia, a Puerto Rican woman in her late 20s, volunteered:

Camden is not the place to be if you just want to teach...ya'know, just teach you classes and go about your business... Like people still, as much as people talk shit about teachers sometimes, people here, especially immigrant parents, still really overall trust their child's teachers—especially with all these immigrant raids and deportations and what not... I think with that trust, and knowing all the needs people have here, especially immigrant parents, teachers have a role to make things better...

Lydia's comments, like Ida's, ask where Camden's teachers are in the face of such disparate need. While not specifying what she envisions Camden's teachers *doing* to help make things better for residents, it was clear that Lydia, like others in the group, expect Camden's teachers to be present and active in community struggles to make life better for Camden's residents because of the trust Camden residents still have in their teachers.

Additionally, the community members comprising SCPS overwhelmingly connected the needs of the broader community to the needs of students the teachers see daily. The issues SCPS highlighted, like poverty, incarceration, and immigration, are issues external to the confines of the classroom; and though SCPS lacked specificity in what they desired to see teachers doing, it was evident that residents still expected teachers to fill some problem-solving or activist role for the good both Camden students and the community.

Don't Talk About It, Be About It: Camden Teachers' Responsibility to Social Justice Advocates

Community members in SCPS, when asked whether Camden teachers have a role to play in

community social justice pursuits and resistance efforts, were clear. For example, Monique, an African American woman residing in the Fairview section of Camden, responded in saying:

We [community activists] out here fighting for everything from clean parks, to clean water, registering people to vote so we can get rid of this Democratic machine [Camden County Democrats]...demonstrating in protest to violence, and of course fighting this superintendent [of schools], but I swear when we look around its always only us—a handful of residents. They [teachers] kill me not wanting to fight with us on issues that impact where they work and their students... [pauses then continues] ...crazy thing is, as soon as teachers are about to get axed the first thing they wanna do is come to the community and ask us for help...I feel them. but in the back of my mind, I wonder, ‘where the hell are yall when we need you?’

Monique’s comments raise the issue in residents’ minds, of the need for teachers to be part of social justice efforts on behalf of the community at large, not only when its teachers’ interests are impacted. Monique’s perspective indicates the community’s desire to have a sustained partnership, beyond the classroom, between residents and educators, that improves lives for both residents and students.

Shabree, a Puerto Rican female college student and SCPS member, recently graduated from Camden High School. She commented:

I believe city teachers have a responsibility to join movements here in Camden because teachers are here to teach and grow just like the people in the city...how could they want to teach in this city and get paid here, and not give back by helping the community fight for what we’re crying out for...jobs, quality healthcare, fair elections, safe

streets...we’ve been without these things for so long and as we’re fighting to try to get this stuff for ourselves and neighbors, teachers can do so much to show they are really down for us. They can protest with us, encourage those who are doing the fighting, write some stuff, like editorials or to politicians...really any way a teacher feels comfortable fighting, they should fight... the community is watching, and the community sees who cares enough about them to fight for them. And I honestly don’t see teachers willing to fight here with us for things they preach about all the time in class. Now, I’m like, teachers don’t talk about it if yall not gonna be about it.

SCPS participants overwhelmingly communicated their expanded expectations for Camden’s school teachers beyond the classroom setting.

Shabree’s comments divulged a variety of approaches, from direct activism in protesting to passive activism in writing to policymakers and media outlets. In that, Shabree believes Camden teachers can fulfill residents’ expectations that they become social justice fighters in Camden alongside Camden’s citizens by staying true to the ideal many teachers profess within their classroom. In remarking that teachers often extoll the need for social justice equity, Shabree continued in asserting teachers’ actions in the streets ought to match their classroom-bound rhetoric.

Additionally, in commenting that teaching, within the black community, is still a most respected and beloved profession, during the group interview, Errol, an African American resident in his 60s, continued:

Teachers are like field sergeants leading ground troops [students] into battle [life] where the consequences are steep. How are our kids gonna learn how to fight this corrupt system that uses them like cannon-fodder by locking them up, enslaving them, deliberately under-educating them, systemically denying them opportunities to succeed...how are they supposed to learn to fight that...if their teachers never show them by fighting? You expect a kid to just all of a sudden know how to fight cause yall talked to them about Martin Luther King...fight for them by fighting unfair sentencing laws, fight for them when these new companies coming here act like they don't wanna hire Camden residents...fight for them by confronting the Mayor and city council when they passing land agreements that's gonna push their families out of their hood...

Hassan, resident of Parkside in his mid-30s, agreed, adding:

I feel like when you take a job [teaching job] in communities like Camden, you should be ready to do more than what is required in the classroom, because you know some of your students are going to need more than just a teacher. These kids here, this community here, needs fighters and teachers have to step up...I mean yall have all the tools yall need to fight in these fights. Computers, paper, internet...most people out here don't got all that! I dunno what the hell is stopping yall...and the thing of it is, the better it is for us out here [in the community], the better it's gonna be for yall in there [in school]...so really by helping us, yall really helping yall selves forreal, forreal.

Overwhelmingly, the members of SCPS, like Errol and Hasan, expressed the need and their

desire for teachers to join social justice oriented resistance movements in Camden.

While some respondents referred to the need for teachers to model what activism looks like for the next generation of student-activists to learn from, others referenced the need for teachers to be consistent in practice with what they espouse in theory, and others referenced the need for teachers to be present because the community simply needs more voices in its struggle against marginalization. From a variety of perspectives, it was clear residents see teachers as dormant—but a potentially vital—ally in their community struggles to achieve greater social equity.

Conclusion

Resistance is described as conscious disruption of an oppressive normative system in order to achieve a more balancing of power and greater equity among the marginalized.³³ Additionally, principled resistance commonly refers to teachers pushing back against intrusive policies that run counter to their professional ethics and practice inside their workplace.³⁴

Yet, despite educators respected position in urban communities, and theoretical responsibility to speak up against injustice, exhibiting resistance is still a controversial endeavor within the field because of teacher fear³⁵ and a cultural disjuncture between urban educators and urban

³³ Cann, C. & DeMeulenaere, E. (2010). "Forged in the Crucibles of Difference—Building Discordant Communities," *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 7(1), 41–53.

³⁴ Santoro, D. A. & Rocha, S. D. (2015). The Beautiful Risk of Teaching: Review of Gert Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 34(4), 413–418.

³⁵ Bemak, F., & Chung R. C.-Y. (2008). New professional roles and advocacy strategies for school counselors: A multicultural social justice perspective to move beyond the nice counselor syndrome. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 38, 372–381.

communities.³⁶ While increasing literature explores the various methods in which teachers exhibit resistance as they see their classrooms as a safe space to fight school-based and societal oppression, what remains largely unexplored is the role teachers play in participating in community-based activism outside of the schoolhouse, and with the school's surrounding community from the perspective of urban residents.

In that many urban neighborhoods are contending with consequences stemming from decades of urban disinvestment, housing and residential discrimination,³⁷ educational and economic inequities, all of which, over time, have become part of the urban milieu, actions taken to confront and disrupt this pattern can be seen as resistance. In that teachers often espouse the values of social justice and equity, urban educators joining with community members in their struggle to combat such normative marginalization are engaging in activist resistance simply within an alternative context.

As Camden's low-income minority residents, like many urban marginalized populations across the country, are rarely asked what they expect of their teachers beyond the classroom setting, this article sought to further understand Camden community's expectation of teachers outside the classroom. SCPS participants overwhelmingly communicated their expanded expectations for Camden's school teachers beyond the classroom setting. In that the city is facing such oppressive realities by lacking in resources and advocates, along with understanding that city teachers generally espouse an equity and social justice positionality in the classrooms, SCPS communicated that

they expect to see their educators as active allies in community struggles.

Finally, because localities like Camden are often without adequate necessities and resources upon which effective advocacy relies, the demand and expectation for those positioned to advocate on behalf of residents in such cities is exacerbated. Urban educators, typically with more economic, technical, and linguistic wherewithal than marginalized low-income urban residents, have the potential to be assets in exhibiting community-based activism alongside the community in assisting in their struggles to achieve greater social equity.³⁸

Going forward, urban educators ought to be aware that the community expects more than from them beyond "just teaching." Not only are urban residents expecting urban educators to teach the communities' children, they also expect them to participate in struggle alongside of them as well.³⁹ Urban educators ought not see community struggles as a separate concern in which they have no responsibility to engage, as urban residents not only want, but expect, to see teachers advocating and fighting in the streets right next to them.

³⁶ Rubin, B., & Hayes, B. (2010). "No backpacks" versus "drugs and murder": The promise and complexity of youth civic action. *Harvard Education Review*, 80(3), 352-379.

³⁷ Brecher, C. (1977). The mismatch understanding. *New York Affairs*, 4(1), 6-12.

³⁸ Ginwright, S., Noguera, P., & Cammarota, J. (2006). *Beyond Resistance! Youth Activism and Community Change: New Democratic Possibilities for Practice and Policy for America's Youth*. NYC and London: Routledge.

³⁹ hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.