TOO MUCH REFORM, NOT ENOUGH CHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF

TRANSFORMATIONAL POTENTIAL AND STAKEHOLDER READINESS FOR

CHANGE IN AN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates the failure of the American public school system to meet

the needs of all students, particularly urban students of color. Despite billions of dollars

spent on various education reforms, little systemic change has taken place in urban

schools. This qualitative study utilized a case study design to examine the experiences of

stakeholders at Southmore Middle School (pseudonym), an urban middle school

undergoing reform in the northeastern United States. Archival data, collected in the

2008-2009 school year as part of a previous study of a community school reform effort,

the Allied Community School Cooperative (pseudonym), included semi-structured

interviews collected from 23 participants at Southmore. Participants were teachers,

administrators, and support staff. Using a constant comparative method, the present

study examined these stakeholder groups and their readiness for change.

The researcher used an inductive process to make meaning of the archival data,

allowing research questions to emerge concurrently with analysis. Literature on school

culture elucidated the role of human actors in urban schools undergoing reform. Through

an ecological lens informed by theories of competing expectations, race/class and

organizational habitus, and transformation of intentions, the researcher coded data and

extracted themes. These themes led to the development of transformational potential, a

framework that assesses the degree to which a reform effort and a local school system

are able to achieve synthesis toward creating systemic change. Transformational

potential requires a synthesis within and between stakeholder groups and the reform in five key areas: ideologies, engagement, intentions, amelioration, and culture.

This study extends the literature on school culture and reform, suggesting that culture should be included as a facet of a school's ecology to represent the role of stakeholders in impacting a school and efforts to transform it. The transformational potential framework will be a useful tool for stakeholders in schools undergoing reform as they interrogate their own ideologies, motives for engagement, intentions, understanding of amelioration, and culture. Administrators, who are often the first stakeholders to interact with potential reforms, will find this research particularly useful as they negotiate the multiple levels of synthesis required for successful reform.

DEDICATION

To my children, Luke Dowe and Alice Rose. Being your mother is the most important teaching job I will ever have. May you develop a love of learning and the courage to use your knowledge to do good in the world.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The systemic failure of the American public school system, particularly its urban

schools, is widely documented. Students of color living in urban poverty are often most

affected by a system in desperate need of reform (Hale, 1986; Landsman and Lewis,

2006; Noguera, 2003, 2008). The fate of urban students shines an especially bright light

on the failure of schools in this country to meet the needs of all students. According to

Books (2007), in the United States "only about half of all Black, Latino, and American

Indian students are graduating from high school on-time, with their peers" (p. 15). *Yes*

We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males (2010) finds

that only 47% of African American males graduate from high school. In the state ranked

lowest by this report, New York, only 25% of African American males graduated with

their cohort in the 2007-2008 school year (Schott Foundation). Books suggests that

schools actually encourage some students to dropout by participating in an

"unconscionable but widespread practice of encouraging the lowest-achieving students

to leave a school or district" (p. 15). Wald and Losen (2007) modify the term *dropout* to

"push out" (p. 24), indicating that the blame lies in policies and procedures that result in

students leaving schools; these include school discipline, high stakes testing, and the

lack of graduation rate accountability.

The Texas Appleseed (2010) report, *Texas' School-to-Prison Pipeline,* notes that

"numerous studies by national experts in the fields of education, criminal justice, and mental health have established a link between school discipline, school dropout rates and incarceration" (p. 1). *Yes We Can* (2010) reaches a similar conclusion for African American males at the national level:

> Currently, the rate at which Black males are being pushed out of school and into the pipeline to prison far exceeds the rate at which they are graduating and reaching high levels of academic achievement. A deliberate, intense focus is needed to disrupt and redirect the current educational trajectory for Black males. (p. 1)

Efforts to reform the American school system have been based largely on standardization and accountability. Seely (2009) recalls the 1983 "alarm-bell" report that warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity" (p. 48) that jeopardized the future of not only our school system but of our country as a whole:

> The apocalyptic language of *A Nation at Risk* created a sense of urgency that helped push through its most talked-about recommendation: the establishment of much tougher educational standards. Since then, we have been implementing a three-pronged system of standards, tests, and "consequences" – with a vengeance under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. (p. 48)

Neill (2003) criticizes No Child Left Behind for its focus on standardized testing:

> All our children deserve a high-quality education, not classrooms transformed into test-prep centers. In most states, the law will make scores on standardized reading and math tests the sole measure of student progress. Test proponents

claim that these exams measure what is most important, but any realistic

assessment of state tests reveals that much of what is important is not tested and

much of what is tested is not of major importance. (p. 225)

Some champion standards for their potential to equalize education, closing the

achievement gap between students of dominant and minority cultural and socioeconomic

backgrounds (Ogawa, Sandholtz, Martinez-Flores, & Scribner, 2003, p. 148). According

to McNeil (2002):

The language of accountability seems, on a commonsense level, to be about

professional practice that is responsible to the children and to the public. The

language of standardization appears to denote equity, of assuring that all children

receive the same education. Behind the usages of these terms in educational

policy, however, is a far different political and pedagogical reality. . . .

"Standardization" equates sameness with equity in ways that mask pervasive and

continuing inequalities. (p. 10)

Despite whatever good intentions the standardization movement might have initially

represented, in practice standardization has done little to improve education for students

of color and students living in poverty. In 2006, the Associated Press reported that

school districts nationwide were finding ways to avoid reporting the test scores of

students in these subpopulations using loopholes in the No Child Left Behind legal

requirements. Nearly 2 million students had their scores excluded in the 2003-2004

school year, most of whom were students of color who were seven times more likely to

have their scores excluded than White students. With so many ways to avoid revealing

test scores by race or socio-economic status, it seems unlikely that NCLB could do anything to close the achievement gap. Furthermore, the singular focus on test scores means that the reform ignores the multi-faceted failure of urban schools. Speaking of NCLB, Noguera (2003) recognizes that "the measure does nothing to address the horrid conditions present in many failing schools, and it does not even begin to attempt to ameliorate the social inequities that affect schooling" (p. 102).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law on December 10, 2015, will replace the accountability-focused NCLB. ESSA takes away much of the federal influence on education and places decision-making power back in the hands of the state (Klein, 2016). While ESSA purports to put less emphasis on testing as an accountability measure by allowing alternate indicators, three of four required measures are still academic indicators that are likely to be tests, and the language of the bill requires that these measures carry more weight in school evaluation than alternate indicators like school climate or student engagement (Klein, 2016). There are also concerns about ambiguous language in the bill that might allow states to make Title I funds the only funds directed at high-poverty schools and the most vulnerable student populations with no requirement to supplement these programs with state dollars (Cain, 2016). With ESSA not slated to go into full effect until the 2017-2018 school year, it is too early to tell how the legislation will affect urban school failure.

Statement of the Problem

Under NCLB failing schools across the country adopted comprehensive school reform measures, most of which were changes to school structures and largely

overlooked issues of school climate and culture. The present study examines such an undertaking at an urban middle school in the northeastern region of the United States. This school, like many other failing schools, sought to transform its structures, focusing primarily on curriculum and pedagogy, and doing little to change the school culture. Attempts to ameliorate climate focused largely on controlling student discipline, ignoring other climate indicators. The present study seeks to understand how this case can inform our understanding of school reform.

The School

Southmore Middle School (pseudonym) is located in an urban school district in the northeastern region of the United States. In 2008-2009, data was collected as part of a study of the implementation of a community school reform that involved a partnership between Southmore Middle School and the state's flagship university. The reform initiative, Allied Community Schools Cooperative (pseudonym), was undertaken as a means of avoiding state control, which Southmore was facing due to repeated failure to make adequate yearly progress (AYP).

In 2007-2008, the year prior to the implementation of the Allied Community Schools Cooperative reform, Southmore served 1197 students in grades 6-8, which represented a 5-year enrollment change of -14.3%. School profile data, made publicly available online by the state's education agency, shows that in 2007-2008, 74.8% of Southmore students had attended Southmore the year before. This retention rate is nearly 10 percentage points below the 84.3% retention rate of schools districtwide. It was almost 20 percentage points below the state retention rate of 92.3%. Southmore is an

urban school with a diverse population. In 2007-2008, the school's student racial composition was 47.8% Hispanic, 27.4% White, 23.1% African American, 1.7% Asian American, and 0.1% American Indian. 86.3% of the school's staff was White, which, while disproportionate to Southmore's student composition, was in keeping with the national teaching force, which was 83.1% White in the same year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). 15.6% of Southmore's students came from homes where English was not the primary spoken language. A total of 10 non-English home languages were recorded among Southmore's students.

Performance on the state's standardized assessments reveals significant disparities between Southmore students and their counterparts throughout the state. According to online performance data, Southmore students met the state goal at a rate at least 23 percentage points lower than students at other schools in the state in all tested subjects. The disparity seemed to increase across grade levels, reaching its highest point in 8th-grade science where 58.6% of tested students in the state met the state goal and only 20.0% of Southmore 8th graders met the state goal, a difference of 38.6 percentage points. Disaggregating data by race and gender shows that some subgroups are especially underserved at Southmore, particularly African American and Hispanic males, who underperformed their White male counterparts in all categories. Looking at the state assessment data for 8th graders in 2008, the smallest gap between male subgroups is a difference of 16.8 percentage points, where 68.8% of White male students and 52.0% of Hispanic male students met proficiency in mathematics. Most gaps are much wider at 20-30 percentage points or more. Science was a particularly disparate area for both

Hispanic and African American males at the proficiency and goal levels. While 59.5% of White male students at Southmore met proficiency in 8th-grade science, that percentage dropped to 35.6% for African American males and 35.1% for Hispanic males. The gap widened even further at the goal level, with 45.6% of White male students meeting goal, while only 14.6% of Hispanic males and 12.2% of African American males met goal in 8th-grade science at Southmore.

Indicators of educational need show special populations occurring at instances in line with the school district, but much higher than the state. For instance, 79.1% of Southmore's students were eligible for free or reduced-priced meals in 2007-2008 compared with 72.9% in the district and only 23.6% in the state. 12.9% of Southmore's students were not fluent in English compared to 11.0% in the district; however, in the state as a whole, only 3.8% of students were not fluent in English. Southmore had a higher percentage of students with disabilities as well at 15.2%; 14.9% of the district's students had disabilities, while at the state level, that percentage dropped to 11.6%. In the 2007-2008 school year, only 5 of Southmore's 1197 students were identified as gifted or talented. At 0.4%, that number was not far off from the district ratio of 0.6%, but it was considerably lower than the state's 7.7%.

School profile data also suggests a disparity between the resources available to Southmore students versus those available to students in the rest of the state. While the state's average 7th-grade class size in 2007-2008 was 20.5 students, Southmore's 7th-grade students experienced classes that included, on average, 26.5 students. And while 24.9% of Southmore's 8th graders were enrolled in high school level mathematics

courses compared to 31.2% of the state's 8th graders, none of Southmore's students were enrolled in high school level world language courses, even though the state's 8th graders took such courses at a rate of 46.4%. Online school profile data outlines hours of instruction per year in selected areas for 8th graders. Southmore's 8th graders spent less time in many subject areas than the average 8th grader in the state, including English language arts, health, mathematics, science, social studies, and world languages. 8th-grade students at Southmore spent more time in electives such as art, family and consumer science, and music than their counterparts in the state. The only core content area in which Southmore students spent more time than the average students in their state was reading, no doubt as a result of poor performance on the state assessment and the school's subsequent inclusion of literacy as a key part of their campus improvement plan. Paradoxically, Southmore students had access to print resources at a much lower rate than students in other parts of the state. In 2007-2008, Southmore owned 11.3 print volumes per student, while the state average was 20.5 volumes per student. And while the average student in the state had access to 27 print periodical subscriptions, Southmore subscribed to zero print periodicals. Southmore also had far fewer computers at one per 5.3 students than the state's ratio of 2.7 students per computer. Southmore's computers also had only an 81.7% rate of internet access, whereas 98.8% of the middle school-owned computers in the state had internet access.

School profile data suggests that teacher quality was another inequitably distributed resource within the state in 2007-2008. Southmore's teachers had an average of 9.0 years of experience in education, slightly lower than the district average of 9.8

years and nearly 5 years lower than the state's average of 13.8 years of experience. 69.0% of Southmore teachers had a master's degree or above, whereas 75.5% of the state's teachers had similar credentials. Teacher retention seems to have been a concern at Southmore where only 66.7% of teachers were retained from the previous year; 74.9% of state teachers returned to the same school in the 2007-2008 school year.

Publicly available profile and performance data indicates a clear need for reform at Southmore. Data suggests problems in teacher quality and retention, student retention, student academic achievement, resource allocation, and curriculum. However, disaggregating data by gender, race, and socio-economic status suggests that within a failing school system, failure was experienced differently and to different degrees depending on student characteristics. Such inequities indicate a need for reform of climate and culture; however, like most urban school reform efforts in this country, Southmore appears to have taken a largely structural approach to change.

Significance of Problem

Scholars have pointed to standardization and accountability as most harmful to those who are already disadvantaged by a system of inequity and call for stakeholders, particularly students and parents, to demand reform (Hunter & Bartree, 2003; McNeil, 2002; Valencia, 2015). Others have urged the formation of authentic partnerships between schools, families, and communities as a means of improving outcomes for urban students of color (Auerbach, 2010; Hands & Hubbard, 2011). Literature has also called for stakeholders within schools, including teachers, administrators, and school counselors, to address inequities through teaching and leading for social justice

(Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Khalil & Brown, 2015; Valencia, 2015). Much attention has been paid in the literature to the role of administrators, suggesting skilled school leaders can work for social justice, which includes moving beyond political mandates of accountability for more equitable understandings of student achievement (Brown, Benkovitz, Muttillo, & Urban, 2010; Valencia, Valenzuela, Sloan, & Foley, 2001). However, the extent to which stakeholders contribute to equitable school reform is unclear. While the literature includes examples of teachers resisting accountability structures and teaching for social justice (see, for example, Crawford-Garrett & Riley, 2016), research has also demonstrated that teacher expectations, rooted in deficit ideologies, exacerbate accountability issues, preventing standards from being applied equitably for all students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004; Harris, 2012; Valencia, 2015). It must then be considered to what degree stakeholder readiness for change impacts efforts to transform urban schools.

Indeed, attempts at educational reform to this point have done nothing to address the social inequalities that poor students and students of color face in American schools, particularly those in urban areas. Data shows a litany of examples of bias against African American children. For instance, African American students are more likely to receive special education services (Losen & Orfield, 2002) and receive harsher discipline consequences – and more frequent referrals – than their White counterparts (Butler, Joubert, & Lewis, 2009). Research also shows that African American students are less likely to graduate from high school (Goodman & Hilton, 2010) and are less likely to complete a college degree (Johnston & Viadero, 2000).

National data for Latino students shows similar trends. While the dropout rate decreased for Latino students between 1990 and 2013, from 32 to 12 percent, the gap between White and Latino students was still 7 percentage points nationwide (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). And the statistics for Latino male students are much more troubling. *Yes We Can: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (2010) found that the graduation rate in 2010 was only 65 percent for Latino males as compared to 80 percent for White males. In some states, that gap is much larger. In Connecticut and New York where the graduation rates for Latino males were 51.9 percent and 57.2 percent respectively, the gap between Latino males and their White counterparts was just over 27 percent. And while discipline disparities have been less documented for Latino students than African American students, Skiba et al. (2011) found a statistically significant disproportionality for Latino middle school students in office discipline referrals. Urban school reform must work to correct these inequities, and the role of stakeholders in such efforts must be closely examined, particularly the extent to which readiness for change impacts outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how administrators, teachers, and support staff described their experiences as stakeholders in an urban middle school undergoing reform. The use of archival data necessitated an inductive process in which the purpose emerged as the researcher worked to make meaning of the data. Understanding how different stakeholder groups viewed the reform and the school itself illuminated codes, questions, and, eventually, themes that highlighted the need for

synthesis in and across stakeholder groups. The following global question was developed through the analysis process: Why is achieving synthesis among stakeholders critical to promoting effective reform in an urban middle school?

Significance of the Study

As a case study, this research increases our understanding of reform as experienced by stakeholders within an urban middle school. The findings of this study, which will be discussed in Chapter IV, provide insights for those who influence the workings of the urban school reform, including teachers, administrators, and support staff. A framework was developed for understanding urban school reform and the role of school culture in affecting systemic change.

Research Questions

Because of the inductive nature of the present study, research questions were developed concurrently with the analysis process. The data drove the study design, and analysis produced codes, questions, and themes in a fluid process that resulted in these five research questions that simultaneously informed and were informed by emerging themes:

1. How do stakeholders (teachers, administrators, and support staff) describe teaching, learning, and leadership in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

2. How do stakeholders describe their rationales for wanting change in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

3. How do stakeholders describe the challenges they believe warrant change in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

4. How do stakeholders describe successful school reform in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

5. How do stakeholders describe shared values and norms in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

An overarching question is offered here as a guide for the reader: Why is achieving synthesis among stakeholders critical to promoting effective reform in an urban middle school?

Summary

The study will be organized as follows. Chapter I introduces the problem and purpose of the study. In Chapter II, the researcher will review pertinent literature on urban middle school reform and introduce the conceptual framework that undergirds the present study. Studies and other primary sources will be reviewed. Chapter III discusses the study's methodology, including how data was collected and analyzed. Chapter IV will present study findings and analysis. The final chapter discusses conclusions and implications for practice and future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Overview of School Reform

The Cost of School Reform

Billions of dollars are spent annually in the United States on school reform. President Obama's Race to the Top initiative provided over $4 billion in competitive grants between 2009 and 2014 to fund innovative approaches to turn around low-performing schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The proposed U.S. Department of Education budget for 2017 includes $69.4 billion in discretionary funding, an increase of $1.3 billion over the 2016 enacted level. The budget also proposes $139.7 billion in new mandatory spending and reforms over the next decade. The U.S. Department of Education identifies three main goals for reform, two of which focus on P-12 education reform: "increasing equity and excellence" and "providing support for teachers and school leaders" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The budget funnels $3.8 billion into recruiting and supporting P-12 teachers. In addition to $15.4 billion in Title I grants, funds provide grants for a variety of reform initiatives, including $120 million for a new grant program called Stronger Together, which encourages the development of plans to increase socioeconomic diversity. The budget also supports school choice initiatives, a popular reform strategy, in the form of $350 million for Charter School Grants and $115 million for Magnet Schools Assistance. Some monies target specific content reforms such as a 3-year commitment of $4 billion

for the new Computer Science for All program; others target specific locales for reform, such as the $128 million for Promise Neighborhoods, which supports community-based reform efforts in high-poverty neighborhoods (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Beyond the reform initiatives funded by the federal government, private foundations and non-profits spend billions each year to fund additional education-related projects. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for example, spent $2 billion on education reform between 2008 and 2013. Of that $2 billion, nearly $700 million dollars went to the foundation's agenda to improve teacher quality (*Education Week*, 2016). Current grant commitments include $290 million for the Intensive Partnerships for Effective Teaching, which supports reform in the areas of teacher recruitment and retention, professional development, and reward systems for teachers (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2016). A $23-million-dollar grant commitment to Achieve, Inc. and the American Diploma Project Network assists states in aligning high school standards for college and career readiness (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2016).

Despite funneling billions of dollars into P-12 reform efforts, gross inequities still exist for urban students. See Chapter I for a discussion of these inequities. Indeed, despite an overabundance of reform, there has simply not been enough change. Consequently, those in a position to fund or adopt school reforms must look more critically at policies and programs aimed at improving P-12 education.

Urban Middle School Reform

Research shows that the middle school years, usually comprised of grades 6-8, are key developmental years (Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004) and

that for urban students of color, these years are marked by increases in disproportionalities that may eventually lead to dropping out (Garriott, 2007; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2006). In an 8-year longitudinal study of nearly 13,000 urban middle school students in the School District of Philadelphia, Balfanz, Herzog, and Iver (2007) identified predictors that could identify at the 6th-grade level, 60 percent of students who would not graduate from high school. The predictors included attendance, behavior, and academic failure, and the authors found that these factors could determine as early as 6th grade whether or not a student was likely to graduate. The authors found that reform efforts that target these specific predictors in the middle grades could substantially increase graduation rates. If, as research suggests, the middle school years are crucial to long-term academic success, attention must be paid to increasing their effectiveness, particularly for students of color and students experiencing poverty. However, urban school reform remains a complex issue with much attention and little proven success.

Hill and Celio (1998) note the fragmentation of urban school reform efforts since the 1960s. Government and private funders target specific groups of students or specific programs to support, but these efforts compete with one another within schools and do little to create lasting change (Hill & Celio, 1998). Hill and Celio explain:

> Every school thus becomes host to many programs, each focused on a particular problem or beneficiary and each running autonomously as if nothing else were happening. These separate efforts compete for the time and attention of teachers, administrators, and students and often end up getting in each other's way. (p. 4)

Hill and Celio identify the many methods of urban school reform that have emerged: standards-based reforms, reforms based on teacher development, school redesigns and reorganizations, decentralization and site-based management, and school choice initiatives like charter schools and voucher programs. While each of these reform methods target specific failings of the current urban education system, each is also limited and, alone, does little to effect systemic change (Hill & Celio, 1998). Recent studies have continued to investigate the effectiveness of such reform strategies, finding varying degrees of success and failure. In the following section, examples of current research on these reform strategies in urban middle schools will be reviewed.

   Teacher development. Shulman and Armitage (2005) conducted a five-year case study of a Staten Island middle school implementing Project Discovery, a federally funded middle school reform based primarily on teacher development. Participating teachers attended weekly after-school workshops plus additional trainings in the summer where they were led in the creation of learning activities that were discovery-based, interdisciplinary, and relevant to students' lives. Compared to other urban middle schools in the district, students at the Project Discovery school showed gains in all three measured areas: state assessment scores, report card grades, and attendance. Teachers also experienced positive changes, as Shulman and Armitage describe an increase in enthusiasm and ownership among participating teachers. The authors also report that teacher beliefs changed, as teachers described their beliefs that all students could be successful by taking charge of their own learning through discovery learning. Survey data showed an increase in teacher efficacy and an increased level of collaboration

among teachers across disciplines. The study conducted by Shulman and Armitage demonstrates how various parts of a school's ecology – curriculum and pedagogy, school climate and culture – interact to affect student achievement. Teacher beliefs were directly impacted by their new understandings of curriculum and pedagogy. Those beliefs, in turn, influence school culture and student outcomes. Shulman and Armitage's findings suggest that an urban reform effort that takes into account school culture as part of a school's ecology can create change.

School redesigns. Muñoz, Ross, and McDonald (2007) conducted a qualitative study of the implementation of Different Ways of Knowing, a Comprehensive School Reform program authorized and federally funded under No Child Left Behind. Originally developed for elementary schools and redesigned for middle schools, the Different Ways of Knowing reform features thematically integrated curriculum that emphasizes arts education and considers multiple learning styles. The program also emphasizes teacher collaboration and parental involvement. Muñoz et al. paired three treatment middle schools with control schools before analyzing state assessment data. Results found that students at Different Ways of Knowing schools performed significantly better than students at control schools. The authors, however, note the limitations of their study, including small sample size and the challenge of showing sustained success over time. They also acknowledge that Different Ways of Knowing likely accounts for some but not all of the differences between treatment and control schools. Muñoz et al. suggest "disparity in leadership and school climate" (p. 180) as other possible factors contributing to student outcomes. Longitudinal and qualitative

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studies are suggested for further research to determine causal relationships between the reform effort and student achievement.

Charter schools. Dobbie and Fryer (2011) conducted a quantitative study of the Promise Academy charter schools in the Harlem Children's Zone, a reform effort that seeks to improve urban student achievement with a combination of the no-excuse charter model and an extensive web of community services. While Dobbie and Fryer found that attending Promise Academy was enough to eliminate the racial achievement gap in math at the middle school level, they also found that the community services offered had no statistical effect on achievement; the no excuse charter school was the only cause of the achievement gains. The authors contend that as the community programs model is gaining in popularity, it is important to consider the costs and effects of such reforms (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011).

Golann (2015) discusses the paradox of the no-excuses school reform model of charter schools like the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) schools and the Harlem Children's Zone Promise Academies studied by Dobbie and Fryer (2011). Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of schools such as these in improving academic achievement and reducing or even closing the achievement gap by implementing such measures as extended school days and years, data-driven instruction, highly qualified teachers, and very structured discipline systems (Golann, 2015). However, Golann's study of Dream Academy, an urban charter middle school, finds that the strictly enforced curricular and discipline practices of no-excuses schools may negatively impact students' social and emotional well-being while simultaneously improving their

academic skills. At the time of the study, Dream Academy had been open for five years and served 250 students in grades 5 through 8. The school had been recognized by the state for its success in improving standardized test scores (Golann, 2015). Golann notes that the system, designed to improve academic achievement (i.e. test scores), produced "worker-learners" (p. 108) whose creativity and assertiveness were stunted by the strict expectations that were the hallmark of the school climate. Golann cautions that this celebrated model of urban school reform should be further considered, as the controlling nature of the no-excuses school does not promote the skills necessary to function in college and the workplace. By focusing solely on mastering state-assessed skills, this model may reproduce inequalities in social and cultural capital, despite producing gains in academic achievement.

Decentralization. Gallucci, Knapp, Markholt, and Ort (2003) conducted a three-year study of three schools implementing a combination of small schools of choice and standards-based reform. The author's note the potential for these two reform theories to compete with one another, but they show instead how the two reform efforts, when purposefully and thoughtfully implemented, could complement one another. Each reform, in essence, fills a gap left by the other. The study took place in three middle schools in District M, a pseudonym for a New York City school district. The small school of choice model implemented in District M emphasized decentralization, allowing stakeholder ownership and collaboration. This reform focused on relationships between teachers and students, but it didn't dictate how teaching and learning should take place. At the same time District M implemented a standards-based reform, one that

would seemingly be in conflict with the decentralization efforts. However, Gallucci et al. note that the two reforms actually have the potential to support one another, each offering something that the other lacks. However, the study found varying degrees of success across the three schools, making its findings somewhat inconclusive. Gallucci et al. maintain the possibility that these two reforms (or other combinations of reforms) can work together to effect change in urban schools. However, factors within the schools determined the reforms success within those particular schools. The findings of Gallucci et al. suggest a need to look at all facets of a school's ecology, including school culture, as these unique school characteristics appear to have impacted the success of reform efforts.

The present study. The school in the present study had implemented a community school reform after years of repeated failure. Southmore Middle School (pseudonym) became part of the Allied Community Schools Cooperative (pseudonym) in order to avoid state control. According to its website, Allied Community Schools Cooperative (ACSC) takes existing neighborhood schools and converts them to ACSC schools, which are governed collaboratively by stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the community. As part of a partnership with the state's flagship university, ACSC schools have access to research-based educational practices. ACSC claims to offer assistance to its schools in the areas of curriculum and instruction, school governance, decision-making, community involvement, and behavior management. The Allied Community Schools Cooperative website lists its goal as to provide an "equity of opportunity" where all students attend

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"high quality schools," making education a "vehicle of opportunity." The primary components of an ACSC school redesign are autonomy, collaboration, and instructional practice. First, ACSC schools are released from district and state requirements that allow for autonomy in governance, budgeting, and curriculum. Collaboration between stakeholders is the second key element of an ACSC redesign. The ACSC website describes teacher ownership of curriculum and student ownership of learning as central to this collaborative effort; these are facilitated by the schools' access to the resources of the state's flagship university. Finally, instructional practice under the ACSC model requires real-world learning that student's find "personally meaningful." Implementing these three components of the community schools model involves "cultural transformation," relying heavily on professional learning communities and data-driven decision making.

Literature has encouraged the formation of authentic partnerships between schools, families, and communities (Auerbach, 2010; Hands & Hubbard, 2011) and has found some success in such partnerships improving student outcomes (Mickelson & Cousins, 2011; Olson, 2014). However, data revealed that Southmore Middle School undertook the ACSC reform primarily as a response to imminent reconstitution; furthermore, data reveals stakeholder intentions inconsistent with the purposes of community school reform. As such, it may be that the Southmore Middle School ACSC reform was not the "authentic partnership" that existing literature calls for. The impact of such dissonance will be discussed in Chapter IV as it relates to the findings of this study.

Conceptual Framework

In an attempt to increase our understanding of urban schools and the various approaches to reforming them, researchers have developed theories that describe the inner-workings of urban schools. The present study utilizes the ecology of school improvement model (Eisner, 1988; Uhrmacher & Moroye, 2007) as a lens for understanding the ecology of Southmore Middle School and the Allied Community Schools Cooperative reform that took place there.

Ecology of School Improvement

The ecology of school improvement model views schools as living organisms, describing how multiple facets within a school work together to form the whole (Eisner, 1988; Uhrmacher & Moroye, 2007). Eisner (1988) first developed the ecology of school improvement model in response to what he saw as the problem of fragmentation within schools. Eisner identified five factors that must be considered together for effective school reform: the intentional, the structural, the curricular, the pedagogical, and the evaluative. Intentions have a two-part role in the ecology of a school. By establishing what matters in a school, intentions determine what kinds of opportunities students are offered; secondly, they convey the school's values to students by communicating to them what the school feels it is important for them to learn. Eisner defines structure as "the organizational framework within which intentions are pursued" (p. 26). School structures include all the physical and organizational decisions that are made within a school, such as master scheduling decisions, determinations of class size, scheduling instructional periods within the school day, and allotting classroom space. Importantly,

Eisner posits that when intentions and structure are in conflict, structure usually wins. Considering that most urban school reforms are structural in nature, it is worth considering this observation and its implications.

Eisner's third dimension of school ecology is curriculum, "the formal content of education" (p. 26). Structure determines the constraints within which curriculum is delivered, and pedagogy, the fourth dimension of school ecology, determines the means through which that curriculum is delivered. Pedagogy, according to Eisner, is the element that makes curriculum meaningful as it is shaped and altered to fit the needs of particular students and communities. The final facet of school ecology is evaluation, which Eisner describes as both a reflection of and determiner of a school's intentions:

> It is the evaluative dimension that most directly reflects and controls our priorities. Our evaluation devices, usually achievement tests, tell teachers what and how to teach and what their priorities should be. They tell students what to study for and what is worthwhile. And they tell the community, for good or for ill, how well we are doing. (p. 26)

Eisner notes that these dimensions work together, not in isolation, and any effort toward school improvement must effect change in all five areas:

> Schools are like ecological systems. Given a critical mass, what one does in one place influences what happens in another. When the mass is not critical, changes made in one place are returned to their earlier position by the others. (p. 29)

Uhrmacher and Moroye (2007) developed a similar model of the ecology of schools. Much like Eisner (1988), Uhrmacher and Moroye identify five interacting

dimensions of schools: structure, curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, and school-community relations. The authors define structure, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation in much the same terms as Eisner. However, they have removed Eisner's intentional dimension and added a school-community dimension, noting that the community in which a school operates has an effect on the school itself. That relationship can be positive or negative, but it exists and must, therefore, be examined. Uhrmacher and Moroye note that the five factors work together as interdependent facets of the school: "Change one and the others change too, either consciously or inadvertently. The goal is to create change with conscious intent" (p. 56). As Eisner first posited and Uhrmacher and Moroye supported, change of any kind within a school must take all factors of the ecological system into account. Therefore, the standards-based reforms that focus solely on curriculum and pedagogy or the structural reforms that ignore other facets are not effective ways to improve schools.

School Climate and Culture

Despite their usefulness for looking at school reform, neither the model developed by Eisner (1988) or Uhrmacher and Moroye (2007) include school climate or culture. The present study suggests that school culture and climate are essential facets of a school's ecology and must be studied for their impact on reform.

School culture and school climate are enigmatic terms, seemingly abstract ideas that literature increasingly suggests a need to observe and quantify. Often used interchangeably, the terms school culture and school climate have no universally

accepted definition. The National School Climate Center defines school climate as follows:

> School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students', parents' and school personnel's experience of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.

Peterson (2002) has defined school culture in much the same way:

> School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the "persona" of the school. These unwritten expectations build up over time as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together, solve problems, deal with challenges and, at times, cope with failures. (p. 10)

Both terms define climate or culture as the feeling of a school – its "persona" or "character" – and identify norms and values as central to creating that feeling. Both definitions also capture the role of human actors, showing how humans within a school both create the climate/culture and experience it. For the purposes of this study, school climate and culture are both used to refer to the institutionalized beliefs and norms that are simultaneously created and experienced by the human stakeholders that make up the institution.

Due to a growing interest in school climate over the last three decades, school climate receives far more treatment in the existing literature than school culture. Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, and Higgins-D'Alessandro (2013) identify three reasons for this

increasing attention. First, the authors cite increased scholarship in areas related to how context shapes experience. Second, an urgent need to curb school violence and bullying has brought school climate to the forefront as a possible means of mitigating such acts. And third, Thapa et al. identify a heightened interest in research-based strategies for teaching character education, service learning, and other social and civic skills. Increasingly, the language of school climate is represented in policy, increasing the need to develop instruments to measure school climate (Thapa et al., 2013).

   Dimensions and outcomes of school climate. Based on an extensive review of the existing research on school climate, Thapa et al. (2013) identify five dimensions of school climate: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and the school improvement process. The authors further describe the interrelated nature of these dimensions, noting that they overlap and inform one another. In much the same way, the outcomes of a positive school culture and climate share a complex relationship with these dimensions. Thapa et al. posit, "It must be understood that both the effects of school climate and the conditions that give rise to them are deeply interconnected, growing out of the shared experience of a dynamic ecological system" (p. 3). Recognizing the ecological nature of the school and the ways in which context shapes experience, school culture can be understood as a fluid system in which stakeholders both shape and are shaped by their school's culture and climate. Current literature identifies a diverse list of outcomes of creating a positive school climate (Thapa et al., 2013). See Figure 1 for a visual representation of these dimensions and outcomes created by the author of the present study. The figure lists the five dimensions of school climate

identified by Thapa et al. as well as the positive outcomes that research suggests school

culture and climate can effect. Finally, as the figure demonstrates, while the dimensions

that Thapa et al. identify lead to the positive outcomes, the outcomes in turn alter the

ecosystem of the school, including its culture and climate. The result is a continuous

cycle in which positive school culture essentially begets more positive school culture.

The following section discusses the effects of school culture on reform.

DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL CULTURE/CLIMATE
Safety
Institutional Environment
School Improvement Process
Teaching and Learning
Relationships

SCHOOL CULTURE/ CLIMATE OUTCOMES
Safety
School improvement
Dropout prevention
Bullying prevention
Healthy relationships
Sense of connectedness
Student and teacher engagement
Improved physical and mental health
Decreased psychiatric problems
Higher academic achievement
Improved social/civic skills
Increased self-esteem
Positive self-concept
Decreased drug use
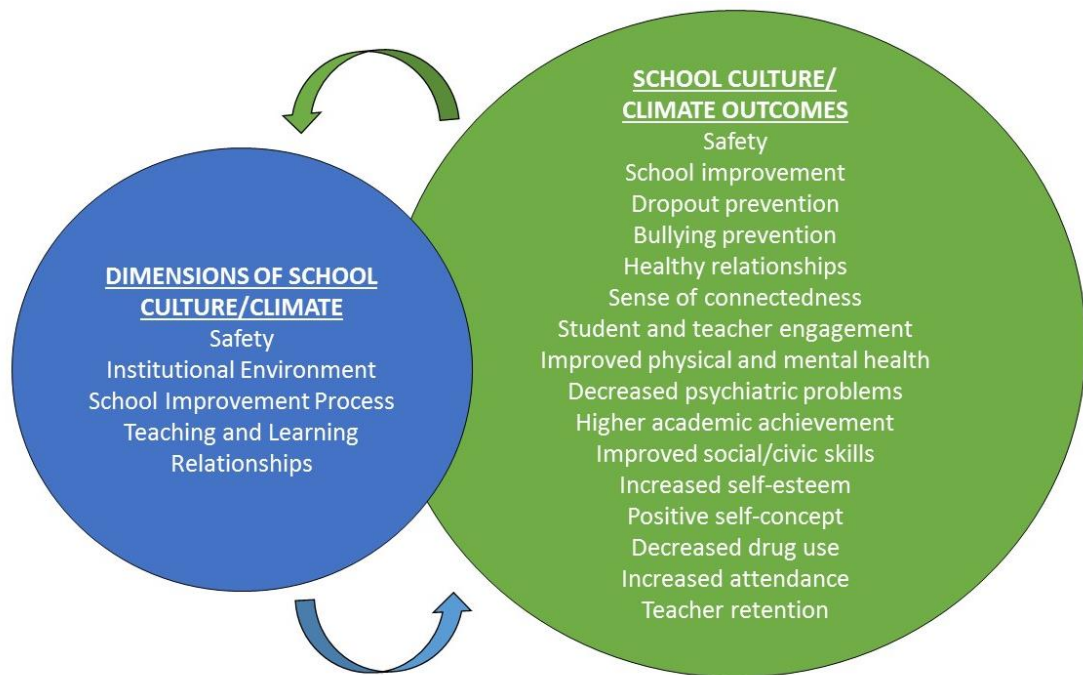Increased attendance
Teacher retention

Figure 1. *Dimensions and Outcomes of School Culture/Climate.*

School climate/culture and urban school reform. Muhammad (2009)

delineates two types of school reforms: technical change and cultural change. The

reforms implemented under No Child Left Behind – standards-based, decentralization,

redesigns, etc. – are technical changes. They change the "tools and mechanisms"

(Muhammad, 2009, p. 15) of schools, affecting only the pedagogical, curricular, and

structural facets of a school's ecology in limited ways. Cultural changes, as Muhammad

notes, are much harder to enact, but they are also, arguably, much more important.

Cultural changes affect the beliefs of stakeholders within the school, which are not as

easy to alter as the structures and curriculums that are so often implemented as quick

fixes. But as Muhammad argues, cultural change must occur, and it must occur first,

since educational tools are no good in the hands of those who do not believe in their

efficacy. Conversely, stakeholders who are part of a positive school culture will pursue

the means of effecting positive change (Muhammad, 2009).

Human Actors: How People Influence Reform

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, educational reform is an expensive

pursuit with debatable outcomes. Because it is essential that we ameliorate failing

schools disproportionately serving students of color and students living in poverty, we

must examine why educational reform has not produced the results one might expect

given the tremendous investment in its success. The present study suggests that the role

of human actors is an under-examined component of school reform. Our failure to

adequately consider the impact of human actors on reform may, at least in part, explain

urban school reform's inability to create lasting, systemic change. By the definition

established previously, this human factor can be conceptualized as school culture. Changing school culture is a necessary first step in producing real, lasting change in urban schools. However, despite a growing body of literature on school culture and climate, our research-based understanding of school culture is not impacting policies and practices (Cohen et al., 2009). The following sections suggest these works as lenses for including the role of human actors in discussions of urban school reform: Muhammad's (2009) theory of competing expectations, Diamond et al.'s (2004) work on race, class, and organizational habitus, and the transformation of intentions (Hall & McGinty, 1997; Placier et al., 2000).

Competing expectations. Through his ethnographic study on school culture, Muhammad (2009) identifies a set of competing belief systems that educators hold. These beliefs systems support or hinder efforts to transform school culture. In order to create a positive school culture that supports systemic change within a school, school leaders must understand these groups and be able to impact their competing belief systems.

Muhammad (2009) identifies "Believers" (p. 29) as those with high efficacy and high student expectations; believers support a healthy school culture. Believers are experienced teachers who are committed to student success. Believers as observed through Muhammad's study were highly motivated, felt a connection to their school and community, were flexible, had high expectations for students, and were willing to confront those with different views. Muhammad also notes that while these characteristics were common to all Believers, pedagogical skill was inconsistent across

this group. In other words, while all Believers strived for student success and believed all students were capable of achieving success, not all Believers had the pedagogical tools to make this belief a reality. Muhammad recognizes the need to create a professional culture that offers necessary professional development. He also posits that harnessing the Believers and expanding their numbers is an essential step in changing school culture.

The next group, "Tweeners" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 29) have possibly the most potential for being converted to Believers. Tweeners, new to the school culture, try to learn school culture during what Muhammad (2009) calls a "honeymoon period" (p. 29). Tweeners were typically new teachers, usually straight out of college but sometimes entering teaching as a second career later in life. While they have less impact on school culture, Tweeners can also be experienced educators who are new to a school. Tweeners were characterized by a loose connection to the school and community and an enthusiasm for their new profession. Tweeners also shared a belief that all students could succeed; although, they seemed more likely than the Believers to recognize that they didn't necessarily know how to foster that success for all students. However, school leaders often judged Tweeners as proficient because of their willingness to comply and their eagerness to please, overlooking deficits in pedagogical skill (Muhammad, 2009). Muhammad calls for purposeful new-teacher development as one of the most effectively ways to improve school culture among Tweeners.

A third group, "Survivors" (Muhammad, 2009, p. 29), are a relatively small group of educators who are overwhelmed and burned out. This group is barely surviving

the day-to-day tasks of teaching, and are concerned with their own well-being, not with student achievement (Muhammad, 2009). Muhammad points out the general agreement that these teachers are not suited for the profession. To mitigate the lasting effects of ineffective teachers, administrators must take action to remove Survivors from their positions, temporarily until the situation changes, or sometimes permanently (Muhammad, 2009).

The final group, which Muhammad (2009) terms "Fundamentalists" (p. 29), are inherently opposed to change and actively work against efforts to reform and improve school culture. Muhammad notes that Believers and Fundamentalists are in opposition to one another, one working for and one working against change. Fundamentalists are adamant in their adherence to a traditional model of school:

> Their experiences have led them to believe that the traditional model of school is the best and purest model of schooling. It is the system that was used to educate them, and it is the system they were socialized into when they became new professionals. They have learned the rules of that system, and they understand how it functions and how to excel within it. (p. 61)

Fundamentalists view change and anyone who supports it as their adversary, and they are quite aggressive in their defense of the status quo (Muhammad, 2009). Muhammad observes that Fundamentalists are not necessarily ineffective teachers, but their resistance to change makes them inhibitive to creating a positive school culture.

Each of these four groups has its own organizational goal. Believers strive for academic success for all students, Tweeners seek organizational stability, Survivors

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concern themselves with little beyond their own emotional and mental well-being, and Fundamentalists actively work to maintain the status quo. With so many competing expectations within a school, the negative impact on reform is clear. Muhammad identifies three main ways that Fundamentalists challenge reform efforts: through defamation, disruption, and distraction. While the actions of this group can be a threat to change, Muhammad does believe that strong leaders can overcome division to effect change in school culture. Harnessing Believers, who are not as active in influencing school culture as Fundamentalists, and encouraging them to engage Fundamentalists in data-driven conversations about change is an important step. Considering the failure of so many urban school reforms, it is important to consider the ways in which competing expectations may be sabotaging potential solutions to school failure. Since competing expectations (Muhammad, 2009) negatively impact school climate and impede change, it is essential that we find ways to implement reforms that work systematically to improve the culture of schools.

Race, class, and organizational habitus. Valencia (2015) calls the achievement gap in American public schools "an incontrovertible racialized reality" (p. xiii) in which students of color, particularly those identified as having low-socioeconomic status, achieve academically at rates disproportionate to their White peers. The achievement gap compares the academic performance of students of color to the average academic performance of White students, which Valencia warns can lead to the false conclusion that "there is something about being a student of color that produces low performance" (p. xiii). This deficit thinking looks internally to students of color, their families, and

their cultures to explain low academic achievement, instead of looking outwardly to biases at the school and societal levels (Valencia, 2015).

Diamond, Randolph, and Spillane (2004) situate deficit thinking organizationally in school culture, or what they and others (Horvat & Antonio, 1999; McDonough, 1997) have termed organizational habitus. Diamond et al. extend Horvat and Antonio's (1999) definition of organizational habitus as "the set of class-based dispositions, perceptions, and appreciations transmitted to individuals in a common organizational culture" (p. 320) to include race and ethnicity. Diamond et al. argue that school context, the student race and class composition of a school, shapes teacher expectations and influences, at an organizational level, the degree to which teachers feel responsible for student learning. In an ethnographic study of five urban elementary schools, Diamond et al. found that in schools where the majority of students were African American and low-income, teachers held deficit ideologies that decreased their sense of responsibility for student learning. Instead, teachers focused on students' perceived lack of motivation, family backgrounds, and low levels of academic readiness as limiting factors that prevented them from effectively teaching these students.

It stands to reason that teachers who feel that student learning is not their responsibility and that improving student academic achievement is beyond their ability would have little rationale for engaging in reform. Like Muhammad's (2009) Fundamentalists, these teachers have accepted the status quo, in this case, the academic failure of low-income students of color. However, like Muhammad, Diamond et al. (2004) posit that stakeholder ideologies can be overcome and that school culture can be

improved by skilled school leaders. In one of the schools studied, Diamond et al. found that even though teachers exhibited the same deficit ideologies as teachers in other predominantly African American and low-income schools, leadership had successfully overcome those ideologies through the purposive implementation of practices designed to create a collective responsibility for student learning. This finding has important implications for urban school reform, suggesting the ability of organizational practices to overcome individual stakeholder ideologies to affect school culture. Valencia (2015) calls for "workable, comprehensive, and equitable school reform" (p. xiv) to counter the deficit thinking that pervades urban schools. The work of Muhammad and Diamond et al. highlights the need to understand stakeholder expectations and mitigate deficit thinking through the hard work of changing school culture.

Transformation of intentions. To counter the traditional view of policy as a linear process of enactment and implementation, Hall and McGinty (1997) propose a way of looking at policy as the transformation of intentions, which they illustrate through a case study of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's development of a legislatively mandated career ladder program for teachers. In contrast to the linear, sequential way in which policy is often viewed and discussed, Hall and McGinty note that the process of policy making is actually quite "messy, complex, and dynamic" (p. 439). Focusing on the stages of policy implementation, what Hall and McGinty call "the stages heuristic" (p. 440), overlooks the human agency that drives policy making. Individuals and groups shape policy at every turn; people move reform forward. Hall and McGinty describe policies as "vehicles for the realization of

intentions" (p. 441). The authors define intentions as the purposes and motivations for enacting reform. These intentions may be practical, spoken policy goals, or they may be symbolic, inexplicitly revealing the aims of those involved. Therefore, the transformation of intentions is to "aim specific actions at a given problem for announced purposes" (Hall & McGinty, 1997, p. 441).

However, the expression of intentions is not limited to the enactment stage of policy development. Hall and McGinty (1997) recognize that many individuals and groups who may have different intentions and interests impact policy at many different points in its non-linear process of implementation. A sort of negotiation occurs as various actors contend with their conflicting aims and interests. These negotiations lead to a continual transformation of intentions, and are likely to involve subversion and resistance. Additionally, transformation may involve necessary, practical changes as necessitated during policy implementation. Transformation can also represent the human actors within the process changing their own intentions through discovery or reflection. Hall and McGinty also acknowledge self-serving aims as part of the transformation of intentions, citing political and bureaucratic intentions that may differ from, compete with, or even work against the intentions of other stakeholders within the reform.

Extending the work of Hall and McGinty (1997), Placier, Hall, McKendall, and Cockrell (2000) apply the transformations of intentions framework to multicultural education policy. The authors conducted a case study of a committee convened by a school board in the Midwestern U.S. to construct multicultural education policy in reaction to a racial conflict in a local high school. Placier et al. (2000) add to Hall and

McGinty's (1997) framework by outlining multiple dimensions of intentions. Process intentions are related to the actual process of implementing reform. Content intentions focus on the product or what the reform hopes to accomplish. Consensual intentions are the collective interests of various stakeholders and the degree to which consensus can lead to shared intentions being realized. Finally, plural intentions refer to the divergence of interests between groups or individuals and the ways in which these conflicts affect the realization of intentions. In the study conducted by Placier et al. (2000), plural intentions inhibited the committee and prevented reform. The authors note that while the committee largely shared content intentions, agreeing on the need for changes in climate and curriculum, differences in process intentions led to unproductive power struggles.

Both Hall and McGinty (1997) and Placier et al. (2000) acknowledge the role of conventions in the transformation of intentions. Conventions, "taken-for-granted ways of understanding, communicating, and doing" (Hall and McGinty, 1997, p. 442), paradoxically facilitate and constrain policy processes. Conventions make policy processes easier because they are efficient; maintaining the status quo is easier than challenging it. Conversely, conventions also inhibit change as they inherently steer processes in known, comfortable directions.

Conclusions

The ecology of school improvement model (Eisner, 1988; Uhrmacher & Moroye, 2007) provides a fitting lens for this study of stakeholders' experiences of a community school reform. It is important to consider the ways in which the Allied Community Schools Cooperative reform implemented at Southmore Middle School affected the

various facets of the school's ecology. However, the current study suggests that a redesigned model of school ecology is necessary. The proposed model combines the existing models created by Eisner (1988) and Uhrmacher and Moroye (2007) with some key changes. First, the proposed model retains the intentional facet proposed by Eisner and later omitted by Uhrmacher and Moroye. In considering urban school reform, critically reflecting on intentions is a crucial step, particularly considering the fluid nature of intentions and the potential for dissonance of intentions within and between stakeholder groups along the continuum of reform (Hall & McGinty, 1997; Placier et al., 2000). Second, this new framework maintains the school-community partnership proposed by Uhrmacher and Moroye. The nature of the community school reform experienced by Southmore Middle School makes the community-school dimension an essential part of its school ecology. However, regardless of the school or the reform method in question, schools are context-dependent entities, and communities must be treated as part of that context. Third, curriculum and pedagogy, the *what* and *how* of teaching and learning, are combined into a single facet, acknowledging that implementing curriculum reforms absent of pedagogy is not likely to produce real change (Kelly, 2009). And finally, school culture is added as an essential component of understanding the urban school. Figure 2 demonstrates the six interactive facets of this revised ecology of school improvement model: intentions, structure, curriculum and pedagogy, evaluation, school-community relations, and school culture. The figure also illustrates the interactive nature of these facets on student academic achievement. In reform, facets of the school's ecology are adjusted in response to student achievement,

and achievement is impacted by the various parts of the school's ecology and the reforms enacted upon them. The result is a continuous cycle of ecological school improvement.
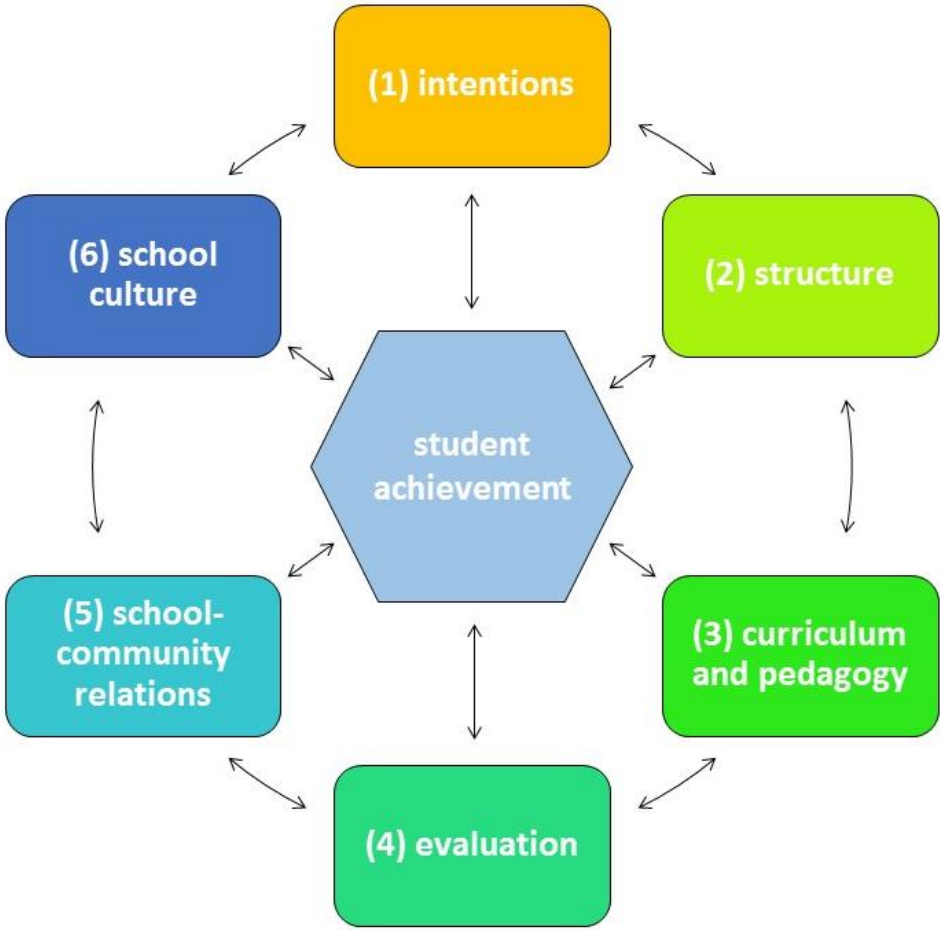

Figure 2. *Ecology of School Improvement Cycle.*

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of stakeholders in an

urban middle school in the northeastern United States that was undergoing the initial

stages of a community school reform. The researcher was interested in understanding

how administrators, teachers, and support staff understood the process of reform and

their roles within that reform. The archival nature of the data called for an inductive

research process that began with the stakeholder voices. This chapter outlines the study

design and rationale for decisions related to study design. This chapter will also include

information about the researcher's positionality as an educator and researcher, data

sources, data collection, and data analysis.

Study Design

In order to understand stakeholders' perceptions of their school and its efforts to

transform, the researcher employed a case study design. The case study design was

appropriate for this particular study because the goal was to develop a "thick

description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 125) of the beliefs of administrators, teachers,

and support staff within one urban middle school undergoing community school reform.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define thick description as the amount of information

necessary for another researcher to understand a context well enough to determine

transferability to another context. One of the primary benefits of a case study is its

ability to provide a description detailed enough to provide a "vicarious experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 258) of the case under study. The research in the present study has tried to provide just this type of vicarious experience of the case, an urban middle school in the process of reform.

Additionally, Merriam (2009) defines a case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40). The bounded system in this study was a single urban middle school that had implemented a community school reform. The researcher analyzed data collected from one urban middle school in order to develop the in-depth depiction that Merriam describes; in this instance, the purpose of the study required a detailed analysis of the beliefs of stakeholder groups – including administrators, teachers, and support staff – in regards to education and education reform. The middle school under question was an urban school undergoing community school reform in the northwestern region of the United States. Yin (2008) claims that case study designs are useful for observing phenomena that are uniquely tied to their contexts. Therefore, a case study was an appropriate methodology for this study because the school existed within a specific context and implemented a specific reform initiative both within and as a reaction to that context.

Merriam (2009) describes these benefits of the case study, which make it particularly useful for research in the field of education:

> The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic

account of the phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that

expand its readers' experiences. (p. 50-51)

A case study design was appropriate for this study for the very reasons Merriam

describes: the social unit under study was an urban middle school, specifically the

various stakeholder groups within the middle school; the phenomenon in question was

the implementation of reform within an urban middle school; and, the researcher's goal

was to provide a rich account of this real-world context.

Flyvbjerg (2011) argues that deep knowledge of a subject or phenomenon cannot

occur absent of context. Context-independent study, according to Flyvbjerg, never

results in expert knowledge. Since a case study allows for proximity and intimacy with

real conditions and experiences, it provides the best opportunity for advancing

knowledge about human behavior (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The researcher made every effort to

achieve such proximity and intimacy with the middle school under study and the

administrators, teachers, and support staff within that middle school, thereby advancing

the understanding of stakeholder perceptions of reform and their beliefs about education.

Flyvbjerg cites Beveridge's (1951) conclusion that the level of depth achieved by a case

study teaches us much more than statistical analysis pertaining to large groups. Flyvbjerg

further argues, "If you want to understand a phenomenon in any degree of thoroughness

. . . you need to do case studies" (p. 314). Through a case study of stakeholders within

the reform context of one urban middle school, the present study deepens the

understanding of stakeholder beliefs and their impact on urban school reform.

Yin (2014) also discusses the importance of context in all case study designs. The researcher utilized what Yin calls a single-case, embedded design. The present case study design begins with the contextual conditions of the case, in this study, the urban school context and the context of urban school reform. The single case for this study was the urban middle school. Within that single case, the researcher also analyzed multiple units of analysis. These subunits were made up of the various stakeholder groups. Administrators, teachers, and support staff comprised the three subunits of analysis. Yin notes the importance in an embedded design of returning to the larger case for analysis. To address this need, the researcher analyzed each of the subunits individually but also analyzed the larger case of the school itself by comparing and contrasting the subunits and their impacts on the school and its reform efforts.

Merriam (2009) identifies these qualities of a case study: case studies seek meaning and understanding, are inductive in nature, and aim for rich description. A case study design, then, seemed especially appropriate for the analysis of the archival data collected through stakeholder interviews at Southmore Middle School. Because the data was collected previously for another purpose, the data was not collected to answer a predetermined research question in the present study. Instead, a main goal of the present research was to discover meaning within the data through an inductive process driven by the voices of the stakeholders themselves.

As a type of qualitative research, a case study is determined by its unit of analysis and may be combined with other types of studies (Merriam, 2009). Case studies do not require any specific methods for gathering or analyzing data (Merriam, 2009).

The following sections of this chapter discuss data sources, collection, and analysis, working within a case study design.

Data Sources

   Case. A case study's key feature is its focus on a bounded system, a case (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) offers the following examples of a bounded system: a person, a program, a policy, a group, an organization, or a community. For this case study, a specific urban middle school served as the bounded system. Merriam notes that a case "might be selected because it is an instance of some process, issue, or concern" (p. 41). The middle school in this study fit this description, as it served as an instance of all three. The process in question was the implementation of a community school model as a means of reforming an urban middle school. It was also an instance of an issue, the reform of the urban American middle school. The current failure of the urban middle school to address the needs of all learners, particularly its students of color and students living in poverty, is certainly a concern that was evident within this case as well. See Chapters I and II for an extended discussion of these issues and their representation in the literature.

   Site selection. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) consider site selection a critical element of the design of a qualitative study. Yin (2009) notes that in some case studies, the case is identified early in the design process because it is a unique case that forms the basis for the inquiry. In other situations, many possible cases exist, and a set of criteria for selection must be developed (Yin, 2009). This study utilized archival data in the form of semi-structured interviews that were previously collected. A

team of researchers conducted the interviews with various stakeholder groups, including administrators, teachers, and support staff. The interviews were conducted in eight urban schools across five districts in a northeastern state. The schools in question were all undergoing a community school reform as a means of avoiding state control under NCLB. All eight schools met the initial criteria for the present study of being urban schools that were undergoing reform. Of the eight schools, three met the next criteria of serving middle school students. Of those three schools, two schools served grades K-8. The researcher selected Southmore Middle School (pseudonym), the only school that was a stand-alone middle school, serving grades 6-8, as the case for this study.

In the 2007-2008 school year, the year before the Allied Community Schools Cooperative (pseudonym) was implemented, Southmore Middle School failed to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the fourth year in a row. That year, Southmore served 1197 students in grades 6-8, which represented a 5-year enrollment change of -14.3%. School profile data shows that in 2007-2008, 74.8% of Southmore students had attended Southmore the year before, a retention rate nearly 10 percentage points below the 84.3% retention rate of schools districtwide and almost 20 percentage points below the state retention rate of 92.3%. Southmore is an urban school with a diverse population. In 2007-2008, the school's racial make-up was 47.8% Hispanic, 27.4% White, 23.1% African American, 1.7% Asian American, and 0.1% American Indian. 15.6% of Southmore's students came from homes where English was not the primary spoken language. 79.1% of Southmore's students were eligible for free or reduced-

priced meals. See Table 1 for a summary of school variables for the 2007-2008 school year.

Table 1. *Student Composition: Southmore Middle School, 2007-2008.*

Student Composition	
Grades Served	6-8
Total Enrollment	1197
5-year Enrollment Change	-14.3%
Hispanic	47.8%
White	27.4%
African American	23.1%
Asian American	1.7%
American Indian	0.1%
Free/Reduced Meals	79.1%
LEP Students	12.9%
Students with Disabilities	15.2%
Gifted and Talented	0.4%

Data Collection

Data was previously collected in the form of semistructured interviews. The researcher also utilized publicly available demographic and performance data provided through the state's education department website. This section describes these two data collection methods and provides rationale for the selection of each.

Participant selection. Data used in the present study was collected at Southmore Middle School as part of a previous research study. In 2008-2009, the year in which the data was collected, Southmore served 1,276 students in grades 6-8. School profile data shows that the school employed 158 staff members, including 89 teachers, 4 administrators, and 65 support staff. See Table 2 for a breakdown of educators by race. Participants were not coded for race, which may be considered a drawback of the archival data used for the present study.

Table 2. *Educator Race: Southmore Middle School, 2008-2009.*

Educator Race	#	Percent
White	89	87.3%
Hispanic	8	7.8%
Black or African American	3	2.9%
Asian	2	2.0%

Participants were selected in the original data collection. For Southmore Middle School, the data team conducted semistructured interviews with a total of 23 participants. The participants represented three stakeholder groups within the school – 5 administrators, 9 teachers, and 9 support staff. Two of the support staff were Southmore parents in addition to being school employees. Researchers conducted a second interview with 5 participants, for a total of 28 interviews. For this study, the researcher analyzed all 28 interviews with the intention of developing a rich description of the case

(Merriam, 2009). Hays and Singh (2012) note that in qualitative research the goal is depth, not breadth as is often the case in quantitative research. The number of participants required to reach a depth of understanding depends on the phenomenon under study. According to Hays and Singh, "sample size should be consistent with the number of participants you need to adequately represent the phenomenon of inquiry" (p. 173). Analysis, which will be detailed in Chapter IV, suggests that this sample size was adequate to represent the experiences of stakeholders within this urban middle school undergoing reform. See Appendix A for a complete list of participants and their roles organized by stakeholder group.

Semistructured interviews. Interviews are the most common data collection method in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). While interviews may range in structure, the more open-ended questions of semistructured interviews value individual experiences and life views (Merriam, 2009). In this type of interview the wording and order of questions is flexible, and the use of an interview guide makes it possible for the researcher to adapt based on participant responses (Merriam, 2009). The interviewer is free to add or subtract questions as necessary throughout the interview (Hays & Singh, 2012). Hays and Singh (2012) see the primary benefits of this type of interview as its ability to include "participant voice" and "provide a richer picture of a phenomenon under investigation" (p. 239). Data was collected for a previous study using semistructured interviews. Interviewers used an interview protocol, but also added and deleted questions as evidenced by the conversational style in the interviews as well as their informing the participants at the beginning of the interviews that they had specific

questions to ask, but also wanted the participants to feel free to share their experiences. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the original research team. The archival data used for this study consisted only of the interview transcriptions.

Document analysis. In addition to semistructured individual interviews, documents were collected for analysis. These documents included publicly available school profile and performance data provided on the website of the state's department of education. Other documents included the school district's mission statement – no school-specific mission statement was available – and other public documents regarding the structure and philosophy of the school, which were posted on the school and district websites. In addition, the researcher collected documents from the Allied Community Schools Cooperative (pseudonym) website which described the history, mission, and logistics of the reform initiative. Merriam (2009) notes that documents such as these are not produced by the researcher for the purpose of the research; therefore, they frequently contain more than is relevant to the study. However, Merriam also acknowledges the benefits of document collection and analysis, particularly their ability to provide clues and insights related the phenomenon under study.

Positionality. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument for the collection and analysis of data (Merriam, 2009). Considering one's position as researcher is an integral part of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Hays & Singh, 2012). Hays and Singh (2012) define positionality as "the social locations of the researcher and participants" (p. 186). Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) use the term "reflexivity" to describe "the process of reflecting critically on the

self as researcher" (p. 124). Merriam (2009) describes positionality as a reflection on the researcher's own views, assumptions, and biases. Positionality may also include the researcher's relationship to the study, which may affect its design and implementation.

Since the present study utilized archival qualitative data, the researcher was not involved in the collection of data. Researchers have debated this and other possible problems with archival data and the secondary analysis of qualitative data (Ziebland & Hunt, 2014; Heaton, 2008). Hox and Boeije (2005) distinguish between primary data, data collected to address a particular research problem, and secondary data, data collected for a different purpose that is made available to be reused by other researchers. Secondary data may be used for a variety of purposes, including reanalysis, which Hox and Boeije define as "asking new questions of the data which were not originally addressed" (p. 593). The data used in the present study was reanalyzed with the purpose of asking new questions about urban school reform and stakeholder readiness for change. The nature of this reanalysis informed the inductive design of the present study.

Parry and Mauthner (2004) describe the concern that qualitative data is co-constructed by the researcher and the participant. A researcher using archival data has "the problem of not having been there" (Heaton, 2008) for the construction of the data. Others, however, have argued that this does not preclude successful studies using archival data or secondary analyses (Mason, 2007; Bishop, 2007). Bishop (2007) in particular postulates that the data is reconstructed and recontextualized through the analysis process, even when the researcher conducting the study was not involved in the initial data collection. Fielding (2004) further argues that the use of archival data

presents only practical concerns and is not epistemologically problematic, since qualitative researchers must always consider positionality or reflexivity, regardless of who collected the data. Furthermore, Fielding points out that the nature of qualitative research presents its own challenges, which a researcher must contend with, even when conducting a primary analysis of one's own data: "Qualitative researchers have always been in the position of having to weigh the evidence, and often have to deal with incomplete information or speculate about what may have happened if a researcher had not been there" (p. 99). Fielding describes the various scenarios that qualitative researchers encounter:

> Information regarded as vital in providing evidence for a given analytic point may well be missing from the archived data. But that happens in primary data analysis too—the tape runs out 'just when things get interesting', or the respondent withdraws their remark, or the observer leaves the police station just before the suspect gets violent, or any number of other contingencies. One might, and should, expect the professional researcher to respond to such a contingency in exactly the same way regardless of whether the data source is primary or secondary—by saying 'that is too bad but I cannot evidence this point' and moving on to what can be evidenced by the material available. Since one of the attractions of qualitative research is the richness of the data it can produce, this is not such a terrible problem. (p. 99)

Hays and Singh (2012) suggest journaling about issues of positionality during the research process, and the researcher utilized this method for reflecting on her own positionality as a researcher analyzing archival data.

Personal Story. When I told my mom that I wanted to be a teacher, she said, "You're too smart to be a teacher." The irony of that statement is only compounded by the fact that she herself is in fact a teacher. I think what that statement was meant to imply was that my academic record and my perceived intelligence probably had the potential to land me a more financially lucrative career. As a teacher herself, she may also have been thinking about the often thankless nature of what can be a very demanding job. My mother also grew up in a time when women had fewer career options. I remember finding several typing and shorthand books in a closet and asking her why she had them. Her answer revealed volumes about how she had chosen her own career: she really saw only two paths for herself, secretary or teacher.

I, on the other hand, had career options that were quite possibly limitless. So why did I choose education, a move that clearly confounded my own parents? I have always loved learning. That is not to say that I always loved school, but there were certainly aspects of it that appealed to me. I loved the excitement of learning something for the first time. I loved the satisfaction of accomplishing something that was especially difficult. I loved bringing home good grades. I loved books. This love was certainly developed by my parents who, whether consciously or not, fueled my early love of books by surrounding me with them.

My mom certainly nurtured my early experiences with reading and learning at home, but she was also actually my 2nd-grade teacher. The teachers I had the following years, my 3rd- and 4th-grade teachers, Mrs. Barrett and Mrs. Chargois, were also some of my most memorable. I'm not sure what exactly distinguished them from so many others, but they made me feel special and still hold a special place in my heart. From my middle school and high school years, I best remember the classes and teachers that challenged me most. While my first love is literature, two math teachers are among my most memorable. Mr. Haywood taught me Algebra I, and Coach T (Mr. Turner who coached math team at my high school) taught me Algebra II. Both had their work cut out for them. I struggled in these classes probably more than any others, but both men patiently explained concepts to me until I got them. Coincidently, both of these teachers were African American and male, both exceptionalities in my small, rural school district. Both had high expectations, and I responded to that, always driven by making myself and others proud.

I finished high school, second in my class and went on to college at Southwestern University, a small, private liberal arts university in Georgetown, Texas. I quickly learned that my school experiences, as rewarding as they seemed at the time, had neither challenged nor prepared me. My undergraduate experience is by far the most influential episode in my educational career. Rigorous courses forced me to challenge myself in ways that my K-12 education never had. The variety of topics and views encountered in a wide array of subject areas opened my perspective, as my small-town childhood had restricted it. I learned infinitely more in my four years at Southwestern than I had at any

other point in my education. I think I became the person I am today in college. I learned who I was. I learned what I was capable of. I learned what I wanted out of life. I learned that I never wanted to stop learning.

Maybe most importantly, I learned that I wanted to teach. I began college majoring in English and then picked up history as a second major. It wasn't until later that I decided that what I wanted to do with my knowledge in those fields was to teach. I credit one particular English professor, Dr. Debbie Ellis, with cementing this decision. Dr. Ellis was passionate about her area of specialization, medieval literature. She had the kind of passion that is contagious, so much so that I took several classes with her on medieval literature and medieval women in particular, a topic that I don't think I would have pursued otherwise. Sadly, Dr. Ellis passed away unexpectedly during my junior year. I was deeply affected by her passing, and I still consider her a mentor. Her loves of literature and learning and teaching strengthened the love that I already felt for these same pursuits. College in general, really, took a love of learning that was always a spark inside of me and ignited it into a conflagration that told me there was no logical choice for me other than to pursue a career in education. One of my favorite things about being a teacher is that I can really continue being a student. The most rewarding days, the most exciting days, are the ones where I walk away feeling not only like I have taught someone something but that I have also learned something myself. And the times I feel like I've done my job the best are when I can spark passion in a student for some idea that we've discussed. While I certainly don't expect all of my students to become teachers, I do hope that they all find a love for learning that they carry into adulthood.

So, after over a decade in the profession, I think I would rework my mom's statement to form a question: "Was I smart enough to be a teacher?" Maybe. My graduate studies in urban education have definitely taught me that I had, and still have, a lot to learn. I have had the unique experience of simultaneously playing two roles: academic and practicing teacher. This duality has taught me a great deal about both worlds and how they do and do not work together. During my fifteen years as a practicing teacher, I have taught in two high schools. Both were large, comprehensive high schools in historically suburban districts that had undergone transitions marked by increased percentages of students of color and students living in poverty. Anyon (2005) refers to such areas as "urbanized suburbs" (p. 82), noting that the term "urban" no longer applies singularly to the inner city but to suburbs that increasingly exhibit characteristics of central cities, namely poverty and segregation. Perhaps because my own small-town, rural schooling experience differed so much from the experiences of the students in these large, urban-suburban schools, I developed an interest in the structures within these comprehensive schools. While the high school students I taught had infinitely more choices and opportunities than my small high school could have hoped to offer, they also experienced obstacles I never did – namely, a lack of connection with other students and with faculty, products of the schools' sizes.

During my time at these two high schools, both turned to smaller learning communities as a means of reform. My interest in high school structures was heightened by these restructurings. My first high school reorganized into houses, alphabetical groupings of students that cut the school into smaller learning communities where

students would have dedicated teachers, counselors, and administrators that would remain with them throughout their high school careers. The second high school I taught in underwent a similar change, restructuring into six career academies that met the same criteria as the smaller learning communities in my previous school but also incorporated a relevancy component by grouping students who shared similar career interests. Both schools' restructurings were motivated by grants that were awarded specifically to fund the implementation of smaller learning communities. I served as a teacher leader in a smaller learning community, working both as a classroom teacher an as an Academy Coordinator for the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Academy and later for the Health Science Academy. In this position I was tasked with leading professional development for teachers and involving students in academy initiatives, including project-based learning, with the goal of increasing college and career readiness. While I enjoyed my leadership position and bought in to the promise of the smaller learning community reform, I, like many others, experienced the frustration of a reform that produces little systemic change. As someone who was committed to the idea of reform and understood the desperate need for change that would meet the needs of all students, I found myself often at odds with those who not only saw no need for change but were adamantly against change of any kind. Experiencing the implementation and essential failure of a reform effort made me particularly interested in the reasons that reform does or does not succeed. I hope this study clarifies some of those reasons and provides insight for future urban school reform.

Reliability. According to Merriam (2009), internal validity is a strength of qualitative research because the researcher as the instrument achieves a certain closeness to the reality under study that is not present when a data collection instrument is used. Merriam also points out that while qualitative research does not seek to capture an objective, single truth, steps can be taken to increase credibility. Maxwell (2013) suggests that credibility attempts to align, as closely as possible, research and reality. The present study utilized triangulation to increase credibility.

Merriam (2009) notes multiple ways of achieving triangulation. For this study, triangulation was achieved through the use of multiple methods of data collection (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, the researcher analyzed data that was collected through semistructured interviews as well as documents about the school and reform. Hays and Singh (2012) find triangulation of data collection methods appropriate when the different methods yield data that would not be obtained by using solely one method. Additionally, the design of a single-case, embedded study provided triangulation by allowing for comparison between different stakeholder groups who held different beliefs and perspectives. Merriam discusses comparing "interview data collected from people with different perspectives" (p. 216) as a method of triangulation.

Data Analysis

Inductive data analysis. Hays and Singh (2012) define inductive analysis as "the notion that data drive theory or a deeper understanding of an issue or phenomenon" (p. 5). Lincoln and Guba (1995) distinguish between deductive and inductive data analysis. In conventional studies, the researcher seeks out data that will prove or

disprove a hypothesis that has been constructed from established theory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In naturalistic studies, data is collected and then analyzed inductively in order to construct hypotheses and theories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba, inductive data analysis is more likely to fully depict the setting under study, identify the ways that different phenomena interact and influence one another within the context under study, and uncover the multiple realities present within the data. Merriam (2009) also cites inductive data analysis as a feature of qualitative research. The qualitative researcher works from the specific to the general, gathering data, combining and ordering data, and using that data to generate themes, hypotheses, or theories (Merriam, 2009). Because this research sought to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of stakeholders in an urban middle school undergoing reform, inductive data analysis was used in this study. Research questions were written in conjunction with analysis as codes were developed and themes emerged. The following global question is offered to guide the reader: Why is achieving synthesis among stakeholders critical to promoting effective reform in an urban middle school? The question did not guide the research but developed as meaning was made through the research process.

Content analysis and the constant comparative method. The researcher conducted a qualitative analysis of archival data previously collected through semistructured interviews using content analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) review Holsti's (1969) characteristics of content analysis, and determine these to be applicable to naturalistic inquiry: In content analysis, procedures are developed prior to data

analysis, rules are consistently applied to data, and context is essential to data analysis. Lincoln and Guba adapt Holsti's conception of content analysis for naturalistic inquiry, rejecting several of his characteristics, including the need for a guiding theory and the precept that findings should be generalizable.

The researcher utilized the constant comparative method of data analysis as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who adapt Glaser and Strauss's (1967) method for use with naturalistic inquiry. The constant comparative method includes unitizing and categorizing data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unitizing involves breaking data into units that will be used to define categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba note that units of data must have two characteristics. First, the unit must be heuristic, which the authors define as "aimed at some understanding or some action that the inquirer needs to have or to take" (p. 345). Second, the unit must be "the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself" (p. 345). This might be a sentence or a paragraph. In order to identify and catalog these units of data, the researcher utilized the qualitative data analysis software Dedoose (2016).

Dedoose (2016) is a web-based qualitative and mixed-methods tool for storing, organizing, analyzing, and presenting data. All coding and analyzing done in Dedoose is performed by the researcher, not the software. The software is simply a tool for managing data collection and analysis. See Dalal (2013) and Olivia (2013) for examples of case studies using Dedoose for data analysis in the field of education. For a detailed description of how to use Dedoose for qualitative data management and analysis, see the User Guide online at http://www.dedoose.com/userguide/meetdedoose/whatisdedoose#

WhatIsDedoose.

The researcher uploaded all 28 interview transcriptions into Dedoose (2016) and double-encrypted the data. Once the data, which Dedoose refers to as media files, were uploaded, each file was linked with a descriptor that identified the stakeholder group to which the interview belonged. Descriptors were created for teacher, administrator, and support staff. The descriptor feature in Dedoose allows the researcher to easily organize and compare data. Next, the researcher began working through the interviews one at a time and identifying units of analysis, which Dedoose calls excerpts. As excerpts are identified, Dedoose links them with identifying information such as the specific interview that is the source of the unit and where within the interview the unit can be located.

After units of analysis are identified, the second step in the constant comparative method is categorizing, which groups together units with similar content (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline the steps for this process utilizing index cards that are categorized and compared. This method was digitized using Dedoose (2016). Much like one would in the index card system, the researcher read the units one by one and noted their content. The first unit began the first category, to be named later. A second unit was read and its contents compared to the first unit. The second unit was either placed in the same category as the first unit based on its having "'essentially' similar" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 347) content, or it began a second category. The rest of the units were treated the same way, as each successive unit was compared to existing categories and either added to one of those categories or used to begin a new one.

Lincoln and Guba describe this decision making process as searching for "look-alike" or "feel-alike" units (p. 347).

As units accumulated in each category, rules for inclusion in those categories were developed and the categories were given titles, or codes. These new inclusion rules replaced the original "look/feel-alike" method, and new units were included or excluded from a category based solely on their contents' adherence to the rule. Dedoose includes a memo feature which is useful for making notes about inclusion rules.

In Dedoose, excerpts can be labeled with one or more codes, which the researcher can create and edit throughout the analysis process. In this study, 1201 excerpts were unitized across 28 interviews. The initial constant comparative process yielded 72 codes. Codes were refined throughout the analysis process and were eventually collapsed into 57 total codes – 32 parent, or super-ordinate, codes and 25 child, or sub-ordinate, codes (Dedoose, 2016). The data presentation capabilities of Dedoose include a variety of qualitative and mixed methods charts. Figure 3 depicts a packed code cloud for the present study, which visually represents coding frequency. Codes appear in size relative to their frequency, so the larger the appearance, the more frequent the application. All charts in Dedoose are dynamically linked to the underlying data. For instance, in the packed code cloud, clicking on any code will pull up the associated excerpts, making it a useful tool not only for presentation but also for analysis.

Following the categorization process, the researcher looked for patterns and extracted themes. The conceptual framework described in Chapter II informed this

inductive process. A review of existing literature suggested the importance of human actors in urban school reform and a need to interrogate the intentions (Hall & McGinty, 1997) and the expectations (Diamond et al., 2004; Muhammad, 2009) of these actors. The model proposed in Figure 2 emphasized the role of human actors in school reform through the inclusion of school culture, or institutionalized beliefs and norms, in a cycle of ecological school improvement. This framework served as a lens through which the data was initially coded, and also drove the development of themes. Coded categories were matched with emerging themes to form a framework that will be discussed in Chapter V.

Figure 3. *Packed Code Cloud Produced in Dedoose.*

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed inductively from the data as themes began to emerge:

1. How do stakeholders (teachers, administrators, and support staff) describe teaching, learning, and leadership in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

2. How do stakeholders describe their rationales for wanting change in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

3. How do stakeholders describe the challenges they believe warrant change in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

4. How do stakeholders describe successful school reform in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

5. How do stakeholders describe shared values and norms in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

These questions both aided the analysis process and emerged through the analysis process. Because of the inductive nature of the study, the researcher offers the following overarching question which the reader may find useful as a guide to reading the study: Why is achieving synthesis among stakeholders critical to promoting effective reform in an urban middle school?

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

Under NCLB failing schools across the country adopted comprehensive school reform measures, most of which were changes to school structures and largely overlooked issues of school climate and culture. In the present study, Southmore Middle School undertook a community school reform, Allied Community Schools Cooperative (ACSC) in order to avoid reconstitution following four consecutive years of not making adequate yearly progress (AYP). While the ACSC reform intended to empower stakeholders and implement research-based strategies in partnership with the state's flagship university, interview data suggests that the individual stakeholders and the school as an organization did not hold shared beliefs about change. Like many other failing schools, Southmore sought to transform its structures, focusing primarily on curriculum and pedagogy, and did little to change the school culture or climate. When culture/climate was discussed by participants, it was defined very narrowly as related to concerns about student discipline.

The ecology of school improvement model (Eisner, 1998; Uhrmacher & Moroye, 2007) provides a lens for viewing a school as a living organism comprised of integrated facets that interact with reform and with each other. In addition, Muhammad's (2009) competing expectations and transformation of intentions (Hall & McGinty, 1997; Placier, Hall, McKendall, and Cockrell, 2000) underscore the importance of

understanding the role of human actors in creating school culture, an integral part of a school's ecology. Diamond et al. (2004) also address the effect of school context on stakeholder expectations and school culture. The data analyzed in the present study suggests that this human factor is a crucial determinant of a reform's potential to create systemic change.

On multiple levels, stakeholders act and interact to influence reform. Individually and collectively, they have an enormous impact on the reform along its continuum. Individually, stakeholders hold ideologies that may support or reject the institutionalized beliefs of the school's culture. Collectively, a school's culture may support or reject the school's stated mission and/or the stated mission of the reform being implemented. Achieving synthesis between these levels of stakeholder/school/reform interaction is a difficult but necessary process, as dissonance at or between any level will limit the *transformational potential* of a reform.

Transformational potential is the degree to which a reform effort and a local school system can achieve synthesis toward creating lasting, systemic change. The data collected at Southmore Middle School produced five major themes that form a framework for assessing transformational potential: (1) synthesis of ideologies, (2) synthesis of engagement, (3) synthesis of intentions, (4) synthesis of amelioration, and (5) synthesis of culture. These themes represent the key areas in which synthesis must be achieved between a local school system, as represented by the school's stakeholders, and a reform effort. See Figure 4 for a visual representation of transformational potential that serves as a tool for stakeholders.

Figure 4. *Transformational Potential.*

The research design of a single-case, embedded study informs the organization of

findings and analyses in this chapter. Findings will be discussed as they respond to each

of five research questions, which emerged inductively during the analysis process:

1. How do stakeholders (teachers, administrators, and support staff) describe teaching, learning, and leadership in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

2. How do stakeholders describe their rationales for wanting change in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

3. How do stakeholders describe the challenges they believe warrant change in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

4. How do stakeholders describe successful school reform in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

5. How do stakeholders describe shared values and norms in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

The chapter is divided into five sections with each section addressing one of the themes that make up the transformational potential framework. For each theme, stakeholder groups will be treated as separate, embedded cases, followed by a discussion of the school as a whole case. Therefore, each section includes the same subheadings – teachers, administrators, support staff, the school – under which can be found analyses and findings derived from the data collected within that case. Particular attention will be given to how synthesis or dissonance in the data affects the transformational potential of the ACSC reform at Southmore Middle School.

Synthesis of Ideologies

Findings in this section answer the research question: How do stakeholders describe teaching, learning, and leadership in an urban middle school undergoing reform? *Ideologies* are personal beliefs and ideals. For the purposes of this study, ideologies form the basis for one's understanding of education. Ideologies are personal, and therefore vary from person to person. A great deal of variance in stakeholder's educational ideologies will limit the transformational potential of a reform effort.

Teachers

       Beliefs about teaching. As teachers describe their acts of teaching, they reveal their ideologies about the practice of educating. The teachers reveal varied beliefs about what quality teaching involves.

       Teaching is about relationships. Chelsea sees relationships as a key tenet in her ideology of teaching:

> Okay, socially, I think that the kids they need – a lot of them lack it, they don't have it at home, they need people – they need to know people care about them. And that's how I kind of draw my kids in. I show them that there are people that care about them. And that if they find that, if you show them – if you care about them and show them how they wanted to be treated, then, they'll want to learn. It's true, it just works like that.

Miranda believes that relationship-building is an important component of teaching. She describes talking to students about career goals:

> I think it definitely matters to the kids when you ask and are interested in that and encourage them. That definitely makes a difference and they are sometimes surprised, the kids that I've talked to, if I've said to them, "Have you ever thought of . . . " and it's something they had never considered, and they just kind of look at you like, "Why would I go into that?" And then they hear what that career would involve and it is something that they're interested in.

Miranda notes it can be difficult to build relationships with the high number of students most teachers have, but her words reveal that she values relationships and makes a point to create them:

> And I think it's hard because most of the teachers on team have 140 kids or something. So not necessarily for everyone, but I think we've all connected with a number of kids who – we've been able to have those conversations with and give our input to – and you'd be really great at this, have you ever considered. So I think every teacher has their small pocket of kids that they may be able to just connect with on that level.

Miranda, describes how nonacademic factors like food and routine disruptions

affect learning and how addressing these needs is an important part of teaching:

> If they're a few minutes late and breakfast has closed, they don't get breakfast. If
> their bus is late, they're not getting breakfast. And then they're in here, and my
> kids, of course, deal with everything a little bit more loudly than the rest of the
> kids. But I'm not getting a word out of them if they hadn't had breakfast. And I
> think that's pretty typical of any kid, but that's a huge thing. If their parents are
> putting them on the bus, thinking they're getting breakfast at school, the bus is
> late, breakfast is closed and for some – I had no idea what goes on down the
> cafeteria, but if the bus is late, they don't get breakfast, which I think is
> completely unfair. . . . And I think they're not getting big enough meals and they
> all pretty much hate the lunch. So then they're not – you know if they missed
> breakfast, they come in, they don't work all morning because they're mad about
> that or they're cold or whatever, and they don't get a lunch – or they get a lunch,
> but they refuse to eat it, we just lost the whole day.

For Miranda, understanding what students go through both inside and outside of school

is part of building relationships and is an essential part of teaching. Miranda goes on to

describe a recent incident with a specific student:

> My kids come to school some days and – I mean as with any city. Yesterday, I
> had one of the girls show up and she's like shivering. So I said to her, "A, did
> you take the bus?" No, she had walked to school. "Where is your coat? Why
> wear a sweater? Where were your gloves?" "I don't have gloves." So, she spent
> the morning trying to warm up. I had got just nothing out of her all morning.

Miranda reveals that caring for the whole student is part of her ideology. She knows that

making sure students' needs are met is an essential first step in teaching.

Teaching is about order. Julia offers the following discussion of classroom

procedures, revealing her beliefs about teaching and learning:

> I think, for me, I taught high school, so I'm always grilling them about it,
> something as simple as like bring a pen. Yeah, I used to be nice and give them
> and I don't anymore and they, you know, either get it from a friend or they don't
> get a grade for the day. You know, simple things like that, but other teachers

baby them and treat them they're still in 5th or 6th grade and like it's grueling that some teachers do that and some don't, but it's important that like when you have team meeting, grade level team meetings, that you talk about that like our team has set. We have four basic expectations and we all have the same, we all have the same signs made, so in their transition, they know when they look above the board and it's the same thing in my room as it would be in somebody else's room and that helps.

At first glance, and perhaps in her own mind, Julia's response represents her high expectations for her students. However, by focusing on something as simple as bringing a supply to class, Julia reveals that policy and procedure are key in her beliefs about teaching and learning. Julia equates expectations with rules. Julia's response also suggests that consistency is a key tenet of her educational ideology. It is very important to her that her teammates share her expectations.

Julia describes her students' academic skills, and in turn, reveals her own beliefs about teaching:

I mean, they don't remember what you did in September. Never mind what you did a month ago. Whenever you give them a test or a quiz, they want to use their notes. They have no like memorization, no recall. . . . Yeah, it's a skill that hasn't been either taught or you know, pushed upon them that the teachers got tired of arguing, so they're like, "Yeah, use your notes," you know.

Part of it is laziness too. They're lazy. You know, they don't want to do homework and they won't do homework and then you do a spreadsheet of what they owe and they can't believe they missed that many homeworks and they start backpedaling and I have no make up calls. I schedule myself to correct papers and if you can't meet my deadlines, why do I need to make another schedule on another time to correct papers that you didn't have enough responsibility to hand them in.

Much like her previous comments, Julia probably imagines that she is benefiting her students by holding them to high standards. In reality, her decision to focus on deadlines suggests punctuality is more important to her than mastery. She talks a great deal about

their academic readiness levels and need for remediation, but her discussion of "rules"

reveal priorities that may prevent her students from making progress.

Teaching is collaborative. Several teachers discuss collaboration, which has

been a key component of the ACSC reform. Most teachers seem to agree that

collaboration is an important part of teaching. Miranda, a special education teacher,

notes that teacher teaming does happen as Southmore, but she, unfortunately, is excluded

because of her schedule. When asked about collaboration, Miranda responds:

> I have a hard time with that one because I don't get to go to all those data team
> meetings, because also I'm having periods with my kids. . . . The rotation I'm in
> right now, it doesn't afford me that opportunity. So I don't get to go to those
> meetings where all the 7th-grade language arts teachers are together and looking
> at data and getting to interact and do co-planning and all that. But it does happen.

When asked if teachers are able to observe one another in the classroom, Kathleen

responds:

> I wish we could. . . . Especially being a newer teacher, I would really like to see
> other teachers teach. . . . There are a few teachers in the school I would just like
> to see their teaching style and see – because right now, I'm also going for my
> cross endorsement to teach middle school, so I'd like to see what's happening in
> seventh and eighth grade and how the kids are different and stuff.

Carmen, who mentors new teachers says, "the idea and the concepts of collaboration are

great, greatly improved this year." She goes on to describe her positive experience with

collaboration and helping new teachers:

> I have a very positive experience. But again, you have to take a lot of stuff. It's
> for the person, your team. I relish the idea being to help somebody and to share –
> that's all in your attitude. So, this experience was great and so this is your
> playing field. I'm very flexible, do what you want and we'll learn together from
> it. And let's just see making you feel comfortable with everybody here is vitally
> important.

Carmen's answers reveal that collaboration and mentoring are important parts of her educational ideology. Carmen also values data-driven decision making: "Also we have team meetings, so my team of 8th-grade teachers, we work really well together, we're flexible. We then collect data on kids that are having difficulties." Carmen serves in a voluntary position as a data leader, further showing her belief in the importance of collecting and analyzing data:

> I've been trained and I felt we're really worked well together in getting our curriculum and alignment. We will be held accountable and I do all the data collection for all of us. So, I could speak on my behalf as far as with the data I'm working collectively, even with my team upstairs. So that's 8th-grade across the school that we do that. And yes, our lessons on alignments, we're running the best that's ever run this year.

Carmen feels that focusing on data has helped teachers work collaboratively to improve student achievement. However, the data does not suggest that all teachers share Carmen's view of data as an integral part of collaboration.

Beliefs about leadership. When asked if ACSC has changed the way decisions are made at Southmore, Kathleen says, "I don't think so, not yet. Julia provides a similar answer: "It's supposed to. Has it? I haven't seen it." Julia adds: "I mean there are some things that just come from [the building principal], and that's it."

Peter voices his colleagues' concerns about shared leadership:

> It's happening at this level and some people – some naysayers or at least those that were maybe questioning the process would say, "Well, if you don't have top down management that can make a decision right away and make it happen, then you're going to have problems with the time element and decision making." And I don't necessarily think that's going to be so. I think in fact, you might have a more timely response to problems when you have the community here working on it and being able to institute the changes rather than waiting.

Jonathan believes administration must work to increase buy-in: "I mean, we need obviously the help to get to that point and get people invested. I'm all for that, but it's one part of the overall process and yeah, you need leadership." He continues to discuss his perception of Southmore's administration:

> I mean, you would like to think there are people who will all be in the same thing and that's basically wanting the best for your students would very easily get on board and kind of fall into place in terms of doing the procedures and the things that you need to do as a team consistently to make things happen, but I mean there are managers for a reason and there's administration for a reason because it's your job to see that those I's get dotted and T's gets crossed and I think sometimes, the administration here is a little afraid. I don't know if it's union-wise or just lack the capability. I like – I don't know, they just need a little more focus from the top.

Carmen observes a lack of communication from leadership: "What goes on in the leadership team meeting really isn't carried through to the rest of it. There's such a disconnection with a lack of communication." Jonathan feels the problem stems from not taking action:

> I mean, it's all fine and good to get everybody together and make up the plan and everybody has to agree, but at some point, you say, "Okay, this is the best we got to go with. This is what we're going to do." And then from that point forward, you kind of do that and it's the doing that and getting everybody to do that and stay on task and be consistent.

Kathleen feels that these feelings about administration affect morale: "Administratively, the morale here is very low towards our high ups in the building, so I mean that's taking its toll on what the teachers are willing to do." Kathleen recognizes that when there is not a synthesis between what teachers believe about leadership and what administrators believe about leadership, motives for engaging with reform will be negatively impacted.

Beliefs about learners. Not surprisingly, the teacher group expressed more perceptions about students than the other stakeholder groups interviewed. Teachers interact more with students than any other staff members on campus, and these interactions, arguably, affect every facet of the school. The teachers interviewed talk about students, revealing their beliefs about learners and the context in which they learn and live.

Several teachers discussed student engagement in their interviews, revealing student engagement, or the lack of it, as an important concern. Julia sees issues with discipline and engagement in the classroom: "And academically, a lot of our time is spent on behavior and getting them to come in, sit down, get the work out and you know." Jeremiah describes uneven levels of engagement:

> I have some kids that want to be here and some kids that don't want to be here. . . . It's just a mix. Do you know what I mean? Some kids are great and really engaged and you have some kids don't. They don't want to be here – so it's just definitely a mix.

Miranda feels engagement is important, but, more so than some of her colleagues, Miranda seems to believe that achieving engagement is the teacher's responsibility, not the student's:

> If you tap into something they're interested in and I think this is pretty much school-wide. It's hard to find 1200 different ways to teach something, like we might have six kids who are really interested in something and two that don't care for that, because I have three girls now. And the girls aren't always interested in what the boys are interested in and I have such a small group. I'm able to work around that. I think that's a big challenge for teaching, to define being – you know, 16 different ways to teach the same thing, because you have kids who are interested in 16 different things.

Jonathan describes working to engage a disinterested student:

So I go and find the kids who are motivated, who want to work and I try to get that girl involved and we did, later on in that class she was doing skim work at the computer, but for that part, the beginning – it's tough when you get beat down because all it takes is a couple of knuckleheads in a class to kind of throw it off and you spend all of your time focusing and you're trying to keep these guys from not screwing up your class that you don't get through what you need and so some of the students suffer.

Kathleen is concerned about engagement, but she feels that she has no power to change students' engagement levels:

I know that I'm doing everything I can and looking at things at all different ways and no matter what I do, I cannot make a child care. I can't make them do it. They have to make that choice, whether or not they want to do what they have to do to succeed.

Teachers' willingness and perceived ability to affect student engagement reveals their ideologies about learners. While the teacher group seems to agree that student engagement is important and teaching is difficult without it, they express varying beliefs about who is responsible for increasing engagement. As discussed by Diamond et al. (2004), teachers in diverse contexts often hold deficit ideologies that contribute to a decreased responsibility for student learning at the organizational level. Kathleen's feeling that she cannot overcome students' lack of engagement reveals her own beliefs about her diverse urban students. But Kathleen's ideologies may also suggest a decreased sense of responsibility for student learning at the school level.

Teachers further reveal their beliefs about learners as they talk about the urban context in which they teach. Jonathan describes Southmore as a diverse school:

Teaching in the [district] schools, this is a tough district. I think anybody kind of knows that that's been here for like that time and we have a strong cross-section of students from all different kind of backgrounds and races. So it's very integrated school. There's a lot of minorities and that makes it challenging; it makes it difficult.

It's a very diverse population. We got exposure to a lot of different—you know, ways of going about things and outlooks on life. I mean, that's a good thing—you know, you have to deal—the white kids have to be with the Puerto Ricans and the Black kids and you know, to a smaller extent the Asians and whatnot.

Several teachers describe having been forewarned about taking on a job in an urban school. Chelsea was warned about taking a position at Southmore where teacher turnover was high:

I had a lot of warnings. . . . Yes I did. I had lots of people tell me that this was going to be an experience for me and truthfully, it was a week by week thing, they could not believe I survived, you know I stayed, because evidently there was a few teachers that went—during my job, before I got it. . . . But yeah, but I got over that quick, you know, and the other is that—I hate to say, but it's more like you just—it's live and learn kind of thing, I'm sure you understand.

Miranda received similar responses to her decision to teach and then stay at Southmore:

I got a lot of, "God Bless you," and you know, "Good luck!" I was pretty well aware of what I was getting into. I requested the position. So last year, the end of the year though, I definitely got a lot of, "Where are you going next year?" Like no one – and again, last year is my first year, I don't know the total history of it, but apparently, there's not been a lot of teacher attrition in this program. So, they just thought I would – you know a different classroom in this building, but somewhat of a shock to people.

Julia compares Southmore to the school where she used to teach:

The kids here, compared to where I used to teach are totally different. In my opinion, they come in with a lot on their shoulders and they have a lot of things they deal with. . . . I just started to do breakfast this year and I was so amazed to see how many kids eat breakfast here and how many kids eat lunch here. And it amazes me, you know, when it's getting towards the end of the month and before the next check because the numbers increase.

Like Julia's, Kathleen's experiences have been in contexts unlike those in which she now teaches:

Fifteen years ago, I was sitting pretty much in eighth grade or ninth grade, so I'm not that far off with these kids and in that time, it's unfortunately comparatively speaking from 15 years ago, I mean, I grew up in a pretty much a very small

district . . . and I would've never dared doing some things that out of place. You wouldn't think that, and even the worst kids in the school wouldn't be as this reactive with some of the kids we have here and that's a big change over 15 years.

Kathleen contributes the discipline concerns at Southmore with change over time; she does not make the connection that she grew up in a very different environment. Julia makes a connection between students' socioeconomic status and their behavior, revealing her beliefs about the urban context:

> So you have kids that maybe don't have the best or the best finances at home and behavior wise, they're very defensive. They don't understand like parameters of respect and that, you know, when I was I kid you always respected the adults, teachers. And here they're told that, "If you don't get it, you don't give it." You know, I have more than one kids say that to me. . . . If you don't get respect, you don't have to give it. So that makes it difficult. I find that the manner in which they interact with each other is combative at times and they're very derogatory in what they say and words they use.

Ironically, Carmen uses Julia's exact words to describe her relationship with students:

> I had a student – I will never ever get used to seeing one of my students taken out of here in cuffs. There's within me, there's always – I believe that's a reflection of classroom management. I don't like kids up, I take – "This is my classroom." I have mutual love and respect for my kids, wonderful rapport with them. You give respect, you get respect. I think I've had one write up in my years, where others have 500 for a school year. There's something wrong there.

Beliefs about respect – who deserves it and how it is obtained – is an important part of teachers' ideologies. Julia is surprised that students don't automatically offer respect to their teachers. Carmen believes she commands the respect that she expects from students by showing them respect in return. These differences in beliefs represent a lack of synthesis of ideologies. Teachers harbor disparate beliefs about students, and these ideologies will affect how the engage with reform.

All teachers interviewed brought up students' backgrounds and home lives. Some

teachers, like Jeremiah, describe Southmore students as "at-risk:"

> Well, there are definitely a lot of kids that are just great, where they want to learn, they really are -- you know, needs school. . . . Yeah, there's definitely like at risk kids, kids that just need more attention. . . . Yeah, home, the communities. They just need some strength there and support.

Johnathan begins to unpack the term "at-risk," a term that for him includes single-parent

homes and home languages other than English:

> You know kids that overcome, you know home lives that are lousy and you know, come here, and instead of – their best part of the day, is being in a normal kind of school environment and the kids that want to learn. . . . Some of it is a struggle. Some of these kids have parents and their best adult interaction of the day is when they come to school and it's – you're dealing with that kind of kid here, so it's tough. . . . Then there's the lack of support from parents, there's the single-parent families, there's the kids that—the parents don't care, that don't speak English, don't even try and learn the language. You know, it's just frustrating.

Jonathan continues:

> They're not brought up with the social skills they need and they don't have strong parents. I've come from single-parent families and you know – I mean, I have such respect for single parents, I'm doing it – you know, I have a wife and it's hard enough for two people, I cannot imagine how to do it with just one.

> And that's got to be so hard. I just can't even picture it. I even appreciate it when my mom was a single parent for a while because my parents were actually divorced when I was 13. That's hard when these kids don't come in with that structure, with that understanding socially of how to interact that appreciation for now, so it's hard.

> Teachers' beliefs about students and their urban context affect their perceptions

of their post-secondary opportunities. Chelsea discusses the post-secondary options she

sees for her students:

> I think what it is, is I think that I look at my kids and I look at them and I realize the money for college. And it's not – do you know what I mean? Some of these

kids have six or seven brothers and sisters and there's a lot going on. I mean what I see every day – I mean it changed me as a person.

So, how I look at—you know, you look at those homeless people and you realize these are some of your students and that's scary. But yeah, but that's probably why, because I think to myself, they go to a technical high school, then that's already paid for and they can get a career and make it for themselves afterwards. And then if they decide to go to college, that's great. But if not, they got something a fallback on.

Chelsea feels she has been "changed" by witnessing her students in extreme circumstances. She believes that educational goals may be difficult for them to achieve because of their financial situations, but she describes a plan that makes it possible. Chelsea's ideology includes the belief that post-secondary education is crucial, and there is a way for all students to achieve further education. Kathleen similarly takes a proactive step as she describes talking to her 6th-graders about college:

I mean, just because you're working hard doesn't mean you're guaranteed you'll see through college. And it's a hard conversation to have especially at the sixth grade, but it is a conversation we have with them. We want them to think about what's going to happen in ten years, where they're going to be in ten years. And looking at their parent's lives and/or whoever is taking care of them and what do they have to do to get to this point, would you want something better for yourself and things like that.

Chelsea and Kathleen's responses reveal not only their beliefs about the importance of continued education but also their beliefs that part of teaching is encouraging students to pursue post-secondary education, even if it seems difficult.

Miranda feels her students' contexts limit their post-secondary goals:

I think they don't necessarily have enough exposure to what they could be doing. You know, they're kind of limited by circumstance and what the people around them are doing. Very few middle school children will say, "I want to be a teacher," because they pretty much hate school. You know, and we all did.

Julia feels that parents contribute to the limitations she perceives as facing her urban

students:

> The others want to see them get a high school diploma. I have seen some just happy to graduate 8th grade. I have parents say that, "Well, 8th grade was good enough for me." And we have kids in here that are like turning 16 that are still in 8th grade. . . . You know, and they could send them – the parents could send them out at 16. That's crazy. And you try to talk about like the importance of an education, and at least having a diploma, show something to an employer that you can at least show up and get through school. You know, a lot of people don't want to hire kids with GED's.

Sasha feels reaching out to and educating parents is an important part of helping her

students meet their post-secondary goals:

> Sometimes I think school is an afterthought. Because of all the other environmental and social issues going on, school is an afterthought. Can you blame them? No, but we have to do a better job of convincing parents and marketing to parents also.

> Johnathan describes students with a variety of academic readiness levels and

other factors that he believes will shape their educational attainment:

> You want to have high expectations, I mean, if you've taught here long enough, you know that there's kids – you kind of have smart kids and you have high expectations for them and then you have your kids. Smart kids, you have the kids with stride, but academically, they're challenged – I mean, they're the B level students and then there's the SPED kids and the ones who are going to try, but they're going to struggle to get by and pass, and then you've got your 10%. You get to the trouble to make your kids who are 15 in the eighth grade and showing around their ultrasound picture to their friends – that was last week. We have a 15-year-old 8th-grader who's pregnant. What are my expectations for her? That hopefully she finishes 8th-grade and start high school.

Jonathan also offers the following anecdote as an example of how students limit the

potential of other students. Jonathan recounts the harassment of an African American

student who was academically successful:

> He was intelligent, he would carry books to school and you know was trying to be an intelligent person, and . . . the Black kids in this neighborhood were like, "Why are you trying to be white?" And I asked them – I asked some of the kids – I'm like, "Does that still happen?" And they're like, "Yeah, it does." They're like, "That still a problem that – ." And then like you realize when you extrapolate that and turn around, what you're saying is that you know, to be Black you've got to be stupid or ignorant, just like, really? And they're like, "Oh yeah, that kind of happen," like I just don't get that, you know.

Julia seems troubled by students' and families' choices, which she feels prioritize the wrong things:

> So we're struggling with that, you know, we have kids with difficult home lives. The kids don't like dress codes so you're always struggling with things like that, and they'll tell you they don't have the money for, but then the next day, they'll have $200 sneakers on their feet, you know.

> It's like how they are determined to spend their money, it doesn't always like – it blows my mind that they say they have no money, but the next day they show up with a $200 sneakers, you know, but they are getting free lunch or free breakfast.

This rather stereotypical observation reveals an ideology that may prevent Julia from succeeding as a teacher of urban students. Miranda chalks up challenges to "typical middle school" behavior:

> I think they're typical middle school students. I think when you're working in an elementary or high school, you're not aware of what a middle school student is really like. They're all good kids, they definitely get into that group mentality sometimes, but it's the age they are. And I think a lot of us can remember what we were like when we were at that age.

The lack of synthesis in the area of ideologies will limit the transformational potential of the ACSC reform, as stakeholder's ideologies naturally inform their intentions and motives for engaging with reform. With such varied beliefs about learners, intentions are likely to be equally varied, and beliefs will dictate stakeholders' rationale for engaging with reform.

Administrators

Beliefs about leadership. As leaders, the administrators interviewed have no
doubt reflected on their beliefs about leadership. Their responses reveal their ideologies
about what qualities a leader should exhibit, particularly while taking part in a reform.

Building principal, Clayton, shares the following observation about himself as a
leader:

> And part of my, I would say, my leadership is I understand my strengths and my
> weaknesses. Part of my weaknesses as I look at this whole process – I mean,
> being narcissistic, I believe I can fix all these problems. I'm a psychologist. I'm a
> Special Ed teacher, supervisor, administrator, therapist, all that.

Clayton hopes ACSC will allow him to take a step back as a leader:

> I'm hoping that at the end of next year, I can really sit back and be the absorbing
> eagle for the school then say, "What help do you need here? I'm over here." I
> finally put myself out of the craziness instead of the juror. I'm the observer and
> the monitor.

In response to a question about whether or not ACSC aligned with her personal goals as
a leader, Ruth responds in the affirmative, focusing on her belief in the importance of
parental involvement:

> Absolutely 100% yes. I believe in the whole philosophy with community and the
> parents and we have many wonderful parents out in this community. . . .
> Absolutely, and unfortunately and I know as I said there are many wonderful
> teachers who buy-in. I just wished that everybody did meaning when we voted
> on it, it was 99% agreement. So it's disappointing in the sense that they haven't
> really jumped on board. But those that do, we bring our parents in, we bring them
> in to our classroom, projects, talent shows that we do, when it really should be
> something that's done school-wide.

Ruth suggests that not everyone at Southmore shares the value she places on parental
involvement. She is disappointed that the effort to bring parents into the school is not

occurring on a campus-wide scale but is instead limited to a few committed individuals

and special programs.

Joel describes his interactions with teachers and his desire to be viewed as an

administrator who will listen:

> A lot of times I'll sit and they'll ask the teachers what do you think or they'll come to me and I think they're more willing to come to me and say we need to talk to you, we don't like how this happened or what were the reasons behind this and things like that and not in an adversarial way, but they'll come and ask questions and things like that. And then they'll state their feelings regarding issues that are happening even outside of the building like a teacher's contract was just settled and it's settled in a point of contention right now, because of some things that were said about teachers and things like that.

In response to a question about his beliefs on teachers sharing decision-making,

Joel responds in the affirmative: "Yeah. That's the way it should be. I mean and these

certain things like Truman: the bucks stops here."

But Joel's response immediately moves from shared decision-making to

challenges that he seems to feel are inhibitive:

> But the thing is we have to –- what we have to do is pick the areas that we know we can change, that will make a difference and that we can change. . . . Some of the things like I said before, maybe we can.

Joel goes on to mention the challenge in achieving one of his main structural goals,

changing the school hours. He notes the unlikely probability of getting the resources

needed for extra buses. While Joel states that he values shared decision-making, his

practical concerns about resource allotment preclude making this intention a reality:

> I mean because it will all come down to impacting our budget. So the thing is, I think we pretty much recognize we can make a lot of changes inside the building internally and then start working externally. I think we show them that it's

working and we show them what we've achieved. It's okay, fine, then we'll go with that.

While Joel believes in the importance of involving stakeholders in the reform process, he feels hindered by outside forces, namely those controlling his budget.

On the contrary, building principal, Clayton, claims to have "listened," but his response is inflammatory, claiming that some teachers just "don't have it" and should leave:

> I really kind of show them that this isn't their cup of tea. Right church, wrong pew, maybe, education, learning, you know whatever, you don't have it, it's because I've watched, I've observed, I've listened, you don't want to make change, you're fighting me. And again, I love a fight, I absolutely love a fight based on philosophy, show me this, show me that, show me your data, show me your piece, show me what, rather than oh I don't want to, I don't have the time, we got a union contract, sorry.

There is some inconsistently in administrators' beliefs about leadership, particularly in the area of shared decision-making.

Beliefs about learners. Administrators also discuss their perceptions of students, revealing their beliefs about learners. Joel describes Southmore students, particularly 7th-graders, as typical middle school students affected by hormones:

> The 7th grade – I consider the most challenged grade in the middle school because a 6th-grader, still you can mold them and they're still sort of scared and everything. The 7th grade, you're old hat. So you know, between being in the middle and the age, the hormones kicking in, that's usually the worse grade. It tends to warp your sense of right and wrong sometimes. You hold the line and be very strict. It causes some problems, I think. You have to sort of nurture and work with the kids in a lot of ways.

Joel's beliefs about middle school learners include his observation that "nurturing" and "working with the kids" is more effective than taking punitive measures.

Melinda makes this observation about the diversity of Southmore's student body:

> So I think that when somebody comes from the outside and asks what is it like and they already have preconceived notions of what they think it might be like, I try to explain that even though it's such a diverse population, it's amazing at this level to see the kids not adjusting to it but how they deal with it. Because if you watch them, you would think that they were all the same in their eyes. They don't see groups of people as being different or they definitely have the ability, because they've been probably doing this since they were younger in school. They have the ability to get along with each other, accept one another and work collaboratively in a classroom, in a school setting, because they've been doing it.

Melinda sees Southmore's diversity as a positive: "A lot of people from the outside think that that would create a lot of problems and it actually doesn't because the kids have – that's what the kids know. They're all here and they accept each other's differences."

Despite Melinda's positive outlook regarding racial and ethnic diversity at Southmore, she acknowledges that the diversity in ability level presents a challenge:

> We have a lot of kids that have repeated somewhere along the way and are still very far below grade level, so we get a lot of disenfranchised kids that "I've done this, I've been here, I'm older than my classmates" kind of a thing which presents a whole other challenge for the student and the teachers. We at one time maybe could name eight to ten kids that are grade level. This is going back a long time that fell in that ballpark. Now unfortunately, we have a lot more of them.

Melinda's ideology includes beliefs about retention, which she does not see as beneficial to the students who do not move up with their peers. Melinda sees retention affecting levels of engagement and impeding academic success.

Becky observes that nonacademic factors influence student achievement:

> A lot of our kids come to school hungry and they go home hungry. Do you know what I mean? So I mean we have some needs that are I don't [think] being met by the district and I don't know that ACSC would meet those, but I think in discussion, anything we can do to help out those areas would be great.

Becky offers food instability as a factor affecting many Southmore students. Becky

recognizes that students whose basic needs are not met are less likely to succeed in

school. Melinda also identifies a range of ability in social and civic skills:

> I would say the same where the range is as large for their social and behavioral abilities. We have kids that come here every day that do the right thing every day all day long. They follow the rules, they're pleasant, their teachers would classify them as cooperative a lot of the time. And then, we have kids that are somewhere in the middle and kids that are very uncooperative. So the range applies definitely to socially and behaviorally as well.

Melinda worries that teachers may let biases against certain groups of students affect

their expectations:

> Because of that, I think that a lot of teachers – not all teachers – I think a lot of teachers have different expectations for different groups of kids that are in front of them. So they may not raise the bar when in their mind, they have the lower performing group in the room. They may set it up in their mind or in their lesson plans that, "I'm going to introduce these three vocabulary and this concept, and we're going to do an activity and we're going to do a written assignment." They might have a whole different set of expectations for a group that they see as higher performing.

Melinda's concerns about groups of students being treated differently suggests an

ideology of equity.

Beliefs about teaching. Melinda's educational ideology includes the

understanding that students have a variety of lived experiences and learning styles that

makes a one-size-fits-all approach inappropriate:

> It's a very diverse population of students. We have – probably the majority of our students are Hispanic students that come from many different areas that are in our district and our district guidelines, street lines. We also have many other races and cultures of students here, so in front of our teachers every day is a group of kids that have much different backgrounds and have a lot of different background knowledge from the kids that they're sitting next to in the classroom.

I think the bigger challenge is for teachers, especially veteran teachers, to understand all of the different groups and backgrounds of the kids here. It creates a very large range of abilities academically, and so in the classroom, you have to take all that in, not just different ethnic backgrounds or different cultures, but also a lot of variety of academic abilities that are sitting on the room together at once.

Melinda recognizes the range of academic readiness levels as a challenge for teachers, but her response reveals that she values differentiation.

So our curriculum could be adapted to any or all of those kids, but the challenge is really for the teacher to do that with the kids that they have in front of them every day, which changes every period or every two periods. So you know, our teachers see over a hundred kids in the course of a day and so that I think is a challenge as far as implementing our curriculum.

Becky responds to a question about collaboration:

So I think the fact that they have time to meet and talk about kids and figure where the things are lacking, where the things are really good and share across core areas different ideas like I my Social Studies teachers in language arts and reading, they work very closely together. So like let's say if the language arts teachers are doing something on, I don't know, forming an opinion, you know then the social studies teacher will take something to happen in history and do a formulating opinion thing about that area. And I think science tries to do the same thing with math. They're working measurement, graphing, whatever. So they share information and I think that benefits everybody.

Becky's answer supports an ideology that includes collaboration as a key teaching practice. She describes teams of interdisciplinary teachers working together to plan lessons, and she believes this "benefits everybody."

Becky also describes data-driven decision making as part of her ideology of teaching:

We had data teams up and going before ACSC, but like anything else it takes a little while to get that up and running the right way through the process, and I think that the timing was right where they both kind of met up and people

understood now that "hey, we're doing this." It's not to make it harder, it's to make it easier.

Becky goes on to describe how data improves teaching:

> Because we have data teams with academic core area, the teachers are more able to brings samples of work, talk about what's going on with kids and share it with their team of four academic teachers. So that like let's say it's an issue with reading type piece, social studies teacher's willing to jump in and do something in support of what the reading teacher is doing.

Building principal, Clayton, values consistency and describes how he sees this as a key component of good teaching:

> I got two eighth grade teachers. I've used that with the eighth grade team, and basically, we got the same numbers here. But these last numbers, I have two teachers that don't have any D's or F's. And so I just get – and said well, is that good or bad? . . . I want you to analyze. What's wrong with this? Show me there's a gap analysis to this. Would you want to have your kid in this teacher's class or up here? Is this teacher harder, firmer, stricter or just been – teaching giving away a star?

> I said so when you go on a data team meeting you will think have work to do. Okay, your work is to look at the consistency or inconsistency of your team. And so that pattern of resistance. They want to have curriculum meetings – well I found a new book, better than – . Show me your work. How do you grade an F? What's an A with me? An A with me is a C with you.

The data shows an inconsistency among teachers, and Clayton feels that getting teachers on the same page – in terms of grading, in this case – is the primary goal of meeting time. Clayton values consistency over collaboration, as he dismisses the teachers' who "want to have curriculum meetings" while he calls instead for "a data team meeting."

Support Staff

    Beliefs about leadership. Grace observes that ACSC has initiated a move away from top-down leadership:

I mean, just the leadership alone. Just asking for someone's opinion about something; now they're reaching out more. We're not going to just make a decision until we know how you feel about it. Before decisions are just made and you don't own anything. It's like nobody cared what you had to think.

Demetria, the school's speech pathologist, feels that the administration still drives most

of the decision-making, despite the introduction of the steering committee:

So I think that if that became more of a priority, I think it would help get things done. But also, like you're saying, I think it's still frustrating with the whole decision-making. It's still not just the steering. I think it's still—yeah, it's still administration and then it's still influenced by the things that are not—or the steering committee making that decision.

Similarly, Kyle suggests that decision-making power still lies largely with

administration:

Well I would say that it's the building principal, the house principals and to some extent the [teaching vice principals] would be part of that decision making. At least have an input into that. And that's—I mean I don't know I could be wrong, but it seems like that's a typical model for leadership that we have a typical model.

When asked to define ACSC, however, Kyle notes a move toward more shared decision-

making as a key component:

So I guess it's sharing the leadership and not doing top down from administrators "this is what you're going to do and this is how we're going to do it and make sure it gets done." Now, it's going to be everybody is going to decide what we do.

There is a disconnect between what stakeholders believe about leadership and what they

perceive administration as believing about leadership.

Beliefs about learners. Many of the support staff members interviewed

discussed the students at Southmore in terms of their behavior, revealing a shared

ideology about how students should behave at school. Elena, whose own children have attended Southmore, relates an anecdote about her son and how things have changed since he was a middle school student:

> I don't know I think it's the mom in me. If you think about it, I'm a mother too. You know my eldest one is 25 and he came to visit me around the holidays, and he is like, "Ma, I can't get over how the school has changed in ten years." And my elder one just graduated in 2005 even and you would have never seen these kids walk through this building before the way they do. They just walk out of the class, they disrespect the teachers, they disrespect the staff, and this didn't happen ten years ago. This just blows me away as a mom.

As a parent and Southmore employee, Elena seems surprised at how much worse behavior has gotten over time. She sees the behavior infractions as signs of disrespect.

Deana gives a one-word answer – "wild" – when the interviewer asks her to describe the students at Southmore:

> Wild. [Laughs]. They are wild there. There could kids like to me, they all have a background of coming from somewhere and obviously there's a reason why they behave like that. They have family problems or they come from broken families and stuff like that.

Deana follows her answer with an explanation that attributes the "wild" behavior to "family problems." Deana goes on to describe a hypothetical interaction she might have with a student:

> I think they do because they do talk like once they get frustrated or if you ask them something, they're like, "Oh, you don't know what I go through. You don't know where I come from." Like they do see psychologists and all kinds of stuff and they go through groups also.

All of the support staff members interviewed discussed the difficult home live of Southmore students, and they offer these lived experiences, to some degree, as explanations for the students' poor behavior. Grace offers:

It's just the way that it is today now. Mom and dad are both working and if you have a single parent, they're working and kids are kind of given more responsibility on top of being empowered and you know what I mean? So it just causes for a big mess! And it's happening everywhere, it's not just city, it's everywhere. It's very sad, but –

Many participants specifically mention absent parents as contributing to students' behavior problems. Grace mentions single-parent households and households where both parents work. Grace offers an explanation for the perceived loosening of discipline among some parents:

They've educated the kids and they've empowered them and now, people have lost control of their children and I do see a lot of frustration in parents that some people may think don't care. They don't know what to do anymore because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing to their kid and then their kid going to [the Department of Children and Families]. And we're not even talking about hitting them or anything, just saying – There's a lot of kids that are saying things that sometimes aren't true.

As a parent, Grace sympathizes with parents to some degree. Here she identifies students showing their parents the same disrespect she sees students give teachers. Larry also identifies absent parents as a cause of discipline problems:

One time there were two parent household, now for the most part one parent household, Daddy's in jail, a lot of these kids are being raised by grandparents, foster homes. So the whole parent structure has changed in a generation. It has changed basically and I got to trust you? You look just as young as me how can I trust you? How did you get into this advantage and I did not?

Larry goes on to compare behavior in schools today to when he was a student, remarking that "mommy and daddy" would have taken care of the discipline in his day:

Put it in this way when I was in school, the principals were able to spank you that can't happen today. It can't. When I was growing up everybody wasn't so crazy. When I was growing up there wasn't as much as far as behaviors and discipline because basically all you had to do is make a phone call to mommy or daddy and that was it.

In response to what they perceive as difficult lived experiences, many participants express sympathy toward Southmore students. As a paraprofessional, Deana has been in a position to have students tell her about their lives:

> But I believe just from what I hear from their stories, they do go through stuff at home and I don't think they're rotten kids. It's not like they just come here and they decide – I mean, we have those too – but I don't think they just come here and decide, "Let me go and be a mess." They came to that point somehow.

Alicia recounts similar experiences of students telling her "in confidence" about what they've gone through:

> But sometimes you often wonder, they're opting out why. So they have a lot. They have a lot – you think – at times I come in here and I'm feeling upset, then a kid would sit down and tell me something in confidence. I'll go out – I look them like, "Okay," and I'll take it to heart. And I'll go home like, "Life is not that bad," because . . . imagine how they feel. Suddenly they don't have their parents, they go to foster care or they are home, they had to live with the parents, but the parents don't give a damn. And that breaks your heart, because you just want to take them in. But it is like you can't, so you do it – for some of them, this is the only sanctuary they have, the safety, because they're consistent, they know where they are every day. They know one another – one teacher or two and no matter what house, somebody cares somewhere.

Alicia expresses sympathy, saying that it "breaks [her] heart" to hear their stories. Alicia recognizes that school is a "sanctuary" for some students because it represents a constancy and a stability that they may not have at home. Grace notes the effect of students' home lives on their and others' academic achievement:

> Let's see, there's a lot of personal issues with some of the students that comes into the building. That affects the students that really come here and maybe have a more stable home life that come in and really want to have an education, so we're having a big issue with that.

Grace identifies students' "personal issues" as detrimental to the academic success of both themselves and others because of the discipline concerns that they cause.

Some participants, like Rodney, a violence prevention specialist, say that adults contribute to students' misbehavior. Here, Rodney discusses how students react to adult behavior:

> And not that they don't know right from wrong but we've been down paths that we want them to walk. And knowing we're here before they do, if we lead by example and stop acting like a child which some of us adults do. And the kids see that, the kids are very, very observing, they're very, very aware, they can sense blood, they can sense when you like them, they can say when you don't like them, they can sense when you're sincere, they can sense when you're not sincere—oh these kids are very astute, very astute – very. And that's one the unique things about them because their honest and I like the mere fact that – as they said, they call a spade a spade. There's nothing fake about these kids at Southmore Middle School.

Kyle makes a similar statement that "kids are kids" and will act out as far as they are allowed by adults to do so:

> So I don't think we have bad kids. I mean kids are kids. They're going to get away with what you let them get away with. And they know they're very smart at figuring out which teacher lets them do certain things whether its, you know have an iPod or this.

> But overall, I think that our kids are not bad. A lot of the referrals I get are for skipping class, or insubordination, but it's actually not – I mean the amount of referrals I get for a kid swearing at a teacher is very few. So I think there's definitely room to improve the school in terms of the students. I think its consistency – teacher consistency.

Rodney and Kyle share an ideology that places responsibility on adults for impacting student behavior. Genuinely caring for students is an important part of working in schools because as both men point out, students know who does and does not care about them, and their perception of adults' feelings about them determines their actions.

Other participants express similar ideologies that include treating students with respect. Jack, the in-school suspension teacher, identifies with the students:

> I like the kids. I understand where they're coming from. I understand the pressures. I grew up in the city. I'm the product of a one-parent family. I know what a lot of them are going through.

In his role as ISS teacher, Jack encounters students who have committed discipline infractions. He describes here that he believes treating students with respect is an important part of his role:

> Some students – I don't want to say – there's always a small group of students that no matter what you do, they're either not going to get it or they're not going to follow the rules as best they can, but then a lot of the students that come down there are first timers. They make one mistake, they get sent down there for a day or two and they don't want to be there. I respect that and I treat them with respect. And I know that's an important facet.

Jack talks elsewhere in his interview about wanting to decrease recidivism in the ISS program, and he sees treating students, especially first-time ISS students, with respect as an important means of doing so. Grace also feels that it is important to see students as individuals and respect their lived experiences:

> The kids that do come in like don't – I'm talking about the ones that may have issues. I don't really – I think they're just looked at as student and not an individual, but that's starting to change a little bit.

Grace's comment recognizes that not all adults treat students, especially challenging ones, with respect.

Some of the participants in the support staff group discuss students' post-secondary opportunities in relation to their urban context, revealing their ideologies about urban learners. Deana and Grace express their beliefs that all students can graduate and go on to succeed in college. Deana believes all students can succeed, including those with learning disabilities:

They do have strengths. I mean, they could all succeed. They're all smart children and I do work with learning disability children and to me they're all great. They have organization goals. They have like, you know, very minor things that could be fixed easily and they could definitely succeed. They could grow up to go to college and finish and everything.

Grace believes all students can graduate and go to college, but she remarks that not all of her colleagues feel the same way:

Teachers, I think they're split. A lot of them talk to the kids about college and high school, moving forward and then I do know that there are some people who say, "If you go…" I think if we stressed in school there is no if. If you always said, "When you go to college…" that it just sinks into their head and it's just the way it's going to work out. There's no if. It doesn't matter who they are, it doesn't matter where they come from, just when you go to college, we're getting ready for you to go to college. Even if the kids say something negative about it, it just doesn't matter. Keep saying the same thing.

Kyle, a school social worker, talks a great deal about students' post-secondary goals. He notes here that it is problematic that so many Southmore students do not have plans for their futures:

Well I think that's another problem with, in general, that there isn't a whole lot of looking ahead. And again, it could be that I've just been in middle school too long, but the kids here at least the ones that I typically see don't have a whole lot of – "don't know" what they're going to be doing after high school. And I know that we send over about 400 kids every year to [the high school Southmore feeds into] – only half graduate.

But we definitely get some kids that know what they want to do: "I want to be a nurse. I want to do plumbing." Something like that which is great that they already have an idea, but I think a lot of our students doesn't know. And I don't know if that's a problem or if the problem is that they just don't value the education.

Kyle voices a belief that middle school teachers and staff members have a responsibility to help students understand and plan for their post-secondary educational options. Kyle

reflects what causes the absence of post-secondary planning and notes the fact that many

Southmore students do not have family members who have gone to college:

> But if you look at the majority of students, again, I don't know if it's – if it's just I'm not knowing or just they're not able to see that far ahead and kind of delay gratification to the point where – you know, I don't know. It's something that's philosophically it's a difficult question because if you look at some – like helplessness. You know a lot of these families, nobody in their family went to college and you know, maybe mom and dad they don't have a great job, they make just a little bit of money.

The support staff members interviewed largely focus on behavior as a way of expressing

their ideologies about learners. In addition, their perceptions of learners are largely

influenced by their understandings of the learners' lived experiences which they perceive

as difficult. It is important to consider how these perceptions influence stakeholders'

individual beliefs about students and their collective sense of responsibility for student

learning. While Diamond et al. (2004) discuss this aspect of school culture in terms of

teacher expectations, the data in the present study suggests that all stakeholders'

ideologies influence school culture and determine a reform's transformational potential.

The School

 Beliefs about learners in sub-populations. Some stakeholders voice ideologies

specific to sub-populations at Southmore. Miranda, a special education teacher,

discusses how special education teachers at Southmore have not been able to participate

in ACSC in the same way as regular education teachers:

> Yesterday, there was a teacher's meeting for example, and I was – this is something that frustrates me – I still have to go to all the district wide special ed trainings, so I have now missed two meetings that were heavily ACSC, our professional development on the day after Martin Luther King [Day] there was

professional development that not a single special ed teacher in the building was present for, because we have to go to district-wide [professional development].

Miranda sees this as an extension of an already-present inequity for special education: "Yeah, and it really only affected special ed, which was – we're trying to follow like, 'Okay.' Sometimes our kids are being excluded from things and now the teachers are too." For Miranda, this represents and ideology of equity, a value that she does not feel is institutionalized at Southmore.

Social studies teacher, Sasha, describes the bilingual program at Southmore, which segregates English language learners until they pass a series of tests and eventually move into the general education classroom:

> They receive separate instruction by bilingual teachers and it has something to do with the number of months they've been in school and they kind of – again, it goes from a level three to a level two to a level one, related to them integrating in to regular education.

Sasha questions whether or not the program benefits learners:

> Building consistency into the program. If you look at our statistics and our scores over the last three years, we've had seen a decline and I think a lot of it has to do with consistency and I think a lot of it has to do with programmatic changes that really is in the best interest of schools. We could do better. I'm not a bilingual teacher though.

Sasha describes having ESL students in her classroom who have exited the bilingual program:

> Some, yes, absolutely. Some are fully capable, ready, and absolutely on the dime. Others, again, they're kids. They're students. There's going to be a range. There's not one fit for every child. There's going to be a range of performance.

Sasha questions the design of the bilingual program but doesn't feel entirely capable of voicing her concerns because she is "not a bilingual teacher." She says the program is

successful for some students and not others, stating her belief that "there's not one fit for every child."

Melinda describes pull-out programs for students identified as gifted and talented, which some may view as another inequity. Melinda concedes that "homogenous grouping" is a "trapped system" that they have tried to move away from despite still having pull-outs:

> I think that although we kind of got away from homogenous grouping the way it was at one time where it was definitely a trapped system and we've gone to more of a homogenous grouping and the academic teams, we still have that segment of kids that are looked at as the focus kids and they go out to a talented gifted program one day a week. So we know who those kids are. We know who the kids are that are in an Algebra class as 8th-graders getting high school credit because they're identified and they have a whole different math curriculum. So those packets of higher performing kids are definitely out there, and everybody knows who they are.

Grace talks quite a bit about a new program that pulls out only a small number of students districtwide for a gifted and talented program. Grace opposes the program and has tried to use her position as parent liaison to mobilize other parents to speak out against it:

> It's still 50/50 for me. I want to push and the parents that we had at the meeting discussing that. We had eight parents there and they said that – and their students were ineligible, but their feeling was and I reported it back to leadership was this shouldn't be open to only 60 kids. You're saying that only 60 kids from all of our feeder schools are smart enough to have this program? There's something wrong with that number. You're talking thousands of kids here, thousands – I think we have like eight or nine feeder schools coming in to Southside. Those kids are going to be chosen on recommendation, well, that doesn't always work either. . . . Maybe a test, something like that, but don't give it – base it on somebody's opinion.

Grace's opposition to the program reveals her belief that all students deserve a quality education. Building principal, Clayton, also opposes the program. He feels that gifted

and talented students should be served in the regular education classroom the same as students who receive special education services: "We've been integrating and including the co-teacher, so why would you exclude and isolate the top gifted kids?" Grace feels other parents will share her ideology and tries to explain to them the inequity she sees taking place:

> And so, I can help with that, but yeah – "Listen, do you know your kids aren't getting the same education," and I know I'm not supposed to do that, but ACSC school is we want an education, a good education for everybody and the kids have to have something to say about what they're learning. I mean, I'm having the same problem with my 7-year-old. They're worried about the kids that aren't up to speed, but my child is suffering. Well, you've got to look at everybody. You really have got to pull everybody in and everybody's got to be on the same page.

So far, her efforts have not been successful, but she still opposes the program.

> We are still it's like 50/50. We're pushing, but they're pushing – it's just a tug of war right now. They've already given out applications to the other schools about the program we're going to start, but none of us have any information on it. We don't know anything and I'm not a teacher. I can imagine what they're thinking. How are we going to do this program? They have this summer now to figure this out and that's – How does that sound successful? So the first year to me, looks like it will be a bum! We'll have to make it look like it went well, but –

Ironically, the ACSC reform calls for all stakeholder voices to be heard, and decisions are supposed to be unanimous, which in this case, they clearly are not. However, this example also demonstrates a hurdle in the reform curriculum; ACSC is supposed to empower the school's stakeholders and release it from district mandates, but there are instances like this when that simply does not happen. Grace reiterates her ideology of equity:

> So my vision for ACSC schools is the same education. There's no picking and choosing what's what. Yeah, there's going to be some kids that can't keep up,

but let's find out how we can bring them up to speed or we're going to have to work their level. Whatever we need to do.

Beliefs about change. The data reveals various stakeholder beliefs about reform, which represent a lack of synthesis of ideologies. For instance, the data suggests different ideologies about who is responsible for affecting change in schools. Technology teacher, Jonathan, believes that administration holds the ultimate responsibility for making change happen.

> You would like to think there are people who will all be in the same thing and that's basically wanting the best for your students would very easily get on board and kind of fall into place in terms of doing the procedures and the things that you need to do as a team consistently to make things happen. But I mean, there are managers for a reason and there's administration for a reason because it's your job to see that those I's get dotted and T's gets crossed.

Jonathan reiterates, "You need leadership." Conversely, the building principal, Clayton, talks about the reform letting him "really sit back" and be an "observer." Clayton counts it as a flaw that he has traditionally believed that he "can fix all these problems," and he values the "shared leadership" that ACSC champions and says that he's working to let the cadres be more responsible for making changes. Jonathan and Clayton's responses show that a synthesis of ideologies has not been achieved, as their beliefs about who is responsible for affecting change conflict. The administrator believes teachers should bear more of the responsibility for reform, while the teacher believes that administration needs to take more of a role. This lack of synthesis of ideologies hampers the transformational potential of the ACSC reform.

Clayton goes on to argue that teachers need to take more responsibility for change. He responds to teachers' hypothetical excuses:

Through ACSC, so do some work, because I'm not going to accept it. "Well, it was the kid." "I wish we had more time to . . ." Do what? Plan? You got ten periods per week, who's got ten periods a week? Nobody.

Clayton feels that the ACSC reform offers teachers the tools they should need to improve student achievement, and he is frustrated that they don't all share his beliefs about the reform.

Alternately, Chelsea talks about the ACSC coach and the role of the university partner in making changes at Southmore:

[The ACSC coach] makes herself pretty well-known around here, which is really great to know the people. I mean, everybody knew. I think everybody knows who she is. And that made me a little nervous in the beginning, because I thought that, "Oh, we're ACSC, you never know, you never see anybody from [the university]." It's nice to know that she's here.

Chelsea admits to being "a little nervous" about the university partnership, but she is glad that the coach is present and helping to enact change. Larry, a prevention specialist at Southmore, takes a similar position; he feels that "ACSC itself" has a responsibility to engage Southmore staff and make change:

People have to let you know, they cannot wait six months, seven months down the road or a year down the road and then inform you and all along maybe you're thinking, wait a minute this is working because nobody is telling me anything, but then ACSC itself has to ask the question, the hard questions, questions maybe that you might not want to hear and I don't know what they are. Is this working? Could you tell me what we are doing wrong? Could you tell what we're doing right? Most people don't like truthful answers so they avoid certain questions.

Kyle observes, among his colleagues, feelings similar to those of Chelsea and Larry:

So it's very exciting, but I think to speak for other people I think there's some frustration because of it doesn't seem like it's going quick enough or fast enough, or what exactly are we doing. And I think they wanted – and I don't know I'm not speaking for other people, but the perception I get is they want people to

come in and just fix the school and everything should be fixed by now, what's taking so long? Why isn't [the university] in here fixing everything? Like we're still doing the same things.

Kyle's observations suggest other staff members at Southmore who feel the burden of working for change lies outside of themselves. They see the ACSC reform and its university partners as implementing change absent of their own participation.

Grace, a Southmore secretary and parent, feels that she must act as an agent for change and wishes more of her colleagues felt the same way:

> Well, I definitely do see a change and I'm happy about the change because I have an investment here and because I have two more children that are going to be coming through Southmore. If it doesn't change, they won't come to us. Do you know what I mean? So I'm a part of that change and I have to make that change. I have to see it happen. So I have to actually follow through with what I'm trying to do.

As a parent, Grace feels she must take on the responsibility of transforming Southmore into a school that will help her children be successful. However, she feels other staff members at Southmore need to take more responsibility for the reform:

> It's always the same ones. So I'd like to see you know, there's only so much one person can do and I try to do as much as I can, but I know that the more I fill my plate the less of a better job that I do because I'm trying to do too many things. So that doesn't work.

Jack feels a similar responsibility, believing that he is part of the reform process and responsible for its success: "I hope that I can be a positive impact on the project, as well as be helpful to bring the school back up the where it needs to be." These dissonant beliefs about change must be viewed within the urban context of the school and its diverse student composition. Diamond et al. (2004) find that in diverse schools like Southmore, teachers' deficit ideologies lead to a collective decrease in sense of

responsibility for student learning. In the context of urban school reform, this decrease in feelings of responsibility will limit stakeholders' engagement with change, making a synthesis of ideologies a crucial first step in any reform effort.

Synthesis of Engagement

The following section addresses the research question: How do stakeholders describe their rationales for wanting change in an urban middle school undergoing reform? In order to engage with reform, stakeholders need cause, or motive. For the purpose of this study, engagement is defined as stakeholders' individual and collective motives, or rationales, for participating in reform. Motives may be spoken or tacit, which makes achieving a synthesis of engagement especially challenging. Like intentions, motives may change as stakeholders interact with the continuum of reform, altering levels of engagement.

Teachers

The teachers interviewed describe varied motives for engaging with reform. Miranda's motivation for engaging with reform has to do with autonomy. She appreciates that ACSC gives Southmore the freedom to make choices:

> I guess just that the people who aren't in this school and not that this school matters more to us, but it's ours, where it's more personal to us. So we have more say now in how it's run and different – I guess what excited me the most was that we could have a little say, hopefully in, like, what books we're using for our different classes. And it doesn't have to be necessarily something chosen for the entire district. It's a huge district. It's nice to have something a little more personal.

Not being bound by the district provides the rationale for Miranda to engage with the ACSC reform.

Peter gives a possible rationale for engaging with reform:

> So the need was there, I think it was recognized. I think we get bogged down on the day to day operations of the building that just deflect us and pull you and me in different directions and when you go home at night, you say, "I just wish I had the time." It just doesn't get done. That's why I think people are receptive to the idea of trying something different that would address this need to get everybody pulling together, seeing everybody on the same page.

Peter believes teachers are receptive to a reform effort because it will improve their day-to-day experiences. Peter perceives the reform as having the ability "to get everybody pulling together," presumably making daily operations more efficient.

Jonathan thinks that most teachers want to engage with the ACSC reform because it's in students' best interests:

> The teaching community is pretty professional. I think most of the teachers care, I think the majority of them kind of play by the rules and want their students to be successful. There's always a few here and there and I think we've thinned out some of those just in the ACSC process, because they kind of signed on to it. So one particular, in my department finally left.

Jonathan acknowledges that not all teachers feel this way, and some have actually exited since ACSC was implemented. Chelsea tries to explain the rationale of those who are against change: "I think that there are some people that have been here for a long time that are very doubtful, very negative." Julia feels resisting reform is not a trait specific to the length of teaching careers, but to a general desire to put in the work required to change: "And you can start to see who just—you know, and it's not any age group amount of time in teaching. It's just some people don't want to make the effort."

Peter describes a recent staff meeting during which teachers were more attentive than usual:

Well, probably because the issue – well, the issues that were brought up were issues that came from the teachers through this data reporting and that issues that they're all tied to – so they all had a vested interest going on and they were looking for answers. That's where the impatience comes in and that's the thing, they're very impatient. Why is this happening now?

Peter notes that teachers are more willing to work for reform when the intentions align with their own. However, he also describes an impatience that can diminish engagement. As a group, the teachers represent varied reform motives that are far from synthesis.

Administrators

 Avoiding takeover. Building principal Clayton was the only participant across all stakeholder groups to identify avoiding state takeover as a motive for reform. Clayton feels the near total agreement for instituting the ACSC reform is due to the possibility of state takeover: "We on paper said 99[%], but I only believe it was because we could have been reconstituted three years ago. We don't have to worry about for five years. It is a get out of jail pass." Avoiding reconstitution is Clayton's personal motive for instituting the ACSC reform. He describes convincing the union to support the reform:

> "I much rather have knives in the heart than knives in the back. I love it when I can see who's coming at me; at least I can brace myself. . ." I said, "You have made no changes. You don't want to make any changes. You resent someone coming in to try and tell you that you're doing it right or wrong, so have the state do it or [the state university]."

Essentially, Clayton sees the ACSC reform as the lesser of two evils. He felt that the reconstitution was inevitable and felt his only options were to be taken over by the state or try ACSC. In his view, it was better to be taken over willingly by the university partnership that to be taken over forcibly by the state.

Clayton describes the way in which staff were persuaded to vote for the reform: "By the way, you could be restructured and reconstituted and because you have not made any progress, this is a shot that get you [off the] list for five years." These statements reveal that avoiding takeover was a primary rationale for engaging with the reform. However, the "get out of jail pass" nature of the rationale may preclude long-term motivation for engaging with the reform along its continuum. Clayton recognizes that convincing the staff to vote for the reform was only the first step:

> Now, you may not like doing it, but at least your job is safe, your integrity is safe, your career is safe. You have five years to build this school the way you think. You think you know how to make it a better place. So I think initially that was what it was, and I know it is a lot of work.

Indeed, "a lot of work" would follow that initial vote if the reform were to be successful in implementing institutional change. Clayton also identifies secondary motives for engaging with reform, namely job safety. Clayton appeals to staff's desire to maintain their positions, which might be in jeopardy under reconstitution. While this fear tactic may have been enough to persuade the staff to vote for ACSC, it does not suggest a synthesis of engagement or long-term transformation potential.

Resisting reform. Clayton offers a team of teachers to illustrate a lack of synthesis of engagement. Clayton answers a question about the type of teacher who is likely to resist reform:

> My best team for a product is one 7th-grade team. They got the best attendance from kids, they got the least referrals, best CMT scores in reading and in math, they've got the best parent relationships and personally, they have the best attendance as teachers coming to school with high scores, the most resistant in daily driven decision making. . . . Hate it. I'm just wasting my time, but I'm not quite sure we haven't got like why they really believe this is a waste of their

time. I've had conversation with them, it's like you know it's just a waste of my time. I love one model, no differentiation, I drilled down, I get kids to learn it and I know my kids and that's it, why do I have to worry about somebody else's. It doesn't save my contract that I have got to worry about you. Help you, teach you, show you.

Clayton struggles to understand the teachers' motives. This team of successful teachers feel they have no reason to engage with the reform. The experiences in their classrooms do not mirror those of the school as a whole. These teachers are an interesting representation of the group Muhammad (2009) calls Fundamentalists. As Muhammad concedes, Fundamentalists are not necessarily bad teachers. On the contrary, Clayton admits these are some of his most successful teachers, not just in terms of test scores, but even in terms of relationships. However, this group of effective teachers is not interested in change. Their refusal to participate harms Southmore's culture, and threatens the success of the ACSC reform.

Support Staff

Several support staff members describe a "why not" motive for engaging with the ACSC reform. In light of challenges they perceive Southmore as facing, they express a desire for change and feel ACSC is worth a try. Others accept that the reform is already being implemented, and since Southmore has made a 5-year commitment to the reform, they feel there is no reason not to engage with it. Support staff members also attempt to explain the motive some staff members have to reject reform.

Rodney, a violence prevention specialist at Southmore, feels ACSC is worth a try:

ACSC was here, it was an opportunity, you jump on it, just like anything else. You have to try. And it's here to stay for the next five years, so what are you going to do for the next five years, moan and groan? You might as well grab onto it and see where it can carry you. It might open up a lot of door that you might not take that open. So it's here to stay at least for five years not unless you're going to be miserable for five years.

Rodney makes the following observation about the staff's willingness to engage in the ACSC reform:

But hopefully, the positive outweigh the negative and people will realize it's not about me. It's not about me, it's about these 1200 kids that walk through this building every day that have baggage for lack of a better word and their needs definitely outweigh our needs because we're adults.

Rodney is largely positive about the idea of reform in general, and he hopes the staff will come to feel the same. Rodney reveals that his primary motive is to do what's best for students.

Grace who is both a Southmore employee and parent has a personal motive for engaging with the ACSC reform:

Well, I definitely do see a change and I'm happy about the change because I have an investment here and because I have two more children that are going to be coming through Southmore. If it doesn't change, they won't come to us. Do you know what I mean? So I'm a part of that change and I have to make that change. I have to see it happen. So I have to actually follow through with what I'm trying to do.

Jack, the ISS teacher, makes this statement about his personal motive: "I hope that I can be a positive impact on the project, as well as be helpful to bring the school back up the where it needs to be."

Larry, a prevention specialist, feels that some resistant to ACSC may be due to a lack of understanding. In order to engage all stakeholders, Larry feels that the reform intentions must be clearly communicated:

> But with ACSC you're introducing a whole bunch of new ideas. Some agree, some don't agree, some understand, some don't understand. People that do not understand are embarrassed to say that they do not understand. And it could be working but it's like I don't want you to you know that it is working because I still have to be rebellious.

Larry also identifies a group of teachers who simply need to be "rebellious" by not engaging with the reform. Larry's observation demonstrates the group Muhammad (2009) identifies as Fundamentalists. Larry recognizes that some people may desire more education about the reform, but the Fundamentalist will rebel against change regardless of any amount of explanation. Larry further discusses the Fundamentalist resistance to change: "Now, after so many years you're trying to introduce something that some people don't want to conform to because they're used to the status quo doing it one way."

Larry believes that some stakeholders need to see how the reform benefits them in order to have a rationale for engaging with it:

> Just like this right here, you guys are here introducing the program that people aren't used to and it is here why? Why is it here? Most people answer or question is how is it going to benefit me? How is this going to benefit me? How is this going to make my job easier? How is this going to eliminate the paper trail? How is this going to make me a better teacher, a better psychologist, a better social worker, a better principal, how? Because putting it on paper being looking at it, reading it oh it looks good but show me some data.

The questioning process that Larry mimics indicates that some stakeholders are looking for a motive to believe in the reform, but the questions represent self-interested motives

only. Based on Larry's interpretation, some stakeholders fail to ask how ACSC will

benefit students.

Larry also stated that some stakeholders needed to see more data on ACSC. As if

in response, Grace discusses a recent presentation of data from an employee perception

survey:

> Yes, the last presentation. . . . Because for the first time, they actually have now
> gone out and asked how do you feel? And now we know the things that we need
> to look at for next year, so we have a starting point. We didn't have a starting
> point before and that was not going to happen without ACSC . . . being here to
> drive that.

Grace reveals two possible motives here. First, she says that asking how stakeholders

"feel" is a motivating factor. Indeed, voice is an important motive for many stakeholders

to engage with reform and will be discussed further within the context of the whole

school case. Second, Grace identifies having a "starting point" as a motive. It is possible

that the reform has seemed overwhelming and that staff members have chosen not to

engage with it because of that sense. Providing a practical place to begin reform makes

the reform seem manageable and improves morale.

Kyle posits that the failure to follow through with previous reforms has left

teachers jaded against reform of any kind:

> Some of the other teachers are getting a little jaded because they see these things
> that come in like workshop, or somebody comes in and speaks and you know,
> "this is going to be a new thing that we're going to do." And then you know a
> year later it's, "Do you remember that? What was that? Oh yeah I kind of
> remember." Like these things that kind of you know, spur of the moment kind of
> decisions that are made to have somebody come in to fix this and then it just
> doesn't follow through.

Staff are suspicious of reform and expect it to fail, resulting in a lack of commitment.

Support staff are largely supportive of ACSC. They offer their personal motives for engaging with reform and conjecture as to why some staff members have chosen not to do so. The disparate rationale for engaging or disengaging represent a lack of synthesis.

The School

The data across whole school case reveals that one powerful motive for engaging with reform is communication. People want their voices heard, and this outlet for communication – or the silencing of that voice – provides or eliminates motives for participating in reform. Commenting on changes that have occurred since the implementation of ACSC, Grace shares that more voices are included in decision-making:

> Just the leadership alone. Just asking for someone's opinion about something; now they're reaching out more. We're not going to just make a decision until we know how you feel about it. Before decisions are just made and you don't own anything. It's like nobody cared what you had to think.

However, by the time she gives her second interview, Grace has become frustrated that her coworkers choose not to speak up:

> I just feel like no one – they'll say it, but they won't say it at the appropriate times. We've been at staff meetings and I voiced what I could hear them mumbling here but they won't say it, you know what I mean? So then I get a little agitated and then I say something and I'm not even a teacher, so half of the things that are affecting them really aren't going to affect me but I just can't stand it so I say something. I get a little bit of heat for it, you know for opening my mouth but then later on, after the meeting, the teachers come to me and say, "Thank you for what you said." "Well why didn't you say it?" You know? So I don't know, I don't understand. It's very frustrating trying to figure this whole corrupt system out because – [Laughs].

Grace continues:

So when I'm going to the meetings now I'm just going to give my honest, when I go to the meetings now, I'm just kind of wondering the same thing, what am I doing here? I could be home you know, I have six children. I could be doing something like you know, so it just—I want to see us get back on track and I believe in ACSC. But listening to you know what everybody else has to say and a lot of people I think come to me because they know I'm going to relay the information. They're afraid to do it themselves and I don't know what repercussions they are afraid of facing because I really don't see any repercussions around here but I don't know. I wish there was a way to boost it and get it going again, you know?

Social studies teacher, Sasha feels that some voices have been excluded:

I think we're still in the infinitesimal kind of position where we haven't quite gotten to the point where everyone has an equal involvement in what's going on related to ACSC. I think that we have bits and pieces of getting to that point where there are some teachers that are making some – like research decisions and looking into things, a select number. But when you have a teaching body of 150 and only 7 people are involved with ACSC, that to me isn't representative of everyone having input.

Sasha returns to this idea in a later answer:

I was hoping that at some point there would be more participation from various stakeholders because what's happening right now, we're not really hearing the voices of the masses, so what you have is just disgruntled people saying nothing is changing.

Language arts teacher, Carmen, also feels that there are not enough voices being heard:

I mean there's a lot that would have liked to have gone for all these trainings. But we're told that it has to be the core members. Well, why is that? And why is it that they do not come back from these two-day seminars and have to present to us at a staff meeting, make a PowerPoint, teach us because we couldn't be there. . . . You've been gone for two days here . . . two days here, the same people, 16 to 20 teachers out of the building, "Well, why aren't you reporting back to us what you've learned? Share with us." Aside from the fact I feel they should rotate each of those sessions – if you really want to get this bettering of your school,

you need to have representatives. Switch that up – the more people exposed to it, the more it's getting out there.

In a second interview, Carmen returns to this lack of inclusiveness:

> More teachers should be involved in the training. If you get more teachers involved in the training that go to this, you're having more feedback, more voices to hear, not the same people going. . . . Sell it to the kids, work collectively. . . . There's a lot of process to it but there's more that can be done at this point in the school year.

Carmen's answer reveals multiple frustrations. First, she feels training has not been inclusive. She speaks of "the same people going," which she feels has reduced the representation of voices in the ACSC reform. Her suggestion to "sell it to the kids" reveals another missing voice; according to the ACSC website, including students as stakeholders in the decision-making process is a stated intention. Carmen, however, indicates that this has not come to fruition. Finally, Carmen's final statement that "more can be done at this point in the school year" shows frustration toward a perceived lack of progress. This exasperation at the slow pace of reform comes up often in the data and will be treated later as part of the synthesis of amelioration. Here, the lack of progress and the frustration it causes prevents a synthesis of engagement in two ways. First, the negative feelings naturally decrease optimism about the potential of the reform to create transformation; stakeholders who do not believe in the transformational potential of the reform have less rationale for engaging with the reform. Second, the perceived lack of progress interacts with the competing expectations of various stakeholder groups. For Fundamentalists, this negativity only adds fuel to their fight to maintain the status quo. The lack of progress may also hamper attempts to move the Tweeners to the side of the

Believers. Both these consequences will negatively impact school culture and prevent transformation.

Peter, a teacher leader, believes that some people are simply not suited to reform, and should remove themselves or be removed from the school so as not to inhibit reform:

> Without being too harsh, I knew there were also people who we are going to have to lose along the way because they just won't buy in, or it's just not their thing. It's not – some people need to be directed top down. They just feel more comfortable with that approach. But I think overall, your strong teachers, your dedicated teachers are all behind us.

Interestingly, at the end of his response, Peter equates "strong" and "dedicated" with support for the reform. In effect, he says that the best teachers support ACSC. However, building principal, Clayton, gives the example of the strong 7th-grade team, which he repeatedly describes as the "best," and these teachers do not engage with the reform. There is a lack of synthesis in this case about engagement; there is not a consistent understanding of what motivates teachers to participate in the ACSC reform.

Administrator, Melinda, feels that teachers' voices are adequately represented on the leadership team:

> Yes, definitely. A lot of the information comes from the staff. When it's filtered through the leadership team, there's a lot more teacher thinking and teacher opinion that weighs in on our final decision. When I look at the panel, I don't sit on the panel or a building principal does, so I'm sitting . . . opposite to them, and as I look at that, most of the people sitting on the panel are teachers. So the discussions are heavily weighted with teacher participation and contribution, and the decisions are definitely including – many more teachers than administrators are sitting there at that moment.

Becky agrees that teachers' voices are represented more under ACSC:

I think there is better communication because in each cadre when the teachers meet in that group, they pass their information to the person that's the leader of the cadre, and then that gets shared in leadership meetings and things so that a larger more governance-oriented group takes that information, thinks about it. Because a lot of times that piece was missing and we decide how that's going to work. So I think it's a good thing.

When asked how teachers were selected for leadership roles, Becky responds:

Well, it's funny because a lot of a people that we identified in the beginning are the people that are stepping up and carrying the balls so to speak. We do have some pleasant surprises some people that have done some turnarounds.

Becky has a positive view of this process in which teachers were "identified." However, this was a chief complaint among teacher participants, several of whom were unclear about the selection process and a few of whom felt slighted when they weren't chosen. This mismatch of perceptions represents a lack of synthesis of motivations. The administration is not perceptive of how teachers reacted to the selection process or how this may have led them not to engage with the reform.

Synthesis of Intentions

This section answers the research question: How do stakeholders describe the challenges they believe warrant change in an urban middle school undergoing reform? As stakeholders describe the challenges they wish to see ameliorated, they express their intentions. Here, *intentions* refer to the purposes of reform. As defined by Hall and McGinty's (1997) transformation of intentions theory, these may be stated intentions of the reform, or they may be implicit intentions. Intentions between individuals and groups that interact with a reform may differ, preventing a synthesis of intentions and negatively impacting a reform's transformational potential. Further, individual and group intentions

can change as stakeholders interact with one another and with the reform along its continuum of enactment and implementation (Hall & McGinty, 1997).

Teachers

Reform intentions. As a group, the teachers interviewed provide very similar definitions of the ACSC reform, suggesting a synthesis of intentions. However, intentions may be stated or unstated, formal or tacit. These intentions identified by the teachers are essential definitions of ACSC and, therefore, represent the stated intentions of the reform.

Peter, a music teacher and teacher leader, defines ACSC this way:

It's all the stakeholders coming together. They have a vested interest in the student's achievement. I mean, ultimately you're looking at student achievement, but it's everybody coming together, the parents, the teachers, administrators. That your community around you all pulling together to make the changes that we need to make.

Jonathan, a technology teacher, provides this explanation of the reform:

It's designed to my understanding that the structure is to be inclusive in terms of decision making and input and curriculum choices and I mean, just what you're doing. People all have a voice and people should all be invested and that's all well and good and you should feel invested even if it doesn't necessarily go your way, but at some point, those decisions need to be implemented and it's that implementation part that I think if you're going to help our school.

Jonathan identifies inclusiveness as an intention of the reform, saying that everyone should "be invested." This is very similar to Peter's comment that all stakeholders "have a vested interest" in student success. Jonathan adds that acting based on shared decision-making is a key intention.

Miranda, a special education teacher, defines ACSC in terms of stakeholder

voice:

> Kids have great ideas, they get to voice their opinion. Our parents have great
> ideas, the teachers have great ideas and it sometimes gets lost in the district of
> 20,000 students or 18,000. So, we kind of are able to say, "You know what, for
> us, this is what will work," just like a family would do something different for
> themselves versus what the rest of the neighborhood is doing.
> Jeremiah, a music teacher, states the intentions of ACSC as "just a dialogue, just

the openness." Julia, a science teacher, also identifies stakeholder voice as a key

intention of the ACSC reform:

> It's an opportunity for a community, teachers, administrators, parents,
> paraprofessionals in the building to kind of come together and talk about what's
> working, what's not working and how we can come together as a community to
> kind of get it going in the right direction. . . . Everybody is kind of a shareholder
> that have taken a stake in improving this and how can we come together and
> work from all angles and not from the top down but, you know, from the
> teachers, from the parents, from what the community is and from the
> administration and kind of pull that together and get us going in the direction that
> fills the needs of the kids in getting them to be much better educated and
> knowing what they need to know to be successful.

Julia's response also mentions moving away from "top down" leadership as an intention

of the reform. She also includes meeting students' needs and improving academic

achievement as intentions. Jonathan makes a similar statement about "top down"

leadership:

> The idea of ACSC is to have a joint kind of group decision making, not just the
> standard kind of hierarchal top down kind of decisions come from up above, and
> you do whatever the administrator would have said, and it's kind of going to be a
> group thing.

Julia continues her response by naming ownership as an intention of ACSC:

When I heard about ACSC, I was hoping it would bring a sense of – to the students and for staff a sense of ownership and the sense of pride. And yeah, we're not the best. There's a lot of room for improvement, but the strength in numbers and if everybody pulls together, you can kind of get in the direction you need to go.

Personal intentions. In addition to the definition-like statements of intention offered by all teachers interviewed, the teachers also revealed other intentions. These intentions are not necessarily those stated by the reform, but they are personal intentions, the challenges that individual teachers believe warrant change and, therefore, expect the reform to address.

Curriculum, pedagogy, and test scores. Not surprisingly, some of the intentions expressed by teachers are related to teaching and learning. Test scores and their impact on curriculum and pedagogy are concerns for Kathleen and Julia. Kathleen identifies raising test scores as a reform intention:

> There's a lot of pressure on the [state tests]. When I came into this position, that's what I looked at first because I knew this district wasn't meeting the AYP. So when I came in to interview for this position . . . I went on the state websites and pulled the stuff for Southmore and looked at where they are and what strategies we could take to try to get them towards where they needed to be, but this class – this specific class I have this year, I don't have – I have the expectation, but the meeting it, I'm a little worried about.

Julia also notes that "our kids have not met their [state test] scores that they need for us to be compliant and people are concerned." Kathleen makes a connection between this testing pressure and the ACSC reform:

> So, when it comes down to it, I mean, the [state test] pressure is always going to be there, it's always going to be great. We're always going to have to take them. Just because we're ACSC isn't going to take away the [state test], I mean, we always have to have that in the back of our heads whenever we're planning for whatever big changes are going to take place with ACSC because you have to

stick to what the outcome of the curriculum is. You can only change it so much or modify—I don't know if people are under the impression that they can change the curriculum, but I don't know.

Kathleen expresses her concern over test scores and the pressure to improve them. She feels strongly that the reform must align with this goal. She continues to discuss this concern:

> And with all of the data collecting and attaching their names to everything – it's a little scary because it's just like, I mean, granted I know I'm doing my job, I know that I'm doing everything I can and looking at things at all different ways and no matter what I do, I cannot make a child care. I can't make them do it. They have to make that choice, whether or not they want to do what they have to do to succeed.

Amid her concern over test scores and their attachment to teacher evaluation, Kathleen reveals an unspoken intention to improve student engagement. Her recognition that she "cannot make a child care" and that "they have to make that choice" suggests a need to increase engagement in order to improve student academic success.

Perhaps surprisingly, social studies teacher, Sasha, is the only teacher to discuss improving curriculum or pedagogy as intentions of the reform, not in terms of test scores. Sasha talks a great deal in her interview about her intentions for improving curriculum and pedagogy, identifying "literacy" as Southmore's "biggest problem" and expressing her belief that differentiated instructed would improve this problem:

> We need to get better at when the students are in school, actually instructing to their need level where they are and not teaching at the bar, because if you're not at the bar and you know where to begin at the bar. Well, for teaching, they're only there. You have no hope of catching up. So we need to have tiered instruction to help kids advance and continue to advance, not just kind of flounder along. . . . One of my hopes is that ACSC would give my colleagues other materials, other instructional strategies, other ways of helping to get to that

hundred, because we can't just always teach to the 50 and then pass the 100 along just because they behaved in class. . . . And it's no fault of theirs if this is what you've known, and this is what we've done and we haven't given the tools to do anything different or the opportunity. Then again, maybe that's the job of ACSC and us as teachers saying, "Okay, I realize this is my problem." Because I think everyone is very educated and can say that. But when you're educated and say that but don't have the tools or know how, the problem perpetuates.

Sasha continues to discuss her intentions for improving literacy through differentiation:

I think differentiated instruction will solve a lot of issues. I think differentiated instruction will make a teacher work a whole lot harder. But at the same time, there has to be a happy medium where we need to come up with some system to allow for that literacy ability grouping, because if a teacher is teaching . . . like 8th graders and there's someone in the room at the 2nd grade reading level, differentiated instruction is not going to make that kid jump six levels of grade with the level of reading. They need intensified remedial instruction to help them move along.

Sasha reiterates the intention to improve instruction to meet students at their readiness level: "If we're not reactive, if we're not meeting their needs, they're going to continue to fall behind." This is a particularly interesting theme for observing the problem with not achieving a synthesis of intentions. Two teachers discuss improving curriculum and pedagogy as related to test scores; one teacher discusses improving curriculum and pedagogy to meet students' needs. It may seem that this is not an important reform intention; however, the ACSC website does indicate improved instruction as an intention. And it's worth remembering that Southmore only considered ACSC as a reform in the face of reconstitution, a state that directly resulted from failure to make AYP, which is primarily a reflection of students' failure to meet standard on state tests. This was discussed in the previous section as a motive for engaging with reform. In that

sense, it represents a dissonance that issues of curriculum and pedagogy actually come

up so infrequently in the data.

    Teacher retention. Some teachers bring up the high teacher turnover rate at

Southmore. Sasha discusses teacher retention as an intention:

> We have a high turnover right now. We have a very, very high turnover and a
> large, in my opinion, retention problem. We have a large teacher retention
> problem. . . . We have here veterans that are retiring, which is – God love them,
> thank you. You have your mid-level teachers that are moving on for various
> reasons. And then you have new teachers who are saying, "I just can't do it."
> And some of them don't even make it through the year.

When the interviewer asks Sasha to speculate on the reason for the high turnover rate,

Sasha continues:

> I'm trying to think of a way to verbalize. Well, natural attrition would be
> considered our retiring teachers. Our mid-level teachers, might be in a level of
> frustration and poor morale and just not content with what's going on in the
> school. Mid-level teachers, you're always going to see a lot of teachers leaving
> for pay reasons. I mean, mid-level teachers, you have to consider that most mid-
> level teachers have been on a pay freeze for six or seven years. . . . . There's
> nothing you can do. So there's a level of "I have to do what's best for my family"
> because seven years on step two with no pay increase is a lot for anyone to ask
> for anybody. So if you're a mid-level teacher, you're going to see a lot of them
> leaving for monetary reasons. So you have monetary concerns, you have no
> content, you have poor morale. There are just a lot of complex issues with that
> mid-level grade of teachers that has them leaving. Your 1st year teachers I think
> sometimes feel like they're just struggling and banging their head against the
> wall and not getting the support. I really think a lot of 1st year, 2nd year teachers
> feel like they're not supported, so they're leaving.

Sasha's answer reveals a complex retention problem with explanations that represent

various morale issues. For Sasha, retaining teachers is an intention of the reform, even if

it is not a stated reform goal. Peter and Julia also identify morale and retention as

intentions. Peter describes a morale problem that he attributes to changing

demographics:

> As the years went by, then the [demographics] changed quite a bit, but we also lost a lot of our veteran staff and in fact about – I'd say maybe roughly about ten years ago, it was a large exodus. Basically, they were pushed out to save money and roughly about that time, there was a lot of challenges that arose especially with discipline, classroom management and really they've been escalating through these years and there's been – the morale at the same time went down quite a bit.

Peter links school climate and culture to low morale, causing high teacher attrition. Julia

mentions the same pay freeze as Sasha that creates a morale issue: "Turnover is part of it

too. A lot of people leave because [the district] hasn't given their teachers pay raise in

four years."

Climate and behavior. Several teachers discuss improving student discipline as a

reform intention. Some teachers seem to view discipline as synonymous with climate.

Peter identifies climate as the most urgent intention of the ACSC reform:

> [The cadres] were all given the task of developing surveys and getting them out to parents, children and staff whatever the issues were for their committee. . . . The one I feel is most important is the climate. . . . I've said from day one, if we're going to keep people involved here, we have to attack the climate first.

Peter goes on to distinguish between what he calls "student climate" and "building

climate:"

> Not the student climate, the building climate. I'm talking about, well a couple of things, I mean, just what you see and sense when you walk in the building. The hallways have been chaotic. It's been for a long time, not just recent. Behaviors in a lot of the classrooms are chaotic. There's also an anti-administration bend going on here because not all three houses are consistent the way they apply discipline and when you filter all of that down, the morale has plummeted among staff. So the climate has been very negative.

Poor student behavior is the primary contributor to the "chaotic" climate that Peter describes. Problems related to discipline have created low teacher morale, and what Peter, in turn, calls a "very negative" climate. From an ecological perspective, problems in the structural and pedagogical/curricular facet of the school are affecting the cultural facet.

Jonathan feels progress has been slow, but his response reveals discipline as an intention of reform:

> And we'll see, I mean, it's slow, but in the end, we're starting to get on the hallway transitions, we started that and I thought that could have started earlier. But again, you've got to do your baseline work and you know I understand that.

Chelsea also identifies improving behavior as a main intention for reform:

> I want to see that it's more uniform with working together. And because of that, the kids know the expectations and they understand that if they work together and if these changes and they embraced changes, it can get better, and that you know with the things that they want to happen will happen because that's basic. The better you behave, the more things can happen.

Chelsea wants to see behavior improve, and she relates this to being "uniform" and "working together."

Jonathan identifies improving discipline as a reform intention, but his answer reveals an underlying intention of garnering consistency among staff:

> But those teachers have also been allowed to kind of do their own thing for a while and are not made to answer to somebody that goes, "Look, these are the rules, this is what we're doing, you've got to follow along. You can't come in late, not walk your kids down, or let them run wild in class, or let them be out in the hallways." But at the same time we've got to get back up from the administrators, too.

Jonathan's suggestion that "those teachers" who let their students "run wild" are creating the discipline issues reveals a morale issue. Furthermore, his inclusion of administration in his response and their need to provide "back up" reveals an additional intention of increasing administrative support. Jonathan suggests professional development as a way of tackling this intention to improve discipline: "You know, I wish we had some real professional development on how do you deal with the kids. What's your approach? You know, just – teachers don't get that."

Like Jonathan, Carmen puts the onus on the teachers to improve climate, identifying teachers' talking negatively about students as creating a toxic culture:

> I don't sit in the teacher's room and it's a problem sometimes. It's almost embarrassing . . . some of these teachers' rooms, what they talk about, the inappropriate subject matters are discussed, and you know that that's substitute teachers moving out toward another school and the reputation is – you know, you want to believe – there are certain things they don't need to talk about.

Carmen recognizes that her colleague's negative talk about students impacts the school culture and even community perception since substitute teachers hear the negativity and take that out into the community and to other schools. For Carmen, an intention of reform is to improve teachers' relationships with students, thereby improving morale and climate.

Even though many teachers seem to have intentions related to behavior and climate, the varied nature of these responses do not constitute a synthesis of intentions. Teachers define climate differently, and more importantly, see different causes and solutions for behavior issues. Without consistent understandings of these issues, a synthesis of intentions is not achieved, and the transformational potential of the reform is

undermined. This example is particularly apt in demonstrating the importance of synthesis; teachers do share beliefs about what warrants change, but the dissonance in their understandings of these challenges will hinder systemic change. The fact that intentions are similar but not the same also demonstrates the relatively small task required to achieve synthesis. Work along the reform continuum to calibrate understandings of the challenges that warrant reform and the specific outcomes desired could facilitate a synthesis of intentions and an increase in reform potential.

Administrators

The ACSC reform is a community school reform, which means giving voice to stakeholders is a key component in affecting change. Joel acknowledges that they have strides to make in including stakeholder voices:

> I think it's to the point now, where we have to make sure that we can validate some of their concerns and follow through and make them realize that they have a bigger voice as parents, teachers and principals. I mean we're all the same.

Joel's statement that "we're all the same" represents a personal intention and a voiced goal of the ACSC reform. There have been "concerns," however, and Joel realizes that this intention has not been achieved.

Melinda and Clayton identify raising test scores as a reform intention. Melinda identifies meeting student needs as one of Southmore's most pressing challenges:

> So we have that many kids that are basic or below basic. And so, when we put them in a classroom setting for any of their academics or unified arts, it's difficult to say we'll take all those kids and put them in a nice small group and give them intensive for math or writing because we're not able to do that. We have a lot of kids in the building, so it ends up where a teacher may have five classes a day of 28 kids in each. So if they were to try to make that lower

performing group smaller, they would overlook the higher function kids. So that is a big challenge because of the achievement levels of the kids that are here.

If you look at [state test] scores overall for a grade level of kids or building-wide, there's a huge range of kids, probably our smallest group being that advanced level on the [state test]. We have a lot of students that are below proficiency. . . . We have more students than we can accommodate with the number of staff we have through Title I.

While Melinda identifies low test scores, varying levels of academic readiness, and over-crowding as challenges that warrant reform, she does not see actionable ways to address those challenges. She recognizes that smaller class sizes would be a worthwhile reform intention, but she does not seem to think that is a feasible goal, noting that even Title I funds have been insufficient to decrease the student to staff ratio. Melinda continues:

I think every school that is categorized as in need of improvement has been feeling a lot of pressure for the past couple of years regarding AYP and looking at our scores and preparing for the next annual standardized test and anticipating those results. And that's become a very large focus for everybody in the district. And the schools that are in need of improvement for a couple of years now are looking for something that would alter what they're doing and hopefully, possibly, and luckily would impact our path to making AYP.

Melinda reiterates her intention for the reform to improve test scores, but her observation that Southmore and similarly rated schools are searching for "something" that would affect student achievement shows a lack of specificity regarding the reform intentions. She even adds that luck will play a part in Southmore making AYP. Building principal, Clayton, shares Melinda's intention of raising test scores; although, he does not offer any specific ways the ACSC reform will address this intention:

If I gave you the same [state test] score results, if you're my boss and I said another year of the 50th percentile or the 40th percentile. After a while you'd say to me, "[Clayton] I need you to get the 60," that's only normal I can give you

10,000 reasons why I can't but I don't want to hear any excuses, I don't want to know why.

His "no excuses" approach bluntly expresses an intention, but it is likely to further harm morale, something the teacher participants frequently mention.

Melinda is the only administrator to mention discipline as a reform intention:

We're a large school, we have our share of discipline issues, and so that's another challenge for everyone from the paraprofessionals to the teachers to the administrators because of discipline issues that arise when you have this many kids in the building.

Extending her identification of improving discipline as a reform, Melinda also talks about improving climate through changes to discipline procedures:

I can definitely see it impacting school climate where teachers would devise or design one procedure or one hazard behavior support system and it would be implemented to that degree that it would really make a difference. And that would obviously change discipline overall. But when I think of discipline, I think of kids coming into my office and here's the infraction and here's your consequence. But on a bigger scale with regard to school climate, I think there can be a lot of good things that come out of that via ACSC.

Antithetically, building principal, Clayton, actually makes statements that seem against improving climate as an intention:

I don't function here for any one's care, comfort, or convenience. Those are my three C's. . . . I spend more time here than I spend with my family. There is a level of care and a level of comfort and convenience that I enjoy, and I hope everyone has it, but that's not a priority function.

Clayton does not see climate as something that deserves time and energy. Considering that many other stakeholders discuss improving discipline and climate as intentions, this disconnect is an important one to recognize. The lack of synthesis in intentions lessens the transformational potential of the reform as stakeholders do not agree on the

challenges that warrant change. This is particularly concerning as it represents a

dissonance between the building principal and his staff.

Support Staff

Many of the intentions espoused by support staff have to do with discipline.

Deana describes the behavior at Southmore as out of control, making it a primary reform

intention:

> But they all like the way they behave, I don't think it should be acceptable in any
> school and we're not helping them by letting them get away with that or behave
> like that. So to me, there's something needs to get done because even – not just
> the 8th-graders, but we have 6th- and 7th-graders who are actually going to follow
> their steps and come to the point – you know we have kids who just get up in the
> middle of class and leave and they care less and they come back in and out
> anytime they want and not that they're doing that, but they're actually disrupting
> others who are learning and just the teachers are keep yelling and screaming.
> There are actually probably ways to have it lessen, just by trying to get them to
> sit down or get in class or –

Deana hope the ACSC reform will keep kids in class and decrease the conflict between

teachers and students. Some support staff describe ways the reform is attempting to

addressing behavior. Kyle describes increasing suspensions as a way of curbing

misbehavior:

> Now, we're doing some things where we're suspending the kids if there are
> skipping class, being disruptive – we're going to suspend them. And this came
> from actually one of our professional development where staff overwhelmingly
> said, "The hallways are out of control."

Like Deana, Kyle identifies decreasing class disruptions as a reform intention. Jack, the

ISS teacher, discusses using the ISS program as a consequence:

> And basically, the whole function for in-house suspension is to get the kids to
> understand that there are going to be consequences if they break the rules. And

prior to us taking back control of that room, it was – I would categorize it as somewhat of a free-for-all and the kids just hung out down there.

Jack's intentions include both improving behavior and improving the effectiveness of ISS as a consequence. Elena describes a change she'd like to see in the ISS program:

> I would like to see the fact that the kids that are going in the in-house, we know they're going in in-house all across the school that the work is prepared like I know it's hard, teachers are very, very busy and they have a lot to do themselves, I don't even know how they do it with meetings and team meetings and after school, I don't know but I mean I would like to see that the kid's work is done like set forth right away, as soon as we know like that morning.

In addition to concerns about discipline that are part of many participants' intentions for the reform, others, like Elena, also mention specific procedures like those for the ISS room. Elena continues describing her intentions for the ISS program. She is concerned about students not serving ISS time quickly enough because of staffing issues:

> When we seem short staff because of illness and whatnot, they seem to pull [Jack] out to cover another teacher, and this is a class [that] should be there every single day regardless who is out and absent and they're short of staff. . . . They don't serve their in-house that day it will be the following day. And then those kids would have been the following day like those that we're on the schedule and I think it's got to be done right away for them to understand the consequence.

Like Jack, Elena has the specific intention of making ISS a more effective consequence by making its staffing a priority. Jack expresses his own intentions for the ISS program:

> The first thing that occurred when I arrived, the room that they had designated for in-school suspension was a room that was 12 x 20 and it had 11 desks in it, as well as my own, and no windows. It was hot in the summertime and cold in the winter, and it was far away from any administration. It was tucked away in the basement. It was not a good location or a good site ultimately, and that's one of the things that I looked at and recommended.
>
> We've talked about it in our cadre and the cadre made recommendations. I was then asked to make a presentation to our steering committee and I made some

recommendations that we look for alternate space because first of all, a room that small with the desks that close together and the students that close together who don't want to be there in the first place tends to lead to disruption.

It is especially important to Jack that the ISS room be an ACSC intention, of course, since it is his primary duty, but it is a priority to Grace as well to increase its effectiveness. The support staff at Southmore view improving school climate by addressing discipline concerns as among their primary intentions for reform.

Discussing another aspect of climate, Grace identifies a trust issue among staff at Southmore, and hopes that the reform will address these feelings:

> One of the – I think it was the demographics committee, only a small percentage of the staff returned the surveys and [the ACSC coach], we had a PD day and she actually talked about that. Maybe, I think there's a lot of trust issues here in the school and that's the same thing that she reiterated to them and no one's going to look at this and no – it's just to see what's going on. That's what – and they did, they ended up turning around and giving more information.

Grace also hopes that trust will be fostered as the ACSC reform increases stakeholder participation. Speaking of a report following a perceptual climate survey, Grace says:

> It was so good because . . . they actually have now gone out and asked, "How do you feel?" And now we know the things that we need to look at for next year, so we have a starting point. We didn't have a starting point before and that was not going to happen without ACSC and without [the ACSC coach] being here to drive that.

Grace also addresses climate in terms of the overall feeling of the school, which she hopes to see improved by the reform:

> There's a book, I'm not sure of the name of it, but it recognizes the different kinds of schools that are out there, and we were kind of a fortress school. . . . It was very, very cold. You could walk through the hallways and you wouldn't be greeted and I was a parent. You would think that people would want to say hello or how are you or just be kind to you.

It may be viewed as ironic that the support staff group views controlling discipline as its primary intention and yet Grace criticizes the appearance of the school as a fortress. A synthesis of intentions is necessary here to clarify reform intentions. Grace may not see her desire for order and her desire for amiability as antithetical; indeed, they need not be. But there is the potential here for confusion of intentions. More discussion is needed to achieve a synthesis of intentions.

The School

When the interviewer asks Sasha if the school community has adopted a vision statement, she responds: "Yes, but there's a difference between adopting and owning." Sasha elaborates:

> There's a difference. You can adopt something, say, "Oh yeah, this is what my school is supposed to do." Okay, but how does that reflect itself on what you do every day and how you conduct your day-to-day expectations and beliefs and day-to-day business. So there's paper adoption and then I guess there's commitment. There are two different things. On paper, we have adopted the mission statement and the vision statement. They worked very hard on it and they had a celebration and a rollout. Okay, how does that change the way you do your day-to-day business, or has it? And if it hasn't, are you doing the right thing?

Sasha makes an important delineation between "adopting" and "owning." Southmore has stated their intentions in the form of a much-celebrated vision statement. But as Sasha points out, that vision has to be broken down into specific actions that will be taken, and intentions must be revisited regularly along the reform continuum, as intentions can change for a variety of personal and political reasons (Hall & McGinty, 1997). The data across the whole school case reveals dissonance and uncertainty in the area of intentions.

Uncertainties and inconsistencies. Kyle feels that Southmore is still in the process of identifying its intentions:

> I think we're in very early stages of just kind of identifying what our weaknesses are within the school. And when I say we I mean the school as a whole not top down more kind of spread out among everyone having some of the responsibility to find that out exactly what we need.

Kyle feels that Southmore is still identifying the challenges that it wants to ameliorate through the ACSC reform. In fact, Kyle doesn't think decisions about intentions will be made until the end of the school year:

> But I think there is still newness to it that we don't quite know exactly what we're doing and how we should be doing it. And I know probably by the end of the year, we'll establish a governance board and that sort of thing to figure out more in terms of decisions that are being made.

Grace describes similar uncertainty among her cadre:

> The restructuring committee broke off and they are still doing the research, the other half. I'm not a part of the research portion, so I couldn't even tell you – we're kind of sitting in limbo, our last meeting that we had, we weren't sure we were having the same discussion. What are we doing here like – and we all feel like we're spinning our wheels right now.

Research is still underway that will lead to the selection of intentions, and in the meantime, Grace feels they are simply "spinning [their] wheels." Grace continues:

> One of the things and I think what really caused the problem is the restructuring. That was the biggest priority, and I think the staff was assuming that something was going to happen more, and I don't know what changes because everyone wants a different change. Or because there was no change. That seems to be what comes up in conversation a lot outside of cadre meetings, "You know, we voted for restructuring, nothing's . . ." They wanted to see something quickly.

Grace says that "everyone wants a different change," so certainly no synthesis of intentions has been reached. In fact, the frustration she describes indicates that some

stakeholders are so anxious for change that they want to skip the intention-identifying

phase altogether.

Kyle expresses a similar uncertainty, revealing that a vote has yet to take place to

determine the primary reform intentions:

> Then eventually, I know we're going to vote on what do we think the one or two
> big things are that we need to focus on. I know that's coming up probably very
> soon. I think it might be our next staff meeting in February where the staff is
> going to vote based on those reports from the committees yesterday, what do you
> feel is the most important thing that we need to work on.

Not only is there some uncertainty about intentions, but there is an uncertainty about the

timeline of the vote that will "eventually" occur.

The vote. Several participants described the vote which led to Southmore's

decision to become an ACSC school. Participants' descriptions suggest a somewhat

rushed vote that may or may not have accurately represented the staff's commitment to

reform. It may be the nature of this vote and the subsequent decision to take on the

reform that has led to such dissonance of intentions. Sasha describes Southmore's

process for deciding whether or not to become an ACSC school:

> The first time – well, no, the first time, there really wasn't a vote because there
> were too many questions. There were too many questions for us really to say,
> "We want to jump into this." So the very first time, it was like, "Okay, we need
> more information before we commit to anything," which is when the second
> meeting came. And then after the second meeting, then it was like, "Okay, we
> have to put our heels to the floor and make a decision," and there was the vote
> that occurred.

Grace also describes the rushed vote:

> We had PD and during the PD, all of the teachers went into one room, [an ACSC
> representative] came in and discussed the program with everybody and she said,

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"Maybe send out a survey. What should we do?" And right then everybody, they
were like, "No. We decide now."

Peter admits that the high agreement rate was not representative of the staff's true

feelings:

> We went into – I know, on record with 97% buy-in from the staff, but
> realistically, we knew it was probably less and there'd be all different levels of
> buy-in to it. I thought, pretty much, you're looking at maybe 50% to 60% sincere
> full buy-in to it, and I think that's panned out so far as we look at the work on
> committees who's participating.

Kathleen feels like the staff was not allowed sufficient time to ask questions before

voting:

> Initially, the impression of it – when we were told about it, the literature we were
> given about it, like we said, it looks good on paper, it sounds like a great idea and
> it is – it all seemed to be a great idea, but it is baby steps. It is a long time to see
> the progress results. . . . We had like 90% of on-board participation, so a lot of us
> in school kind of went in unknowingly. I mean, I don't know how it would be
> different if people had time to actually ask the questions or understand.

Sasha feels like the rushed vote has translated into a lack of commitment. The vote

happened so quickly, followed by the ACSC designation, that intentions weren't

adequately discussed:

> Some of it is just by design when ACSC had to happen and also, just we had to
> hit the ground running, and I recognize that. The question is where do we go
> from here to get more involvement and participation from different parties
> because right now, it's very limited.

The fact that so many stakeholders discuss the voting process, its rushed nature, and its

questionable veracity makes it an important point of analysis. Participants describe

needing to form intentions now that the reform has been implemented, but really, the

process should have been reversed. For the reform to have transformational potential, the

discussion and selection of intentions should have taken place before the vote. Stakeholders should have known the reform's intentions and reached a synthesis before deciding whether or not to become an ACSC school. The failure to devote adequate time to naming intentions up front has led to loss of commitment among stakeholders and a stall in the reform continuum.

<div align="center">Synthesis of Amelioration</div>

The following section addresses the research question: How do stakeholders describe successful school reform in an urban middle school undergoing reform? For the purposes of this study, *amelioration* is defined as the act of improving. Amelioration may refer to the act of achieving the stated or implied intentions of the reform. More broadly, it may also refer to perceived amelioration, or the perception of improvement. Various stakeholders may experience amelioration differently, particularly when a synthesis of intentions has not been achieved.

Teachers

Measures of success. Julia is the only participant in any stakeholder group who identifies meeting student needs as a success measure when she says that the reform should "get us going in the direction that fills the needs of the kids in getting them to be much better educated and knowing what they need to know to be successful."

Peter, a teacher leader, discusses improving climate as his primary success measure:

> That basically for me is when I sat down with Lauren in the beginning, I said, "What do you think of the major thing – is it to tackle climate first and you'll get everybody sold on ACSC." And I think that's where we're looking at. It came

out yesterday in reporting. The perceptual committee was the one that had the best report of the four.

Peter is pleased with the progress in terms of climate, which he also sees as essential for buy-in. Peter elaborates, revealing his understanding of climate:

> That's all part of the climate that's been very negative for quite a while and I felt all along, the first thing maybe we have to do was ACSC, we'll get climate and see if we can make some visual changes by the end of the year, so staff will say, "ACSC is making a difference here." It's maybe low-level, but it's I think what people sense first. I've always felt perception drives reality anyway, and even visual. And the building has always been clean and nice, but we're trying to make other things happen, pretty up places so when parents come in, they can see a more welcoming office.

Peter's response indicates that climate, to him, is primarily visual. He sees improving the building's appearance as a visual representation of the climate that he hopes will be "more welcoming." He concedes this as a "low-level" change, but he believes it will appeal to parents and also to staff. Julia also identifies improving climate as a success measure, but she defines it more in terms of the human experience:

> When I heard about ACSC, I was hoping it would bring a sense of – to the students and for staff a sense of ownership and the sense of pride. And yeah, we're not the best. There's a lot of room for improvement, but the strength in numbers and if everybody pulls together, you can kind of get in the direction you need to go.

Julia's understanding of climate is much more emotional than Peter's. She sees amelioration of climate as involving senses of "ownership" and "pride."

Several teachers discuss decreasing discipline infractions as an important sign of amelioration. Chelsea discusses a policy change designed to improve behavior in the hallways:

I'll tell you, I was really impressed with – like with our new – the hallway behavior with the referral program. [We] sent a letter home to the parents, saying that, "If your student doesn't go by the rules for this, this is what's going to happen," and I thought that was great, because the parents have to sign it and the students have to sign it.

Chelsea describes the change in behavior following the parent letter:

I think the behavior changes are wonderful. I mean I would consider our hallways last year a danger as compared to what they are now. In fact, I even said, the way that they're telling – two lines, you know to walk in the hallway is two lines, you know, quiet and everything and I even said to myself, "I'm impressed on how better it's gotten."

Kathleen also describes improved hallway transitions but worries that the change isn't permanent:

The things that are working – I mean right now, we're in this hallway, we're working specifically on hallway transition and you can definitely notice the change and the improvement in that specific realm. It works like anything, in a few months, it's going to get lax and then we're going to have to pull the reins again, reteach, redo everything and that's fine, but I'm afraid that in a few months, people are just going to say, "Whatever."

Kathleen's fear that "it's going to get lax" likely stems from her observations of previous attempts at reform. She notes improvement, but is skeptical about the staff's commitment to maintaining that amelioration.

While more teachers identified discipline specifically as a success measure, Chelsea makes a connection between discipline and climate:

I want to see that it's more uniform with working together. And because of that, the kids know the expectations and they understand that if they work together and if these changes and they embraced changes, it can get better, and that you know with the things that they want to happen will happen because that's basic. The better you behave, the more things can happen, and that's a big, big thing that I think has changed amazingly since ACSC has come, it's the behavior.

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Chelsea associates improved behavior with the students' taking ownership and "embracing changes" and "working together." She sees improving behavior as a first step, after which "more things can happen."

Buy-in. Beyond measures of success, amelioration also includes the perception of difference-making. The teachers interviewed talked about "buy-in," that is, the belief that the reform can affect systemic change. Julia, a science teacher, represents a Southmore teacher who has bought-in to the reform. She responds to a question about drawbacks to the ACSC reform:

> I haven't really seen any [drawbacks]. I mean, it's one of those of things you can elect to do more and I elected to be on a committee, but I don't think there's a drawback. I found it to be interesting. If there was a drawback, it's just trying to figure out how to get everybody to buy in.

Peter, a music teacher and teacher leader, observes:

> I haven't had it personally, no one has come to me. I put emails out there continually, trying to keep the staff fired up, but I always them, if you have concerns or complaints, come to me. No one really has except the same, "Can we get this to move faster?" But other people do get complacent and then come to me and then that's the big one, why aren't things happening quicker and I try to answer that for them. I will be patient when the structure is in place.

In her interview, Kathleen shows some of the frustrations at the slowness of change that Peter describes; however, she seems optimistic about the possibility of change in the future:

> I wouldn't say there are drawbacks, I would just say there are frustrations. They're just—I guess you can say it goes along with the territory in terms of the changes and stuff, and the benefits are to come. I think the process of going through where we are and where we want to be learning a lot about ourselves, as a school, as an individual and that's always a good thing. I think it's a good thing.

Kathleen recognizes that her frustrations are a natural part of the reform process and is still able to see the positives. "Learning a lot about ourselves, as a school, as an individual" is a measure of success in Kathleen's view. Miranda similarly observes the frustration; she says she is "pretty excited" about ACSC but is afraid the staff is losing buy-in:

> I think there's a lot of excitement in the beginning. And again, with having to do a year of assessing where we're at. It's unfortunately I think it's losing—like some people are kind of losing that enthusiasm for it, in the kind of wait time that we have.

Language arts teacher, Carmen, feels an opportunity has been missed to create buy-in:

> There's a lot I would do differently to buy-in to this. There's so much more that could be done, that should be done for such a beautiful idea and concept. There should not be any teachers dissatisfied. I don't have a problem speaking up because ultimately, it supposed to be beneficial to the kids. But there should not be staff that's worrying its favoritism. There should not be kids that don't know what this is. There shouldn't be a parent have come into my classroom and saying, "What is this?"

There is a great deal of dissonance in the area of amelioration, particularly as treated in terms of buy-in. Levels of buy-in as described by teacher participants vary wildly, ranging from feelings of excitement and hope to frustration and even anger. In addition to a lack of synthesis in the area of amelioration, the findings here also suggest an emotional component that affects stakeholder engagement. Engagement levels and perceptions of difference-making are intricately related, making the argument for continuous monitoring of these areas. Dissonance in either area must be addressed to maintain transformational potential.

Administrators

Measures of success. Building principal Clayton identifies decreasing discipline

infractions as a measure of success, one on which teachers are being evaluated:

> It's a big piece of it, so that's one of goal objective expected outcome. I want to
> see a reduction in disciplinary action, because you've known how to do this, you
> know how to do this.

Following improvement in discipline, Clayton states that his second goal is to improve

instruction:

> We only have control about 90% or 10% of a kids like, 90% we can't control. So
> that 10% slice, I'm squeezing every ounce out of teachers. So the first level was
> behavior change, second level is instructional change. That'll be an ongoing
> process. I've got some teachers that couldn't teach a shark how to eat meat.

Clayton returns to test scores several times as he discusses teacher evaluation and

success measures. In this hypothetical conversation with a teacher he is evaluating,

Clayton focuses on the percentage of students meeting standard on state testing:

> But if everyone started basically 50, 52, 53% and at the end of the year meeting
> with you and I show you your [state test] scores and you're at the 28th percentile,
> what does that say? "It wasn't my fault, really." How kids go backwards 30
> points? Tell me how. Was it the curriculum? This is where it comes to my
> analogy, you know the CSI movie, CSI Miami? Well, we all have to play
> detective to see it, was it the curriculum? You taught something else, everybody
> else got to the 50-yard line. You started at the 50, you went backwards, okay?
> Was it the curriculum? No, I taught the same curriculum, okay. Well, was it the
> students? Did they not show up? You didn't have them for 50% of the time?
> They were in jail, so you didn't have the kids? No, that wasn't the case. Was it
> the instruction, which is it? You tell me. Is there no other reason? I don't have
> any other reason that I know why they failed.

Clayton sees improving instruction, with the intention of raising standardized test scores,

as a key measure of success:

We train the teachers. I wrote my school improvement plan based three basic goals. It's not about student achievement, that's the outcome. If adult behavior doesn't change, we're never going to get student achievement to change. So you might have a good class and somebody says you will have – they did really well, luck, until I know, you got all the skills. Until I know, you know what you're doing and I can see it, smell it and prove it. And you can do it with the team of people over time. It's why we had a good year.

Clayton describes curriculum and pedagogy as a calculated process that can be taught. He sees improving teaching skills as the reason "we had a good year." It is worth noting that Clayton is the only participant in any stakeholder group to identify improved instruction as a measure of success. He states that this is a component of the campus improvement plan, and yet no other staff member interviewed discussed this as part of the improvement plan or as something they have observed improving since the ACSC reform began. This lack of synthesis of amelioration clearly demonstrates the impact on transformational potential. The building principal presumably has intentions that are not shared by the rest of the staff. It is possible that he has not adequately voiced this intention or that he did not successfully garner synthesis of intention in this area. It is also possible that the staff views teacher evaluation as separate from the ACSC reform goals. In this case, the ecological model dictates that intentions, curriculum and pedagogy, and evaluation are all interdependent. Attempts to change one will alter the others, and in this case, it seems that alteration is unlikely to be productive. A synthesis of amelioration would require that a synthesis of intentions had been achieved. Likewise, a synthesis of ideologies that included beliefs about what constitute quality instruction would be necessary for a synthesis of amelioration.

Clayton also identifies climate as a success measure; however, his description of climate makes it unclear how he understands the concept of climate:

> The next piece is the school climate, the management and where would we lead if this were a family. You need some people who are way out here to say, oh, outlooks. I am an army person. And you send that person out forward, those forward people who need to know what's going on so we can make decisions about how to get our reconnaissance in place, how to arm the people. Do you need any arms at all. Is it treacherous?

Clayton's identification of climate as a success measure quickly turns to an army analogy that more broadly describes the reform process. He goes on to identify these "forward people" as the cadres. Of course, the cadres focus on various reform goals, one of which is climate. So while he says, generally, that he wants a group of staff members to "know what's going on so we can make decisions" about climate, he doesn't define climate or identify specific changes that he wants to see or that would mark success. It is also telling that no other administrators discuss climate as a success measure. So again, there is question about the degree to which Clayton has successfully conveyed his intentions to the administrative team, if not the entire staff.

Buy-in. The administrators interviewed all discussed teacher buy-in, its importance in the reform process and the difficulty of gaining and maintaining it. While their assessments vary regarding the degree of buy-in from the teaching staff, all administrators share a belief in the necessity of buy-in. They also agree that a lack of commitment from some staff members is hindering the success of the reform.

Like her administrative colleagues, Becky sees buy-in as crucial along the reform

continuum. Becky argues for the importance of teacher buy-in from the start of the

reform process:

> When ACSC was still a question, they asked me my feeling about it, and I said
> that I thought it was a great idea but the commitment needed to be there and
> everybody needed to be onboard and then we would see some changes.

Becky is frustrated that this crucial commitment from the staff has not been fully

realized:

> I would say from what I view there's about 80% commitment and this is one of
> my frustration points. We were told that if people weren't going to buy into this
> that they would be going other places because you really need people that are on
> board with this. And so that's one of my frustrations that people that don't have
> anything positive to add are not being – I don't know – forced out.

She continues:

> Contractually, but they shouldn't be here. If they don't buy into this and they're
> not willing to work 110% on it and my feeling is they need to go. So that's one of
> the things it doesn't happen quick enough for me.

Clayton reveals that initial buy-in was quite high, near 100%, in fact. But he wonders if

that buy-in was simply a quick-fix solution to the imminent fear of a state takeover:

> We on paper said 99 [%], but I only believe it was because we could have been
> reconstituted three years ago. We don't have to worry about that for five years. It
> is a get out of jail pass.

Without the looming threat of reconstitution, Clayton feels the staff has lost its initial

enthusiasm for change:

> So even though on paper, I know we've got 99% of people that said, "Yeah, let's
> go." You probably got about 50% of the people who are really – when we say,
> boo, let's do it because we are committed to a process and the process that we're
> using now is this.

Melinda discusses teacher buy-in:

> I think that there's a good percentage of the staff that will do anything on their own time to further the process. They put a lot of time and effort in right now, like going to a lot of trainings. Another group of people have gone to a lot of sub-committee meetings and are definitely those that have bought in.

Melinda notes that buy-in was high early in the reform process: "We then had to survey the staff and get buy-in and agreement from the staff at a high percentage, which we did. And there are a lot of people here that are really, really excited about it." She returns to the topic later in the interview and acknowledges difficulty in maintaining buy-in:

> So, we got there with a huge percentage of agreement and buy in and we're now trying to maintain that level of – we're in our beginning stage. We need patience, we need people who understand that the process sometimes in the beginning is very productive, but there aren't obvious outcomes yet.

Melinda feels there is a percentage of the staff that does not believe in the reform. She feels this is a "trust" issue and seems to feel it can be overcome:

> I think there's another percentage of staff that we still have to bring them in with their enthusiasm because they're waiting to see something that they feel that they can trust as something that will give them assurance that, "Okay, this is going to work, this is going to happen." I don't think it has touched everyone on the staff yet.

Ruth discusses the disappointment she feels in terms of buy-in:

> The challenges I face is that there is not 100% buy-in from teachers and it's maybe because I believe wholeheartedly with what ACSC is trying to address. I know that the parents are very excited about it and I feel almost that in one sense that it's put out there as ACSC school with this and with that and it means community, parents all of these and we publicize it to the parents as such. But in the sense, I almost feel like I'm being dishonest in some respect because it's really not being fully implemented the way that it should. And I realized we're early in the stage but we have a few naysayers that kind of ruined it for the rest.

Ruth admits that she feels "dishonest" about the stated intention of involving parents and the community. She attributes the failure of the reform to achieve this goal to "a few naysayers." This lack of buy-in demonstrates Muhammad's (2009) observation that Fundamentalists are especially powerful in derailing reform efforts. Ruth feels defeated, and seems to accept this aspect of the reform as "ruined" even though they are early in the process.

When asked how she feels about teacher buy-in, Ruth laments:

I believe that there's a very few teachers, too small number of teachers that buy into it and those are the people that are on the cadres, that are on steering committee that really believe with all their heart. But there is unfortunately a larger population that really hasn't brought into it even though they all agreed that they wanted this. I don't feel that they're really putting forward I think that is necessary to do so.

In her previous comment, Ruth noted "a few naysayers," but in this subsequent comment she says that "very few teachers" are committed to the reform.

Joel has a slightly more positive view of teacher buy-in:

I'd say you have at least 50% of the building that is now active and gung-ho, it's like that. And the first year might have been different because it was new and everything . . . and then we changed the structure to cadres and things like that. So I think we sort of lost the enthusiasm a little bit and that lost people, they lost the enthusiasm, so that's the part where we have to start rebuilding and getting people back on the ball.

Joel returns to the theme of teacher buy-in:

It's like anything, you know you got to the certain people that will embrace it and love it. And the other people I know will just decide on majority that'll come along and then the ones that naysayer, "Well, yeah, this is another change, another change again, how long is this going to last?" and things like that. And that's why I think it's important that we begin to start changing and doing things, because if not, 2 or 3 years you start losing people.

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Joel offers an optimistic view for the future of ACSC:

> I think when we changed over, we started to mature. It was, like again, it was uncharted territory. Well what can we do? What can't we do? But I think we've reassessed that and we have goals and we're going to be working toward. And certainly if we stay the same way next year, I think that will solve a lot of the problems. . . . I think we're on our way, that we have a little bit of better handle on it.

Clayton has bought-in; he really believes in ACSC. Now, he understands, that he needs other stakeholders to feel the same way:

> And so it's a model that I think works and the data shows it does work. And as of now, it needs an emotional element for building and growing. We've stomped around the wheels, crushed a lot of the nay-sayers, but now we needed to smooth out things and build on people's strengths and their weaknesses because we need everybody.

Clayton is often so blunt in his responses, that it seems almost peculiar here that he recognizes the "emotional element" of reform. He says "we need everybody" to believe in the reform in order for it to work. What Clayton calls for is a synthesis of amelioration, something that Southmore and the ACSC reform are a long way from achieving.

Support Staff

Measures of success. For support staff, ideas about what constitutes success are often related to their roles within the school. Support staff are less likely than teachers or administrators to focus on amelioration of academic failure. One exception is Kyle, a school social worker, who mentions the need to raise test scores three times in his interview. However, Kyle is also the only participant, regardless of stakeholder group, to identify an achievement gap:

> Why is there a disparity between African-American and Hispanic and White? And hopefully that will improve the scores or at least narrow that gap. Obviously the end result is we want everybody to be proficient in [state testing], but there is a disparity amongst students of color and White students.

Kyle questions the cause of the achievement gap, and amelioration for him would go beyond raising test scores to specifically raise test scores for underserved students.

Alicia, a building substitute, is the only other member of the support staff stakeholder group to mention academics. Her role has allowed her to observe the 6th grade team, which she views as having made changes that are improving student academic success:

> I think now more is done to make sure that the kids are on level. . . . They let parents . . . know if they're missing homework. They know if the kids are in danger of failing, they immediately call and set up a meeting. They have the parents and they have to sit down like a panel, so they could help that one student or students.

Kyle and Alicia discuss amelioration of academic failure as important to reform efforts, but other support staff are much more likely to see improved discipline as the primary measure of a successful reform.

Rodney, who works in violence prevention, focuses largely on discipline as he discusses measures of success. He describes students' improved behavior in relation to the implementation of a PBS rewards system:

> I mean if your name is there, then you get whatever the prize might be in terms of maybe from the open gym and students are buying into that. Students are to the point where they want that golden ticket. They want that Wampum, so that's changed because that wasn't here before.

Like Rodney, Jack, who runs the in-school suspension program, identifies reductions in disciplinary infractions as the primary measure of success. However, even though

Rodney and Jack appear to share similar beliefs in terms of what warrants and indicates change, their responses show disparities in processes that indicate a lack of cohesion in reform efforts. Jack describes the changes since he took over the ISS program:

> We made a recommendation to the steering committee to move the room. [Clayton], the principal, found a room for us that was more suitable. And in fact, we now have I think 16 desks in there. There were spaces between the desks and the students are less apt to push each other or knock things off their desk, which happened all time downstairs. And it's much easier for someone such as myself or anybody who's in there to keep control in the room because of the space. That's a key thing. Plus, I have the room set up in a semi-circle, two rows in a semi-circle with my desk, and then I have a bench with a high stool on it, so I can sit up overseeing them so I can see what's going on in the back of the room, if you will.

Jack feels the changes have been successful, and that the ISS program is now more effective:

> It didn't take long for them to realize that there was a new sheriff in town. I don't say that because it's me. I've consistently been the coordinator for that room since I came in. No one else has taken it over, except when I go on a break, so there's more consistency, there's more accountability, and I also hold them to those rules. If I get somebody who doesn't abide by the rules, they earn check marks, they earn points, which is contrary to what normally in school, you try to earn points. But I explain to them, I say, "You don't want to earn points in this class." And they all look at me, "What do you mean by that, Mr. Herman?" I say, "Well, listen. If you earn three points, you come back tomorrow."

Rodney describes a rewards system where students earn rewards for positive behavior, a hallmark of the PBS system Southmore has implemented. Conversely, Jack describes a punishment system where students' infractions are tracked and eventually punished. These two different approaches to discipline suggest a lack of cohesion in this area of policy. While stakeholders in this case agree on what needs to occur – namely, behavior needs to improve – they don't agree on a procedure for effecting that change.

Deana, a paraprofessional, notes several success measures in answering a question about what she hopes the reform will do for Southmore. Her answer mentions grades, behavior, relationships, and climate:

> For grades to go up for children or behavior to be in control. . . . I don't want to say for like teachers to have a better relationship because you do like each houses, I think they all get along between each other, like house blue, house gold and red house. But I think we need to have like more relationship between houses so kids don't feel, you know, you feel like you belong to red house and you are a red house student and that's all. You're not at West Side, you're at red house. That's how I feel it works.

Deana's disjointed answer likely reflects her role as a paraprofessional who observes various facets of the school and interacts with various stakeholder groups. However, her mentioning so many success measures also suggests a lack of focus in the overall reform effort. Amelioration may be difficult to achieve and measure if there is not an institutionally agreed upon target.

When asked about improvement in school climate and culture, Alicia, a building substitute begins by suggesting climate has improved, but quickly moves to observations about discipline concerns:

> Actually, we see it a lot calmer than it was last year. When I first started here, before I even know it, kids are getting locked up and suspended, left and right. . . . Cursing at a teacher, many things like dress code, this is like fighting, little things like, "Oh my God! It was off the wall!" Then we had a number of arrests, but I think it's not as bad as it was last year. It was off key. It was really bad last year. The 8th Grade girls constantly fighting, oh my God! "He say, she say…."

Alicia vaguely acknowledges that the school climate is better this year than last, but her observation that "it was really bad last year" suggests that the perceived improvement may only be in the context of having just gone through a particularly difficult phase. No

specific measures are mentioned, only a general sense that fewer discipline reactions have occurred and, therefore, climate is better.

Kyle makes a similar connection between climate and discipline, noting that "suspensions would decrease in school as school suspension always would be more manageable with the better climate." Kyle goes on to clarify that a "better climate" is one that is "more conducive to learning." Something here about culture/climate and the fact that support staff only mentions discipline, which is only one factor of climate.

Grace, Southmore's parent liaison observes an improvement in school climate and culture:

> There were people when I was just volunteering here that just like I said, would not say hello or nothing. I don't know what happened to them this year, but they're smiling. . . . I would associate it with ACSC. . . . The only thing that's different is ACSC and maybe the hope that goes along with it because right now, that's all we really have. It's the hope that things will change and how are we moving there.

Grace attributes improved attitudes among staff members to the ACSC reform. She believes the promise of change has given people hope, positively affecting the school's climate.

Buy-in. Like other stakeholder groups, support staff also discuss buy-in. Alicia notes inconsistency in buy-in among staff: "As some teachers are coming around, other teachers are not. They kind of like walk the fence." She continues, discussing different groups of teachers:

> And it's kind of hard for them because you teach your old dog new tricks, but sometimes they don't want to formulate. Now those were very those enthusiastic, they want to do it. You have those who want to get the – like, "Okay, we're just doing it, because we have to." That's the impressions that I'm seeing sometimes.

Alicia's "old dogs" and those who just go through the motions without committing to the vision of reform are Muhammad's (2009) Fundamentalists. She also observes those who are very "enthusiastic," Muhammad's Believers. Unfortunately, this lack of buy-in from some staff hurts the overall culture and the potential for transformation.

Some stakeholders are unsure about ACSC, and Grace describes being positive in hopes of convincing them to engage with the reform:

> I think we're maybe at an 80/20, I would say. There's still people that are kind of like, I don't know if this is going to work. We were just outside a few minutes ago and someone said, "Do you really think it's going to work?" And I think they want to know what you think, and I said, "I believe it's going to work. It's going to take time."

When asked if the staff support ACSC, Rodney responds: "Most, but not all. But then that's just with anything, that's just many things. There's always going to be the 'ayes' and the 'nays'. There's always going to be the positive and the negative." Rodney is not surprised that buy-in is not universal. Larry agrees that in any situation there will be dissenters:

> But if you're used to doing something one way for a long period of time, change is hard and I think some, I can't say all, have brought into the idea of ACSC but then there are some them that are still like leery or wait a minute is this for real and the naysayers are going to be the naysayers. They will conform only because it's what they're supposed to do, but I don't think they have brought into the whole idea of ACSC and I think . . . that's no matter where you have go.

Larry recognizes that some people, those Muhammad (2009) terms Fundamentalists, are resistant to any kind of change. They cling to the status quo because "change is hard."

Larry speculates that some stakeholders won't buy-in until they see some tangible progress:

> Show me something to make me realize this is for real and we are from a society that from the show me state, you have to show me. Even though that's not the state that we have you know, live in but we are a people of you like to show me, and I think you understand that.

Kyle makes a similar observation that some stakeholders are waiting for more information before they decide to buy-in:

> So I think there are some misinformation and maybe just not knowing, and again its small groups of people. I think we got a lot of people that are on board and definitely are willing to put the work in.

Demetria is largely optimistic about the reform's ability to affect change: "I personally do see a difference from last year to this year, that I think it will be positive if we stay – that things will go in a positive direction for next year." Demetria responds to a question about whether or not her colleagues see the benefits of ACSC:

> It depends. Some people, yes. . . . Others, I think they're waiting for a big change and I think I felt a little bit more that way last year, like where's the change, when is it going to happen? I do definitely feel more positive because the communication with, like you said, the leadership committee and the cadres, at least they're now getting that information. Last year, it was through email.

Like Larry and Kyle, Demetria observes a degree of ambivalence about the reform that stems from a certain amount of uncertainty and doubt. The support staff interviewed share the belief that some people need to see change in order to believe change is possible. While this might be human nature to feel this way, it is easy to see how this attitude could hinder change, particularly the kind of systemic change needed in failing urban schools like Southmore.

Grace wishes more people would take an active role in ACSC, particularly by taking on leadership positions:

It's always the same ones. So I'd like to see you know, there's only so much one person can do and I try to do as much as I can, but I know that the more I fill my plate the less of a better job that I do because I'm trying to do too many things. So that doesn't work.

Demetria has a different perception, positing that participation has increased: "I think people have stepped up. I think it's hard to get everyone but I think there are more people involved with the cadres." Demetria's further comments, however, reveal that cadre participation is required: "Yes, because you had to. It wasn't a choice really with the cadres." The fact that teachers were required to join a cadre may account for the difference in Demetria and Grace's perception of participation. On one hand, more people are participating in leadership roles; however, the fact that this participation is forced may explain the reluctance that Grace observes. The data suggests synthesis of amelioration has not been achieved. Grace and Demetria have different perceptions of success because they measure it differently. Unlike Demetria, Grace recognizes that the cadres do not increase shared decision-making if they do not encourage communication.

The School

Amelioration, more broadly defined, is the perception of difference-making. All stakeholder groups discuss the pace of change, which they perceive as slow. Some seem frustrated at the sluggish pace, while others accept this as typical of reform. In both cases, stakeholders view the lack of progress as, to some degree, a lack of amelioration.

Math teacher, Kathleen, argues that "change is going to take time whether it's going in a positive direction or a negative direction." She elaborates:

But I mean, yes, it's going to take a while, and you can't expect a hundred and something people on staff to all jump on to the same ship and go in the same

direction and have this little following of the little ducks and everything in a line, so I mean, it's going to take time

Sasha echoes Kathleen's point:

Again, I think it's a work in progress. There are so many different things going on. It's just a matter of making sure that they all start to coordinate. And I don't know if we've gotten there yet. You can't expect everything in a year.

Teachers, Julia and Kathleen, acknowledge the slow pace but seem to accept this as the nature of reform. Julia says, "It's new. So, this is our first year and we've been into it since September – this is February – just really laying the brickwork in the sense of getting people to come and get an idea of who we are." Kathleen concedes, "The whole idea of a ACSC school and coming to – it's going to be a long time before we see the heavy impact. . . . Everyone is 'oh it is a great thing, it's a great thing,' but it's like, you know, it just takes us a while to get there."

Demetria, Southmore's speech pathologist, seems to accept that reform is a process that occurs slowly over time: "Changes? I think overall small. I think we're taking steps. Like I said, I've seen more this year than last year. So when I think – well again, it's a process." When asked by the interviewer to identify larger changes that have occurred since ACSC began, she struggles: "Big change, no. Little changes, sometimes you see them. They're inconsistent." Demetria expresses her concern as the lack of progress threatens to move the culture back to an acceptance of the status quo:

In my sense, I would hope something gets impacted with the scheduling because we've researched that. I think it can be a little disappointing if nothing gets changed, but that's where I think that contract, that union, or "we did this in the past," that kind of gets stuck.

Others express greater degrees of frustration. Special education teacher, Miranda, is frustrated by the lack of changes and feels the slow pace has already started to affect buy-in:

> I think there's a lot of excitement in the beginning. And again, with having to do a year of assessing where we're at. It's – unfortunately – I think it's losing – like some people are kind of losing that enthusiasm for it, in the kind of wait time that we have, so, initially though, I'm almost pretty excited about it.
>
> I am one of those people who doesn't have a lot of patience for that first year, where we're getting everything established. I would like to already see things happening, but I know realistically that doesn't work that way. So it's just – you know, this is the year of, "Let's see how we're doing," and then we'll start making changes. I would rather, "Okay, let's change this."

Miranda recognizes that her need to see immediate results is unrealistic, but her feelings are shared by other staff members. Miranda continues:

> I don't think it really has [changed] yet, and again I think there's a lot of frustration about like we thought we're going to be a ACSC school. We thought we're going to have a say in things and people weren't prepared to wait the year.

Teacher, Carmen, feels more change could have occurred: "I have heard positive things. I'm not saying I have not. I just feel that at this point in this school year, March, April, May, June – three more months, it should be a lot farther along." Fellow teacher, Jeremiah, agrees: "Yeah, I mean, I think it's slow but I can see – you know just [there] could be more action." Technology teacher, Jonathan tempers his frustration: "I mean, the process is a little slow. . . . I don't want to say frustrating because that's a little strong of a word, but you're just anxious a little bit to see how it goes. We'll see."

Social worker, Kyle, defends the pace of reform:

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I think maybe it's not happening quick enough. And I'm not saying that because I don't – I mean, my philosophy is change takes time, and yes it might it seem like we're doing exactly the same thing as last year, but we're not. It's changing.

So, I think that's part of what we're seeing. But I think it's going to take time. I mean how long did it take the school to get in the shape that it's in. I mean five years is not a long time to see some change and of course, we've been doing some good things just in the past year.

Peter, a teacher leader, also defends the pace and describes explaining this to his colleagues:

I think if anything that we're seeing is maybe impatience and I anticipated this. People like change and they want to see it happen fast. There's a lot of problems in the building. . . . People want to see changes happen fast and I'm trying to keep that in check and say, "We've got to get the first order changes in place first, the structure in place and just be patient. We're working there and we're getting there."

As a Southmore staff member, Elena understands that reform is a slow process, but as a Southmore parent, Elena expresses her frustration at the pace of reform:

Yeah it seems slow, I have to say. I mean some of that has happened, but I really wish it was a little bit faster, and . . . all in all ACSC is a slow moving thing . . . but I feel that as a parent and a staff that certain decisions should not have to wait to go in forward in front of a steering committee to ask permission for something.

Elena contributes some of the slowness to the collaborative nature of the reform:

I think in respect I believe that if you have cadres – this is how I look at it, if each all have cadres to handle this situation why keep going – we're waiting another month you're talking about to go in front of the steering committee to ask them this and they're getting another month to tell your team this is what they said.

Grace makes a similar observation in her role as parent liaison. Grace describes initiating the Watch Dog Dad program that other stakeholders speak so highly of. Under the ACSC reform, the program had to be approved by all stakeholders:

I wanted to initiate, it's called a Watch Dog Program and to have dads come in and help out just monitoring around the school. So something like that – before I could just start running with it and doing it on my own – I brought it to leadership. I brought them paperwork, so they can read up on it and then it was discussed at the next meeting and it has to be unanimous. There's no – one person doesn't agree. If one person disagrees, we have to talk that through and see what the problem is. It's not six say yes, two say no. It doesn't work like that.

On the one hand this system values stakeholder voice, but on the other, it risks stagnating change. While stakeholders speak favorably of the cadres and their inclusiveness, others, like Elena, express various frustrations with the steering committee. Here, Elena feels that the steering committee is an unnecessary impediment to timely reform:

> To me I think it's a little too long of a process and I think that as a cadre you've made decisions on things that are important and good for the school, students and everyone along the line that we should just move forward to this and say this is what we will like to have done and why not just start like next week. Here is our plan here is you know, all written down or whatnot and let's just move forward.

> Grace fears the lack of progress will hurt morale and jeopardize the reform's

success:

> As far as ACSC, we have put together our cadres and we've been meeting not as regularly as we should be meeting so I think with that is holding us back from moving forward in a way. It's also fostering somewhat a feeling that what is ACSC here for, for a lot of people, which we don't need that because that's just going to bring the idea and what we're trying to do down. So we're afraid, a lot of us are afraid that we're losing the ambition and esteem that we had originally with it.

Teacher vice principal, Ruth, also recognizes the concerns over the steering committee:

> And now based on that everybody is supposed to be in these little cadres on it, if ever a proposal goes to the steering committee and what we're finding is that the process with the steering committee has become slowed down a great deal with the weather and various things. We don't meet nearly as frequently as we should.

So if you put a proposal three months ago, maybe it has to go through the steering committee to get approved.

Or maybe we've done maybe four things that were really, really great but we have a lot of other things that needs to be addressed and that's what I know for a fact, first hand, that teachers are becoming frustrated with the process this year. But we're looking to rectify that as a steering committee.

Grace is on the restructuring committee and describes the lack of focus among her cadre:

One of the things, and I think what really caused the problem, is the restructuring that one, the biggest priority, and I think the staff was assuming that something was going to happen more and I don't know what changes because everyone wants a different change or because there was no change. That seems to be what comes up in conversation a lot outside of cadre meetings. You know, we voted for restructuring, nothing's – they wanted to see something quickly and – .

The restructuring committee broke off and they are still doing the research, the other half. I'm not a part of the research portion, so I couldn't even tell you – we're kind of sitting in limbo, our last meeting that we had, we weren't sure we were having the same discussion. What are we doing here like – and we all feel like we're spinning our wheels right now.

Several participants, especially in the teacher group, talked about perceived problems with the house system and were in favor of getting rid of this structure. However, as Grace's answer reveals, there is a lack of synthesis even within this single intention. The formation of the restructuring committee suggests an institutionalized intention to restructure the school, yet committee members cannot reach consensus on what structural challenges warrant reform or what the intentions for restructuring should be. This lack of synthesis in regards to intentions is impacting the school culture, as Grace describes:

And along with that, because we are meeting, some people aren't staying, they're going home and because they might feel like they're spinning their wheels: "Why am I staying here for this meeting and we're not really accomplishing anything."

But I think because we're not having like the steering committee every other week like we should be, even if they said once a month it should be once a month.

Grace is unsure if any degree of amelioration has been achieved:

As far as what we've accomplished, I don't really have any answer for that, there's nothing that I can say. We went to once a week to half a day so that the teachers could meet and you know do their lesson planning so the kids could learn more. We have – I don't have – yeah. [Laughs].

Grace maintains some hope for change, positing that her colleagues would put in the work for reform if they felt supported:

Honestly, they would step up I think they don't feel like they're supported. So if they were supported, if they felt like the administration's full support I think they would step up for anything, honestly. But I don't think they are at that place right now. I think we're going to maybe get there but still that's just a hope. A vision that I have, you know where the school can get but they would do anything but I think everybody feels beaten down right now and there's no change. But I think that – I believe they're willing to step up anywhere. If they see something happen.

Here, Grace attributes the lack of participation to a culture of distrust. The staff does not feel that they are supported by administration and, therefore, do not commit fully to the reform, inhibiting its potential for transforming the school. Some administrators commented on the lack of progress in their interviews as well. Melinda seems to recognize the trust component:

We still have to bring them in with their enthusiasm because they're waiting to see something that they feel that they can trust as something that will give them assurance that, "Okay, this is going to work, this is going to happen." I don't think it has touched everyone on the staff yet. We need patience, we need people who understand that the process sometimes in the beginning is very productive, but there aren't obvious outcomes yet.

As an administrator, Becky's own feelings about the reform mirror the frustration of many of the teachers at the perceived lack of amelioration:

> I am a little frustrated because I'm a kind of an immediate kind of person, and I haven't seen the change that I would like to have seen before I got out. And I think that we're beyond point of data collection right now and we should be looking at things and making some changes that are going to have some impact for us, and that's been a little slow coming. And I'm not blaming anybody but for me . . . we know what we need to do, let's just do it.

Becky tries to mitigate her frustration:

> And I know that we have to work through that process. Again, I think it is more me. I expect immediate feedback or change, and I know this is a process, so I am trying to temper my frustrations but yet sometimes I just figured that easier things could be done very quickly and I haven't seen those.

Becky clarifies that she still supports the ACSC reform despite the lack of amelioration she perceives:

> So I have spoken for it before we even voted for it. I'm still – even though I'm frustrated I still think it's a great way to go. I just would like to see a little bit more visual things change.

Looking across the data, a synthesis of amelioration may not have been achieved in terms of identifying measures of success; however, there is a synthesis among staff that amelioration is slow to occur. The concern here is that a growing consensus that change is not taking place will undermine the ACSC reform's transformational potential.

Synthesis of Culture

As noted in Chapter II, school culture is a term with no agreed-upon definition. Peterson (2002) offers the following definition which informs the current study:

> School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the "persona" of the school. These unwritten

expectations build up over time as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together, solve problems, deal with challenges and, at times, cope with failures. (p. 10)

Culture is simultaneously constructed and experienced by humans and, therefore, is unwritten and evolving. And while culture, by this definition, is a shared set of values and norms, it must also be acknowledged that various stakeholders will experience and interpret culture differently. It may, then, be difficult to achieve a synthesis of culture, but it is essential that stakeholders engage with the idea of culture and discuss its role in the ecology of the school and in the reform continuum. This section addresses the final research question: How do stakeholders describe shared values and norms in an urban middle school undergoing reform?

Teachers

Shared decision-making. The teachers interviewed talk about shared decision-making as a reform priority and as a norm that is voiced at Southmore; however, the data suggests that shared decision-making has not truly become part of Southmore's culture. Peter, a music teacher and teacher leader, admits his concern in having the staff share in decision-making:

> My big concern was the staff did not know how to build consensus and that was the first thing I mentioned. I said, "You know, there isn't a staff out that is going to work readily with one another." They said, "Don't worry, those are all part of the PD that we'll be going through."

Miranda, a special education teacher, provides a different view of shared-decision making. She describes not being chosen for a leadership committee and suggests that administration may be limiting participation:

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I think there's a lot of frustration about like we thought we're going to be a ACSC school. We thought we were going to have a say in things and people weren't prepared to wait the year. You know I've heard, just from my doors being opened at the end of the day, a couple of people upset because they wanted to be on committees and there's . . . a group of people who seem to manage to get on every committee they want to be on and there's not necessarily the variety of people. So, I think that's a hugely frustrating thing for some people. There are some really great people with great ideas who just aren't being chosen. When a list of leadership committee, people came out, I was not surprised with all their names on the list.

Miranda continues when prompted by a follow-up question from the interviewer about how teachers were chosen for leadership roles:

I have no idea how. Like, we could submit our names and I did, and I was not chosen, and I know a number of other people were not selected to be on the committee who wanted to be and it was kind of, "Oh yeah, big surprise, like this one, this one." . . . I didn't want to seem like, "Oh, why wasn't I chosen?" And I wasn't able to stay for the meeting where they did discuss how the team was selected.

Miranda's answers reflect a certain amount of distrust. Her sarcastic remark that it was no "surprise" that certain people were chosen evidences a culture of favoritism that places the same people in positions of leadership, hurting morale and creating distrust. Sasha responds this way when asked about teacher representation on the leadership committee: "A select limited number. I mean those are representatives that were selected. They weren't even members that were kind of voted on."

Kathleen feels that shared decision-making is hindered by district interference:

We were told before we got into the whole ACSC idea that teachers would have a say and you would be designing basically, it's your school! But then we were told, well, it's a district policy and you have a dress code. It's out of our hand. You can't change – I can't change it, but it'll be something that's addressed, but then dropped, not looked into.

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Kathleen's frustration mirrors the frustration felt by other teachers regarding issues of power. On the one hand ACSC values shared decision-making; therefore, Southmore, as an ACSC school, has adopted that value as well. But in practice, the teachers describe shared decision-making as hindered by administrative preferences and district mandates. Shared decision-making has not become part of the Southmore culture, and the frustration caused by this dissonance between spoken and operational norms prevents reform from transforming Southmore.

Parental involvement. The data reveals that teachers at Southmore hold certain shared beliefs about parental involvement. Teachers consistently vocalize both the importance of parental involvement and their desire to see more.

Julia notes a general lack of parental involvement, but also acknowledges that there are some parents who are very involved:

> And if we see 35 in our open house, that's good. You have the extremes. You have parents who are super involved, want to know everything that's going on, will email you, you know, stop by pick up work when their kid's out and then you have nothing. Kids, their phone number is change, the call disconnected like you can't get a hold of them, letters will go out, they'll come back and move.

Miranda also feels there is a lack of widespread parental involvement: "I think we have the same small group of parents who try to do a lot and we don't get enough of the variety of parents." Miranda notes that there is a parent committee involved in the ACSC reform, but she thinks more stakeholders, including more parents, need to take action:

> From what I've seen . . . our parents work very hard. There's actually parents who are on a committee here at Southmore that I had never seen before which is nice. But it is the same – you know, I could probably tell you five parents that I see

around the school all the time. We need to get more of the parents, because there's a lot of you know with anything, lot of these people criticizing things, like complaining a lot of things are the ones who like, want everything to change but are not putting the time and the effort. Same with teachers and students, and everything else.

Sasha also observes inconsistency in parental involvement:

Unfortunately, it's more common than not, and I'm not saying all. Like I said, making a blanketed statement isn't fair because I've had my stellar years where I've had parents tripping over themselves. Yeah, I have a parent team. This is cool, and that's been a stellar year. And then I've had other years that it's a matter of, "Could you do me a favor? Do a home visit. We need to find a parent" kind of situation. So it's a full spectrum.

Julia specifically describes a lack of parental support in terms of discipline:

You have to send out the officer, you call home, some parents will deal with it, other parents would say it to you that it's got to be you because my kid wouldn't do that type of thing. I've had parents actually come in as the way to go to my room the back way and they're surprised on how their kid is acting because they say that's not how they are at home. When they are at school, they think they're a big shot.

Chelsea, a music teacher, discusses contacting parents:

I do by phone a lot of times, there's a lot of working parents. I do by phone, but I also make sure that when we have performances and stuff I have lots of time beforehand to talk and interact with the parents. I wish there was more parent interaction. However, in being an inner city that is a little bit of a problem, there's – a little bit lack of – we tried to reach out as much as possible.

As a music teacher, Chelsea sees performances as a way to connect to parents, but she also acknowledges that making parent contact is sometimes difficult. She attributes this to "being an inner city [school]" but cuts herself off before finishing her explanation of how that context impedes parental involvement. Jeremiah, also a music teacher, thinks ACSC has increased parental involvement:

> This school had a lot of – aside from the generic definition, just it seemed like a lot of more involvement from the teachers, from parents, from students, just about the policy program – voices heard – just trying to catch more involvement, kids are more involved, students were more involved, parents are more involved.

It is likely that Chelsea and Jeremiah, as music teachers, have different experiences with parental involvement than academic content teachers at Southmore. The performance component of their content means that Chelsea and Jeremiah routinely have formal opportunities to interact with parents and the community. Furthermore, their interactions with parents are more likely to be positive ones, unlike other teachers who describe contacting parents mainly about academic failure and discipline infractions. Kathleen, for instance, admits that most phone calls home are negative but adds that she tries to say something positive to parents, too:

> I mean, we've only had one huge – that kickoff at the beginning of the year, but every parent we saw we were trying to bring in just to kind of build that positive relationship, but I mean, we all make phone calls, home and stuff and keep a log book and I would say that most of our phone calls, unfortunately are negative, just because that's what sticks out, but I mean, every time – at least for me, every time I call a parent, I try to make some sort of positive thing. Even if the kids get suspended –

Some teachers interviewed discuss ways that Southmore has tried to improve parental involvement. Kathleen mentions the parent liaison position but wonders how effective the reform efforts have been:

> I know our parent liaison has been working hard to try to build those bridges, I mean, we have parents that want to be involved, but it's almost like at this point, what is there for them to be involved in? It's like all of these volunteers, but there's nothing to volunteer for. I mean, we do have some parents who come in and help out with doing envelope stuff or things in the office or whatever.

As a teacher leader, Peter has opportunities to interact with parents:

So, yeah, it's just everybody pulling together. the big challenge is parent strength, to get them involved. That's a district goal, but we're working hard on that one, and I don't let a parent coming out of my office . . . before we leave, we have the conversation, "By the way, now that we've got through the issue, let me explain to you about ACSC, let me tell you how I need you." So I do that with every parent that comes through here. and direct some of the others.

Peter is using his leadership position to engage parents with the reform. Peter also describes efforts to increase communication between the school and its parents:

Oh, well, the parent communication – our parent liaison right away formed a parent committee, a parent advisory committee and she's constantly doing. We're doing robo-calls, we never did this stuff before. Robo-calls, we get information out to parents. The website went up and it's being very active now on the website, whereas we had one before that maybe wasn't updated every two years. Now, almost daily stuff is being posted. I can't tell you how many communications they've already sent home to parents on different issues that we're tapping initiatives – hallway is one initiative. We've started to clean up the hallways.

Social studies teacher, Sasha, is particularly vocal about parental involvement in her interview. She shares her colleagues' belief in the importance of getting more parents involved, but she does not feel Southmore has done enough:

When you have a student body of 1500 and you have 4 parents, to me that's not really equal representation of what the general has to say. I think that we haven't quite figure out how to rally those numbers and come up with everyone having – even the voting, say like, "Okay, yeah, I agree with this. No, I don't agree with this." We haven't gotten there yet.

Sasha recognizes the critical role of parents in increasing student academic success at Southmore:

We need to get better at including our parents. . . . We're teachers; we only have them six hours a day. We need to get better at involving our parents and making them really commit to the educational process.

More so than her colleagues, Sasha seems to have reflected on the complexities of parental involvement. She wonders why involvement decreases at the middle school level:

> I don't know what that barrier is that keeps parents from getting involved because if you look at their involvement to elementary school, our parents are involved. They do the cupcakes. They go to the play all through elementary. Then the middle school and it's like, okay, you're on your own. I don't understand that, where that drop happens. I really don't.

But Sasha does not leave the conversation there; the issue has clearly weighed on her, and unlike her colleagues, she offers several possible reasons for the perceived lack of involvement:

> We have parents that feel like they have nothing to add to their child anymore other than discipline. Maybe they're intimidated. In which case, okay, what do we do to let them know that even if you're intimidated, we're not here to make you look bad as a parent. We just want you involved because it shows a lot to the kids.

Sasha describes an interaction with a parent that has affected her:

> I think I had a parent come in at open house that said . . . I had to stop and think. I'm like oh, okay, I never really thought of it that way. He said, "I want to help my child but I don't know how to help them anymore. The work is too hard for me." And I was like, I never thought of it that way. So I don't know if it's an intimidation factor. . . . He was like, "I need you to basically teach me so I could help my kid because I don't know how." And I was like, huh, I wonder how many other parents feel that way but have never verbalized it.

Sasha considers how parents feel about their relationship with the school:

> There's way too many times where you pick up a phone and you call a parent and the parent says, "Well, why didn't anyone tell me before this?" Or there's too many times where a parent doesn't feel comfortable coming to the school even if you invite them.

Sasha's observations reveal an important dissonance in Southmore's culture. The data

suggests a spoken value place on parental involvement at Southmore, and yet Sasha

describes a climate that is not necessarily welcoming. The school may not be

intentionally creating an unwelcoming environment, but as Sasha recognizes, if there are

parents who do not "feel comfortable" at Southmore, the issue should be addressed – if,

as stakeholders say, parental involvement is valued.

Administrators

Parental involvement. Becky, house principal and former physical education

teacher, describes a positive relationship with parents, something that she attributes to

her having been at Southmore for more than three decades:

> Well, having been in this building for 31 years, I now have a lot of my ex-students whose children are here. So they knew me from the beginning of my career and who doesn't like their phys ed teacher when you're a younger kid usually. So I find that it's much easier for me and it's also easier for me once I've known the parents, we keep them in our house for three years so you keep the same parents and deal with them. The opposite is if you have a parent that's a real pain in the neck, you also have to keep them for three years and sometimes you just can't win with that.

Becky further describes her relationship with parents and how that has helped to build

trust:

> I think that parents think that I'm accessible, I think that's a good thing that they know that they can come in, we can talk we can try to figure out what's best because I kind of feel that actually we're more of a parent than the parent during the school year. So I think they trust that their child is going to be safe here and that – like that's a major theme even with my teachers too. It's safety and doing what we need to do and making sure that everybody's respected.

Melinda describes a similar relationship with parents, something she has also built over

time:

There are a lot of people that come in my office. I've know them I may have had their family members or their other kids. I've had some parents come in here that I taught when I was here and now, they're parents. And so, they like that connection but it's almost like if I wasn't here year after year, they wouldn't be able to make that connection with me. So they kind of hold on to that and they're more likely to call me or come in here and say, "I have a problem with this. Can you help me?"

Clayton paints a different picture of parental involvement, describing past attempts to increase involvement that were not successful:

Seven years here, last year and we'd had good open houses. Everybody comes open house. But we had no PTA here or PTSA and so I'm kind of give up on the whole thing. And I mean literally, we have meetings. We picked them up by bus, have food, pizza, bring your kids, baby sitters. You get maybe 10 to 12 people.

In contrast, Clayton describes a successful volunteer program that has been implemented under the ACSC reform:

So [Grace] instituted – she saw this program called Watch Dog Dads. It was on TV. . . . To make a long story short, got the whole of program, got some information, she got some of her friends, who volunteer to school and we start off of one. It's a Watch Dog Dad. It means with their fathers, dads of good kids or something like that. And what they do is they just – I gave them [a radio], they walk around, hey there's a problem over here. We went from one to two, to three, to four, to five, and they volunteer. It was in the newspaper. It was on CNN. It was on ABC, it was on NBC, it was on CBS. All the police knew about, the mayor called so she had a breakfast and she had put a little thing out flyer just for that. . . . You had a kid in school, show up. We don't want to recruit you. We just want you to know about this, just short, 50 dads show up. We were like, done, perfect. That's a 500% increase in dad participation.

Clayton is pleased with the increase in parental involvement: "So we're really enthused about the parents' participation so far."

When asked if ACSC has increased parental involvement, Joel responds:

Yes and no. I think we've had a kick-off ceremony. It was fantastic and it was a whole school function and the things like that. I think as the year went on we sort of lost a lot of that enthusiasm. Certainly our parent liaison noticed that there are few things that are kind of keep parents in, the Watch Dog Dads, she's started.

We had all the TV cameras up there that various times watching that. There are things that we're trying to do, but that if we – I think we didn't harness the kick-off enthusiasm we had. They continue it through the whole year.

Joel feels the kick-off ceremony was a missed opportunity. He describes "enthusiasm" stemming from the event, but he feels they "lost a lot of that enthusiasm" by not following up with parent contact. Melinda describes a similar missed opportunity. She actually feels that a large number of Southmore parents come in and out of the building on a daily basis, but she doesn't think they've successfully harnessed that presence to benefit the school:

> But I think of the community first being a huge set of parents that are connected to the school because their students attend it. And when you look at through the course of a month, the parents that come in and out of this building, there are loads of them and they come in for various reasons. But if we could collect those people or a lot of those people for a directed reason or purpose and involve them, I think it would be a different kind of community, a different purpose. And there are a lot of them.

> Like Clayton, Joel praises the Watch Dog Dads initiative. In addition to having

the added help in the building, Joel feels it is a positive step just to get parents into the building to observe the day-to-day workings.

> Well, certainly I mean I think we're going down the right road, with the Watch Dog Dads. I like to see more parents involved because I like to see them, see the good or the bad. Certainly, I don't want to hide anything, but I have a behavior class in the corner of my 6th-grade. When they come in, "What's that?" "That's my BA." "Oh okay." And they sort of understand that they're asking – but certainly some of the behavior of the regular kids isn't the best either. But I want them to see that we're working on this, but this is what we deal with every single day.

Joel seems to think that spending time in the building, observing the school day, will give parents a better understanding of Southmore and its students, perhaps increasing support. Becky agrees, making a connection between parent involvement and climate: "I

think the more parents you have in the building the more friendly the building appears to everyone." Becky also praises the Watch Dog Dads as an example of increased parent participation:

> So I think that our parent Liaison over there has made a lot of impact with parents, we have lots of dads coming now patrolling the hallways. We have a lot of things that we didn't have before. She's willing to pitch in, make phone calls to parents; it's all a plus.

But Becky goes on to list other ways parents could be involved:

> So I'd like to see them, I'd like to see them in cafeteria times, just touching bases with kids and checking out to see who's eating, who's not eating because you know 400 kids in a room, it's very difficult to monitor that kind of stuff. So I'd like to see more parents, but it's tough because people that are working and you know.

Melinda agrees that parental support could be increased:

> So I think that we have to get a lot more outreach to the parents first and get them here but have a purpose for what we want for their group.

> There are a lot of people in the building, staff and administrators that have a set of parents that they have a great rapport with, that they definitely have a connection with. But I don't think we're using any of those people or groups of people for a directed purpose.

> Several of the administrators interviewed offered suppositions about the

perceived lack of parental involvement. Building principal, Clayton, describes his

student population as "transitory" and feels that the high student mobility rate affects

Southmore's ability to grow parent involvement:

> But we can have core 50, 60 parents, I'll take that in a hard beat. And that's consistent with the other – to middle schools. They don't have anybody just like I had nobody. . . . So our parent participation is starting to grow and starting to get the outcome of that getting the extra help of this volunteer, one day a week, come on in for a couple of hours. Then what that does is word of mouth. "I'm involved in my kid's school. I know what's going on. I can see my teachers anytime you

want, you walk in." I've got husbands and wives now coming, mothers and dads. So it's a start for us.

Melinda adds that parent participation generally decreases at the middle school level, so

this may not be a problem specific to Southmore:

> The first thing I think about is parents, and middle school, I know from my own kids that go to middle school in another town, that whole idea of parent – PTA, PSA kind of just trails off when they hit the middle school. The group of people that I went to PTA with at the elementary school level almost disappears at the middle school level, from my perspective as a parent. We have the same issues here with our formal PPT. We don't have a big draw of parents, so I think part of it is the nature of – the age level of the kids.

Ruth describes the parents' own education level as creating a negative relationship with

school:

> To be honest, from my experience here in this district, I feel and I also feel with the special ed students when they come in for PPT and the parents come in and what I have observed from the parents in this district and a lot of our parents are not very highly educated. I feel they are intimidated by the process. They come in and it breaks my heart because they don't know the questions. They haven't been guided as far as the education system. Some are just babies themselves they have young kids that are in middle school.

In addition, Ruth feels that Southmore needs to take more initiative to increase parental

involvement through ACSC:

> When we have a parent the second year into it coming to your classroom at open house and says, "What is ACSC?" Why don't they know? Your child goes here. So there's something wrong with that.

Ruth continues:

> Should more of that be done? Absolutely. But that's why my vision is to see ACSC really come full force because having those parents come in—they'll come. Give them something to come for. Don't be calling the parent because John is having a bad day 24/7. Go ahead and tell them what a great job he did today.

The administrative group largely agrees that parental involvement is valuable, and they all identify improving parent participation as a reform intention. There is, however, some dissonance in what constitutes parental involvement or how to increase it. Several administrators praise the Watch Dog Dads program, but few offer other specific ways to get parents involved. And while all administrators want to see parent participation increase, a dissonance in institutional beliefs about parental involvement is likely to prevent transformation. Some administrators interviewed seem to believe increasing involvement is possible through initiatives instituted through the reform, while others offer excuses for low involvement that place blame largely on the parents themselves. The lack of synthesis here will decrease the transformational potential of the ACSC reform.

Support Staff

The value of support staff. Support staff are an integral part of any school setting, interacting with all stakeholder groups and all facets of a school's ecology. Some of the support staff interviewed however, expressed feelings of devaluation. Elena, a Southmore parent and secretary, makes the following observation about the culture:

> I wish I could do more sometimes but . . . you know I'm a secretary and I'm a parent and I'm not a teacher and there are certain things that only teachers are allowed to do. But yeah I would like to do what they do after school and help out, but I can't because I'm not a teacher. It's in their contract, they're supposed to do it, but they're not here to volunteer, and to step up and say, I'll volunteer and do that, it's so hard. I mean it's like when you have people helping . . . but we can't ask you because it would step on their toes, but they're not voluntarily doing it neither you know.

Ironically, a community school reform like ACSC calls for all stakeholders to take ownership of the school and of student academic success; however, Elena feels uncomfortable asking to be included in efforts to improve student achievement. The culture at Southmore does not seem to have been changed by the reform to allow wider participation. Further, Elena is employed at Southmore, so her feelings of helplessness do not suggest an open portal for other Southmore parents to get involved; Elena's status as an employee within the school has not produced opportunities for involvement. Deana makes a similar observation:

> Actually, the whole staff had a meeting and it was good, the ideas that they presented and different strategies and different approaches for like—I think there was four different teams that they presented data and all that information. It was good to see and to actually know other people because we don't get included. As paras, we don't get included in teacher's meetings. So we have no idea of what's going on. So that was actually the first meeting that I ever had with the whole staff and got to actually see them as well, who they are.

Elena and Deana perceive that teachers are valued more than other stakeholders – paraprofessionals, parents, etc. This is an important part of the Southmore culture that limits a reform's transformational potential.

Parental involvement. Kyle says that increasing parent involvement is a reform intention:

> So I think parent involvement and that's one of our goals is to increase the parent involvement typically, we haven't had a whole lot of parent involvement. When they have the PTSA meetings, you know sometimes you might get three parents or one parent. So it's a little frustrating.

Like those of the other participants interviewed, Kyle's answers exhibit an institutionally

held value of parental involvement. Kyle, a social worker, describes having had positive

interactions with parents:

> And, I mean the parents that I come across I mean are usually very good. You
> know they want what's best for their kid whether it's for special ed or for
> discipline, but most of the parents I come across are very good.

Parent liaison, Grace, describes limited parental involvement:

> Well, since it was open house, we actually attached [a notice about a parent
> meeting] to the letter that went home with the kids about open house and we put
> a set time, I think it was 6:30 to meet in the library, so we should have had more
> parents, but believe me, I see ten, I get excited. Believe me, it's kind of like,
> "Yes!"

Grace counts any involvement as positive.

> The support staff at Southmore describe varying degrees of participation among

parents. Alicia describes the disparate responses from parents:

> If you have those parents that we had here and some parents look at us like, "You
> called me for that?" We're like, "Okay." I have one parent called – their
> daughter didn't do the homework. And it's like, "Is this what you called me for?"
> Like that's not important, like, "Oh, I'm so sorry."

> You have those that really – they come in and they're concerned about, "My
> daughter can do better." Or, "My son can do better. What can I do to help?" So
> it's kind of like a 50/50.

Deana does not view Southmore parents as involved:

> I don't have a lot of contact with the parents, I don't know but from what I see,
> like – I don't think parents are involved much. Like if you sent papers, it doesn't
> come back. It doesn't necessarily mean that parents are not responding because
> maybe the kid never sent the paper home. But they're not involved.

Demetria, Southmore's speech pathologist, notes that 6th-grade parents are still relatively

involved, but she sees that involvement taper off in the subsequent grades.

Do I think there's more parent involvement? . . . Our parent liaison has definitely kind of improved that overall. I also have – just my personal thing, I had 6th-graders this year and I do see that their parents kind of continue. I don't always see that carryover like in 7th and 8th.

Grace defends parents who may appear uninvolved:

You have parents that work a lot, so just because I might think a parent is not involved, that doesn't mean that their parent is not working 70 hours a week like I was to try to have a home and everything else. Just because they don't show up at the school doesn't mean they're not watching from the sidelines.

Kyle discusses the fact that the values of parents and the values of the schools don't always align:

Somebody said, it's probably not true—and again, this is probably small minority. But we'll have some parents that come in after kids fight and says, "Oh you fought? Okay, good. I told him to fight." Or they'll say, "Mom says, if somebody is messing with me I can fight them." So that's kind of difficult and disheartening when you come across that that they're getting a different message at home, which – not that you think every parent is teaching the same thing we're teaching, but it's just a little disheartening to know that they're giving them a lot of different things in terms of coping than we are. And it kind of runs counter to what we're trying to do.

Several support staff members indicate that they do believe ACSC has increased parental involvement. Alicia feels that parental involvement is more positive since the implementation of ACSC:

I see more parental involvement now that they introduced ACSC, because – the only time you saw parents when the kid was either sick or in trouble. Now, you have parents come in and actually would inquire, they want to help

Larry also feels involvement has increased and credits the parent liaison with aiding this change:

More so with the parent liaison I say yes. I mean [the parent liaison] has been great. . . . She is the one that gets the parents involved in a lot of stuff whereas before, we don't have that kind of liaison and I will say that the last and we had a parent liaison prior to her, good, bad or different but [the current liaison] is very

actively involved. She is actively involved in every aspect. . . . Oh yes and I believe more parent involvement.

Grace, who started the Watch Dog Dad program, talks about the initiative and how it has been beneficial:

> At first we didn't know what to do we didn't know how the kids were going to react to the whole idea. But there's one dad . . . he's here any given week between two and three times a day just patrolling the hallways. And he was asked a few weeks ago to watch a classroom. So he said he decided to ask the kids how they felt about him being here because he's on their side but at the same time he does what I do. "Get to class." "Where you belong?" You know what I mean? And he's giving it to them and they're listening to him.

Demetria also praises the Watch Dog Dad program, but wishes more parents could spend time at school:

> I think the positive with the dads coming in, I think that's a positive having them walk through the hall. I think it would be nice to even get more parents in where they can see the kids in action. That would be a definite – and not just the behavior, just overall, just to have them in the hallways, to have them in different places I think would be helpful, even having them in the classrooms. It would be nice to have that involvement. But I know there's restriction number one, if they're working, and time in getting here, that's an issue too.

Alicia offers that contacting parents through the arts programs is a successful way to get parents involved:

> We have the play, bring kids from the 6th, 7th, 8th grade and send them pamphlets home to the parents, their parents are really thrilled about it. [The drama teacher] welcomes them, they could come anytime. He has some parents volunteering now. He has more help than he had in last year, which is good.

> The students, and so the parents could come and see [the music program] and then, they would have instruments, the kids get to take them home. They had to sign off on it, but their involvement, they need to talk to the teachers, and it's like an open door policy. Now, they can come in and see.

Alicia addresses parental involvement from her perspective as a parent:

If – we have parental involvement, I like it personally, because now my daughter's school is ACSC too, they know, I'm one of those parents – I want to know what's going on, I'm not going to be there when she's sick, or she got in trouble, I want to know what's going on in the school. I am interested.

You want to have the parents to come in, but you don't give them any incentive to have them come here, because we're all setting it like, the parents go after work, yet they come across—you know what, this is a job too. Your kids' education is something important, come and see, take a half day, you don't have to call them, but come in and see what your child is doing.

Deana also compares Southmore parents to herself as a parent:

I don't see—I see that we have behavior children that for example gets suspended so many times, so we get in trouble so many times and I don't have that feeling that parents are actually to come to school to see what's going on or I would be like if my daughter got in trouble, I would go to school and see what's going on or why is she in trouble or question the teacher of what happened and we don't see that a lot. We don't have parents calling in and asking about their children.

Like other stakeholders, Larry understands that most parent contact is negative and

reactionary:

Whether it's the teacher, whether it's the principal, but for the most part you call home for what? When your kid is bad or the kid did something out of line, disrespectful. How many times do you call home to say you know what? Your son and daughter did an outstanding job or et cetera that does not happen that often.

Larry feels that communication is key in increasing parental involvement:

Once you inform a parent that you're here not just ACSC in general to better serve their child, to make their children safe, they get onboard because then they could understand what your purpose is.

Grace also sees the task of increasing parental involvement as relational:

It was good that I was here last year because I still met 6th-grade parents coming in, so when I see them now this year, there's more of a relationship, so if I need them for something, I can call. There's always the one – if you see them, the first time you smile, the second time, have a few words – over time, it just – you meet

their husband, you find out about their other kids, why they're upset today. You just start to find things out about them and it makes it easier to ask them for help when I need it.

Grace speaks to school culture as it relates to parental involvement:

I mean, just—you've got to make them feel comfortable like they can come here at any time. Don't make them feel like they're a thorn on the side and that's what happens.

Grace describes how she reaches out to other parents:

Because we had an open house here in October, we had maybe 25 parents come in for the small meeting. I let them know and I related it to the Board of Education and I said, "You know how the Board of Ed has their meetings? I said, "We're having our same kind of meetings here." I said, "All of the decision are made at the Board of Ed." I said, "But here, all of our decisions are going to be made at leadership. It's your way to have your voice. Use me." And [another parent liaison] was here and I said, "This is your other parent representative. Use us. Tell us what you want and we will go back." And that night, we got a lot of phone numbers and things like that.

As parent liaison, Grace participates in meetings that give parents voice; although, participation is minimal:

And our meetings are small, but what we did was leadership is the first and third Wednesday of every month and we did the second and fourth Thursday of every month. So it's different parents coming in, it gives more parents an opportunity to come in and say – and we discuss the minutes. What's going on? See how they feel about it and then leadership is the following week. We say, "This is what the parents have to say about this."

Parent involvement seems to be something that all stakeholders value, and yet this is an example of the structural facet of the school's ecology not aligning with the cultural facet. Even though she is a paraprofessional at Southmore, Elena describes her role as a parent liaison as voluntary. Grace describes her position as parent liaison and answers the interviewer's question about the position being full-time:

I'm here Monday through Friday. It used to be 20 hours a week; now they moved it up to 30, but you spend more like 40 to 50 [hours a week]. . . . I choose to be. I voluntarily stay here. I have a choice but I prefer to stay because I like to see and get things done.

Adequate resources are not devoted to increasing parental involvement despite all stakeholders expressing its value. Grace's programs, such as the Watch Dog Dads, are successful, but her position is still part-time, which as Grace describes, is not enough time to do what she feels needs to be done. The dissonance between structure and culture prevent synthesis and stunt the transformational potential of a reform that, in the case of ACSC, should put an emphasis – and substantial resources – on increasing parental involvement.

The School

      Discipline. Discipline – the number of infractions, whether or not discipline has improved, how to ameliorate behavior – is a theme discussed by all stakeholder groups throughout the data. While discipline issues have been discussed as ideologies, personal beliefs of participants, as well as in terms of success measures, discipline will be discussed in this section as a crucial part of Southmore's school culture. Institutionalized beliefs about discipline affect the transformational potential of the ACSC reform.

      The stakeholders in all groups talk about the positive behavior system (PBS) that Southmore has implemented. House principal, Joel, describes the inquiry that led to the development of the system:

It started as a district initiative a couple of years ago because I guess the state was looking at the – our printouts of the suspensions. . . . This is something that we download and send to the state and then they have some . . . okay, this is the code for the incident, okay let's see, how many days and that's what they look for and then they'll look at – then because they have gender and race, they'll look

at that and then they'll be able to look at special ed. . . . They also say, "Well, you suspend a lot of Hispanics," and things like that, well, the majority of our population, male Hispanics, is in this building, so of course those things would go up. But that's one of the things that the state did and I think there were a couple of other districts that they looked at and so, you have to start some other initiatives other than just suspension, which is fine.

Joel describes the state's inquiry into disproportionalities in suspensions. The district implemented PBS as a reaction to questions about the higher instances of suspensions in some subpopulations. Joel mentions Hispanic males as one such subpopulation, qualifying that this is Southmore's largest demographic group. While Joel seems to somewhat dismiss the cause for implementing PBS, stakeholders speak positively about the system and its effects.

Julia discusses the PBS as a growing part of the school culture:

It's the behavior part. It was here before ACSC but ACSC is really getting it rolling in the sense that—you know, what's nice about that is its teachers and students in administrator's meeting every Wednesday, to come up with ways to have positive behavior system where there's rewards and all that stuff and student council has to say and so.

Chelsea: "I think the students should be positively encouraged, instead of just negatively. And it always works, at their age, they're kids and kids respond well to positive things." Kathleen agrees that PBS is working:

I do feel that the reward system is working to an extent. It is nice for the kids. Fortunately, our "great doings" are doing what they're supposed to be doing, getting the recognition and it also is starting to lure kids who wouldn't know how to make good choices to start thinking about their choices.

Kathleen describes a PBS reward system and its positive effect on behavior. Across stakeholder groups, there is a collective belief that PBS is working to reduce behavior concerns at Southmore. The work of Diamond et al. (2004) and Valencia (2015)

demonstrates, however, that failure to address the underlying biases that lead to

discipline disparities results in a school culture that disadvantages urban students of

color.

Institutionalized beliefs about teaching. Across stakeholder groups,

participants talk about acts of teaching. While ideologies about teaching vary,

participants do express institutionalized beliefs about teaching that have become part of

the Southmore culture. One theme that comes up repeatedly is collaboration.

Alicia describes collaboration as an important part of the 6th-grade team's goal to

raise test scores. For this team, collaboration involves students and parents:

> I think now more is to make sure that the kids are on level, because . . . you
> know, the 6th-grade team, they're intense about having the kids, about the [state
> test] scores, about . . . the academics. They let parents – they let them know if
> they're missing homework. They're still on top of them but they're – sleeping,
> they're caught immediately. And they had the parents – they know if the kids are
> in danger of failing, they immediately call and set up a meeting. They have the
> parents and they have to sit down like a panel, so they could help that one student
> or students.

Grace spends a great deal of time discussing teacher collaboration with the

interviewer. She recognizes collaboration as a stated norm, something valued as part of

the Southmore school culture. However, Grace is concerned about the reality of

collaboration:

> I think a lot of the collaboration time is determined for them rather than allowing
> them to – I think they need time to sit together and talk about lesson plans, things
> like that and how they want to teach. I think a lot of them are held back because
> of the [state tests] and things like that. So even if we talk about collaboration
> time, because—but the collaboration time, you're not able to utilize it to put good
> lesson plans together, you know what I mean? It's already dictated that the
> speaker is going to come in or this workshop is going to happen.

Grace continues to discuss how ACSC has not increased collaboration time as intended:

> And I thought that they would have a good collaboration time. To me, I'd rather take an hour or two away from each school weeks so that they can put good lesson plans together, you know what I mean? And then the following week have good instruction. So I'm not sure what collaboration time is supposed to be for. I thought that's what it's supposed to, you know. [Laughs].

Grace punctuates her concern as a parent:

> And I only say this because I have children that are coming here, and I'm concerned. I'm truly, truly concerned, so – I don't know. I don't think it's changed. I don't know. Maybe the teachers have said that it's changed. Maybe there's more collaboration time, but I don't see what they're doing.

Grace's observations represent a lack of cultural synthesis. On one hand the stated intentions of the reform and the school's administration value teacher collaboration, and stakeholders mention collaboration repeatedly as something they value. However, there is dissonance between this stated value and the actual norms that stakeholders like Grace are experiencing.

Demetria feels that collaboration has improved at Southmore in the last few years:

> Every teacher of course is different in their teaching style but I think – I will say this. I think in the last three years, I noticed more communication grade level wise like working with the grade level teachers. For example, by going to these classes, I think there's definitely more communication on the curriculum because they have time to meet. Is it exactly the same? No, but there's communication. So I think it's the starting point.

Grace also sees collaboration increasing, but she questions its effectiveness:

> I think a lot of the collaboration time is determined for them rather than allowing them to – I think they need time to sit together and talk about lesson plans, things like that and how they want to teach. I think a lot of them are held back because of the [state standardized test] and things like that. So even if we talk about

collaboration time, because – but the collaboration time, you're not able to utilize it to put good lesson plans together, you know what I mean? It's already dictated that the speaker is going to come in or this workshop is going to happen.

Grace's concern comes from the perspective of a parent: "I'm truly, truly concerned. . . . I don't think it's changed. I don't know. Maybe the teachers have said that it's changed, maybe there's more collaboration time but I don't see what they're doing."

Analysis of ideologies reveals a fairly consistent belief among stakeholders that collaboration is a key component of good teaching. However, the structure at Southmore, even with reform, hinders some forms of collaboration, suggesting that, culturally, collaboration is not valued at the institutional level. Kyle responds to a question about whether or not teachers have the opportunity to observe one another in the classroom:

> They'd be able to see sixth grade or seventh grade, but an eight grade teacher wouldn't be able to see an eight grade teacher teaching. . . . Because all the 8th-grade teachers are off at the same time. So there's not really . . . you know, we have to put a sub in there or something like that, but it's not practical that they can. They can definitely meet and collaboration, but in terms of them seeing a peer teaching in the same grade, no.

Alicia observes another structure that impedes collaboration, the house system:

> To be honest, when I first got here, no. I didn't see that. It was this house against this house, that house against this house, no. They weren't collaborating. They're collaborating within the houses, but not to give there as a whole, as a school. No, I don't see it.

Alicia makes a similar comment while describing the autonomy afforded by the ACSC reform: "So you could kind of figure out how you want to maneuver this and to me, hopefully more teachers working more together, not divided by houses, to tell you the

truth." Ideologically, Alicia seems to value collaboration, as do many of the other participants. However, this observation by Alicia suggests that collaboration is not valued by all: "People now are trying to make nice – try to work together, because now they have no choice but do it." Alicia's statement reveals that some collaboration is forced and happens only because ACSC requires it; collaboration is not a consistent part of the Southmore culture.

Deana describes voluntary collaboration in her house, but she also admits that not everyone participates:

> At red house, yes. That's a big thing. It's really good. That's actually the whole lunch time, they have a long table like this and all the teachers sit together and that's where their all conversation between which kid needs to be switched, what's going on. I mean, I'm talking in perspective for some teachers who come to lunch because we have like one or two who don't actually come down to the lunch room to eat with everybody which is they're going to do whatever they want.

In this case, collaboration takes place outside the institutionalized structures of Southmore; however, it is not successful in gaining everyone's participation. Whether structural or not, there is not a synthesis of culture when it comes to the institutionalized valuing of collaboration.

Competing expectations. Throughout the data, particularly in the teacher group, stakeholders discuss divisions between those at Southmore who support the ACSC reform and those who do not. These divisions represent competing expectations (Muhammad, 2009) and are a dominant part of the Southmore culture. These competing expectations warrant analysis for the limitations they inherently place on transformational potential.

Music teacher, Chelsea, discusses some teachers' resistance to change:

> Yeah, I hate to say that, I think it's – you know, I kind of want to say set in your way. . . . If somebody feels a negative way, they need to express it. Or let it out there and just let be dealt with, instead of things like writing something down or I heard that I had happened. Yesterday we had professional development day and I heard that somebody wrote on one of surveys and everybody said why would you do it? And it's the truth, if we're going to work together here, then if you have a problem, just bring it on to the open. Even if we can't find the solution, at least we'll discuss it. So, maybe there will be a solution.

Chelsea is frustrated by those who passive-aggressively work to thwart reform and maintain the status quo. The group of teachers Chelsea describes are the Fundamentalists, a powerful group of teachers whose negativity creates a toxic school culture (Muhammad, 2009). Such a culture makes it unlikely that reform efforts will be successful in achieving systemic change.

Sasha, a social studies teacher, makes the following observations about how teachers respond differently to attempts to reform:

> I think it's a very interesting community in the respect that we have older veteran teachers. And then those older veteran teachers, you have a split. You have those teachers that are still engaged and still doing their thing, and involved in making – really being part of a professional learning community and this is people coming in and observe. They'll offer support, mentor, and then you have those other ones that are more reserved and more fearful of change.

Sasha describes the divide between the Believers and the Fundamentalists (Muhammad, 2009). Sasha observes Believers who are engaging along the continuum of reform; conversely, she observes the Fundamentalists who she euphemistically identifies as "more reserved and more fearful of change." Indeed, this fear of or resistance to change, negatively impacts school culture. The failure to achieve a synthesis of culture reduces transformational potential.

Indeed, the Fundamentalist attitude appears in the data as some participants resist the changes ACSC seeks to implement. For example, Carmen seems suspicious of administrators' attempts to change the culture at Southmore:

> And the problem I have with that is that now, all of a sudden, because we're ACSC, these same people—and this is in general from talking with and listening to colleagues. . . . It's hypocritical in my view point because now, it almost comes across as being phony. . . . I've been in this building for five years, and there's administrators that I've seen, not personally, walked by staff and not looking, not saying hi. . . . In the four years, they never acknowledge you. And all of a sudden, all this, "Yea! Rah rah! Sis boom bah!" And to me, I find very hypocritical because if it was truly within your heart, if that was really what you felt, it wouldn't have taken ACSC to make the school all of a sudden this.

Carmen represents the Fundamentalists teachers who thwart change. Carmen doesn't attack ACSC directly, instead, she focuses her negativity on administration who she views as "phony" in their attempts to improve school culture. If the administrators really felt this enthusiasm, she argues, the ACSC reform wouldn't have been necessary. Of course, her logic is rather faulty, since one intention of the reform is to improve the school culture, and it only worsens the culture to chastise those who are actively trying to make strides. As Muhammad (2009) points out, Fundamentalists make emotional arguments and do not respond to reason. If Southmore seeks systemic change, there must be a clear intention to address these competing expectations. A synthesis of culture cannot be achieved as long as some teachers pollute the culture by actively working against reform.

It is also important to observe how a lack of synthesis of culture can potentially prevent even Believers (Muhammad, 2009) from supporting change. Grace, who

expresses optimism about change in general and about ACSC specifically, makes this observation in her second interview:

> I just – I'm getting myself to a point where I did small things like dress code issues or starting to push me over the edge, you know what I mean? . . . When I go to the meetings now, I'm just kind of wondering the same thing, what am I doing here? I could be home you know, I have six children.

Grace is a Believer; she urgently wants reform for Southmore and for her own children, and she genuinely believes in the ACSC model: "The idea itself is great. There's no reason why it can't work. Absolutely no reason in the world." But the lack of synthesis has frustrated even Grace to the point that she questions her own motives for engaging with reform. Grace is an example of how transformational potential and school culture work as interdependent facets. The toxic culture created by Fundamentalists disrupts transformational potential. As transformational potential is disrupted and reform falters, morale worsens, and Believers like Grace can start to slip toward the negativity of Fundamentalists.

Summary

When viewed as a living organism, a school is made up of ecological facets that interact interdependently. When one facet is acted upon, all factors are altered (Eisner, 1998; Uhrmacher & Moroye, 2007). The forces that act upon these ecological facets are conrolled by human actors, and it is therefore necessary to include those human actors in discussions of school reform. Muhammad's (2009) competing expectations, Diamond et al.'s (2004) conception of race, class, and organizational habitus, and transformation of intentions (Hall & McGinty, 1997; Placier, Hall, McKendall, and Cockrell, 2000)

provide a lens for understanding the human actions that determine to what extent a reform can create systemic change in failing urban schools. In the present case study, five major themes emerged from the data collected at Southmore Middle School. These themes represent the degree to which synthesis is achieved among stakeholders in key areas that impact reform. These include: (1) synthesis of ideologies, (2) synthesis of engagement, (3) synthesis of intentions, (4) synthesis of amelioration, and (5) synthesis of culture. Together, these five factors make up the transformational potential of a reform. This chapter discussed each of the five themes as they were represented in the whole school case and the embedded subunits of the three stakeholder groups: teachers, administrators, and support staff. Analysis revealed that dissonance in ideologies, engagement, intentions, amelioration, and culture interrupt and even prevent a reform from having the transformational potential necessary to affect systemic change.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The present study set out to understand how stakeholders described their experiences in an urban middle school undergoing reform, an inductive process that began with the stakeholder voices. Southmore Middle School was the case under study, as it implemented a community school reform with the hopes of turning around years of failure and avoiding reconstitution. In addition to the school as a whole case, three stakeholder groups served as subunits of analysis – teachers, administrators, and support staff. Based on a content analysis of previously collected semi-structured interview data and document analysis of publicly available school profile and performance data, the researcher developed a framework for understanding school reform, transformational potential. Transformational potential, the degree to which a reform effort and a local school system can achieve synthesis toward creating lasting, systemic change, asks stakeholders to question their ideologies, engagement, intentions, perceptions of amelioration, and school culture. Synthesis in each of these areas is necessary if a reform is to have the potential to transform a failing urban school; conversely, dissonance in these areas will restrict the transformational potential of a reform.

This concluding chapter will discuss the implications gleaned from the case study of Southmore Middle School and its stakeholders. Implications include a revised ecological model of school improvement, extensions of existing literature on school

culture and literature that informs urban school reform, and a conceptualization of school culture at the center of a multi-level ecosystem of human actors who impact reform efforts. These implications highlight the contextual nature of all schools and the exo-system that bounds urban schools in particular. Recommendations for practice are directed primarily to district and school administrators who hold the power to interrogate stakeholder readiness for change and synthesis between the local school system and a proposed reform. The present study also calls for administrators to empower stakeholder voices along the continuum of reform. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are also addressed.

Implications

The ecology of school improvement model provided a lens through which to view Southmore Middle School as a living organism made up of interdependent facets. In addition to the facets proposed by Eisner (1988) and Uhrmacher and Moroye (2007) – intentions, structure, curriculum and pedagogy, evaluation, and school-community relations – the current study proposes school culture as a sixth facet of a revised ecology of school improvement model. School culture is an essential component of a school's ecology, as it represents the human actors that make up a school, impacting all ecological facets as well as reform initiatives that attempt to alter these facets. Efforts to reform urban schools have focused primarily on the structural, curricular/pedagogical, and evaluative facets of schools, failing to take into account the human actors who create and experience school culture. That culture, as evidenced by the stakeholder groups at Southmore Middle School, has an enormous impact on a reform's transformational

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potential. As Figure 2 illustrates, the interdependent facets of a school's ecology, including school culture, impact student achievement and are, in turn, impacted *by* student achievement, creating a cycle of ecological school improvement. Attempts to reform urban schools cannot ignore school culture as an important part of a school's ecology.

Muhammad's (2009) theory of competing expectations provided a framework for understanding school culture in the present study by identifying four groups of teachers – Believers, Tweeners, Survivors, and Fundamentalists. Each group has its own beliefs and expectations regarding the school and efforts to transform it. Believers, with their high efficacy and high expectations, support a positive school culture and positively impact reform efforts. Fundamentalists, who champion the status quo, create a toxic school culture and actively work to thwart reform efforts. Muhammad's work is an apt way of viewing school culture and its role in reform. While Muhammad's framework consists of groups of teachers, the present study suggests that Muhammad's work can be more broadly applied to all stakeholder groups. In all stakeholder groups there are those who will resist change, Fundamentalists, and those who will support it, Believers, making Muhammad's work applicable to teachers, administrators, and support staff.

The present study also informs Muhammad's (2009) work by illuminating nuances within the groups presented by Muhammad, particularly the Believers. The data collected at Southmore Middle School suggests that failing to achieve synthesis in ideologies, engagement, intentions, amelioration, and culture may create a dissonance that disrupts Believers. Muhammad casts Believers as wholeheartedly committed to

student success but less committed to garnering that commitment in their peers. Dissonance may make Believers further resist actively converting Fundamentalists, as Muhammad points out they are already wont to do. In some cases, dissonance may further harm the Believer group, causing them to doubt reform if not outright resist it. Support staff member and parent, Grace, serves as a warning against this possibility. Grace, who is clearly a Believer and even acts to thwart Fundamentalists by speaking out in meetings, eventually expresses doubt as to the ACSC reform's ability to create change. This is an important extension of Muhammad's work that bears further study. While Believers are unlikely to become true Fundamentalists in ideology, it may be possible for them to, in practice, become part of a fifth group existing somewhere between Believers and Fundamentalists – those beleaguered by dissonance.

The current study extends Hall and McGinty's (1997) transformation of intentions framework by highlighting the importance of intentions both as an ecological facet and as a multi-layered expression of reform goals. Placier et al. (2000) distinguish between consensual and plural intentions, the former being shared among stakeholders and the latter representing conflicts between stakeholders. Placier et al. additionally identify content intentions, those that focus on the product of reform, and process intentions, those related to the implementation process. Stakeholders at Southmore Middle School experienced plural content and process intentions, creating dissonance and restricting transformational potential. However, the dissonance of intentions at Southmore occurred not only between stakeholders and stakeholder groups; the data revealed a dissonance of intentions between stakeholders and the school, between

stakeholders and the ACSC reform, and between the school and the ACSC reform. Additionally, as the present study finds, stakeholders experienced dissonance in not only intentions, but also in ideologies, engagement, amelioration, and culture. The data suggests a need to interrogate not only intentions but all five of the areas included in the transformational potential framework (see Figure 4). As Hall and McGinty note, the reform continuum is "messy, complex, and dynamic" (p. 439), and the present study underscores the role of the human actors who make it so.

A primary implication of the present study is the necessity of including school culture as an ecological facet of schools and as a construct that can advance or impede reform. School culture represents the institutionalized beliefs and norms that are simultaneously created and experienced by the human stakeholders that make up the institution. It is not to be confused with the beliefs of individual stakeholders, ideologies, or the publicly espoused beliefs of the school, which often takes the form of a school mission or vision statement. Instead, school culture lies somewhere between stakeholder ideologies and the school vision.

Borrowing from sociology, the space in which school culture lies might be described as the "meso-level" to which Fine (2012) assigns groups. Fine defines a group as "an aggregation of persons that is characterized by shared place, common identity, collective culture, and social relations" and argues for their study as the "bridge between the self and the institution" (p. 160). The shared beliefs that develop as a group interacts make up its culture. As we see in the transformational potential framework, dissonance in culture impedes reform. However, dissonance does not occur only within the meso-

level. Dissonance can occur at or between any of the multiple levels at which human actors impact reform, as illustrated in Figure 5. At the macro-level are the intentions of the reform initiative that the school is adopting and the mission or vision of the school itself. At the micro-level are the ideologies held by individual stakeholders in the school. In the present study, stakeholder participants included teachers, administrators, and support staff. Other stakeholders to consider include students, parents, and community members. Between the macro- and micro-levels lies the meso-level, school culture. In order for school reform to succeed in bringing about change, school culture must be attended to.

Additionally, these multiple levels can be conceptualized as occurring within an exo-system. As defined by Bronfenbrenner (1976), the exo-system is the structural level within which educational settings exist. The exo-system contains formal and informal structures that both bound and impinge on the classroom and the school. Within the exo-system lie factors such as neighborhood characteristics, school-community relations, the local reform agenda, the local political climate, and race and class structures, which inform the social context of the school and the human stakeholders that interact there. For the present study, it is important to note that this exo-system bounds and influences reform processes, particularly as it encompasses societal beliefs about urban students of color, which, as Diamond et al. (2004) demonstrate, are manifested at the micro-level as deficit ideologies and, if left unchecked, pervade school culture and perpetuate the achievement gap (Valencia, 2015).
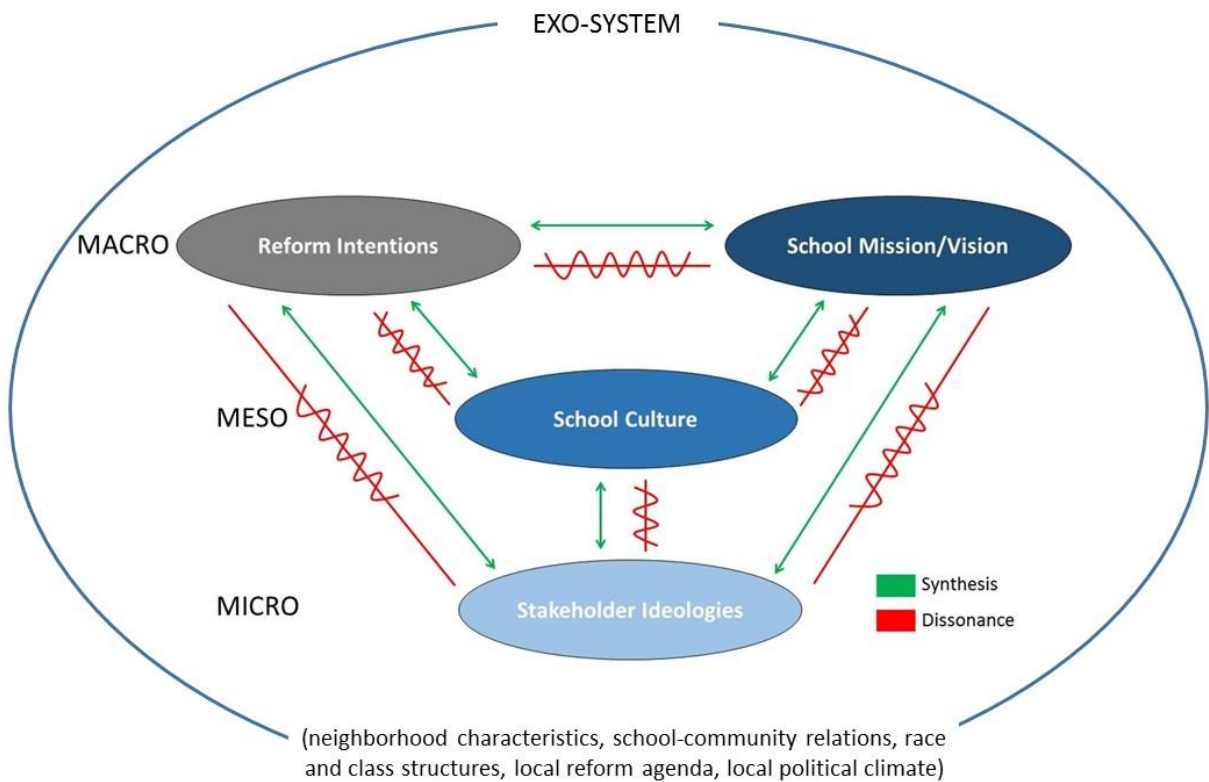
Figure 5. *Synthesis and Dissonance Between Levels of Human Actors Impacting School Reform.*

In the urban context, school reform efforts cannot ignore the political climate within which they are situated. Southmore Middle School's implementation of the ACSC reform was politically motivated, driven by outside forces. Indeed, the data illustrates the rushed, even coercive, milieu in which the reform was adopted. A hurried vote in the face of reconstitution, under the threat of lost job security, inaccurately suggested a shared readiness for change. In reality, the near unanimous vote masked a

dissonance that limited the ACSC reform's transformational potential. In urban schools, stakeholder buy-in is essential for reform to work, and yet, in the case of Southmore, fear tactics and coercive practices quickly wore off, revealing dissonance in and across all levels of human actors.

Furthermore, in schools with student compositions that include high percentages of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, it is particularly challenging to achieve synthesis of engagement because individual ideologies and expectations are shaped by wider societal divisions on issues of race and class (Diamond et al., 2004; Valencia, 2015). Culturally and economically diverse educational contexts require special attention to ideologies, engagement, intentions, amelioration, and culture in order to achieve synthesis toward creating systemic change. The individual and collective voices of Southmore's stakeholders highlight the complicated, difficult, but wholly necessary process of addressing dissonance to assure the transformational potential of urban reform efforts.

Recommendations for Practice

The transformational potential framework is intended to be a practical tool for implementation in districts and schools considering reform. The framework may have the greatest implications for administrators who often find themselves acting as representatives for their schools and districts in the reform process, especially early in the continuum. Administrators may be the first stakeholders to interact with a reform and, therefore, have the opportunity to initiate the questioning process to determine

whether or not a reform is a good fit for their school. Stakeholders, especially administrators, must answer these questions:

1. What do we believe about teaching, learning, and leadership?

2. Why do we think change needs to occur?

3. What challenges do we believe warrant reform?

4. How do we measure successful school reform?

5. What shared values and norms impact reform?

In order to answer the above questions, administrators and other stakeholders involved in reform, must have an accurate understanding of school culture. For administrators, this means observing interactions between stakeholders and noticing the nuances that shape and reveal shared norms, values, and beliefs. Understanding culture also means heeding climate survey data and offering authentic and frequent opportunities for stakeholders to be heard. Administrators must also interrogate the reform intentions and their own beliefs about why change needs to occur. Those involved in adopting reform must ask if the reform intentions align with the school vision and with the school culture. It is possible that adopting reform requires revisiting and revising the school mission statement, along with the much more difficult task of transforming school culture. Motives must also be interrogated, both for adopting reform in general and for choosing the specific reform under consideration. Beyond these initial concerns regarding motives, stakeholders must also continue to revisit and question rationale for engaging along the reform's continuum. The case of Southmore Middle School represents dissonance in engagement since the primary motive for choosing the

ACSC reform was to avoid reconstitution; engaging with the community school reform model was a secondary motive for some stakeholders and not a motive at all for others, and the dissonance created inhibited the transformational potential of the reform. Synthesis must also be achieved in the area of amelioration, which requires that clear reform goals that are aligned with intentions be developed up front and revisited often along the reform continuum.

The present study calls for administrators to act as researchers at the district and school level to interrogate school culture, individual ideologies, and overall readiness for change. To accomplish this, research efforts must first be organized at the district level to discern if a specific reform effort is the right fit for the educational context in question. An individual might be appointed to a research role with the primary purpose of interrogating the transformational potential of a reform. Protected from political repercussions, this person must be given the freedom and support to ask the necessary questions to determine or achieve synthesis. At the school level, a similar task might be undertaken by a team of stakeholders – including parents and students – who question stakeholder readiness for change and the appropriateness of a proposed reform for the local context. District and school level researchers must work together to ensure that all voices are represented not only in these early decisions but along the continuum of reform.

At the school level, administrators must take further steps to increase transformational potential. While the literature demonstrates the devastating effect of deficit ideologies on urban students of color and students experiencing poverty

(Diamond et al., 2004; Valencia, 2015), the literature also suggests the power of skilled leaders to positively alter school culture to raise expectations and achievement (Diamond et al., 2004; Muhammad, 2009). First, administrators must identify the groups Muhammad (2009) describes – Believers, Tweeners, Survivors, and Fundamentalists – as a starting point for understanding existing stakeholder ideologies. Administrators can further impact school culture by hiring teachers and staff members who are already Believers. Interviews should include questions about ideologies; assessing what interviewees believe about teaching, learning, and leadership will help determine if they will have a positive impact on school culture. Administrators will no doubt hire a number of new teachers who will fall in the Tweener category. It is essential to provide targeted support – in the form of professional development and mentoring – for these Tweeners to become Believers. While a discussion of teacher induction is beyond the scope of the present study, Muhammad (2009) notes the ever-growing retention problem in urban schools and sees supporting new teachers as a step toward reducing teacher turnover and creating positive school culture. Administrators must also take action against existing Fundamentalists and Survivors. As Muhammad finds, some Fundamentalists can be converted by articulating rationale and building trust. Administrators must take steps to exit Survivors and remaining Fundamentalists. A first step is aligning the master scheduling process with a positive school culture by not assigning coveted teaching assignments to Fundamentalists; doing so rewards their poor behavior and gives others the impression that such behavior is acceptable or at least won't be met with consequences.

Teachers also play a part in ameliorating school culture. Tweeners should align themselves with Believers through formal or informal mentorships. Believers should not only seek out Tweeners to mentor, but they should also confront Fundamentalists. Administrators can aid this process by encouraging Believers to speak up and by arming them with the data to support their arguments against Fundamentalists. As Muhammad (2009) posits, Fundamentalists are largely emotional in their obstinacy to change and can often be quieted, if not converted, by logic which they are not prepared to refute.

Finally, the present study recommends that schools recognize support staff as valuable stakeholders who often straddle the line between school and community and are therefore an important link to parents and other community members. Support staff may have the pulse of the community in a way that administrators do not. Parents, Grace and Elena, make fitting examples of this in the case study of Southmore Middle School. Both women work in the school and live in the community, and their status as parents makes them willing change-agents who support the reform and have the potential to garner support from other stakeholders within the school and community. Unfortunately, both Grace and Elena expressed feelings of devaluation despite their support of the ACSC reform. Valuing all stakeholder voices should have been an inherent component of the community school reform implemented at Southmore, but regardless of the type of reform a school is undergoing, the present study argues for the importance of valuing all stakeholders for their role in creating school culture.

Limitations

The case study of Southmore Middle School was conducted using archival semi-structured interview data and documents such as school and district websites and publicly available profile and performance data. While the researcher acknowledges issues of reflexivity related to the analysis of archival qualitative data, the researcher has reflected on these issues throughout all stages of research and feels a thick description of the context under study was achieved (Fielding, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Since the goal of a case study is to present an accurate depiction of a contextually experienced phenomenon, the researcher can only attest that every effort has been made to accurately represent the experiences of stakeholders at Southmore Middle School. This thick description will allow other researchers to assess the transferability of findings to future cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with the understanding that every school has a unique culture and will experience reform differently.

Therefore, a critical limitation of this case study research is the need to carefully assess the transferability of the transformational potential model to other urban districts and schools. The thick description offered in this study provides any number of points of comparison for administrators to determine similarities between Southmore's ecology and their own in terms of student and staff composition, political climate, and local reform agenda. Also, future research may assess the applicability of the transformational potential framework to other educational contexts. If transferability is determined, the

findings of this case study can inform local efforts to assess stakeholder readiness for change and the transformational potential of a proposed reform effort.

Recommendations for Future Research

As noted, case studies are designed to depict only the context of the particular phenomenon under study. Therefore, decisions about transferability are made by the readers of case study research. Readers may find it appropriate to apply the transformational potential framework to other cases of schools undergoing reform. Such efforts may serve to refine the framework and its applicability for use in schools. The researcher also recommends that future research include an interview protocol designed to tease out underlying intentions for reform and motives for engaging. Pointed questions about the race, class, and language diversity within the school would further understandings of stakeholder ideologies and readiness for change.

The researcher also recommends studies that continue the growing trend of including school climate in research and policy; however, the present study suggests that this trend should be extended to include school culture. While the two have largely been used synonymously, this study calls for a focus on the human element in schools and in reform and finds that attention to school climate often focuses narrowly on structural issues such as safety and discipline. As previously noted, the archival data used in this study did not include the coding of participants for race and other variables. As Diamond et al. (2004) address the effect of student composition on teachers' collective sense of responsibility for student learning, there may be opportunity for future research to study

the effect of educator composition on readiness for and sense of responsibility for reform.

Future research should also include wider stakeholder representation, including the voices of groups such as parents, students, and community members. While the researcher believes that Muhammad's competing expectations applies in this study to administrators and support staff, further research is necessary to determine the applicability of Muhammad's four classification groups to other stakeholder groups such as parents and community members. Elena and Grace, members of the Southmore support staff, were also Southmore parents, and they're perspectives were uniquely situated within this duality. Their insights indicate the potential and, arguably, necessity of including parent voices in the study and practice of urban school reform. The student voice is also noticeably absent here, an oversight that should be addressed in future data collection efforts. The present study finds that human actors within schools and the culture that they simultaneously create and experience are the primary determinants of transformational potential. Students certainly impact and are impacted by school culture, and their achievement is at the center of school reform efforts; therefore, their voices as stakeholders should be heard and valued.

Conclusion

The present study explores the global question: Why is achieving synthesis among stakeholders critical to promoting effective reform in an urban middle school? An inductive research design yielded several insights, all pointing to the role of human actors in urban school reform. First, based on data analysis and a review of the literature,

the researcher proposed a revised ecology of school improvement model that represents the cyclical nature of reform and includes school culture as an important facet of a school's ecology (See Figure 2). Second, the researcher developed a framework for understanding the transformational potential of reform (See Figure 4). The transformational potential framework asks stakeholders to interrogate the areas of ideologies, engagement, intentions, amelioration and culture to achieve synthesis, which the present study finds is essential for a reform initiative to succeed in transforming a failing school. Finally, the present study clarifies the idea of synthesis to demonstrate that synthesis must be achieved between multiple levels of human actors across a school's ecological system. Findings suggest that school culture lies within this system in a meso-level between the micro-level of individual stakeholder ideologies and the macro-level of reform intentions and school vision (See Figure 5). Synthesis at and between all levels must be achieved, as dissonance in any of the five areas of transformational potential threatens to stagnate reform.

These findings all highlight the humans who simultaneously create and experience school culture. In urban schools, the change process must be contextualized not only within the school culture but also within the school's ecosystem as a whole and within the exo-system that bounds it. School reform is an enormously costly, infinitely complex endeavor that has produced little systemic success to date. The present study seeks to impact future reform efforts by drawing attention to the role of human actors in urban school reform.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT LIST

Participant (Pseudonym)	Stakeholder Group	Role
Carmen	Teacher	Language Arts Teacher
Chelsea	Teacher	Music Teacher
Jeremiah	Teacher	Music Teacher
Jonathan	Teacher	Technology Teacher
Julia	Teacher	Science Teacher
Kathleen	Teacher	Math Teacher
Miranda	Teacher	Special Education Teacher
Peter	Teacher	Music Teacher/Teacher Leader
Sasha	Teacher	Social Studies Teacher
Becky	Administrator	House Principal
Clayton	Administrator	Building Principal
Joel	Administrator	House Principal
Melinda	Administrator	House Principal
Ruth	Administrator	Teaching Vice Principal
Alicia	Support Staff	Building Substitute
Deana	Support Staff	Paraprofessional
Demetria	Support Staff	Speech Pathologist
Elena	Support Staff	Paraprofessional
Grace	Support Staff	Parent Liaison
Jack	Support Staff	In-School Suspension Teacher
Kyle	Support Staff	Social Worker
Larry	Support Staff	Prevention Specialist
Rodney	Support Staff	Violence Prevention Specialist