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*All contributions to this issue have undergone blind, external peer-review.

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Are We Really ‘bout that Life’? Urban Educators as Activists in, and for, their Urban Schools’ Community

Keith E. Benson
Camden City School District

Witnessing urban American society on the cusp of configurational change during the turn of the century—with northern urban centers experiencing an influx of newly arriving persons from southern and eastern Europe, Latin America, and black people from the South—Dewey’s Democracy and Education pondered the best ways in which to synthesize educational methods and activities to educate a new American public.

In response to swift demographic change, Dewey noticed that the methods through which public education was historically administered would not be suitable to this new and evolving American school setting. Dewey understood schools ought not teach the same things to very different people in a uniform fashion. Instead, he recognized that communication between schools, teachers, and students must induce an educative experience for all. Dewey wrote: Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity, any more than a man ceases to be socially influenced by being so many feet of miles removed from others...If, however, they were all cognizant of the common end and interested in it so that they regulated their specific activity in view of it, then they would form a community.1

This “great community” remains a goal for all those interested in social justice today.

Since the ascension of neo-liberalization over cities and public education systems, capstoned with the election of Donald Trump as president, the responsibility for educators to forge a sense of community in the face of such public uncertainty is imperative. Over the past few years, with increased attention being dedicated to police violence against the vulnerable, the expanded criminalization of black and brown girls (both in and out of schools), sustained mass incarceration, the poisoning of water in Flint, sustained deportation of immigrants from Latin America and Islamic nations, and issues of gentrification and displacement in urban centers across America, urban educators today are presented with urgent and necessary opportunities to engage with, and advocate for, the diverse and marginalized communities in which they teach.

Since the ascension of neo-liberalization over cities and public education systems, capstoned with the election of Donald Trump as president, the responsibility for educators to forge a sense of community in the face of such public uncertainty is imperative.

Often armed with greater economic resources, a functional linguistic compatibility with Power, as well as greater access to decision-makers and knowledge of the mechanics of Power, urban teachers are uniquely positioned to aid their school’s surrounding com-

munity in ways many urban residents simply cannot. Given that teaching is inherently political, educators are either consciously fighting oppression and marginalization, or, as Paulo Freire explained, passively sustaining it.2

For urban educators looking to be agents of positive change, we need only look outside our classroom windows for abundant opportunities to practice needed, meaningful activism. And although urban educators often adopt a position that says we are effecting change simply by teaching the next generation of potential leaders and social justice fighters, it is quite possible that we could and should be doing much more. We should be participating in the world outside the school: with, and on behalf of, the communities where we urban educators work.

The aim of this special issue of the Journal of School and Society is to explore the ways in which urban teachers can both be and become advocates for social justice beyond the schoolhouse. Expansive literature explores the often divergent backgrounds and lived experiences between urban teachers, their students, and the communities in which they work. What is less explored is the concept of urban educators acting as agents for societal change—beyond the walls of the classroom, as they seek to combat oppressive conditions present in the communities where they teach—for the betterment of the community.

Some guiding questions this special issue seeks to explore are: In economically and sociopolitical depressed urban areas, is teaching enough? What responsibility do urban educators have to the schools’ surrounding community? How can teachers help urban community members in their struggle to achieve social justice and equity? What are the possibilities for increased partnership between urban educators and urban residents for unified advocacy? What do urban communities expect of their teachers as partners in community-based struggle?

Exhibiting Herculean efforts to tackle such broad and consequential question, this issue includes perspectives from educational practitioners as well as education and urban studies researchers attempting to illustrate the need for, possible approaches of, and inspiring examples of urban educators being truly about that “change agent” life.

In our first section of this issue, Lois Weiner explores what the current American milieu signifies for educators and researchers who work in, and with, low-income communities of color. She explains that our professional responsibilities ought to emerge from an understanding that urban educators face an intensification of policies that harm students, their communities, and their schools. Weiner suggests urban educators propose ideas that operationalize a moral and pedagogical commitment to protect our students and our society’s democratic aspirations in the face of normalized oppression.

Next, Keith Benson investigates whether low-income urban communities—ones that are often dictated to by schools, teachers and education researchers pertaining to how they ought to help schools educate children—have their own expectations for urban educators. With Camden, New Jersey being the geographic setting for his article, Benson essentially asks Camden’s residents, specifically, and urban residents, generally, what expectations, if any, they have of their educators beyond the school setting.

Finally, closing out this section, Randy Miller explores whether “good” teaching alone is

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sufficient for improving low-income minority students’ academic outcomes. Acknowledging academic research pointing to effective teaching as the strongest predictor of improved student performance, Miller arrives at the conclusion that, despite the best efforts of educators, non-school bound issues disconnected from classroom instruction can frustrate the efforts of even the most effective teachers.

In the next section, dedicated to what educator activism looks like, we begin with a piece by Janene Onyango that explores urban teachers’ power to heal emotionally wounded black and Latina girls through restorative practices centered around communication, sharing, and care. Using vignettes, Onyango expresses the need for teachers to engage minority girls’ sense of hurt and pain, often originating from places outside the school setting, in overt expressions of love and sisterhood as an alternative approach to discipline-only policies. Within this context of attempting to heal students’ wounds endured outside the schoolhouse, Onyango displays how teachers can do needed community work, within their classroom.

Similarly, Chicago teachers Mayra Almaraz and Dave Stieber explore their approaches to overtly combating racism within their classrooms and neighborhoods. Almaraz and Stieber plainly convey some of the strategies they employ to push back against racist thinking and privilege, both in their classroom and out. For both Almaraz and Stieber, their fight to be actively “anti-racist” is a matter of staying true to the profession they love, to their passion for their students and their city.

Victor Powell and Sheron Fraser-Burgess illustrate how both teachers and administrators formed an educator-led, non-school-bound program in the Washington DC metro area to improve the prospects of young men and women of color, from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are transitioning out of high school and into college and employment. While the program’s focus is to develop the academic, social, and interpersonal skills of minority students, Powell and Burgess’ piece exemplifies how committed educators can unify around one common goal and work to improve the prospects of residents in urban communities through means unaffiliated with the school.

Philly educator Stephen Flemming’s submission helps us understand the various ways teachers can exhibit community-based resistance as a demonstration of unity and solidarity. From curriculum battles, to community events, from patronizing local barbershops, to living where he teaches, Flemming’s article conveys the wide and varied approaches urban educators can act upon to support the urban communities in which they teach—thereby forming bonds grounded in social justice advocacy.

Rounding out this section on what educator activism looks like, Stephen Danley and Gayle Christiansen convey their experiences as educated, professional, white, millennials—with privilege—moving into Camden, New Jersey. Ever aware of prevailing gentrifier and “white-savior” stereotypes, this piece lays bare the struggles that coincided with being privileged white gentrifiers who hope to balance their desire to work alongside residents to achieve greater community empowerment, and at the same time juggle their own political, economic, and racial realities.

In our final section covering educational institutions’ aid to communities, Wendy Osefo examines how an urban, community-based charter school confronted the oft-cited problem of parental disengagement. Here, Osefo conveys how a school’s efforts to maximize students’ success and engaged parents directly eventually led to a parent engagement institute that taught historically marginalized community members how to advocate on their own behalf. Osefo demonstrates how a school can maximize student academic outcomes by engaging parents directly, empowering hundreds of alienated and historically marginalized residents.
Next, urban policy analyst Tarika Dorner, posits that if educators truly desire to be community advocates for social justice, both urban educators and their urban institutions must modernize students’ high school curriculum by shifting toward a more entrepreneurial pedagogy. In noting that academic achievement alone is insufficient to lift economically-struggling students (and their families) out of generational and racialized poverty, Dorner asserts that urban students must be equipped, in their schools, with both entrepreneurial knowledge and adequate social networks to benefit their respective communities.

Finally, in the issue’s last piece, Mildred Boveda examines the work of schools of education in preparing the next generation of urban educators. Boveda suggests that institutions of higher education, which are increasingly under attack from politicians and lawmakers, ought be more self-critical and reflective in addressing their own shortcomings. In this way, the might better prepare their teacher candidates for a future in urban education—one grounded in civic activism amidst the ever-evolving urban education terrain.

Thank you for your interest in the Journal of School & Society. I hope this issue inspires you with stories of heart, courage, activism, community and justice.
Understanding Challenges for Urban Educators in the Age of Trump through a Deweyan Lens: New Dangers and Old Responsibilities

Lois Weiner
New Jersey City University (NJCU)
Director, The Urban Education and Teacher Unionism Policy Project

What should Donald Trump’s election as President change for educators, teacher educators, and researchers—and for those of us who, in particular, work in and with low-income communities of color in cities?

Dewey argues that our transcendent obligation as educators is not to a particular institution but to our profession. What is that obligation now and how do we fulfill it? I suggest in these comments that our analysis of how to satisfy our professional responsibilities should emerge from an understanding that those who are at the helm of our government will, if they are allowed, intensify policies that will harm our students, their communities, and our schools. I propose ideas about operationalizing a moral and pedagogical commitment to protect our students and our society’s democratic aspirations.

As academic research catches up with policies put in place based on economic beliefs about the “free market” and “choice,” we see evidence of how policies like school closings, charter schools, and privatizing services, justified rhetorically as “putting kids first,” have been harmful. Even when policies are not accomplishing what was claimed they would, as has been demonstrated about effects of vouchers in Milwaukee, advocates may contend the weakness is in implementation rather than the premises of the reforms.

Despite accumulating evidence that education reforms we call “neoliberal” have intensified racial segregation of schools and failed to boost achievement, under the Trump administration, these policies will be intensified, but likely without the explicit bipartisan support that has heretofore characterized the project. One question is how alterations in state and federal relations will impact implementation of privatization.

Teaching and Teachers in the Aftermath of the 2016 Election: A Deweyan Perspective


3 Another issue, one that takes me beyond the focus of this article, is how to address continuing support within the Democratic Party for privatization, while juggling this project with push from civil rights organizations on equity concerns.
In “My Pedagogic Creed,” John Dewey sets out how the dynamic interaction between the psychological and sociological configures learning, observing that students’ psychological needs drive the interaction. Dewey’s assertion that students’ psychological needs drive learning means teachers, teacher educators, and researchers must provide hope and nurturing to our students, creating safe spaces in our classrooms, and if we can, our schools. We need to see and address the psychological and emotional needs of children who are fearful they or family will be deported; worried they will be attacked if they respect their religion; or angry at violence directed at their communities by police.

However, for Dewey, the teacher’s responsibility includes defending democracy and public education. Dewey arrived at his understandings of teachers’ social responsibilities over time, becoming increasingly involved with social justice in the society, and conditions in schools, as he worked directly with teachers and schools.

Dewey’s legacy helps us understand how this juncture in history presents an urgent need to see our classrooms in the context of the school and society, and for us to challenge inequality and injustice. At the same time, he explained that looking only outside the school is insufficient. For schools to support democracy, they must themselves be democratic institutions. He observed:

ments are responding to economic, political, and social policies that have devastated communities of color in the cities and diminished possibilities for public education to serve all students well. While activism on social justice issues in education among and for communities of color—after years of little recognized movement-building—has finally been brought to public attention, the contestation of power within city teachers unions has received scant attention.

Yet a development under the radar of educational research and the mass media is how a new generation of teacher union activists committed to social justice is winning leadership in their local and state unions. The history and transformative leadership of the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE) in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) have heralded and supported the emergence of a new generation of teacher union activists who are challenging the premises on which teacher unionism, indeed the US labor movement, have operated for a half-century.

CORE’s transformation of the CTU is a highly significant political development that is an actual and potential “game changer” in teacher unionism. One key element of this change is in developing relations between parent, teacher, and community that sidestep the “blame game” that has undercut creation of respectful alliances.

The project DeVos and the Trump administration will now advance aims to eliminate spaces in schools for critique, social justice teaching, and the voices of parents and communities historically underserved by public education. As I explain elsewhere, powerful elites who share information and policies across international borders understand (unfortunately, more than do most teachers) that, despite teachers unions all too glaring problems, they are the main impediment to the project of public education’s destruction being fully realized. Even when unions don’t live up to their ideals, teacher unionism’s principles of collective action and solidarity contradict neoliberalism’s key premises: individual initiative and competition. Labor unions presume people have to work together to protect their common interests, which contradicts the “survival of the fittest” ethos of the “free market.”

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Another reason unions are a threat, making them a target of legislation that limits their ability to organize, is that they can exercise institutional power. Because unions have institutional roots, they are a stable force. A union can draw on a regular source of income: membership dues. These characteristics give teacher unions an organizational capacity seldom acquired by advocacy groups or parents.

Paradoxically, the very factors that make teachers unions stable and potentially powerful

http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol23/iss1/73.
also induce hierarchy and conservatism. Neither unions as organizations nor union members as individuals are immune to the prejudices that infect a society, even when these prejudices contradict the union’s premises of equality in the workplace. Though the popular media cast teachers unions as powerful, the unions are quite weak at the school site, where an educated, mobilized membership is their source of strength. Many union leaders are disoriented and confused, and the well-orchestrated, extravagantly financed, anti-teacher and anti-teachers-union propaganda campaign has succeeded in partially discrediting the unions as organizations—and even the idea of teacher unionism itself.

Yet, transformed teachers unions can provide a muscle that parents and advocacy groups very much need. This new kind of unionism builds consensus with its potential allies on educational issues by examining how all stakeholders view the problem—before taking action. In cities as different in size and demographics as Minneapolis and Detroit, Philadelphia and Portland, teachers unions or reform caucuses within these unions have organized actions with parents and students, including demonstrations, packing board meetings for presentations, circulating petitions presented to the board and local politicians, and civil disobedience—even occupying the school building. In what has become a model for other reformers, the Caucus of Rank and File Educators, elected to lead the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), developed a program that lays out what schools should look like and what Chicago children deserve—and don’t receive because of educational apartheid. The CTU’s strike and contract negotiations were used quite creatively to fight for improvements that affected children directly, like providing teachers the right to distribute books on the first day of school and providing air conditioning when the temperature soars. For example, the union countered the Mayor’s insistence on a longer day for students (for more test preparation) and no extra pay for teachers with a demand for a better day, and the rehiring teachers of art, music, and physical education.

A Global Perspective is Deweyan

One challenge we face is that the attacks on public education and teachers’ unions that low-income communities of color feel most acutely are part of a global project. For this reason, teachers resistance must be international, too. Here, too, Dewey’s career guides us. He traveled widely to assist many other countries to reform or create their systems of public education so that schooling advanced democracy.

Education policies are borrowed and adapted through international collaboration of the wealthy and powerful, in economic organizations and international summits. We have an important stake in the success of teachers resistance elsewhere in the world because their movements help weaken what is a common opponent. International solidarity isn't charity.

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It's in our self-interest, as is democratizing and revitalizing teachers unions.

Moreover, we have much to learn from struggles of teachers unions elsewhere in the world. They often have a more organic relationship with communities and social justice campaigns, as is shown by teachers in Mexico, struggling to democratize their own union as well as battling their government to defend the right to a free, public education for all Mexicans.20

Our Work and the Future

As I write, no one knows what our political future holds. Regardless of what opponents of a free, quality, publicly-controlled system of public education propose, the basic contour of our activism should be to identify resources we can as individuals and organizations mobilize to protect our students and public education.

The Urban Education and Teacher Unionism Policy Project at New Jersey City University aims to provide the resources for transformed teachers unions and communities to develop mutually respectful alliances. These bonds should emerge from a shared understanding that stark inequality in US public education has been present since its creation. Though teachers and teachers unions did not create systems of public education, they share responsibility, along with the rest of education establishment, for an unjust, unequal status quo. And though there have been important exceptions, teacher unions have more often than not shown complicity and silence about systemic racism in education.21

Two key assumptions that underlie the Policy Project’s work distinguish it from other think tanks producing materials that critically scrutinize the claims and outcomes of reforms associated with privatization. Both are, I think, consistent with Dewey’s principles and ideals. First, the Policy Project does not assume that US education must be changed to conform to the needs of transnational corporations. As has been the case since creation of public education, academic credentials remain essential for individuals to obtain well-paying jobs.22 However, it is also true that most jobs being created today do not require advanced academic skills and do not pay well.23

Both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders pushed economic equality into the forefront of national debate during the Presidential election.24 Though they differed sharply in their analyses and programs, campaign rhetoric highlighted the problem of corporations shifting jobs to other countries. However, Sanders highlighted that this dynamic occurs not only because of trade per se but also due to disparities in wages and working conditions among countries.

What was not a focus of debate—but that is germane to education reform—is that the number of “good jobs” is shrinking, and only a small fraction of the population will be able to obtain them.25 For education activists, under-

standing this is key, because reforms carried out in the name of “higher standards” and “excellence” mask how schooling and the economy are actually being resynchronized.

Education is being refashioned to diminish the number of students who obtain the sophisticated thinking and skills needed in highly-paid white collar or professional jobs. And as proponents of policies that are dismantling the old system of public education correctly observe, it is most often students of color—living in communities that have been poorly served by public schools—who are excluded from this competition for the shrinking number of well-paid jobs.

This analysis of the labor market and the economy has complex implications for teachers unions that want to push back on educational policies that diminish opportunity for poor students of color in cities. On the one hand, education cannot create jobs and reverse the economic devastation many communities face—though that is an essential issue teachers unions must raise within organized labor. At the same time, schools and teachers that are better supported can help more students to succeed academically.

Often the reasons for students’ lack of academic success and the ways to solve it are cast as an either/or: Either schools are to blame or factors beyond the school walls are responsible. In fact, social justice activists and teachers unions, working together, need to change school and teaching practices as well as struggle for economic and social policies we know will reduce poverty, unemployment, and social oppression.

The challenge for teachers unions is to acknowledge that some schools (and teachers) do not serve kids well and can and should do better while exposing realities like child hunger, homelessness, and unemployment that undercut what even the best schools and teachers can do.

Strong Alliances and Transformed Teachers Unions

The other assumption that makes the Policy Project unique and that configures the briefs is its contention that teachers unions need to be transformed to be more effective in defending members and the public good. Despite their potential, teachers unions, as they exist in many cities, are not reliable allies for social justice initiatives or strong defenders of the working conditions that support learning.

Yet a movement of activists is rebuilding teachers unions on different principles. They may call their aim “social justice” or “social movement” unionism, but they share a commitment that union power needs to come from the bottom-up, as it does in social movements.

A social movement teachers union is committed to democracy at the school and in the school system. It is this commitment to democracy that opens the door to building authentic alliances and coalitions with community groups, parents, and students, as well as other unions. Leading transformed teachers unions is demanding in a way that heading a traditional labor union is not. Arlene Inouye, an officer of the United Teachers of Los Angeles and a Policy Project advisory board member, observes: union democracy and power from the bottom up, for us, has required extensive communication and collaboration with our governance bodies. But in a paradoxical way, it has also required more leadership from the top, in putting
forward our goals, and plans for the coming years... In engaging with union leadership, we open up a dialogue and space for feedback, and we alter our plans accordingly. I’ve learned that carrying out social justice unionism requires stronger leadership but in a collaborative and collective spirit.  

The Urban Education and Teacher Unionism Policy Project aims to support this new generation of social movement teacher unionism activists to stretch the union’s definition of “what counts” for members. Using research and insights from activists for social justice, the Policy Briefs that we produce will try to help transformed teachers unions understand their role as connective tissue, linking struggles for a just, equitable society—and world—to teachers' immediate concerns about their pay, their work, and their schools.

In the coming months, Urban Education and Teacher Unionism Policy Briefs will explore policy controversies by scrutinizing fundamental assumptions about what we want from schools and then applying these understandings to analyze how policies already proposed or enacted fit with those assumptions and vision.

We invite ideas and authors for Policy Briefs and commentaries as well as suggestions for topics that are in Dewey’s tradition of advancing our profession’s obligation to make schools democratic and strengthen democracy. Lois Weiner is Professor of Elementary and Secondary Education at New Jersey City University, where she directs the Urban Education and Teacher Unionism Policy Project and coordinates a Masters in Urban Education for experienced teachers. She writes widely in diverse venues about education and teacher unionism. The American Educational Research Association (AERA) honored her first book, Preparing Teachers for Urban School, for its contribution to teacher education. Most recently she and Daniel Jerome revised Urban Teaching: The Essentials, (2016, Teachers College Press.) Her book, The Future of our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice, (Haymarket Press) is a primer about how transformed teachers unions might contest the global project that is reshaping education to suit the demands of transnational corporations.

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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 action. 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.

As urban educators are often referred to as “change agents” and Dreamkeepers, 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 intended 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. 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.

Conversely, however, the median salary for a Camden public school teacher is $61,000. 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

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.

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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 linguistic\(^8\) 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

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\(^8\) 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.


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 upon, 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


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.


withdrawing from participation in, and opposing, the drafting of national standards; 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.

**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. 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. 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.

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.”

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.


Council meetings, blogging about community resistance, marching in rallies, tweeting about community-related equity issues, 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 expression 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.

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

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! 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.

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, Larry’s comments not only highlight the difficult situations faced by many Camden youth, but connects larger Camden issues of

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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:

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:

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.

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, systematically 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. Additionally, principled resistance commonly refers to teachers pushing back against intrusive policies that run counter to their professional ethics and practice inside their workplace.

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 fear and a cultural disjuncture between urban educators and urban residents.

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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, 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.

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. 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.


The Power to Heal: Making the Case for Using Restorative Practices with Black and Brown Girls in Schools

Janene Onyango
Willingboro Public School
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Lakisha was a student in my READ 180 class two years ago. Typically, READ 180 is a reading program that replaces the regular reading instruction block. However, in my school, it is a supplementary reading instruction program.

Lakisha was placed in my class, not because she was reading below grade level, but because she was having a very difficult time getting along with her classroom teacher. My principal thought that she might need a smaller and more intimate learning setting. My classes are no more than ten students on average whereas, Lakisha’s homeroom class had about 22 students.

Lakisha is a bright and articulate young lady. She did well on the READ 180 assessments and well in my class overall. Lakisha and I got along very well. Many times, when Lakisha had behavior difficulties in her homeroom class, she would leave her class and come to my classroom. Her teacher welcomed her departure, which was a temporary fix for the deeper troubles that Lakisha was experiencing.

As I got to know her better, she shared her story: of being a foster child and not being able to see her parents because they were both in jail. Her father was in prison for molesting her and her mother was put in prison because she tried to kill her after she found out about the sexual abuse.

This child did receive one-on-one counseling sessions with our guidance counselor, but she needed so much more help. She also had an older sister named Shanice that I also had as a READ 180 student. Both girls had made their “rounds” around the different elementary schools in the district. When they would they had disciplinary issues in one school, they would move to another. They were known for being “loud, rowdy and sexually precocious.”

Lakisha was suspended from my school for minor infractions. Most of them were related to how she spoke back to her teachers. Her teacher, who happened to be a black woman, felt disrespected by her. Lakisha called her teacher names. She made fun of her teacher’s clothing and shoes in front of the other children, causing chaos and pandemonium in the classroom. The straw that broke the camel’s back was when Lakisha flung her book bag. She was angry about what the teacher had said to her. The book bag hit the teacher.

The computer teacher, who also had many disciplinary run ins with Lakisha, decided to file a complaint with the superintendent’s office as well as a police report. This student was suspended from our school and placed on homebound instruction. She eventually was expelled by the school district as a result of a hearing.

By “pushing” Lakisha out, we never had the opportunity to address the root causes of her misbehavior and offer her help.

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The computer teacher, who also had many disciplinary run ins with Lakisha, decided to file a complaint with the superintendent’s office as well as a police report. This student was suspended from our school and placed on homebound instruction. She eventually was expelled by the school district as a result of a hearing.

By “pushing” Lakisha out, we never had the opportunity to address the root causes of her misbehavior and offer her help. Our school district code of conduct did not offer many other options for disciplining students.

Children act out for a reason.
Most times, it’s a cry for help.

Healing the Pushed

This short vignette has been echoed in urban classrooms and schools around the country. There are so many Lakisha’s that are being
“pushed out” of school due to harsh school disciplinary policies. Monique Morris, author of *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, chronicles the lived experiences of these black girls. She tells the stories of girls as young as six years old, like Salecia Johnson and Desre’e Watson, who were arrested for having tantrums in their classrooms.

Overall, there seems to be an accelerated rush to the harshest disciplinary choices, often bypassing intermediate interventions, such as school counseling and behavior modification plans. Instead, school administrators opt for suspensions, and in some cases, expulsions. In fact, Black students are more likely to be suspended or expelled for “disrespect, excessive noise, threat, and loitering” than their school peers of other races.

Schools criminalize behavior through zero-tolerance mandatory suspension and expulsion policies, employing on-campus law enforcement, and arresting students on campus. This criminalization of school discipline includes the direct involvement of criminal justice employees and sanctions, such as arrests and referrals, as well as the adoption and implementation of zero tolerance suspension and expulsion policies.

However, suspension and expulsion as modes of punishment are not used across the board for all populations of students. These modes of punishment are primarily used by schools with large numbers of black and brown students.

Furthermore, many public schools are adopting the language of medicine to manage misbehavior of students. For example, teachers and school administrators are more likely than any other adult outside one’s family to suggest that misbehavior may be a symptom of a medical disorder. Unlike white parents, the families of black and Hispanic children are less likely to blame their children’s behavior on medical or psychological causes.

All of these factors make for an inequitable educational environment for students of color, black girls in particular. The odds are stacked against them. In disadvantaged schools, they have less resources overall. In the case of my school district, in particular, we are understaffed. We don’t have enough social workers and school counselors to keep up with needs of our students. Maybe if we had some alternatives to expulsion at my school, Lakisha would have had a chance to continue her education and receive the help and support she so desperately needed.

That is why I am exploring restorative practices: specifically, the use of circles as a disciplinary alternative and classroom management tool in my own fifth-grade classroom this school year.

Unfortunately, restorative practices are underutilized in schools where the students are predominately black and brown, despite the

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4 Ibid., 2008.


research that shows that these restorative practices reduce suspensions. When students are suspended for disciplinary issues, the suspension creates a vicious cycle. Suspension leads to reduce instructional time, which negatively impacts student achievement. This ultimately increases a student’s likelihood of dropping out. This paper argues that restorative practices might be a way to break this vicious cycle and help students to stay in school and graduate.

Since it is a known fact that high school graduates and, better yet, college graduates, earn more over their lifetime and are less likely to become involved with the criminal justice system, I feel that it is my duty to do whatever I can to short circuit the school-to-prison pipeline. The many “Lakishas” in school districts like mine across this country deserve to receive an equal chance to learn.

Lately, the emphasis has been on the “black and brown boy problem,” as evidenced by Obama’s My Brothers’ Keeper Initiative. According to Monique Morris, “there is an absence of research and data on outcomes associated with RJ programs and their impact on girls of color, specifically Black girls.” The struggles that black girls face in school are not single-issue struggles. They struggle because they are black and because they are girls.

I argue that restorative practices transcend boundaries and barriers. They are truly intersectional and holistic. RP practices have the potential not to only effect change in schools, but in the larger community as well.

What are Restorative Practices?

According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices, restorative practices include “the use of informal and formal processes that precede wrongdoing, those that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing.” They define social capital as the connections among individuals, and the trust, mutual understanding, shared values and behaviors that bind us together and make cooperative action possible.

Restorative practices are preventative, not punitive. They are practices to employ and introduce before a problem occurs. There are different restorative practices that are utilized in different settings.

One restorative practice that is used more often in educational setting is the circle. In education, circles and groups provide opportunities for students to share their feelings, build relationships and solve problems, and when there is wrongdoing, to play an active role in addressing the wrong and making things right.

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one should interrupt. Most times, a talking piece—a small object that is easily held and passed from person to person—helps keep everyone on track. Only the person who is holding the talking piece has the right to speak.\textsuperscript{10} Both the circle and the talking piece have roots in ancient and indigenous practices.\textsuperscript{11}

There are also other informal restorative practices that can be utilized in a classroom. Another example of such a practice is affective statements, which communicate people’s feelings, as well as affective questions, which cause people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others.\textsuperscript{12}

A teacher in a classroom might employ an affective statement when a student has misbehaved, letting the student know how he or she has been affected by the student’s behavior: “When you disrupt the class, I feel sad,” or “disrespected” or “disappointed.” Hearing this, the student learns how his or her behavior is affecting others.\textsuperscript{13}

When I think of this informal restorative practice, I envision what could have happened for Lakisha in my school, had we tried RP first. Imagine if time was taken to help Lakisha to reflect on her own behavior? I am sure that she probably would have made better choices going forward. The outcomes for Lakisha, and black and brown girls like her, would greatly improve. Furthermore, I argue that restorative practices are a way of disciplining with dignity.

How are school districts using restorative practices?

There are many school districts that are using RP and finding success for their students. School districts in Pennsylvania have begun to follow schools like Oakland School District and Chicago Public Schools in their efforts to look for alternatives to zero-tolerance policies. Keeping students in school so that they can learn is now becoming the priority.

Schools like West Philadelphia High have seen a significant decrease in the number of suspensions, down more than 50\% in just two years of implementing RP. Superintendent of Schools in Philadelphia, Dr. William Hite Jr., says, “more students are making the right choices, and our principals, teachers and school staff members are providing the right supports and guidance. We are very proud of what our school communities continue to accomplish.”\textsuperscript{14}

But, RP’s isn’t just about providing discipline with dignity. It is also about building school community. It’s been reported that the practices help to create and promote high-quality learning and teaching. So, using RP is a win-win and is beneficial not only for students, but the whole school community.

\textbf{“The Audacity of Hope”: Will the Use of Restorative Practices Help Black and Brown Girls to Stay in School?}

The term, “the audacity of hope,” comes from the title of President Barack Obama’s 2006

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The Audacity of Hope: Reclaiming the American Dream. As we think about the plight of brown and black girls in schools around the country, this term is so fitting.

It will take audacity and boldness on the part of educators, school administrators and the community to stem the tide and help black and brown girls be successful in school and beyond. Based on the research that has already been presented in this paper, I argue that restorative practices have the potential to help black and brown girls stay in school.

With that thought and end in mind, I began the work of implementing circles as part of my classroom routine. We started this process by co-authoring circle norms. Here’s what we came up with:

- Listen when someone speaks.
- Only talk when you have the speaking piece.
- Be kind and respectful.

It has been six months so far. At first, students were reluctant and did not want to participate in circles. Now, they beg to have circles.

Maria, a fifth grade student, says this about our circles, “circles allow us to express how we feel.” My students are eager to share their thoughts and feelings. The circles have been used to mediate conflicts, as well as to share thoughts and aspirations. Not only have the circles been beneficial and instrumental in achieving a harmonious classroom environment in my classroom this year, they have also assisted administrators when having to make disciplinary decisions.

School administrator Barbara Coleman says, “it used to be that you were suspended and you are out. Now we are looking at talking it out with the student and the parents, so that we don’t have to take that route.” To this end, I will continue learn more about how to implement restorative practices in my classroom. I believe that these practices are transformative and have the potential to not only turn the wave of suspensions in my school, but help students build and form relationships both inside and outside of the classroom.

... restorative practices have the potential to help black and brown girls stay in school.

The idea is that we will effect change, one student at time, one classroom at a time, one school at a time. My hope is that using RP will catch on like wildfire and it spread throughout my school district.

Janene Onyango is an elementary school educator whose commitment to educating, inspiring and uplifting students has span over twenty years. Over the years, she has been the recipient of various awards, including being recognized as a 2016 Burlington County Teacher of the Year, a 2015 Mulroney Scholar (University of Pennsylvania), and a 2015 NJEA Hipp Foundation Grant recipient. In addition to her responsibilities as a classroom teacher, she is currently a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania, studying Reading, Writing and Literacy. Her research interests include: critical studies, educational equity, intergenerational reading practices, digital storytelling and technology in education and social justice. She has also written articles for The Review, a publication of the New Jersey Education Association, of which she is an active member. Outside of the classroom, Janene serves in her community through the many community service initiatives sponsored by her sorority, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. Janene also is a member of the Fountain of Life Center’s Serve Team ministering to youth each Sunday through their Life Kids children’s ministry. She currently teaches fifth grade at Twin Hills Elementary School in Willingboro, New Jersey.
Using the Expertise of CPS Teachers in and out of the Classroom to Combat Racism

Mayra Almaraz
Chicago Public Schools

Dave Stieber
Chicago Public Schools

Inside the Classroom

Mayra Almaraz: I teach Ethnic Studies, a junior and senior year elective course, at Taft High School. Taft is located in the far northwest side of the city in a mostly white, blue collar, city worker, Chicago neighborhood.

My first unit of ethnic studies is always the most difficult. In this unit, I introduce students to the concept of systemic racism and privilege. We use readings and ideas from James Baldwin, Paulo Freire, and Beverly Daniels Tatum. Tatum’s first chapter of her book, “Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?”, informs students of a new definition of racism: In short, she states that racism is not being mean to someone based on the color of their skin (that is discrimination). Instead, she defines racism as a system of advantage based on race.

Tatum believes this definition is best because it holds people responsible for the systems in place that contribute to inequality and privilege, even if you’re not aware that you are benefiting. To better understand the chapter and concepts, I hold a Socratic Seminar and ask students to discuss if her definition helps or hurts our society.

For many of my students, this is a liberating conversation. This is where many of my students of color open up to the class about the ways in which they’ve felt that the color of their skin, ethnic background, or religion made them feel “less than.” For many of my white students, this conversation is hurtful. Students have shared that when they first read this definition, they feel sad because they’ve never realized they have certain benefits or privileges that their peers don’t have. The discussions that emerge between my students during this difficult conversation are messy, tough, raw with emotion, but so full of hope.

And they are necessary.

Ms. Almaraz, I’m not going to lie, when I first read Tatum, I was very mad at you. But after hearing my classmates’ experiences, I got it. I’m getting it. I’m still not there. But please be patient with me.

In her chapter, Tatum describes the importance of being actively anti-racist.

I have never looked at racism this way before. And it makes great sense to me. I get it. But Ms. Almaraz, I need help. How can I be anti-racist? I don’t have opportunities to be anti-racist. And I want to make a difference.

My student’s words resonated with me. As a teacher of color, I am conscious of the fact that my experiences and realities are not my students’, especially those that have a different ethnic background from me. I try hard to incorporate what I teach my students in my everyday life. I struggled with my student’s request.

How can I teach my white students to be anti-racist?

Then I remembered an experience with my white friend and teaching colleague, Dave...
Stieber. One evening, during our National Board Certification class, I mentioned that I was asked to write something for an online publication about the importance of having Latinx teachers. Unfortunately, because I took too long in turning in my piece, the publication’s deadline for Hispanic Heritage month was over. They would no longer need my piece.

Dave asked me to send him my writing, and through one of his contacts, my piece got published. I will never forget the words he said to me, “I’m able to get my work published whenever I have something, I don’t have to wait for a specific month to publish it. Everyone should have this privilege.”

To me, this was an example of my colleague using his white privilege to help someone without this benefit. So naturally, because of this experience and conversations with him regarding his work around racism, I thought about him when my student asked what she could do to be anti-racist.

Dave Stieber: I teach at Chicago Vocational on the South Side of the city. I love my students and work to make strong connections with them by the curriculum I create, content I teach, and the way in which I get to know my students.

Over my ten years of teaching in CPS I have always worked hard to create a space where my students feel comfortable sharing their stories. I’ve learned from them about their experiences with the police, violence, and what life is like for a kid growing up in the city. I’ve learned that the privileges and experiences I had growing up white were not the same as my students have. Based on the education my students give me, I have been working on not only trying to be anti-racist in my life, but also to create a class that challenges the system of white supremacy.

One of the ways that I do this is by bringing in guest speakers who work to change the systems in place in our city. I’ve found bringing in guest speakers to be very beneficial for my students and myself. A guest speaker makes the learning further real and relevant, it exposes students to more viewpoints—ones that may differ from or complement our curriculum. It also shakes class up and lets the students hear a voice besides their teacher.

The day after guest speakers my students always say something to the effect of, “the guest speaker we had yesterday was amazing, when are they coming back?” As the teacher, I tend to envy the novelty of the guest speakers. Their fresh voice captivates my students and they are excited to have them in the room.

It wasn’t until this year that the opportunity to be a guest speaker myself became an option. Mayra knew I had written articles for the Huffington Post about race. She asked me if I would be willing to come in and talk to her students about my experiences understanding whiteness and privilege.

I was nervous to speak at Taft. I was used to being in front of a room of students, but I had never spoke with white students about working to overcome their privileges. When I got off the expressway near Taft, there were blue ribbons, everywhere, in support of Blue Lives Matter, increasing my anxiety. I had been writing a lot recently about why white people should support the Movement for Black Lives. But, regardless, I knew the work Mayra had been doing with her classes and I was excited.

I knew her students read an article that I had written about ways in which white people could help with systemic racism. I decided to open my guest speaking experience by saying, “Be wary of a white person speaking to you
about race. Meaning: know that, while working to be anti-racist, I am still operating in a place of privilege and so please call me out if necessary."

The classes went really well. Students asked questions. Many asked ways in which they themselves could work to be anti-racist. Some challenged some of my comments. Some arranged to come back to a later period that I was speaking at.

Among the many great questions and comments, there were two that really resonated with me. One student, who very quietly asked me in front of the whole class, “My parents are racist. What can I do?” Mayra created such a safe and respectful environment that her student felt comfortable enough to ask that question and be honest amongst her peers. I admitted that I had racist family members too (I would contend all white people do). I told her I did not know what it was like to have blatantly racist parents, but by her knowing this about her parents, and her being willing to work to challenge this, this was already a brave step.

Another student stated in front of the entire group, “I want to be like you.” I have to be honest, I’ve never had anyone tell me that before (remember what I said about guest speakers, students love them).

Both of these comments blew me away. I gave both these students some advice after class, such as: listen to People of Color. Read books that will push your thinking, like Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria and A People’s History of the United States. Read about Black Youth Project 100 and Assata’s Daughters.

The work that Mayra does in her Ethnic Studies class challenges racism, white supremacy, and privilege, daily. We teachers know how brilliant and amazing many of our colleagues are. Rather than using a PB day to go speak to students in other schools like I had to, CPS should encourage collaboration and provide professional development days to work together.

Here are a few of the reflections from Mayra’s students about my visit:

I really liked the way he talked about how he was working to make a change. It made me think more about what I want to do to help make a difference.

I liked how he shared that he has different views than some of his family members because I have different views than my mother.

I believe Ms. Almaraz invited Mr. Stieber because she wanted us to understand the perspective of a white male who tries to understand racism and does his best to fight against it in his own life.”

What impacted me the most was when he said he would just listen, instead of trying to figure out what to say next, and that’s how he learned a lot of the pain others went through.

I understand that Mr. Stieber acted as both an alternate perspective and an example of how to cause an effect while being a somewhat “small scaled” (i.e. not a politician, political speaker, civil rights leader) influence.
I really liked that he said he is raising his children to be aware of the problems of the world and providing the necessary tools to help them deal with it.

Stieber impacted me because his understanding and honesty of today’s society blew me away.

You asked him to come because he speaks about a topic that some hate to believe is true and still going on.

To get the perspective of someone with privilege to show us how he’s trying to use his advantages to help others.

### Outside of the Classroom

With all the demands that we teachers have upon us, it would be great if we could just leave school and not have to worry about anything else. Unfortunately, teachers who are truly committed to making every aspect of their student’s lives better do not have that option.

I remember during my first year of teaching going to visit friends in another city, they started talking bad about Chicago teenagers. Referring to them as gangbangers. I was exhausted from teaching and had been looking forward to getting away and relaxing for a weekend. But now I had a decision to make. I chose the career of teaching youth. In my mind, I did not choose the job of teaching adults.

I had two options: Let the comment go unchecked, thereby letting that stereotype continue, or say something. Most white people are raised in a way that seeks to avoid confrontation. I was raised the same way. My privilege allowed me the option of not saying something. But my responsibility to my students required that I did.

I spoke with my wife after this situation and expressed my frustration to her, saying something to the effect of, “I enjoy teaching kids and I’m paid to do that, but I have no desire to have to teach adults too.” I can’t remember her exact words. She phrased it well, but the meaning was basically, “too bad, if you care about kids, then you need to speak up for them.”

She was and is right.

I have encountered so many adults, whether in person or via social media, saying upsetting, ignorant and offensive things about the students I teach. I was on the bus headed downtown from the South Side and a lady next to me on the bus struck up a conversation. Eventually, she found out that I was a teacher and where I worked. As soon as I finished the last syllable of Englewood¹ her face showed complete disgust and she promptly said, “Englewood! Those people are animals, you should never go there.”

I responded, “I’ve worked there five years. I have good kids and parents. Have a nice night.” Thankfully, it happened to me by my stop. Believe me I wanted to tell her off. But I had to take the high road: not for me, but for my students. I had to provide a counter narrative to her ingrained stereotypes.

Speaking up is not easy, but we have a duty to our students and their families to challenge every stereotypical or bigoted comment we hear, whether it be from a relative, a friend or a stranger. It is not easy, it is not comfortable, but if I want to really begin to make things better for our students, then it is necessary.

We must use the privileges we are afforded to help our students. I never enjoyed writing.

¹ The neighborhood I worked in at the time.
But I decided to start writing letters to the editor when I read things that were written in the newspaper that I disagreed with. From that, I have submitted many writings over the years.

In Chicago, teachers are required to live in the city if they want to teach in the city. Of all the things Chicago does wrong, this requirement is one that I agree with. As teachers, we have a moral obligation to help make the lives of our students better. One way to do that is to make the city that we all live in better. At times, there is already a disconnect between the experiences of our students’ lives and the experiences that we teachers have. The thing is, even if we don’t live in the specific neighborhood in which our school is located, if we live in the city, we are infinitely more aware of what life is like for our students than, say, if we commuted from one of the surrounding suburbs. We owe it to our students—as voters, taxpayers, and parents—to have a political, economic, and educational stake in this city.

We owe it to our students to pay taxes to this city to help improve it for everyone. Yes, the way the money is used or not used needs to be improved, but politicians need our revenue to pay for those improvements. These same politicians also need our voices to pressure them to use our revenue the way that it should be used. We owe it to our students to be teachers who not only work in CPS but also send our kids to CPS. By doing so, we obviously will have more at stake in wanting to improve the schools for all children.

Teaching is about building connections with our students. We teachers may differ from our students in terms of race and/or economic status. But when we live in the city, pay taxes here, and send our kids to public schools here, our students will see that, despite our differences, we also share many common bonds—most importantly, the desire to improve the city that we all call home.

We teachers love and care about our students. That is why discussions about the teacher residency rule, and any and everything else that impacts our careers as teachers, are vital. But to truly care about and fight for the schools our students deserve, we must also live in and fight for the city that we all deserve.

Mayra Almaraz-De Santiago is a wife and mother of two boys. A proud Chicagoan, she was born and raised in the Northwest Side. Her teaching career began 14 years ago in Chicago’s Back of the Yards neighborhood and she is now back to her Northwest Side roots, teaching high school history for CPS. Mayra has a deep passion for social justice and for helping students critically examine the world so they can change it. She is a Golden Apple Scholar. She received her Secondary Education in History degree from DePaul University. She is currently a candidate for National Board Certification.

Dave Stieber is in his tenth year of teaching Social Studies in CPS. He is working to become National Board Certified. He has a Masters in Urban Education Policy Studies from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is an occasional blogger for the Huffington Post. His partner, Stephanie Stieber, is also a CPS teacher and together they have two children. Their school-aged child attends a CPS neighborhood school.
To Inspire, Connect and Educate (ICE): A DC Metro Effort Advances a Minority Cultural Wealth Model of Youth Development

Victor Powell

Sheron Fraser-Burgess

In 2013, a group of impassioned African American male educators identified concerns related to the educational preparation of young men and women of color (YM and WC) in their proximal geographic area. The cadre of teachers and administrators were cognizant of the dire educational statistics for this population of YM and WC and the challenges to successful transition from high school to college and the workforce.

Their focus was to develop the academic, social, and interpersonal skills of African American and Latino students in elementary, middle and high school in order to ultimately position them for success in all areas of their lives. Representing various disciplines in education, this group of dedicated professionals embarked upon a creative problem-solving process, which included the formation of strategic alliances with community and civic organizations to address several of these concerns in tangible ways.

One result of their efforts was the creation of the Inspire, Connect, Educate (ICE), Conference, as spearheaded by the first author of this essay. For the last three years consecutively, ICE has presented informal educational experiences and opportunities that target YM and WC. These activities are geared towards providing YM and WC a form of social capital that can better prepare them to make these transitions. This essay, co-written with a second author, who is an education scholar, frames the efforts to create and sustain ICE as an example of a community outreach that conforms to Yosso’s cultural wealth model.1

What is ICE?

With an expressed purpose to inspire, connect, and educate, as indicated by its acronym, this annual conference and mentorship program seeks to accomplish the following through dynamic keynote speakers and workshop facilitators.

Young men of color will be inspired to hope and desire more of themselves and from their lives by connecting them to positive role models—many of whom are from their same ethnic heritage—and educating them with a wealth of information and resources about the ways to succeed in high school, post-secondary education, and the workforce.2

These three concepts function as governing constructs that dictate ICE’s purpose and aim.

For the first conference in 2014, ICE focused on three areas for our 6th through 12th grade students in the DC Metro area. They were: (1) high school readiness, (2) higher education readiness, and (3) career readiness skills.


We understood then, and still understand today, that exposure and access are too often shielded from specific populations that may need it the most. It can seem that only those born into families in the majority, whose knowledge is already deemed valuable, have access to the knowledge possessed by those in the middle and upper class—as well as the potential for social mobility through formal schooling that it provides.3

We set out to assemble professionals who were experts in their field from various institutions and sectors of society such as Temple University, University of Kentucky, Prince George County Public Schools, Fairfax County Public Schools, University of Maryland, PNC Bank and other highly qualified professionals to help improve the education outcomes of people of color within these communities. For us, it was not sufficient merely to have quality professionals, but it was also important that we ensured that these individuals—who would have the attention and time of students—have a proven record of being good role models, in every sense of the word.

The conference’s core mission intentionally relates to the structure of the day’s events, which include the keynote address, workshops, and mentorship. Because of this structure, we begin our conference with the keynote address, which aims to align with the core value of inspiring our youth to listen to and engage with highly successful black men—men who can share their stories and wisdom with the audience in a way that is relatable to their current lives. By exposing our students to keynote speakers like DeMaurice Smith, an African-American who is the executive director of the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA), we show our students that there are other voices and beliefs with which they can identify. The presence of these persons, by being members of their own communities who have achieved financial and professional success, brings a message of legitimacy and meaning from their larger community that counters the majority view.

In addition, the conference offers workshops through which our youth are connected to the nine-month “Bridge Builders” program, which is a local mentorship program that offers our youth examples of positive and consistent role models within their larger community and within the Operation Uplift Foundation.4 The organization strives to provide students with enhanced development and growth opportunities to advance their academics and social goals. We believe that this year-round approach to walking alongside young men will allow the youth to build longer lasting relationships and provides support for their future goals and ongoing endeavors.

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to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Our conferences will continue to position our young men and woman in front of mentors that build them up by giving back to the community with their time, talents and resources. Ultimately, we want to build a strong network around our students so that they have a variety of kinds of support and resources to ensure they are prepared for their pursuits of higher education or skilled training.

Through our workshops and mentoring sessions, we ensure that we are giving our youth the most current and useful information possible, so that our goal of educating and equipping the next generation is being accomplished. In the first author’s own story as a child, he remembers hearing an unknown author quote: “the best way to hide something from black people is to put it in a book.” This sparked a flame inside of him to inquire more deeply about learning and investigating his world around him with a critical lens. It is his belief that knowledge and being literate are essential for our national and local youth of color.

For our first conferences in the DC Metro area, we wanted to ensure that those who were presenting were passing on truths and nuggets of knowledge that could be useful for students’ lives today. Offering workshops like: “Funding Your Future,” “Handling Homework Hassle,” “STEM: Welcome to Genetics,” “Your Internet Face: Building A Strong Online Presence” and “Do You Know Your Communication Style.” These are just a few of the workshops that were offered in year one that were able to educate and expose our students to the career and higher education readiness skills that they would need in their near future.

By educating our youth in these key topics and information, we aimed to equip students with the knowledge of the pathway to academic and social success. The conference actively engaged so they would be eligible and ready for higher education and the larger world context. Society speaks of an education gap between whites and blacks: but there is also a potential gap in exposure and experiences. This gap must be filled if we are to give our youth the ability and opportunities needed to reach beyond the stereotypical limits that are imposed upon them.

**Social Capital as Minority Cultural Capital**

In structuring this conference to advance a constructive perspective of the history and lived experiences of communities of color, ICE presupposes a critical race narrative of such experiences, one situated within the broader American story. Yosso explains that Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education “refutes the dominant ideology and white privilege while validating and centering the experiences of People of Color.”

Young black and Hispanic men need to understand that they are in no way inherently flawed and that they are not a problem plaguing the public education system (or our society). If one listens to the national dialogue or examines society’s representations of these stories, it comes across as if minorities in general can be reduced to an issue to be addressed—one that is in need of being fixed—without calling into the question the prevailing cultural and political environment. CRT, as a transformative theorization of the basis of racialized inequality in education, problematizes the antecedent systems and other societal structures of American society.

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ICE’s theory of action—as fundamentally a positive assertion of minority cultural worth—is shown in that one of ICE’s goals is to communicate to YW and WC that they have experiences from which their nation and world can benefit. They are powerful beyond measure in their ability to shape their perception of their lived experiences. In this vein, ICE aims to construct an environment that counters deficit thinking. Chapman explains that education policy has been based on a deficit paradigms of racial groups. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) Students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) Parents neither value nor support their child’s education.

The racialized assumptions about the deficiencies of communities of color most often lead schools to default to the banking method of education as described by Paulo Freire. This approach reifies social divisions based on race by preparing YM and WC to fulfill a subservient role in society. Rather than being given the opportunity to engage in high-order thinking and acquire critical literacy, they are shuttled through classes that equip them merely in the most basic skills. The ICE conference has the goal of connecting these youth with educated individuals who will speak candidly to them about the effort that educational success will demand, while walking alongside them in their developmental journey.

The idea of being connected to a larger network of support is essential for ICE’s mission. The literature on youth civic activism depicts civic engagement as being extremely valuable for holistic youth development as well as for the society in which it takes place. Indeed, African-American youth have historically been more likely to engage in civic activism than any other ethnic group, according to The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement.

During the second year of our conference, we exposed our students to a workshop called “Master Class for Service in the Community.” In this workshop, Senior Pastor Reverend Michelle C. Thomas instructed our students in ways in which they can get involved in their schools, communities, and local non-for-profit organizations. She was able to communicate to our youth that connecting with people that have diverse backgrounds is essential to the betterment of self and the community. It was sessions like this that brought research on youth activism and critical race theory out of the academia and into the real world.

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The Cultural Wealth Model of Capital

The insidiousness of deficit thinking can be a consequence of conventional knowledge about the means towards social mobility. According to this view most clearly articulated by Bourdieu and Passeron, upward movement in the social hierarchy requires that individuals possess the habits, practices and skills that the society most values. The range of experiences, knowledge and perspective available to middle and upper-middle class society are the social mobility currency in a highly-stratified society.

Yosso invokes CRT analysis to question the purely descriptive status of Bourdieu and Passeron’s theories. There is an argument that negative assumptions about the efficacy of diverse family systems and community values at work in minority neighborhoods and communities of color is also influencing the conventional definition of social capital. If one assumes generative potential in communities of color, rather than deficiency, the community’s cultural values, practices and beliefs can offer alternate resources, which also can translate to mainstream aspirational values such as pursuing higher education. Yosso proposes multifarious sources of cultural capital, in aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant forms.

Under the umbrella of ICE core principle of inspiration, Yosso’s six forms of are salient. Our team knows the value of families of color and that their experience and community structure can support school goals and positive youth development. Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti describe this cultural knowledge base as culturally embedded funds of knowledge. It is evident, for example, when within the home, students are learning a spoken language and its contextual terms and meaning that will help them navigate the various cultures and arenas that they will need to master in their daily lives. Most of our students of color have to learn really quickly how to have the “double consciousness” that W.E.B Du Bois spoke of in The Souls of Black Folk.

In what follows, we look at Yosso’s forms of capital and consider how they connect with ICE’s work.

Aspirational capital

Our key pillar of inspiration exemplifies the first form: aspirational capital. Through the conference keynote speakers that we bring to our students, we attempt to enhance and maintain our students’ hopes and dreams for the future by presenting strong black men that come from similar circumstances as they do. In this way, they can see real strategies for how to face and overcome possible barriers. The ICE conference strives to push students to dream of all the possibilities that are in the world, so that our students are not limited by their current condition in their options for goals and aspirations. Students’ zip codes or parental status should not be the determining principle of their end result in life. We aspire to continue to place highly successful men and woman in front of our students that will ignite a stronger passion to push toward or beyond their dreams.

Linguistic capital

The 2015 conference featured two high school social workers, both of whom conducted a workshop for our students. This workshop trained them in the social skills that can be
gained through communication exercises and experiences with different types of individuals. We know our students come to schools with an array of languages and communication styles, as far ranging as Spanish to street vernacular. By approaching our students in the right way, we can show them that any linguistic capital they bring has value, no matter what end of the spectrum their particular communication style is. Our goal is to show our students that within the real-world context, each of these has a place and can be used to their benefit and enhancement. Our students will then know that what they are gaining in their family context has value beyond the four walls of their home.

By approaching our students in the right way, we can show them that any linguistic capital they bring has value, no matter what end of the spectrum their particular communication style is.

Familial capital

Familial capital is valued highly in our vision through our engagement with families, mentors, and youth. If one serves in the public schools, the diverse family structure of many children, including mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles and grandparents, is evident. Because our students come from a plethora of backgrounds, we partner with faith groups, local organizations, and schools to ensure that we are building lasting relationships with those parental figures that have influence over the development of our youth. We want our families to know that they have a partner in ICE and Operation Uplift that will assist them in securing their child’s hopes and dreams for the future. Building this network of social bonds with families ensures a strong web of community resources being poured into students’ lives.

Social capital

Each year of our conference we encourage our workshop presenters and our students to network with each other so that students can enhance their opportunities for higher education or securing employment in their future. For example, our conference and networking sessions for our students often involve several members of the Divine Nine of the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

Last year, the first hour of our conference was set up for our students to build their social connections within our networking session. Various organizations and vendors showcased their services and activities to parents and students who are seeking opportunities for mentoring and networking with local organizations. The goal was to be determine whether these organizations had the resources that would help to enhance YM and WC and their ability to advance educationally.

The resources that were offered were along the lines of mentorship programs, math and science camps, or career internship opportunities. From these examples that “we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources.”15 Because of these connections, our young men of color will expand their awareness of the social network within their area and gain additional resources to project them forward in their future success.

As another example, during our 2015 conference, two African-American male residential

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directors from one of the local Washington DC college campuses conducted a workshop on residential life. This workshop helped our students to prepare for what student life or residential life on a college campus is like and to take advantage of the multifarious offerings that are available to on-campus students within the residential halls.

Because our middle and high school students are getting this information proactively, they are seeing that they have allies, now and in the future, when navigating the ins and outs of future pathways, such as a university campus. Each year our conference is in session, we ensure that there are career or human resource specialists on board to lead workshops that help our students of color understand strategies to approach the employment and hiring processes. We realize that in order for our students to be marketable and competitive, they need to be equipped with knowledge in resume building, interviewing and networking skills. If our students learn to grasp these skills, they will have a best chance of guiding themselves through the unspoken rules of schools, the workplace or society.

**Navigational capital**

Navigational capital is a resource with which our conference strives to equip our students so that they can understand how to negotiate public or private institutions that were not established with them in mind. In his experience, the first author remembers attending a small, Christian, liberal arts school in central Indiana and realizing that there were people who had never seen or interacted with a young black male before, other than the representation in popular culture of their television or local movie theatre.

Being presented with this situation caused him and others to be aware that he should shy away from certain areas of the country, state or communities because of their perceived or realistic threat of racial hostility. Even though this reality was not new to him, it still caused him recalibrate his thinking about his college experience in order to cope with the sense of alienation. Thankfully, most people of color are constantly aware of the idea of navigational capital because they must enter and exit the dominant white society on a regular basis. So, the rules of engagement and interaction are learned and practiced within our daily lives.

**Resistant capital**

In today’s society, we must continue to educate our youth to be aware of their environments, so that if they are placed in a vulnerable context, they are equipped to respond in constructive ways. As Yosso states, “strategies to navigate through racially-hostile university campuses draw on the concept of academic invulnerability, or students’ ability to sustain high levels of achievement, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly at school and, ultimately dropping out of school.”

In 2001, the incoming freshman class at the first author’s college was one of the largest numbers of young men of color in the university’s history. But, sadly, four years later, only two black males graduated with a degree. He was one of the two young men of color that acquired the degree. This experience, of navigating institutions of learning, workplace or local communities that were not established with structures that supported the success of young black males, was not solely his own experience. Countless other African-American, Hispanic and female individuals must confront these issues on a daily basis to ensure their future success in American culture. It was so even in the age of President Obama—and continues to be.

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16 Yosso, ibid, 80.
case, post the first African American presidency.

Contemporary writers such as Julius Bailey in his text, Racial Realities and Post-Racial Dreams: The Age of Obama and Beyond, or Michelle Alexander in her text, The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness, focus on our current situations of people of color within the system of public education, politics and public policy. The ICE conference directly confronts these issues so that students of color are exposed to new schools of thought and information so that their arsenal of information around social institutions is sound and prepares them to make effective choices in their own lives. Youth of color need to be equipped with the tools to recognize and dismantle systems of oppression.

The idea of resistant capital teaches our youth to challenge the inequities they see in their schools, communities or local governments. Our conference wants to instruct students to fully engage in behaviors that goes against the status quo, such as black males not being literate, college educated or family oriented. As Dr. Ivory Toldson (2008), Howard University Professor states, “a lot of the information we get is all about [black males’] problems, but not anything about what it takes to help them achieve at an optimal level. So, what I wanted to do with my first “Breaking Barriers” report was to de-emphasize the cross-group comparisons.”

Mobilizing Funds of Knowledge to Create Unique Pathways of Success

Our goal is not to compare our black youth to white or Asian students, but to highlight those persons from their various communities that have achieved success. Operation Uplift’s mentorship program and the ICE conference look to shine a bright light on the truth about our youth of color, so that they can see effective ways of being successful from individuals that come from their home communities.

Toldson maintains that there has been the assumption that, for black males to achieve, they must be like other race groups. But there are other paths to success. Depending on where our youth come from, there is a common thread to the pathway of success and we look to expose our youth to various presenters, workshop leaders, and mentors that can articulate those blueprinted plans for our young men and woman. For those of us who have achieved or maintained some arena of success, our stories or testimonies should not be bottled inside of our minds. They should be—and are meant to be—shared with the younger generation that come from our same metaphorical neighborhood blocks.

In the DC Metro area, our goal is to shift the mindset of our community toward a resiliency orientation in a strength-based approach to education, community engagement and political commentary. Our students of color deserve to see and hear positive interpretations of Black or Hispanic males that can magnify these strategies designed to enhance their strengths and skills, not highlight their problems in their communities.

For those wishing to follow our path, we suggest presenting clear indications of ways of success, ensuring a sense of safety for our youth, and having black males read written works from other black males. It could be hoped that society would cease plastering our youth with negative and false statistics about black males and that there actually would be more substantive conversations. We have to change our mindset in our approach to foster resilient men and women of color, so that we are pushing them forward.

Sadly, if students are not exposed to a K-12 educator who consciously and intentionally encourages our youth to be writers and artists in the likes of W.E.B Du Bois, Alice Walker or Frederick Douglass, our students will not get the core foundation of ICE: to be inspired, connected and educated by those who have a similar hue or shade that they have. For the first author, almost 21 years of his life passed before he was a part of an institution of learning that engaged him in critical analysis of some of these prominent American writers. ICE’s aim is to be more proactive with minority youth of today and to share these ideals with them while they are growing within their K-12 experience.

Conclusion

The ICE conference has a very defined mission of providing YM and WC the resources to envision a different life than that which could be immediately before them in their own lived experiences and that which is represented generally in American culture. It provides access to community social networks by which relationships of mentoring can be established for the year. Through the keynote speakers, workshops and mentoring, ICE delivers the cultural capital that supports students in leveraging their cultural background and experiences to aid them in navigating the dominant culture.

Victor L. Powell has been a Samuel W. Tucker Tiger for the past two years as an Assistant Principal. Previous to serving at Samuel W. Tucker Elementary, Mr. Powell served as an Assistant Principal at Park View High School and as the Dean at Freedom High School in Loudoun County Public Schools. Mr. Powell has served as a teacher in grades 4-8 and spent most of that teaching as a math teacher. His experience has included serving as an adjunct instructor, teaching Multicultural Education courses, within the Educational Studies Department at Ball State University. He has also coached basketball and track at the middle and high school levels. Mr. Powell received his Bachelor’s degree from Anderson University (in Education) and a Master’s degree from Ball State University (in Educational Leadership and Supervision, K-12).

Sheron Fraser-Burgess earned Master’s degrees in education and philosophy and a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Miami in Florida. Dr. Fraser-Burgess then joined the educational studies department at Ball State University in 2005. Her primary research interests are in ethics and education. She is particularly interested in the principles and practices of democratic education as they apply to teacher preparation. A social foundations scholar who does interdisciplinary work, Dr. Fraser-Burgess has published papers in the Journal of Thought, Educational Philosophy and Theory, and Philosophical Studies in Education. She has also authored conference papers for the American Educational Research Association, the Philosophy of Education Society and the American Educational Studies Association.
The school bell tolls, signaling the commencement of another school day. Students file into the building, making beelines to their respective classrooms, to begin another day of something.

That something, ideally, would be quality, memorable, engaging, exciting, conversation-at-home-worthy teaching and learning experiences, entrenched in what Ladson-Billings calls, culturally relevant pedagogy.¹

In many instances, all of the aforementioned types of experiences plop themselves down in seats on the last row—you know, somewhere in the back, “over there,” out of the way. Often seated in the front of the classroom, and much more visible, are test-prep drills and bubble sheets, dingy buildings, obsolete technology, tattered books, curricula that reflects the language, heritage, and culture of the majority of teachers, but not the majority of students.

Some life.

Also seated in the front row, if not closer, are systems bent on maintaining the marginalization of students of color, who are often living below the poverty line and outside of red-lined neighborhoods.

Interesting life.

Teachers in urban settings, who care enough to notice these issues, are in unique positions to play pivotal roles in advocating for change. Teachers who care enough to notice and not make these experiences fodder for dinner time banter, teacher who can and should be advocates for social justice—as they are often up close and personal with the struggles and successes of many students, often students of color.

I’d like to think I’m one such teacher, a teacher who is ‘bout that life!

There are many challenges that urban educators face, most of which are entangled in a motley mix of political mandates. They have very little, if anything, to do with real teaching and learning. These improperly informed political mandates and structurally deficient systemic issues are the exact contexts in which educators engaged in the work of advocating for social justice find themselves. It’s no small feat, and no simple task, to lay hold onto the issues and fight from the inside—from the classroom.

But the fight, it is a necessary one.

Educators who are advocates for social justice have many weapons from which to choose. Those weapons range from sounding off on myriad social media platforms to pounding the pavement in marches and protests. They include drumming up conversations and plans in barbershops, living rooms, cafés, or even on the bus.

I should know. I’ve engaged in all of the aforementioned activities. When the clarion call was made to bring awareness to funding issues and staff shortages in our public schools—and yet the district continued to approve charter schools—I pounded the pavement in marches.

and rallies at the school district administration building, outside of U.S. Senator Toomey’s office, and in the Germantown section of the city where I work. I’ve composed and sent countless emails to the state representatives of where I live in Southwest Philadelphia and the school where I work in Germantown for the exact same reason. Not to mention the numerous tweets I’ve sent in order to shed some light on these same subjects—whereas others feel as though they cannot speak for fear of their rogue administrator’s retaliatory memos.

Still, I remain undaunted. Why?
Allow me to invoke the words of my dearly departed Pastor: “for the generation that is now and the generation that is to come.”

My students are worth the fight! With all of these options, however, the most effective options for advancing social justice involves working alongside families and residents in the vicinity of the neighborhood public school. The coalition that is the educator-resident-family alliance is a threefold chord not easily broken. Working in tandem, urban educators, urban families, and urban residents can be relentless in their efforts. Together, they can assist each other in fighting community-based struggles, including those of the neighborhood public school.

As urban educators build these coalitions, it is imperative that teachers, especially those who are not from or don’t live in the communities in which they teach, understand that families and residents are allies in the fight for social justice. It’s a relationship. A relationship but not a savior-syndrome relationship. The mentality that white educators are to come into the neighborhood public school and save the poor Black and Brown children from themselves.

It’s a relationship. And as such, a partnership, each bringing a unique relevance to the cause. Urban educators bring with them knowledge of the system; families bring with them cultural capital and knowledge; and community-based organizations bring with them an understanding of the needs of the community. Together, these educators and families, these community members and students, whose arms and causes are interlocked in a fight for real equity and justice for all, are an unstoppable force.

As an educator and activist, I have had the privilege of partnering with parents on more than a few occasions. There was an ongoing fight to raise awareness of the physical conditions of the local neighborhood school. Together, parents and I, along with my colleagues, would call, email, or speak with school and district administrators. They did. We all did!

These partnerships have also included my and my colleagues’ working with community organizations to beautify the school grounds in order to make it a place and space that is warm and welcoming, not only for the students, but also for some of our insect and bird friends with whom we share Mother Earth.

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We have also rallied with residents, parents, and the community in general in an effort to inform others members of the public of what budget cuts would actually look like at the school! Yes, this is a fight and fight we must!!
As with any relationship, it takes effort on the part of each party to maintain its authenticity, relevance, and brilliance. Maintenance of educator-family-community social justice relations requires that all embrace what Otto Scharmer refers to as “empathetic listening,” or the type of listening where, as he states, “our perception shifts.”

This type of ear action goes beyond just hearing. This type of listening requires the respective parties to place themselves in the other’s shoes: educators, families, and community members all listening from one another’s point of view, hence “empathetic.”

To do so, allow me to suggest that each subscribe to the other’s email lists, follow each other’s professional social media accounts, or meet for lunch or dinner every now and then. Perhaps community members and families could attend functions at school and educators could hang around after school and attend functions in the neighborhood.

Once there, enjoy the event, and when appropriate, talk. Talk about the needs and successes of the community. Be intentional in broaching the needs of the school with parents and families. Follow up with a call, email, text or tweet. Whatever you do, communicate and communicate often.

As an educator at the neighborhood public school and a native of the city in which I teach, I make it a point to attend local high school football and basketball games. I frequent the corner stores, local eateries, and some of the chain stores in the neighborhood. I chat with brothers while waiting to get my fresh fade at the local barbershop a few blocks away from the school (Now that’s a great place to stir folks to action, the barbershop!).

The parents of current and former students often email, text, or hit me up on social media with questions, concerns, compliments, or just to say hi. These relationships? They are a must! They build mutual trust. Not only do I talk, but I also listen.

As parents talk in the neighborhood, and at the beginning and end of the school day, I get a sense of their likes and dislikes. Whether I am the subject of their conversations or not, their opinion of the school, of the educational program, of my colleagues—it matters. If we are to accomplish anything as allied force, we cannot dismiss the voices of any of our partners, be they constituents, kids, or colleagues.

Communicating and relationship-forming is a start. A little positive PR couldn’t hurt either. Boast a bit, and publicly! Nothing solidifies deficit-model thinking and pedagogy more than highly and oft-publicized neighborhoods in distress and the fight to fix them! For this reason, educators, families, and the community at large should infuse counter-narratives into public discourse.

Yes, we have some struggles and will continue to fight! But in the midst of the fight, we offer the following success stories...

Take, for example, my and my students’ experiences. Our classroom library was negligible at best. With the support of family, friends, a community member, and a grandparent, all of whom are loyal supporters of my classes, we now have a classroom library rich in diverse reading materials.

We, in turn, volunteer once a month at the local nursing home, reading with the residence there, using some of those same books that now comprise our library. I’ve written about it, posted to social media, and have allowed the kids to “snap” it as well. Technology can definitely be our friend.

It’s 2017 and technology has greatly changed the way in which we receive our news and other current events. It also has changed the landscape for how we fight! Using Twitter
and other social media platforms, I urge you to inundate those timelines and inboxes! We see it with #BlackLivesMatter often. We saw it recently in the days following the inauguration of the 45th President with #WomenMarch. Additionally, in the aftermath of a series of Executive Orders, we saw it with #NoBan and #NoBanNoWall.

Educators, parents, and community members can harness the power of social media to amplify their voices on issues of social justice in their communities and in their neighborhood public schools. I certainly do and am not shy about it!! I've heard it said, for years, that a closed mouth doesn't get fed! Zora Neale Hurston said, “If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”

In this quest for social justice, it doesn’t hurt to go old school with fighting the power. Pick up the phone and dial the number of your lawmakers at the local, state, and federal levels! While they are all on social media, let the phones ring off the hook until there is assurance that they have heard the voices of the masses! Educators call representing the neighborhood public school’s students, while at the same time parents are on the other line speaking up for their sons and daughters, while on line three, concerned community members tussling in the exact same fight to propel communities forward!

Just as the voices of adults are strong and effective, the voices of our youth are just as strong, just as important, just as necessary, and just as effective. Student organizations in Philadelphia, Newark, and elsewhere have demonstrated their collective power by organizing civil disobedience responses for social justice causes such as draconian school budget cuts and market-based school reform initiatives. Urban educators ought to encourage students in their civic engagement and democratic discourse, as they speak up for themselves, their teachers, and the generations of students who will one day follow suit.

The question is asked if we really are ‘bout that life. Absolutely!

Teachers who are ‘bout that life understand the bonds that need to be formed with parents, families and the communities we serve. Those of us who are truly ‘bout that life comprehend that communication with families, the community, our lawmakers, the social media world, with brothers at the barbershop or with sisters at the salon, all of that is key.

We must communicate the needs and successes of our schools and communities. Furthermore, educators who are really bout that life fight the good fight, notwithstanding any nerves or feelings that might get in the way!

Ms. Cottman is one such teacher, digging deep into her own pockets and getting the help of family and friends to supplement such an endeavor

This fight is for survival and “thrival”!

Teachers ‘bout that life go old school with marches and phone calls, new school with emails and text messages, or newer school with social media—whichever school or tool, we all fight!

We encourage students in their speaking up for the education they want! We show them what is possible when they work hard and knock down the doors that may be in their way, as Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughn, Mary Jackson, and others did in real life, and in Hidden Figures.

Might I add, that teachers who are ‘bout that life sometimes do things like reach down deep in their own pockets, hundreds of dollars deep, to supplement the cost of a trip for an entire class of students (90+ students) to see that film because they believed in the value of such a lesson. Ms. Cottman is one such teacher, digging
deep into her own pockets and getting the help of family and friends to supplement such an endeavor, such a learning experience and memory; such a lesson.

A lesson the students might have missed were it not for the daily life’s lessons they already receive from us who are ‘bout that life. What we saw solidified the life we already speak into their lives.

The school bell tolls, signaling the end of another school day. Because of the passion and heart of educators who are also advocates for social justice and linked with parents, families, and community members of the same mind, the students, who are departing for the afternoon, were involved in quality, memorable, engaging, exciting, conversation-at-home-worthy, culturally relevant teaching and learning experiences! They learned from teachers who really are ‘bout that life.

Stephen R. Flemming is a veteran public school teacher in Philadelphia. He is a graduate of the city’s public schools and went on to earn his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Education. He is now a second year doctoral student at Drexel University and an adjunct professor of reading at a local community college. He is passionate about teaching and learning in urban settings. His research interests include Black male pedagogy and literacy instruction. His twitter handle is @kellygrade6.
New to the Neighborhood: Race, Civic Engagement, and Challenges for Educators

Stephen Danley
Gayle Christiansen

Recent research shows the prevalence of implicit bias in policing, classroom discipline, teacher expectations, and throughout our legal systems. With race playing a critical role in our understanding of systems, the issue of who stands in front of our students has received more attention. There are increased calls for seeing teachers of color in front of students of color, as well as arguments that a diverse teaching force benefits white students. A parallel line of research shows the best techniques for teachers trying to address race issues by teaching on social justice. Less researched but critical concepts such as allyship, savior-mentality, and white racial justice activists, touch on the strengths and weaknesses of those teachers (and people) who do not share culture or race with those around them.

Many of these conversations are limited to the K-12 space, and rarely do they extend beyond (much-needed) calls for more teachers of color, or address the benefits/harm that come not just within the classroom, but outside it.

A parallel conversation is ongoing at the university level, where institutions of public learning have historically been the location of protests to increase the diversity of faculty, and recently students have made similar demands. At the same time, universities are reexamining their historical relationships with their surrounding communities, often using civic engagement (of students, faculty, and the university) to attempt to bridge historically fraught relationships with communities of color.

While much of the literature on such civic engagement within higher education can be self-congratulatory, it also identifies critical

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13 Libresco, Leah. "Here are the Demands from Students Protesting Racism at 51 Colleges." 538. 2015 http://scholar.aci.info/view/14636574e1d084e0361/15169c94d530010003.
problems with the paradigm—including the ways universities overwhelm community voices even while seeking to partner with them. Also missing from this civic engagement discussion is an understanding of how white educators who choose to live in communities of color where they teach negotiate their intersecting roles, both as members of a higher education institution and as community members.

This paper is a starting point for such a discussion. It aims to blend the literature focusing on race and culture at the K-12 level with popular conceptions of allyship and savior mentality, and with a discussion of civic engagement impediments in institutions of higher learning.

We ask: what challenges are faced when educators choose to live where they teach? And what strategies can educators use to address these challenges?

For the two of us, civic engagement played a central role in where we chose to work and where we chose to live. Both of us moved to Camden, New Jersey, motivated in part by the ethos of civic engagement to be good citizens and attempt to contribute to our community. Doing so comes with many benefits: as residents, our understanding of urban challenges and history has expanded, which informs and enhances our teaching.

But moving to the community in which we teach also comes with serious ethical, economic and political challenges. Our status as white educators and white residents in a community of color can place us at odds with the community, with the institutions where we work, and with the systemic ways racism is rooted in urban communities.

In this article we use reflective practice to better understand the responsibilities educators have to their communities, and to lay out strategies for white educators to navigate these challenges. In particular, we lay out the ways that playing multiple roles in a community can lead to conflicting responsibilities, how the political desire to attract middle-class residents can warp power relationships, and how the economic influence of newcomers to communities can contribute to gentrification and undermine local businesses. We also show how an intentional focus on relationship-building and investing locally are first principles for avoiding unintended consequences that damage local communities.

This is not an indictment of civic engagement or an educator becoming a resident in the local community where one teaches. We believe that doing so can be a critical learning opportunity for such educators while also introducing them to wonderful communities and local institutions. But we recognize that white educators moving into communities of color creates challenging power dynamics stemming from decades of oppression and discrimination.

In laying out these challenges, we hope to both increase our theoretical understanding of the tensions inherent in living where we teach,


and also to give practical guidance for those considering such a commitment.

Diverse Teaching and Civic Engagement

First, a disclaimer: this paper is not meant to undermine the great research showing the value of hiring educators who share cultural and racial characteristics with their students. In fact, the challenges we lay out in the context of this article should reemphasize the value of doing. And yet, as civic engagement becomes a growth area within higher education institutions, white educators find themselves moving to the communities surrounding their education institutions, in part in response to critiques of (largely white) educators who are neither living locally, nor invested beyond the classroom walls.

Urban universities have a history of building (metaphorical or literal) walls around their campuses. Calls to change this relationship harken back to Dewey.17 Engaging directly with surrounding communities18 through community partnerships or service-learning classes is a powerful pedagogical opportunity for students in these institutions19 that can make academic learning more applicable and meaningful to real world problems.20

While often seen as beneficial,21 scholars have identified drawbacks to civic engagement.22 Community voices are often overwhelmed by university voices,23 universities may be “serving ourselves” rather than community through the choice of projects,24 and gentrification is caused by an influx of university-affiliated residents.

Much civic engagement literature is aimed at the institution, with little applying to decisions made by individuals. Ivan Illich,25 in To Hell with Good Intentions, argues such attempts often create unintended consequences, are unwanted by surrounding communities, and serve more as evangelism for beliefs than genuine progress for local communities. These critiques are at the heart of our discussion of civic engagement by university educators.

Those seeking to engage with communities in which they teach face the potential for damaging those very same communities. In this paper, we examine some of these challenges and, because we disagree with Illich’s assertion that such civic engagement is ultimately counter-productive, we lay out strategies for minimizing the potential damage caused by these unintended consequences.

The K-12 conversation around teachers and race shows how having a teaching force that reflects the student body can increase achieve-


24 Bortolin, 2011.

ment and is a critical issue for parents and activists. Similarly, there exists helpful research to inform teaching social justice in the classroom or teaching across cultural boundaries.

There is less discussion of teachers’ responsibilities directly to their communities. Such discussions address the use of critical pedagogy and the disconnect between urban educators and their surrounding community. Rarely do they address teachers who do not share backgrounds with their students but wish to invest in a school’s community.

How should such educators navigate this space?

Recent discussions of allyship and the “savior mentality” address this question in part. Allyship addresses the question of how people who care and want to contribute to the effort of oppressed communities to better their lives can do so, despite their privilege. That effort, often by white, middle-class individuals to contribute to movements by people of color, can be tortured.

Mia McKenzie suggests that true allyship is to “shut up and listen” to people of color. Others argue that allyship involves leveraging privilege and power to help such groups. Such allyship can be fraught, leading to what McKenzie calls “ally theater” in which allyship is performed socially, not for the purpose of ending oppression, but rather for the social benefits of being labeled an ally.

A related concept is that of “savior mentality” in which people come to teach in schools with students of color to “save” students. As put by Dr. Christopher Edmin, the savior mentality is expressed by the fact that “there’s a teacher right now in urban America who’s going to teach for exactly two years and he’s going to leave believing that these young people can’t be saved.” Similarly, in a stunning poem titled Hallelujah the Saviors are Here, Rachel Smith relates her own experience as a student, and the biases of a constant string of self-proclaimed “saviors” who both took pride in their short experience in urban America, and looked down upon their students while so doing.

Such discussions of privilege, savior-mentality, and allyship can be criticized as insular, and according to Smith, for being esoteric.

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32 Peterson-Smith and Bean, 2015.
33 Ibid.
35 Flaherty, 2016.
37 Smith, Rachel. Hallelujah the Saviors are Here. Smith, Rachel. 2012. Louder than a Bomb. (Spoken Word).
38 Smith, 2012.
and ritualistic. But for educators attempting to engage civically, these nuanced discussions belie the real, everyday challenges of being a newcomer and an educator in a community.

Who We Are

The stories examined below are the experiences we have lived through. They are our civic engagement with Camden, New Jersey. They are the ways we have struggled. They draw deeply from our own experiences as two leaders of civic engagement activities at Rutgers-Camden University. Before moving to these stories, we will briefly examine our biographies, what brought us to Camden, and two partnerships that grew out of our involvement with the city.

Stephen Danley

As an academic, my eyes turned to Camden when I applied for an Assistant Professorship at Rutgers-Camden University. Coming off a study in post-Katrina New Orleans, I saw firsthand the distrust communities have of researchers, and the need for genuine civic engagement work by local universities. Rutgers-Camden put civic engagement at the center of its strategic plan. When I received the position, I moved to the city, believing as a young, white, male professor intending to focus my research and teaching agenda locally, I had a responsibility to invest personally in the city as well.

I began teaching a class entitled Camden, Philadelphia and the Region and launched the Local Knowledge Blog, which focused on amplifying local issues, local ideas, and local voices. The blog became what one local activist called a “credible alternative voice” in a city with overwhelming political control. Through it, I met many of the city’s activists.

Of all of the issues I became involved in, my favorite was the Camden “foodie” scene. The focus on local culture and food reminded me of New Orleans, and local organizations were doing excellent work. My Camden class worked with the Latin American Economic Development Authority (hereafter LAEDA) to promote Dine Around Friday, a program that linked downtown institutions to locally-owned ethnic restaurants, and my students produced online restaurant reviews for a variety of local Camden restaurants as called for by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission’s (hereafter DVRPC) food plan. Students wrote over 85 restaurant reviews.

Gayle Christiansen

I first came to Camden to teach 7th and 8th grade science in a public middle school and, after a brief stint away for graduate school, I returned to lead the Rutgers-Camden Office of Civic Engagement’s University-Assisted Community School initiative, the North Camden Schools Partnership. This partnership was funded with a five-year, 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, providing a half million dollars a year to support a partnership with three schools in the neighborhood closest to campus.

In taking the position with the Office of Civic Engagement, I chose to move to Camden and to the same neighborhood that contained the schools where I worked. From my previous experience in the city, I knew living in the neighborhood would help provide me with better insight into what students and families experienced while also lending me some credibility for doing this work. My own race was not a good starting point for gaining trust.

During my time with the North Camden Schools Partnership, the Governor called for state control of the school district, installing an appointed superintendent and making the recommendations of the School Board advisory. The Superintendent brought a portfolio management approach to the Camden schools, which meant different things for the three
North Camden schools I worked with: phasing one out while co-locating a charter run school in the same building; flipping one school from being run by the district to being run by a charter organization; and keeping the final school open to compete with the new neighborhood options. A for-profit organization built and opened a fourth school in the neighborhood during this time.

**White Resident in a Black and Brown City**

At the crux of this investigation is the intersectionality between identity as an educator and identity as a new, white resident in a black and brown city. Through reflection, we brought together key themes and struggles that occurred at this intersection.

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**Wessells asks of university-community partnerships, “ethical obligations to whom?”**

We argue that educators who take seriously a responsibility to engage civically beyond the classroom in the communities within which they teach face struggles that roughly fall under three categories. The first is ethical challenges that put the responsibilities of the job at odds with responsibilities to community partners. The second is the challenge of engaging politically when the political context may empower and privilege new, white residents out of a desire to attract middle-class residents to the city, putting educators at a further power imbalance with existing residents. The third is grappling with the economic impact of our presence in the city upon gentrification and local businesses influenced by our spending patterns.

**Ethics**

Wessells\(^{39}\) asks of university-community partnerships, “ethical obligations to whom?” We have often asked ourselves the same question, as we found our responsibilities as educators and newfound responsibilities as residents coming into conflict.

For example, in working with LAEDA, Stephen faced conflicts between his responsibility to his students and his responsibility to the LAEDA partnership. LAEDA came to the partnership hoping to expand its Dine Around program, which helped bring downtown students and employees to local restaurants. Stephen saw the partnership as an opportunity for students to expand their limited knowledge of the city by exploring restaurants in neighborhoods not adjacent to campus.

The partnership was a poor fit because many students worked and were unable to attend the program’s monthly Friday lunches, a frustrating result that undermined the educational objective. Stephen wanted to change the nature of the collaboration to ensure a better experience for students, but also knew that in doing so, the collaboration would stray further from LAEDA’s objectives.

The next semester, Stephen added a third partner and changed the civic requirement to focus more on a Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission’s call to build online infrastructure through having students conduct restaurant reviews. LAEDA was frustrated with the changes. Over time, students had even less of a presence at Dine Around, yet students responded well to conducting restaurant reviews on their own time. This is an ethical challenge

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of the type described by Bortolin.\textsuperscript{40} It is an example where educational and local ethical responsibilities come into tension and must be negotiated.

Gayle also faced ethical challenges of “to whom.” As the state-appointed superintendent made changes in the North Camden schools, Gayle found the new school operator a poor partner, unwilling to provide classroom space and access to staff members to assist in running programming. This failure to engage with and commit to the partnership made it difficult to run a quality after-school program that benefited students and families. On a personal level, Gayle saw this school operating with militaristic practices that she believed disrespected students. If it had been her choice, she would have ended the relationship with this school operator. But there was an obligation to the University to make it work and contribute to the success of the school system.

Gayle also felt an obligation to the University students she employed as assistant teachers in the after-school program. From an academic perspective, the changes taking place within the school district were a ripe opportunity for debate on the purpose of education, what excellent education looks like, and the role of education in alleviating poverty. Yet, this debate was stifled because there was a mandate from the University to work with the new school operator. Finally, the North Camden families faced disruptions and uncertainty as they saw one school close, another change ownership, and a new school open.

Gayle and her Rutgers students knew each of the schools as the North Camden Schools Partnership covered the entire neighborhood. They were often put in the place of answering parent questions about which school their child should attend. Here, Gayle allowed the student staff to share their own opinions, and she shared hers as well, giving her personal beliefs regarding what makes for a great school. With families who entrusted their students to your care daily, it proved difficult to always toe the party line.

These examples show how intersectionality naturally leads to conflicting ethical responsibilities. Educators, in particular, face multidimensional ethical responsibilities to students, community, partners, and their own conscience. We often found ourselves in no-win situations, where every choice felt as if it were betraying someone or something we cared about.

**Politics**

There is a similar danger in what we define as the political space. In this space, new, white, residents often receive preferential treatment by politicians, and must wrestle with the implications of such treatment. A couple of small examples from Camden show how this works. In a recent tour given to Rutgers students by the local Cooper-Norcross Foundation, a foundation employee began to recruit the students to live in the city. We wrote in our fieldnotes that:

The tour guide seemed to make his presentation a direct pitch to the students to move into the neighborhood. He talked about nurses and doctors moving to new homes there, and mentioned that now there was a school for “your” kids to go to if you moved to the neighborhood. He talked up a forthcoming CNN piece about a family, with six kids, that moved into the neighborhood specifically to go to a new KIPP charter school.

Similarly, at a meeting of the Camden Social Club, run by a group of young African-Americans who recently had purchased homes in the neighborhood surrounding Cooper Hospital, Mayor Dana Redd described new housing in the neighborhood as “housing for those of

\textsuperscript{40} Bortolin, 2011.
our peer group.” These examples show the ways in which the needs of middle class, white newcomers to a neighborhood can be the first concern of local public officials, in part because a city with overwhelming amounts of poverty perceives a need for residents with expendable income. New residents occupy a powerful political position because of the political effort to bring them to the city.

Take, for example, a local, white artist who moved to Camden. We wrote in our fieldnotes that:

We talked a bit about how art is in some ways apolitical and provided this communal space. But he continued, arguing about how welcoming Camden had been to him. He frequently served alcohol illegally in his gallery without once having a problem, even though police and even the Mayor had come to visit on such occasions. He remarked how easy it was to come buy a property, not end up with problems, paperwork or licensing.

This is in sharp contrast to the experiences of small business leaders taking LAEDA’s small business training classes.

According to LAEDA CEO Ray Lamboy, those entrepreneurs face serious challenges getting appropriate and timely inspections and certification from Camden City Hall, often crippling resident entrepreneurs with relatively small backup funds who need to open their business quickly in order to stay solvent. Similarly, entrepreneurs complain about the way that small businesses were excluded from the tax credits in the 2013 Economic Opportunity Act, which resulted in $1.4 billion in tax subsidies to new corporations moving to Camden.

That exclusion plays out in the city’s politics. In the 2016 Democratic Congressional Primary, Alex Law, a 25-year-old white suburban male, left his job at Microsoft to run for Congress. Camden was part of his district. He came to the city and told its activists that he was their best chance for change, leveraging his privilege into an immediate leadership position among local activists. In a similar situation, a local artist bought a home in the city and briefly considered a run for office, in part because she had the resources to run a professional campaign, unlike many of the long-time Camden residents who made periodic runs for office.

Such examples show how resources, being an outsider, and even whiteness can be political assets and lead to inequitable results. Long-time city residents are often skeptical of new residents for exactly this reason, seeing how this advantage had been leveraged into preferable treatment.

We struggled with the proper response to these political situations in day-to-day life. There are constant political decisions about when to defer to long-time residents and when to move forward with our own ideas. In many ways, these are political decisions—they are decisions about who should have final say over what is happening in the city. New, middle class, white residents face the decision of how often to defer to existing residents. The knowledge, compassion and wisdom of existing residents is a great benefit for new residents, but disagreements often lead to power struggles.

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For example, while promoting Dine Around, Stephen had friends from outside the city who wanted to try Camden restaurants. These friends called themselves the “Camden Supper Club” and their monthly dinners were covered by the Philadelphia Inquirer.\footnote{Riordan, Kevin. “Sampling Fine Food and Fellowship.” Philadelphia Inquirer, 2015. \url{http://articles.philly.com/2015-03-27/news/60520897_1_camden-store-assistant-professor-east-camden}.} The coverage led to quick growth and ballooned to a monthly gathering of up to 37 people and a list serve with over two hundred members. This success also brought political challenges. LAEDA’s Ray Lamboy was nervous that Camden Supper Club was now competing with Dine Around, which saw its numbers shrink over the same period. As Camden Supper Club leveraged its largely white, suburban group into a second newspaper article, \footnote{Paolino, Tammy. “Discover Camden’s Many Restaurants with Supper Club.” Courier-Post, 2015. \url{http://www.courierpostonline.com/story/life/2015/09/22/discover-camdens-many-restaurants-supper-club/72615626/}.} Ray Lamboy complained that the group often went to similar restaurants as Dine Around and might be causing its decline.

For Stephen, this was a political choice. As a new resident to the city, he often deferred to Lamboy, who had long been involved in Camden and whose father had run a furniture store in Camden. But Stephen chose not to stop the Camden Supper Club because it drew from a different group of people, was specifically started for those who could not make Dine Around, and was a personal social group.

Such challenges speak to the small ways that new residents struggle with finding the appropriate role in a new city. These are political challenges and personal ones. They reflect the “allyship” discussion which asks whether allies should always defer, or should use their privilege in attempts to further causes which are handicapped by oppression and discrimination.

While our experiences do not offer a definitive answer for such debates, we argue that being aware of the advantages and power dynamics of being a new, middle class, white resident in a community is a first step towards morally addressing these challenges.

**Economics**

Just as these challenges manifest themselves through multiple ethical responsibilities and political challenges, there is an economic challenge for new, middle class, white resident educators. Hertz\footnote{Hertz, Daniel. “There’s Basically no Way Not to be a Gentrifier.” City Labs, 2014. \url{http://www.citylab.com/housing/2014/04/theres-basically-no-way-not-be-gentrifier/8877/}.} questions whether it is possible to avoid being a gentrifier. As cities increasingly face “Disneyification,”\footnote{Harvey, David., Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution. Verso Books, 2012.} in which downtown cores become playgrounds for the rich, there are corresponding fears about rising prices and displacement.

Displacement is a distinct fear in Camden, where investment is often criticized as being for newcomers and not existing residents. Benson\footnote{Benson, Keith. “COMMENTARY: School fight about gentrification.” Courier-Post, 2015.} sees displacement as a risk in the rise of charter schools in Camden and the rebuilding of Camden High School.\footnote{Benson, Keith. “Residents must fight Camden High plan.” Courier Post, 2016.} Similarly, residents in Camden’s Whitman Park neighborhood opposed a federal Promise Neighborhood application—a program which would come with significant investment—but the initial application included the power to use eminent domain to displace residents.

There is an economic risk beyond displacement posed by such newcomers: that of
cultural appropriation in which newcomers monetize existing culture in a city. Stephen struggled with this when his Local Knowledge Blog received positive press and he began to be interviewed by the media on Camden-related policy issues. Realizing that his own professional development might be coming at the expense of residents with encyclopedic knowledge of Camden’s history and politics, he instituted a policy where if he is on a panel, is asked for a quote, or makes a radio appearance, he pushes to have a long-term Camden resident included as well. 

In many ways, the partnership with LAEDA and the creation of Dine Around (and Camden Supper Club) are designed to explicitly address the ways that dollars are captured during development. Take, for example, the case of Little Slice of New York in downtown Camden. Its owner, Pete Toso, chose a Camden location in part because of the promise of development downtown. But when that development happened, the two projects nearest his restaurant included direct competitors. The Victor Luxury Lofts included Market Street Pizzeria as a tenant, only blocks from Toso’s pizza shop. The L3 office buildings across the street included an internal cafeteria. With employees leaving at 5pm, and an internal cafeteria for lunch, Toso says little business trickles to Little Slice. 

Without networks in the city, it can be difficult to even know what local establishments exist. When the mayor spoke at an event run by new homeowners in the city, Stephen took a moment to ask why the club regularly met at Hank’s—a new bar opened downtown on the waterfront—instead of at a long-established Camden restaurant. One of the organizers, who recently had bought a home in Camden’s Cooper Plaza neighborhood, shrugged and mentioned there was nowhere else to go.

For educators new to the neighborhood, this is the risk. Cultural distance can be a barrier that keeps new residents from assimilating in a way that supports pre-existing local businesses. At the same time, as new residents with more income increase, it puts additional rental pressure on old establishments without sharing the benefits of new customers.

Strategies for Educator Residents

Illich argues that, given similar challenges, the effort to “help” through civic engagement is a counterproductive one. We make no such argument. We see the effort of both higher education institutions and educators to engage their surrounding communities as much needed progress. But this does not make the path toward progress any less treacherous. White educators who become residents in communities of color, out of good intentions, can still have negative impacts. These challenges are real, and we lay out both a macro strategy for addressing them, as well as micro-approaches that address day-to-day situations.

Our starting point is that these challenges are deeply embedded in society. Ladson-Billings and Tate argue that systematic racism is at the root of our education system, as well as our segregated housing system. The challenges of structural racism and systemic racism are at the heart of the challenges white educators face. The vulnerability of housing in communities of color, influenced by a racist policy of red-lining, leaves communities more vulnerable to gentrification. The use of zoning to avoid affordable housing leaves poverty segregated and leaves politicians desperate for investment from both

References


49 Illich, 1968.
51 Friedman, 1969.
52 Feagin, 2006.
middle class residents and businesses that can leverage the city for tax breaks.

In some ways, moving into an under-resourced community that has been the site of discrimination is an act of solidarity and an attempt to mitigate segregation of races and resources in a small way. But those who do also walk into a society shaped by those forces. Because of this, we argue for a macro-strategy that combines intentional relationship-building with intentional spending. Racism can be structural. Thus, educators in communities of color will be working in a situation in which structural racism (and other factors) may restrict their choices. There may not always be a “right” choice, making building local relationships strong enough to withstand conflicts a necessity.

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We assume that part of being in a community is realizing that, it is a “harmful fiction” to assume community has a universal voice that can always be agreed with.\(^{53}\) Instead of guiding other educators towards the “right” decision, our own experiences show that building relationships that can withstand critical arguments and disagreements is a key component to joining a community—it is almost inevitable that new residents will both make mistakes and find themselves in no-win situations. Local relationships have helped us as educators avoid ill-suited partnerships while widening our pool of engagement projects for students, but have also supported our residential life by helping us to find places to live, introducing us to local businesses, and connecting us to other valuable people in the community.

These relationships are a sounding board for feedback to avoid damaging community. For example, a local foundation requires that grassroots groups partner with one of a select few nonprofits in the city in their grant application process, giving those nonprofits influence over the budget and shape of grant proposals. The foundation reached out to Stephen during the process of evaluating the Cooper Grant Neighborhood Association grant application to implement its neighborhood plan.

The foundation’s representatives were surprised to hear that the neighborhood association was frustrated with the process and in a power struggle with its partner nonprofit. When Stephen challenged the foundation representatives on the consequences of their policy requiring these partnerships in the city, the foundation representatives insisted that they were the “good guys” trying to work in communities, an example of savior-mentality.\(^{54}\) Both can be true. But not being able to hear the damage being done—in this case, setting up a nonprofit with few employees from the city as a kingpin over a neighborhood association conducting a neighborhood plan—can happen alongside much-needed investment. At a later meeting, the foundation was surprised to see that only $130,000 of a $750,000 implementation grant was designated for the neighborhood association to spend. The required partners had claimed the rest of the grant for their on-going projects.

The success of the North Camden Schools Partnership depended on Gayle’s ability to build relationships with members of the school and greater communities. To use classroom space, for instance, required a relationship with building leadership and classroom teachers that would be tested when students left rooms messier than they found them. Gayle also need-

\(^{53}\) Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995.

\(^{54}\) Flaherty, 2016.
ed to build relationships with families and students to have them sign-up and attend after-school programming, an especially difficult endeavor for middle school students facing stigma from peers for spending their free time learning after school.

Stephen and Gayle found building relationships rooted in generative listening\textsuperscript{55} that went beyond downloading information from community members and considered how past histories and divides underlie their words, tone, and body language.\textsuperscript{56}

Gayle, for instance, received many phone calls from school staff regarding the state of classrooms and building the morning after program took place, often from teachers with notoriously messy and disorganized classrooms as their normal state. Gayle made a point of getting to know these teachers by taking time while in the building to stop by and say hello and ask how their day was. In so doing, she eventually heard how these teachers felt unsupported by their school administrations or overwhelmed by another new policy being put into place. It seemed Gayle and her staff were easy outside targets for projecting existing frustration.

In those conversations, Gayle had a chance to share parts of her story and to work with the teachers to see how her program could try to make their day easier. She was able to identify students who rarely turned in homework and have afterschool staff work more intently with them on assignment completion. And after learning that spelling tests took place every Friday, her staff started reviewing spelling with students on Thursdays. Listening first helped to build relationships that reduced complaints—it was hard to be upset with someone you knew was genuinely trying to help your students—and led to working for common goals.

The thriving discussion about allyship starts to capture the intricacies of building these relationships. A key component of this type of listening is recognizing that other perspectives are valuable—and then deferring to them. We do not go as far as some\textsuperscript{57} in arguing that in communities of color, white educators need always defer. There are areas of expertise in which educators need insist upon using their training, but educators' first instinct needs to be that the views of local residents, students and parents are valuable, bring new and needed information forward, and deserve to be deferred to in most situations.

In this sense, we agree more with Warren\textsuperscript{58} in that issue championing requires a conversation about race, no matter who ends up leading.

Listening and deferring is not charity. It is recognition that if there are negative consequences of honest civic engagement efforts, local residents will be the first to feel them. It is prudent to value such knowledge. The same can be said of economic support of local institutions. We argue that buying and hiring locally is a necessary first principle for educators new to the neighborhood. Doing so is not a compromise or gift. Local residents ensure stability in local educational programs and connect these programs to existing resources of which newcomers are often unaware.

Gayle found in the afterschool program that the Rutgers students, who were both serving as assistant teachers and were from the city, connected better and more easily with students than those from the suburbs. She also intentionally sought out school teachers to hire for the afterschool program instead of bringing in outside staff. These individuals knew the students, families, school day procedures, and challenges from the school day that could easily


\textsuperscript{57} McKenzie, 2015.

\textsuperscript{58} Warren, 2010.
flow into the afterschool hours. Hiring staff from the school and city allowed the program to flourish.

Support of local businesses has the same effect. East Camden, with a host of homegrown businesses, has become a tourist destination for local Latino immigrant communities. Donkey’s, a local cheesesteak joint, was featured on Anthony Bourdain’s TV show and named one of the East Coast’s best sandwiches. Yet the danger is “Disneyification,” when genuine establishments with local character are replaced with generic businesses along prime waterfront property. The result is a sterilization of local culture that creates a generalized (and fictional) culture in its place. Walk into the Victor Pub or the newly-opened Hank’s on Camden’s waterfront and this feeling is tangible.

When new residents fail to support local and homegrown institutions, they risk undermining local gems that could distinguish urban businesses from surrounding suburban developments filled with chains. Take, for example, the case of Camden Printworks. The longtime Camden business prints a variety of t-shirts, hoodies, bags and more. At a recent start-up conference, the company was a big hit, bringing its press and giving away “City Invincible” t-shirts—a reference to Walt Whitman’s poem about Camden.

Stephen reached out to Adam Woods, the business owner and a member of Camden Super Club, and bought shirts to hand out to guest speakers and students. Woods shared his frustration that he was unable to work with Rutgers-Camden University on an official basis. Unlike the other universities with which Camden Printworks collaborates, Rutgers requires all shirts to go through its vendor and trademark process. For the other schools, Camden Printworks does not do official work for bookstores or athletics. Instead, it works with student groups, and small programs and schools within the university able to afford the lower-cost Camden Printworks products but unable to pay the cost of the firm which does the Universities’ more traditional paraphernalia.

At first glance, it appears that Rutgers policy is a loss for Camden Printworks. And it is. But it is also a loss for Rutgers-Camden University. The smaller campus in Camden is less able than the New Brunswick campus to produce a variety of official university clothing. In the Rutgers-Camden bookstore, there are university sanctioned items and Rutgers Law School items, but little in terms of the boutique, hip shirts that are popular on campuses.

A lack of local knowledge subtly undermines existing local businesses. This process does not need to be intentional. It can occur because of a lack of existing social ties. If housing and geography are an ingrained component of racism, it follows that development contains the same foibles. New residents may not have access points or the social capital to connect to the broader set of local businesses, instead stay-

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60 Young, A. “New Jersey: Anthony Bourdain's visit to Donkey's Place in Camden brings in extra large lunch crowd.” NJ.com. 2015.


ing in what some Camden residents refer to as the “downtown bubble.” In doing so, new residents both miss out on the rich existing culture in a city and simultaneously undermine that culture economically.

The overarching strategies of building relationships and investing locally point to several other more specific strategies of value to white educators new to the neighborhood. The first of these is the “multiple hats” strategy in which educators delineate between personal and work roles. Intersecting roles can lead to tense moments in partnerships, as responsibilities to neighborhoods and selves occasionally conflict with responsibilities to other actors. At these times, we recommend educators be explicit about the role they are playing.

For example, when the school district overhaul was first announced, the new superintendent led meetings across the city to talk about upcoming changes. Gayle attended one of these meetings, outside of work hours, but in the North Camden neighborhood, her catchment area based on address as well as where she worked. While at the meeting, she spoke to several activists, who she would also consider friends. Gayle left the meeting a bit early to attend another commitment and was surprised that a more senior work colleague followed her outside, stopping her to provide the advice that she should be careful with whom she was seen during meetings. Gayle was too surprised to respond, but had she, she could have explained that in this meeting, she was wearing her “resident hat,” which is different from her “Rutgers hat.”

A second specific strategy is to show up and engage. In spending time in the North Camden schools, Gayle heard about the North Camden Little League. Attending games on Saturday afternoons signaled to families she was willing to be a part of the community and was interested in getting to know it and them better. Instead of creating one’s own community, seeing themselves as “urban pioneers” in a city that is a blank slate, white educators can build relationships and discover ways to invest locally by seeing what the city has to offer through the eyes of more long-term residents.

A third strategy is to use one’s white privilege as a bridge to better connect disparate individuals and power imbalances. Being white comes with the political challenge of being catered to or valued above minority residents. White educators can contribute to their new communities by using the preference that comes with their race to advocate for greater inclusion of others.

Gayle, for instance, was invited as a part of her neighborhood association to a meeting with developers receiving tax incentives for development of waterfront property. The leadership of the association is all white and, while this neighborhood is not the only one affected by the development, the it was the only one invited to meet with the outside developers. During the meeting, the developers, who also happened to be white, shared designs connoting a fear of Camden residents—a shuttle will take employees a few blocks to the front door, there will be private security preventing people who aren’t supposed to be there from entering buildings, etc. Gayle, angry over how those she worked with on a daily basis were portrayed, advocated for the developers to share their plans with other community groups, offering to put the developers in touch with North Camden residents.

The challenges and zig-zag path through them lead to a final recommendation: reflection. White educators living in communities of color face tensions and loneliness. Along with their new neighbors they live with the weight of a difficult racial history. The above strategies are a start to navigating this space, but self-reflection can assist in further understanding dynamics and next steps. In this strategy of re-
reflection, we echo the call by Otto Scharmer\textsuperscript{63} to create an open mind, open heart, and open will.

To take time to become present instead of remaining on autopilot by continuing one’s normal routines and approaches.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this article we have attempted to lay out a theoretical argument for the responsibilities of individual educators outside their classrooms. Doing so improves our understanding of civic engagement in higher education institutions and of educators in urban communities. While there are necessary calls for more teachers of color,\textsuperscript{64} guidance for white educators in classrooms with students of color,\textsuperscript{65} and critiques of institutions seeking to engage civically with their surrounding communities,\textsuperscript{66} there is less information for those of us seeking to both move to and teach in urban communities.

Using reflective practice, we lay out a theoretical structure that examines ethical, political and economic challenges to educators new to the neighborhood. In doing so, we show how the well-intentioned can find ourselves in difficult situations, undermine the community we care about, and influence the economy around us in ways that damage long-local businesses.

But we also lay out a series of macro and micro strategies for addressing these challenges that serve as guidance for individuals seeking to live where they teach. We focus on relationship-building and investing locally in both business and people. These approaches are grounded in our belief that living and educating in the same urban community is not a series of binary choices between right and wrong, but a complex system of responsibilities which lead to inevitable miscommunications, conflicts, or unintended consequences that can damage the very community we hoped and worked to contribute to.

Our micro-strategies help fill in the blanks of such broad-brush strategies, focusing on building relationships through clear communication (“multiple hats”), showing up and engaging, leveraging privilege to better connect isolated groups, and, finally, reflection.

Hopefully, these strategies are both practical for educators seeking to invest more deeply in their community and help set the stage for future systematic research that more fully investigates the challenges of educators new to the neighborhood.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{We focus on relationship-building and investing locally in both business and people.}
\end{quote}

The strategies also embody both our reflection on our own experiences, and our beliefs about the ways such experiences intersect with, but are not entirely explained by, the focus in the literature on allyship,\textsuperscript{67} savior mentality,\textsuperscript{68} civic engagement,\textsuperscript{69} or social justice activism.\textsuperscript{70}

Yes, our motivations for this work and this life were grounded in these concepts. But we believe that investing locally as an educator is a worthwhile pursuit. With the decision to live and teach in the same urban community comes the challenges of being a good neighbor—despite historical oppression and power balances that manifest in surprising and unpredictable ways.

Our challenges in living here, and our biggest failures in doing so, extend from the challenges of being a good neighbor. It is that expe-

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\textsuperscript{63} Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013. &  \\
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\textsuperscript{66} Bortolin, 2011. &  \\
\textsuperscript{67} McKenzie, 2015. &  \\
\textsuperscript{68} Flaherty, 2016. &  \\
\textsuperscript{69} Cruz and Giles, 2000. &  \\
\textsuperscript{70} Picower, 2012. &  \\
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rience which led us to suggest responding to miscommunications, unintended consequences, and power imbalances by relationship-building, rather than setting up a moral code to guide action. Becoming part of a community is a process.

We believe that process can be beautiful, despite the mistakes we make. We believe so because we have lived through these mistakes and leaned on our relationships to remedy them. We hope our reflections help academics to capture that experience and relate it to existing conversations about educators and civic engagement.

But more importantly, we hope that it provides actionable support for those who, like us, want to engage with their community but do not always know how.

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Disrupting the Narrative: Parent Engagement and Urban Families

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In a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event hosted by the National Action Network, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan advanced, “education is the civil rights issue of our generation”\(^1\) and “if we want our young people to have a chance to enter the mainstream of society and pursue the American Dream, they can only do that through education.”\(^2\)

In America, schools are essential vehicles that equip citizens with skills. They are perceived by the populace as a tool that extols the virtues of civic responsibility.\(^3\) Education provides a means by which to level the achievement playing field and mitigate educational inequalities.\(^4\) Through education, schools provide means to make the American Dream not only possible but attainable.

Furthermore, not only does education provide a vehicle that promotes individual success, education also provides an avenue to both revitalize and develop our nation’s most impoverished communities. However, for all students to attain this goal, a comprehensive and systemic approach to academic success is needed.

A popular Nigerian proverb asserts, “It takes a village to raise a child.” When it comes to parental engagement, this statement could not be more appropriate.\(^5\) Research has shown that parental involvement in schools influence school outcomes in a positive and beneficial way for children.\(^6\) As a result of the correlation between parent involvement and positive school outcomes, cross-sectional studies\(^7\) as well as longitudinal case studies have indicated that higher levels of parental involvement equal greater academic success for students.\(^8\)

Parental involvement continues to be listed as the main factor that directly correlates to student academic success.\(^9\) Students have better attendance and experience greater success socially.\(^10\) Parent engagement at an early age is directly linked to students experiencing in-

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increased social competence and language skills. The importance of student school achievement is a chief contributing factor to their future status in society. It speaks to the ability for a student and their family to have social mobility. All this said, educational research also shows that traditional avenues to engagement in schools are not open to every parent. Barriers are created because traditional forms of engagement require time, awareness, and resources that are often not available to all parent groups. While nontraditional forms of engagement are available and have helped families to come together to build relationships between schools and parents, other, non-traditional forms of engagement are often not accounted for or recognized by schools and administrators.

Aside from improving student test scores and grades, parental engagement has been shown to have positive effects on students’ overall lives. When congruency exists between home and school, students have a greater chance of academic success. Thus, parents who are “in-tune” with their child’s school and educational needs are in the position to be better advocates for their child. In-tune parents are typically connected with key players within the school—key players who have the ability to supply a child with resources, such as tutoring or extra help, if requested by the parent.

When parents are aware of the happenings within their child’s school and classroom, congruency between home and school occurs. This congruency becomes synonymous with parental engagement and leads to parent-school collaboration. The level of congruency and the ability to aid in children’s developmental and school success is often stymied when it comes to schools that serve urban populations. Such parents may lack the social capital and knowledge required to gain access to school administrators. As a result, urban parents have been categorized as having low or non-existent parent engagement levels.

Furthermore, various barriers and hindrances confront efforts to involve urban parents in home and school collaborative efforts. Challenges to home and school collaboration...
include divergent goals and motivations between parents and educators. They also include varying capacities of parents to understand schools and interface with them. Some parents lack the time to be actively involved. Finally, cultural and class barriers may deter urban parent populations from participation.

Teachers often fear that talking about the role parents need to play in their children’s education will sound like they are passing the buck. But the fact is, parents’ contribution to the education of their children is essential. Parents are their children’s first and, in many ways, their most valuable teachers.

Scholars such Brantlinger have noted that parental-involvement approaches are often based on middle-class paradigms of how parents should interface with schools, making it more comfortable for middle- and upper-class parents to interact with schools than urban parents who lack access and social capital. For example, middle- and upper-class parents understand how schools function, are more at ease in interfacing with school personnel, and have the ability to secure information that can help them support their children. Impediments to the inclusion of all parent voices hinder attempts to mobilize urban parents and thus deter the full engagement of parents from underrepresented groups.

Given the importance and benefits of parent-school engagement and the often-noted lack of such engagement among urban parents, K-12 schools that serve urban communities need to employ a framework that cultivates and encourages parent engagement.

Hansen held that social class differences in the way parents relate to schools result from different values held by middle-class families compared to their urban counterparts. Furthermore, in defining parental engagement, current literature mainly captures engagement practices that are reflective of parents who have higher levels of social capital and are from the middle class.

It is fair to conclude that a parental engagement framework that cultivates, encourages, and recognizes parental engagement within urban parent populations is needed.

Lessons from Camden: Understanding Urban Parent Engagement Patterns
I conducted a study that examines urban parental experiences and engagement activities. I focused on those parents whose children attend LEAP Academy University Charter School in Camden, New Jersey.

The City. The area where the study took place is a clearly defined geographic area within

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Camden, New Jersey. The area is an island of concentrated poverty that is slightly less than 11 miles long and is composed of more than 20 contiguous neighborhoods. The city is isolated, being cut off from Philadelphia, which is situated across the Delaware River. Living in this area are hundreds of extremely poor families, many coping with an array of challenges: extreme poverty rates, a preponderance of single-family households, high unemployment rates, low educational attainment, teen pregnancy, high rates of violent crime, and a lack of resources and services.

Over the past fifty years, a dramatic change in urban demographics has occurred as the middle class vacated urban centers like Camden in what is often referred to as white flight. By 1990, approximately 86% of Camden’s residents were racial minorities. With the loss of the middle class, small businesses, and major manufacturing companies, Camden experienced a sudden and significant shift, resulting in tremendous environmental pressure on the city’s ability to successfully function.

Today, roughly 77,344 people call Camden home. Of that population, 95% are African American or Hispanic, 45% live in poverty, 27% depend upon public assistance, one-third of infants receive routine prenatal care, more than two-thirds of households are single-parent households, homicide is the number one cause of death for people ages 15 to 24, and 49% of residents’ experience food insecurity.

Camden’s public education system has also faced its share of woes. In 2000, the average amount of money spent on additional educational supports for classrooms in Camden was $82 per student, with the average extracurricular expenditure being $74 per a student. Comparable figures for schools in the county were $127 and $238 per student, respectively. At the time of this study, only half of all Camden residents, age 25 and older, had a high school education, and seven percent had a college degree or higher.

The School. In the early 1990s, when Dr. Gloria Bonilla-Santiago, the founder of LEAP Academy University Charter School, created a strategic plan for the school, the first step in the planning agenda was the identification of stakeholders and creation of a partnership that would have the widest possible representation and participation of community interests.

Born out of the community’s dissatisfaction with the Camden school system and the desire to provide all children with quality education, Project LEAP was created to reform not only the Camden school system, but also the larger Camden community. Participation in the creation of Project LEAP included Camden residents; Rutgers University administrators, faculty, and students; Camden public school superintendents, board members, central administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and students; the Camden mayor’s office and social service agencies; public and private community organizations; members of the Camden clergy; the Camden business community; and the Delaware River Port Authority.

Today, the LEAP (Leadership, Education, and Partnership) Academy University Charter School is a K-12 public charter school that serves Camden, New Jersey. It boasts one fundamental belief: “all children and families deserve access to a quality public education.” LEAP Academy charter school was one of the first charter schools that opened in New Jersey.

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and the first in the city of Camden. The school serves 1,705 students.

The school provides a college preparatory education with an emphasis on the content areas of science, technology, education, and mathematics, as well as specialized career academies in business, liberal studies, and social sciences at the high school level. Attached to the school, there is a subsidiary Early Learning Research Academy (ELRA), which caters to students from the age of eight weeks to five years. Females account for 55% of students. 90% of students are eligible for free and reduced breakfast and lunch. The majority of students at LEAP are of Latino or African American ethnicity.

The Study. Using the Epstein Framework of Parent Involvement as the theoretical framework for research, I sought to examine how social class shapes parental engagement. Using theories of social capital, I describe the formation of social networks between LEAP Academy parents and the way this was turned into valuable social capital.

Urban parents as a group are an understudied population in the United States. This unique group possesses its own organizational patterns and needs. Given this knowledge, I considered the following questions:

- In what ways do urban parents engage in the academic lives of their children?
- What innovative strategies does LEAP Academy University Charter School utilize to garner high levels of parental engagement?
- How should the definition of parental engagement be modified to take into account variant levels of social capital?

Data for this study was collected through formal and informal interviews, documents review, and analysis of archival documents, participant observation, and survey analysis.

Empowering Parents

Our nation’s school system is a direct reflection of the citizens that make up our society, necessitating strategies and programmatic efforts that are reflective and inclusive of each citizen.

In my study, I found that the school taught parents how to lobby lawmakers, how to protest, how to dress for success, and how to speak in public, as well as when to make noise and when to be quiet. Parents were enrolled in a training institute within the school that had a curriculum centered on advocacy, self-awareness, and pride in their community. The founder of the school utilized the Saul Alinsky method of empowerment to organize parents and provide them with a community school model.

Our nation’s school system is a direct reflection of the citizens that make up our society, necessitating strategies and programmatic efforts that are reflective and inclusive of each citizen.

The training institute built capacity in parents by graduating leaders. When parents graduated from the program, these parents then trained a new group of parents. According to an October 27, 1994 Courier Post article by David Gilmore,

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Camden parents have always suffered from breakdown in communication...by giving parents the tools and trainings they need to communicate, [LEAP] is changing the whole paradigm for parental engagement in the city’s education. The Parent Leader-to-Leader Institute program not only trained leaders, but also created new parent leaders to transform community and school. Urban parents, who for the most part have been told all their lives what to do and what they need, now have the opportunity to teach other parents the importance of getting involved in their children’s education. This new ability is because of the skills provided to them by Project LEAP.

The parents who had been recruited and organized to support LEAP Academy were adamantly opposed to a shared governance option. They threatened to withdraw from the training program if “their” new school was given back to the failed Camden school system that they were desperately trying to get away from.

The activism seen in parents was an early sign that LEAP had not only mobilized parents, but had effectively built capacity with their parents. Parents who at one point felt hopeless and powerless were banding together in opposition of an entire school system—the Camden school system. Parents, most of whom had no formal education, and some of whom barely spoke English, were now becoming empowered. “Parents talk about the school as if it were something belonging to them, and indeed it does…. LEAP lets parents help make decisions, and they are an integral part of what the school stands for.”

According to a Courier Post article, the mission of LEAP Academy is not only to provide seven hours of academic programming to students, but to become a place they consider home.

Parent engagement to me means getting involved in the school that our children are in. And it doesn’t have to be my children because I consider LEAP to be my home—LEAP is my family and all the kids at LEAP are my kids. Even when my last child graduates four years from now, I think I’m still going to stay engaged in the school because of the community, the kids that come here…parent engagement to me is, us getting involved and making sure that the school is going to do the right thing. To make sure that the school is teaching. To make sure that our kids are not, I guess, wasting their time.

Social capital at LEAP Academy is not about the individual, but an attribute of the collective community. When LEAP planted the seeds of liberation, it empowered parents to become advocates in changing the academic landscape for their children.

Despite the socioeconomic status of the parents, LEAP wanted parents to be involved in the design, creation, and development of the school. Allowing urban parents to play a role in their liberation created social ties and networks among LEAP parents, thereby increasing their social capital. The creation of social networks and social capital served as the catalyst for LEAP parents to understand the importance of becoming engaged in the academic life of their children.

LEAP Academy was intentional during the planning and development phase of its exist-

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31 Interview, LEAP Employee, February 18, 2016.
32 Ibid.
35 Interview, LEAP Board Member, February 18, 2016.
ence. This level of intentionality triggered a positive chain of reactions that remains a part of the current school culture today. Parents are the pillars of LEAP Academy. Through comprehensive social services and programs, LEAP Academy is able to empower families, give hope to children and parents, and transform the lives of Camden families.

As a result of delivering these benefits to LEAP parents and children, LEAP Academy has managed to achieve high levels of parental engagement from its urban parent population. The efforts of LEAP Academy have not gone unnoticed from its parent population, as 69% of parents who completed the 2015 LEAP Parent Engagement Survey were satisfied with the parent programs at LEAP Academy, and 72% of parents reported overall satisfaction with the school.

Based on interviews conducted and documents reviewed, LEAP Academy provides parents with various points for engagement. LEAP meets parents at their level by not assuming that all parents know how to engage in the academic lives of their children. It empowers. It builds the capacity and social capital of parents through numerous parent-training programs. It allows parents the opportunity to be a part of the school’s governance structure. It uses various forms of communication—both in English and Spanish. It enters into an agreement with parents through parental compacts. It is successful in its educational mission—as seen from the 100% graduation rate. The LEAP Family Engagement Model is a holistic model with the parent engaged with the school, the school engaged in the home.

This school challenges the dominant parental engagement paradigm. For Epstein’s Framework of Parent Involvement is a lockstep method of parental involvement. Epstein’s framework minimizes individuality and adheres to a one-size-fits-all approach to parenting. This approach alienates urban parents as it does not account for the need to build social capital and advocacy skills in parents prior to schools asking for urban parents to engage in the academic lives of their children.

The LEAP Family Engagement Model is an interactive model that forges collaboration and communication between the school and parents at all levels. LEAP’s interactive approach to engaging parents gives birth to nontraditional forms of parent engagement, fosters innovative strategies for parental engagement, and lays the groundwork to augment the current definition of parental engagement.

**Parents were able to engage in all aspects of their children’s lives at school**

### Engaging Academically

The findings of the study showed that parents engage in the lives of their children in diverse ways, including volunteering at school, serving as a member of the governance structure, working as an employee of the school, and helping sew outfits for the school play.

Parents were able to engage in all aspects of their children’s lives at school by advocating for the charter school bill, lobbying lawmakers, being present at school functions, visiting their children’s classrooms, attending parent-training workshops, serving as parent chaperones for LEAP events, participating in social and networking events at LEAP, being a part of the teacher-hiring process, and playing an active role in the Parent Council.

At home, parents engaged in the academic lives of their children by serving as tutors, being present at extracurricular activities, helping with homework, purchasing school uniforms, serving as role models for their children, providing a stable home environment, making sure their
child was healthy enough to attend school, and assisting in the completion of school work.

The ways in which parents engage at LEAP eschew the traditional typologies set forth by Epstein’s Framework of Parent Involvement. LEAP creates increased avenues for engagement to both reflect and include its urban parent population. Epstein often touted the importance of PTA meetings and school events (e.g., bake sales and car washes), but she failed to make concessions for urban parents whose lifestyles do not fit into the demographic of traditional notions of engagement.36

Due to overreliance on such frameworks, the ways by which urban parents engage have been left out of parental engagement conversations.

Redefining Engagement

Given the ways these urban parents engage, and the innovative strategies used to produce such high levels of engagement, how should the definition of parental engagement be modified?

Parental engagement as it is currently defined focuses on parent-child interaction and the use of investment and resources in the schooling of a child. Rather than positing a new definition, I identified five practices that should be incorporated into parental engagement to augment current definitions and present-day practices.

- We must first begin by replacing the word “involvement” with “engagement.”
- All parental engagement strategies should include a component that develops parents as co-creators in the educational endeavor and builds their capacity.
- Schools and parents should work together to co-create a shared vision and a code of conduct.
- Schools should take a comprehensive approach to engagement that includes services to support families: health centers, GED classes, college access, job creation, legal services, and overall wellness.
- The goal of the school should be to serve as a community for students and their families.

These practices, unlike the traditional definitions used today, do not assume that parents (a) know how to engage in the academic life of their child, (b) are knowledgeable about their role in the academic life of their child, and (c) are aware that their engagement in their child’s life will be beneficial.

When these three assumptions are removed, we are able to take a more holistic and bottom-up approach to parental engagement that would be of benefit to and inclusive of all parents.

Urban families face a great deal of instability at home and need to be stabilized before they can be effective co-educators in their children’s lives. These five suggested practices for parental engagement account for the possibility that parents are not aware and do not know the benefit of parental engagement. Furthermore, these practices speak to the creation of social and human capital within the lives of parents. As reflected in the LEAP Parent Engagement Model, these are all elements that are needed to effectively engage urban parent populations.

Final Thoughts

Through the study of a single public school that uses innovative approaches for parental engagement, this study aimed to re-examine accepted views, add new findings to the current

literature on parental engagement, and analyze how institutional arrangements can either facilitate or block engagement among urban parents.

The findings of this study indicate that urban parents engage in the academic lives of their children when schools implement a parental engagement framework that trains, cultivates, facilitates, and encourages myriad ways of engaging. My scholarship deepens our understanding of critically responsive parental engagement practices in a K-12 schooling.

... these practices speak to the creation of social and human capital within the lives of parents.

Schools with substantial populations of students from urban families should work towards creating robust relationships and partnerships with parents and community members. When these authentic relationships are formed between schools and parents, they aid in the development of effective parent-education training programs, inclusive engagement practices and strategies, increased communication between the home environment and school, and increased student academic success. As affirmed by a LEAP Academy parent, “When a participatory process is sincere and inclusive, parents believe they are listened to and respected. You will have gone a long way in building parent ownership, support, and legitimacy.”

As a nation, we can no longer use a one-size-fits-all method to engage parents in their children’s education. We must begin to change the narrative of how we define effective parental engagement strategies. Otherwise, we risk alienating vulnerable parent groups. Until we, as a nation, discontinue our overreliance on traditional notions of parental engagement, we will continue to alienate and fail our urban parents, whose desire is to be treated with the same respect and dignity as everyone else.

37 Interview, LEAP Parent, February 18, 2016
Enterprise Education to Entrepreneurial Vocation: Why Entrepreneurship Should Include Youth

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I am a practitioner of community and economic development, by way of leadership and workforce development. When considering how I believe teachers can help achieve social justice and equity, particularly in communities that wish to improve economic conditions, what I hear is what can we do to move beyond the zero-sum game. Throughout history, education has been a tool, with varying degrees of success, for building economic infrastructures. Still, I advocate for education, within the walls of the school and beyond, to serve as a pillar for community and economic development. But I further assert that education today, tomorrow, and for the foreseeable future must promote the development of skills directly related to wealth creation—to earnestly address economic conditions.

In this article, I lay out why the fastest-growing curriculum across higher education is gaining support for pre-college youth as well.

Entrepreneurship and Community & Economic Development

Entrepreneurship education is a response to youth unemployment. It was introduced into formal education as a means of encouraging growth and generating employment.¹

Both public and private sectors have been charged with addressing the capital needs of communities. However, within the past twenty years, the private sector has been heavily criticized for its inability to support the capital needs of diverse communities—and specifically underserved communities. The limitations of the private sector have led to public sector leadership in addressing this problem.² While opportunities for firm creation are embedded in the private sector, research shows that the private sector can neither sustain economies nor economic growth on its own.³

The private sector, specifically large-scale businesses, could be an impediment to social and economic development goals. This is why entrepreneurship has emerged as a response to economic development efforts. Economic development, as a term, means increasingly sophisticated ways of producing and competing. This, in turn, leads to the accumulation of physical and human capital through an interrelated process of structural change and education.

Theoretically, we recognize that knowledge does not just benefit the recipient but is also spilled over into the community in which that recipient interacts. When agents acquire new knowledge, that knowledge can be exploited for economic opportunity. Entrepreneurship, then, is where economic opportunity meets community need. Entrepreneurship is not just about profit seeking—it is about improving the quality of people’s lives. The entrepreneurial mindset is a critical mix of success-oriented attitudes, including initiative, intelligent risk-taking, collaboration, and opportunity recognition.

Still, while entrepreneurship has long thrived in America’s economy, formal instruction has been deficient because entrepreneurship education until more recently was under-valued.

Entrepreneurship is not just about profit seeking—it is about improving the quality of people’s lives.

Educational Policy and Entrepreneurship

Among the greatest challenge facing the U.S. economy and consequently the education system is how to grow a skilled workforce prepared to meet and exceed the demands of the present-day economy.

I think it has been made clear that today’s economy requires innovative thinking with an entrepreneurial mindset. But because formal curriculum within a large number of school districts exclude entrepreneurship education, the discipline has been slow to grow at the primary and secondary levels—despite the rapidity of growth at the collegiate level. High schools, in particular, have not been able to revise curricu-

lum to meet the rapid changes in technological advancement.

Jacobi emphasizes that the goal of entrepreneurship education is to engage a segment of the community in the creation of social capital.4 The solidarity amongst stakeholders—that is, teachers, parents, students, public and private sectors, and the community-at-large—results in more institutionalized practices that can address problems such as violence, unemployment, inequality, and exclusion. When viewed in this way, entrepreneurship is about thriving in an economic system where all actors and stakeholders are essential.

The more recent expansion of entrepreneurship education supports the function of formal education and is a response by the institution of higher education to ensure that nations maintain a high standard of living and remain competitive in the global economy. In the US, it has emerged in the face of youth unemployment and economic development challenges.

Fostering the life skills of students enhances the benefits of communities collectively. To translate entrepreneurship education into entrepreneurial activity, youth should be integrated into the labor market and entrepreneurial social activity in a meaningful way.5 The challenge in creating more effective policies is to ensure that its impacts are for positive, both for the individual and the community, and that underserved communities are the primary beneficiary.

Entrepreneurs are Made

Literature supports the inclusion of youth in entrepreneurial education and related activity. However, the study of entrepreneurship education is limited. Due to the limitations, several constructs of entrepreneurship education have not been settled upon. As the discipline emerged, the argument existed as to whether entrepreneurship education could be taught or whether entrepreneurial motivation was an inherent character trait. Based on the growth of the discipline, it is now evident this argument has been settled upon: these skills can be taught.

The entrepreneur has been embedded into American character since the first recorded inventions from great innovators, such as Thomas Edison and Lewis Latimer. We are surrounded by the outputs of innovators, such as the light bulb, filament, cars, and computers. The emphasis on the end product rather than the process paints the entrepreneur as capable of independent and spontaneous innovation. To credit the entrepreneur, these are traits of an innovator, but history informs that innovation is a process that is influenced by environment, circumstance, motivation, and many other factors. Thus, the entrepreneur is made—not born.

Entrepreneurship curriculum should utilize a multi-disciplinary and mixed-method approach of instruction. However, there is no single method to teach entrepreneurship education. Research expanding the past several decades has shown that the classroom alone cannot provide the skills needed to build a real business. Potential entrepreneurs need exposure to risks, creativity, and ambiguity—which can only be acquired through experiential learning. The typical business pedagogy taught in the classroom lacks hands-on applicability. Entrepreneurship education should be seen as a complement to other business and leadership programs that covers an understanding about the broader economy and their own personal economic foundation.6

While there is a strong argument that entrepreneurship education can support or improve economic conditions, research has been limited in youth or pre-college age entrepreneurship education. Due to the nascency of entrepreneurship education for youth, there is a gap in information, a lack of theory, a lack of agreed upon evaluation, and a lack of policy. Entrepreneurship education and skill development programs can be an invaluable experience for youth because it provides the opportunity to build on skills relative and beneficial to all aspects of life. This is one aspect of entrepreneurship that seems to be uncontested.

Entrepreneurship education and skill development programs can be an invaluable experience for youth because it provides the opportunity to build on skills relative and beneficial to all aspects of life.

Conclusion

The profound ability for entrepreneurship education to address social justice and equity, particularly in communities that wish to improve economic conditions, make it ideally suited for addressing economic and workforce development.7 While there has been an unprecedented increase in demand and subsequent supply of entrepreneurship curriculum in higher education, in more recent years, other institutions—

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such as primary schools, secondary schools, and not-for-profits—have begun to offer creative opportunities for entrepreneurship skill development as well.

However, the nascency of youth entrepreneurship education have led to gaps in evaluating the validity of the construct and a dearth of practitioners. Nonetheless, the importance of curricula designed to foster the development of entrepreneurship implores all stakeholders—students, parents, teachers, and researchers—to find practices and policies for social and economic improvements. After all, the knowledge and skills obtained through entrepreneurship education not only benefit the individual, but stand to benefit the welfare of the community.8

8 Ibid.
From an “Insider” to an “Outsider”: The Metamorphosis of an Educator Navigating School-University Partnerships in Urban Communities

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When we reflect upon an experience instead of just having it, we inevitably distinguish between our own attitude and the objects toward which we sustain the attitude… Such reflection upon experience gives rise to a distinction of what we experience (the experienced) and the experiencing—the how.

John Dewey

Within the past three decades, urban school and district leaders have increasingly forged joint ventures with philanthropic groups, universities, and other education consultants to turn disjointed collections of flagship and failing schools into systems of high quality schools. School boards have turned to military, government, social and private sectors in search of executives to recruit to improve urban school systems. The burden has traditionally fallen on the “outsiders” to warrant that their contributions are neither ignored nor dismissed. How can outside agents get the buy-in from practitioners to influence student outcomes?

As schools and district offices collaborate with agents from outside of P-12 institutions to bring instructional improvements to scale, observers argue that these partnerships are tilted because the “insiders,” or practitioners, ultimately decide whether they will implement the ideas created by the partnerships. The burden has traditionally fallen on the “outsiders” to warrant that their contributions are neither ignored nor dismissed. How can outside agents get the buy-in from practitioners to influence student outcomes?

I contend that outsiders (e.g., representatives from Institutions of Higher Education) who during the earlier stages of the partnership

purposively seek to understand the formal and informal structures of the institution—as well as the urban context in which their work will take place—are more likely to have input that is embraced and implemented by insiders.

This self-reflective analysis draws from first-hand professional experiences with two school-university partnerships: the first as an elementary school teacher, the second as a university-representative working with an urban district office. I reflect, with references to institutional theorists, on how reformers and practitioners perceived attempted outside influence on instructional outcomes.

In the second section of this paper, I discuss the unique role that teacher preparation programs in Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) have as outside agents that prepare future and current insiders. As outsiders, teacher educators are charged with preparing future teachers of urban districts to become reflective and collaborative agents of social change, responsible for meeting the diverse needs of students and families within an increasingly complex urban education landscape.

I conclude with a discussion of the lessons learned from these school-university partnerships and how they inform my current role as teacher educator and researcher.

**Situated Knowledge**

I have personally and professionally confronted the obstacles commonly entrenched in the urban school context. Prior to my current role as a teacher educator and researcher, I worked as a special education and bilingual teacher for six years in one of the nation’s five largest urban school districts. The Title I schools where I taught—and which my son and daughter also attended—were in the predominately African American and Caribbean neighborhood where I grew up, in the southeastern region of the United States.

A substantial number of parents were my childhood peers. During my tenure, I dedicated hours to efforts that generated new opportunities for students. I refused to succumb to low expectations and the notion that success was not attainable. Instead, I helped start a photography club, lead tutorial programs, invited alumni of the schools to speak to the students, and pursued grants for different student empowerment projects.

Committed to bringing out the strengths in my collaborators and in enhancing the lives of children, I endeavored to incorporate the knowledge of parents and colleagues into the conversation about improving student learning. For example, by developing a partnership with an assistant professor from a nearby research IHE, I organized a series of dialogue sessions about education as a social justice issue.

I met the academic at a conference where I first learned about his scholarship. After I described some of the strengths and challenges at my school, he accepted the invitation to speak to our community. Since our school was targeted for both district and state-level interventions, teachers, students, and parents had become numb to the presence of the revolving door of visitors in fancy suits. It was my hope that families and colleagues would find his ideas about centering relationships and highlighting the community’s cultural wealth as refreshing as I did.

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Per my request, he agreed to visit prior to conducting the first meeting to gain an understanding of the school context. The researcher, a Latino man from the west coast of the United States, said the ranch-style homes in the neighborhood reminded him of his hometown. With that simple observation, I remember, I felt more at ease with his collaboration with our school.

As the dialogue sessions were scheduled after school hours, I went to each teacher to personally ask for their assistance with promoting the gatherings. I used money from small teacher grants to create invitations for the parents and advertisements that we shared around the community. School administrators showed their support for the endeavor by securing tickets to professional basketball and football events, books, and educational toys from local partners, which were presented as giveaways during the meeting. For one of his visits, the university professor invited preservice teachers who were his students to attend the dialogue. Although I was a special education teacher who did not hold an official administrative title, I was influencing change at the school with mobilization efforts that scholars describe as distributed leadership.

One outcome of engaging the community was that the school administrators supported the idea to establish a school-based Before/After School Care Program. The program met the families’ request for a safe, educationally sound, after school option for their children. It also provided job opportunities for families. For the first two years, I oversaw the recruitment and hiring of a dozen employees for the program—all of whom were relatives of students at our school. Despite the various instructional and extracurricular activities I engaged in, the driving narrative behind most school interactions during my six years as an urban schoolteacher centered on state accountability, assessments, and surveillance measures.

The adoption of high stakes accountability measures by state governments in the mid to late 1990s, reinforced by the 2002 federal passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, created a climate dominated by the politics of accountability in education governance. State assessments and the media’s role in providing information about schools’ performance to the public have drawn attention to the great variations of student achievement from district to district and among schools within a district. In this age of accountability, as low-performing districts want to get out of the spotlight, large urban cities continued to struggle with making improvements in student performance measures.

The experience I gained at the school level heavily influenced my desire to understand the role that community agency and leadership plays in enriching the lives of students in urban settings. As I witnessed the humiliated faces of students, parents, and educators who were casualties of policy side-effects—for example, the looming possibility of retention of students who did not pass our state test or the stigma of receiving a “D” as a school grade—my mounting frustration motivated my comments to the independent newsmagazine In These Times.

In my first media opportunity, I argued that accountability alone is simply not enough, suggesting that “instead of stigmatizing the school and putting more pressure on students, let’s talk about the social issues that are going on, with-
in... outside and around the school.” Shortly after that interview I applied to graduate school in order to gain a deeper understanding of the processes in which educational policies are made and school systems managed.

**Institutional History and Contexts Matter**

After beginning my graduate studies in 2010, I engaged in various activities where I examined the research, practice, and policies involved with educating students with diverse needs. As my career and academic interests took me across different urban districts in the country, I quickly learned that, despite having attended and taught in urban schools, each context was different and I was most often perceived as an outsider who represented an IHE. The first time I realized that my affiliation with an IHE made me an outsider to P-12 professionals was an upsetting and humbling discovery.

At the time of my contract as a professional development (PD) facilitator at a northeastern urban district, 30% of students were English learners (ELs) while 46% of students spoke a language other than English at home. Although ELs represented a substantial proportion of the student body and were explicitly mentioned in the district’s strategic plans, this sub-group had the lowest academic outcomes and the highest dropout rates in the state.

The alarming statistics, brought to the attention of the US Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (DOJ), initiated an investigation that exposed the lack of sufficient support given to the learners in the district. In October 2010, the superintendent signed a settlement agreement with the OCR and DOJ, which called for the expansion of EL services and the assurance that every school had the capacity to serve this student population.

Per the settlement, teachers were required to complete four categories of competencies trainings to be deemed qualified by the state to teach ELs. Since the inception of the OCR investigations, the district has hired or trained thousands of teachers. In addition to EL’s achievement gap, however, there was a considerable professional development gap for their teachers. A district office trained most of them, but the sessions were not competence-based.

Furthermore, a survey by the teachers union had synthesized the feedback about the category trainings and published it online: “many, many teachers were quite put off by the ELL Category trainings and called it the worst PD they ever experienced in their careers. There was not one positive comment about the category trainings.” I did not learn about this problematic PD history until months into my partnership with the district office.

Eventually, the trainers acknowledged that there was no formal procedures to document whether the strategies presented in these trainings were implemented and agreed that teacher participants displayed a dismissive attitude during the trainings. In short, the categorical trainings had been implemented more as a compliance measure than as a useful method for improving the instructional core.

I was one of three consultants hired from my university. The supervisor responsible for hiring us proudly shared that their office was the most ethnically and linguistically diverse staff in the district. As a former English language learner and a teacher from a large urban school district, I felt that I was a perfect fit for the position. It took me a while to realize, however, that the district staff members in this office had pegged me as an intruder.

I initially received a warm welcome by most. However, just as I had grown apathetic to the revolving door of fancy-suits during my
years as an elementary school teacher, the district staff were used to meeting and greeting new people who ultimately left. Moreover, most of the staff had worked at the office for years, while the department supervisors who were most enthusiastic about my contributions, were newer to the office.

An example that illustrates the complicated dynamics in this joint venture was a series of events that led to the early dismissal of one of my co-facilitators. During our orientation, two trainers told us that we could work from home. Despite their advice, I thought it was wise to work from the central office. During the first two weeks, I was the only one of the three facilitators who was consistently coming to the office and I was soon tapped to lead several projects. A few weeks later, a supervisor asked one of the facilitators not to return because she “was not putting in enough effort.” I believe those who encouraged us to work from home were partly responsible for her lack of engagement. Shortly before hearing about her dismissal, I contacted the other facilitator and suggested that he come to work in the central office because that was where most the information for our projects could be found.

For an 11-month period, I was responsible for managing a budget of $163,000, oversaw professional development sessions for district teachers, and executed the specific goals of a time-sensitive project funded by a federal grant. As my time at the office progressed, the resistance from some staff members also increased. Upon reflection, I realize that my questions, demeanor, and institutional affiliation were the most prominent markers that defined my relationship in the office.

The staff were accustomed to operating without anyone questioning their actions. Considering the decision by the DOJ, the newspaper articles in the local paper, and the teacher union’s posting of the office’s failures on the internet, my presence and questions put them on the defensive. Consequently, some staff chose to ignore my requests and requested to work with the other facilitators. It was the first time I experienced resistance to collaboration. The contentious interactions with district personnel taught me an important lesson about the need to come into a school-university partnership with an in-depth understanding of the institutional context, as well as the importance of building relationships with more than just the administrators.

In their empirical exploration of the negotiation processes involved in a collaborative effort between an urban school district and a university-based research center, Coburn and colleagues found that authority and status during these partnerships were incredibly dynamic. The district office is a context with hierarchical and more complex organizational structures than that found in schools.

While emerging research touts the synergetic benefits of insider–outsider collaboration, Coburn and colleagues contend that there is insufficient examination of the processes by

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which partnerships are negotiated and maintained at the district level. Furthermore, the authors argued that the existing literature primarily focuses on researchers’ reflections and typically they are at the school level instead at the district level.

Drawing on data from a longitudinal case study, this same research team found that the organizational structure, namely the stability of district leadership teams, influenced the negotiation between the “experts” and “practitioners.” In my experience, I also found that the frequent administrative turnover in the district office influenced my perceived contribution as an outside expert.

Through interviews, the researchers also found that insiders and outsiders with more practical experience were given higher status, although outsiders were less likely to need experience to have status. The authors concluded that even though district offices may solicit the partnerships due to the “outsiders” level of expertise, these partnerships are skewed toward the insider practitioners. Finally, the authors advised outside agents to pay especially close attention to the insiders that had authority, because this authority is dynamic, and those insiders would be able to impart informal authority to the outside agent.

Making Sense of My Transition from Insider to Outsider

In the two narratives I shared above, I describe very different reactions of urban school professionals to representatives of IHEs. In both cases, the insiders were wary of outside influences because of the surveillance and public declarations that deemed their efforts as failures.

In both cases the expert outsiders were, like the urban district insiders, members of historically marginalized ethnic groups, albeit from different regions of the country. Although there is anecdotal evidence that explicit discussion about race and differences are critical for collaborative efforts in urban districts, these demographic considerations are often not explicitly explored in collaborative research. In both of my shared experiences, however, intercultural communication were effective and perceived racial slights did not emerge.

A feature of large urban school districts that repeatedly receive criticisms, from both the staff within and observers outside the systems, is the bureaucratic structure and “pathologies” of these organizations. Both conservative and progressive education pundits point to bureaucratic problems in relationship to improving student outcome. A review of the literature on bureaucracies both elucidates the complicated nature of effecting change in urban districts and reveals the beliefs that often affect how outsiders view the insiders within the school systems.

German sociologist Max Weber maintained that, although bureaucracies may concentrate power at the top of the hierarchy, it also provides for checks and balances to prevent the abuse of power. That is, bureaucracy has the potential to reduce and remove opportunities for corruption and arbitrary exercises of power. Many argue that in urban school systems these checks and balances can become too rigid and lead to stagnation and active maintenance of the status quo by hostile bureaucrats.

8 Ibid., p. 12.
One of the earlier critics of centralized school systems, Chubb and Moe looked to the achievement of private schools and a handful of successful school districts, and concluded that school autonomy—not overbureaucratization—leads to better student performance. In Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools, Chubb and Moe took the bold position that state governments needed to create a new public education system based on the market principles of parental choice and school competition: “bureaucracy problem namely is the more immediate explanation for the schools’ poor academic performance.”11 Specifically, they argue that expansive centralized bureaucracies are antithetical to instructional improvement for two reasons: (1) entrenched bureaucrats are self-interested and resistant to evaluation and accountability and (2) bureaucracies limit unconventional school leaders and teachers’ discretion to propose and implement innovative educational approaches that would improve student outcome.

In Reframing Organizations, Bolman and Deal assert that blaming people, blaming bureaucracy, and blaming the quest for power are oversimplified explanations for an organization’s failure to achieve its mission.12 Market-base reformers like Chubb and Moe unduly attribute sinister motives to the mobilization of educators.

Having been a teacher in a large urban district, I understand that these actors have a real and understandable stake in education policy and school governance. Furthermore, I felt more constricted by the hyper-focus on assessments, which was a greater hindrance to innovative instructional approaches than the bureaucratic nature of schools. The idea that teachers, principals, and district staff are bureaucrats actively engaged in avoidance of accountability for student outcomes is assuming that organizational rationality exists and that the actors are pursuing misguided goals.

Moreover, Payne contends that much of education policy “discussion… proceeds as if schools were sane places. Thus, reformers of both the left and the right continue to act as if making this or that change in school structure will, by itself, lead to change.” But if urban school systems are in fact, as Payne argues, irrational institutions, then what other reasons can explain the inability to successfully educate all its students?13

Institutional theorists provide a more benign perspective on bureaucracies, arguing that bureaucratization of schools occurred as a response to change in social structure and a “worldwide trend of national development.”14 The influx of immigrants and the rise of industrialization in central cities provided the “impetus to control school on a large scale.”15 A key difference that separated the bureaucratization of U.S. schools from similar processes taking place in countries like the United Kingdom, however, was the value of local control and pluralism that this nation holds.

Furthermore, Meyer and Rowan differentiate district and school administrators’ commitment to the formal structures and appearance of legitimacy from the core technical work of teaching and learning.16 In other words, school

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15 Ibid., pp. 92-93.

administrators coordinated efforts were designed to buffer classroom activities from the scrutiny of outsider observers, and maintain the public confidence in their institutions.

**Implications for a Teacher Educator and Researcher**

The US, comprised of more than 15,000 school districts, has a network of schools where there are extensively diverse demographics of students and yet all quite similar in structure. As the nation moves to assure all students have access to a quality education, large urban districts are especially pressed to find ways to implement changes across complex networks of schools. Sociologists and institutional theorists elucidate the challenges of enacting reform in these contexts. These partnerships, if gone awry, can be time consuming and frustrating for university representatives and expensive for district offices.

During my special education preservice teacher education training, collaboration was primarily framed in terms of collaboration with general education colleagues and students’ families. From the narratives above, however, it is evident that teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with a host of professionals and community members outside of their schools.

So, how can teacher educators prepare teachers to become change agents within complex urban districts?

For one, both of my narratives underscore the importance of explicit attention to the sociocultural markers and histories of the collaborating partners. In the elementary school I worked in, I shared many of the demographic characteristics with the families I worked with, but not with the university professor I collaborated with. It was helpful to have an upfront conversation with my collaborator about our cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

A similar conversation about the value of multiculturalism also took place in collaboration with urban northeastern school district. Pugach and colleagues argue that it is not only necessary to identify the sociocultural identities of teachers, teacher educators, students, and families in collaborative research, but also to indicate the demographic information of researchers in these contexts.

> **teacher educators must be cautious in asserting their roles as experts, especially if they lack experience in the P-12 classrooms or in that specific urban context.**

Moreover, IHE representatives and teacher educators must be cautious in asserting their roles as experts, especially if they lack experience in the P-12 classrooms or in that specific urban context. How can university-based external partners encourage buy-in from large urban school practitioners?

One of the challenges that my narratives underscore is that school leaders are conditioned to conceal and buffer the actual occurrences in classrooms from outside scrutiny. Consequently, in collaborative efforts in complex system it should be expected that insiders

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would be slow to discuss any past failures of their own or that of their faculty and staff, especially if disclosing that information could be seen as potentially tarnishing their public image.

The implications of my experiences clarify ways in which outside partners can best engage the system without overstepping their roles and meeting resistance. Although I served as a liaison between the school community and the university professor prior to his visit to our school, when I was the university representative, I did not have a similar gatekeeper available to teach me the dynamics of the district office. Furthermore, had I been proactive in taking steps to learn the institutional history of the district office I worked with, I may have been sensitive to the staff’s resistance to my efforts.

I learned that any school reform effort should not purposively antagonize teachers and practitioners, nor inadvertently slight them, because they are the group with the greatest power to “sabotage reform. No realistic estimate of strategies for change in American education could afford to ignore teachers or fail to enlist their support.”

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Is Teaching Enough? The Impact of Effective Teachers on Student Performance in High Poverty-Schools in New Jersey

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Teachers influence students’ learning more than any other school-based factor. Those who are most effective are likely to leave the schools that need them the most. The schools that need effective teachers the most are low-performing school districts. Such districts tend to be located in high-poverty communities.

Many schools serving America’s neediest children lose over half of their teaching staff every five years. The odds that low-income children will be taught by inexperienced teachers are now higher than ever before.

With that said, conventional wisdom would suggest that effective teaching is a would-be cure-all for securing academic achievement in schools, particularly schools with a highly concentrated population of students of color or low-income students. Such schools contend with a multitude of challenges in addition to a lack of effective teachers.

However, teachers influence students’ learning more than any other school-based factor—effective teaching all the more. New empirical work has reinforced James Coleman’s Equality of Educational Opportunity report conclusion that teacher quality is the most important schooling variable.

The quality of the teacher workforce in the United States is of considerable concern to education stakeholders and policymakers. Numerous studies show that student academic success depends, in no small part, on access to high-quality teachers. The desire for effective teaching in schools is seen nationwide. However, special attention has been paid to the

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need for effective teaching in districts that serve low-income students and/or students of color.

Research has shown that low-income students and students of color are more likely than their higher income and White counterparts to be taught by an ineffective teacher. Low-income students and students of color, in many cases, tend to be one in the same: they attend high-poverty schools in high-poverty areas. According to Reardon, Robinson, & Weathers, in about half of the largest 100 cities, most African American and Latino students attend schools where at least 75 percent of all students qualify as poor or low-income under federal guidelines.

Where students attend school and who teaches them matters. The disparity between the caliber of teacher found in a high-poverty or high-minority school and that of a teacher found in a low-poverty or low-minority school has a massive impact on student achievement. The data show similar results for the highest-poverty versus lowest-poverty schools.

Data across states show that low-income and minority students are saddled with disproportionate numbers of inexperienced teachers that have taught for three or fewer years.

For example, In Tennessee, 23.8% of teachers in high-poverty and high-minority schools are rated “least effective,” while only 16% of staff at low-poverty and low-minority schools fall into this category.

White students are more concentrated in suburban schools, whereas students of color are more concentrated in urban schools. Although there are several definitions of what constitutes urban schools, they are typically classified by “highs” and “lows.” These “highs” and “lows” require in-coming teachers to have a set of skills that empower them to teach students in spite of the “highs” and “lows.” However, school leaders often struggle with finding high-quality teachers who are prepared to address the challenges often presented in urban schools.

Purpose and Impetus

The purpose of this study was to identify if a casual and statistically significant relationship exist among high performing schools and high performing teachers in the high-poverty schools in the state of New Jersey. More specific, this study will explore if any relationship ex-

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ists between (1) teacher effectiveness and academic achievement in high-poverty schools in New Jersey, and (2) teacher effectiveness and college and career readiness in high-poverty schools in New Jersey.

The impetus for this study was the lack of research concerning the quantitative measures of teacher effectiveness impact on academic achievement and college- and career-readiness in high-poverty schools. The relationship between poverty and education cannot be denied.

Low-income children start at a disadvantage, in comparison to students who are not low-income, at the start of pre-primary education. Powerful evidence of the link include the fact that 46 percent of Americans who grew up in low-income families but failed to earn college degrees stayed in the lowest income quintile, compared to 16 percent for those who earned a college degree. Less than 10 percent of school revenue comes from the federal government while about 90 percent comes from the state and local governments; as a result, school funding varies from state to state, and funding within a state also tends to be unequal.17

As one example, New Jersey has had numerous bouts to reform school funding inequities between the state Department of Education and advocates on behalf of the state’s 30 poorest districts—referred to as Abbott Districts.18

Under New Jersey school funding law, the state is obligated to provide a thorough and efficient education to special needs districts with a high level of educational opportunity that will enable them to compete successfully with other public school students.19 School-funding legislation under the Abbott guidelines matter in light of a Legal Services of New Jersey study that showed that more New Jersey residents live in poverty now than in the past five decades, and the outlook for the future is bleak.20 According to Legal Services of New Jersey, 2.8 million adults and 800,000 children lived poverty in 2014. As of the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year, New Jersey educated a total of 1.3 million students.21 It is plausible to conclude that over half (58.3%) of New Jersey students educated during the 2013-2014 school year lived in poverty.

Methods

The desire of this study is to test for a causal and statistically significant relationship. To achieve that end, quantitative data was used to test for the sought after relationship between teacher effectiveness scores for New Jersey teachers as was reported by individual high-poverty schools and academic achievement scores and college- and career-readiness scores as reported by individual high-poverty schools. Data for this study comes from three sources: (1) the U.S. Census American FactFinder (CAFF), (2) the New Jersey Department of Ed-

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21 According to the NJ Department of Education, 1,371,399 students were enrolled in the 2013-2014 school year.
ucation (NJDOE), and (3) the 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC).

According to its website, the CAFF provides access to data about the United States, Puerto Rico and the Island Areas. The data in CAFF come from several censuses and surveys. Information on the poverty percentages was taken directly from the 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. From this database was gathered the top ten high-poverty municipalities in New Jersey. Those cities include (not in any order) City of Newark, Passaic City, Salem City, Bridgeton City, Camden City, Lakewood Township, City of New Brunswick, Atlantic City, Paulsboro Borough and the City of Asbury Park.\(^{22}\)

The NJDOE provides data about New Jersey schools, both public and charter. NJDOE data reports include information on enrollment, dropouts, certificated staff (e.g. teachers, guidance counselor and principals), non-certificated staff (e.g. custodians, office managers and maintenance), adjusted cohort graduation rates, staff evaluation, school performance, statewide assessment and special education data.\(^{23}\)

The focus of this study is the NJDOE’s data on staff evaluation for the 2013-2014 school year, for each school within the highest poverty districts, as per Table 1. Also of focus is the statewide percentile score in the areas of academic achievement and college- and career-readiness for each school within the highest poverty districts, as per Table 1. The NJDOE requires all school districts to provide statistics on the number of faculty members graded as (1) ineffective, (2) somewhat effective, (3) effective and (4) highly effective for each school within the district.

The NJDOE also requires all school districts to provide metrics that are used to account for yearly performance, then expressed as a percentile score for academic achievement.

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**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Poverty Rate</th>
<th>Poverty Rate Among Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camden City</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem City</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakewood Township</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic City</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Asbury Park</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulsboro Borough</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of New Brunswick</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgeton City</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passaic City</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Newark</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{22}\) Schools in the City of Newark were not used for this study due to the lack of data. Paterson City (ranked 11\(^{th}\)) was used in Newark’s place for this study. Paterson has a poverty rate of 29.1% (39.5% for children ages 5 to 17). Please see the limitations section for more information.

\(^{23}\) For more information, see [http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/fact.htm](http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/fact.htm).
and college and career readiness. Schools districts that did not report particular metrics or no data at all for their schools informed the NJDOE they have certified inaccurate data, therefore data filed by the state of New Jersey does not match local personnel records. There are percentile scores to account for peer school comparisons and statewide school comparisons.

The percentage of teachers who were categorized as “effective” or “highly effective” are labeled (EFF), the academic achievement statewide percentile score is labeled (AAST), and the college and career statewide percentile score is labeled (CCST). The AAST and CCST metrics were taken from the NJDOE NJ School Performance Report data set.

The statewide percentiles were used rather than the peer percentiles because the peer percentile only offers a comparison to similar schools. While there is a value to finding out how peer schools relate to each other, the peer percentile score is only an indicator of how those schools compare overall. The peer percentile compares schools with similar grade levels and students with similar demographic characteristics, such as the percentage of students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch, Limited English Proficiency programs or Special Education programs.

According to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), Academic Achievement measures the content knowledge students have in language arts literacy and math. According to the NJDOE, College and Career readiness measures the degree to which students are demonstrating behaviors that are indicative of future attendance and/or success in college and careers.

According to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), peer schools are schools that have similar grade levels and students with similar demographic characteristics, such as the percentage of students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch, Limited English Proficiency programs or Special Education programs.

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24 According to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), Academic Achievement measures the content knowledge students have in language arts literacy and math. According to the NJDOE, College and Career readiness measures the degree to which students are demonstrating behaviors that are indicative of future attendance and/or success in college and careers.

25 According to the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), peer schools are schools that have similar grade levels and students with similar demographic characteristics, such as the percentage of students qualifying for Free/Reduced Lunch, Limited English Proficiency programs or Special Education programs.

26 “The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE), School Performance Reports are designed to inform parents, educators and communities about how well a school is performing and preparing its students for college and careers” (https://homeroom5.doe.state.nj.us/pr/).
percentile does not reflect an accurate metric when tested against another statewide metric, i.e. teacher effectiveness. The teacher effectiveness metric is not a metric according to peer-wide standards and measures, but statewide standards and measure. It is believed that maintaining consistent with statewide metrics in this case offers a more level study.

The 2013-14 CRDC is a survey of all public schools and school districts in the United States. The CRDC include 16,758 school districts (99.2% of all school districts) and 95,507 public schools (99.5% of all public schools). The CRDC measures student access to courses, programs, instructional and other staff, and resources—as well as school climate factors, such as student discipline and bullying and harassment. All of these impact education equity and opportunity for students.

The focus of this study is the CRDC’s data on a number of variables gathered from CRDC’s data that will serve as controls when examining the relationship between teacher effectiveness and academic achievement and college and career readiness. The CRDC’s data on school discipline is to provide information that answers the following: compared to overall enrollment, what is the race/ethnicity of students receiving in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, or expulsions?

Due to the underwhelming reporting of student expulsions and in-school suspension by the vast majority of New Jersey public school districts, the metrics of use in this study are out-of-school suspensions. Of focus in those metrics are the percentages of Latino students in New Jersey who received out-of-school suspensions (HISOSS) and African-American students in New Jersey who received out-of-school suspensions (BLKROSS).

Other metrics used from the CRDC are the percent population of African-American students within a school district (PERBLK), the percent population of Latino students within a school district (PERHIS), the percentage of students in a school district who received free or reduced lunch (FRPL), the percentage of students who are limited language proficient (LEP), the ratio of students to one teacher (RATIO), the percentage of second-year teachers within a school district (SECOND), the percentage of first-year teachers within a school district (FIRYR), and the percentage of students with either an IEP or 504 plan within a school district (DIS).

The entire top ten of municipalities with the highest poverty rates did not report data with respect to the CRDC. Newark Public Schools did not report any data to the CRDC. To achieve a sample size of over 100 schools, the 11th ranked municipality for poverty, Paterson City, New Jersey, was chosen. From the list expressed in Table 1, plus Paterson City, the samples chosen came from the schools from the municipality’s school district.

Of those school districts, this study selected all available schools with reported data to both the CRDC and the NJDOE. Both AAST and CCST served as the dependent variables in

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29 According the NJDOE, the total number of public school districts in New Jersey, as of the 2015-2016 school year, are 599 (only 586 school districts are operating districts). This number does not include charter schools (there are 89 charter school district operating in New Jersey). Information on the total number of public school districts in New Jersey, as of 2013-2014 school year (the year data was collected for the sample), is not available. It is reasonably believed that the 2013-2014 numbers of districts do not stray far from the 2015-2016 numbers of districts. For more information, see http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/fact.htm.
a series of regression tests. The metric EFF served as independent variable in a series of regressions tests. In all, two regressions test were conducted to find if there was a causal relationship of significance EFF and AAST and CCST in high-poverty schools in New Jersey.

For each regression test, I controlled for the following variables: PERBLK, PERHIS, FRPL, DIS, LEP, FIRYR, SECOND, RATIO, BLKOSS and HISOSS. PERBLK, PERHIS and FRPL are used because those variables are what make up urban schools: low-income students and students of color. In almost all major American cities, most African American and Hispanic students attend public schools where a majority of their classmates qualify as poor or low-income. 30

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, chronic absenteeism is defined as a particular student missing 10% or more of school days, equaling about a month within a 180-day academic year. 31 A recent study estimates as many as 7.5 million students nationally are chronically absent each year. 32 Chronic absenteeism is also associated with poverty. Children living in poverty are 25% more likely to miss three or more days of school per month compared to more students from higher economic backgrounds. 33 Lower-income and students of color are at a greater risk for health problems and subsequent absenteeism. 34

The disciplinary response to absenteeism too often includes loss of course credits, detention, and suspension. 35 Exclusionary discipline is utilized in schools as a method to correct misbehavior from students. With a teaching force nationwide that is predominately white and female, 36 the possibility of cultural mismatch or racial stereotyping as a contributing factor in disproportionate office referral cannot be discounted or ignored. 37

First year and second year teachers face various challenges when they enter the classroom. 85% of teachers in New Jersey are white. It is plausible to assert that higher percentages of first-year teachers entering New Jersey classrooms will be white. They must negotiate a plethora of tasks simultaneously, even as they are acquiring the skills necessary to perform those tasks.

The economic segregation facing African American and Hispanic students represents the convergence of many trends, including the stubbornly high rates of childhood poverty since the Great Recession; persistent patterns of housing segregation in many major cities; the increasing economic polarization in many metropolitan areas that has resulted in more residents living either in affluent or poor neighborhoods, and fewer residing in middle-income communities; and the general retreat from efforts to promote racial or economic integration in the schools.


Among these discreet challenges, first-year teachers, particularly, regularly cite difficulties related to classroom management as the most trying aspect of teaching. Student ratios impact academic achievement as well. Students display less disruptive behavior in small classes, and teachers spend less time on discipline, leaving more time for instruction. Specifically, teachers in smaller classes can diagnose and track student learning and differentiate instruction in response to student needs.

Students with disabilities face challenges with respect to academic achievement. According to the CRDC, students with disabilities in grades K-12 are disproportionately suspended from school. All of these metrics selected as variables, when controlled, will help isolate if a relationship exists between teacher effectiveness and academic achievement and between college and career readiness.

Results and Discussion

Regression results are located in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 displays the relationship of academic achievement of students in high-poverty schools in New Jersey (AAST) and teacher effectiveness (EFF). Table 3 focuses on the relationship of college- and career-readiness of students in high-poverty schools in New Jersey (CCST) and teacher effectiveness (EFF).

Table 3 is a regression test to investigate if there is a relationship between AAST and EFF. The regression results show that when you continue to add new variables of control, the impact of EFF on AAST changes very little. The correlation coefficient shows that there is an increase in the academic achievement percentile of a school when the teacher effectiveness percentage within a school decreases. However, the correlation is not strong. Also, this is not a statistically significant relationship.

The controlled variables show that the relationship between AAST and EFF is minimally impacted by other factors. What the regression test does show, however, is a relationship of statistical significance at the .01 level between AAST and PERBLK. The correlation coefficient shows that where there is a decrease in the population of Black students, the statewide percentile for academic achievement increased. One cannot conclude on the face that the percentage of Black students impact the academic achievement levels of a high-poverty school. A disproportionate amount of Black students overcrowd urban schools.

The regression test also shows a statistically significant relationship at the .05 level between AAST and LEP, when all other factors are accounted in the regression test. That is, with a decrease in the percentage of limited language proficient students, there is an increase in the academic achievement statewide percentile. However, the correlation is not as strong as the correlation between AAST and PERBLK. One could conclude that to increase a school’s academic achievement percentile, they should reduce the number of limited language proficient students in their school. However, the results can be taken another way. Improving teacher quality in the area of working with limited language proficient students could

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increase academic performance at a school. That hypothesis would require more study.

Table 3 is a regression test to investigate if there is a relationship between CCST and EFF. The regression results show that when you continue to add new variables of control, EFF has an impact on CCST. The correlation coefficient shows that there is an increase in the college- and career-readiness percentile of a school when the teacher effectiveness percentage within a school increases. The correlation is not very strong. However, this is a statistically significant relationship at the .05 level.

The controlled variables show that the relationship between CCST and EFF is minimally impacted by other factors. What the regression test also shows is a relationship of statistical significance at the .05 level between CCST and FIRST as well as between CCST and SECOND. The correlation coefficient shows that, where there is an increase in the statewide percentile for college- and career-readiness, the percentage of first and second teachers increased. The correlation is strong with the increase of second-year teachers.

The results do not provide any insight into the CCST and FIRST relationship or the CCST and SECOND relationship in high-poverty schools. More study is needed to properly account for the reasons behind this relationship and what about high-poverty schools speaks to the correlation. There is no current scholarship to explain such a relationship. Current research speaks to the inexperience and ineffectiveness of novice teachers. However, the regression test speaks to something different.

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Grissom, J. A. "Can Good Principals Keep Teachers in Disadvantaged Schools? Linking Principal Effectiveness to Teacher Satisfaction and Turnover in Hard-to-Staff
Limitations

This regression study sought to identify a casual and statistically significant relationship between (1) teacher effectiveness and academic achievement in high-poverty schools in New Jersey, and (2) teacher effectiveness and college- and career-readiness in high-poverty schools in New Jersey. The high-poverty schools were gathered from the U.S. Census American Fact Finder data specific to poverty rates per municipality. The top ten New Jersey municipalities with the highest rates of poverty were chosen because they were each had a municipal poverty rate over 30% for all residents. However, the Newark Public Schools were not included in the student for the lack of data available concerning the controlled variables.

In reality, it is not a true top ten list, but it is a top ten list of districts that have submitted data to both the NJDOE and CRDC. While Paterson City Public School data is of value for this study, data on the Newark Public Schools would have contributed value to this study due to Newark being New Jersey’s most populated municipality. According to the NJDOE, for the 2013-2014 academic year, 34,980.5 students were enrolled in Newark Schools. Of that total, 91% of students were Black or Latino and 84% of all students received free or reduced lunch.

Also, no charter schools were included in this study. New Jersey charter schools are located throughout the state, however they are primarily located in high-poverty, heavily Black and Latino populated areas. Adding data from these schools would have been valuable to this study.

Table 4

College and Career Readiness and Teacher Effectiveness (115 Obs.)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CCST</th>
<th>REG-1</th>
<th>REG-2</th>
<th>REG-3</th>
<th>REG-4</th>
<th>REG-5</th>
<th>REG-6</th>
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<th>REG-9</th>
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<td>(.285)*</td>
<td>(.250)*</td>
<td>(.238)*</td>
<td>(.220)*</td>
<td>(.255)*</td>
<td>(.267)*</td>
<td>(.255)*</td>
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<td>(.168)</td>
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<td>(.192)</td>
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<td>(.013)</td>
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<td>(-.132)</td>
<td>(-.123)</td>
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<td>(.052)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>(.577)*</td>
<td>(.580)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECOND</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.704)*</td>
<td>(.678)*</td>
<td>(.724)*</td>
<td>(.718)*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIO</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.547)</td>
<td>(.451)</td>
<td>(.425)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLKLOSS</td>
<td></td>
<td>(-.101)</td>
<td>(-.111)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HISOS</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-9.16</td>
<td>11.73</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>15.97</td>
<td>20.26</td>
<td>18.23</td>
<td>14.16</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>-4.57</td>
<td>-1.97</td>
<td>-3.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

All New Jersey charter schools submitted data to the CRDC and the NJDOE with the exception of the teacher effectiveness scores for their schools and/or districts. Without the teacher effectiveness data for charter schools, they could not be used for the purposes of this study. However, future studies on teacher effectiveness of New Jersey teachers can include charter schools as they provide data to the NJDOE.

With the exception of AAST and CCST, no other student achievement metrics were used in this study. More student achievement metrics could have been applied to the dataset for this study. However, while the CRDC does include information within its data about early learning and college- and career-readiness pathways, it does not offer data on student achievement in the way of test scores or grades. The NJDOE offers achievement data at the individual school level.

However, AAST and CCST are the only universal metrics that allow for a uniform way of analyzing data from school to school. New Jersey school districts, as with school districts nationwide, are not universally K-12 districts. Some are, while others are K-5, K-6, 6-8, K-8 or 9-12 districts. To find a metric universal to New Jersey districts would have lowered the sample size of districts, thus the nature of the study would have been changed to focus on either elementary or secondary schools.

The use of schools from the top ten poverty municipalities in New Jersey limited the sample size of the study. While this study could have found more schools to include using the free or reduced lunch metric, that metric does not provide a true measure of poverty for the area where the school is located. While poverty rates are associated with students who receive free or reduced lunch, state voucher programs and regional schools do move students from high-poverty areas to low-poverty areas. However, this study could have added more schools from districts where poverty rates were in the 20% to 30% range.

Lastly, there is no racial data for teacher composition at the school-wide level. This data only exists as the district level. While this study was not focused on the relationship between teacher race and academic performance, including teacher racial composition would have add-

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Table 5

**New Jersey Charter Schools in High-Poverty Locations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Number of Charter Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camden City</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salem City</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakewood Township</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic City</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Asbury Park</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulsboro Borough</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of New Brunswick</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridgeton City</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passaic City</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Newark</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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ed value to this study. Likewise, there would be value to studying the impact of teacher racial composition and academic performance at both the school and district levels. There is a body of research that has examined the impact of the academic achievement of students with a same race teacher.42

**Summary and Recommendations**

It was the intention of this investigation to contribute to the empirical scholarship on the impact teacher effectiveness has on the academic performance and readiness of New Jersey’s high-poverty public schools students. The results of the data provide information that can both offer insight into ways to strategically address the achievement gap among White students and students of color and how to build the foundation for a more in-depth study using the CRDC and NJDOE data, replicating and developing a different investigative model.

Another investigation on New Jersey school districts, or an investigation like this investigation, should isolate race and gender to explore the specific relationship between male and/or female teachers of color in addition to White teachers and the academic achievement of students of color in high-poverty areas. Also, another investigation should replicate the same dataset from the CRDC and NJDOE for the school years ending in 2012 and 2010 to be compared with the data compiled in this study (school year ending 2014).43

The results of this investigation do not necessarily answer the question: is teaching enough in high-poverty schools. However, this study does lead to questions that can serve as the impetus for a new study.

There are two prospective studies of interest that come from this particular study. The first has to do with investigating a potential relationship between student race and academic achievement. According to Table 2, there was a statistically significant relationship between the population of Black students and the academic achievement statewide percentile. To understand why those relationships exist, further investigation is need.

The second has to do with investigating a potential relationship between first-year teachers, second-year teachers and college- and career-readiness statewide percentile. According to Table 3, there was a statistically significant relationship between the percentage of first-year teachers in a high-poverty school and the college- and career-readiness statewide percentile. There was also a statistically significant relationship between the percentage of second-year teachers in a high-poverty school and the college- and career-readiness statewide percentile. To understand the link between inexperienced teachers and student readiness for college and career, further exploration is required.

All students are deserving of access to a quality education. To provide a student with a quality education requires the collective efforts of educators and support staff to put the stu-


43 The CRDC only has data for the years 2009-2010, 2011-2012 and 2013-2014. They will release data for 2015-2016 upon their next reporting.
dent first. Students of color and low-income students are not assured access to a quality education when they attend high-poverty schools with the likelihood of being taught by inexperienced and ineffective teachers.

To ensure high teacher quality in high-poverty schools, and school in general, leadership from all levels—school, district and state—must dedicate their efforts to change school conditions and mindsets to guarantee that the institution of the public school provides its entire student, regardless of race/ethnicity, the access to a quality education.

Randy R. Miller earned both his B.A. and M.P.A. from at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, where he is currently a doctoral student studying Public Affairs and Community Development. Now in his seventh year in public education, he is the director of the 21st Century Community Learning Center at Woodbury Junior-Senior High School in Woodbury, New Jersey. He has published books on education and has contributed a chapter in Black Male Teachers: Diversifying the United States’ Teacher Workforce. He is the author of the Urban Education Mixtape Blog (http://urbanedmixtape.com). He can be followed on twitter at @UrbanEdDJ.