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## Social Contexts of the School Closures in West Philadelphia

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## Social Contexts of the School Closures in West Philadelphia

### Abstract

Background Information: This paper discusses the social contexts of the 2013 school closures in Philadelphia, specifically focusing on University City High School. This paper explores the notion that the school closings in West Philadelphia are connected to urban renewal or gentrifying processes. In this paper, "contexts" refers to the relevant history leading up to the school closings, information about the School District of Philadelphia, community perceptions of the closings, and quantitative data in some West Philadelphia neighborhoods. Methodology: Fieldwork at University City High School took place from January-April 2013, during the time the school closures were being announced, to collect information on stakeholders' opinions of the school closings and the motivations behind them. Quantitative data was collected from the School District of Philadelphia and United States Censuses. Results: The data did not provide conclusive evidence as to whether there were ulterior motives behind the school closings; however, many community members shared the belief that there were, highlighting the need for increased transparency.

### Disciplines

Anthropology

SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF THE SCHOOL CLOSURES IN WEST PHILADELPHIA

By

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In

Anthropology

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Department of Anthropology

University of Pennsylvania

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Brian Spooner

2014

## **ABSTRACT**

*Background Information:* This paper discusses the social contexts of the 2013 school closures in Philadelphia, specifically focusing on University City High School. This paper explores the notion that the school closings in West Philadelphia are connected to urban renewal or gentrifying processes. In this paper, “contexts” refers to the relevant history leading up to the school closings, information about the School District of Philadelphia, community perceptions of the closings, and quantitative data in some West Philadelphia neighborhoods. *Methodology:* Fieldwork at University City High School took place from January-April 2013, during the time the school closures were being announced, to collect information on stakeholders’ opinions of the school closings and the motivations behind them. Quantitative data was collected from the School District of Philadelphia and United States Censuses. *Results:* The data did not provide conclusive evidence as to whether there were ulterior motives behind the school closings; however, many community members shared the belief that there were, highlighting the need for increased transparency.

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*“Ability is stretched or stunted by the family that you live with, and the neighborhood you live in—by the school you got to and the poverty or richness of your surroundings” -*

Lyndon B. Johnson, Howard University, 1965 (Hall et al. 2010:507)

*“It should be perfectly clear to anyone who reads the daily roster of violence, hatred, and despair which fills the newspapers...that this country needs a social revolution—a revolution in human values and human relationships. If this does not occur, I see no reason for bothering to educate our children. And if it is to occur, the schools must be the cauldron whether we like it or consider it our traditional role or not” -* Mark R. Shedd,

Philadelphia’s incoming superintendent, addressing school principals, 1967 (Binzen 1970:272)

## **INTRODUCTION:**

“Stop selling our kids”: the statement, the plea, was written across a poster held up by an African American woman at a community meeting at University City High School in January of 2013 (Field Notes, January 23). The community meeting, one of many in the beginning months of 2013, was held by Philadelphia’s School Reform Commission to provide a forum for discussing the recent announcement of schools slated for closure. This research project—through a combination of ethnography, literature review, and quantitative and qualitative data analysis—examines the social contexts of the school closures—and, more broadly, questions of educational equity—in the West Philadelphia community. In particular, it seeks to investigate the perceptions of the school closings among residents with regard to how these closings fit into broader issues,

as well as what we can glean from quantitative data. While it remains unclear as to how exactly these school closures fit into the broader history of the area, this research project reveals that there is a strong feeling among community members that they are being discriminated against through these closings, highlighting the need for increased transparency in policy decisions.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Since 2010, the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) has been working on what it has termed the “Facilities Master Plan,” a long-range plan to “standardize grade configurations, increase school utilization and reduce excess building capacity” (School District of Philadelphia 2013). In February 2012, the SDP hired the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to help address its deficit and to achieve its goals (The Notebook). The primary objectives of the partnership, as identified in BCG’s proposal to the SDP, were to assist the Chief Academic Officer in “designing a future-state decentralized ‘portfolio’ model for the district,” to review the district’s “programs serving special education and [English-Language Learner] students,” and to review the SDP’s operations to identifying opportunities for savings and for supporting a decentralized model (The Notebook). Around this same time, in January 2012, the School Reform Commission (SRC)—the state-run body, appointed by the mayor and the governor, that oversees schools in the SDP—began looking for a new superintendent, appointing Dr. William Hite in June 2012 (School District of Philadelphia; Hurlde 2013).

The Chief Recovery Officer and Standing Superintendent, Thomas E. Knudsen, then presented BCG’s recommendations to the SRC in August 2012 (School District of



Philadelphia). According to the proposal, the SDP faces a cumulative deficit of over \$1.1 billion over the next five years, caused, in large part, due to the loss of \$300 million in state and federal revenues, along with the growth of charter school and rising personnel costs (School District of Philadelphia). The report presents Philadelphia public schools “among the worst performing in the nation,” with “wide racial and ethnic disparities in achievement” (School District of Philadelphia). Between 2003 and 2012, enrolment in Philadelphia public schools declined by approximately 21 percent, while charter school enrolment increased by over 150 percent;<sup>1</sup> however, there has not be a significant change in the SDP’s facilities (School District of Philadelphia). The recommendation to close schools was born out of this proposal. The Notebook cites charter schools costs as a major cause of the increased expenses, which total \$690 million, \$80 million more than this year. However, it is also important to consider the demographic transition within Philadelphia County: between 2000 and 2010, there was a -14.90% change in the number people between the ages of 5 and 17 years; in real terms, there were 42,524 fewer school aged children in the School District of Philadelphia in 2010 than there were in 2000 (CensusViewer). This budget and demographic information is useful for understanding the current situation the SDP is in, and contextualizing the school closings.

However, closing schools is a difficult and controversial task: according to Diane Ravitch (2010), an education policy analyst, “Closing a school should be only a last resort and an admission of failure, not by the school or its staff, but by the educational authorities who failed to provide timely assistance” (227).

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<sup>1</sup> Charter schools, of which Philadelphia has eighty, are “independently operated public schools that are funded with federal, state, and local tax dollars” (School District of Philadelphia). While charter schools are technically public, they follow a privatized model of education.

According to Jerry T. Jordan, president of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, the school closures will not improve education quality, and are purely about “saving a few dollars in the short term” (Souleo 2013:13). Jordan also criticizes the SDP for spending only approximately “half per student of what is spent in neighboring suburbs,” returning again to the “value” placed upon students in the city’s public schools (Souleo 2013:13). However, Dr. William Hite, Jr., superintendent of the SDP, rejects this notion, saying the school closures will “save the nearly bankrupt system and improve overall performance” (Souleo 2013:13). Similarly, the SDP has justified the closures by calling them a “necessary cost-saving measure” that was largely born of the fact the SDP is currently paying for 53,000 empty seats in its public schools, and that it faces a possible deficit of \$1.35 billion in the next five years (Maxwell 2013:4). Regardless of the different opinions of the closings, March 7 marked “one of the largest single waves of school shutdowns to have occurred in the nation” (Maxwell 2013:4).

Brown (2013), Souleo (2013), and Maxwell (2013) all reported on the SRC’s decision to close twenty-three public schools in Philadelphia. The final decision was made at a community meeting on March 7, 2013 hosted by the SRC (Brown 2013:5). At the meeting, nineteen protestors, including Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, were handcuffed and escorted off the premises. In response to the changes in Philadelphia and school districts around the country, there is a growing movement to end “corporate-style” education reform (Brown 2013:5). This movement is motivated by the belief that families and students do not benefit from the drive to “privatize” education (Brown 2013:5). There are also many logistical concerns about the school closings, including “safety concerns for displaced students going to

neighborhoods with gang issues,” “transportation hazards,” schools receiving students with behavioral issues, and “classroom overcrowding” (Souleo 2013:13).

Additionally, there has been much debate about how much money can be saved by closing schools (Hurdle 2013). Further, there are concerns by many community groups that closing schools is a method of discriminating against African American and Latino students, who often comprise the majority in urban schools (Hurdle 2013). In fact, in January 2013, activists filed a civil-rights complaint with the United States Education Department, which plans to investigate the complaints in Philadelphia, Detroit, and Newark, NJ. Some activists further argue that the school closings are a “wholesale violation of civil rights” because minority students are “disproportionately affected” (Brown 2013:5).

This concern about discrimination is very real in Philadelphia, particularly in the communities in West Philadelphia that were studied for this research project. It further ties into larger pictures and concerns about gentrification in the area. On March 7, 2013, after three months of community meetings and discussions, and amidst a “day of impassioned protests,” the SDP announced that it would be closing twenty-three schools between June and September 2013; in addition, twenty-five programs were closed (The Notebook). University City High School, located at 36<sup>th</sup> and Filbert Streets, adjacent to the University of Pennsylvania campus, was among those listed. This research project uses the Penn Alexander School, Lea Elementary School, and University City High School as case studies to investigate community concerns that the school closures have brought to the surface.

The Philadelphia Public School Notebook is a website that posts new information and stories on Philadelphia public schools (The Notebook). A valuable resource for the community, it helps to increase transparency on school district policies. For example, on March 28, 2013, the website provided information on the SDP's budget, written in a comprehensible, but still comprehensive, manner. Of note, the fiscal year that ended on June 30, 2012 saw the SDP \$20 million in debt (The Notebook). Further, the SDP began the 2013-2014 school year with a \$304 million budget gap, and with 3,000 fewer employees (The Notebook). Yet the problem only stands to worsen: the funds that allowed the district to open its doors this fall—including \$50 million from the City of Philadelphia and \$45 million from the state—were one-time measures, leaving the SDP to face additional problems in the 2014-2015 fiscal year (The Notebook). Information on the school district budget is important, as the SDP's financial crisis is what led to the need to close schools; however, the decision of which schools to close depended on a variety of factors.

***History: Philadelphia, Urban Revitalization, and Public Education in the United States***

*Most cities are engaged in...something called urban renewal, which means moving Negroes out: it means Negro removal, that's what it means. The federal government is an accomplice to this fact...*

So said James Baldwin, an African American writer and social critic, in 1965 (Baldwin, Stanley, and Pratt 1989). Urban renewal and gentrification are terms that are used to describe changes in city neighborhoods; however, the precise meaning of each term is often poorly defined and broadly construed. In general, urban renewal refers to

policies that “revitalize” and redevelop areas that are deemed to be blighted, while gentrification implies that this renewal is done in an effort to displace current residents, who are often low-wealth minorities (Madden 2013). There are many instances in which urban renewal efforts can be classified as gentrification, yet others in which it cannot. According to Galster and Peacock (1986), gentrification—also known as the “back-to-the-city movement,” “urban renaissance,” or “neighborhood revitalization”—can be defined in terms of property or people (321). Depending on the definition, and the stringency to which it is applied, different neighborhood changes can be classified as gentrification; it is therefore important to be “exceedingly careful” in the chosen definition (Galster and Peacock 1986:335). Keeping this in mind, for this research project, gentrification will be measured by evaluating: the percent increase in the proportion of whites (and decrease in the proportion of blacks) in the area; the percent change in the median value of a single-family home as it corresponds to the city-wide median; the percent change in median income as it corresponds to the city-wide median; and the percent change in residents with a high school diploma as it corresponds to the city-wide median (Galster and Peacock 1986:322-323). A high school diploma was selected as the criteria for educational attainment as Philadelphia has an on-time high school graduation rate of 66%, making the possession of a high school diploma a valuable data point (The Notebook 2013). Additionally, looking at residents with a high school diploma seemed particularly relevant given the focus of this research paper. These definitions were chosen because of the area being studied and of the primary demographics in that area—for example, the majority of residents in these areas, and students at these schools, are either white or African American, which is how these two

racers were selected—and due to the type of shifts that would happen in the area (e.g. it is mostly residential by Penn Alexander, so looking at housing price is a useful exercise).

Furthermore, according to Galster and Peacock (1986), in order to be “eligible” for gentrification, the area must have a median single-family home value less than the corresponding city-wide median; a median income less than 80% of the corresponding city-wide median; have a percent college-educated less than the city-wide median; and have less than 90% of the tract population white (Galster and Peacock 1986:322-323). The areas being studied fit these criteria in 1970 in terms of race and median income, with the exception of the University of Pennsylvania census tract, which does not qualify based on race. There were not data available for house value in 1970, and none of the areas fit the criteria based on educational attainment, whether looking at education at a high school or college level (Social Explorer). Nonetheless, while perhaps not necessarily “eligible” for gentrification based on these definitions, it is useful to study quantitative data to provide greater context and to understand the shifts that may be occurring. Additionally, Galster and Peacock (1986) write that the most statistically significant determinants of whether or not a tract will be gentrified are proportion of population born outside of the U.S., proximity to a university or college, and proximity to a main historical district; as the areas being studied are close to the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University, studying these changes is even more relevant. In determining whether or not the shifts in a certain area are worth examining further as potential indicators of urban renewal or gentrification, statistically significant percent changes will be studied.

West Philadelphia was originally a suburb of Center City, emerging in the mid-to late-1800s (Miller and Siry 1980:109). While it was first an escape from the city for the wealthy, West Philadelphia's population of minority and working classes increased around the turn of the twentieth century (Miller and Siry 1980:140-141). As Miller and Siry (1980) state, "West Philadelphia's early image as an entire village of genteel estates was gradually modified as housing demands changed during the century" (141). Moving through West Philadelphia, "one can discern a regular progression down the socioeconomic ladder in the residents of the major east-west thoroughfares, the intersecting north-south number streets, and finally the interstitial alleys" (Miller and Siry 1980:143). Near the University of Pennsylvania campus, housing units were built in higher densities, and with a more "economic design" than the previous housing projects in the area (Miller and Siry 1980:141). Thus, West Philadelphia transitioned from a wealthy suburb to an extension of the city. This is important background information for this research project as it helps to contextualize housing in West Philadelphia, and provides history on the region. Importantly, the article also notes, "rich and poor did not usually live on the same block" (Miller and Siry 1980:141).

In the mid-twentieth century, Philadelphia, like many other American cities at the time, underwent the process of deindustrialization; in the 1970s alone, the city experienced a 14% reduction in its job base (Raines, et al. 1982:abstract). This resulted in a period of demographic and economic adjustment for the city.

While Foster, Gomm, and Hammersley (1996) focus on educational inequality in Britain since WWII, their policy discussions are applicable to Philadelphia. Of particular note is their discussion of direct and indirect discrimination. Foster, Gomm, and

Hammersley (1996) present direct discrimination as “policies and actions which have the effect of preserving or increasing inequality of opportunity...and which are adopted *because they have that effect* [sic]” (49-50). In contrast, policies of indirect discrimination are those which “have the effect of preserving or increasing inequality or opportunity...but which are not adopted for that reason, and whose consequences in this respect may not be known to the relevant policymakers or practitioners” (Foster, et al. 1996:49-50). Do the school closings in Philadelphia fit into either category of direct or indirect discrimination? Or are the SDP’s current changes operating separate from any sort of discrimination? This research paper will seek to characterize the school closures in this frame of mind.

In *Street Wise: Race, Class, and Change in an Urban Community*, Anderson (1990) conducted fieldwork from 1975-1989 in a general area of Chicago that encompassed two communities: “one black and low income to very poor...the other racially mixed but becoming increasingly middle upper income and white” (ix). Although this research project focuses on a different city and time period, the description of the area is reminiscent of the dynamics in Philadelphia’s University City. Anderson describes the group of young professionals who moved to inner-city areas in the 1970s and 1980s as contributing to gentrification: “housing in these marginal areas is inexpensive but promises a high return on investment” (Anderson 1990:xi, 1). After a period of time, these “newcomers, because of their professional status and (usually but not always) their white skin, are able to alter the earlier perception of the neighborhood” (Anderson 1990:2). Neighborhoods that were once considered, as Michael Thompson (1979) would say, “rubbish,” are transformed, “in response to social pressures,” into highly valued



neighborhoods (11). What impact does this have on local communities and neighborhood schools? To answer this question in the context of West Philadelphia and University City, this research project will compare and contrast the Penn Alexander and Lea Elementary schools.

There is a dangerous cycle that occurs with gentrification: as the neighborhood becomes higher in demand and housing prices increase (as tends to happen when middle class whites move to a certain area), poorer residents, “who tend to be renters, find themselves compelled to move—sometimes, if they are black, into the adjacent ghetto,” in which, due to “[declining]” conditions, “unemployment, crime, drug use, family disorganization, and antisocial behavior have become powerful social forces” (Anderson 1990:2, 3). Significantly, the role model for children changes to one that is involved in the underground economy and has poor moral character (Anderson 1990:3). These neighborhood changes have a considerable impact on the quality of neighborhood schools and, in turn, the educational outcomes of the students in these neighborhoods. Gentrification can also occur through evicting current residents under the law of eminent domain, which allows land to be seized by the government in the name of a very broadly defined “public purpose.” This research project will investigate both how the school closings and student displacements in Philadelphia relate to the quality of neighborhood schools, as well as whether the changing demographics and school closures in areas of University City have forced families to move to neighborhoods with lower performing schools.

Anderson (1990) also writes that growing numbers of whites “appear indifferent and comfortable about such distancing behavior [of themselves from black males],

viewing it as simply one more urban survival tool” (5)—were the specific schools chosen to close, such as University City High School, selected, in part, to appease the surrounding largely middle-class white community? Similarly, was the establishment of Penn Alexander in 2001 a way to separate the university community from low-income black West Philadelphians by incentivizing more middle class families to move to the area? This question will likely take years to be answered; this paper merely hopes to join the dialogue and start a more in-depth investigation on the issue. Further, even if this is not an accurate motive, it is still significant if this is how the community perceives the school district and university’s actions. A last relevant anecdote from Anderson’s case study is that, while the neighborhood school began as “integrated in terms of both class and race,” it has become increasingly lower-income and largely black, as wealthier residents sent their children to private schools.

Binzen’s *Whitetown, U.S.A.* (1970) describes Philadelphia’s Kensington area in 1970 (5). The book provides valuable background information on the Philadelphia School District, as well as on racial tensions in the area (Binzen 1970). Mark R. Shedd, the incoming superintendent in 1967, was selected by Philadelphia’s reform school board to “breathe new life into a staggering system,” seemingly much the same reason current superintendent Dr. William Hite was chosen (Binzen 1970:273). Interestingly, particularly in the context of current discussions of the privatization of education, from 1936-1962, the business manager, Add B. Anderson, “made all major decisions on city school budgets, city school taxes, [and] even on assignment of key instructional personnel in Philadelphia” (Binzen 1970:273-274). Anderson gave politicians what they wanted—“schools that seemed to roll along placidly without making waves and without

costing much”—and also gave businessmen, the majority of whom “lived in the suburbs or sent their children to private schools in the city” what they wanted: “low city taxes” (Binzen 1970:275). Binzen also discusses the dynamic between blacks, poor whites, and wealthy whites, and the stereotypes that exist amongst these groups (Binzen 1970:300).

Conrad Weiler (1974) writes, “Philadelphians lack a strong positive image of their city, their city’s governments, and their own roles as citizens of the city” (14). He describes neighborhoods in Philadelphia, providing valuable history and background information on community dynamics and organization in Philadelphia for this research project. Although the data is out-of-date, it remains valuable for understanding how the current situation in Philadelphia came about; after all, knowledge of history is an essential ingredient to conceptualizing current events. Weiler (1974) also assesses Philadelphians’ perceptions of the likely residence of different personality types: 72% of those surveyed thought the poor would live in the city, and 72.6% believed the rich would live in the suburbs (5). Further, 78.1% believed the violent, and 64.3% believed the subversive, would live in the city (Weiler 1974:5). These perceptions are likely correlated to where people would choose to live, which also affects schools, which are largely paid for by property taxes within the district.

At the time, there were a large number of blacks living in the outer-city area of Philadelphia, but mostly in “ghetto-type areas of concentrated black, mostly lower-income population” (Weiler 1974:21). Further, there were areas in the outer-city, “primarily in the urban fringe areas,” in which the black population was decreasing, often “dislodged by the processes of suburbanization” (Weiler 1974:21). Explaining the process of gentrification, which remains similar today, Weiler (1974) writes, “as the

expansion of the metropolitan area begins to drive up land prices, and as the first suburbanites begin to drive up the tax rate with their urban tastes in public services, many of these rural blacks are forced to leave, often to urban ghettos” (21). Interestingly, in the second-half of the twentieth century, Philadelphia was receiving “less in per capita aid from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania than many Philadelphia suburbs, even though a disproportionate share of state taxes [were] collected in the city” (Weiler 1974:21). Some state funding is allocated to schools, making this statement reminiscent of the decrease in state funding to the SDP. Weiler also provides useful information on the SDP, citing that, from 1940-1960, the school population changed, as two things happened: the black population of Philadelphia increased by 282,672, mostly concentrated in the older, inner parts of the city, and the white population of Philadelphia decreased by 211,098 (Weiler 1974:79). The changing demographics of the city undoubtedly impacted property taxes in the area, which, in turn, impacted school funding.

Philadelphia has a tumultuous history with school segregation and racial tensions, fostering educational inequality, with an effect of many failing schools in which the majority of the student body belonged to a racial minority. On June 7, 1971, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission declared that 228 of Philadelphia’s 281 public schools were racially segregated, despite the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling (Weiler 1974:97). The Commission ordered the SDP to desegregate its schools by 1974; however, Weiler (1974) notes the irony of the situation:

...[An agency of the Commonwealth] *ordering one of the Commonwealth’s own legal dependencies, a school district whose boundaries were set by the Commonwealth and that could raise no new taxes without Commonwealth*

*permission, to undertake a crash program of busing and other measures that would cost millions of dollars, in a city that had lost a quarter of a million whites in the preceding decade to adjoining suburbs that excluded blacks with no Commonwealth interferences, in a city that was about to vote along racial lines for its next mayor. (98)*

While this took place almost forty years ago, most West Philadelphian schools remain largely composed of African American students. Further, in 2013, the Penn Alexander School had a black population of only 27.5%, and only 51.3% percent of students were identified as economically disadvantaged; in contrast, Lea Elementary School, only six blocks away, had a black population of 81% and 95.7% of its students were identified as economically disadvantaged (School District of Philadelphia). This research project seeks to find the underlying meaning and policies behind these data; in other words, why are there such stark differences between these two schools? What are the demographics of the surrounding areas? How have these changed over time? According to Weiler (1974), “seen from a locational standpoint, public housing in Philadelphia does not serve to promote racial or income heterogeneity in neighborhoods of the city, since it tends to put poor people in neighborhoods of poor people and cheap and poor housing, and to put black people in black neighborhoods” (110).

In his article, Hunter (2004) examines race relations and education before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and discusses the decisions that were made in the case. He provides historical background to describe past race relations in America (Hunter 2004). Despite the advancements made in improving race relations, Hunter (2004) argues that public school desegregation is “less viable” today than it was in the

second-half of the twentieth century (229). He claims that, amidst discussions of charter schools, state-funded vouchers programs, and statewide accountability systems, desegregation is no longer a top priority for school systems (Hunter 2004:229). Interestingly, this aligns with Weiler's (1974) evidence that, by 1971, most people, "including many blacks, put quality of educational program and facilities and jobs for blacks ahead of the abstract ideal of integration that seemed so difficult to achieve" (98). This suggests that the trend away from desegregation began, at least in Philadelphia, not long after the *Brown* decision. This is a relevant article because it describes the atmosphere of, and approach to, urban education. Further, Hunter's thesis is supported by the lack of diversity at University City High School and many other public schools in West Philadelphia (School District of Philadelphia).

In West Philadelphia today, the Black Bottom was a residential community that occupied the area between 32<sup>nd</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Streets east-west, and Filbert Street and the Woodlands Cemetery north-south; in other words, essentially the area now referred to as University City (BlackBottom). In the 1950s, the community was largely comprised of working-class African Americans (BlackBottom). From 1945-1954, the government, in conjunction with the University of Pennsylvania, enacted a period of "slum clearance," which has since been criticized as "urban removal" (BlackBottom; Bergman 2013). It is estimated that over 4,500 people were displaced through the government's invocation of eminent domain (BlackBottom). In 1967, writers for the University of Pennsylvania's *Daily Pennsylvanian* wrote,

*To most people, urban renewal is a hopeful-sounding term that suggests plowing under slums and planting parks and skyscrapers in their place. But to nearly 150*

*of the soon-to-be-displaced families, urban renewal means that giant, impersonal institutions like the University of Pennsylvania are devouring small homeowners, spreading segregation, and prolonging social inequalities. (BlackBottom)*

### ***University-Community Relationships***

As briefly discussed above, also central in contextualizing the West Philadelphia environment is the neighborhood's relationship with its universities, including the University of Pennsylvania.

The University of Pennsylvania has had a notoriously precarious relationship with the surrounding community: according to one editorial on Philly.com from 1996, “With the exception of some sweet-sounding projects, Penn has kept the neighborhood at a distance for a good 40 years” (Stalberg 1996). Many residents viewed the university in a negative light, one even saying, “For the most part, we view Penn as an 800-pound gorilla—a gorilla that had systematically razed houses as it moved westward” (Lin 2004). Penn’s “grab for land” in the 1950s—in which it worked with Philadelphia’s redevelopment authority to target blocks of houses for demolition—resulted in the displacement of many African American families, “stoking resentment that simmered for decades” (Lin 2004). However, when Judith Rodin took over presidency of the university in 1994, there was a more conscious effort to “[improve]” the surrounding community (Lin 2004). It was during this time that the Penn Alexander School was opened, and Penn invested over \$300 million in real estate projects around the edges of campus (Lin 2004). Furthermore, from 1999-2004, 400 members of Penn’s faculty and staff moved into the University City area, and the university offered “\$15,000 in tax-free money to any

member of the faculty or staff who bought a home in the neighborhood and lived there for at least five years” (Lin 2004). While many of these projects are viewed in a positive light (Lin 2004), they were also undeniably directed at the immediate Penn community, only a small portion of University City and West Philadelphia’s population.

In “School-Community-University Partnerships: Effectively Integrating Community Building and Education Reform,” a paper presented to a conference in Washington, D.C., Ira Harkavy, Associate Vice President and Director of the University of Pennsylvania’s Netter Center for Community Partnerships, states, “the school-community connection is evident in the multiple interrelated plagues of poverty, violence, disease, broken families, drug and alcohol abuse and academic failure” (Harkavy 1998:3). This highlights the importance of the connection between neighborhood schools and their surrounding community, a concept central to this research project. As Mayor Paul Helmke of Fort Wayne, current president of the Conference of Mayors, said, “Good schools encourage parents to remain in the city, bad schools drive them away and keep employees out” (Harkavy 1998:4). Given the importance of neighborhood schools and their community, it is crucial for surrounding universities to partner with them for mutual benefit (Harkavy 1998:7). As Dewey argued, “Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community” (Harkavy 1998:5). However, since the Second World War, American institutions of higher education have “increasingly competed, ferociously, egocentrically, narcissistically, for institutional prestige and material resources,” an attitude that is not conducive to community development nor, therefore, to the improvement of neighborhood schools (Harkavy 1998:5).



Also evaluating university relationships with surrounding areas is Harley F. Etienne's *Pushing Back the Gates: Neighborhood Perspectives on University-Driven Revitalization in West Philadelphia*, reviewed by Byron P. White (2012). The book questions whether neighborhood revitalization efforts have "done more harm than good" by placing the interests of institutions—such as making the area appealing to university students and protecting real estate interests—have "overshadowed the social goals of helping the economically disadvantaged" (White 2012). The University of Pennsylvania, located in the West Philadelphia University City area, has struggled to balance these two diverging interests: there are former President Judith Rodin's revitalization efforts—during her ten-year tenure, which lasted until 2004, she tried to "improve the safety and the physical appearance" of the area surrounding the university through commercial property and housing development—but also Ira Harkavy's "democratic practices" and university-community partnership programs (White 2012). Etienne, who studied under Harkavy as a graduate student and is now a university administrator, argues that the current revitalization and planning theories adopted by universities "fail adequately to take into account the social relations and structures that are more relevant to poverty alleviation and racial inequity" (White 2012).

While university-community relationships are often more nuanced than the former pursuing development interests, there is a feeling among the community that the university is notoriously lacking transparency, and there is much "mistrust and suspicion among residents even when the university's public intentions seem benign and constructive" (White 2012). The author claims that university attention to the community is "cyclical," and that the university and the community often have polarizing views on

crime and safety (White 2012). The issues raised in this book review are extremely relevant to the research project because the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University, both of which are located in University City, are mentioned in the discussion of the school closings, with some community members—correctly—predicting that the land University City High School currently sits on will be bought by one of these institutions. During the closing announcements and meetings, neither university made an official comment on the school closings, which contributed to community concerns about a lack of transparency. As Etienne argues, “credible community accountability for university-led engagement efforts is desperately needed” (White 2012).

In contrast, Fain (2005) takes a different approach to the University of Pennsylvania’s community engagement efforts, hailing it as a “model for community partnerships” (A20). He supports this by citing that Penn built a public school (the Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School, commonly referred to as the Penn Alexander School) and has hired security guards to patrol the neighborhood (Fain 2005:A20). This article provides a different perspective on some of the University of Pennsylvania’s initiatives, and is relevant as the Penn Alexander School will be studied in this project, evaluating how it relates to urban revitalization efforts.

Similarly, Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett (2000) discuss the positive impact of Penn’s university-assisted community schools, “designed to help educate, engage, activate, and serve all members of the community in which the school is located” (29). University City High School was one such partner school, with a wide range of University of Pennsylvania partnership programs taking place at the school.

The discussion of the role of the urban university in its surrounding community is not a new one, as evidenced by Berube's *The Urban University in America* (1978). Berube (1978) claims that urban universities have three primary objectives: "educating an urban poor, establishing good community relations, and developing urban research and related studies" (5). Similar to current dialogue of university-community relations, the author claims that the "urban college and university has great potential in playing an increasingly important role in the life of the city" (Berube 1978:16). University-community relations are particularly relevant in the West Philadelphia and University City area as the University of Pennsylvania, with its expansion and influence, has contributed greatly to the changing demographics of the area. Further, as mentioned above, the University of Pennsylvania holds many partnerships with surrounding schools, including University City High School, Lea Elementary, and Penn Alexander. Berube (1978) cites that "findings starkly indicate that higher education is catered to an upper and middle class," and that there is a question of whether "equality, certainly for the black poor, could be achieved without attempts to provide both educational opportunity and social change in the economic structure" (25, 177). How do the school closures fit into this narrative? Are they providing opportunities to minority students through closing failing schools, or are they denying these opportunities through the same action? Further, what, if any, roles do, or should, the universities in the community have in these decisions?

### ***Current Public School Reform and Urban Revitalization***

Davis and Oakley discuss the interrelationship between charter school development and urban revitalization. This paper is relevant as it investigates a similar question as the research project; however, it focuses specifically on charter schools in cities (including Philadelphia), while this research project researches the social contexts of public education and the school closings. In addition, one of the reasons the School District of Philadelphia cites for school closings is the increased enrolment of charter schools, leaving many empty seats in public schools. Lastly, discussions of the Penn Alexander School are often similar to those cited by the authors about charter schools. Davis and Oakley (2013) highlight both positive and negative views of urban policy and school reform in the literature. For example, some claim that the “creation of new schools in blighted urban communities is benevolent urban policy” because it helps to “transform neighborhoods and provide greater access to resources and opportunities...for low-income residents” (Davis and Oakley 2013:83). However, others argue that urban revitalization policies are “unjust and self-interested,” and that they are “mechanisms of dislocation” that “displace disadvantaged residents from one area of the city to another, clearing blighted but desirable locations of poorer residents, who are also often racial minorities, in favor of wealthier residents and the businesses that cater to them” (Davis and Oakley 2013:84). Furthermore, as in the case of Philadelphia, research suggests that displaced students are unlikely to benefit academically from the closings, often attending schools that are no better performing than the ones they had been moved from (Simon 2013). As Elaine Simon (2013), a professor in the University of Pennsylvania’s Urban Studies Department, asks, “Are school closings the new urban renewal?”

This research project will hopefully reach a conclusion on the above debate, particularly as it relates to changes in urban public education. The authors claim that, in contrast to cities like Chicago, the literature does not indicate that charter school development in Philadelphia was “used as a means of urban revitalization and economic development” (Davis and Oakley 2013:85-86). They claim that in the 1990s, the School District of Philadelphia was “honest but failing” (Davis and Oakley 2013:85-86). However, some literature suggests, “Philadelphia business leaders...used school reform to spur the movement of middle-class White families back to the city” (Davis and Oakley 2013:86). The authors cite an example of a group of “gentrifiers,” parents in New York who, “dissatisfied with the available options, set out to open a new school” (Davis and Oakley 2013:87). Could the opening of the Penn Alexander School have a similar narrative? The article poses the question of whether “neighborhood revitalization [occurs] because of efforts to change schools or [whether] schools [are transformed] because neighborhoods are revitalized?” (Davis and Oakley 2013:89). In Philadelphia, there is some evidence that school reform efforts are initiated to spur neighborhood change (Davis and Oakley 2013:90).

Blanc and Simon argue for civic capacity in the Philadelphia public education system (Blanc and Simon 2007:503-506). The authors write that the School District of Philadelphia has been “at the forefront of a national trend toward private-sector involvement in urban education” (Blanc and Simon 2007:504). This was demonstrated to be true when the Boston Consulting Group, a private consulting group, was hired to make recommendations for the district. Further, the trend towards charter school enrolment further illustrates the movement toward privatization.

Blanc and Simon (2007) argue that, in Philadelphia, with the post-WWII immigration of blacks, school district boundaries were drawn to “*create segregated schools in neighborhoods that were racially mixed*” (504). The redrawing of school district boundaries, and motivations behind redrawing these boundaries, is relevant to consider today, particularly as the catchment areas for University City High School and its feeder schools have changed in recent years. The authors also write that “white flight” increased the segregation of inner city schools; with many middle class families leaving the city, there was “increasingly inadequate funding of the school system” (Blanc and Simon 2007:503).

Inseparable from the discussion of public schools is that of urban growth and housing affordability, addressed by Voith and Wachter (2009) in their article. While the authors did not study Philadelphia as a city that has seen considerable growth since 2000, they argued that, “if the trend from comeback cities holds, this increase in home prices relative to rents indicates anticipation that Philadelphia will become a latter-day turnaround case” (Voith and Wachter 2009:120). As this occurs in Philadelphia, housing affordability will become a pressing concern for residents of Philadelphia. This research project will examine data, particularly since the 2009 publication of this article, which provides insight into Philadelphia housing trends, particularly in the West Philadelphia and University City areas.

In “Making the Global City, Making Inequality: The Political Economy and Cultural Politics of Chicago School Policy,” Pauline Lipman (2002) classifies education as another “front in the struggle for the direction of globalization,” providing valuable insight into the motivation behind different education policies and predicting a possible

direction in which urban public education is moving (409). Lipman (2002) defines a “global city” as one that is “marked by high growth and downgraded labor and by upscale, gentrified neighborhoods and redeveloped downtowns catering to arts, tourism, and leisure alongside isolated, poor African-American, Latino, and immigrant neighborhoods” (386). While Lipman’s analysis is of Chicago (2002), her observations are important to consider when studying Philadelphia. In Chicago, “gentrifying areas are booming at the expense of working-class residents, who, because of rising property taxes and rents, are priced out of the neighborhoods where they have raised families, shopped, and established relationships (Lipman 2002:389).

This research project will question whether the University City District of Philadelphia, with its urban revitalization and reform efforts, could be classified as a gentrifying area, and whether this has an impact on the public schools in the area and their students. Another comparison between Philadelphia and Chicago can be made in terms of their standardized tests in public schools, which can be viewed as either a source of accountability or a requirement that detracts from core educational material (Lipman 2002:390). My experience tutoring in West Philadelphia schools has aligned with Lipman’s assertion that, from January through April, standardized tests become a “school-wide focus” (2002:390). Lipman (2002) also argues that the district is “[designed]” so “standardized tests are most central, and accountability most rigorous, in schools with the lowest scores...Concretely, these are schools with predominantly low-income African-American and Latino student populations (391). These “high-stakes policies” transfer the “responsibility for the failure of public education from the state to individuals;” for example, in interviews with students in a Chicago public school, eighth-

graders “interpreted test failure and retention as their own fault” (Lipman 2002:394). If students perceive poor test scores as their own fault, how do they perceive school closures—do they believe these are their own “fault” as well? How does this factor into the current state of the SDP? Lipman (2002) claims that global cities “must satisfy the lifestyle demands of high-paid, high-skilled workers” in order to attract producer and financial services; in doing this, “challenging,” “state of the art” schools are a key component (407). In short, “good” schools are real estate anchors in gentrifying neighborhoods (Lipman 2002:408). This research project will keep this in mind while studying the catchment area of the Penn Alexander School in University City.

Hirschfield’s article (2008) discusses the criminalization—defined in the article as the “shift toward a crime control paradigm in the definition and management of the problem of student deviance”—of the American education system (80). He argues that this criminalization is a response to the problems facing the domestic economy, the “mass unemployment and incarceration of disadvantaged minorities,” and the “resulting fiscal crises in urban public education” (Hirschfield 2008:79). He also details the differences between strategies used to manage crime in urban schools and those used to manage crime in suburban schools. For example, “gates, walls, and barricades” are more likely to be found in urban schools, whereas drug-sniffing dogs are more likely to be found in predominantly white suburban or rural schools (Hirschfield 2008:83). He also mentions that the presence of metal detectors is positively correlated to the percentage of minority students at the school (Hirschfield 2008:83). According to one former inner-city high school student who is now a maximum security prisoner, the “school was run more like a prison than a high school. It don’t have to be nothing illegal about it. But you’re getting



arrested. No regard for if a college going to accept you with this record...because you're not expected to leave this school and go to college. You're not expected to do anything" (Hirschfield 2008:79). At an early community meeting, one University City High School student expressed a similar sentiment (Field Notes, January 17). UCHS required people entering the school to go through a metal detector. This "anticipatory labeling of students as future prisoners in need of coercive control or exclusion can be a self-fulfilling prophecy as students frequently suspended from school face increased risks of juvenile and adult incarceration" (Hirschfield 2008:92). In Philadelphia, this is an important consideration when thinking of the school environment to which displaced students are being transferred.

Hirschfield (2008) claims that the "school accountability narrative is consistent with the spatio-temporal and demographic distribution of criminalization," and, similar to Lipman's concern about standardized testing (2002), writes, "through instituting market competition, performance monitoring, and accountability, federal education reforms...analogous to the criminal law itself, place the onus of responsibility for school crime and the 'crime' of illiteracy on the underperforming students, teachers, and schools, while exonerating the political and economic system of its leaders" (Hirschfield 2008:87). This narrative of accountability programs being used as a means of reassigning blame is an important concept to contemplate in researching policies in the SDP. Further, Hirschfield's article is relevant to the research project as University City High School is an urban school with a predominantly African American student body: how punishment is handled at schools reflects society's perceptions of the student body.

Every January since 1998, *Education Week* has published *Quality Counts*, a report on “state-level efforts to improve public education.” The most recent report is “Code of Conduct,” which examines the impact of a school’s social and disciplinary environment on the school community. This is relevant to the study of the school closings because many students are being relocated to different schools, and it is important to consider the type of school environment they are entering into. The Education Week: Quality Counts website also assigns grades to states based on factors such as “Standards, Assessments, and Accountability” and “School Finance;” overall, Pennsylvania was given a “C+” (to compare: New York was given a “B,” Illinois was given a “C+”).

Suess and Lewis’ paper (2007) is a field report that presents Research for Action’s “research on the first years of the youth-led campaigns for small schools,” particularly focusing on “how youth-driven organizing groups have helped to build civic capacity in Philadelphia” (Abstract). The article also discusses how poor conditions—such as outdated textbooks—are tolerated in urban schools, whereas they would not be tolerated in suburban/wealthier schools (Suess and Lewis 2007:365). The youth movement involved students realizing that they could break their large, urban schools into “multiple, autonomous, ‘small’ high schools” (Suess and Lewis 2007:365). This article relates to University City High School and the school closings because the students were very active in trying to make change. Additionally, University City High School is a small school (due to its under-enrolment); however, when schools are combined, they will increase in size. According to the article, small schools have been shown to be able to: raise student achievement; reduce incidents of violence and disruptive behavior; combat student anonymity and isolation; increase attendance and

graduation rates; elevate teacher satisfaction; improve school climate; and be more cost effective (Suess and Lewis 2007:368). The article highlights the “importance of youth organizing for school reform” (Suess and Lewis 2007:378).

### *School Closings*

The article by Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni (2010) investigates the impact that school closings have on displaced students, a particularly pertinent article for this research paper. Although the article is from 2010 and does not discuss Philadelphia in particular, it provides a valuable framework from which to begin researching the impact of the recent closures in Philadelphia. The authors define “closure” as when staff and students move to new schools, and argue that school closures in urban districts have “disproportionately affected schools with high percentages of African American and Latino students from low-income families” (Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni 2010:408). A study in Iowa showed that, of displaced students, only 6% transferred into top performing schools, while 40% transferred to schools that “were either on probation or in the lower quartile of performance”; as such, the closures are not presenting an opportunity for an improvement in the quality of education the students receive (Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni 2010:408).

Other studies have revealed that students and their families “experienced feelings of loss and social dislocation after their neighborhood schools were closed,” which is likely to have a negative effect on the community (Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni 2010:408). Further, and particularly relevant to this research project, the article cites that, in Chicago, teachers from schools receiving students were concerned that displaced

students would lower the schools' test scores, and that displaced students worried that their safety would be put at risk through crossing gang-identified boundaries (Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni 2010:408). Displaced students in Philadelphia have raised similar concerns about violence in a new school (Field Notes). Lastly, some research has shown that displacement is associated with “lower test scores, grades, and high school completion rates,” and that displaced students felt a stigma in their new environment because their school had been closed (Kirshner, Gaertner, and Pozzoboni 2010:408,423).

In another discussion of displacement, Lipman (2009) argues that the “subtext [of creating mixed-income communities] is race—students and families to be displaced, relocated, and reformed are mainly African American” (215). She argues that “mixed-income strategies” further the “neoliberal urban agenda,” producing “displacement, gentrification, and marketization of public education on the premise of social betterment” (Lipman 2009:216). A displacement strategy that has been used in Philadelphia is the redrawing of the school's attendance boundaries, thereby changing the students that are able to enroll in a particular school (Lipman 2009:226). As one parent interviewed by Lipman said, “They just want to give it to the rich...parents and push us out. They already are pushing us out of the neighborhood because we can't afford it” (Lipman 2009:226). This becomes particularly relevant when considering the schools that displaced students are sent to—Lipman (2009) writes that many are transferred to “other low-income schools out of their neighborhoods” (226). Schools have “complex meanings” for community members, providing a “web of social connections essential to well-being and survival;” as such closing schools, even those that appear “deprived,” “run-down,” or “bad,” can cause “root shock” for displaced students (Lipman 2009:227).

This is relevant in the case of University City High School in Philadelphia. Also applicable to the school closures in Philadelphia is Lipman's statement that decisions about public events, such as school closings, are often made by public-private partnerships, appointment commissions, or corporate boards "without democratic participation, oversight, or transparency"; in Philadelphia, the recommendation to close schools was made by Boston Consult Group, a private agency, and the final decision was made by the School Reform Commission, an appointed body (Lipman 2009:229). One parent that Lipman (2009) interviewed voiced concerns about this, saying, "People who don't care about my children are making decisions about their lives" (229). Lastly, similar to in Philadelphia, in which the time between the recommendation to close schools and the final decision was less than three months, Lipman (2009) notes there is often limited notice given for closings, with equally limited transparency (230).

The dialogue surrounding the school closures is part of a large dialogue of how to turnaround failing schools. According to Pamela Cantor (2013), the founder and CEO of the non-profit Turnaround for Children, there are three strategies that "lay the foundation for success" in schools: providing a support center, such as a community-mental health center; providing teachers with training in "classroom management and instructional strategies;" and training leaders to drive school-wide improvement (9). Cantor (2013) does not claim that we should stop school closings altogether, but that these closings should be done more thoughtfully, using "metrics besides test scores" to identify whether or not a school is improving (9). The suggestions for navigating current challenges in urban education are useful to consider in evaluating the attempt to reform schools in Philadelphia.

### *University City High School*

University City High School (UCHS) is located on Filbert Street, just north of Market Street, at 36<sup>th</sup> Street (Image 3). In 2011, the school had a total enrolment of 634, despite having a capacity of approximately 1,500 students (School District of Philadelphia 2011). Students largely come from areas slightly to the north and west of the school (Image 2). In 2011, only 10.3% of students were proficient in Math, and 14.5% in Reading, according to the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) (School District of Philadelphia 2011). Ninety-percent of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged, and 91% were African American (School District of Philadelphia 2011). According to a survey of students, approximately 50% of respondents agree that they were getting a good education at UCHS, and 78% agreed that there was at least one teacher or adult who did extra to support them (School District of Philadelphia 2011). Fifty-eight percent of students reported feeling safe or very safe in and around UCHS, and traveling between their home and UCHS (School District of Philadelphia 2011). The 2010 School Performance Index—which is calculated based on academic progress, academic achievement, and the satisfaction of parents, teachers, and students—ranked UCHS as the lowest performing (a score of 10 on a 1-10 scale), both overall and of schools marked as similar to it (School District of Philadelphia 2010).

There is a fairly extensive body of literature on both gentrification and public school reform, as well as some examples of the connection between the two. However, there are few analyses on Philadelphia, and none that look specifically at the West Philadelphia/University City area. Further, as the school closures are so recent and their

aftershock is still reverberating, research findings are particularly relevant and applicable to current policies and events in Philadelphia. When the announcement to close schools was made, the community responded negatively: it is important to further investigate community perceptions and the sources of, and history behind, these perceptions. This research project will therefore fill a gap in the literature and will closely examine the interrelationship between urban renewal efforts and urban education in the West Philadelphia/University City area, relating it to the school closings and community perceptions of the current events in both the SDP and Philadelphia neighborhoods.

According to an announcement made on February 26, 2014, the SDP is planning to close deals on several of the closed school properties; of note, UCHS and the adjacent property that formerly housed Drew Elementary School, along with the Walnut Center, will be sold to Drexel University Development (Graham and Graham 2014). This is a joint venture between Drexel University and Wexford Science & Technology L.L.C. that intends to use the land for a “mixed-use development of residential, retail, educational, lab, and office space” (Graham and Graham 2014). Drexel plans to use the properties to help with the expansion of Powel Elementary School (Rahman 2014). Also of note, the Alexander Wilson School property, located at 46<sup>th</sup> Street and Woodland Avenue, has been sold to Orens Bros. Real Estate Inc. for a “mixed-use residential and retail development” (Graham and Graham 2014). It is currently difficult to assess the potential outcomes of these decisions as so little is known about them and development has not yet started, but further research should be conducted as these changes pan-out. Important questions to consider are: which demographic are the new land developments targeting? Are community centers being built to replace the role of the school? What changes are

occurring in the surrounding communities, particularly with respect to indicators of gentrification or urban renewal?

**METHODOLOGY:**

This research project was born out of my interest in public education in Philadelphia and, more specifically, West Philadelphia. I served on the executive board of the University of Pennsylvania's West Philadelphia Tutoring Project, and first became interested in the school closings when, at our board retreat in January 2013, a professor from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education gave a presentation on the school closings. During his presentation, he mentioned that some people felt that UCHS was being closed so that the land could be used as a field for Drexel University, whose current field is 10 blocks from its main campus. This sparked my interest in investigating the school closings, both in terms of their impact on students and the community, and possible motives behind them.

The project began as a research assignment for ANTH516: Public Interest Workshop, an academically based community service course offered through the University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center. It expanded into a larger project, one in which I intended to view the school closings through the lens of gentrification, investigating whether they were either directly or indirectly a gentrifying act. While this idea remained and framed much of my research, the topic expanded and grew more complicated as I conducted more research, and I shifted my topic—or, more accurately, my topic shifted itself—to focus on broader social contexts, integrating this original approach with these contexts.



The majority of the data collection for this research project occurred from mid-January, 2013 through April 2013. I conducted ethnographic field research at community meetings and through interviews. A full list of recorded field notes can be found in the Appendix (Appendix 1). I met with a UCHS staff member, a UCHS alumna, and a few students from UCHS. My primary interviewees were: Eden, an eleventh grade African American female; Caleb, a twelfth grade African American male; Renee, an eleventh grade African American female; Wendy, a UCHS alumna; and Patience, a UCHS staff member. All names have been changed to preserve confidentiality. I corresponded with the Institutional Review Board, and a specific review was not needed as the interviews were conducted in conjunction with the academically based community service course.

To supplement the qualitative data collected from ethnographic research, quantitative demographic data was also collected on: residential sale price (Table 1); median household income (Table 2); educational attainment (percentage of population with a high school degree or more) (Table 3); race (percent African American) (Table 4); and median house value (Table 5). Most of these criteria—race, median house value, educational attainment, and median income—were collected to assess gentrification criteria (Galster and Peacock 1986). Residential sale price was added to provide a more accurate portrait of the area. Data on median house value, race, educational attainment, and median household income were collected based on census tract from the United States Census Bureau's Social Explorer. Data on residential sale price were collected based on neighborhoods from the Philadelphia NIS NeighborhoodBase. Quantitative data, when available, were collected starting from 1970, as UCHS was opened in the 1970s.

Data was also collected from the School District of Philadelphia on school statistics to provide quantitative information on the schools that the project is focusing on (Table 6). Lastly, to help contextualize the school closures within Philadelphia, I used Google Maps to create a map of the schools that were closed, marking each with a star (Image 1). This allowed me to see whether there were clusters of schools in a particular area or neighborhood that were slated to close.

*Limitations:*

With regards to the qualitative data collection, the most notable limitation is that the number of interviews and interviewees was fairly small, and the period of data collection was relatively short. Furthermore—because the main data collection site was closed, and Patience, the main staff contact, left—I was unable to follow-up with the students interviewed in the fall. Additionally, the qualitative data was only collected through these interviews, not through a survey that may give a broader overview of community perceptions. However, the community meetings did provide a forum for a large number of people to voice their opinions, which was helpful for increasing the breadth of the qualitative data collection.

The quantitative data was limited, firstly, by the fact that much of it—median house value, race, educational attainment, and median household income—was only available by census tract, which differs slightly from school catchment area. School catchment area would have been the ideal data collection area; however, sufficient data was not available in the required categories to make this possible. Therefore the correlation between school and neighborhood changes is less clear, and greater

extrapolation had to be made. Additionally, the availability of the data provided another limitation: the data on residential sale price were only available starting in 1999; those for the median household income were only available from 1980; and those for median house value for all owner-occupied units were only available from 2000, with the information for the University of Pennsylvania's census tract not available in 2012.

Lastly, when determining the significance of the changes that occurred in each category to measure gentrification over time, the data from the census tract or neighborhood were compared against changes in the city of Philadelphia as a whole. While this is an unavoidable limitation, it is problematic as it means that there is no true control group; this comparison assumes, to an extent, that gentrifying changes have not been made across the entire city. Therefore, the statistical and substantive significance of the quantitative data, while helpful for comparisons and analyses, must be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

### **DATA ANALYSIS:**

Quantitative data were analyzed to determine whether the changes in each category within the neighborhood or census tract were significant in comparison to the changes that occurred on the city level over time. Differences were calculated as percentages, and written in their absolute number form (for example, a 9% increase was written as 0.09). The changes over time within each category were compared between census tract or neighborhood and the city using paired two-tailed T-tests in Microsoft Excel. Paired T-tests were chosen to determine whether the difference between the changes in the experiment results—in other words, the data by census tract—were

statistically significant from the changes in the results of the control group—in this case, the Philadelphia county city-wide median. Two-tailed tests were used so as to be able to evaluate changes in both directions, not just those that would possibly indicate gentrifying processes; this helped to reduce experimenter bias and allowed for the possibility of a wider range of results. The full tables for each category can be found in Tables 1-5 of the Appendix. A few P-values were statistically significant ( $P < 0.05$ ), and a few others were of interest and should be explored further.

Firstly, the decrease in the percent African American in the UCHS census tract was statistically significant from 1970-2012, with a P-value of 0.01, in comparison to the citywide change. The percentage of African Americans in the UCHS census tract decreased by over 18%, while the citywide percentage of African Americans increased by 10% over this period. The increase in the percentage of residents with a high school degree in the UCHS tract from 1970-2012 was also statistically significantly different from the citywide change: the percentage in the UCHS tract only increased by 9%, while the percentage in the City of Philadelphia increased by 14%.

While not possessing statistically significant P-values, there were additional data that are of interest and would be interesting to pursue further in a different research project. Firstly, there are notable differences across all categories between the Lea and Penn Alexander schools, despite the fact that they are only five blocks away from each other and are both for students in kindergarten through the eighth grade (Table 6). For example, since 2011, the percentage of African American students at Penn Alexander has decreased by nearly 7%, while the percentage of African American students at Lea has only decreased by ~3%; in the Penn Alexander Census Tract, 23.365% of people are

African America, whereas 73.762% of people in the Lea census tract are African American. Additionally, 94.80% of people in the Penn Alexander census tract have a high school degree or more, whereas only 70.90% of people in the Lea school census tract have the same level of educational attainment.

Additionally, while there were not enough data available to perform T-tests on this dataset, it is worth noting that, between 2000 and 2012, the housing price in the Penn Alexander census tract increased from \$100,700 to \$562,000; in comparison, the city housing price only increased from \$61,000 to \$142,000 over the same period, and the housing price in the Lea School census tract increased from \$66,500 to \$213,000. In other words, the Penn Alexander census tract experienced a 558% increase, while Philadelphia and the Lea census tract experienced 233% and 320% increases, respectively.

While there is unfortunately little that can be said concretely based on the above data alone, they are helpful for providing the demographic context of the school closings, and for understanding greater shifts in each area and in Philadelphia as a whole.

With these quantitative data in mind, I will now discuss qualitative findings from my fieldwork. Field notes were coded manually based upon trends that came-up during the ethnography. The following codes were used: perceptions/opinions of school closings; perceptions/opinions of University City High School; perceptions/opinions of University City and the University of Pennsylvania; and perceptions/opinions of the School District of Philadelphia. Perceptions/opinions of school closings was further divided to include mentions/allusions related to gentrification and safety/transportation concerns, and perceptions/opinions of University City and the University of Pennsylvania

had a specific section to include opinions of university-assisted partnerships, of which UCHS had several. Each section was further divided into positive, negative, and neutral/mixed perceptions.

*Perceptions of the School Closings:*

Many discussions of the school closings were negative, or neutral statements—for example, factual assertions that the SDP is “broke” (Eden, January 17)—at best. As mentioned above, one of the themes that was raised in the discussion of the school closings was the reference to loss and the perception of them as stealing. For instance, the students expressed concern that, if UCHS were to close, recommendations and relationships for sophomores and juniors would be “gone” (February 21). Renee and Eden, both of whom were high school juniors, feared that college recommendation letters would be jeopardized and that it would be difficult to fulfill aspirations of being class president in a new school, respectively (February 21). Similarly, one student at a community meeting argued that relocating was the same as stealing; the student said that by moving students out of their school, the SRC was stealing their programs (January 23). A staff member from Robeson High School, which was slated to close, elaborated on this, saying that merging schools would result in the students losing their identity; for example, they would be combined with the other school’s athletics team (January 23). A Robeson student said that merging schools would “tear [them] apart” (January 23).

Many students were upset about the school closings: Caleb mentioned that he had family legacy at UCHS, and that it was “weird” to think that he might be the last one in his family to go to UCHS; he said the thought “doesn’t sit well in the stomach” (February

21). Eden said that on the day the school closing announcement was made, everything was dead, and the principal of UCHS “disappeared” for a while (February 21, UCHS). Renee agreed, saying that when the school closings were announced in December, everyone at UCHS was lower energy, and that some people even started crying (February 21, UCHS). In a one-on-one interview, Eden said that she felt that closing the schools was a “disservice” because it is “shutting down a community”; she said she felt like her “twelfth grade is gonna be a blur, like I’m not gonna care” (February 28). She went on, saying, “When you’re in a school where you have to start all over...you start not to care about the game anymore” (February 28). Eden said that the school closings were “an insult to all kids, but [they’re really] an insult to the good kids who really wanted something...it’s really sad for the kids who have made their roots here and who actually achieved something and wanted to achieve something” (February 28). She added that the school closings were “like a slap in the face,” a way for the District to say that “all your hard work in this building is tarnished, is ruined, never meant a thing from the jump...Which is, again, a disservice...It sucks for everyone, but it hits harder for the teachers and the kids that actually do care” (February 28).

Despite the largely negative perceptions that many people had of the school closings, there seemed to be an understanding of the difficult situation that the school district was in. For example, Wendy said that the school closings “train will be moving no matter what” (February 21). However, there were questions, as one student said, as to why the School District did not “clean up the mess as [they] went along” (January 23).

After the final announcement was made, Patience said many students were losing motivation, no longer wearing the school uniform, were struggling in classes, and more

generally did not seem to care anymore (April 11). Patience further said that, with the exception of the fight that had previously existed, UCHS resembled the school it had been in 2009/2010 when she first arrived; she added that even the previously dedicated students were becoming disconnected (April 11).

There was also much distrust within the community of school and government officials with respect to the transparency of, and motivations for, the school closings. One UCHS student claimed that the SRC was holding the community meetings so that community members would come to meetings and the SRC could “hear and pretend to listen” (January 17). A student criticized the fact that the SRC “[does its] homework after each meeting” to catch-up on the issues that were raised, as opposed to knowing this information beforehand (January 17). At the January 23 community meeting, a student from Robeson High School asked the SRC how they could be sure that our school has not already been sold, and how they could ensure an unbiased perspective when “[all of the panel members went to UPenn]” (January 23). An alumnus of UCHS expressed a similar concern, saying that he heard a rumor that “Penn has dibs” on the UCHS property (January 23).

In a one-on-one interview, Wendy claimed that Mayor Nutter wanted the school closings to go through, so he was not doing anything about them (February 21). She went on to say that it was his last term, so the issue did not matter to him (February 21). Wendy viewed the school closings as part of a larger plan that had started a few years ago; she claimed that UCHS needed to stay open, but that it was being closed because of its location (February 21). Renee expressed a similar idea when she said that she was



fighting for UCHS because others had done so in the past and that UCHS was not even “supposed to exist” because it was located on “prime property” (February 26).

Building from this, there were many concerns about gentrification in particular, about larger plans to move low-wealth minority students out of particular areas. Wendy said that Philadelphia was becoming a college city, and that it was trying to shift everyone out (February 21). She said she lived in Chicago for a few years and saw the same thing there (February 21). Wendy also expressed concern for senior citizens who, due to the increasing taxes, would likely be forced to leave their homes (February 21). She argued that, “If you’re not a doctor, etcetera, you won’t be able to afford the housing, [so] you’ll be living in the outskirts” (February 21). Wendy believed that people who were in the middle- and lower-middle classes would be pushed out—she described the issue as “[hitting] them where they hurt” (February 21). One UCHS student claimed that different university were after UCHS because it was in the University City area; the student went on to say that students at UCHS “are not meant to be considered to go to college, they’re meant to be considered to go to prison...” (January 17). Another student believed that the UCHS property was going to be used to make dorms or other infrastructure for universities (January 17).

One councilman at the stakeholders’ meeting claimed that school closings were happening in many areas, and were not specific to Philadelphia. He encouraged the students not to focus on specific schools, as this would only win the battle, not the war (January). He described the closings as part of a bigger agenda or narrative, and that the reasons given for closing UCHS—lack of funding, structural issues, school depopulation—were just ways of bringing this narrative about (January 17). A student

elaborated on this, saying that the SDP strategically allowed for everything to fall apart at once; the student cited the example of closing McMichael, the main feeder school for UCHS (January 17). The councilman urged the students to not make the fight about the building, but about them as “black bodies”; he claimed that it was not an accident that many of the schools slated for closing were located in North and West Philadelphia, that these are areas slated for gentrification (January 17). Gentrification was a topic of conversation even beyond the issue of the school closings: at a general community meeting discussing Penn’s economic inclusion, one councilwoman mentioned the importance of this conversation because many people felt they were being “pushed out due to gentrification” (October 3).

There were also many logistical concerns about the school closings. For instance, one UCHS sophomore raised concerns about over-crowding in a new school (January 23). Wendy also provided an anecdote of a conversation with a friend who was the principal of a middle school; according to Wendy, her friend was very concerned about her school’s capacity as her school was already overcrowded and she will be receiving students from three surrounding schools (February 21). Superintendent Hite stated that there would be the same number of students per class as they planned to use empty classrooms in the new schools (January 23). There were also concerns about students being transferred to lower-performing schools: one woman who described herself as a low-income single mother in the Penn Alexander catchment area had waited overnight to get her child into Penn Alexander, but was still not able to get in (January 23). As such, she advocated for keeping the Alexander Wilson school open to avoid having to send her child to Lea, which, in her view, has a bad reputation (January 23).

Many of the logistical concerns raised were about the safety of the students when combining two different school populations. Wendy discussed how many of the schools were territorial, which results in a lot of conflicts and rivalries between them; she even mentioned that some students were saying that they refused to go to certain schools (February 21). Another alumnus at the January 17 community meeting asked whether the SDP had considered the safety issues associated with transferring schools. A student from Robeson High School claimed that the safety concerns associated with transferring to a new school would discourage students from attending school (January 23). When a panel member asked why violence prevention methods that were used at Robeson could not be used at Sayre, the school Robeson was slated to combine with, a woman from the audience yelled, “No. Two different crowds coming together!” and the student replied that he “[knows] Sayre...” (January 23). A staff member from Robeson also raised this concern, asking the panel, “are you implying that 42<sup>nd</sup> Street is the same as 58<sup>th</sup> Street? The students are *scared* [sic]” (January 23).

Finally, there were logistical concerns about students’ transportation to new schools: one student worried that students would simply not transfer to a school that was too far away (January 23). People also questioned whether the SDP had considered the extra costs of providing students with public transit tokens when they calculated the amount of money they would save from the school closures (January 17). The primary goal of staff and students was to keep their school community together, and these logistics served as a barrier to achieving that goal (January 17, January 23).

*Perceptions of University City High School:*

While no one made claims that UCHS was an ideal school in terms of performance or physical infrastructure, both staff and students held largely positive and optimistic views about the school and possibilities for its future. Among the students I spoke to, there was a general consensus that they did not like UCHS at first and did not want to go to school there, but then grew to love it (February 21). Caleb said that he was fighting for UCHS for “selfish” reasons: he loved the school and wanted his family members to be able to go there in the future (February 21). Caleb said that, at his old school—a magnet school that he had been expelled of—he “[wasn’t] Caleb, [he was] number 33” (February 21). In contrast, he said that, at UCHS, he has a stronger relationship with the faculty (February 21). He described the people at his old school as “robots,” and said that being at UCHS was like being around “real people” for the first time (February 21). The other students agreed that everyone knows everyone else by name, and that the school had a personal feel (February 21). The students also said that UCHS brought different people together: Renee had previously gone to a “white” school in Wayne, PA, at which she said everyone was “cliqued up” by race (February 21). Renee said that this had been a top-rated school, but it was socially bad (February 21).

Renee said that teachers at UCHS see potential in her, and Caleb added that the teachers challenge them (February 21). Renee also commented that, at UCHS, teachers help the students because they care about their wellbeing—it’s not an “infomercial,” they actually do care and want to teach their students (February 21). Eden agreed, saying that she had been worried about not being challenged upon coming to UCHS, but that the teachers gave her extra work and encouraged her to take Advanced Placement classes in

the tenth grade (February 21). She said that teachers at UCHS treat her more “human” than she treats herself (February 21). A recent graduate from UCHS claimed that the school was a “home...a family,” and a “legacy” (January 23). A staff member at UCHS said that it was difficult to hear that UCHS was slated to close, and that it was definitely a school “on the right track” (April 17).

In a one-on-one interview, Renee said that University City was not like most other schools; she said that the school “may seem like a low-income, like not a good school, but it’s a school that can really change a person” (February 26). She also said that UCHS is the only school, out of the “nine-to-ten schools” she’s been to, that she’s been able to “open up and really be [herself]” (February 26).

However, as mentioned above, members of the UCHS community were aware of certain challenges that the school faced. One man who had started teaching in UCHS in 1971 called the building a “rush job”; he mentioned that it looked good, but that it had flaws, such as a dark room without equipment, asbestos in the building, and air-conditioning that worked in the winter and heat that worked in the summer (January 17). It was also estimated that the building required \$30 million in repairs, and would require \$147 million to replace it as is (January 17). Additionally, when the principal of UCHS cited the statistic of UCHS having 98 students enrolled in Advanced Placement classes, one teacher said, “...and not studying, or doing their reading...,” laughing (January 17). Lastly, Renee mentioned the frequent curriculum and/or staff changes that UCHS had experienced since she had been a student there, and that her grade had experienced the “worst” of them (February 26).

*Perceptions of University City & the University of Pennsylvania:*

Many staff and students were grateful for university-community schools partnerships, and expressed concern that they would lose these partnerships if UCHS were to close. Renee claimed that the partnerships provide “another sense of family” and she said, “Without University City [High School], I don’t think we would have had that opportunity [to have college trips]....and I’m really happy for that, I really am” (February 26). Caleb also commented that UCHS helped get him into a program at Drexel University that focused on videogames, something that he particularly enjoyed as he wants to be a videogame designer (February 21). Additionally, Patience used the many partnerships, that she claimed are beneficial to both staff and students, that UCHS had as a way to advocate to keep the school open (February 12). However, Renee commented that, if UCHS were located anywhere else, she “personally [doesn’t] think [they] could have the partnerships that [they’re] in because UPenn and Drexel students...have class to go to...[and] it would be disorganized for them and would be a waste of their time [to travel to further schools]” (February 26).

*Perceptions of the School District of Philadelphia:*

Perceptions of the School District of Philadelphia were decidedly more negative. Wendy was of the opinion that, since the School Reform Commission had taken over, the district has wasted books and money; she was very concerned with corruption and convinced of the misuse of public funds (February 21). Additionally, there was general mistrust and disappointment, particularly because UCHS becoming a Promise Academy was supposed to grant the school more money and continued support from the SDP; the

fact that three Promise Academies were slated to be closed seemed to discouraging to some community members (January 17).

### **SIGNIFICANCE:**

So what does any of this mean? People were clearly upset by the school closures, but, as the quantitative data reveal, there is no way to concretely say whether these closings were brought about as part of a larger “gentrifying plan” (i.e. part of the shifts in the area) or whether they were merely a policy decision made out of a desperate act to address a very real budget crisis. It is also difficult to assess the situation as the school closings are such a recent event, and the future of the area is not yet known. That being said, there are important conclusions and considerations that are born out of this research project.

Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that, if someone believes something to be true, then it is necessarily a truth and will influence what happens in society and how people interpret certain events. As such, if members of the West Philadelphia community believe the school closings have a certain motivation behind them, then these concerns are truths and must be treated as such, regardless of what one might call “true” intent. Questions of whether or not the school closings were meant to spur urban renewal are gentrification are certainly important, but equally important is whether community members believe the closings were intended to achieve these ends. Similarly, local knowledge is invaluable, and if community members believe that the school closings pose certain risks to the students or the community, these also must be taken seriously.

However, while being mindful of this, we must also conduct a critical analysis in an effort to both reflect and find a way to move forward.

Nothing occurs in a void, and it is important to review the history of Philadelphia and its school district to understand the current situation and why people—community members and the SRC—have responded in the ways that they have. The challenges that the school district and the city are facing are not new—they are culminations of years of policies and human agency, and are symptoms of deep-rooted issues that must be addressed.

Additionally, though it may be stating the obvious, it is nonetheless worth mentioning that there remains significant inequality in Philadelphia: not all students (indeed, it is tempting to say not the majority of students) are given the opportunity to be educated at a high performing school, with much of this inequality occurring along lines of race and socioeconomic status. As such, when an event like this happens—in which the majority of people affected are low-wealth minority students, and those making the decisions are perceived as outsiders—there is both greater cause for concern about true motives and heightened community sensitivity about these motives.

Schools are essential parts of neighborhoods, both as community centers and as learning centers that can help to equalize opportunities across different neighborhoods. High-performing schools, low-performing schools, and closed schools are indicative of the neighborhood's overall educational attainment, and predictive of the future of that neighborhood's growth and resources. With respect to the specific findings from this study, some of the quantitatively significant and notable changes over time, and comparisons between areas, are worth examining further. Demographic changes in the



Penn Alexander and Lea schools should be closely watched, as should the median house value in these schools' census tracts. For instance, while the results may not have been statistically significant as of yet, I do believe that there is and/or will be a correlation between changes in the area around Penn Alexander due to the quality of the school; I do not believe it is coincidence that, already, just over a decade after the Penn Alexander school was opened, 94.80% of those of age living in the Penn Alexander census tract have at least a high school degree, whereas the same percent is only 70.90% for the adjacent Lea school census tract. Similarly, I do not believe that it can be ignored that only 23.365% of the Penn Alexander census tract is African American, while 73.762% of the Lea school census tract is, or that the median house value in the Penn Alexander census tract increased \$461,300 from 2000 to 2012.

Furthermore, while specific plans for the UCHS property have not yet been released, it is unlikely that Drexel's use of the land will cater to the same demographic that UCHS did. Similarly, the data from the SDP on serious incidents, suspensions, and attendance are not yet available for the 2013-2014 school year; however, once these are released, they should be compared to those from 2012-2013 to determine whether schools receiving students have experienced any changes in these areas.

Furthermore, additional data should be collected and analyzed with different boundaries (e.g. school catchment areas instead of census tracts) to give a more accurate and nuanced picture. It is also important to mention that, although the schools have officially been closed and the students relocated, the issue is by no means resolved: many of the school properties have yet to have been sold, the SDP will still likely need additional funds, and community members and students affected by the closures are still

adjusting and coping. There may no longer be *New York Times* articles written about the topic (Hurdle 2013), but that does not mean the extent of its impact has been expired.

Schools are important community hubs, and school closings are a real concern—many staff and students talked about the loss of community, as well as of the dangers and challenges associated with the school closings. Given the important, multi-faceted role that schools play in the community, the negative backlash that the SDP and SRC received for the school closings, while incredibly important, should have been expected—the SDP should have been more prepared for this response, considering and addressing community concerns in advance to avoid the perception of, as one student said, the SRC “[doing] its homework after each meeting” to catch-up (January 17).

However, although the school closures have many effects and were motivated by many causes, the fact that the SDP is so far in debt cannot be understated. It is difficult to assess whether or not the SDP’s process for determining which schools to close was completely sound—for instance, did it close UCHS to move out that population of students, or did the changes in the surrounding neighborhood and increased demand for the land make it a logical financial decision to close?—but it is undeniable that the SDP needs large sums of money. Furthermore, on a quantitative scale, UCHS was not performing well, most notably in terms of student achievement, quality of school building, and enrolment. Furthermore, Philadelphia is undergoing significant demographic shifts—with many empty seats, the SDP was forced to take action. While these objective statistics ignore many important qualitative aspects of the school, they are nonetheless important to remember.

There needs to be more transparency between the community and the SRC, as both groups are looking at the issue from very different perspectives. On the one hand, the SRC lacks community knowledge and, in this sense, are not necessarily qualified to make a decision about what constitutes a “good” school and which schools should be closed. Similarly, SRC members likely also know less about the local history and the lens—of discrimination, of gentrification, of inequality—through which many community members are viewing these closings. However, on the other hand, community members are likely biased, and they do not necessarily know as much about the budget concerns and why school closures may be necessary. Additionally, some community members appear to associate these school closures with past policy decisions, in some ways conflating the two; while this is understandable, it likely means that they are not evaluating the school closings as a decision in their own right, and are not treating them as the separate decision that they are.

Yet the school closings do raise important questions of justice and who “wins” and “loses” in large policy decisions; how do we evaluate the fairness behind these decisions? How do we adequately compensate community members for their loss? How do we measure the extent of the impact of these school closings?

In the end, community members feel that they are being discriminated against, which makes this a truth and which makes the school closings important to investigate; at a minimum, relationships and transparency between the affected community and the SDP need to be improved. However, it is difficult to say what the “bottom line” is at the moment, or if there is one—there are many individual agents and structural forces at play. Furthermore, as the history reveals, the school closures did not occur in a void; the

closings likely exacerbated existing social problems, such as overcrowding, low performing urban public schools, a racial and socioeconomic-based divide, and the feeling of “us versus them” that exists among community members.

This project takes an early, in-depth look at the school closings in Philadelphia, and is unique for taking both a qualitative and quantitative approach to really delve into the social contexts of the school closings. It is helpful for providing context about the school closings, situating them in a larger narrative of public education, policy decisions, and community relations in Philadelphia. Hopefully, this project will encourage more communication between public officials and community members, and will promote understanding between the two groups. Additionally, it is my hope that this project will help to convey the complexity of the public school system in Philadelphia, as well as to educate readers on the fragility of community-policymaker relations, particularly along lines of race and socioeconomic status. It is difficult to say who is “right” and who is “wrong,” and whether or not a decision was made for a particular reason and whether the benefits will outweigh the costs, or vice versa. However, by listening—truly listening—to different perspectives, the gap between opposing groups can hopefully be lessened, and we will find a way to establish policies that solve existing problems—such as that of the budget—without notably favoring or negatively impacting one community over another.

To return to Thompson’s *Rubbish Theory* (1979): “Those people near the top have the power to make things durable and to make things transient, so they can ensure that their own objects are always durable and that those of others are always transient” (9). In many ways this expresses the concern that many community members felt upon hearing of the school closures: that those in power were acting in their own self-interest and

deliberately impeding their students' future successes. We need to actively work to dispel such notions and, in certain cases, such motivations to improve community relations and the quality of public education in Philadelphia.

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## **APPENDIX: TABLES & FIGURES**

### **Appendix 1: Field Notes**

January 17 = UCHS stakeholder meeting

January 23 = Community Meeting

February 12 = meeting with Ms. Berry

February 21 = meeting with UCHS students; meeting with WL

February 26 = discussion with UCHS student (Rhonda)

February 28 = meeting with UCHS student (Evynn)

April 11 = meeting with Ms. Berry

April 17 = PhillyCAM

October 3 = First Thursday Meeting, Economic Inclusion

December 5 = First Thursday Meeting, Penn & Public Schools

**Table 1:** Residential Sale Price

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	(1999-2007)
<b><i>Cedar Park</i></b>	84500	85310	87750	102500	153000	191500	244000	200000	306000	
Difference		0.009585799	0.028601571	0.168091168	0.492682927	0.251633987	0.274151436	0.180327869	0.53	
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.172	0.500	0.500	0.418	0.134	0.868	0.710	
P-Value (Overall Change)										0.140638405
<b><i>Powellton</i></b>	77500	71900	65000	50000	83750	75000	98250	35000	108500	
Difference		0.072258065	0.09596662	0.230769231	0.675	0.104477612	0.31	0.643765903	2.1	
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.104	0.381	0.882	0.807	0.731	0.624	0.688	
P-Value (Overall Change)										0.610574997
<b><i>University City</i></b>	100000	120500	115100	172000	150000	225000	322500	210000	325000	

Difference		-	-	-		-	-		
P-Value		0.0448132	0.4943527	0.1279069		0.4333333	0.3488372	0.5476190	
(Change	0.205	78	37	77	0.5	33	09	48	
by									
Decade)		0.568	0.547	0.879	0.904	0.072	0.938	0.920	
P-Value									
(Overall								0.2460608	
Change)								04	
<b>City-</b>	4890								
<b>wide</b>	0	48000	47000	54900	60000	72000	86000	81000	95000
Difference		-	-				-		
P-Value	0.0184049	0.0208333	0.1680851	0.0928961		0.1944444	0.0581395	0.1728395	
(Change	08	33	06	75	0.2	44	35	06	

**Table 2: Median Household Income**

<b>Average Family Income (US\$)</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>(1980-2012)</b>
<b>University City High School Census Tract (91)</b>	5988.00	8774.00	17500.00	15119.00	
Difference		0.47	0.99	-0.14	1.52
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.82	0.77	
P-Value (Overall Change)					1.00
<b>University of Pennsylvania Census Tract (89/369)</b>	5894.00	12695.00	6311.00	47614.00	
Difference		1.15	-0.50	6.54	7.08
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.73	0.58	
P-Value (Overall Change)					0.47

<b>Penn Alexander Census Tract (87.02)</b>	8793.00	19562.00	21131.00	24808.00	
Difference		1.22	0.08	0.17	1.82
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.78	0.39	
P-Value (Overall Change)					0.77
<b>Lea School Census Tract (86.02)</b>	9828.00	18418.00	19612.00	29472.00	
Difference		0.87	0.06	0.50	2.00
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.52	0.85	
P-Value (Overall Change)					0.80
<b>Philadelphia County</b>	13169.00	24603.00	30746.00	37016.00	
Difference		0.87	0.25	0.20	1.81

**Table 3:** Educational Attainment

<b>High School+ Degree (%)</b>	<b>1970 (% 25+ years)</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>(1970-2012)</b>
<b>University City High School Census Tract (91)</b>	71.26	75.37	62.00	67.90	80.80	
Difference		4.11	-13.37	0.06	0.13	9.54
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.18	0.20	0.09	
P-Value (Overall Change)						0.01
<b>University of Pennsylvania Census Tract (89/369)</b>	90.32	83.94	86.20	78.40	88.60	
Difference		-6.38	0.02	-0.08	0.10	-1.72
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.51	0.51	0.08	
P-Value (Overall Change)						0.11



<b>Penn Alexander Census Tract (87.02)</b>	80.31	92.18	88.30	86.80	94.80	
Difference		11.87	-0.04	-0.02	0.08	
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.38	0.51	0.09	
P-Value (Overall Change)						0.21
<b>Lea School Census Tract (86.02)</b>	78.81	82.69	68.30	73.50	70.90	
Difference		3.88	-0.14	0.05	-0.03	
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.50	0.50	0.09	
P-Value (Overall Change)						0.06
<b>Philadelphia County</b>	66.54	77.89	64.32	71.20	80.40	
Difference		11.35	-0.14	6.88	9.20	13.87

**Table 4:** Race

(% African American)

**University City High School****Census****Tract (91)**

Difference

P-Value

(Change by Decade)

P-Value

(Overall

Change)

**University of Pennsylvania****Census****Tract****(89/369)**

Difference

P-Value

(Change by Decade)

P-Value

(Overall

Change)

	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>(1970-2012)</b>
	61.763	60.727	55.93	54.09	43.627	
Difference		-1.036	-4.797	-1.84	-10.463	-18.136
P-Value						
(Change by Decade)			0.077081145	0.084687005	0.211425278	
P-Value						
(Overall Change)						0.011929007
<b>University of Pennsylvania</b>						
<b>Census</b>						
<b>Tract</b>						
<b>(89/369)</b>	8.924	5.654	10.625	14.693	8.93	
Difference		-3.27	4.971	4.068	-5.763	
P-Value						
(Change by Decade)			0.737435493	0.350739014	0.574955403	
P-Value						
(Overall Change)						0.403874853

<b>Penn Alexander Census Tract (87.02)</b>	18.595	18.96	21.296	29.066	23.365	
Difference		0.365	2.336	7.77	-5.701	
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.552527151	0.453157652	0.907784342	
P-Value (Overall Change)						0.617174659
<b>Lea School Census Tract (86.02)</b>	57.797	66.992	67.823	75.835	73.762	
Difference		9.195	0.831	8.012	-2.073	
P-Value (Change by Decade)			0.650443887	0.65817857	0.790937448	
P-Value (Overall Change)						0.48050448
<b>Philadelphia County</b>	33.549	37.844	39.855	43.216	43.43	
Difference		4.295	2.011	3.361	0.214	

**Table 5: Median House Value**

Median House Value for All Owner-Occupied Units	2000	2012
<b>University City High School Census Tract (91)</b>	86,700	223,600
Difference		2
P-Value (Change by Decade)		
P-Value (Overall Change)		
<b>University of Pennsylvania Census Tract (88 – altered to reflect where houses are, not just campus buildings)</b>	177,500	N/A
Difference		

P-Value  
(Change by  
Decade)

P-Value  
(Overall  
Change)

**Penn  
Alexander  
Census  
Tract (87.02)**  
Difference

100,700	562,000
	5

P-Value  
(Change by  
Decade)

P-Value  
(Overall  
Change)

**Lea School  
Census  
Tract (86.02)**  
Difference

66,500	213,200
	2

P-Value  
(Change by  
Decade)

P-Value  
(Overall  
Change)

**Philadelphia  
County**  
Difference

61,000

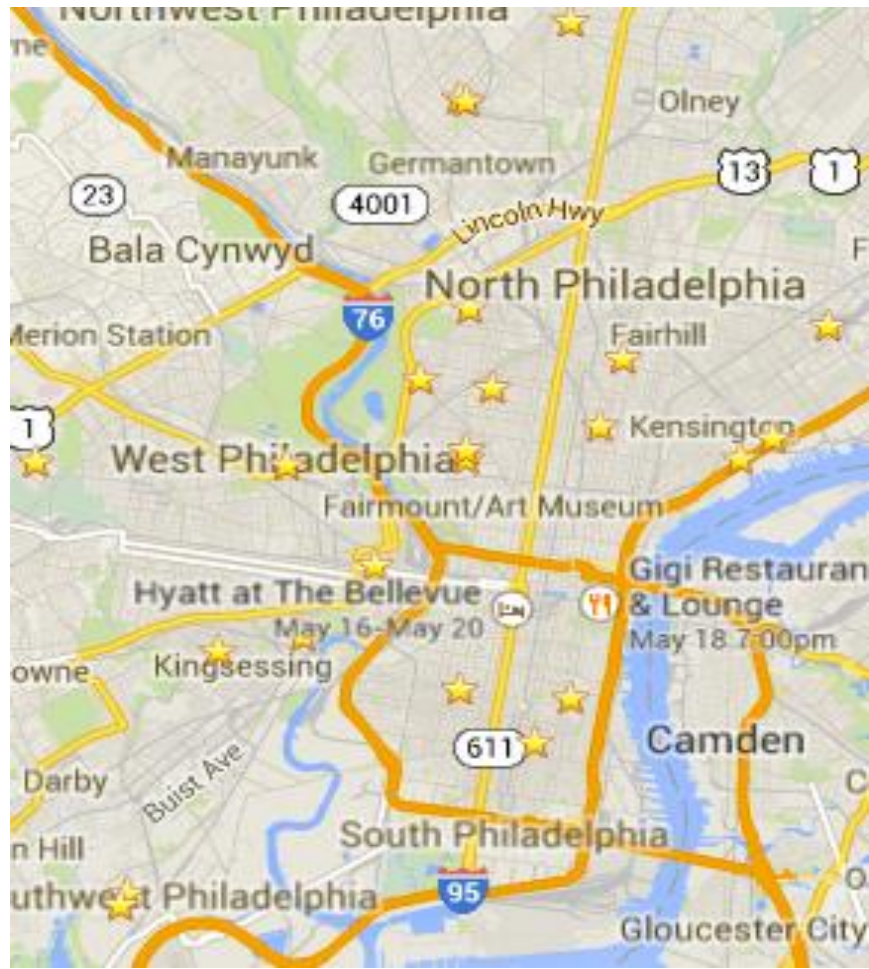
142,300

1

**Table 6:** School Statistics

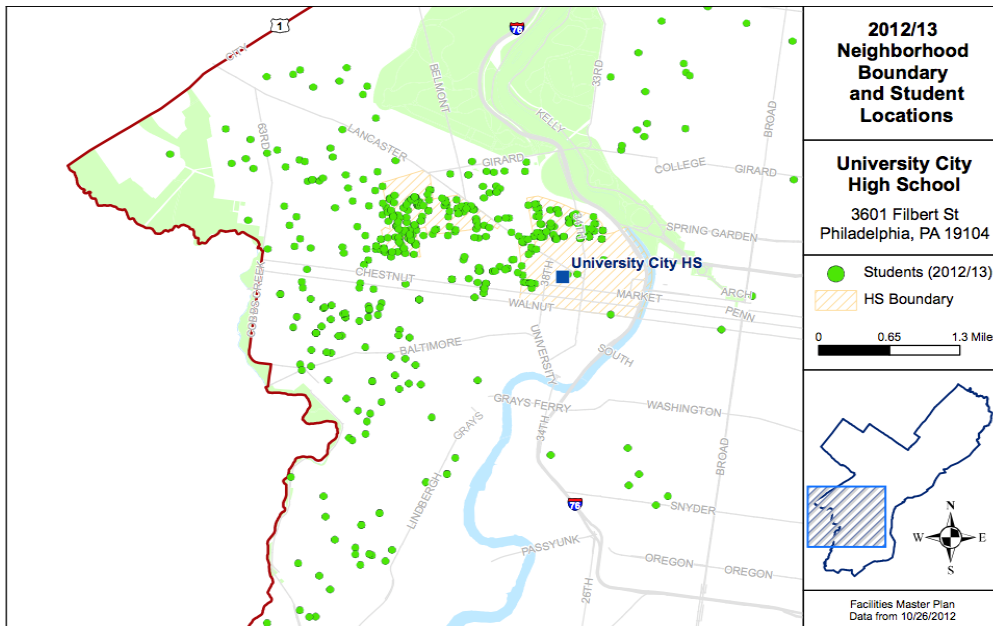
<b>School Name</b>	<b>Ethnic/Racial Composition</b>	<b>Percent Economically Disadvantaged</b>	<b>No. Suspensions, 2011-12</b>	<b>No. Serious Incidents, 2011-12</b>	<b>PSSA Scores</b>	<b>Student : Teacher Attendance (%)</b>
University City High School	93.4% African American	94.70%	143	22 assault; 5 drugs; 3 morals; 3 weapons; 5 theft	~25% below SDP avg.	86.4 : 94.9
Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School	39.1% white; 27.5% African American; 15.6% Asian; 7.8% Latino	51.30%	2	0	~40% above SDP avg.	98.2 : 97.7
Henry C. Lea	81% African American; 9.3% Asian	95.70%	33	2 assault; 1 drugs; 2 morals; 1 weapons; 2 theft	at/~15% below (occasionally slightly above) SDP avg.	95.2 : 93.4

**Image 1:** Map of Philadelphia – Location of Schools that were Closed Spring 2013





**Image 2:** 2012-2013 Neighborhood Boundary and Student Locations for UCHS



**Image 3:** School Locations – UCHS, Penn Alexander, and Lea



