BRANDING AGAINST CLOSURE: NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS AND THE

MANAGEMENT OF RISKY FUTURES

Julia A. McWilliams

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Supervisor of Dissertation: Graduate Group Chairperson, Education

_____   _____
Kathleen D. Hall, Associate Professor of   J. Matthew Hartley, Professor of Higher
Education & Anthropology   Education

Graduate Group Chairperson, Anthropology

_____
Deborah A. Thomas, Professor of Anthropology

Dissertation Committee

Kathleen D. Hall, Associate Professor of Education & Anthropology

Deborah A. Thomas, Professor of Anthropology

Alexander Posecznick, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Education

Maia B. Cucchiara, Associate Professor of Urban Education, Temple University

Robert P. Fairbank, II, Lecturer & Fellow in Urban Studies

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DEDICATION

To my family, for loving me through the imperfect moments.

To the students and educators in this dissertation, for your resilience and strength. May we find the humanity to do better by you.

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My father used to tell me when I was young that life is in the small moments. I've never fully grasped that expression until now, almost seven years after beginning this PhD, as I write the final section of my dissertation. I will not recall this "big moment" but rather the "small moments" of sustained love, support, listening, and generosity afforded to me by all of the individuals that have made this journey possible.

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ABSTRACT

BRANDING AGAINST CLOSURE: NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS AND THE

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Julia A. McWilliams

Kathleen D. Hall

Philadelphia is one of many distressed American urban school districts, from

Chicago to New Orleans, that has embraced market-based responses like school closures

to tackle entrenched problems of funding and academic performance. While urban

districts have increasingly appropriated closures-as-policy, little scholarship interrogates

the sweeping social and organizational changes in governance and praxis that schools

make when faced its explicit ultimatum: compete or close. Applying a framework

developed in the anthropologies of branding and value, this dissertation explores school

leaders' fraught responses to imminent closure as they attempted to make their "value"

legible in an expanding marketplace of school choice. Through a three-year ethnographic

case study of an ethnically diverse neighborhood school slated for closure, I examine how

the school's strategies to remain open hinged on the selective enrollment and retention of

students deemed "valuable" to their imagined brand. As these practices indexed raced

notions of "value", I analyze how school branding processes deepen racialized disparities

in educational provision.

Methods include over 200 semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and

administrators, participant observation in classrooms, district offices and meetings, and

document analysis. As closures continue to threaten urban public schools across the

United States, this study uniquely captures the dilemmas that surface in educational practice and philosophy when schools prioritize the business of survival over the business of educating. Further, I contribute to emergent literatures in educational commodification and marketization by explaining how school branding, prompted by closure threats and competition for school survival, extend inequities in opportunity structures for vulnerable youth.

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EDUCATION CRISIS IN PHILADELPHIA

Photo: Water damage in a neighborhood school classroom.

Johnson High is a century-old, non-selective neighborhood high school serving

approximately 650 students in Philadelphia. On rainy days in 2011, the academic year

that I first began tutoring at Johnson High, water streamed from the ceiling onto students'

shoulders as the leaky roof went unrepaired. In the winter, the furnace fired on all

cylinders, spiking classroom temperatures as students laid their heads on desks, trying to

pay attention to their teachers amidst the sleep-inducing heat. As I walked through an

empty top floor of the building, I peeked through door windows of locked classrooms to

see old chairs piled high as mice gathered in corners to nibble on dust balls (Fieldnote,

4/13/11). The administration had sealed off this floor several years ago due to alleged

asbestos contamination. The principal and several teachers complained of the bed bugs

infesting the furniture, but there was no room in the budget to hire an exterminator. Students pointed fingers at the mold growing on classroom walls that aggravated their asthma and sent them to hospitals. The school was suffering from a steady, decade-long decline in enrollment, holding only half of the students in 2011 that it did in 2000 as shiny charter schools cropped up in both the surrounding neighborhood and throughout the city, poaching students and leaving empty seats in their wake.

When the School District of Philadelphia leaked a consultants' report in June 2011, slating Johnson High for potential closure, the school community went into a state of panic, searching for a comprehensive strategy to keep the school alive (Herold and Mezzacappa 2011). In spite of the century-old building's shortcomings and school's growing vacancy, those that remained couldn't imagine an academic home anywhere else. Referring to the Johnson High community as a "family" with long-embedded histories in the neighborhood and school, parents, teachers, and even administrators having attended Johnson preceding their children, understood the school's closure to signify the erasure of those roots, the death of an historic institution that had served generations of their families.

Johnson High managed to evade the closures that rocked neighborhood schools across the city for two years after the district's initial school closure announcement. From 2012 to 2013, the School District of Philadelphia closed 30 district-run neighborhood schools, in part to address a $1.35 billion budget gap (School District of Philadelphia 2013). Twenty-four closures coincided with passing of the "doomsday budget" in June 2013 as cuts in state-funding precipitated a $300 million fiscal shortfall for the AY 2013-2014 school year (Strauss 2013). Philadelphia joins 70 other large and mid-sized urban

school systems in the last decade that have closed neighborhood schools as they have increasingly embraced the charter sector as a route to expand "school choice", mitigate "poor academic performance", and cope with severe fiscal shortfalls, particularly in the wake of the Great Recession (Engberg et al. 2012). New York City and Washington D.C. have carried out school closures *en masse* over the course of the last ten years. Chicago however is the nation's leader, pioneering mass school closures beginning in 2001 as it turned district schools over to charter school operators, pressured by philanthropists, billionaires, and policymakers to increase competition and choice in its district's educational portfolio.

While Philadelphia has garnered international attention as a laboratory for experiments in market-driven education reform (Denvir 2014) through its exponential charter school expansion (Leitner 2014), contracts with educational management organizations (EMOs) (Cucchiara, Gold, and Simon 2011), and partnerships with non-profit and philanthropic organizations (Limm 2014; Hardy 2014), the years of 2012 and 2013 marked the district's first foray into mass school closures. For a district attempting to maintain essentially "two education systems", the charter school network and district-run neighborhood schools, district leadership framed closures as an inevitable policy option in the context of increasingly scarce resources and national and state-level incentives to fortify "school choice" options for families (School District of Philadelphia 2013; Hite 2013). Displacing over 15,000 students from chronically "low-performing" and or "dangerous" schools, the closures raised controversial questions, not only about the short-term and long-term effects on the children and communities affected, but also concerning the precarious arc of education reform in the city (Gym 2015a).

In Philadelphia, as in other large, poor, post-industrial American cities, school closures, at their core, index myriad tensions arising from the intensified and long-term mapping of federal accountability measures and top-down policies encouraging privatization onto public education in the country's poorest urban districts. Standardized metrics of "school quality" like school infrastructure costs, enrollment numbers, and test scores naturalize school closure as a policy that privileges the laws of the market. Promoted as a reform model through the No Child Left Behind Act and Obama's Race to the Top program, school closings have been framed at the national level as a way to improve "efficiency", "choice", and "quality" as schools compete in the "marketplace" of educational options to attract students and raise efficacy or ultimately shutter for persistent "failure" (Linkow, Streich, and Jacob 2011). Driven by problematic assumptions that the closure threat first motivates schools to improve their performance and that second, schools have the resources at their disposal to support improvements in performance, the policy unmoors schools from the range of environments and actors that produce "school failure".

At the heart of this dissertation is an exploration of how the problematic assumptions that undergird school closings articulate with the complex social realities that stem from their enactment. As Jack and Sludden (2013) point out, school closings are rarely a policy option pursued by school systems serving affluent constituencies. Operationalized largely by "failing" urban districts in the midst of severe fiscal distress, school closings, like other punitive market-based reforms (i.e. high stakes standardized testing, teacher merit-pay), inject high degrees of risk and uncertainty into education systems already reeling from decades of disinvestment and overwhelming student needs.

The policy, as a marketized bureaucratic apparatus, distills schools into an amalgam of seemingly "objective" measures that rationalize an ultimatum for schools: demonstrate "quality" through competition or close. These measures are divorced from neighborhood geographies, school histories, the relations of the educators and students, student demographics, and nuanced ways in which other district-level and state-level accountability mandates, fiscal crises, and bipartisan politics converge to complicate the work of teachers and administrators trying to keep their schools afloat amidst rising tides of uncertainty and fiscal distress. In turn, the policy wrongly assumes that schools are independent entities capable of governing their own fates, dissociating schools from the layered neighborhood and district contexts that influence their resources and capacity for "success" (as defined by the policy).

Whereas punitive yet not fatal measures such as annual defunding or labeling as "persistently failing" accompanied other market-oriented policies (i.e. high-stakes testing) historically, mass closures represent the next evolution in the marketization of public education by creating zero-sum predicaments where neighborhood school communities must find ways to demonstrate "quality" according to the laws of the market or lose their buildings and livelihoods. In other words, by treating schools like businesses and closing them for underperformance, the policy induces prophylactic action to respond to the terminal stakes of failure. Understanding how neighborhood school communities react to their positioning as endangered commodities in an urban education marketplace, made ever more ominous by closures, provides insight into how the introduction of a closure policy in a district transforms educational practice in threatened schools as schools must minimize risk to their performance. Such insight further offers a window

consider how those practices align with or contradict several of the broader, principled goals of urban education reform: equity and social justice for poor youth of color (Giroux and Saltman 2009).

To examine closures' implications for educational practice and reform, I trace how neighborhood school leadership, staff, and students perceive the threat of closure and how those perceptions shape their organizational structures, climates, and relationships within neighborhood schools qualifying via standardized criteria for the pool of potential closures. Moreover, I investigate how school communities narrate, process, and strategize around fiscal crisis, resource scarcity, privatization creep, and the construction of school failure at the state, district, and school levels – common conditions that discursively inform the legitimacy and inevitability of neighborhood school closures. In other words, unlike the bulk of research on this policy, I do not consider the impact of school closures on youth and communities where schools have already been closed, but rather how the risk and uncertainty around the policy threat influences the social and cultural politics of schools working to resist closure.

Taking into account one of the central assumptions of this policy, that schools will strive to improve the "quality" of their services (Smarick 2010), I argue that a careful ethnographic examination of this policy as an *interpretative process within schools* is needed to illuminate the complex responses and potentially unintended consequences of the policy on the ground (Deeds and Pattillo 2014). I anchor my study at Johnson High, a nonselective neighborhood high school in Philadelphia that has been identified as a school "fit" for closure by the criteria established by the School District of Philadelphia (School District of Philadelphia 2012a). It's aged building, declining enrollments, and

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regressive academic performance over the course of the last decade marked the school as closure-worthy in 2011 when the district first issued school closure recommendations. Over the course of the three years I spent conducting research, the threat of closure set into motion a problematic assemblage of practices, discourses, and relationships that contradicted one of the central missions of public education: to "ensure access to equal educational opportunity for every individual" (U.S. Department of Education 2015). The school, one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhood schools in the city, served as key site to explore the ways in which the school closure hazard shaped Johnson High's cultural and racial politics and ensuing strategies around keeping the school open.

By also conducting ethnographic fieldwork in AY 2013-2014, the year of the "doomsday" budget, I captured how political and organizational tumult at the state and district levels came to powerfully influence student and staff narratives over their capacity to survive as a school with increasingly unavailable resources and capacity to perform. Conceiving of school closure policy as a process that involves the "negotiation, contestation, or struggle between different group who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy making" (Ozga 2000:2), my ethnographic approach allowed me to observe the productive capacities of the policy's widespread circulation by attending to not only one school community's response, but also its vertically scaled logics. I explored district and state-level policymakers and officials rationales for the necessity of closures in the midst of a budget crisis, taking note of how their narratives and actions conflicted or resonated with the grievances of school-level administrators, educators, and students. In contrast to statistical approaches to studying education policy that bring the gaze to decontextualized, bottom-line performance metrics, oftentimes

providing fodder for market-principled justifications for closure, ethnographic attention to closures as process suggest several analytical advantages:

First, scaled ethnographic engagement at the school, district, and state levels allowed me identify and problematize the driving assumption and therefore rationales for the policy, that schools improve their "quality" when faced with the risk of closure. I do this by showing how district and state policymakers constructed the methodology for failure and how teachers, administrators, and students at Johnson High came to interpret and act upon the criteria that the district used to define "quality" schools. These interpretations informed a set of strategies that the administration, staff, and students used to makeover the school into one "deserving" of being kept open yet brought into relief the ethically muddled, racialized, and exclusionary dimensions of their response.

Second, the racial and moral tensions that these strategies surfaced had larger, negative implications for peer relationships, the in-school experiences of students deemed a "threat" to the "quality" of the school, and also educators' sense of purpose and value as advocates, mentors, and caregivers for *all students*. The fraught consciences of leadership that I capture at the school, district, and state levels demonstrate that school closures are not merely an inevitable process that shutters building and sells off public infrastructure, but an impetus behind shifts in educational practice that have larger implications for age-old purposes, aims, and values of non-selective public education. It was only through immersion as a participant observer that I could watch this closure process unfold in real time, documenting the lived experience of closures as well as their unintended consequences in schools that did not ultimately did not close in this first round, but perceived themselves as perpetually vulnerable to an impending round.

In the following sections, I will situate my ethnographic case study of Johnson High in relation to literature on market-driven education reform, race and education policy, and namely the scant research on school closures. I will further discuss what this work contributes to these bodies of work. From there I will introduce the theoretical framework that I use to problematize school closures as policy as well as identify the central mechanisms through which closure-as-threat sets the process of becoming a "worthy" school into motion. Finally, I will delineate the research questions and subsequent methodology I used to investigate this process.

Literature Review

Market-Driven Urban Education Reform and School Choice

In her canonical work *The Life and Death of the Great American School System,* Diane Ravitch (2011) attributes the turn to markets to solve educational problems to the release of the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk* (*ANAR*) by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The 36-pg. report delineated a "crisis" in public education by examining declining test scores, pervasive functional illiteracy, stagnant teacher salaries, and growing turnover rates among educators. Likening the crisis to a "war" on "failure" that America must wage in its schools in order to avoid economic ruin, *ANAR* tethered educational mediocrity to ominous market predictions. Embraced by the Reagan administration, *ANAR* paved the way for an era of technocratic, market-driven tactics to restore "excellence" to the educational system.

While Ravitch describes this turn to markets as rooted in panic about the "failing" state of public education as defined by the United States' decline as an economic powerhouse, Mehta (2013) links marketization to one of a series of paradigm shifts

throughout the 20th and 21st centuries that have shaped a politics of accountability in the education sector to "reduce variation and discretion across school in favor of increasingly formal systems of standardized top-down control" (1). Within the current iteration of these reformers, academics, and politicians identify unwieldy school bureaucracies, lack of standards, and direct democratic control of schools as the roots of "failure." Framing "failure" as a problem rooted in institutions, reformers aggressively pursued policies promoting "school choice" and "school competition" to improve schools and student achievement (Chubb and Moe 1990; Hanushek 1986). Endemic to this movement was the assumption that market-driven policies that held failing institutions accountable and incentivized "success" (defined vis-à-vis standardized testing metrics) would galvanize schools to improve their "quality."

Social scientists and education scholars alike have broadly used the term "neoliberalism" (Harvey 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Lipman 2011; Brenner and Theodore 2002; Apple 2001; Hursh 2008; Giroux and Saltman 2009) or "market fundamentalism" (Somers 2008; Cucchiara 2013) to capture the rising moral authority of markets in the governance and provision of traditional public goods since *ANAR*'s release in the early 1980s. For the purposes of situating school closure policy in a scholarly discourse at the intersection of markets and the citizenship rights to equitable educational opportunities, I draw on Margaret Somers (2008) coining and defining of market fundamentalism as "an ideational regime" that "subjects all social life and the public sphere to market mechanisms" (2). Market fundamentalism has been powerful and widespread restructuring force in the governance and provision of public goods in the last 30 years, particularly public education in major American cities. Intensified high-stakes

standardized testing, charter school and school of choice expansion, and privatization of

public school operations all fall under what Bartlett and her colleagues (2002) describe as

the "marketization of education," or the embedding of business-oriented principles into

policy, school operations, and discourses around public education's purposes and aims.

Education scholars have pointed to the roots of market fundamentalism in the

theoretical assumptions generated by neoclassical economists like Frederic Von Hayek

and Milton Friedman (K. Saltman 2007; Johnson 2013). These economists posited in the

1950s that only through unfettered markets could individuals maximize their potential.

Following this logic, they argued that market fundamentalism necessitated the

privatization of public resources to improve their efficiency and quality and therefore

empower individuals through expanding market opportunities. Social scientists have

traced the historical uptake of these once peripheral theories into mainstream social

policy in the 1980s under the political leadership of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald

Reagan, (Katz 2010; Harvey 2005; Hall 2005). Katz (2010) specifically argues that

market-driven education reform mirrors the erosion of the Keynesian welfare state from

the 1980s to the present. He writes,

> The war on dependence, the devolution of authority, and the application of market models also run through the history of public education in these decades. The attack on "social promotion," emphasis on high-stakes tests, implementation of tougher high school graduation requirements and transmutation of "accountability" into the engine of school reform: all these developments are a piece with the war on dependence. *They call students to stand on their own with rewards distributed strictly according to personal (testable) merit*…In both education and public assistance, the mechanism of reform became the *centralization of acceptable outcomes and the decentralization of the means for achieving them* (55-56).

Sharing Katz's view, Lipman (2011) similarly links the turn to market driven-reforms in education with decline of the welfare state, pointing to a shift in the social imaginary that transformed both (poor) urban youth and their families from citizens with naturally endowed rights to education to consumers of educational services. Making an explicit link between this strain of thinking and school choice movement, Lipman writes, "People are "empowered" by taking advantage of the opportunities of the market…One improves one's life situation by becoming an "entrepreneur of oneself", cultivating the image, persona, and resume that enhances one's competitive position in the marketplace of "human capital"" (11). This framing of youth as "entrepreneurs of the selves", similarly transforms schools from publicly funded democratic institutions to competitive enterprises responsible for producing human capital for the larger economy. Saltman (2007) argues that this tendency for market-driven reforms to fold politics into economics translates social issues like educational inequality into business-oriented concerns with possibilities for profiteering. School choice and voucher plans in education reinforce conceptions of schools as largely serving the needs of the economy rather than the inculcation of democratic and civic sensibilities (Apple 2006, 39).

These transformations induced by market-reforms in education have prompted researchers to examine their stratifying effects and subsequent implications for social inequality and citizenship (Cucchiara 2013; Lipman 2011; Brown 2012; Ball 1994). Philadelphia, among other major cities like Dallas, New York, New Orleans, Detroit, and Chicago, has become a vanguard for market-driven educational policies, particularly in the last ten years. As market fundamentalist logics have gained political and discursive credence through the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002 and

Obama's Race to the Top program (RTTT) in 2009 (Ravitch 2013), scholars have used cities including Philadelphia as a urban laboratory to study the application of these policies. Research on reforms in Philadelphia in particular draws attention to the markets' heavy incursion into educational provision and management through contracts with for-profit and non-profit management companies, the alignment of curriculum with high-stakes testing, and the explosive growth of charter schools (Cucchiara, Gold, and Simon 2011; Christman, Gold, and Herold 2005; Gill et al. 2007; Gold, Christman, and Herold 2007).

Cucchiara's (2013) recent exploration of the Center City Schools Initiative (CCSI), a public-private partnerships between the Center City District, a powerful business improvement districts (BID), serves as a prime example of the tensions that arise from introducing market models of governance to public education. Predicated on a particular vision of urban prosperity, the policy targeted public schools in Philadelphia's most affluent neighborhood for bolstering and branding in order to retain upper middle-class families. However, the policy positioned these families as privileged consumers of educational amenities while further marginalizing lower-class families that fell beyond the catchments. My intent is to draw on this work to situate school closures in Philadelphia within the national arc of market-driven reforms over the course of the last 30 years. In doing so I hope to examine school closures as a consequence of these reforms as well as an extension of market-driven logics as they come to restructure neighborhood geographies and the urban youths' relationships to their schools.

Race, Education Policy, and the Construction of Failure

Critical theorists studying market-driven education reform argue for the centrality of race as a lens to understand the functions of educational policy and their effects on marginalized communities of color. Fundamental to this literature is the notion that "colorblind", technocratic representations of educational outcomes to assess student and school "quality", mask the powerful links between academic achievement and the racial organization of society (Bonilla-Silva 2009; Yosso 2005; Zamudio et al. 2011; hooks 1990; Ladson-Billings 1995). Several scholars argue that *A Nation at Risk* (1983) first ushered in the notion of the "at risk" youth through the tacit lamination of academic failure onto particular racial groups (Margonis, 1992; Winfield, 1991). Policymakers and researchers defined the label "at risk" in relation to groups' inadequate educational achievement, providing a rationale for the positioning of African-American and Latino students as posing the greatest risk to the nation's global competitiveness (Gadsden, Davis, and Artiles 2009). By using abysmal achievement data to construct educational crisis in *ANAR*, O'Connor, Hill, and Robinson (2009) contend that race significantly shaped the discourse around risk in education from the beginnings of the accountability movement.

> Despite these early efforts to elucidate the institutional and structural forces that placed children at risk, at-risk status was commonly reduced to an internalize trait or inherent characteristic and rapidly became synonymous with "minority" status (2).

Within a similar frame, other scholars have traced the ways in which educational legislation pushing privatized, technocratic solutions to educational inequities have further perpetuated the conflation of risk and race and the rendering of "institutional and

structural" forces shaping the educational opportunities of "risky" students invisible (Giroux and Saltman 2009b; Gillborn 2005; McDermott 2007). School reforms characterized by high-stakes testing and punitive accountability mechanisms that followed the passing of No Child Left Behind in 2002, they understand, as concealing the systemic barriers that children and their families confront like health disparities, institutional racism, and generational poverty through a language of "tough love and harsh sanctions" (Leonardo 2009, 137; Lipman 2011). Terming market-driven reforms like those stemming from the passing of NCLB as an "acts of whiteness", Leonardo (2009) maintains that they contribute to a "white common sense" that reduces academic disparities along racial lines to the natural outcomes of group competition or cultural explanations for the inferiority of people of color. In other words, "failure", is assigned to racial categories and normalized through the taken-for-granted scientific logic of the policy. Market-driven reform correspondingly frames schools serving high numbers of "failing" students (of color) as "failing", further collapsing failure and race through technocratic rationalities. Since urban schools serve large groups of high-need students (English Language Learners, poor children of color) and suffer from chronic resource shortages, many claim that technocratic, accountability-centered policy regimes like NCLB produce failure by establishing impossible targets without more funds to meet student needs (Darling-Hammond 2004; Epstein 2012; Saltman 2007).

Joining high-stakes testing and accountability, others have pointed to the cultural politics of race as focal to the rise of market-oriented reforms like charter school expansion, privatization, and school competition. Borrowing from Haymes's (1995) racialized metaphors of concepts of the 'public' and 'private' as equated with 'good' and

'white' and 'bad' and 'black' respectively, Lipman (2011) maintains that the cultural politics of race have provided the fodder to privatize public goods like education. In a similar vein as Katz (2010), she attributes the privatization of public education as part and parcel of a larger racialized project that constructs people of color as pathological and lazy in order to diminish state responsibility and end "dependency" (13). Colorblind, market influenced discourses around these reforms relieve the state of responsibility for mitigating racial inequality and disinvestment in communities of color and ultimately shifts the burden onto those communities to overcome the structural and ideological obstacles to realize their fundamental rights as citizens.

> Individual effort, entrepreneurship and personal accountability are the path to success. This paves he way for cultural explanations of poverty and race-neutral policies and furthers market solutions and disinvestment in the public sphere (Lipman, 2011, 13).

As Lipman highlights, embedded within the rhetoric of "school choice" especially, lies "racially coded" justifications for the handing over of public institutions to the private sector. Pointing to the rollback of affirmative action, "culture of poverty" discourse penetrating explanations for educational failure, and individual choice as a route to equitable educational opportunities, she understand deracialization as a "silent partner of markets."

Given that school closures are a policy adopted by primarily urban districts serving disproportionate percentages of low-income youth of color, I borrow from critical scholarship that assumes race as central to the construction and production of academic "failure." As districts close "failing" schools, they draw on the technocratic language inscribed in policies like NCLB that prescribe market-driven solutions to school failure.

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Those solutions do not account for the ways in which race and poverty as powerfully intertwining structuring forces come to bear on schools, nor how the fiscal crises that plague school districts are often exacerbated by market reforms like charter schools that further drain resources and students from already disinvested neighborhood schools. By using race as a lens through which to understand the dynamics of school closure, I also am able to document how race and racism impact the experiences of students of color in schools under consideration for closure (Zamudio et al. 2011). The processing of race in schools through the praxis of teachers, administrators, and students is of particular import to my study as "decisions" made in classrooms and offices are informed by decisions at the district and state-levels that rely heavily on the discursive rationalities of cold markets. Understanding race's role and impact in schools under the threat of closure requires an multi-level analysis of how race is produced across institutions (Dreeben and Barr 1987; Vavrus and Bartlett 2006).

School Closure as Policy

The rationale for school closures is rooted in the same technocratic, market-oriented discourses around institutional failure that have characterized more extreme educational reforms since the passing of No Child Left Behind. Smarick (2010), in his piece, "The Turnaround Fallacy", argues that closing underperforming schools trumps other reforms because within the for-profit sector, businesses fail to make space for successful businesses in the market, therefore "raising all ships." Without a market to hold schools accountable for their "quality", low-performance will continue in schools unchecked. Sunderman and Payne (2009) tout further benefits to closing schools such as transferring students in underperforming schools to better schools, driving existing

schools to improve their performance through the closure threat, and creating opportunities for the development of new schools. Informing this logic, again, is a Friedmanite economic "shock therapy" that envisions school closures as a means to purge the market of inefficiencies and allows private providers like charter schools to develop more "innovative" educational models (Johnson 2013). Closure policy further articulates with accountability rhetoric embedded in national-level discourse around reform as educators are held responsible for failing to deliver on the promise of quality educational opportunities for children (Duncan 2006, 458).

According to Deeds and Pattillo (2014), although school closings have received considerable attention in the media as a controversial reform, scholars have been slow to look at closure empirically. The small pool of school closure-focused studies has tended to examine their impact on student achievement and districts' savings. Some studies have suggested that students displaced by school closures experience adverse effects on achievement and attendance in the short-run but diminish within the first year of transfer (Pew Charitable Trust and Philadelphia Research Initiative 2011; Engberg et al. 2012; Ozek, Hansen, and Gonzalez 2012). Other studies portend that the negative effects on student achievement endure over several years, but that can be mitigated by students transferring to higher-performing schools (de la Torre and Gwynne 2009). A report released by the Pew Trust and Philadelphia Research Initiative (2011) that conducted a study of six major cities' experiences closing schools en masse suggested that the cost savings of closing schools is limited, particularly with the growth of charter schools that continue to empty seats in district schools. Costs such as maintenance of shuttered

buildings, transportation for dislocated students, and moving furniture and schools' other assets diminished both short-term and long-term savings (Jack and Sludden 2013).

A even smaller but growing literature on school closures has begun to look at its political and social dimensions, exploring not merely closures' "measurable" outcomes but how those relate to questions around equity and notions of social justice. The New York Working Group on Social Transformation (2012) conducted a study of New York City's mass closings and found that closed schools had greater numbers on average of low income, special needs, African-American, and English Language Leaners than other district schools. These same schools also experienced influxes of these high-need populations five years before their phase-out, suggesting that exponential charter school growth in NYC contributed to a sorting of high needs students into district schools (Gabor 2014). The same pattern characterized the schools in the considered pool in Philadelphia's initial foray into closures in AY 2011-2012 (Research for Action 2012). This sorting further indicates that the stratifying effects of school choice and accountability policies contributed to the conditions of "failure" that qualified neighborhood schools for closure.

Other scholars point to the flawed logics of school closures as they assume that students will sort into higher performing schools once the "failing" school are identified and shuttered. Pointing out the unlikelihood that the majority of displaced students will have access to the mixed-incomes schools that are located primarily in gentrifying neighborhoods of cities (Lipman 2011; Aggarwal, Mayorga, and Nevel 2012; Bierbaum 2014), and that existing higher-performing neighborhood schools are overenrolled and oftentimes still labeled "underperforming" by the standards of No Child Left Behind

(Shaw and Schott 2013), research raises doubts about whether closing schools actually accomplishes the intended objectives of the policy. The geographical concentration of "low-performing" schools considered for closure in the most economically disadvantaged and segregated areas of cities helps to explain these flaws as school "failure" becomes an index for racially textured poverty (Research for Action 2013). Consistent with Lipman (2011), closures often eliminate schools that serve as anchors in the poorest neighborhoods. In Chicago, where she does her work, school closures occurred in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of low income African-Americans (55). Here one can see the intertwining of race, class, failure, and closure, bringing into relief the ways in which the methodology of closures elides important social considerations such as the presence of supportive neighborhood-centric institutions tied to community histories.

Closures have also instigated controversy over what becomes of the buildings that are forfeited. While many districts have looked to compensate for budget shortfalls through the selling of empty buildings, large proportions of closed schools have been turned over to charters, further propagating conspiracy theories of the mass privatization of public education (Kristen Graham 2014). According to Jack and Sludden (2013), growth in the charter school sector has driven districts to embrace closures because of intra-district enrollment shifts as students leave district schools in exodus to enroll in charters. In Philadelphia, a consultant report estimated that the district loses $7,000 for every student that leaves for a charter school as the transfer creates new costs for the district in payouts to the charter school and fixed costs for the student's former school remain constant (Herold 2012). The "financial strain" of the "inefficiencies" imposed by

maintaining essentially two separate educational systems, has served as a guiding rationale in studies conducted by independent consultants that have recommended closures in Philadelphia and other cities (Boston Consulting Group 2012; Socolar 2012; Pew Charitable Trust and Philadelphia Research Initiative 2011). These studies recommend "consolidation" through closures in order to mitigate the fiscal insolvency of almost bankrupt districts.

Other work suggests that many cities have seen a decline in their number of school-age children with the rise of the "knowledge class", young professionals between the ages of 25 and 35 that have delayed marriage and children as they focus on careers, therefore increasing the overall population of the city, yet decreasing the number of children attending schools (Cucchiara 2013; Sanchez 2013). Such studies argue that with buildings "half empty", it does not make sense to keep the schools open. The rise of charters however complicates this reasoning as well as raises questions around the pressures of gentrification to close schools and privatize. Bierbaum's (2014) investigation in the role of gentrification in pressuring the closing and sale of school buildings looks to illuminate population and neighborhood change as an impetus behind the location and concentration of closures.

The explosion of charter schools has raised further questions for scholars about the dangers privately managed public schools pose to democratic governance of these institutions. As Grant and his colleagues (2014) argue, schools have historically been considered democratic spaces of collective responsibility. However, school closings that precipitate charter takeover have turned schools into commodities that can be bought and sold without community participation or deliberation (Saltman 2007; Harwitt 2015).

Appointed boards also usually govern charter schools, truncating accountability to parents and communities. Many show that charter schools deprive community members and parents' of their right to an active role in their children's education (Buras 2014; Lipman 2011). As previously mentioned, this robbing of rights to participation compounds political and economic disenfranchisement historically experienced by the communities that school closures disproportionately impact.

As I have demonstrated, the limited work on school closures has examined the implications of closures for student achievement, district finances, and costs to students. A small group of scholars have considered more philosophically the problems school closures pose for equity and democratic governance. Therefore, the literature generally straddles the technical characteristics of closure policy and the larger political context, but very few that examine the political forces at work 'on the ground' that shape district reforms like closures. More integrated work is needed on this issue to understand what Trujillo et al. (2014) writes as central to holistic educational policy studies,

> We need to attend to the political factors that shape district policymaking and reform…[and] the ways in which a district's political history is encapsulated by specific stakeholders, and how individuals' positionalities shape their interpretations of district reform. (896)

Jeffrey Henig (2009; 2013;1995)'s and Dorothy Shipps (2012; 2003)'s argue that attention to local politics and paradigm shifts at different levels of scale is needed to capture school choice movements' impact on neighborhood school governance, yet this work remains seminal within studies of school closures. Two researchers very recently framed school closure policy as a scaled political process by borrowing from work in organizational dynamics. Deeds and Pattillo (2014) argue that studies have often wrongly

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conceptualized school failure as an outcome instead of an "interpretative process" in "pluralistic institutional environments" among diverse stakeholders. Studying school closure as a process instead of an outcome, they show how competing conceptions of legitimacy played out politically between technocrats and the assemblage of students, teachers, and community members in a closing school, divergently defining, enacting, and contesting failure.

Johnson (2013) provides a compliment to their work by not just looking at the organizational dynamics of closing schools but the cultural and ethical changes that the threat of closure induced. By ethnographically tracing how the school interpreted what kind of an institution it would have to become to "merit" staying open, she demonstrates how the policy placed the onus on the school to remake itself anew without additional resources. She contends that this shift in responsibility to the school itself "reflects a cultural and moral shift in the conception of public schools" as social institutional networks protected from the effects of markets and competition to entrepreneurial actors responsible for their own fates. Such a conception resonates with Somers's (2008) notion that market fundamentalist logics shift social risk onto the backs of vulnerable populations.

In this dissertation, I seek to build on the work around school closures that conceives of failure as a socio-political process that envelops multiple stakeholders, geographies, and institutions. Little work on closures has used this frame or examined what Johnson terms the "cultural and ethical" changes that schools feel forced to make when confronted with the "threat" of closure. I am interested in the productive work that the closure threat does in the institutions that feel its weight, and how the strategies that

teachers, administrators and students use to contest the threat, come to bear peer and educator relationships and school climates and identities.

I am also interested to the degree that race and risk become conflated as schools chart their futures based on assessments of which students pose the greatest danger to their fate as a school. As long as the "school choice" movement continues to garner strength in cities across the country, driving fierce competition for students and resources, school closures will remain a policy priority in districts suffering from severe fiscal crises and hemorrhaging student bodies to charter schools (Hangley Jr. 2012). As a result, the threat of closure will endure for neighborhood schools trying to keep their doors open. In contrast to studies that have merely examined the impacts of closures in the same technocratic ways in which they are defined by the policy, I contribute to understandings of perceptions of threat and the nuanced interpretations and responses of school communities to closure.

Theoretical Framework

School closure, at its core, is a policy that injects high degrees of risk and uncertainty into educational systems as schools are frequently audited by districts vis-à-vis consultants to determine their cost-effectiveness, quality, and overall worth. Neighborhood schools resisting closure therefore must strategize around how to demonstrate worthiness to meta-level auditors within an educational marketplace that positions them as inferior in the realm of school choice. I therefore draw on three theoretical concepts to guide make sense of this process of *becoming a school deemed worthy of remaining open* according the measurable criteria of the school closure methodology. This is a process of both intertwined resistance and complicity to the

criteria through which the district determined school "worthiness." First, I bring in critical policy literature to ground my project in an approach that foregrounds social justice and equity as its values and explores policy in its development as a contested process at multiple levels of scale, as well as a process with the capacity to set other socio-political processes into motion. I move to social theories of risk and uncertainty that focus on the social construction of these concepts as they relate to racialized readings of value and danger. These theories help me to understand how risk and uncertainty are produced and processed across state, districts, and schools. Finally, I draw on anthropologies of branding and value to illuminate how schools fashion worthiness via their racialized readings of risk in a market-driven policy environment.

Critical Policy Studies.

School closures are not only a pervasive policy priority in urban districts but also a product of an assemblage of policies in the last 30 years that have pushed districts toward markets as a dominant form of educational governance. Contrary to understandings of policies as having linear, circular trajectories (Colebatch 1998; Clay and Schaffer 1984), I situate my work in a tradition of research that considers policy as a practice of power that implicates diverse agents both inside and outside of formal policy-making bodies. I conceive of policy as "authorized text" that "circulates by various means across the various institutional contexts to which it applies" and interacts with other agents in dynamic processes (Levinson, Sutton, and Winstead 2009, 779; Koyama 2010). Using the concept of "appropriation", Levinson and colleagues (2009) see the interpretation and incorporation of elements of policy into agents' "schemes of interest, motion, and action" as central to understanding how policy is both officially and

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unofficially contested and enacted in peoples' lives (p.779). This lens is couches policies

within social and cultural worlds that both create as well as reflect those worlds (Ball

1994). As Shore and Wright (2003) explain,

> Policies are not simply external, generalized or constraining forces, nor are they
> confined to texts. Rather, they are *productive, performative, and continually*
> *contested*. A policy finds expression through sequences of events; it creates new
> social and semantic spaces, new sets of relations, new political subjects and new
> webs of meaning (5).

This view illuminates the ways in which networks of individuals at different

levels of scale imbue school closure policy with meaning and legitimacy. Further, it helps

us to see the productive capacity of the policy's circulation as teachers, administrators,

students, and district officials interpret it, craft responses, and forge relationships in their

support or resistance for its implementation. Drawing on the ontological and

epistemological traditions of anthropology, this analysis asks what policy means in local

contexts, how does it work, who does it serve, and what are its effects on the social?

Critical policy studies assume the problematic nature of policies as they attempt to

depoliticize inherently political terrains like schools by making themselves seem

incontrovertible. Defining "failure" of a school vis-à-vis a series of "standardized"

metrics therefore becomes self-evident within a policy regime that privileges the

employment of purely quantitative measures of evaluation.

The critical policy tradition also allows one to attend to power relations as they

articulate with social forces like race, class, and gender (Cucchiara 2013; Ozga and Jones

2006). With regards to the evolution of educational policy in the United States, racial

politics especially have been central to the structuring of educational opportunities from

the nation's beginning, naturalized by the dominant rationalities around race over time.

Thrupp and Willmott (2003) argue that uncritical 'policy science' oftentimes minimizes or neglects to attend to the structural and historic relations that shape school-based problems. Critical policy analysis calls for an interrogation of structuring forces like race, as struggle, conflict, and politics over issues of equity and social justice that "lie at the heart of processes through which policy is shaped" (Gillborn 2005:4). I use this lens to examine the role that conceptions of race blur with the technical rationalities of education policy in school closures and to situate closure within the social, economic, political and cultural urban contexts where they overwhelmingly operate (Lipman 2011; Grace 1984).

Following this tradition, I do not see school closure policy as a bounded, linear entity that trickles down, but as a process that engages actors across sites to create "new rationalities of governance and regimes of knowledge and power"(Shore and Wright 2003:2). Understanding policy as "text" processed across diverse institutional sites allows me attend to not only how school-level actors manage the threat of closure, but also how closure as policy is created, interpreted, and executed in other realms of educational governance. In other words, I am able to not only capture the process that ensues when the district produces its methodology for closures but how its circulation further spurs interpretative processes of that methodology between and within school communities among a range of actors including non-profit partners, neighborhood coalitions, and national and city-level philanthropists. I focus particularly on the moral dilemmas that school-level actors face as they attempt to respond to not only the threat of closure, but also how the threat interpellates other difficult everyday realities of work in a high-need, resource-poor conditions.

At its core, this dissertation focuses on what school closure means to the communities made most vulnerable through its logics. Through the application of this particular theoretical conception of policy, I contribute to understandings of not only the mechanisms and assumptions that influence the construction of school closure policy at macro-levels of scale, but also how school-level actors make sense of their positioning, urgency of action, and the logistics and possibilities for resistance. Capturing this sense-making process brings into relief how the introduction of a closure policy to a district initiates controversial changes in the organizational and social dynamics of threatened schools that come to bear directly students' outcomes, educational experiences, as well as school climates that cultivate exclusion, fear, and risk management, rather than belonging, creativity, collaboration, and risk taking in pursuit of academic and social exploration.

Risk Management

Since school closure signifies what Johnson (2013) refers to as a kind of "social and civic death", it serves as a form of injected "risk" into already unstable educational systems. Gene Rosa (1998) defines risk as a "situation or event where something of human value (including human themselves) has been put at stake and where the outcome is uncertain" (28). This conception departs from more technical, scientific understandings of risk that examine "objective" probabilities of a particular set of circumstances arising, usually grounded in the ontological assumptions of actuarial science. Rosa and other social scientists understand risk not as grounded in a "real world" but constructed and mediated through the defining of social problems and their management in relation to actor-oriented values and power relations (Zinn 2008). In other words, they understand

"risk" as socially situated and entailing a state of uncertainty where something of value is at stake but not inevitably designated for destruction. From here, they question how people identify, understand, and manage uncertainty *in context*. These questions resonate with cultural approaches to risk that see not only knowledge but also individuals' sociocultural values as central to their perceptions of risk (Douglas 2013; Wildavsky and Dake 1990). These theorists claim that individuals' values are culturally and historically embedded and cannot be separated from conceptions of morality and danger across communities (Tulloch and Lupton 2003; Kearney and Donovan 2013; Boholm 2003).

According to Bialostok and Whitman (2012), while cultural approaches to risk have gained prominence across the social sciences and "risk-talk saturates the field of education" (1), few scholars have theorized risk in relation to the field of education. They point to *A Nation at Risk* (1983) as starting point for the explosion of risk terminology in education research, and the naturalization of the analytic category, "at-risk", to describe and predict student failure, specifically among children of color. Policy discourses ushered in by the Reagan administration that marketed fear about the direction of education prompted what Bialostok and Whitman argue as an era of "large-scale risk management in American public schools" (22). These scholars argue however that "at-risk children," "achievement gaps," and "illiteracy," pervasive in this discourse, are not part of nature's reality but naturalized through the defining of problems and subsequent creation of these phenomena through human systems. In the current moment, "risk" in education is produced through market fundamentalist logics. They write,

> In education, we see the emergence of a rationality of the market over other
> rationalities, intensification of standards, intensified control of teacher and student

work, and students educated to state their own uncertain futures and pro-actively manage potential risks (9).

As Zinn explains, the most general assumption of all conceptual approaches to risk is "that the future can be altered – or at least perceived as such – by human activities" (5).

This turn to markets as a mechanism to manage risk in education is intrinsically connected with what Ulrich Beck (1992) described as the "rise of the risk society" to suggest that in modernity, people must plan their own life trajectories in response to the hazards brought about by modernization. Within "risk societies" capitalist markets become not only a consequence of modernization but also a mechanism for controlling the risks associated with free market economies – underperformance, ineffiency, bankruptcy, and fiscal insecurity. Power (2004) argues that by the mid-1990s, both the private and public-sectors were "invaded by varying degrees by ideas about risk and management…This phenomenal expansion of the risk industry reflects a number of different but convergent pressures for change in organizational practices for dealing with uncertainty" (9). The growing strength of market fundamentalism as an "ideational regime" in the governance of public goods therefore historically coincides with the expansion of risk management, subjecting public realms like education to market laws and "enabling citizen-consumers to take responsibility for their own well-being" through markets (Rose 1999:141–142). Somers (2008) reminds us that under market fundamentalism, governments have shifted the risks of capitalism onto "individual workers and vulnerable families" (2), echoing Rose's (1999) claim that the market has not usurped the government but rather that the primary role of government has become to enable the market to function effectively.

Within public education sector, this current paradigm has manifested most prominently in urban districts in two major ways. First, districts like Philadelphia have operationalized "school choice" through charterization, creating and facilitating an education market which charges poor students and families of color to orient themselves toward uncertain futures and select and consume "quality" education as an antidote to the risks of cyclical poverty. Second, and more pertinent to this dissertation's focus, education markets, created through policies like privatization and closure, transfer the risks and consequences for failure onto school communities. Schools must succeed within these state-enabled markets by managing in-school social and organizational dynamics as they relate and implicate measures that risk their survival as institutions.

Because I examine in this dissertation the response of a school labeled closure worthy, I draw on this literature to understand not only the how the policy constructs and introduces risk and uncertainty, but how schools respond to the deepening marketization of public education that this particular policy instantiates. At the district-level, officials formulate closure as a response to the construction of school "failure" vis-à-vis high-stakes testing, declining enrollments in neighborhood schools due to the expansion of charter schools, and chronic budget crises that make the renovation of older buildings difficult to finance. The policy assesses school value in relation to a narrow series of measures that embed risk in the form of fiscal and numeric "inefficiencies" yet does not account for the nuanced nature of school environments, community-derived understandings of school value, and variables that remain entirely outside of educators and students' control (i.e. building quality) that introduce "risk" to their performance. In turn, it induces preemptive action where school communities must systematically deal

with the insecurity and uncertainty that accompanies the threat of closure without the control and oftentimes capacity to perform to the standards set by the policy.

I am suggesting here that the concepts emergent within the anthropology and sociology of risk are helpful to understand schools within the current system as small societies that must chart their own courses in response to perceptions of risk within an increasingly aggressive and austere education market – a market reified and deepened by urban school districts (with support from their state and federal governments) that adopt closures. Further, social constructions of risk not only illuminate the macro-level effects of school closure on a larger system of schools, but also how that risk gets translated into practice and official and unofficial school policies that seek to manage subjects perceived as posing a "risk" to a school's performance and reputation.

Drawing on the work of critical race scholarship in education, the social construction of risk, specifically as it relates to students, is deeply influenced by institutional racism. Research has pointed to the disproportionate disciplining and policing of Black students, particularly males, driven by an anti-black imaginary naturalized within neoliberal education reform (Leonardo 2009; Ladson-Billings 2005). The Black male stereotype crystallizes the behavior and characteristics antithetical to a reform movement that seeks to "save" pathologized subjects from themselves through educational uplift (Leonardo 2004). Many ethnographers have linked the prison industrial complex to the criminalization and perverse treatment of Black children in schools, reinforcing notions of "natural difference" between Black students and White and other students of color (Rios 2011; Ferguson 2001; Alexander and West 2012). I use this frame in conjunction with the social processes accompanying the construction of risk to

understand the anti-Black racialization of risk in urban schools competing to remain open.

Anthropologies of Branding and Value

> The commodity exists in a liminal space, caught between itself and what it is not but what it reaches for, what it can become (Nakassis 2013:112).

In the previous section, I argued that the marketization of urban education through the closure of 'failing schools' parallels the intensification and proliferation of "risk management" within the public sector in the last 30 years, making theories of risk useful to understand how districts and school communities interpret school-closure threats. Here I argue that understanding school communities' responses to the possibility of closure, requires theories of branding as schools compete within an "urban education marketplace" of school choice (Cucchiara 2008). Closures, as an extension of market fundamentalist logics, have further commoditized the nature of urban public education by subjecting schools to market laws like competition and deregulation (Jabbar 2015a; Buras 2014; Kasman and Loeb 2012). The demands of market competition transform schools into commodities striving to not only stimulate consumption, but also to create an impression of "quality" that will sustain consumption and drive value over time. Bastos and Levy (2012) write that

> At the root of all branding activity is the human desire to be someone of consequence, to create a personal and social identity, to present oneself as both like other people (e.g. to belong) and unlike other people (e.g. to stand out), and to have a good reputation (Bastos and Levy 2012:349).

I draw on theories of branding to understand the process of value-creation that neighborhood schools must engage to succeed in an ever-privatizing education market. They must become institutions of "consequence" through identity makeovers and brand

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differentiation. As Nakassis (2013) explains, brands authenticate relationships between consumers and producers by transcending their use and exchange values to invoke an immaterial imaginary based on "goodwill, reputation, loyalty, and even love" (113). As cultural, ideological, and sociological objects, brands have mimetic power to create affective attachments between themselves and their consumers (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Chanock 2000; Schroeder, Salzer-Mörling, and Askegaard 2006). According to Meenaghan (1995), "brand choice is based on emotional and intuitive feelings about brands…how these brands satisfy consumer's needs and fit into the consumer's relationship with his/her world" (15). More simply, the "image" of a commodity matters as much or more than its function, benefits, facts, or features – it is the way that the brand exploits human affect that gives it the capacity to extract further profit within the market.

I apply this notion of affective attachments to understand relationships between families and urban schools in the current moment, as the marketplace necessitates strong consumer-producer attachments to enable school survival in the face of competition. While an emergent scholarship in educational commodification has appropriated this frame to explain how organizations like business districts and ethnic associations have "branded" schools to selectively attract students (Cucchiara, 2008; Gulson & Webb, 2013), they explore these processes in relation to broader institutional efforts to revitalize urban space and commodify ethnic identities. I build on this work by distinctively linking branding to the cultural politics and exclusionary practices propelled by market-driven policies like school closure as schools manipulate raced and classed symbols of "quality" to broaden their consumer bases, instantiate their worth, and with any luck, succeed in the educational marketplace. Viewing the traditional neighborhood school as engaged in a process of

"becoming" valuable to the market through branding exposes how the selective pursuit of youth-familial-consumers that both enhance as well as minimize risk to a school's brand, index racialized, classed, and potentially discriminatory educational practices.

Understanding how and the nature of the cultural politics and educational practices surface around a school's branding process has several analytical advantages for educational governance and theory. First, branding requires school leadership to shift their focus to managing perceptions around their school rather than directing their energies toward meaningful and time-intensive improvements. Canonical scholarship focused on "school improvement", namely stemming from the Consortium on Chicago School Research, identifies the centrality of curricular coherence (Newmann et al. 2001), investments in school leadership, and sustained alignment of community and school governing structures, to positive student outcomes (Bryk 2010; Bryk et al. 1998). While branding does not necessarily preclude these efforts, as a process it obliges school leadership to spend vast amounts of time advertising and marketing their schools in order to reinforce symbolic associations between their brand imaginaries and their student-family consumer bases. The gaze therefore falls on improving perceptions of educational "quality" rather than improving praxis itself – a process that Gewirtz, Ball, and Bowe (1995) call "glossification". This theory allows me to trace the tensions and conflicts that emerge when leadership must straddle the fine line between marketing and improving their schools.

Since the laws that govern the education market also differentially position neighborhood schools by giving charter schools they discretion to fundraise corporate dollars to supplement their budgets and remove students that violate their disciplinary and

academic policies, neighborhood schools operate at a relative disadvantage within the market. Overcoming this disadvantage entails finding new ways to effuse impressions of "quality" in order to attract enrollments that match the brand imaginary. In spite of their mission to serve *all students*, branding a neighborhood school successfully requires the creation and maintenance of exclusivity within the brand. Therefore neighborhood school branding processes rest on a central contradiction: *non-selective* schools must build *selective* brands in order to compete with charter schools.

Using branding theory to explore this contradiction will shed light on the muddled moral and ethical responses to school closure, as schools must purge themselves of undesirable symbolic associations in order to establish marketable school brands. Such a process problematically transmutes the mission of the neighborhood school to indiscriminately operate in the service of every child. Further, understanding how other structural forces like budget crises, demographic shifts, and other detrimental policy changes outside of neighborhood schools' come to interfere with this process, will help to explain the limits of this strategy to resist closure as forces beyond the control of schools stifle or enable schools to "merit" remaining open.

Research Questions

Thus, unlike the bulk of research on this policy that looks at the impact of closures on districts and communities, this framework uniquely positions me to explain how risk, uncertainty, and value-creation, induced by closure-as-policy, shift the practices and purposes of public educators' work from pedagogical and democratic, to entrepreneurial and managerial. Moreover, understanding how those practices embed

racialized notions of risk and value illuminates how school branding processes, prompted by closure threats, exacerbate and extend inequities in educational opportunities. Pursuant to this theoretical framework, my research questions explore school closure policy as a practice of power that implicates an assemblage of different stakeholders including state, district and local administrators and officials, educators and students in all neighborhood schools, as well as affiliated partners and community members of neighborhood schools, interrogating how risk management and branding work as overlapping and tandem processes at different levels of scale.

1) In what ways does the School District of Philadelphia define and construct risk within its rationale and subsequent methodology for school closures?

   a. How has the history of marketization in the School District of Philadelphia's internal policies shaped their rationale and methodology for closing schools?

   b. How are current fiscal crises and partisan politics within the state and district influencing their sense of urgency to close schools?

      o How have the district's decade-long expansion of charter networks fueled this urgency?

2) What strategies do school leaders use to signify/create educational value through school branding?

   a. How do educators and youth working in and attending neighborhood schools facing the threat of closure, perceive the risk and uncertainty around their fate as a school?

   b. To whom and how do educators and youth assign blame for their predicament as a potentially closed school?

     c.   What risk management strategies do they understand as necessary to "save

           the school"?

3) How do strategies to brand schools around *selective* consumer identities produce

    ethical tensions in educational practice and service provision in *non-selective*

    neighborhood schools?

     a.   What cultural politics surface as schools forge brands around particular kinds

           of student identities?

     b.   How do these strategies perpetuate and possibly deepen racialized disparities

           in educational provision and performance for students with the greatest needs?

Methodology

      The aims of this study are two-fold: 1) To understand how urban districts like

Philadelphia use technocratic discourses of risk to inform their rationales and

methodologies for rolling out mass school closures. 2) To explain how neighborhood

schools' responses to the deepening marketization of public education (vis-à-vis closures)

are affecting their social and organizational dynamics as well as educational practice.

To explore both the historical process that led to Philadelphia's mass school closures but

also the subsequent responses that closure policy set into motion in neighborhood schools

across the city, I conducted a vertical ethnographic case study in a Philadelphia

neighborhood school slated for closure, Johnson High. Vavrus and Bartlett (2006)

describe vertical case studies as different from traditional ethnographic case studies in

their "concomitant commitment to micro-level understanding and to macro-level

analysis" (96). Vertical case studies are grounded in primary sites like schools, but attend

to the ways in which scaled social structures, historical trends, and international, national,

and local processes shape the site. They write,

> Local understandings and social interactions should not be considered demographically or geographically bounded. Instead, in a vertical case study, understanding of the micro- level is viewed as part and parcel of larger structures, forces, and policies about which the researcher must also develop a full and thorough knowledge.

The approach allowed me to understand how the school closure policy came to affect the social and political dynamics of a particular school vis-à-vis an assemblage of other "structures and forces" like national and district-level politics, policies, and budget crises that contributed to a meta-level discourse of inevitability and "common sense" around employing privatization and closures as a means to cope with School District of Philadelphia's profound fiscal instability and "failure" to provide "quality" educational opportunities to its students in district schools. The vertical nature of this case study provided a window into the iterative exchange between state and district level policymakers encouraging competition, charter expansion, and austerity, and a neighborhood school's internal policymaking and practices as it sought to calibrate top-down demands and pressures with its unique demographics, needs, and constraints.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study took place over two main periods of part-time and full-time fieldwork. My interest in tracking the experiences of recently resettled refugee youth in urban schools first motivated my initial entry into Johnson High in early 2011. During this phase I served as a part-time volunteer in several classrooms, working with teachers and non-profits organizations serving refugee youth both in the school and in the larger neighborhood for an average of 15-20 hours per week. I sought through interviews and participant observation at this stage to learn about the history of the school, its social

context, and the ways it fit into the larger political and social fields of the city and school district.

However, as I volunteered and tutored refugee youth from October 2011 to August 2013, a number of charter schools opened in the neighborhood surrounding Johnson High, damaging the school's enrollment. The School District of Philadelphia also issued a list of potential schools for closure, on which Johnson High ranked as high priority. It became clear at this point that charterization, school closures, and fiscal austerity were the central forces shaping Johnson High's concerns and practices as an endangered institution, and, in turn, the refugee youth that I was tracking. This original work in the first phase therefore provided a window into the problem that I ultimately tackled in this dissertation.

When I entered the second phase of my research in September 2013, I shifted my focus to these drastic reforms, attending to the effects of 31 school closures and a "doomsday" budget crisis that wreaked havoc on the district and school during AY 2013-2014 (Gabriel 2013). I paid more attention to the "verticality" of the school closures policy, visiting district offices and conducting 40 structured, semi-structured, and informal interviews with state and district-level officials, and observing education reform hearings and meetings at city-hall, the district's headquarters to understand how the budget crisis and necessity of closures unfolded in state and district policies. I also covered local and national news sources and attended district and state-level policy meetings to understand the ways in which crisis informed the discourse around school closures. This archival data that I drew upon came from the Philadelphia Inquirer, The Notebook, The New York Times, Al Jazeera, Washington Posts, blogs of politicians and

education activists, Philadelphia Magazine, Penn Gazette, policy documentation at district level such as reports, statistical analyses of school performance, and press statements.

I spent my days in classrooms as Johnson High to observe the concomitant effects of the schools closures and budget crisis in the lives of students and staff. I developed close relationships with the school's administration, its teacher leadership, and a range of philanthropic and non-profit players that the school drew upon to both fill critical resource gaps, gain political capital and clout with connected individuals at the city-level, and contribute to the school's overall branding process. This immersion at Johnson High proved the most illuminating as over 800 hours of participant observation, 160 interviews, 5 focus groups, and document analysis illuminated how school-level interpretations of the school closure threat dramatically altered the ethos, climate, and educational practices of Johnson High's educators.

Table 1.1: Data Collection Phases

Phase	Data Collected
I (October 2011-August 2013) Part-time	• 45 semi-structured interviews with students, non-profit staff • ~800 hours of participant observation in school, partnering non-profits, and neighborhood • Document/media collection of district budget crisis and school closure
II (September 2013-June 2014) Full-time	• ~160 structured, semi-structured, and informal interviews with teachers, administrators, students • 5 focus groups with heterogeneous samplings of students at Johnson High • ~800 hours of participant observation in school, district

	headquarters, community meetings, weekend and after-school non-profit programming, and city-level political institutions
	• Continued document/media collection of district budget crisis, school closure
	• Document collection of school-level and district-level data, reports on performance

Why Johnson High?

Johnson High provided an extraordinary site to capture the ways in which the school closure policy spurred subsequent processes of risk management and branding within threatened schools, transforming educational practice, climate, and the identity of the school *writ large*. As previously mentioned, Johnson High received notice early in my fieldwork that the district had identified it as closure-worthy using criteria recommended by the URS Corporation and the Boston Consulting Group. Based on enrollment, building quality, academic performance, and safety, these two firms, charged with conducting district-wide audits, scored Johnson High poorly. For the two calendar years between initial recommendations for the closures and the closure of 31 neighborhood schools district wide in June 2012 and June 2013, the school had an ultimatum: improve by metrics set forth by the auditors, or accept the chopping block. Johnson High's slating for closure in 2011 therefore offered a starting point to consider how the threat of closure influenced staff and student responses.

The school is also one of the most ethnically variegated in the city, serving increasing numbers of immigrant and refugee students not only from the neighborhood, but also from across catchment lines. Several factors contribute(d) to its diverse

composition. Johnson is nested in a neighborhood that has served as a traditional immigrant gateway since the late 19th century, accommodating vast numbers of white ethnic Europeans through the first half of the 20th century, and later waves of Southeast Asian refugee families beginning in the 1970s (Dubin 1996). Each block around the school also served as a home to a particular enclave. In recent years, the neighborhood gained increasing numbers of refugees from Bhutan and Burma, a trend that significantly altered Johnson High's demographic (Shaw 2014). These newer waves joined second and 1.5 generation Cambodian, Vietnamese and Lao families, as well as longer-standing Irish-American, Italian-American, and African-American communities with claims to particular streets and business districts.

From 2011 to 2013, Johnson High saw a 10 percent increase in its Asian population and a 10 percent decrease in its African-American population. One can also see a moderate increase in the Latino population. The latter can mostly be attributed to high volumes of unaccompanied Central American minors, mostly from Honduras.

Table 1.2: Johnson High's Racial Breakdown[1]

	2008	2010	2012	2014
Asian	25.1%	31.6%	43.0%	51.2%
Black	54.7%	48.3%	35.4%	25.0%
Hispanic	9.6%	10.9%	9.3%	13.6%
White	10.0%	8.2%	10.9%	8.8%
Two or More Races	.6%	1.0%	0.7%	1.3%
Total Enrollment	668	581	588	725

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[1] Civil Rights Data Collection (Ed.gov)

However, this 10 percent increase in the Asian and Latino populations does reflect the significant ethnic and generational diversity of the Johnson High. As the principal explained, district-level data collapses 17 ethnic groups into the Asian category alone.

Layers of immigration history transposed onto the school by earlier waves of Southeast Asian refugees as well as recently arrived populations of Southeast and South Asian refugee youth, Chinese immigrants from both the neighborhood and other parts of the city, and a small population of Pakistani and Bengali students, complicated notions of "Asianness" among the student and staff. "Latino-ness" also became a point of contention as Central American students, mostly from Honduras, grew in number throughout the year, joining more long-standing 1.5 and second generation Mexican youth in their classrooms. At the end of my fieldwork, Tigrinya and French-speaking refugee youth from Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of Congo were beginning to arrive.

Table 1.3: Johnson High's Ethnic Breakdown (2013-2014)[2]

Ethnicity	Status	Generation
Paw Karen	refugee	1st
Sgaw Karen	refugee	1st
Indian	Green card/citizen	1st
Tadem Chin	refugee	1st
Hakkah Chin	refugee	1st
Rohinga	refugee	1st
Khmer	Refugee/citizen	1st and 2nd
Vietnamese	Refugee/citizen	1st and 2nd
Thai	Green card/citizen	1st and 2nd
Chinese	Green card/citizen	1st and 2nd
Taiwanese	Green card/citizen	1st
Bhutanese-Nepali	refugee	1st
Tunisian	Green card/citizen	1st
Lao	Citizen	2nd
Malay	Green card/citizen	1st
Indonesian	Refugee/citizen	1st
Pakistani	Green card/citizen	1st
Eritrean	refugee	1st
Puerto Rican	Citizen	1st and 2nd

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[2] Observed through 3 years of classroom observation – intensive, full-time in AY 2013-2014.

Honduran	Undocumented	1st
Nicaraguan	Undocumented/green card	1st
Mexican	Undocumented/green card/citizen	1st and 2nd
Bangladesh	Green card/citizen	1st
Congolese	Green card	1st

Table 1.4: Languages Spoken at Johnson High (2013-2014)[3]
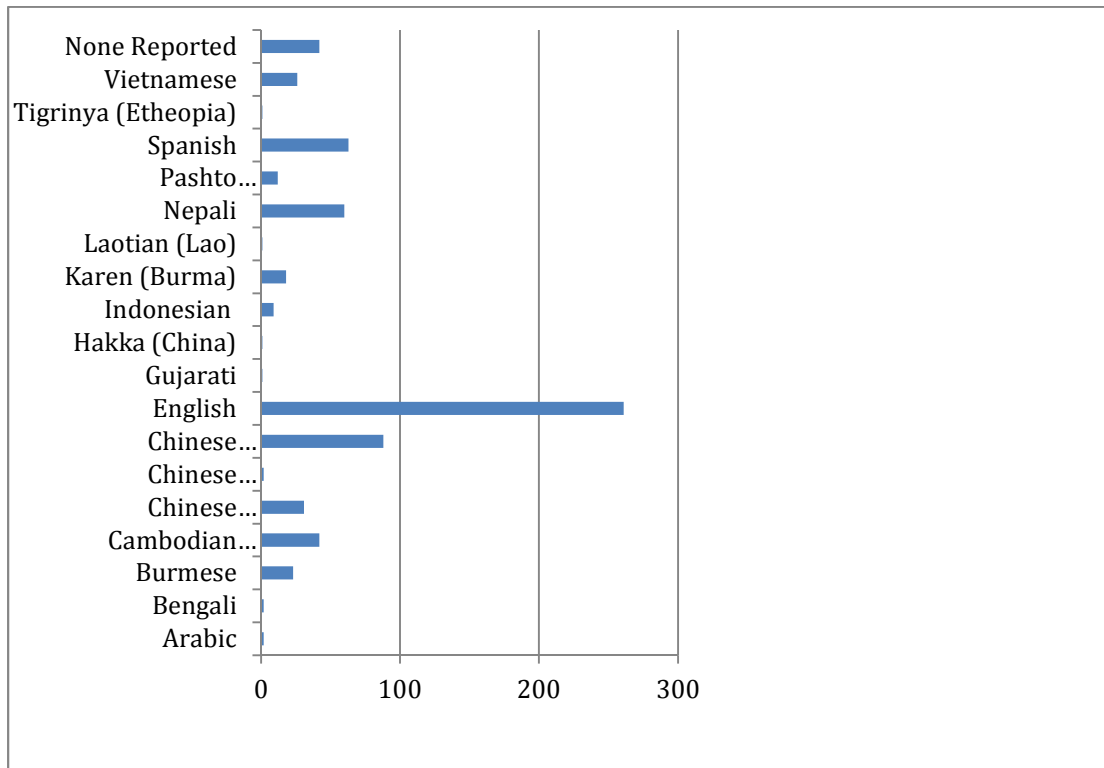
Johnson High's extraordinary diversity provided a rich context to witness *to which students* that the school community assigned risk to their school's performance data and reputation. What is more, this diversity offered a window into the racial and cultural dimensions of the branding process as administrators, teachers, and students made decisions *around which students* the school could build a valuable brand. Perceptions around which student populations were disposed to violence, poor academic performance, and truancy, criteria through which the district measured "quality" in their

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[3] Source: Johnson High Central Office

closure methodology, influenced strategies to contain and/or expel "risky" students and attract students that would boost their school's brand. The school's vulnerable status as well as its diversity therefore brought into relief how cultural politics and successive process of racialization powerfully intertwined with the school's risk management and branding processes.

Community Partners Landscape

Throughout my three years at Johnson High, the number of "community partnerships" ballooned. By AY 2013-2014, sixteen partnering organizations provided most of the after-school programming, case management, and counseling at Johnson High (Fieldnote, 5/17/14). The absence of a counselor, nurse, adequate staff, and large class sizes throughout the school year shifted the role of the partners working at the school from supplemental service providers to becoming the core programs that Johnson offered. Witnessing the growth of partners and what kinds of organizations were attracted to the school and why, offered insight into non-profit partnerships as one of the school's primary branding strategies. Who they served in the school, their stability, and their role in a milieu of resource desperation, provided a window into the consequences of making non-profit partnerships one of the cornerstones of a school's survival strategy.

Table 1.5: Johnson High's Community Partners

Organization	Focus	Resources	Stability	Type and Funding Source
*Career Ready	College-going and career preparation	Part-time staff, limited internship opportunities, curriculum support	Low	Non-profit – corporate/philanthropic funding
*Service for Salvation	Service-learning	2 full-time staff, supply and field trip budgets	High	Non-profit – corporate/philanthropic funding
*College Dreams	College preparation at career prep	1 full-time college counselor, supply and field trip budgets, college workshops and site visits	Low	Federal-City initiative with non-profit and for-profit partners
*Guitars and	Music and	After school music, art,	High	Non-profit –

Hoops	athletic programming	athletic, and science programming; weekend supplementary programming; supply budgets; 4 part-time staff		corporate/philanthropic/state and federal funds blend
*Refugee Aid	Tutoring and supplemental education services	3 part-time staff, field-trip budget for college trips	Moderate	Federal/non-profit initiative – blend of federal and philanthropic funds
Case Managers United	Preventative case management and truancy support	2 part-time case aides	Low	Non-profit – blend of federal-state and private grants
Latino Advocacy	Advocacy for Latino issues	Infrequent in-school and out-of-school programming	Low	Non-profit
Refugee Case Management	Mental health services for refugee youth and adults	Infrequent in-school and out-of-school programming	Low	Non-profit
Neighborhood Central	After-school programming, summer internships, credit recovery programming, college counseling	Infrequent in-school and out-of-school programming	Low	Non-profit
Special Needs Support	Programming for students with special needs	Infrequent in-school and out-of-school programming	Low	Non-profit
Vietnamese Community Coalition	Advocacy and case management services for Vietnamese youth	Infrequent in-school and out-of-school programming	Low	Non-profit
Partner Coordination	Provided a coordinator to oversee collaboration meetings and facilitate communication between partners	1 Full-time staff	Low	Non-profit
Refugee Communities United	Summer internships, truancy case management, resources for Southeast Asian youth, academic enrichment programs	Infrequent in-school and out-of-school programming	High	Non-profit
Anti-Bullying Advocates	Anti-bullying and racism training programs for youth	Infrequent in-school and out-of-school programming	Low	Non-profit

Analysis

I followed Glaser (2006) in treating the analysis of data not as not a distinct stage of research but something that begins in the pre-fieldwork phase. Analytic notes and memoranda emerging from two years of extant data collection, coupled with themes related to my theoretical framework and data from full-time fieldwork throughout AY 2013-2014, informed the refined coding schema I used to analyze my corpus in Dedoose, qualitative coding software (Maxwell, 2005). The development of the coding schema occurred in two phases. In the first phase I conducted a read of all of my data in on place, creating a spreadsheet of emic codes, or short words or phrases that condensed data into smaller themes.

From there I grouped codes into more etic categories, or broader themes that corresponded with my theoretical framework as well as the "verticality" of my methodological approach. For example, etic categories like "district level" and "school-level" and or "brand strategy", "risk management", "market-speak", categories that I assigned as an outside observer based, allowed me to index more emic categories that emerged from participants' data like "budget crisis", "charter school critique", and "blaming." This process was far from linear as emic and etic categories and codes overlapped, corroborating the theoretical underpinnings of the study but also pushing back. Teasing apart the confluence of forces shaping the schools' social and organizational dynamics proved difficult within the coding as some groups within the school focused heavily on the effects of the budget crisis while others remained fixated on an impending round of closures.

I recorded all interviews and transcribed all but 10 of the interviews myself. As a member of the Institute for Education Sciences, Grant #R305B090015 funded the 10 one-hour transcriptions of interviews. I also typed fieldnotes directly after I returned from the field to assure that I re-recorded and refined observations within a few hours in order to guard against memory loss. I returned many of the interview transcripts to my participants to "member-check" my transcription as well as give them the opportunity to strike anything they felt uncomfortable including (Creswell 2007). I have written several articles and conference papers, circulating that work to participants to make sure that the conclusions I'm drawing are in accord with the data they provided. To refine the theoretical framing, I participated in several colloquiums with discussants that are familiar with Philadelphia's educational landscape and the reform history. Their feedback bolstered my analysis of secondary data from documents and reports. They also forced me to consider other angles from which to approach the data, enriching my theoretical framing of the study.

Researcher Reflection

I entered Johnson High in my first year of graduate school after having taught Lao youth in the Lao Peoples' Democratic Republic for several years after finishing my undergraduate studies. My initial intent at Johnson High was to track recently resettled Southeast Asian refugees, namely Burmese ethnic groups from refugee camps in Thailand, in their school-to-work and college transitions. I sought to understand how the education crisis in Philadelphia was impacting their aspirations and trajectories as resources, staff, and support services diminished over time. Since many of these youth and their parents in initial interviews cited educational aspirations as their primary reason

for applying for third-country resettlement, I questioned how educational opportunities for these youth translated into disappointment or fulfillment of the "humanitarian promise" made to refugees arriving to the streets of Philadelphia (Fassin 2011). I hypothesized that these students would be invisible, that their needs would go unrecognized, and entered Johnson High as not only a researcher but an advocate and member of the non-profit cottage industry developing there.

In beginning part-time fieldwork, I represented what many of the non-profit coordinators mirrored: a white, idealistic, mid-20s, female graduate student from an elite university with an interest in the experiences of refugee youth. As a result, throughout the first two years, I primarily focused on these youth while spending time in their neighborhood, classrooms, after-school programs, and at ethnic events. I became a therapist, college counselor, job-finder, bills translator, and tutor. In a formal capacity, I taught English classes on Saturdays and I became a familiar face in the community. Parents and their kids referred to me as a "teacher" and a source of English translation. However, as I volunteered with the non-profits and began to immerse myself in classrooms, I realized that I would not fully understand their experiences unless I broadened my lens and studied these students in relation to the social dynamics and resource economy of school more holistically. Though I focused mostly on refugee youth in my part-time fieldwork, fieldnotes and informal interviews and conversations with teachers and administrators were rife with concerns about Johnson High's potential closure. Concurrently, more non-profit organizations were forging partnerships with the school and suddenly I was one of many white, idealistic young adults working at Johnson High with refugee kids.

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This feeling of being "one of many" folks in the school interested in the experiences of refugees did not sit well with me. I noticed that compared to other students, remarkably the native-born kids, that refugee kids received disproportionate support through this non-profit network. They qualified for special programming through not only the partners, but also within the larger schema of immigrant entitlements like public assistance, social security, and some medical care. I struggled with this idea that I had been privileging the hardship of these students for two years, focused so narrowly on their experiences that I neglected to understand them in relation to other immigrant and native-born youth of color at Johnson High. Therefore, during my full-time fieldwork, I expanded my questions to address those of market fundamentalist education reform and their impact on the school and therefore the refugee youth that I was following. This turn to the school as a case occurred at a tragically advantageous time: the "doomsday" budget crisis and mass school closures.

Ethnographic Work in Crisis

I had served as a part-time tutor in several of Johnson High's ELL classes as well as a tutor and teacher for two non-profit organizations serving refugees, but conducting fieldwork in the midst of a district-wide fiscal crisis proved much more challenging psychologically and methodologically. Ruth Behar (1996) in *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*, writes of the emotional toll exacted by conducting ethnographic work with vulnerable populations and of the ways that we come to "witness" and "know" precarity.

> Anthropology…is the most fascinating, bizarre, disturbing, and necessary form of
> witnessing left to us at the end of the twentieth century. As a mode of knowing
> that depends on the particular relationship formed by a particular anthropologist

with a particular set of people in a particular time and place, anthropology has always been vexed about the question of vulnerability (5).

I turned often to Behar and George Devereux's work to cope with the blurring of boundaries between "anthropologist" and the host of other ill-defined roles I played at Johnson High, particularly during fieldwork in AY 2013-2014 at the height of the district's budget crisis and political tumult following the closing of 31 schools. Not only did I question my prior work as an advocate for refugee youth, but I also became a source of extra labor in a school. Teachers and administrators daily used me as a sounding board for the innumerable stresses of working in an increasingly under-resourced school as well as their more existential qualms about the direction of the district and their profession. More of an "observant participant" than a participant observer, I became not only a tutor and chaperone but also a pseudo-therapist for a traumatized staff and student body.

Initially I embraced the role of therapist, believing that collecting "good data" meant that I needed to position myself to capture the crisis of the school from every angle. However, with no resources and overwhelmed by need, obliging teachers' and administrators' requests for help in their classrooms, tutoring students after-school and on weekends, as well as absorbing the palpable anxieties of everyone weathering the crisis, began to wear on me. Depressed that so little could be done about the state of the school and district, I found myself reluctant to go to the field toward the end of the year as I knew that I would be comforting a crying teaching or committing to a weekend of helping students look for part-time jobs to help their families. With no clearly defined role, I played every role.

The lack of discussion around the profound loneliness of conducting ethnography in a crisis-ridden context came to eventually strike me toward the end of the year. Holding the stories of teachers, staff, and students throughout my fieldwork without the ability to mitigate their suffering rendered me powerless, a steward of their trauma and documentarian of the unprecedented existential and practical professional distress. Every "education policy researcher" that I knew at my graduate school pulled their data from large data sets, wrote their code, and ran their significance tests. I do not make the comparison between my approach to studying policy to diminish the rigor or difficulty of quantitative research, the dominant form of methodological training in education, but rather to point out that anthropologists of education policy are a minority presence in the broad field of education policy research. Studying "crisis" and its "effects" required me not only to position myself within a school but to forge relationships in difficult conditions, collapsing boundaries between my personal life and theirs, and experiencing the full weight of Philadelphia's public education crisis with them as they felt their livelihoods and school community quickly slipping away.

As anthropologists of policy, we must further interrogate the effects of "vicarious trauma" on our work, or how "bearing witness" to vulnerability and precarity textures our observant participation in context. Quantitative researchers implicitly maintain a distance from the everyday realities of the contexts they study, therefore protecting them from the psychological toll that witnessing tragedy exacts. Ethnographers aim for immersion, becoming part of the process they wish to study through participation in their context and deep relationship building. If we admit that such work is needed to further understand how these difficult realities influence the kinds of questions we are asking about schools

as scholars and policymakers, then in what ways can we support not only this work within the academy but also the people conducting this work? My isolation as the sole qualitative researcher/ethnographer in a policy program raises important questions about the contributions this work can make to field where qualitative work is less valued, but also the cost to the ethnographer without having an academic community to engage these conversations and seek company in this endeavor.

Overview of Chapters

Given that I have chosen a vertical ethnographic case study as my approach, the following chapters move from a macro-level analysis of the policy regimes that have shaped the "road to closures" in Chapter 2, to five ethnographic chapters that illuminate the predicament and response of a school threatened by closure, Johnson High. Chapter 2 discusses the school choice movement in Philadelphia in relation to broader trends in national public education legislation that have pushed for privatization and punitive accountability for "underperforming" schools. This chapter argues that school closures are merely an evolution in policies that have divested historically disenfranchised schools of resources as well as reconstructed and displaced the risk of "failure" onto vulnerable student populations and their educators. In turn, this section of the dissertation historicizes closures within the longer trajectories of marketization in urban districts.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the strategies that Johnson High's administrators set into motion to resist closure, detailing their rationales for the institution of problematic branding and risk management mechanisms. Chapter 4 tethers the fraught consciences of educators around the strategies introduced in Chapter 3, to ethical questions around the shifting mission of traditional neighborhood schools in the

expanding educational marketplace, and implications for equity and access to quality public education for vulnerable student populations. Educators in this chapter narrate the moral dilemmas they face as school competition induced by the marketplace coerces them into performing racialized readings of risk and value in their students, building school brands around specific categories of student that will not taint their reputation or endanger the school's performance data.

Chapter 5 turns to the role of community partnerships' in Johnson High's branding process and the ways in which the threat of closure has further spurred the forging of relationships with private organizations to both brand the school and fill critical resource gaps. This critical, private resource economy within the school of selectively serving organizations providing core services as conditions worsened in the district, raised questions over the degree to which a closure threat necessitated the school's privatization. Moreover the paradox of providing selective yet core services through partners generated further ethical tensions over the disproportionate targeting of particular student categories (i.e. race/ethnicity, immigrant status) for resources, compromising the school's commitment to the inclusive service of all students.

The final chapters are more descriptive. Chapter 6 draws on students' voices and their responses to both the district's consideration of Johnson High for closure and the school's survival process. Chapter 7 serves as both an epilogue and conclusion, demonstrating how the unethical underpinnings of the school's survival strategies created an unstable, vulnerable brand that began to unravel shortly after the conclusion of my fieldwork. This final chapter collates lessons learned from the ethnographic chapters with

the moving target that is education policy in Philadelphia, concluding with policy

recommendations and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 – THE ROAD TO SCHOOL CLOSURES IN THE SCHOOL
DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA

"Standing on the Edge of a Cliff"

Mr. Riley (school district official): I was watching Chris Hayes I think, like last week, and he had on this drug policy specialist that was discussing the effects of a product when the resource is limited. So he was talking about tobacco and the way that people think about tobacco use in the world where you can get it anywhere versus the way it's thought about in a prison where people have to engage in contraband. *Once tobacco is treated as a commodity, it changes peoples' perceptions and the tensions around it*. I think about that when I think about the limitations on *the number of quality seats* in this district and the response. The School District of Philadelphia has been failing for a long time. I don't think five-year plans are really being developed and executed because *how can you with so much uncertainty? I think the vision is to prevent the district from going bankrupt and that's a big challenge in itself.* We're not talking about like oh, we might need to move money from here to there. It's more of an existential challenge. It requires resources that we don't have *for a whole bunch of reasons* that people like to broad-brush as the District mismanaging money when that's not really true. When I think about the superintendent and the assistant superintendents that supervise the schools, they're dealing with this *existential crisis*, like "Oh snap! We need $300 million dollars to pay for counselors!" *People need to realize that it's hard to strategically plan when you're standing on the edge of a cliff.*
Julia: Then are charter schools the answer to that because they can fundraise and inject private money into a large system that's going bankrupt?
Mr. Riley: Maybe. (Interview with Mr. Riley Thompson, District Official)[4]

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In a press release following the May 2013 "doomsday" budget cuts, a spokesman

from the Republican majority in the Pennsylvania State Senate, Erik Arneson, claimed,

"At this moment there's no obvious path to reach the outcome being sought by the

School District of Philadelphia" (Gabriel 2013). In my conversations and interviews with

district-officials, they echoed Mr. Arneson's sentiments. Endemic to these discourses was

a paralyzing sense of uncertainty over the future of the district and questions over how

they could work to improve educational outcomes when the battle to balance the budget

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[4] Given the extremely precarious and politicized context that officials worked under in AY 2013-2014, consent forms were written to exclude not only their names but also mention of their home departments and positions.

required increasingly Herculean efforts. Mr. Riley, a school district official who I spent time with in planning sessions for policy-pitches to the School Reform Commission (SRC)[5], described the immediate pressures faced by the district as they simultaneously coped with the decline in existing school enrollments, slashed funds from the state to supplement their budget, and exploding costs of charter schools. Likening charter school expansion to the commodification of tobacco, Mr. Riley alludes to the "existential challenge" of stabilizing a district while reconciling two zero-sum political agendas. The first required district officials to recover a public education system in free fall while the second pressured them to expand semi-private charter school networks that further imperiled their finances.

Caught in the crosshairs of disparate demands on their time, energy, and ethics, I examine in this chapter the political and economic forces shaping this dilemma for officials in the School District of Philadelphia. I pay close attention to the contradictions between state and district policy rhetoric and officials' practical actions as they stood "on the edge of a cliff", unable to develop a "vision" beyond preventing "bankrupt(cy)." Their narratives offer a window into the bureaucratic crunch induced by the deepening marketization of public education in Philadelphia and the social forces policy mechanisms that contributed to what officials perceived as the "inevitable" mass closure of neighborhood schools across the city.

A Decade of Privatization Experiments in Philadelphia: The Road to Closures

While Mr. Riley emphasized the extraordinary uncertainty texturing the work of district officials and administrators in the year of nationally headlined crisis, he also

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[5] The SRC is a five-member governing body that has worked as the driving policy and decision-making apparatus since the State of Pennsylvania took over the School District of Philadelphia in 2002.

alluded to its construction through the large-scale commodification of public education in Philadelphia in the last decade (e.g. "Once [tobacco] is treated like a commodity, it changes peoples' perceptions and the tensions around it). It is not my goal in this section to perform an exhaustive excavation of the School District of Philadelphia's historical instability, but to outline what makes this crisis and the heightened uncertainty surrounding the future of the district unprecedented.

Shortly after the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took over the school district, imposing a five member governing body, the School Reform Commission (SRC). With three appointments from the governor and two from the mayor, the SRC since its inception has championed the principles of "accountability" and "choice" at the heart of NCLB through massive experiments in privatization and public education. As Gill, Zimmer, Christman, and Blanc (2007) highlight, NCLB prescribed state takeover and private management to low-performing districts as reforms to develop more effective, efficient public education systems. Beginning with the diverse provider model (DPM) in 2002, the SDP contracted seven private for-profit and non-profit companies to manage 46 low-performing schools and restructured 21 more under the auspices of district-executed "turnaround" schools (Jack and Sludden 2013). Aggressively forging these partnerships, federal policymakers lauded Philadelphia for becoming the forerunners of these reforms (Christman, Gold, and Herold 2005).

However, at the time of the DPM, the district had 237 district-managed schools and only 40 charters (Bulkley, Henig, and Levin 2010). Today there are 86 charters with an open application process fielding 40 more applications for 2015 (The Notebook 2015).

Pushing charters as a solution to fiscal instability, "failing" schools, and the demand for

"quality" seats, Republican Governor Tom Corbett addressed a crowd of students at First

Philadelphia Preparatory Charter School on November 17th, 2011, distilling the state's

stance toward the support of charter school expansion.

> I want to talk to the men and women in Harrisburg that pass the laws about
> schools. You are a very good example of how we can reform the schools. You are
> a special kind of school here. You are a charter school and that's new. We didn't
> have charter schools 20 years ago. It's new to Pennsylvania and it to the country.
> *We want to look at kids that live in areas where the worst schools in the state are
> – the 145 worst buildings in the state*. When I say worst, I don't mean the people
> are bad, *but that they're not performing. They're not getting the grades*. And
> *they're at the very bottom in Pennsylvania*. So we want a student that goes there
> to be able to take the money that the state gives to that school district and go to a
> charter school. There are a lot of people that are opposed to that, but I don't know
> how you can be opposed to allowing a young boy or girl to leave the worst
> performing schools in the state to have a chance to have the education that you
> have here…We need to give options. We need to *give choices* to your parents and
> to the parents of kids like you all across Pennsylvania to have an opportunity to
> grow – an opportunity to *compete*. (Corbett 2011)

Corbett's statement embeds notions of "competition" and "choice" that ran through state-

level discourse and policy around school reform statewide. Within this rhetoric, charter

schools, or schools of choice that operated largely outside of the authority of the school

district, became the answer to mitigating "failure" within the district system. Of the 145

"failing" schools identified by Corbett, not ironically, almost all of them were in poor zip

codes across the state; the lowest performing were in Philadelphia. Creating a

marketplace of school choice, Corbett and his successive conservative administrations

bolstered charter expansion through legislation that prevented enrollment caps and the

issuing of new charters in cities identified as loci of school "failure" (Jack and Sludden

2013). Enrollment in schools in Philadelphia therefore did not so much decline in the last

decade, but shifted toward charters, propelled by state-level policies to increase "school choice" within, to use Corbett's words, Pennsylvania's "worst" districts.

The Unexpected Costs of Charters

While the charter presence in Philadelphia certainly preceded the state-takeover, NCLB, and the subsequent implementation of the DPM, enrollment in the city's charters increased by 40,000 students as the district-run school enrollment has decreased by 50,000 students from 2002 to 2012. This amounts to a loss of approximately 5,000 students per year and an increase from 12 percent of the districts' students to 33 percent attending charter schools in 2013 (Gabriel 2013; Hurdle 2013). This unfettered expansion of private options through charters and their unexpected soaring costs in the midst of shrinking block grants from the state, contributed to a hemorrhaging budget by 2008 – a budget that worsened through 2013. As public-private partnerships with the district, the state mandated that the district pay charter schools $8,417 per student and $22,307 for students who use special education services to charter schools (Graham 2014). Even though the district had internally instituted agreements for enrollment caps at many charters, other schools refused to agree to enrollment parameters based state legislation that prohibited caps. In the midst of legal battles between the School Reform Commission and state auditors, many schools greatly exceeded their caps, generating unexpected costs, upwards of $25 million in AY 2013-2014 alone (Woodall 2014a).

To complicate the SDP's financial picture, the district assumed other fiscal risks associated with both charter schools' contributions to state pension plans as well as the financing of new charter buildings as charter expanded throughout the decade. Dozens of charters remained delinquent in recent years in pension payments for their teachers.

During AY 2012-2013, the district shouldered $1.3 million in pension payments for 22 charter schools (Woodall 2014b). Further, while charter schools used to inhabit repurposed supermarkets or storefronts, a recent analysis of bond documents shows that 1 in 3 charters have constructed newer and larger school buildings using tax-exempt bonds with extremely high interest rates (Wigglesworth and Briggs 2015). Carrying risky ratings, charter schools have paid for renovations through these "junk" bonds at costs of double to triple what the district would pay for a new school building using government bonds channeled toward infrastructure improvements. Financing processes and real estate transactions have also required charter school networks to pay millions in consulting and legal fees. Increasing percentages of charter schools' budgets service their debts, creating pressure to reduce labor, instruction, and other service costs or overenroll students to stabilize their budgets. When charter schools overenroll students, the district shoulders the burden as they pay schools per capita while also maintaining the fixed costs of the district schools that students leave.

Red-Blue State Dynamics and the Catch-22 for District Officials

The unexpected costs of a reform meant to both increase quality and "efficiency" in the system plagued the consciences and work of district officials. Many described ironies of state-level demands to increase expand "school choice" while also stabilizing the district's finances. Underscoring charter school expansion as the crux of this Catch-22, they cited a dissonance between the state's agenda to legislate in favor of charters and their evisceration of the school district's budgeting troubles. Many lamented the short sightedness of charter laws and their implications for poor urban contexts like Philadelphia. Contrary to critiques of "440 Broad Street," a colloquial expression used at

the school-level to pejoratively address upper-level administration, I found distraught

district officials in a similar place as teachers and students: trying to reconcile what they

perceived to be an increasing stream of conflicting mandates with decreasingly available

human and monetary resources to execute them. Mr. Riley explained his predicament.
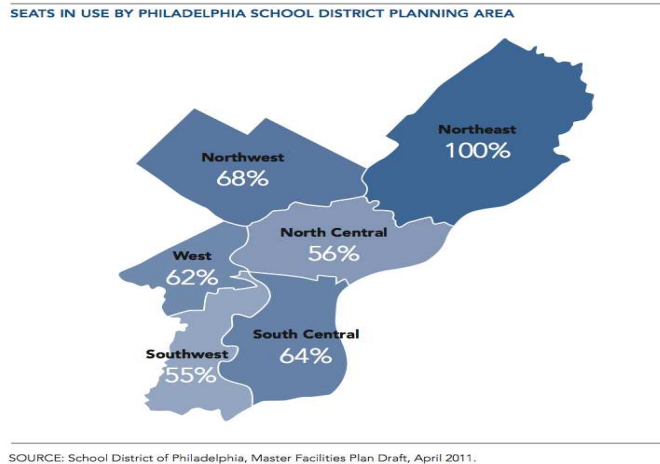
> The District doesn't have the authority to give money to charters or not. It's a
> state mandated conversation about how charters get funded. I mean, in
> Philadelphia we deal with *red state-blue city* dynamics all of the time. *One of
> those dynamics is that people at the state-level that tend to support the charter
> movement also tend to be conservative and pump money into the charter-sector in
> Philadelphia to show that it will work.* Why do you think that Mastery Charter is
> able to fundraise at the level that it does? Because there are people in the state that
> want to see charters work philosophically, separate and apart from what happens
> with these kids in charters and in the rest of the district. So in terms of where the
> district goes in five years, it all starts with the state. Is there going to be a decision
> made at the state level to set up a funding situation that doesn't pit charters versus
> the district for use of the same resources? I don't know. (Interview, 3/14/14)

Pointing out "red-state, blue city" dynamics, Mr. Riley highlights the "philosophical"

battle he saw as being waged at the state-level "separate and apart" from its implications

at the local-level through the pushing of charter legislation and the backing of

conservative politicians and foundations. At its core, he understands the School District

of Philadelphia, with so few resources, to remain at the mercy of state support for

charters schools. He bemoaned in his interview however, not only the assumptions

involved in the unfettered expansion of such a sector, but also ignorance of how

continuing to carve up the system will impact the overall financial health of the district.

In other words, should the "funding situation" continue to "pit charters against the

district" and deplete the already scarce resources of the district, the privatization

experiment might ultimately collapse on itself.

The Beginning of the End for 30 Schools: AY 2012-2013

The explosive growth of the charter sector, a product of the lamination of state-level mandates onto SDP policy and the larger privatization movement in urban public education, generated a fiscal crisis for the district's leadership by AY 2009. Recognizing the inflexible costs of running underutilized district schools and the expenses of supporting the ever-expanding charter system, Arlene Ackerman, the then superintendent, addressed the tenability of continuing to stretch the district's declining resources in the 2009 Facilities Master Plan. Recommending the closing of "half-empty" district schools to cut costs (School District of Philadelphia 2012a), this document served as a template for the 2012 and 2013 school closures. Hiring the URS Corporation, in December 2010 the district set in motion a process to identify underutilized, "failing" schools for closure (Socolar 2010). By June of 2011, the Philadelphia School Notebook, an independent publication that reports on public education issues in Philadelphia, had released a confidential document prepared by URS entitled the "Preliminary Options Report" that listed schools recommended for closure (Herold and Mezzacappa 2011). From this list, Ackerman's predecessor, Leroy Nunery, identified 10 schools for closure based on enrollment trends by October 2011, and had shuttered 6 of them by June 2012.

Graphic 2.1: Utilized Seats by Planning Area

SEATS IN USE BY PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANNING AREA

Northeast 100%

Northwest 68%

North Central 56%

West 62%

South Central 64%

Southwest 55%

SOURCE: School District of Philadelphia, Master Facilities Plan Draft, April 2011.

To compound matters, from 2010 to 2013 Tom Corbett, a Republican governor notorious for his "no-tax" mantra, slashed education budgets across the state (Hurdle 2013). In press interviews, Corbett used the loss of federal stimulus money flowing into the Pennsylvania Department of Education's coffers as the reasoning for the cuts. In an interview with a Philadelphia reporter over the his stance on education budgets, he explained,

> These are difficult economic times. I am consistent in that we will not spend any more than we have. When I took office, and I will repeat this until the day that I leave office, when I took office, there was a 4.2 billion dollar deficit because of outrageous spending from years past. The general education budget for K-12 and higher ed was replaced after 2008 by federal, one-time stimulus money of over a billion dollars and it went away in a year. [Snap] Like that. The tax increase that would be required to replace that would be $930 on every taxpayer in PA to replace that…I wasn't going to place that on the people of Pennsylvania. So we didn't cut. We just didn't replace the money from the federal government because we didn't have it (Governor Tom Corbett on Education Cuts 2013).

Corbett's refusal to raise taxes in spite of its consequences for Philadelphia, created a $287 million dollar deficit for the district by AY 2011-2012, resulting in a loss of $1,327 per student (Lin and Couloumbis 2014). His attitude reflected a general callousness at the

state-level toward the Philadelphia's plight and a shedding of responsibility for its funding predicament. Pointing the figure at the federal government for the "cuts" and pledging to not raise taxes for the "people" of Pennsylvania, Corbett placed the onus on the city to seek a "long-term" solution to its funding problem internally. His explanation further highlights the ideological distance between a conservative state legislature and a poor, blue city in desperate need of resources and support.

Without short-term help from the state, the budget cuts exacerbated feelings of urgency to dramatically reduce the district's spending. Philadelphia, like many poor districts, relies heavily on state funds to supplement upwards of half of their budget (School District of Philadelphia 2012b). As these cuts increased in frequency and scale, district officials hired yet another firm, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to conduct an audit of the district's projected costs and to establish a protocol to mitigate the looming fiscal deficit. The BCG report, issued in August 2012, operated similarly to the URS report by focusing on the "underutilization" of district schools and recommending mass school closures. Calculating an average of $7,000 incurred for the loss of each student to a charter (Boston Consulting Group 2012), BCG recommended that the only way to stabilize the budget and minimize inefficiencies would be to execute a mass closure of 88 underutilized schools and transfer students to other district schools, displacing between 22,000 and 31,000 students district-wide (Gym 2015b).

The district expected the closures, along with grade reconfigurations and co-locations, to eventually achieve $24.5 million in annual savings and improve utilization rates from 67 to 78 percent (Jack and Sluddens 2013). The federal government closures also incentivized closures as part of an accountability framework for schools that did not

meet national performance standards (Hurdle 2013). The district's Chief Recovery Officer, Thomas Knudsen, incorporated these recommendations in a 5-year financial plan for the district released in September 2012. The plan recommended the closure of 40 schools, well below the number of schools recommended to the SRC by BCG, and intended to erase a budget deficit of $1.35 billion over the course of the five years (Socolar 2012; The Notebook 2012).

While the Notebook was able to leak the URS report to the public prior to the September 2012 closings, BCG consultants presented their report in a "secret meeting" with the SRC that the district withheld from circulation. Claiming that they would be taking the multi-million dollar recommendations into consideration, Nunery's successor, William Hite, and the Office of Strategic Analytics, announced in December 2012 the district's plan to close 37 schools and restructure the grade figurations of 18 more at the end of AY 2012-2013 (Limm 2012). In his statement to the public, Hite explained, "We are undertaking this process now because we have few options, but we also believe that at the end, we will have a school system that is better run, safer and higher performing" (Statement by Dr. William Hite, December 13th, 2012). Arguing that the district could barely afford to renovate its utilized schools, Hite pointed out that continuing to pour precious resources into schools with high percentages of empty seats would be irresponsible (Hite 2013).

Criteria for Closure – Inducing District-Wide Paranoia

A "Summary of Recommendations" as well as a "Process and Methodology" document came attached to a modified "Facilities Master Plan" that listed the 37 schools slated for closure and described the criteria the district used to identify the pool. Selection

for closure occurred in two stages. First, the district relied on a highly informed

technocratic analysis using the recommendations by the BCG report to identify schools

based on a combination of building quality, academic performance, utilization, and cost.

These measures pulled district-wide quantitative data on all 180 schools, scored them

based on these criteria, and prioritized the lowest scoring schools for further analyses. As

the slide below demonstrates, slightly less than 1/3 of the district's schools were selected

for further auditing.

Graphic 2.2: School District of Philadelphia Closure Methodology ('12-'13)
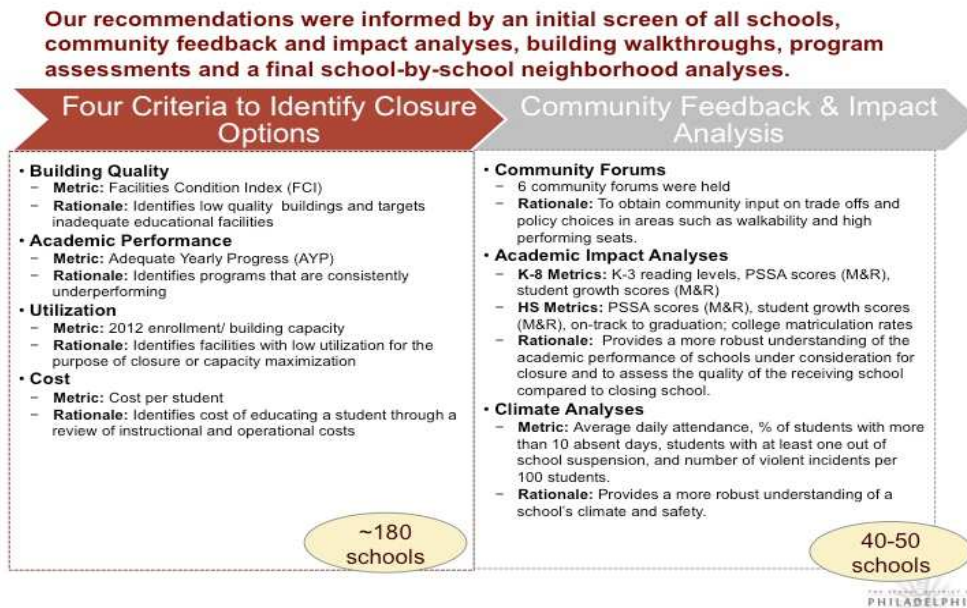
In an interview with a district official that participated heavily in this process, she

describes the magnitude of the closures and the process of prioritizing schools using this

methodology.

> Ms. Crow: From an academic perspective, we look at AYP as a flag, so if you
> think about it, a filter mechanism. From that point, we look at the test scores by
> grade level. Over time, we look at their growth score. We look at their feedback
> score, their attendance, their violent incidents, and suspension rates. So basically
> it's a mixture of climate and academic data in our decision-making process. We

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look at the facility condition index which basically determines what cost it would take to bring the school back to good repair. From a student impact perspective, we look at how far the average student would be going to transfer. From a financial perspective, we look at how much savings closing the school would yield. So those were kind of the chunks. We went from academic to climate to facilities to finances. So it was fairly comprehensive across the board.

Julie: Are there certain criteria that are weighted over others?

Ms. Crow: It's a case-by-case basis. *I have to be honest with you (pause)… it's a little bit hard to disaggregate because we we're trying to close so many schools at once*. A lot of it was messy. (Interview, 5/4/14)

Ms. Crow's testimony demonstrates the highly technocratic nature of the school closure methodology as they collated a range of criteria through their two-stage audit process. However, she also admits that the process, in spite of its well-ordered methodology, was still "messy" and complicated by the "case-by-case" selection of schools. When I pushed Ms. Crow in her interview to explain if and how decision-makers weighted the criteria, she apologized, "I have to be honest with you (pause), it's a bit hard to disaggregate because we're trying to close so many schools at once."

Though the district released this methodology and communicated its intention to incorporate "community feedback", which schools closed ironically hinged on officials' subjective, last minute decisions. The "messiness" of this process was rooted in the growing tension between the *decontextualized*, market-driven conceptions of managing "school failure" and district officials' calibrations of those conceptions with other pressures *in context*. The district attempted to create a guise of objectivity around closing schools by using a techno scientific rationale to define and pool schools of "low quality" based on seemingly "objective" measures. The measures were intended to divorce politics from decisions and craft inevitability and legitimacy around closures. However, the measures remained unmoored from the effects of more than a half of a century of

perpetual disinvestment and the more recent creep of charterization and ensuing

stratification on district schools' performance. Officials like Mr. Riley recognized

blindness in the methodology's defining of the problem,

> [Preventing bankruptcy] requires resources that we don't have for a whole bunch
> of reasons that people like to broad-brush as the District mismanaging money
> when that's not really true. (Interview, 3/14/14)

Yet in the face of the district's potential collapse, they felt that they had no choice but to

rely on they prescription of BCG's "experts" to close school en masse.

This urgency to balance the budget ultimately stifled the democratic process

around closure decisions, minimizing "community meetings" as a significant source of

input. Barred from participation in deciding on the closure of schools, vehement

opposition crystallized outside of the 440 Broad Street from December 2012 to February

2013 as two "closures lists" circulated and officials removed and added schools without

public deliberation. On March 7th, 2013 at an SRC meeting, 24 schools of the 37 were

unilaterally voted upon for shuttering on June 30th, 2013 (Socolar 2014). Of the 32 people

that spoke at the meeting in front of the SRC, only one supported the closures, therefore

bringing into question which "community" mattered: the consultants or the public?

Representative W. Curtis Thomas declared on the headquarters' steps during large

protests, "The process by which the Philadelphia School District decided on school

closures was flawed and must be rejected" (Hurdle 2013).

AY 2013-2014: The Perfect Storm

This unilateral vote and inconsistency between policy rhetoric and the actions of

the district incited district-wide paranoia over whom the district would target next for

closure. Conspiracy theories emerged among leadership and educators in neighborhood

schools over whether the district was operating in collusion with private consultants, conservative state legislators, and most importantly, charter school networks and their powerful connections in philanthropy and "corporate America" to destroy public education in Philadelphia (Fieldnote, 9/10/13). The passing of a "doomsday budget" in the Republican-dominated Pennsylvania state legislature in June 2013 that coincided with the closures only reinforced these sentiments. Diverging dramatically from steady cuts to education spending since 2011, the state spending cuts had particularly dramatic consequences for Philadelphia.

As previously mentioned, almost half of Philadelphia's budget stems from state supplements. With a $419 million dollar cut in June 2013, the district ran a $304 million deficit for the AY 2013-2014 school year. In addition to the closures, the district's "long-term" cost savings strategy, 440 Broad Street issued pink slips to 19 percent of the school-based work force, including all 127 assistant principals, 646 teachers and more than 1,200 aides (Gabriel 2013). Many of these staff were also critical support staff like nurses and school counselors, earning Philadelphia the title of a "city on the brink" of educational collapse and the epicenter for the "slow extinction of public education" (Kerkstra 2014; Ravitch 2014; Strauss 2013; Popp 2014).

Questions and anxieties circulated over how the summer around how the district would transition the 15,000 students displaced by the closures as well as balance the administrative tasks of closing 24 schools with dramatically less resources than initially anticipated. Further, how would the district continue to pay for the rising costs of charter school expansion in light of the budget cuts? These scaled fears of educators and district officials came to fruition on September 9th, 2013 as schools managed to open their doors

on what the Philadelphia Student Union documented in their blog as the "Worst of #Philly1stday" (Philadelphia Student Union 2013). Classes in some schools swelled to 40+ students and principals operated main offices without support staff to answer phones and enroll streams of students coming from closed schools. Without nurses, aids, and counselors, students went without transcripts as they tried to finish college applications and sick students did not receive medical care. Emotions spilled over on September 25th when Laporshia Massey, a 6th grader, died of an asthma attack at a school without a nurse, Bryant Elementary (Denvir 2013). Protests and pleas for emergency funds pressured Governor Corbett to release $45 million to rehire 400 teachers, assistant principals, secretaries, and counselors to select schools in mid-October, almost six weeks into the school year (Snyder, Worden, and Graham 2013).

However, the rehiring of these staff complicated the process of "leveling" schools by October 31st, the state deadline for aligning staffing with enrollments at district schools (McCorry 2013). The district operated under the assumption that the overall utilization would increase but could not predict the skewed distribution of transfers across remaining district schools. While some schools received large numbers of students, others gained few. Overall enrollment fell below 4,000 students as some students showed up at the doors of charter schools and other went missing entirely. Expecting 135,000 students, only 131,000 arrived in district-schools. Enrollment at charter schools grew to 67,000, 2,000 more than slotted for in the district's precarious budget, as many charters exceeded their enrollment caps to accommodate the overflow. Six-hundred students continued to go unaccounted (Langland 2014). In some schools, administrators had to combine grades into one class to cope with the teaching shortage. With the turbulence

brought by the school closures and budget cuts, the leveling deadline came and went. McCorry (2013) described the leveling process as "robbing Peter to pay Paul," as some of the schools that received a larger proportion of the transfers also received a counselor or several extra teachers. In the majority of cases, these transfers were predicated on the loss of one school's staff member for another school's gain. As one teacher at a South Philadelphia elementary school decried, "It should not matter whether my child is in a school of 300 or a school of 1,200. Every child deserves a full-time guidance counselor, a full-time nurse, and a teacher for every grade. It's not rocket science. It's responsibility."

As schools struggled to accommodate the complex accounting of their students and redistribute scarce resources accordingly, sobering analyses of the school closures began to surface in reports. Not only could the district not account for 600 students, but the majority of the closures also took place in the city's north-central region where one-third of the city's "Corrective Action" schools are located. These areas were not unexpectedly, in parts of Philadelphia with the deepest poverty. In other words, the closures concentrated their social, fiscal, and spatial fallout of the closures in areas of greatest disadvantage. A Research for Action study found that while 22 of the receiving schools for these students boasted stronger achievement, 20 performed at similar levels and 16 performed worse. The majority of the better-performing schools are also still considered "low-performing" as measured by the standards of NCLB, and were at or over capacity at the time of the closures (Research for Action 2013).

The Ironies of "Accountability"

In conversations and meetings with district and state officials, discourses around charter school expansion and neighborhood school closure inextricably intertwined. At a

hearing at City Hall, organizations and individuals gathered to address state legislators visiting to understand the impact of state-supported charter school expansion on the district and the recent impact of closures. The Auditor General, Eugene Depasquale, among several state representatives and administrators sat in front of a long line of testimonies that spoke to issues of access, equity, and the ironies of "accountability" in the current climate. Believing that unfettered charterization of the district without evaluating its consequences for the financial health of neighborhood schools represented an glaring contradiction in district policy, Helen Gym, Philadelphia's nationally renowned firebrand education activist, and leader of several parent and advocacy associations in the city, admonished the state.

> For a district paying out $700 million to 86 charter schools per year, their performance is underwhelming. It's amazing to talk about standards when the state won't ensure that our students in neighborhood schools get the most basic of resources. *It's a tragedy and a national disgrace.* The cost to charters and neighborhood schools alike are enormous and you're literally driving people out of the system. People won't be able to stay in Philadelphia if this continues. *It's a mistake to keep closing public schools. It's not accountability but instead shedding accountability by putting families out on the street. So please don't use that term when discussing the rationale for closures.* These kids have no affiliation with their schools because their schools offer nothing…Two-hundred counselors for 131,000 children isn't going to cut it. *Charter schools should not exist at the expense or in lieu of public schools.* (Fieldnote, 3/14/14)

Testimonies like Gym's continued, decrying the pitfalls of unfettered charter expansion without proper legislation and detailing investigations into the enrollment barriers that specific populations faced when applying to charters. Closing schools, Gym argued, was not a form of holding failing schools accountable but instead "shedding accountability" by failing to fund neighborhood schools so that they could adequately serve their students. She also criticized the state-level push for charter school expansion when no

overwhelming evidence existed that charters performed better than neighborhood schools when serving the same kinds of students, namely ELLs and special education students.

In spite of the demand for them with so many students on waiting lists to get into charter schools, Gym maintains that chronic underfunding is "driving people out of the system," forcing parents to consider charters that perhaps would send their children to neighborhood schools. "Charter schools should not exist at the expense or in lieu of public schools," Gym cautioned, pointing to the zero-sum predicament facing district officials, as they must close neighborhood schools to open new charter schools. By pushing charterization and simultaneously defunding of the district system, Gym draws attention to the perverse logic of market-driven policies like closure as they misdiagnose the roots of district "failure." Locating school "failure" at the state-level where policies that purport to boost performance, in reality, deprive neighborhood schools of already scarce resources, Gym points out a central problem of mapping market models onto public good like education. By placing the onus on individual schools to "perform" without acknowledging the interconnectedness of policy decisions at different levels of scale that define and produce "failure", her critique illuminates the paradox facing neighborhood schools, as they are held accountable for "failure" yet not given the resources to adequately serve their students.

Market Stratification

Donna Cooper of Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), in an impassioned delivery at the same meeting, described the inequities that her organization identified in their research on Philadelphia's charter schools, pointed to other flaws in this

policy, as legislators assumed that within the "marketplace" of school choice, students would have equal access to charter school lotteries.

> People aren't just going to operate on an honor system in the *marketplace*. That's naïve to think. Charters have fewer ELL and special education students than traditional neighborhood schools. They should be aggressively recruiting from the bottom in they believe that their models work to initiate change. We identified in our study that there were 111 barriers to enrollment at these schools, many which lied in the recruitment process itself. Some of the recruitment for these schools was done at country clubs. Because we currently have 4 people overseeing 86 charters and nobody at the state level, this grand experiment is one that's about to collapse of its own weight. (Fieldnote, 3/14/14)

Ms. Cooper describes the underbelly of charter school autonomy as they exclude "undesirable" populations from enrollment through recruitment barriers. Instantiating the tension that so many scholars have written about that arise from the tacit lamination of market-reform onto public sector goods like education (Bartlett et al. 2002; Cucchiara, Gold, and Simon 2011), she echoes critiques that charters benefit small numbers of students at the expense of the masses. Leaving the education "market" to do its work and using performance indicators alone to monitor "performance", Ms. Cooper underscores the stratification that occurs when information and access barriers that preclude particular populations' access to the market go unchecked. She further elaborates on the irony embedded in Gym's testimony that as school closure as a policy functions to heighten accountability for "failing" district-run schools, there are virtually no accountability mechanisms in place to monitor charter schools. This irony is particularly stark at the state-level where there are no officials appointed to oversee charter schools.

Mass budget cuts and the fiscal hemorrhaging at the district-level partially explain this lack of accountability for charter schools. Several officials pointed to the problem arising from the simultaneous layoffs of district officials and the expansion of charter

schools, in turn diminishing the district's capacity evaluate the effects of the expansion

and oversee enrollment practices of charter schools with so few staff. In AY 2013-2014,

the year of my full-time fieldwork, the Charter School Office had a total of 3 staff to

supervise the operations and compliance of 86 charter schools district-wide and had an

executive director vacancy for over a year (Fieldnote, 3/14/14). Each of the staff was

responsible for monitoring 25+ schools each, writing policy and procedures for

acceptance and renewal of new charters, representing the office at local and district

meetings, and fielding the concerns and calls of the public over particular schools

(Interview, 3/14/14). One of the coordinators admitted at an SRC meeting, "Yeah, I don't

sleep very much these days" (Fieldnote, 3/17/14).

Again, budget cuts account for only part of the lack of accountability mechanisms

for charters. Several officials pointed to larger existential questions at the state and

district levels concerning the ideological and legal principles that should guide their

growth and governance. The original intent behind the establishment of charters was to

devolve authority to schools and allow them to develop their own governing frameworks.

Within the state's charter law, charter schools "operate independently from the existing

school district structure as a method to…encourage the use of innovative teaching

methods." Within that same article, charter schools must agree to not discriminate on the

basis of admission and be held accountable for their performance through "measurable

academic standards" (Pennsylvania Department of Education 2009). Many district

officials highlighted the contradictions that arose in the evaluation of "school quality"

when the charters were subject to less scrutiny outside of their test scores compared to

district schools. Ms. Turner, an official, discussed the tradeoffs of difficulty of monitoring charter schools when the law allowed them to operate autonomously.

> Five years ago, the parochial system was a primary vehicle for educating middle-class kids. People are concerned about charters because as the parochial system fades away, charters will just become the replacement, which feels bad. Many middle class kids are getting into charters but so are kids who need help. I mean, if you look at the number of FRL[6] kids that go to charters is less than the District but it's not zero. It's still 65 percent. The District is 87 percent Free and Reduced Lunch, so it's just a different world, but it doesn't mean that the charters are serving kids caviar. I think if you're thinking about charters and vulnerable populations, you have to look at the four big buckets. There's FRL or just poor kids. Can poor kids get into charter schools and that's mostly a question of choice and access? Then there's the ELL bucket. If a parent doesn't have a command of the English language, or the systems of Philadelphia, how can they help their kid apply? Then there's the special education bucket, the kids that are costly to educate. The fourth bucket is kids with discipline issues. *The question is, if we're going to say that charters get to operate and have different and innovative models, is it ok for them to say that you need to behave in a certain way to stay? That they are only designed to serve certain kinds of kids?* (Interview, 5/3/14)

Breaking the students that disproportionately attend district schools instead of charters schools into "four buckets", Ms. Turner highlights that though charter schools are serving vulnerable populations (i.e. "it doesn't mean the charters are serving kids eating caviar), the most vulnerable still attend underfunded district schools because of questions of access. Even though charters are not legally allowed to practice selective admission, navigating a unanimous lottery system requires a type of institutional knowledge that puts vulnerable student and parent populations at a disadvantage. These skewed enrollment types therefore reflect a number of barriers to enrollment. The most important question Ms. Turner raises comes at the end of her analysis however when she asks whether it is justified for charters to be selective about the "kinds of kids" that they serve. The question calls attention to issues of ethics and equity and whether, in the spirit of

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[6] Free and Reduced Lunch.

"innovation" and autonomy, charter schools have obligations to serve students that do not

fit their model?

Here enters the question of charters' obligation to *equitably* serve all students. If

the law empowers them to act largely outside of the bureaucratic governing structure of

the district, developing their own accountability systems, tailored curriculums for

particular "kinds" of students, and rules that make admission contingent, then how can

one not expect stratification across charters and district schools? This tension between

market stratification and equity plagued officials' consciences. Several complained that

the current research on the effects of charters on vulnerable student populations like

special education and English-Language Learners was not "sophisticated" enough,

particularly in Philadelphia, to warrant continued expansion (Interview, 4/28/14). In other

words, the state was not taking into consideration how the education market worked to

stratify students along lines of race and class in their acceptance to charter schools.

Returning to Mr. Riley's tobacco metaphor from the chapter's opening vignette, he

admits:

> **Mr. Riley**: You're dealing with the same tobacco issue from before. *These charter decisions help some kids at the expense of other kids. That's just the fact of it, right? I think there's an open question whether the dialogue can get sophisticated enough to have that conversation,* and there are real and legitimate reasons why people don't want that to be a conversation. How could you legitimize a charter school not supporting special education kids? *But by the same token, how could you not legitimize a charter school that has a discipline policy that enables them to have a safe space?* Do you see how thorny this gets? (Interview, 3/14/14)

While these officials felt conflicted about the ethics around charter schools practices, they

felt powerless to resolve these "thorny questions." As Mr. Riley put it, "These charter

decisions help some kids at the expense of other kids." If they system was deliberately set

up around selectively serving schools with incentives to reduce their costs, what might happen to the city's most vulnerable kids that cost the most to educate? Secondarily, what costs would pursuing this reform have for the remaining district schools that disproportionately serve the city's most vulnerable youth?

Returning to red state-blue city dynamics, in a context of limited resources and political enthusiasm for continued expansion at the state-level, officials collaborated with a non-profit firms specializing in educational law to try to address some of the equity issues around school funding and charter expansion. An interview with Mr. Dell, a lawyer at one non-profit law firm, described the predicament in pursuing lawsuits on the basis of charters' access barriers and equity in service.

> I mean, it's always so hard to prove this stuff, that charter schools are deliberately excluding certain populations. We've done a lot legislative advocacy and sneaking around the Commonwealth to examine the disparities in the charter sector. English-Language Learners (ELLs) are the biggest disparity with about 80 percent of ELLs in district schools and less than 3 percent in charter schools. The ELLs that they have, they're upper-level ELLs. We know that non-English speaking families go into charters, get told by the secretary that "We're sorry, but we don't really have services." But then if you go to the school, they say, "Of course we never said that." So it's difficult to prove that it ever happened. You basically have to file with the Department of Justice and they have to do an investigation. It's tough to know where to file this. Do you file it against individual charters or do you file it at the state level where it may or may not have any chance of helping kids in Philly? There's nothing being filed at the moment at the systemic level against charters because of the political climate at the state level that supports charterization. Enrollment caps are something that the district is trying to institute, but many charters are ignoring them, and the state court has so far ruled in their favor. (Interview, 5/27/14)

Mr. Dell highlights two issues that make legal recourse for the district difficult. First, the devolution of governance and accountability systems for charters statewide complicates the filing complaints against charters. Further, the process of conducting an investigation into individual charters practicing exclusive admissions is expensive, time-intensive, and

may not have any impact systemically. Second, the tidal force of conservative support for charters at the state-level (as evidenced by court rulings in favor of abolishing enrollment caps) on the basis of not encroaching upon students and families' rights to "school choice" (Woodall 2014a), evinces a fear of sinking time and resources into cases that go against the state's political grain. Mr. Dell describes again, the issue of powerful interests at the state-level that protect the liberties of charter schools, legislatively coercing districts' to diversify their "choice" portfolios. Philadelphia's status as a poor city that barters with the state for supplemental funding therefore disadvantages its bargaining power in state courts that rule in favor of conservative political agendas that favor pro-charter education policies.

Salvaging Value in a Devalued System: The Impetus to Brand

Interviews and conversations with district officials yielded insight into overwhelming feelings of powerlessness as they sought to recover value from what they perceived to be an increasingly "devalued system." Pointing to a deepening stratification between populations attending district and charter schools – as enabled by policy decisions at the state level that greased the wheels for charter school expansion – many officials watched the neediest kids continue to pool in the schools with increasingly unavailable resources. Confused and scattered by the churn of staff and their status as mediators between the state, the district, and their schools, many felt that this churning thwarted their best efforts in changing the direction of what they deemed as questionable, if not morally reprehensible policy reform. Ms. Smith, an official interested in major policy-changes for accommodations for vulnerable student populations, explained.

I mean, since I've been in this position, everything has just felt very transitional. It's hard to know how much to try if you feel like, tomorrow there's going to be a whole other regime. A superintendent comes is in and they have their plan and everyone tries to get their policies in place within the structure, and then three years later there's someone new and we start all over again. We're burnt out and it's hard to not get sucked into the mentality that any work you do will be for naught. (Interview, 4/29/14)

Another official explained how the turnover, particularly with the budget cuts, impacted her feelings about the district's future,

So many different people have rolled the district out so many different times in so many different ways. Like I was thinking the other day I've been here a little over six years. There was one year where I didn't have a boss for an entire year because she was let go. In six years I've had eight different bosses. So the state of change is so rapid there's no memory, no way to even have a vision. I think that if the district—whatever direction they want to move in – they have to rally the support of the folks that are here. But with budget cuts and charter pressures, there's no vision. The vision is, don't go bankrupt. That's about it. (Interview, 3/28/14)

Many officials voiced that in spite of their qualms with the direction of reform and their implications for equity, pointing to charters as the lightening rod in their work and the contradictions in internal policy that it produced. Yet, the "rapid change" and the lack of institutional "memory" stifled their ability to combat the hazardous, long-term vicissitudes of unencumbered market-inspired charter growth. Caught in the momentum to "cut costs" in spite their problematic and enduring effects for vulnerable youth populations in particular, officials capitulated to marketized notions of "quality and "success" and set plans in motion to close schools.

With what they felt was the inability to lead and develop a lasting "vision" at the district level, many district officials placed the responsibility on schools to compete with charter schools. In Action Plan 2.0, an internal policy document released in 2014, the district promoted the internal marketization of public schools through the development of

public-private partnerships with non-profit, philanthropic, university, and community

organizations. This strategy encouraged schools to attract private resources to both

supplement their declining budgets and sport programming that would attract higher

enrollments. In other words, the policy encouraged schools function like charter by

finding private investments to capacitate services and therefore their marketability. While

the district had created the Office of Strategic Partnerships several years prior to promote

partnership development between itself and private city, state, and national organizations,

the director's position had laid vacant. In the 6-pronged strategy plan to meet four of its

anchor goals, Action Plan 2.0 prescribed the cultivation and sustainment of

"partnerships" at the system and school levels as the central tactic of "Strategy 5" to

"Become an innovative and accountable organization" (23).

> The District will continue to develop and maintain partnerships with
> philanthropic, business, non-profit, higher education and community
> organizations and others, and collaboratively determine where and how partners
> can support our goals. The District will also maintain and expand collaboration
> opportunities with current City and institutional partners to provide and prioritize
> academic and behavioral supports, ensure student safety, and offer extracurricular
> opportunities for students in the early grades. During a period of significant
> financial challenges and transitions, City agencies, philanthropic and community
> organizations, and families have been extraordinarily supportive of the District
> and its schools. Over $10 million was secured in SY12-13 to supported transition
> of District students, to enable the expansion of high quality schools, and the help
> sustain the important student-focused programming (The School District of
> Philadelphia 2014:23).

In this document, while describing partnerships as a "supplemental" measure to improve

the progress "already achieved by district schools", Action Plan 2.0 underscores the

centrality of the resources that partnerships provide, particularly in the midst of a fiscal

crisis. The "$10 million" secured in 2012-2013 refers to the funds provided by

organizations like the Philadelphia School Partnership (PSP), a non-profit dedicated to

garnering philanthropic funds for investment in "turnaround" and private schools, for covering the costs of the schools closures. Though the district created the Office of Strategic Partnerships years prior to the budget cuts to develop partnerships, and partnerships between private organizations and the district have long history in Philadelphia (Harkavy and Puckett 1991), in this iteration of the district's goals partnerships represented a core rather than supplemental tactic for resource garnering.

Many officials oversight but concluded that the only way for district schools to survive in the crisis was to attract partnerships. Partnerships, in their view, could accomplish two, interrelated goals – 1) to fill chronic resource gaps 2) brand schools to bolster their enrollments by offering programming and resources through "respectable" outside organizations. By bringing locally and nationally recognized organizations to offer services like college counseling, after-school programming, and enrichment, schools could disseminate symbols of "quality" that students and families might read as valuable to their children's educational experience. These resources could also insulate against the effects of mass budget cuts, a concern for parents that saw public disinvestment in neighborhood schools as harmful to their long-term value and capacity to adequately serve their children. In effect, partnerships could bring cache to neighborhood schools through their unique services, create an aura of "value" for their school's brand, and in turn, sharpen their competitive edge in the market.

Within the district's bureaucratic machinery, a district official described her plan to build a digital infrastructure around partnerships that administrators could draw on to lure partners to their school.

> **Ms. Lily**: So we would have a site like an Amazon *marketplace* where partners will come in, register, say who they are, what they do, the money they would bring, kids they want to focus on, and outcomes desired. The principal goes into the marketplace and *shops* for partners. That's the piece that doesn't really happen now. There are some really *entrepreneurial* principals but this would allow everyone and their mothers to build their partnerships *portfolio* and track everyone in their buildings. So you would see partners as a *core* of school improvement plan. Say you don't have good science professional development but some corporation is doing externships for science teachers? So then you would begin to see a growing *reliance* on partners. (Interview, 4/12/14)

In Ms. Lily's description of her plan for an online registration forum for interested partners, she maps marketized notions of business and entrepreneurship onto educational service delivery, animating spaces of private resource exchange in public schools. From her perspective, partnerships empower principals to go to a "marketplace" to browse for resources that align with their vision for the school. With technological infrastructure to facilitate these exchanges between private organizations and schools, Ms. Lily envisages partnerships giving neighborhood schools the ability to indirectly fundraise and brand their institutions like charter schools, allowing them to compete in the "marketplace" of schools the district is attempting to create through charter expansion.

Within this discourse, district officials positioned principals as CEOs instead of educators, charged with the responsibility of enticing partnerships to compensate for the dearth of district-provided resources. In a conversation with a district-official responsible for coordinating a district-wide partnership, College Dreams, she explained the responsibility of the school's leadership to manage partner resources and align them with their school's designated "brand."

> **Ms. Tolentine**: The only way you brand your school is to prioritize. If you have all of these partners, you need to be strategic and coordinate them to execute your vision and needs. If none of them do anything, the principal needs to lay down the law. Do you know what we like to call those people? The pimps of poverty. The

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people trying to make money off of poor kids. That's what's happening and it's getting worse as the district gets worse. The principals are the ones that have to make sure that doesn't happen in their schools. They need to take charge and use these people for what they bring. (Fieldnote, 2/17/14)

Aggravated with principals that she felt were not prioritizing her program in their schools, Ms. Tolentine reinforces Ms. Lily's notion that principals must manage their schools like businesses, coordinating this labor and "laying down the law" for recalcitrant or ineffective partners. She alludes to a danger in partners that are only there to profit off of crisis, labeling these partners types as "the pimps of poverty." School leadership, from her perspective, must determine which partners "execute" the "vision" of the school and trim the fat accordingly.

Problematic of Partnerships in a Crisis

While Ms. Tolentine puts the onus on stressed school-level administrations to determine their partnership schemas, others noted that in the current climate, the pressure for district officials and school-level leadership to run schools with so few resources positioned them poorly to lead with their needs at the negotiating table.

> **Ms. Roebuck**: I think the partnerships idea is great because the bottom line is that we don't have enough resources. But we also don't have a framework or the power to structure partnerships equitably. So as a result we have a lot of people who come in, lots of non-profits and universities and with no common interest or agreed-upon strategy. Everyone has his or her own interests. I've never worked with an organization that came in and said, "What do you need?" They've come in and said, "This is what we do." So it's always kind of like trying to fit a round peg into a square hole. (Interview, 3/28/14)

Ms. Roebuck pointed to the discrepancy in the missions of organizations with highly coveted resources and the needs of the district. She also brought issues of power and equity into to relief as she described the decreasing capacity district officials have to negotiate, direct and align private organizations' resources with their goals. Missing key

staff in the partnerships' office and desperate to attract private dollars to support

programming in increasingly underfunded schools, Ms. Roebuck felt that the district

employees did not have the ability to thoroughly oversee the distribution of partners

across schools nor determine partnerships' fit with the needs of the school. Even with the

digital forum proposed by to connect schools, schools desperate for resources would still

be at the mercy of organizations willing to provide services.

Other officials raised questions around sustainability and the distribution of

partner resources district-wide if the district continued to push partnerships in their

strategy to redress service gaps. The same official that saw an opportunity to vest

principals with the power to control their schools' fates through partners, admitted that

building a service delivery infrastructure around partners brought its risks.

> **Ms. Lily**: Funding from foundations and local corporations for non-profit work
> are more limited and shaky, especially since the Recession. Look at the major
> funding sources in the city, like United Way and the William Penn Foundation. If
> William Penn is putting $30 million into educational programming, which they do
> every year, the majority of that comes to kids in our schools. So that's funding a
> non-profit network. When William Penn decided to switch their strategy from
> youth development into academic performance, $30 million dollars of revenue
> left the eco-system. So what happened in the schools with partners funded by
> those people? Services diminished from buildings. We went from having a
> college readiness budget of let's say, 2 or 3 million dollars down to zero. That's
> the risk you take with taking on a non-profit partner. (Interview, 4/12/14)

Ms. Lily couches the instability of partner funding in the precarity of the economy,

demonstrating that when the district allows partners funded by foundations to carry some

of its weight, they are vulnerable to the whims of funders. In spite of the potential she

saw for partners to invigorate school communities, making them more porous and able to

capitalize on external resources, she also saw the cyclical funding of these organizations

as reinforcing the instability that already plagued district schools.

Another key concern around the partners' strategy was distribution of partner resources across schools and within schools. Several officials believed that certain neighborhoods and schools were "better suited" to take on partners than others, emphasizing the desirability of certain neighborhoods for organizations given their demographics as well as geography.

> **Ms. Smith**: I feel like South Philly gets so many more partners than any other part of the city. It's like where the hipsters that work in these community organizations want to be. You know, if you don't have a car, it's easier to get to than the Northeast. These programs aren't in the schools there and it's mainly because it's hard to get to and it's not this cool, new place to live. (Interview, 3/28/14)

Pointing to gentrification as a driver of increasingly established non-profits and community-based organizations, Ms. Smith compares South Philadelphia and Northeast Philadelphia, two areas that differ in their concentration of school-supportive non-profits. If responsibility for filling schools with community partners was displaced onto local schools, she feels that certain neighborhoods would face a geographic disadvantage. Another official also mentioned that not only geography, but also demographics *within* schools might drive skewed distributions of partner resources.

> **Ms. Lily**: I think there are definitely deserts, possibly because of the population or geography of the neighborhood. One year I did a mapping project at a high school that had 54 organizations serving the same 300 kids, and there were like 1300 kids in the building at the time. *So I think that some of it is about people's perception of where they think the need is*. Because the truth be told is, there's only about 10 organizations that can do real scale. Beyond that, it gets real mom and poppy, 35 kids here, 35 there. I got into it with a college readiness provider that said, "Oh, well, we want to be the premiere organization." I was like, "Ok, there are 47,554 high school students and you serve 500. You're nobody's premiere." So yeah, I don't know if there are enough resources to go around at the end of the day, but it's something right? (Interview, 3/26/14)

Ms. Lily's insight brings into focus the problem alluded to by Ms. Roebuck the refraction of the districts' needs through myriad lenses. Partners' lenses are first determined by their

construction of the problem, reflected in the mission of their organization, the ways they measure impact, and the demands of their funders. This refraction, Ms. Nicholas' points out, can lead to a crowding of resources around students constructed as "targets" of partner programming, while unintentionally neglecting a large majority of the student body. This "mom and poppy" quality to partnerships has its benefits in that many organizations operate at an extremely grassroots level with deep connections to the communities they serve. However, with an inability to "scale" their organizations, she harbors uncertainty as to whether "there are enough resources to go around at the end of the day."

Branding Through Partnerships: ELLs as Partnership Currency

The primacy of partnerships-as-strategy grew in scope and intensity throughout the year at both SRC meetings and in interviews with officials and other administrators. As a participant in a series of planning meetings for a presentation to the SRC on English Language Learner policy reform at the district level, I noticed that while many of the attendees were ELL teachers from neighborhood schools with high percentages of ELLs, many were also the ELL-serving partners, public interest lawyers, and district officials working on ELL policies and services in the district. The three planning meetings were tense and complicated by diverse stakeholders coming together to build a unified agenda. The tensions largely centered around the message that ELL-serving constituencies wanted to communicate to the district about the needs of ELLs and the state of services for them. With only two hours to monopolize the attention of the 5 members of the SRC, opinions diverged over whether to "showcase" the best practices of schools serving ELLs or to platform the dramatic loss of resources to these schools as a result of the budget cuts

and its adverse impacts on ELLs. The designated facilitator of the meeting, Ms. Smith, encouraged the group to use this meeting as a "showcase" for partnerships, leading with a "positive" rather than "pejorative" tone.

> We need to show that schools are drawing on all of these extra resources, parents, community groups, non-profit organizations, etcetera to show how while we have challenges with resources, we still developing best practices. We want good examples of best practices like partnerships but to not gloss over the challenges.

An ELL teacher, Ms. Betty, objected to the strategy to avoid confrontation with the SRC by painting the "resort" to partnerships in a positive light.

> This might be clear to everyone but me, but what is the objective of this meeting? What's our tack toward the SRC? Is the point not to direct criticism or rage at the SRC? I'm not sure what the objective is. We also want to show what the weaknesses are with the lack of funding and that these partnerships aren't enough to cover the state's responsibility to provide for ALL of these children. We would like more funding right? Why can't we say that? (Planning Meeting, 3/5/14)

The principal of a prominent elementary for ELL students, Mr. Savitch, responded to Ms. Betty's questions.

> I think that because we're addressing the SRC about ELLs, it's about representing people at this meeting and showing that there is this kind of support and advocacy for our students.

Overriding Ms. Betty and several other teachers' concerns that showcasing schools that develop partnership cottage industries would distort the dire need for state-provided resources and provide further ammunition to displace responsibility for resource-scarcity onto neighborhood schools, the district representatives heading the planning committee structured the presentation to the SRC around "Best Practices for ELLs", center-staging Mr. Savitch's elementary school's numerous partnerships as a gold-standard for building ELL-supportive schools. Seventy-five minutes of the two-hour presentation was dedicated to listening to the testimonies of this school's partner leadership, plugging for

their programming and demonstrating how their financial and human resource commitments have mitigated the impact of the cuts on the school and its students. One partner, a non-profit dedicated to after-school programming, boasted, "We have assembled a parent advisory board and also found neighborhood volunteers to run the school's library," while another claimed, "We have provided the students we serve with application help to charters and special admission schools that they wouldn't have otherwise without counselors." Following the testimonies, Ms. Smith addressed the SRC, "We wanted this school be shown because they are successful in engaging their community's resources, a practice that needs to be more widely adopted."

As the presentations concluded and a panel of district-officials took the platform, a visibly distraught African-American father stood up and shouted at Ms. Smith.

> It's been great hearing about these partners have worked in THIS school doing THIS thing for THESE kids. This is all well and great. [turning to the SRC] But, what is the school district going to do? We can't rely on all of these folks to do what you're supposed to do! Not all neighborhoods can do this. Not all neighborhoods have immigrant kids with organizations that want to help them (Fieldnote, 3/17/14).

Flustered and not knowing exactly how to respond, Ms. Smith assured the father that they would be discussing the issue at the next meeting. He challenged her, "When are WE having THIS meeting? When's the meeting? When's the next meeting? Tell me!" Asking him to give her his contact information at the conclusion of the meeting, Ms. Smith informed the father and the audience that time was running short.

After the meeting, I gathered with several teachers from Johnson High, the high school where I was conducting my fieldwork, to walk to our cars and the subway. Their faces were drawn, tired from the long day at school and now what they perceived to be an

unfruitful presentation to the SRC. Ms. Betty, a teacher usually abounding with energy, explicated her disappointment in a dejected tone.

> I just don't know anymore. We went to three, two-hour meetings, brought students to testify, and not even the surface got scratched. Here we have a district falling apart and they decide to put one school on display because they've gotten a lot of outside help. They parade them around like that's what every school should be doing. We should not be telling them that we can't do this job with partners alone. Our partners are underpaid and unstable in their jobs themselves. I know that school, like all schools, wanted to give itself some visibility, to make them known so they won't close them down. But because of that, we sacrificed an opportunity to tell them that we're not ok. Things are not ok. (Fieldnote, 3/17/14)

Ms. Betty distills the ethical dilemma of increasingly relying on partners as resource providers in public schools, as the distribution of those partnerships does not serve all school equitably. She further critiques the instability of partnerships themselves, as many of them remain at the mercy of the cyclical funding of the non-profit industry. Fearing that partner reliance provides a release valve for the state in terms of pressure to adequately and consistently fund Philadelphia's neighborhood schools, Ms. Betty questions the political ends that such a strategy serves as private organizations come to increasingly perform the work and function of the state in public education. She finally forgives Mr. Savitch's marketing of partnerships to the SRC as evidence of the school's "quality", understanding the necessity of positive press for schools as the school closure threat circulates.

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This chapter details the deepening marketization of the School District of Philadelphia beginning with the passing of No Child Left Behind and the rise of high-stakes testing, "performance-based" evaluation systems, and the privatization of public school operations through school takeovers and the mass expansion of charter schools.

Given the state-takeover of the district in 2002 and the subsequent institution of the School Reform Commission, a body of unelected officials appointed by the state to govern the direction of reform in the city, I further demonstrate that conservative administrations at the state level from 2002 to 2014 influenced the adoption of school reforms pushing for devolution, competition, and choice within low-performing schools districts like Philadelphia. In spite of the intentions of intentions of the reforms to improve "accountability", "quality", and stability in educational provision and district finances, I argue that they operated in concert with state-level budget cuts from 2010 to 2013 to produce the district's most precarious fiscal crisis. Supporting essentially two separate educational systems, the district and the charter system, the School District of Philadelphia turned to closures to "consolidate" infrastructure and attempt to minimize their costs long-term in 2013 and 2014.

Central to my conversations with district officials were the momentum behind these reforms in spite of their unintended consequences at the local level. Citing "red state-blue city" dynamics, or the state's conservative backing and imposition market-driven reform models in a democratic, poor city like Philadelphia, officials lamented the state's lack of concern for equitable outcomes. Pointing out the truncated access populations like first-generation immigrant families and special education students' experience, they implied that unfettered education markets naturally stratify their consumers along lines of access and privilege. Further, they raised questions about the legal parameters of charter schools' rights to selectively service students that abide by their disciplinary policies and or "fit" the criteria for which their charter establishes their services. If charter schools receive public funds but operate autonomously, to what

degree should the district monitor them beyond their performance? To what degree can a bankrupt district monitor the proliferation of charter school networks?

The fact that the "neediest" students were pooling in district schools afflicted the consciences of officials. They recognized that because of stratification across the sector, school closures would therefore have the most adverse impacts on the students that needed the most help. Unable to stymie the demand and support for charters at the city and state-levels, the "necessity" and "inevitability" around school closures emerged from what many felt as forced capitulation with powerful interests pushing market-reform. The fiscal precarity of the federal and state-induced budget crisis in AY 2013-2014 further shaped the urgency that many felt to cut costs and improve the overall "efficiency" of the district system. Their rationales and methodologies for the closures relied heavily on technocratic understandings of school quality and failure, intended to map order onto the messy, intensely political process of shuttering schools across the city. While many officials admitted that they tried to be "objective" as possible, eliciting "community input" to help make their decisions, the closures ultimately hinged on the unilateral voting of the School Reform Commission.

The "messiness" of the closures and the lack of democracy around these reforms index what Greenhouse (2010) writes as the "problems of interpretation" that accompany the marketization of publics. District officials responsible for closing schools and authorizing charters, in spite of their fraught feelings over these actions underlying paradoxes, did not feel a collective agency in altering the direction of reform. Charged with "improving" the overall quality of the district while reconciling the disparate demands of fiscal crisis, they allowed the School Reform Commission, or the state's

governing arm, to dictate the rules of engagement, losing administrators along the way to budget cuts. While admitting that the state and district education policies promoting privatization and context-independent metrics of "quality" worked in tandem with a long history of disinvestment in Philadelphia's district schools to produce schools' "failure", they saw no other option but to rely on the same metrics to close schools. Moreover, in the district's internal policies, officials encouraged district schools to attract private resources to boost their schools' quality through partnerships with non-profit, corporate, and philanthropic organizations.

Though I found officials troubled by the "paradoxes" of choice emergent in these reforms, in the coming chapters I argue that market-driven policies like school closure, charterization, privatization, and continued fiscal crisis created a blanket environment of precarity for all neighborhood schools. Deprived of resources and exhorted to "act" like charters by supplementing their budgets and services with the labor and resources of private organizations, neighborhood schools faced the conditions and demands of an increasingly entrenched education market. However, community members and educators at district meetings with the SRC voiced the problems of looking to private organizations to both attract private resources and demonstrate "quality" to parents selecting schools for their students in an expanding education market. Many questioned the viability of partnerships for all neighborhood schools when certain schools did not have the "ability" to attract enough partnerships to meet their demands. Others questioned the stability of partnerships with organizations that lay at the mercy of cyclical funding cycles. Many underscored the undeserved shift in responsibility to the school to find resources that should come from the state.

Partnerships and school closure policies together index a dramatic seeping of market logics into the relations between public schools. By encouraging public schools to compete for private resources and then evaluating their closure-worthiness based on decontextualized performance metrics, these policies pit public schools against one another, limiting political mobilization and collective efficacy at the local level. Therefore, not only do district officials feel powerlessness in steering the direction of reform, but schools also understand their own survival as hinging on the failure of others. Treated like businesses, school closure and market-driven policies like private partnerships structure zero-sum relationships between schools competing for students, grades, and the resources to defray their rising costs. School closures-as-policy in particular, as both a consequences and extension of market logics, therefore raised the stakes of failure through an explicit ultimatum: compete or close.

In this next chapter, I ethnographically explore one neighborhood high school's response to this ultimatum, examining the dilemmas that surface in educational practice, philosophy, and governance when non-selective neighborhood schools must prioritize the business of survival over the mission of educating. School closure, more than any market-driven reform, fortifies the perils of failure, prompting neighborhood school to compete for survival. I explore processes of social and organizational change that top-down, market-driven accountability mechanisms induce in public schools and they strive to compete in an expanding urban education marketplace. More simply, I trace school communities' responses to the threat of closure and the market demands of demonstrating "value" and managing risk to their performance. By linking school closure threats to the in-school experiences of teachers, administrators, and students at a high school slated for

closure in early 2011, I hope to show how local interpretations of "failure" and markets

come to restructure the educator-student relationships and experiences of equity and

belonging for youth in non-selective neighborhood schools. Further I will show how

market-driven logics alter the inclusive and democratic missions of traditional, non-

selective neighborhood schools.

"Doomsday": September 9th, 2013

When I entered the building on September 9th, 2013, Johnson High was on the cusp on its 100th birthday. Walking into the main office, I saw the principal and one secretary enrolling dozens of students amidst a backdrop of empty desks and forlorn desktop computers of former staff. The May 2013 budget cut had leveled 3,500 employees district-wide, and cut school supply budgets by 90 percent. The crisis also accompanied the closure of two-dozen neighborhood schools throughout the city (Gabriel 2013). Johnson High had survived the "school closures list" for a third year in a row, managing to secure itself another school year in spite of its leaking roof, soaring utility costs, and low test scores. However, it did not escape the consequences of being a neighborhood school in the midst of dramatic district-wide austerity and reform. The school was sharing its counselor with 8 other schools, receiving his services 1 out of every 9 days. The nurse came more often at one day per week.

After sitting for 30 minutes observing the chaos, I noticed that students enrolling in the school were overwhelmingly of Asian descent. Mr. Keo, the school principal, gestured to me to come into his office, a room covered in sprawling paper piles and Khmer artifacts: a paperweight of Angkor Wat, a parchment painting of the Cambodian countryside where he was born, a picture of his mother and her 11 children in her home a few blocks from Johnson High. He himself was a former Khmer refugee, arriving at Johnson High in the early 1980s after escaping the Pol Pot genocide and spending years in a refugee camp in southeastern Thailand. "So how many days per week can you be here this year?" he asked. I told him that I was planning on being in classrooms four

days per week, that I would help out in whatever ways that were needed. "As you can see, we are short-staffed, and some of our classrooms have over 45 students. I'll take you and whoever else I can get."

From there he gave me a schedule of six classes, a mix of low-level English-Language-Learner (ELL) classes, "shelter" classes, or content classes like American history and mathematics modified for ELL students, and finally a class designated for the implementation of a college-access program, College Dreams, for college-aspiring sophomores. As I walked the hallways, the imagery of Jonathan Kozol's (1991) work on the state of public educational infrastructure came alive. Water stains marred peeling walls and cockroach droppings gathered in dusty corners. Stepping over chunks of fallen plaster, I sat in a squeaky seat in Mr. Wolf's room. As the bell chimed, 43 students rushed in to grab a seat in this "shelter" American civics class. With a limited number of desks, several students took their seats on the radiator, a relic from the early 20th century when the school was built. Students passed a set of 14 textbooks published circa 1989 around to their peers. Three and four students crowded around one book, taking turns skimming the lines with their fingers and searching for information to answer Mr. Wolf's opening set of questions on the chalkboard. One student touched her shoulder with a furrowed brow and raised her eyes to see water streaming from a hole in the ceiling. Mr. Wolf looked at her, then to me, and smiled, "Yeah, we thought that sealing off the 4th floor of the building would help, but at the end of the day we need a new roof and it's going to cost 5 million. *You can guarantee that the district will close us down before that happens*. Just don't sit too close to the door. That's where most of the water is."

The rest the day was a whirlwind of desperate teachers trying to salvage lesson plans with no paper, and students navigating overcrowded classrooms, hallways and cafeterias. Whereas I thought that my presence would confuse teachers, make them wary of a graduate student doing ethnographic "research" in their classrooms, many of them seemed relieved to see me. Upon entering Mr. Raymond's fifth period "shelter" biology class, he asked, "What organization do you work for?" I responded, "I don't work for anyone. I'm a graduate student." Squinting his eyes, he asked again, "So you don't work for a non-profit?" "No, I responded, "I'm not. Just a graduate student." Mr. Raymond narrowed his eyes, confused, but aware of the room filling with students, "You're a warm body and that's all that matters" (Fieldnote, 9/9/13).

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The experiences described above illustrate the milieu in which administration and staff worked in September 2013, the direst month of my fieldwork, a moment when neighborhood schools across the city struggled to manage over-enrollment, busting classrooms, and no give in their budgets. In Chapter 2 I described the School District of Philadelphia's current state of affairs, particularly how issues of school choice, privatization, charter expansion, and entrenched bi-partisan politics at the state-level shaped the district's urgency to execute mass closures of 30 non-selective neighborhood schools over the course of two academic years (AY'11-12, '12-13). In this chapter, I explore the ways in which a particular neighborhood school responded to the concomitant pressures of the threat of closure and unprecedented fiscal austerity in their strategies to signify their educational value and save their school through a process of school branding.

I entered Johnson High in early 2011 as a tutor, two years prior to the budget crisis. During that year a leaked report from the URS Corporation recommended the school for closure (Herold and Mezzacappa 2011). While unique in its ethnic diversity, Johnson experienced similar pressures to most neighborhood schools under closure consideration: high student body poverty rates, low standardized test scores[7], a decaying building, and decreasingly available material and human resources. When the school received word that the district was considering it for potential closure, administrators and teachers read the policy as emblem of unprecedented precarity, raising the stakes of "failure" through its explicit ultimatum: compete or close. Positioned as educationally inferior to charter schools and magnet schools as a traditional neighborhood school, they felt that the only way to rise from the fray of considered schools was to minimize risks to their performance, improve the reputation of the school to attract higher enrollments, and build political capital with connected individuals and networks to help insulate the school from the threat. The practices that accompanied each of these strategies set into motion a larger branding process that administrators and educators believed would sustain the school as a viable institution within Philadelphia's educational marketplace.

I therefore take on my second research question in this chapter that pertains to how educators perceived the risk that school closures-as-policy posed to their fate and how they translated those perceptions into organizational and praxis-oriented changes to both mitigate risk to their performance and reputation as a school and circulate symbols of educational quality to bolster enrollment of students deemed valuable to their imagined

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[7] Prior to the 2009-2010 school year, Johnson High scored below the district average on the PSSA (School District of Philadelphia). Both AY 2009-2010 and AY 2010-2011, the school performed significantly higher than the district average. It has subsequently dropped in the last several years to at or below the district average (School District of Philadelphia, 2014).

brand. As recent work demonstrates, underlying closure policy is the condition of extraordinary competition between both charter and neighborhood schools alike. Schools with declining enrollments are deemed "inefficient" and "failing" and therefore must ultimately be consolidated under management rubric. Closure is thus the outcome of what Jabbar (2015) identifies as "competition as process" where school leaders "must develop their responses to competition after they scan the market for the strategic actions of other schools" (3). She also argues that while many economists of education have assumed competition as a natural "lift-all-boats" mechanism for school improvement, as a theory, it remains speculative. While relatively unexamined in the literature, recent work has pointed to the marketing of schools that competition motivates, rather than material and curricular improvements as schools strive to attract enrollments (Davis 2013; Holme, Carkhum, and Rangel 2013; Kasman and Loeb 2012). Other scholars have also discussed issues of equity when "problem kids" are "counseled out" of schools during the marketing of a school, raising questions about the equity (Jennings 2010; Lubienski 2007). I build on this work by considering how school branding, as a racialized process that responds to the risk introduced through competition and resource scarcity, encompasses more than merely marketing the school but transforming the institution into a niche commodity that will succeed in the education market.

As I described in the previous chapter, branding requires the reinforcement of symbolic associations between brands and consumers through the engendering of affective attachments (Schroeder 2009; Bastos and Levy 2012). Brands, as cultural, ideological objects, transcend Marxist-oriented conceptions of use and exchange-value. For Marx, the process under capitalism produces a commodity or use value, that has an

exchange value that is greater than the sum of the values of the commodities in its

production (Foster 2007). Luvaas (2013) argues that within advanced capitalist societies,

notions of use and exchange value have not disappeared but that value creation has come

to hinge more on the immaterial imaginaries that brands invoke through the play on

human affect. As Foster (2007) explains,

> The product singles out the agents and binds them together and, reciprocally, it is
> the agents that, by adjustment, iteration and transformation, define its
> characteristics" (Callon et al. 2002:198). Hence, the product implies a dynamic
> "economy of qualities," an economy in which tradable goods in the market are
> defined by the characteristics attributed to them in successive qualifications and
> requalification, including those enacted by consumers (713).

Drawing on the "qualifications" that brands must consistently negotiate with consumers

to be successful, I show in this chapter how two successive principals and their

administrations sought to qualify the school by capitalizing on the educational desires and

aspirations of first-generation Asian immigrant students that they perceived would

enhance the school's brand and thus attract and retain student-familial-consumers.

The chapter moves from a thick description and history of Johnson High as

context, and then to three major sections that detail the strategies that the school

employed to brand itself as worthy of remaining open. The first section details two

administrations' efforts to alter the student body of Johnson High in order to attract larger

enrollments of particular kinds of students. The second captures the institutionalization of

policies that sought to manage "risk" in the student population in order to insulate the

envisioned school's "brand" from sullying. The third and final section delineates the

ways in which successive principals went outside of the school to forge partnerships with

a large number of private organizations, mostly non-profits, in order to build political

capital with powerful individuals citywide and attract services that would attract enrollments of particular populations. My analysis provides insight into how tandem processes of risk management and branding that these strategies set into motion, indexed racialized and classed educational practices that marked populations as "risky" to the "quality" of the school. I show how these practices promoted particular student populations as "desirable", crowding scarce energies and resources in their service. Conversely, I show how educators, in a context of austerity and heightened urgency, attempted to annex and reduce the presence and visibility of populations that they perceived would stain the school's reputation and ultimately, imperil its survival.

Creating the Brand through ELL-ification

As the school closure threat gained strength from 2010 to 2013, Johnson High came under the microscope by the Office of Strategic Analytics, the arm of the School District of Philadelphia responsible for evaluating school "quality" through a series of metrics including enrollment numbers, the condition of the building, academic performance, and school climate data (School District of Philadelphia 2012a). Johnson High, similar to many high schools considered for school closure, scored poorly across most of the metrics. Consistently performing around or below the district average in math and reading test scores, this 100 year-old school suffered from perpetual maintenance problems and a dramatic drop in enrollment in the last decade. Administrators attributed drops in enrollment and test scores to the "creaming" of better students by charter schools, a trend that had reconfigured the educational landscape of the larger neighborhood in recent years. With no hope for financial help to renovate the building and with the likelihood of continuing to serve high percentages of high-need students, the

two principals that governed Johnson High over the course of my three years there, Mr. Brown ('11-'12) and Mr. Keo ('12-14) highlighted the importance of rising from the fray of considered schools. Each saw improved performance in particular areas as more achievable than others, namely enrollment and school climate. The School District of Philadelphia uses a composite of indicators to measure school climate performance: 1) percentage of students attending 95 percent or more of instructional days 2) within-year retention rates or students that remained in the school for a full academic year year3) across-year retention or students that remained in the school for successive academic years 4) percent of students with zero in-school suspensions or suspension time served in the in-school disciplinary quarters 5) percent of students with zero out-of-school suspensions 6) teacher attendance rates 7) serious/violent incidents (School District of Philadelphia, 2014). In both principals' minds, bolstering "school climate" would naturally increase enrollment. District auditors would also see changes in these indicators as reflective of the school's progress and therefore reconsider its initial recommendation to close Johnson.

After a deluge of violence at another neighborhood high school in 2009 with alleged attacks on Asian students by "African-American" students, contributed to an exodus of "Asian" students, Johnson High's former principal, Mr. Brown, saw an opportunity become a "safe haven" for students fleeing what they perceived to be a persistently "dangerous" school. Teachers and administrators referred to these students, among other first-generation immigrant students, as English Language Learners, or ELLs. While a number of different ethnic groups composed the ELL population at Johnson, youth from East and Southeast Asian nations were the most populous. By

promoting an image of a safety and opportunity for hard-working immigrant students,

Mr. Brown, Johnson High's principal from 2008 to 2012, argued that he could "brand"

the school as an institution that would attract larger enrollments.

> **Mr. Brown**: I use to work as a teacher in a bilingual school in North Philadelphia. We had some ELL kids here [at Johnson High], some wonderful ELL teachers. I was impressed with what was going on in those classrooms so of course I wanted to highlight that. *In a lot of ways you have to market your school – you have to brand your school somehow. I think the school became more positive, safer when we strengthened the ELL program*. I think that kids were happier and therefore kids came back. I mean I'm in charge of a five million dollar company [as a principal]. *I'm the CEO*. I needed to build pride in the school as the resource provider and the brander. I got the school painted, got the new weight room, put in new cameras to improve school climate, so I said to the kids, "Look what I'm doing for you." To the staff and the press I said, "Look at what we're doing for each other and what we're building!" I brought in the Student Union and they went out and said, "Hey, look, ours is a good school and here's why." *When you have the kids selling the school, it's tougher to close it*. (Interview, 4/7/14)

Here, Mr. Brown tethers images of safety and school prosperity to the identity of a

particular kind of student: the diligent, well-behaved English Language Learner. When

Johnson High's staff used this term, they referred to a particular type of student that

embodied the educational aspirations of Asian youth. While the term was slippery, used

to capture hard working, well-behaved Latino students, in this particular context, my

participants deployed "ELL" to index model minority behaviors. Mr. Brown further

describes the importance of reinforcing those images with material improvements and

curriculum changes. Under Mr. Brown, the school bolstered its English language

program, offering not only four levels of English language instruction (ELL) but parallel

content curriculum modified to serve the language needs of immigrant students. He also

points to the mechanisms through which he created an "aura" around Johnson as a "good

school": the students themselves. By bringing in members of the Philadelphia Student

Union, or a city-wide student-led leadership organization, he incorporated students and staff into the branding process by allowing them to circulate the message of the school's quality beyond its bounds.

As a result of this shift to an ELL-centric school, many new students came from across catchment lines, particularly after the district closed other neighborhood schools *en masse* from 2012 to 2013 and allowed students to apply to schools across catchment lines in the spirit of "school choice." Since the large majority of ELL students at Johnson were of Asian descent, the school began to acquire a reputation as "The Asian High School", reinscribing the racialized logic that enrolling more ELL students would give the school the "right kind" of reputation. As one teacher, Ms. Crowley, explained, "Yeah, I mean you have students traveling from Northeast Philly just to come to this school. There's definitely a perception that this school is safe and welcoming for Asian students; also that they represent the majority" (Interview, 1/10/14). Another teacher, Mr. Drew, recounts the legacy of his Mr. Brown's tenure.

> When Brown was here the school was a lot different than it is now. He was actually reforming the school to keep it from closing. So he was focusing a lot on attendance and participation in class, detentions, that kind of thing. It was a very different feel than it is now and that's because of our immigrant students. When he started, that population wasn't as prominent as it is today. (Interview, 1/23/14)

Mr. Drew draws attention to a central assumption in Mr. Brown's strategy to ELL-ify the school: that enrollment numbers and climate statistics like "attendance" and "detentions" would naturally improve with higher numbers of English Language Learners. By improving those criteria, the school would not only bolster its "hard data" but also its "soft data", or staff and student narratives that could be traded upon in neighborhood and city-wide discourse to strengthen the school's reputation.

Heightened Urgency to Brand: AY 2013-2014

Mr. Keo, who in served as Mr. Brown's assistant principal from 2009-2012 and succeeded him as principal, faced tremendous pressure in the AY 2013-2014 school year to continue to brand the school as an ELL haven. With no resources and few support staff as a result of the slashed budget and increasingly disproportionate enrollment of high-need students, Mr. Keo saw ELL-ification as the only way forward to save the school from closure.

> The district is focused strictly on one thing – numbers. It's about saving money, utilizing space, and not getting sued. They do not take into consideration the uniqueness of each school unless it has something to do with those three things. *So you have to beat them at their own game.* If they close the ELL high school and those kids go to other schools and get beat up, *that would hurt their numbers AND get them sued and they know that.* Even the principal of [sister neighborhood high school] keeps saying to me, "Whatever you're doing, don't think you're offending me. You're actually doing me a favor, because if you send those kids over, there's going to be turf war in my building all over again." It's not my intention to make this into an Asian high school, but it would be great if it could be. It's a neighborhood school so I have to take everybody. *However, it doesn't hurt to attract more Asian students because this district will never close down a majority Asian school.* (Interview, 5/1/14)

As he alluded to above, the enrollment of ELLs, namely Asian students, that would allow the school to "beat [the district] at its own game" by exploiting the cultural politics of the neighborhood and city to accomplish two goals. First, the principal assumes that by enrolling first generation Asian students, he will raise the school's "numbers" in terms of enrollment and attendance, making it more difficult for the district to justify the school's closure. Second, Mr. Keo brandishes the political and fiscal risk the district would assume through lawsuits by closing an Asian-dominated high school. The principal's secretary, Ms. Lai, a key adviser and information source to the principal and the only

office staffer in 2013-2014, confirms an underlying assumption at work within the

administration.

> I've been playing around with a lot of the open data in the district and so I was looking at how attendance rates are correlated with the percentage of ELL students, and I found really high correlations between ELLs and attendance rates. (Interview, 2/11/14)

This explicit relationship between the enrollment of ELL students, improvements across

the board in behavior and attendance statistics, and enrollment numbers was a central

theme of conversations across both the administration and staff at JH. The discourse of

school survival ultimately hinged for staff on not only increases in enrollments, but

specifically enrollments of students that would not taint their climate numbers: ELLs.

> **Mr. Cassidy**: The only reason we're not closed is because we have our ELLs. They come here all the way from Chinatown...What's weird is that the Asian scores are just as dismal across the board. The perception is that if you have Asian kids, your math scores are going to go through the roof. It's more of a reading test than anything else, ya know, *so it's not about achievement*. Let's be honest, when 15 ELL kids come in and are like "Oh, we want to go to your school," Mr. Keo is like, "Ok, sign em' up!" *It also helps because as we grow in numbers it's harder for them to close us down*. This school used to house 1200 kids so I mean, we need to be up to 700 or 800 to be safe. Two years ago we were pushing 500. We've gotten 200 ELL kids from all over the city. It's not like 200 show up in August. They come all year. We got a student in June, ya know, it counts! He'll be here next year so sign em' up! *I mean, come on, you have zero issues with those kids. You have issues but you wouldn't have fights, weapons, or things like that. You wouldn't have those issues, ya know?* And for a guy who's been here 11 years, if that's the way to keep it open, then I'm all for it. (Interview, 3/19/14)

Mr. Cassidy below summarizes the institutionalization of the ELL strategy and its key

technocratic advantages, alluded to in both the introductory vignette and the several staff

members' testimonies. Attendance and behavioral statistics trumped achievement data

and therefore, instead of attempting to strengthen achievement in the midst of

increasingly severe resource and labor cuts, maintaining discipline became the key focus

of Johnson's administration. Teachers like Mr. Cassidy confirmed that the manageability

of ELLs made them an appealing student type for recruitment and admission. Together,

the value that Asian enrollment induced via quantification and the legal power they

carried to reverse district decision-making around closure, influenced teachers and

administrators 'strategies to build their brand around this group.

Recruitment and Exploiting Enrollment Caveats

Understanding hard data and soft data as intrinsically connected, Mr. Keo,

spearheaded further efforts to ELL-ify the school to improve its numbers. Mobilizing a

number of staff, bilingual classroom aids, and students, he and this group visited

elementary schools to advertise and promote Johnson High as an alternative to charter

and special admission schools. Creating and relying on a "Student Advisory Council" of

four students, Mr. Keo encouraged this group of "model students" to go with him to

neighborhood elementary and middle schools to recruit students for the following school

year.

> A lot of our students are wonderful, dedicated students. We have knuckleheads, not that many, just like any other school. We know that this is a great school here, but from the perception outside, every time we send out representation and they introduce themselves as Johnson students, other children look at them like, "Really? You're from Johnson? You're the ghetto one?" We need to break that stereotypical perception. So I've asked Rhonda and a few of other students who want to change that to come up with strategies to educate people outside of this building that we are not fighters, *that we aren't the lowest form of human being because we are from Johnson High*. (Meeting Recording, 3/25/14)

Mr. Keo points to a key issue: the power of perception and reputation in terms of

attracting more students to enroll. By changing the perception of Johnson High's as a

violent, low-performing "neighborhood" high school full of "knuckleheads" through the

strategic employment of "model students" as recruiters, Mr. Keo attempted to counteract his school's reputation as serving "the lowest form of human being."

However, Mr. Keo was not interested in all elementary schools equally. Targeting elementary schools, some beyond the boundaries of the catchment area, he, the Student Advisory Council, and a number of bilingual counselors, actively recruited ELL students. Mr. Abram, a security guard whose wife served as the principal at neighborhood elementary school where Mr. Keo sent students and counselors, recounts the selectivity of the recruitment.

> I know for a fact that all of the Bilingual Counselors went into the elementary schools and were recruiting the ELL students to come here. I know that first hand. Mainly Asians, which is understandable because the population down here is largely Asian, but we're also getting Asians from Center City! I think Johnson High will be here for a while because of the climate and because of the type of students Mr. Keo is accepting here. Well, it's first and foremost a neighborhood school, but there are students that can apply here outside the catchment that, in my opinion, may end up turning it into a 100 percent ELL school. If that were the case, *I believe they would never close us*. (Interview, 1/16/14).

As Mr. Abram points out, not only did active recruitment become a strategy to change perceptions of the school, but also an indirect strategy to change the composition of the student body.

The Risk Management of "Americans"

However, branding the school as one "worthy" of remaining open required instituting policies that would also minimize the participation and visibility "risky" students. These policies became of especial import as the district's fiscal crisis deepened throughout AY 2013-2014, intensifying the uncertainty of the direction of the district and its implications for Johnson High's future. As Nakassis (2013) argues, central to the history of branding is the management of risk to the brand. Through differentiation from

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generic classifications, brands distance themselves from undesirable symbolic associations. In the case of Johnson High, avoiding labels such as "dangerous" or "chaotic" became of utmost importance in terms of retaining first-generation Asian students, building their enrollment base, and avoiding poor climate data.

"Behavior" therefore reigned supreme as the defining expression of both student quality and risk. While the generational and ethnic diversity of the school confounded categorical race breakdowns, two homogenizing categories came to both classify and segregate students spatially, academically, and socially: "English Language Learner" and "American." Staff and students also deployed these categories "ELL" and "American" interchangeably with other synonymous terms that contributed to the crystallization of the "ELL" versus "American" dichotomy. While staff and students used "ELL" in most cases, they also substituted "immigrant", "international student", and "foreign" students to invoke the same set of set of behaviors that characterized this student type. Even though the ELL population also splintered in complicated ways across ethnic lines (see Chapter 1), being "ELL" invoked "model minority" behaviors, or behaviors typically associated with "Asian-ness" (Lee 2005; Fong 2008): hardworking, respectful, submissive, and quiet. In contrast, staff and students alike framed "American", or native-born students, as antithetical "ELL" – lazy, violent, disrespectful of authority, loud, and abrasive – characteristics closely associated with what my participants understood as the trope of urban Black masculinity. Ms. Betty, a teacher, describes the distinctions between these two groups.

> In the truest sense of the word, I mean it is sheltered ELL instruction, that's the model, but in reality, we're sheltering them in the broader sense of the word from the *big, bad Americans*. That's the way I see it and I don't discourage it. I know

that it's wrong because I don't believe that's going to help them in their life to be afraid of Americans or not want to commune with them, but to be quite honest, I would not want to commune with them either. *Why would I approach someone in the hallway who's cursing up a storm and fighting in the hallway, whatever you want to call THAT?* The *volume of their voices is offensive to my ELL students.* They cannot figure out why anyone would speak that loudly and that alone prevents them from approaching them, regardless of what color they are. (Interview, 12/18/13)

Ms. Betty points to two issues: first, she assigns a set of behaviors typically exhibited by "big, bad Americans" that makes "ELL" students' fraternization with them difficult to facilitate. Second, she assigns fault in the communication barrier to the native-born students. Claiming, "I would not want to commune with them either," Ms. Betty identifies more with the perceive plight of the ELL students.

This dichotomy did not just apply to behavioral characterizations of students. According to both staff and students alike, ELLs "valued" their education and Americans did not, a performance that had little to do with academic achievement, but instead, an embodied hope that educational attainment would have some bearing on their futures. Ms. Allard makes a comparison between her "ELL" and "American" students:

I do find that I see the American kids are not as appreciative of what they have. You may not have much, but they're like, "Oh, whatever, this is just school and I don't want to be here." Where a lot of my ELL kids, they're like, "I want to be in school because education is important." You even see that in class. When you look at when they turn in work, almost all of the ELL kids turn in all of their work, and the other kids turn it in whenever they want to turn it in. It's the work ethic that I don't see in the American kids. (Interview, 2/18/14)

The dynamics described by Ms. Allard allude to spectrum of behaviors that inform assignment of students to particular social categories: "work ethic" or "attitude" toward their education. Scholars have thoroughly documented the enthusiasm and aspirations that first immigrant youth harbor for educational achievement (Bok 2010; Kao and

Tienda 2005; Louie 2012; McGinnis 2009; Ogbu and Simons 1998), highlighting that fervency for achievement often diminishes as students become incorporated into the American mainstream. Within this particular context, the subsuming categories of "ELL" and "American" reflected that understanding, but went further to embed racialized notions of value and risk. By building a brand around ELL students that demonstrated care toward their education as well as contributed to a climate of order, the school believed that it was elevate the value of the brand, selling the school's environment as one conducive to enthusiasm and respect for learning.

In fact, very few staff dwelled on disparate academic performance in their classrooms but focused more the "effort" that students demonstrated in their work. The obedient, hard-working minority, regardless of ethnicity or generation, was evaluated based on his or her "care" for education – a trait they strongly associated strongly with model Asian-ness. Teachers, administrators, and students designated students exhibiting violence, deviance and apathy toward their academic performance, as more "American", or enacting "urban" behaviors typically identified with Black male students (Ferguson 2001; Rios 2011). While the "American" population, or native-born population, certainly splintered in complicated ways across race and ethnicity, one's labeling as "American" translated into the degree to which their racialized behavior and educational aspiration put the school's imagined brand at risk.

Barring Enrollment of "Problem Kids"

In addition to a large number of ELL students of Asian descent enrolling at Johnson, many of whom the staff referred to as "problem kids", or native-born students ejected from mostly charter schools and some parochial schools due to their poor

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performance, behavioral issues, or a combination of both, were arriving at Johnson High simultaneously (Fieldnote, 2/19/14). These students were mostly African-American boys, but there were several African-American girls and Caucasian boys. With cuts to support staff and teachers, Mr. Keo and the teachers feared that "problem students" might have an adverse impact on the school's climate and overarching reputation. The school struggled with its state mandate to "accept everyone", specifically when branding itself required an associative distancing from "problem students."

> **Mr. Keo**: I've even had people say to me, you know, I know you're trying to convert this school into an all Asian or ELL school. And I was like stop, that's not part of my agenda. If the ELL student comes to my school, I have to take him. *If the African-American student comes to my school and they live within the catchment I have to take him*. I run a neighborhood high school. I have no control over who comes here. But it makes it hard because my school will be held responsible for *that African-American kid* punching someone out in the stairwell. We're one violent incident away from being closed. (Interview, 12/9/13)

The dilemma of inclusion became particularly acute in AY 2013-2014 as Mr. Keo struggled to operate the school with few support staff. In the opening vignette I alluded to the lack of "bodies" in the school, a term that many teachers and Mr. Keo used often. Students with behavioral issues posed a serious risk to the school climate without "bodies" to regulate and govern areas where risk of an "incident" ran high – stairwells, the cafeteria, and outside of school. As he notes, the behaviors he deems as most risky reflect what he perceives as indicative of African-American boys, denoted by his use of the term "him."

As I began to spend more time in the main office observing enrollments, I spoke often to the school secretary and principal's intern. While the intern's purpose was to shadow the principal, she reported that with the budget cuts and the loss of five

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administrators, including the former assistant principal, she mostly helped the sole

secretary cope with the overwhelming workload of enrolling new students. The school

kept a record of transfer students as they streamed in, noting from where and for why

students were enrolling. Eating lunch one day with the principal intern, Ms. Nguyen,

commented on how Mr. Keo oftentimes worked around the "catchment" caveat.

> I mean, every time a student comes in, Mr. Keo asks them a set of questions and why they're here, and they also look at the address. If the student lies beyond the catchment and they have a lot of discipline issues at their old school – usually a charter – then he doesn't have to take them, and he won't. But if they're in the catchment, he has to take them, so usually we'll get like 2 or 3 kids in the two days per week that I'm here that are like that. If the kid is a good kid, doesn't have issues, or doesn't have a record because they're just coming to the country, then he takes them even if they're not in the catchment. They are usually Asian kids. (Fieldnote, 5/12/14)

By turning "problem kids" away and funneling them back to their neighborhood schools,

or students that exhibit the hazardous behaviors associated with African-American boys,

and enrolling "good kids" from across catchment lines to bolster the school's numbers, or

students that reflect model minority behaviors, Ms. Nguyen underscores a central

mechanism created to drive the disproportionate enrollment of Asian ELL students.

Because the district gave principals autonomy to make decisions around admission of

students from outside the catchment, no mechanism existed to correct for racialized

readings of admissions candidates.

The Institution of the "Success Academy"

However, as Ms. Nguyen and Mr. Keo pointed out, as a non-selective

neighborhood school, the law mandated Mr. Keo to take "everyone" within the

catchment. In response to the enrollment of "problem kids", Mr. Keo and teacher

leadership, or two teachers charged with administrative responsibilities in the absence of

an assistant principal, adopted a strategy to corral these students, offer them an alternative curriculum, and also truncate their time spent in the building. Through the founding of the "Success Academy" in 2012, months after the announcement of Johnson High's inclusion on the potential school closures list, Mr. Brown and several teachers split 35 "problem students" between two classrooms in the school's basement. When I asked one of the two Success teachers what qualified students for this tracking, Mr. Marra informed me, "It depends on a bunch of things. They're here because of a combination of behavior, attendance, and grades, in that order. Mostly behavior." (Fieldnote 11/5/13). Mr. Marra repeatedly discussed the prioritizing of weighting behavior and attendance performance over achievement, a priority of the school as climate data became increasingly critical to manage.

The students came from across grades and oftentimes had the same number of credits regardless of their designated class year, largely due to failed classes and truancy. One teacher in each classroom would cover a range of basic subjects like algebra, history, and English, trying to forge a curricular middle ground among the range of levels. Success Academy students arrived at 9am everyday instead of 8am with the rest of the student body, and left by 1:30pm, not 3pm. These students did not enter through the central doors, but came through an entrance on the side of the building that led directly toward the assigned classrooms. Their classrooms were also directly adjacent to the "Dean's Room", another space where students serving in-school suspensions gathered under the supervision of a teacher-disciplinarian. Success students usually spent as much time or more in the Dean's Room as they did in the Success classrooms. They did not eat

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lunch with the rest of the student body and came and went from the school without much interaction with the general population.

Teachers, administrators, and the student body, all constructed the Success Academy in our conversations as a "necessary evil", not only in light of the ever-present school closure threat, but also due to the loss of staff in the May 2013 budget cut. Without an assistant principal and counselor, as well as a teacher shortage, a vacuum replaced former emotional supports for these students. When I asked the second Success teacher, Mr. Cassidy, about the effects of the Success Academy on the climate of the school, he explained, "Well, it certainly has improved things upstairs. You notice a difference in the hallways - not as many fights because all of the instigators are corralled" (Fieldnote, 11/5/13). The idea of "corralling" the problem was understood by the staff as part of the larger strategy of minimizing the risk that "problem kids" could wreak on the reputation and district-level data-driven decisions around keeping the school open. Teachers and the principal himself oftentimes felt conflicted about the program, believing that its absence would promise chaos in the classrooms of students that "wanted to learn." I will discuss the ethical dilemmas circulating around the Success Academy later in Chapter 4.

Racialization of the Brand

As I spent more time observing in the Success classrooms, I came to realize that its institution acutely distilled the spatial, relational, and racial dimensions of Johnson High's branding process. Over the course of the year, the number and composition changed due to the influx of students from charter schools or the relegating of students with behavioral and truancy issues in the regular population to the Success Academy.

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However, of the 35 students, of which only 28 on a given day attended, the majority of the students were African-American males. Though the school was over 50 percent Asian, 83 percent of the Success Academy was African-American.

Table 1.6 Breakdown of Success Academy[8]

Race	Male	Female
Black	19	9
Caucasian	3	0
Mixed[9]	2	1
Asian	0	1

Such a disparity in demographic representation in the Success Academy symbolized the effects of a "colorblind" set of criteria, or behaviors deemed "unacceptable" regardless of race, that the school and district used to contain threats to their climate data and consequently their perceptions of quality schools (Bonilla-Silva 2009). Administrators like Mr. Keo and teachers could justify the racial distribution in the Success Academy by tethering behavioral problems to the risk they posed to the fate of Johnson High.

Justifying Colorblindness: Second Generation Cambodians

As the ELL population grew over the course of my three years there, questions circulated among the students and staff as to whether Asian students were systemically and socially receiving preferential treatment. To deflect this criticism, teachers and administrators, namely the second principal, Mr. Keo, would cite the "other Asians", or second-generation Cambodian students as a contrary example (Ong 2003; Asian Americans Advancing Justice 2013). This group legitimized the ELL-American

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[8] These numbers are subject to change. The Success Academy's numbers and attendance fluctuated dramatically over the course of its two years of existence. This was the racial breakdown during a visit on November 5th, 2013.

[9] Of the mixed students, one male was African-American and Caucasian, one male and one female were Latino and Caucasian.

categorical dichotomy, enabling the school community to deny accusations of racism against Black and White native-born students. While the school had both second and first generation Cambodian students, teachers and students pointed to the differences that divided the groups. Teachers, administrators, and students described second-generation Khmer youth as "more like the African-Americans" in their attitudes and behaviors, predisposed to violence, bullying, and academic apathy. When I asked about the "Asians" of the Success Academy, Mr. Marra commented,

> Yeah, there's a couple. There is one now and last year there was another one but he doesn't go to school with us anymore. It's all Cambodians that are down there – like the dark-skinned Cambodian girl, oh, she's bad. *The Cambodians aren't really Asian like the rest of our students are Asian*. They're all second generation and completely Americanized (Fieldnote, 11/5/13).

Becoming "Americanized" in the school meant the display of behaviors traditionally associated with the subcultural styles of urban Black youth urban, a product of exposure to street life in Philadelphia and the shedding of more stereotypically "Asian" behaviors. Whereas first generation Cambodian students in the school were typified as more authentically "Asian" in their reverence for authority and educational aspirations, they portrayed second-generation Cambodian students as "deviant" and "uncaring toward their education", therefore qualifying them for admission into the Success Academy and the larger category of "American." Mr. Keo, a former Cambodian refugee, reflected on what he perceived as the second generation's plight.

> The children of my generation are lost and confused. They have no clue what to do because most of the people my age dropped out of school and joined the gang, the only place they felt they belonged. There's no parent connection. Back in the 90s, we were trying to get the school district to understand that. They never look at the sub-groups for test scores. When they look, they always see the "Asian" population doing exceptionally well, and we told them to go a little deeper, to break that sub-group down to find that the most challenging sub-groups are the

Cambodians and Laotians. The Vietnamese and Chinese had more education and structure. I still do feel that way. Also the parents—the ones who are growing from my generation—they've gotten way too comfortable with the system in this country. So there's no motivation for our children, the ones who were born here, to achieve higher. So the [first and second generation] are very separate and don't interact with each other. The newcomers, they tend to stick together and they work harder. Whereas the ones—not all but most—who were born here, they tend to hang out with the problem kids. (Interview, 12/4/13)

Mr. Keo in this analysis contrasts the second-generation Cambodian population to "newcomers", or Cambodian families arriving in the U.S. through family reunification visas. Drawing on what are perceived to be more traditional "Asian" behaviors as a metric, particularly the desire to "achieve higher" through educational achievement as well as strong "connections" between parents and children, Mr. Keo explains this sub-group's regression to patterns of urban deviance like joining "gangs" and relying on "welfare."

While he, as a member of this sub-group, understood the underlying history and social forces shaping these youths' educational outcomes, his position as the leader of a threatened high school forced him to lump these students in with "problem students" and quarantine their "deviance" for the "greater good" of the school. Using the treatment of second-generation Cambodian students as evidence of colorblindness, the principal and teachers repelled accusations that the branding of the school as ELL-friendly catalogued a series of racist strategies that disproportionately targeted African-American males for disciplinary action. Further, by shifting the blame to the "problem students" for endangering the Johnson High's already precarious status as closure-worthy school, the administration and staff justified the highly racialized outcomes of their risk-management strategies.

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The Political and Material Benefits of Partnerships

In addition to the enrollment of ELL students to protect against the threat of bad climate data, the administration turned to another strategy to guard against the threat of closure: building public-private partnerships with non-profit organizations at the city and state levels. Though the school lacked an assistant principal and guidance counselor[10] in September 2013, the school had 14 "community partnerships" with organizations across the city. These organizations provided anything from after-school music, athletic, and academic programming to weekend service activities and resources for fieldtrips and supplies, filling key service and resource gaps in the middle of the crisis. Not all organizations were equal in terms of their resource commitments to the school, their funding streams, or missions. Most of the organizations operated entirely on private donations. The more stable organizations and those that had the strongest presence in the school drew on a blend of public and private funding streams in the form of grants from foundations, corporations, and the city, state, and federal governments.

Administrative Entrepreneurialism

Like the ELL enrollment strategy, building public-private partnerships with a constellation of non-profit organizations was marshaled well before the mass school closures and budget cuts. Teachers that worked under the reign of the former principal, Mr. Brown, pointed to the turn to partnerships in 2011 after the school received news that the district recommended its closure.

> **Mr. Cassidy**: When I first got here, there weren't that many community partners. The only partner was Career Ready. And then when Brown came and the district started having financial trouble in 2011, that's when we started getting Guitars

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[10] The counselor returned full-time in December, 2013 when emergency funds were released by the Corbett administration at the state-level.

and Hoops, Service for Salvation, and Refugee Youth Support, and all of those groups started coming. Mr. Keo was Mr. Brown's assistant principal and then when he became he principal he just kept it going. The partners do all kinds of stuff. Guitars and Hoops has sports, music, I mean, it's out of control and Service for Salvation with the treks to the different countries and stuff. (Interview 3/14/14)

As Mr. Cassidy points out, Mr. Brown left a legacy that his successor, Mr. Keo, relied on

heavily to cope with the "financial troubles" of the district. Other teachers celebrated Mr.

Brown's "having juice", or an entrepreneurial spirit that leveraged connections to both

attract as well as actively recruit outside programs to come to the building and provide

key resources. A 16-year veteran teacher at Johnson High reflected on his time under Mr.

Brown:

> **Mr. Darling**: I would say that under his leadership these outside groups set up base here and he knew a lot of people and carried a big stick. So he could make a phone call and bring people in. He had a lot of star power. He has that gift of communication, so he could swim in different social circles. He had juice. (Interview, 1/13/14)

Interviews with teachers like Mr. Darling yielded the same opinions about Mr. Brown's

reign: that without his "juice" to attract partnerships with key service providers, the

school may have closed at the end of the 2013 school year.

While Mr. Brown initially looked to partnerships to mitigate the loss of funds for

programming, the partnerships strategy also accomplished several other objectives. As

the school faced the looming threat of closure, partners allowed the school to market

itself as an attractive alternative for students to enroll in charter schools. With outside

groups like Service for Salvation offering trips to developing countries to build schools

and Refugee Youth Support providing full-time staff to tutor refugee youth after-school

and on weekends, the school hoped that it would strengthen its reputation among key

groups of students. Partners oftentimes had political connections with district officials

and city, state, and national-level private funding streams like corporations and

foundations. By increasing the school's connections with well-resourced as well as well-

connected organizations, Mr. Brown and Mr. Keo both saw partners as a way to assemble

a critical mass of allies in a menacing district climate. Mr. Wood, a teacher that worked

in conjunction with Career Ready to help implement their curriculum model, explained

the political and financial benefits of attracting partners to Johnson High in this climate.

> [Partnerships] are part of this idea that you need to *brand* your school. You build these connections through these external partners and you hope that they bring you a network of money and people to draw on. Every year there's this thing called "Comcast Cares Day" where they pick sites around the city and they fix a playground or do whatever. *Career Ready, well, someone on its board knows someone at Comcast and we became a Comcast Cares Day site.* So Comcast came in and we got resources, we were in the paper, and it was a cool thing for our school. One day out of the year you get some positive press, and maybe someone who knows someone will decide that you shouldn't be shut down. (Interview 3/5/14)

Mr. Wood's description underscores the equal importance of two key benefits of

partners: resource provision as well as the potential for fortifying the school's political

clout through mediums like media and association with persuasive individuals at the city-

level. In a conversation with the formal principal, Mr. Brown explained the "buzz" that

partners had the capacity to generate.

> When good things start happening at a school with partners and it has a buzz, stuff starts opening up. That's kind of what happened. We were already partnered with Career Ready and they were giving us support with their model but then we brought in some other partners too. I would have the Career Ready's board meetings at Johnson High so people could see that our building's a hundred years old and we have antiquated equipment. But it opened their eyes to see the great things and the great kids that were there. (Interview, 4/7/14)

Career Ready, the partner Brown discusses, had multiple corporate partners funding their model throughout Philadelphia, including hotels, electric and cable companies, and major restaurant chains. By locating partners' "board meetings" in the school, Mr. Brown saw an opportunity to bring in leaders across the private sector to showcase the school and create a "buzz" around its portfolio of partner activities, programs, and "great kids." Less visibly, having corporate connections as a threatened public institution was, similarly to Mr. Wood's insight, a key strategy to distinguish the school from other high schools. Revisiting the idea of administrative "entrepreneurialism" or the ability to attract private resources to fund services and programs outside of the scope of the district's budget, principals and teacher saw partners as an outlet to draw political and material resources from to supplement their ailing budgets and reputation.

Supplemental to Core Service Provision

While the former principal used partnerships as a medium to promote the school's reputation in order to attract higher enrollments and build a network of politically connected partners, the role of partners began to shift as the financial crisis in the district spiraled throughout the AY 2012-2013 (Fieldnote 9/9/13). Mr. Keo formerly looked to partners for the same reasons as Mr. Brown, to market the school to the district and larger neighborhood by providing supplemental programming. However, the extent to which he relied on their services and labor changed dramatically in September 2013. Partners became core service providers as a staff hired to serve 500 students, accommodated over seven hundred. Returning to the chapter's opening vignette and the main office scene of "chaos", the school not only faced the enrollment of students coming from another closed high school in the neighborhood, but students from closed high schools throughout the

city. District policy, in the spirit of minimizing the "disruptive effects" of the closures, allowed students to attend their schools of "choice" (Interview, 5/15/14). Without an assistant principal, counselor, nurse, a sufficient number of staff, and nonexistent budget to serve the unpredictable growth of the students, principals and teachers alike embraced partners to fill key service gaps. The school coordinator for one partner, Service for Salvation, reflected on an interaction with the principal in which she asked him how the providers could be of service.

> **Ms. Shore**: Yeah, at the beginning of this school year just talking to Mr. Keo, I would say, "What do you want from the partners?" And he would just say, "I need bodies." I will stand in the hallway during transition time because there just aren't enough people. Some of the partners have really taken the initiative with trying to support like, I mean, I'm supposed to be doing service programming but I'm working with Keo on figuring out how we can work with problem kids on discipline. (Interview, 2/18/14)

Ms. Shore's depiction of Mr. Keo's desperation for "bodies" and her role as a hall monitor and disciplinarian points the ways in which resource and labor shortages forced partner staff into positions where they deviated from their original missions and became indispensable actors in school operations. Another teacher, Mr. Raymond, when asked about their role in the school in AY 2013-2014, explained,

> OH! WE NEED THEM! Hands down. They're not like add-ons to the school anymore. *We're building on top of them*. They're holding us up because they have resources, manpower that they can bring into the school, and outside connections they can bring in. They are the ones running most of the events. They're becoming the core of what we offer to our students. (Interview, 4/10/14)

Describing partner "resources", "manpower", and "outside connections" as "holding up" the school, Mr. Ray confirms this shift in what he sees as once supplemental programming becoming the "core" of the school's services and resources. The partners operated as a private labor force, heightening their presence after the budget cuts. The

hemorrhaging of staff and resources particularly in May 2013 created a void of staff and material functions to be filled by whomever the teachers and administration could draw upon.

> **Mr. Keo**: These relationships bring us bodies. Just knowing that every year I'm threatened to lose my assistant principal again, having other people just standing the hallway makes a difference in the school, even if they don't have the authority to do anything. The fact that they just stand out there, raise their voices a little bit. The kids have a sense that not all is lost. (Interview, 12/9/13)

Mr. Keo not only depends on the "bodies" of partners in hallways to maintain control but also to give the students the sense that they have not been completely abandoned. He describes that an image of "safety" is as important as safety itself. Partners not only attract students through their programming, but bring vitality to a building that otherwise would feel like a hollowed shell. Therefore, partners improve the "image" of the school internally and externally, sending signals to the students and community that "all is not lost.

<p style="text-align:center">***********************************</p>

I have delineated the multitude of strategies and sub-strategies that staff at Johnson High employed to brand the school in order to "save" it from closure. First I showed how administrators actively built curriculum around and recruited English Language Learners in order to improve "school climate" and boost enrollment numbers, two criteria considered strongly in the district's closure evaluation methodology. Second I showed how the administration and teachers managed the participation and spatialization of risk in the school through the founding of the Success Academy and the exploitation of the "catchment" caveat. Students that posed the gravest "danger" to the school's climate statistics were placed in isolated classrooms, given shortened school

days, and redirected to private entranceways to minimize their contact with the rest of the student body.

The labor shortage during AY 2013-2014 further justified school leadership's reasoning for these measures. I demonstrated how "colorblindness" discourse seeped discursively into rationales for quarantining and villainizing "problem kids" as well as for the creation of two dominant social categories: "ELLs" and "Americans." The interpellation of these categories rested on racialized readings of risk and value in relation to the goal of building a competitive school brand. Finally, I explained the utility of partnerships to Johnson High, particularly in the midst of the fiscal crisis. Drawn on for material resources as well as political capital, both Mr. Brown and Mr. Keo saw partnerships as key to branding the school and in turn, guarding against closure.

These strategies to resist closure stemmed from school actors' readings of the threat of school closure and how they might become a valuable neighborhood school as measured by their meeting some of the district's criteria for a "quality school"—though interestingly not the criteria of improved student achievement and learning as measured by test scores. Administrators and teachers believed that in order to compete with charter schools, they would have to build a brand that would send messages of "value" in the form of embodied educational aspirations, order, and safety. Relying on heavily racialized notions of risk and value to their brand, Johnson High's staff facilitated similar processes of stratification and exclusion that many have argued characterize the admissions and operations of charter schools (Leitner 2014; Buras 2014). Interpreting behavioral issues as a "risk" to the school instead of a symptom of needs gone unfilled,

these educators felt forced to eschew their public oath to serve all students, treating students as mini-threats to be managed or expelled versus children to be educated.

My goal was not to indict these teachers for maliciously and intentionally perpetuating racial inequality but to couch their strategies within an educational marketplace that pressured them to compete or lose their livelihoods and school community. Mr. Keo, Mr. Brown, and all of the teachers and support staff worked in deplorable conditions, endured pay freezes for close to half of a decade, and dedicated their own resources to buy supplies and fund extracurricular activities and events. Mr. Keo himself attended the school as a former Cambodian refugee and held the school and its value to the neighborhood in profound esteem. He opened the school almost every Saturday during AY 2013-2014 to allow non-profits partners to provide additional programming, striving to bring opportunities to Johnson High's students, albeit selectively. Many teachers had served at the school for 30+ years and saw Johnson High as a distillation of their life's work. Their deep commitment and care for their students and the school was evident in their sacrifices, digging into their pockets to make events like the prom and other school traditions possible. Further, the participation in some of branding practices plagued their consciences as they saw these measures as necessary but immoral in light of the dire circumstances of the district and the direction of school reform toward charterization.

In the following chapters I will further show how these actors reconciled their fraught consciences with their overarching goal to "save the school", bringing into relief how branding processes, induced by closure threats, are stimulated by small moral economies of educator work that debate and contest what it means to be a "good school"

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under the current paradigm of marketized educational governance. Teachers' and

administrators' troubled narratives will illuminate the lived experience of marketization,

the moral dilemmas that surface in their craft, and their implications for the racialized

care of the vulnerable youth that attend neighborhood schools.

CHAPTER 4 – THE MORAL ECONOMY OF EDUCATOR WORK IN CRISIS

"Screw the Kids"

In the middle of second period, Mr. Keo walked into a 10th grade math class,

lethargically dropping into a seat next to me at the back of the room.

> People expect me to come in, be energetic and light-hearted, but I'm not. I'm
> completely burnt out like everyone else and I don't know how I'm going to keep
> this up for another five years, if we even have a district by then. *We have become*
> *holding ponds for the kids nobody wants*. The idea that I need to get 700 kids in
> order to get an assistant principal, and be subjected to the same standards of the
> magnet and charter schools that get to select their kids is absolutely ridiculous.
> We're not going to get the same scores - we're just not. We get the kids with the
> behavior problems and because of that, we don't deserve an assistant principal?
> They create the conditions for us to fail and then punish us when it happens. *You*
> *devalue the work we do with the toughest kids*, the ones that are hardest to get to,
> the ones that nobody is looking out for. I don't see society getting behind us. I
> don't see the public getting upset about what's happening. Maybe it's because I'm
> in my little bubble taking orders, but from my seat, it feels like we're being
> abandoned. *What's happening is we're dismantling public education piece by*
> *piece. We've made it into a commodity and the irony of it all is that the kids at the*
> *bottom don't have any choice, even though we're supposedly all about "choice."*
> Screw the people that are committed to running good schools for them. These
> people at the top have no plan for how this is going to go. They're all about the
> money. The people making the decisions know nothing about this neighborhood,
> this community, and this city. They have no history here the way that I do, yet
> they makes decisions that wreck havoc on our lives. They threaten to close me
> instead of just giving me teachers and money for supplies. It doesn't matter to
> them that there won't be the resources next year. That's how it works at the top -
> there's no vision – just don't get sued, don't go broke, and screw the kids.
> (Fieldnote, 1/28/14)

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Embedded within this conversation with Mr. Keo, Johnson High's principal, in

the throes of the winter of AY 2013-2014, is the central theme of this chapter: the moral

and ethical dilemmas of teachers and administrators that arose from setting the school's

survival strategies into motion. Questions over the accrued benefits of these strategies

and the marginalization of particular groups of students as a result of enrolling

disproportionate numbers of ELLs surfaced in teachers' discourse around the crisis,

praxis, and relationships with staff and students. While the previous chapter demonstrated

how the crisis at the district level trickled down to permeate the school climate as well as

inform the strategies teachers and administrators adopted to cope with the budget crisis

and bolster perceptions of Johnson High as an institution, this chapter ethnographically

engages the fraught nature of the collective response. As these educators attempted to

"save the school" through these advocacy for students in their politics and praxis and

donating unpaid labor as the budget cuts ebbed at their salaries and healthcare, the

question of "for whom?" the school could be saved brought tension to their work to resist

closure.

I draw on work in moral anthropology to illuminate moral economy of staff labor

to explain how the staff developed and justified problematic branding strategies to keep

to elevate what they perceived reflected a worthy school. Fassin (2009) defines a moral

economy as the "production, circulation, and appropriation of norms and values,

sensibilities, and emotions in contemporary societies" (10). Central to a moral economy

are the contradictions that emerge in the dialectic between politics and compassion, as

different moral judgments and sentiments clash over social problems. Within this view,

moral codes and ethical dilemmas cannot be isolated from political, religious, economic,

or social issues, but apprehended through acts and discourses that people claim are

"moral or good or right or generous" (Lambek 2010: 6). I argue in this chapter that the

ways in which teachers and administrators narrated the troubled "rationality" behind

these strategies illuminates the tension between their call to offer equitable educational

opportunities "all" children at Johnson High and the demands of competition within an expanding educational marketplace.

Downey's (2007) notion of the "moral economy" of teacher-work, or the process of "sense-making" in which educators "develop, maintain, and justify their own logics through the telling of stories" (p.6), brings focus to teachers narratives around their action as a place to explore this tension over what constituted the moral course of action for the school. He posits that often the "job" of teaching is often conflated with the "work" of teaching, arguing that when public educators are not teaching or preparing to teach, their "work" disappears off the radar of researchers, limiting the kinds of questions that can be asked about their labor process. Instead of understanding teachers as merely executors of curriculum or disciplinarians, one must question the ways in which the moral dilemmas teachers face in their care work and activism spills beyond the bounds of the classroom and into their politics and personal lives. This "narrative work" through the telling of stories, offers a window into the coping mechanisms that teachers develop to cultivate hope and direction in a desperate educational milieu that they otherwise understand to be unjust and immoral. Their narratives around school closures and their consequent responses further offer insights into the moral and ethical dilemmas produced through their reading and enacting of resistance to closure.

I detail these ethical dilemmas as they arose throughout the year in two major sections, the first which follows up on the strategy of manipulating the racial composition of the school's student body and the "corralling of poison" in the Success Academy. The second provides a window in the crises of school representation and teacher advocacy as relational rifts in the student body worsened over the course of the school year. Together,

these sections craft an account of how the first strategy came to influence the construction of student and deservingness of the right to a public education, and subsequently, the school's right to remain its provider.

Hopelessness and Burnout: The Rising Premium on "Affective" Rewards

As the budget cuts deepened throughout the year, a discourse of hopelessness and burnout began to circulate more intensely in classrooms, hallways, and teacher professional development meetings. On the ground, overcrowded classrooms, particularly before the "leveling" in late November[11] (McCorry 2013), broken copy-machines, burnt out Smartboard bulbs, and gaping holes in ceilings streaming rain water, contributed to a palpable stress which embedded itself in the tirades of teachers (Fieldnote 10/10/13). If a classroom did have textbooks, albeit dated, three and four students often crowded around one. Without a budget to repair a caving-in roof, Johnson High, a building celebrating its 100th anniversary at the end of 2013, sealed off its asbestos ridden 4th floor. Many students and teachers complained of tight-chests to me as I sat in corners observing their classes. While I was allegedly there to observe, I acted as a sounding board to teachers trying to salvage lesson plans without paper and facing impending cuts to their healthcare and salaries. In the middle of the particularly harsh winter of AY 2013-2014, news surfaced that the district would be asking the teachers to take a 13 percent cut to their salaries and pensions as well as extending their school days and paying into their

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[11] Pennsylvania state law caps class sizes at 35 students and mandates "leveling" by October 1st where disproportionate enrollments are corrected for by the reshuffling of students and teachers across schools. Due to a confluence of factors including but not limited to the holding of state funds in the PA Department of Education and the closure of 24 neighborhood schools city-wide that caused unpredictable enrollments, Johnson High and many other neighborhood schools had classes with 35+ students. After the release of "emergency funds" in late November, the district finally "leveled" classes, allocating 4 extra teachers to Johnson High to cope with the over-enrollment of students.

healthcare costs (Graham 2014). These requests compounded a 5-year pay freeze for teachers in the district that, on average, make less on average than their suburban counterparts.

The day following the release of the request from the district was also a particularly heavy day for Ms. Allard, a 30 year old, 5-year veteran teacher, whose student told her that she had been raped and was pregnant. Ms. Allard left the class suddenly and asked me to take over. Once the bell rang, I went to the bathroom where I found her leaning against the wall and crying.

> If I thought my time was going to make one bit of difference, I would gladly donate it, but I'm just feeding a bad system. I have to play mommy, daddy, social worker, doctor, and teacher and not only am I not compensated for it, but I'm punished for it. I burn myself out and for what? They're just going to charterize this whole district anyway and pay a bunch of Teach for America types half of what I make to work 13-hour days and weekends. I love these kids but life will go on if I'm not their teacher. There will be another warm body in here when I'm gone. I'm barely making it and they want to cut our salaries 13% next year? You can't take 13% of nothing. *If this job were just about teaching, instruction, and the kids' learning, the salary would be ok. But to do everything else, plus the stress of taking on the problems of these students, I can't wear all of these extra hats and see my salary get cut.* Nobody expects anything from these kids or they would have backed it up with resources. *They don't care about them or me* and they've shown me that over and over again." (Fieldnote, 2/25/14)

Ms. Allard's despair touches on the affective dimensions of working at Johnson High with the mounting pressures of the budget crisis for staff across the school. Called to sacrifice her limited income for a district in decline, many of the teachers articulated despondency as they experienced the devaluing of not only their paid labor as instructors, but also the growing emotional labor they performed as " momm[ies], dadd[ies], social workers, [and] doctors." In subsequent conversations with Ms. Allard, she indicated that while teaching in a high need urban school like Johnson High had always required her to

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go "above and beyond" the call of duty in terms of unrecognized forms of care for students (Fieldnote, 10/12/13), mass cuts to support staffing like counselors, school psychologists, and classroom aids only exacerbated the emotional tax exacted by "wearing all of these extra hats."

Teachers certainly bemoaned the salary and healthcare benefits concessions as a product of a conspiracy to break their union and make room for the total domination of charter school networks. Yet teachers pointed more their unrecognized emotional work as they attended to the basic needs of their students while managing the stresses of deplorable conditions of the school as the budget cuts deepened in 2013-2014. This emotional work, performed within and beyond the bounds of the classroom, through the management of students' personal issues and the scramble for the basic resources to do their jobs, increased the premium for what I term the "affective rewards" of educating. I define affective rewards as the interactions and experiences that inform educators' feelings of value and efficacy. Following Downey's (2007) theory of "teacher work" as a meaning-making process that spills beyond the confines of classroom praxis, a "simultaneous battle to make meaning of their jobs and to make their jobs meaningful" (25), I suggest that the implications of the budget cut and stress of impending closure for teachers and administration, increased the premium educators placed on the affective rewards of their work. Affective rewards became one of the coping mechanisms teachers developed to salvage meaning from work they felt was being devalued by the marketized direction of the district.

In other words, facing threats to their incomes and the further deterioration of their working conditions, feeling effective and valued by their students became of greater

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importance to teachers, and figured more significantly into their plans for "saving" Johnson High. Conceptualizing affective rewards as one of the mechanisms driving teachers' to continue their work in the face of what they perceived as the decline of their craft and public education more generally, locates the spaces and interactions with students that teachers came to value in an increasingly hopeless environment. Further, it allows one to understand a branding process as not merely grounded in sending symbols to the larger marketplace of educational care and value, but a source of emotional sustenance and hope for desperate staff and students as they fought to survive as a school.

The Affective Rewards of Teaching ELLs

In my third chapter, I described the terminology deployed to depict the bifurcated social relations of Johnson High's diverse student body. While the school boasted students from a myriad of countries and linguistic backgrounds, teachers, administrators, and students alike divided the student population into two distilled groups: "ELLs" and "Americans." These categories had pseudonyms, but for the most part, participants across the board used these terms to invoke a particular set of behaviors and identifications that students belonging to each group exhibited. Staff and students alike framed ELLs, while overwhelmingly of Asian descent, as well behaved, easy to manage, and "caring" for their teachers and overall educational trajectories. Americans, conversely, were seen as deviant, violent, irreverent to authority, and "not valuing" their education. These students broke down across a range of racial categories, but mostly included African-American students and second-generation Cambodian students. However, of the native-born students, two thirds were African-American, therefore indexing a strong association between the negative behaviors of the "Americans" and

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those of African-American males in particular. Teachers also, for the most part, taught either solely ELL students in the SHELTER program, or non-ELLs, "Americans" or "urban students", in the general program. Hence, this distinction not only signified the school's two prevalent social categories, but also mapped neatly onto staff-student and student-student relationships and the curricular organization of the school.

While these categories carried weight at Johnson High throughout my preliminary fieldwork (September 2010- August 2013), and ostensibly much earlier, the increasing numbers of ELL students leading up to AY 2013-2014, as well as the budget cuts in May 2013, had implications for the ways in which these educators perceived their responsibilities and obligations to students as well as relationships with other teachers. With larger class sizes and scant assistance, having "well-behaved" students made all the difference in weathering the effects of the budget cuts. When I asked teachers who taught primarily ELL students, how the budget cuts have affected their practice, they often cited how their experience wasn't representative of the general experience of teachers at Johnson High and also the district at-large. Mr. Raymond explained,

> I feel like I'm in paradise because I, for some reason, was very lucky to get assigned to all of the ELL and international students. They're very well mannered and I don't really have discipline problems. If I do, a slap on the wrist is more than enough to set them straight. So I'm very fortunate and I don't think my interpretation of what's happening in this school under the budget cuts is accurate because I don't have *all* of the students. I don't have many of the *urban* students. (Interview, 4/10/14)

Another teacher, Mr. Darling, a history teacher in the SHELTER program, when I asked him about the teachers' reactions to over-enrollments in their classes prior to the leveling of students in November, he explained the differences in having "ELLs" versus a general class post-budget cut.

> Most people won't say anything if the kids are like *these* kids [pointing to a his classroom full of ELL students]. Mr. Raymond, even with 38 kids in his class, isn't going to say anything about the illegality of this because those kids behave. No issues. He's not a crybaby. But if it's a bad class of *American* kids, well, that's a different story. People start squawking if it's bad (Fieldnote, 11/26/13)

In both quotes, Darling and Raymond point to differential affective impacts of teaching an ELL class versus a class of "urban" or "American" youth. Understanding "American" students as requiring the expenditure of more energy to manage, each frames the teaching an "American" class as a recipe for burnout. Conversely, a class of "38 of *these* [ELL] kids", even with scarce resources, demands far less emotional energy. As teachers felt the creep of more responsibilities with less compensation, or the wearing of "extra hats" that Ms. Allard described with an impending salary and benefits cut, they couched their emotional energy in a language of scarcity as well. Mr. Raymond and Mr. Darling's testimonies underscore the valuable emotional energy saved by teachers that had SHELTER and ELL classes, and the increasing value of that energy as the labor crunch at the school level came to bear on their time.

In addition to facilitating the conservation of emotional energy for teachers, ELLs offered greater affective rewards, or increased feelings of value and efficacy in their work to students.

> **Mr. Darling**: Now the ELL kids are a little bit different than the Americans. They are forced to learn more because they must acquire the language to succeed in the work force and at home to help their parents. I see a group of people that come to America and must learn the language, and as a result, their behavior is going to be better and they're more willing to learn. Whereas the American kids, it seems like high school is passing time. When I say American kids, I mean the ones in *this* school. That's a stereotype, and maybe I'm feeding into it, but that's what I see. I'll give every kid my best, *but the ELL kids just seem to have places in teachers' hearts because they come, they respect you, they're kind. They make you feel like all of this crap in the district is worth it, that your job is worth it* (Interview, 1/8/14).

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The fact that ELL kids "come", "respect" their teachers, and are "kind" points to an affective preference for teaching ELLs, particularly in a climate where teachers like Ms. Allard feel increasingly undervalued and deprofessionalized by the district and state's treatment. By making him feel that his "job is worth it", Mr. Darling could tolerate the "crap" at the district-level. Ms. Betty, conversely, felt just the opposite about her "American students."

> The ELL kids don't tell you to go fuck yourself. The other day I had a girl who I didn't even know that was on her phone in the hallway. I told her to get off of her phone. She started cursing at me and yelling at me and I said, you still have to put your phone away. I didn't really react but she crossed the hallway to get in my face and threaten me. Then she told me to go home, get my daughter, bring her here, and she'll rumble with my daughter. I wrote this all up on a pink slip, to which to the dean, in front of the child sitting there, cause I went down to check on it, but with no staff in the office and Mr. Keo freaking out with no help, nothing got done about it. So yeah, it pays to have ELL kids when you're getting no support from anywhere else. Even if they wanted to support you, they can't. (Interview, 12/17/13)

In a sense, the feeling of value induced by work with ELL students, compensated Mr. Darling and Ms. Betty for their mounting frustration with the implications of the district's budget crisis. Mr. Darling highlighted the feelings of efficacy and respect from ELL students, and Ms. Betty, conversely, discussed the emotional costs of teaching students that bring negative energy to class. Ms. Betty especially points to the lack of administrative capacity to support her in these moments, therefore compounding the costs of managing difficult students. In other words the affective rewards of ELLs became of greater import, as the struggle to make meaning of his work in a beleaguered district simultaneously grew more difficult.

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Educating Everyone?

In Mr. Darling's excerpt, he does not assign blame to the native-born students for their behavior and even acknowledges that he might be "feeding into" a "stereotype" them. However, he admits that the stereotype accurately fits his experience in his "this school." In saying this, Mr. Darling draws the distinction between Americans students at Johnson High, a neighborhood high school, and American students across a progressively stratified district. With larger numbers of charter schools and the steady presence of selective magnet schools, teachers and administrators harbored a growing sentiment, alluded to also in Chapter 2, that they were receiving the district's students with the greatest needs. Resenting having to take the students that charters and magnet schools either would not accept, or would eject for a series of transgressions, educators would argue that it was namely students with behavioral issues and low academic aspirations unfairly earning neighborhood schools their poor reputations.

Many teachers like Mr. Darling, however, struggled to reconcile their mission as a neighborhood school to "educate everyone" with the understanding that accepting everyone would have implications for the fate of their school as well as their day-to-day struggle to implement curriculum without resources. In the former section I described how teachers perceived the affective rewards of teaching ELLs as far greater than American students. I also argued that in a school with insufficient resources, emotional energy and affective rewards like demonstrations of respect and gratitude became increasingly valuable forms of exchange with students. In turn, the enrollment of ELLs and the value of their behavior as both a statistic as well as an affective commodity in the classroom dramatically impacted the relationships between students and teachers. The

enrollment of ELLs especially prompted questions about the ethics of ELL-ification and

its implications for educating "all" of Johnson High's students.

> **Mr. Cassidy**: In this school, I see the American kids losing out a lot. Between me and you, I really think that they want to keep this school open and do the right thing, but the only way to do that is to make it an ELL school. I do believe that because the kids actually feel that. The American kids say that…Oh, yeah! They ask, "Are they making this an ELL school?" And I always tell them that they can't because it's an neighborhood high school but ya know, what they can do is *just keep making the student numbers bigger and bigger* and a lot of these kids are finally going to say, "You know what, I'm going to go somewhere else." *They're driving them out*. Ya know? (Interview, 3/19/14)

Teachers like Mr. Cassidy faced a moral dilemma in terms of the "right" course of action

to keep the school open. Mr. Cassidy understands that the fate of the school hinges on

whether they can enroll students that will improve both their numbers and climate

statistics, but he also sees how a shift in the school's identity might alienate American

students that already attend the school. This could also hurt their numbers as a school

catering to ELLs risks "driving [the Americans] out." In a conversation with another

teacher, he lamented, "We have to remember sometimes that there are a significant

number of non-ELL students here that we still have to educate. We can't leave them

behind either" (Fieldnote 3/4/14). By branding the school as a "good school" to the

district, one deserving of keeping open, the teachers saw risk in compromising the

mission of the "neighborhood school", to provide a public good to all children. However,

with scarce resources and the threat of closure ever-present in the decision-making of the

teachers and administrators, building a school culture around addressing the needs of

"American" kids seemed implausible.

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Questioning the Success Academy

> **Mr. Keo**: The idea of the Success Academy was you take all of the students who are overage, under credits, behavior, that don't go to class, who hang out in the gym. You round them up instead of sending them from class to class, you keep them there and you send the teachers in there. As incentive for them, they get to come here a little later and they get to leave a little earlier. And we would buy a program—computer-based program—A+ program that they can actually work at their own pace. They earn credits with the support of the teachers there. I think the idea—instead of having these kids walk around, grow older, and drop out, they would have the opportunity to bond amongst themselves and among the same teachers. They know that they're not superstars, but at least someone cares for them. It was successful in the first year, but with the budget cuts that wiped out my whole special education department, no common planning time, no plan to meet, the whole program became very gray." (Interview, 5/5/14)

The moral dilemma of "educating everyone" manifested itself nowhere else more strongly than in the institutionalization and maintenance of the Success Academy. The initial intent behind starting the Success Academy in AY 2012-2013 was to offer a more personalized space for students with "behavioral management problems" to receive a modified curriculum and truncated school day. The teachers would ideally have special education backgrounds, trained to implement individual education plans (IEPs) and manage 'problematic' behavior in a circumscribed area of the building. Students would feel "cared for" by teachers that were dedicated to bringing them up to speed, as Mr. Keo explained in the opening quotation, given the opportunity to atone for their missing credits and poor academic performance in a supportive environment.

However, with the budget cuts, the implementation of the program suffered, raising questions of legality and equity, but also the necessity of continuing the program with limited staff. Mr. Keo underscored the loss of teachers in the special education department as a key consequence of the budget cuts.

Mr. Glyn: The Success Academy really backfired. It really did. Last year when we had a couple of other teachers, it was a real program to nurture these kids. With no faculty this year, it's a holding cell. It's to keep them out of the general population because if they were in classes with 40 kids, it would be chaos. Chaos! This is a budgetary issue too because people say you can't throw money at a problem, but money would have helped to fix this! We would have had different people down there and we could have had actual programs instead of A+. I mean, what is that? You don't want to deal with a kid in any capacity so you just stick them in front of a computer. That's what I'm bugged about. There's no educating them socially and emotionally. That's a perfect example of how the budget cuts are having an impact on our ability to educate the kids who need us most. (Interview, 4/9/14)

Mr. Glyn describes the Success Academy as "holding cell" post-budget cut, a place to keep students out of the "general population" as to stave off ensuing chaos. With so few staff, the necessity for the Success Academy persisted, however at the expense of its students' educational quality. To preserve order and learning climate for the "general population", a population increasingly comprised of ELL students, "problem kids" would have to go without. Another teacher, Mr. Raymond, lamented the message sent to the students of the Success Academy, and the rest of the student body by allowing the program to continue.

It's a necessary evil, I guess. Ethically, it feels kind of wrong, because what you're doing is saying hey, these kids are failures, so we're going to isolate them and keep them from poisoning the rest of the groups. It makes sense and it's very pragmatic. It's hard to say that these students will become nothing and that we just need to keep them away from the rest of the kids so that somebody can learn. And we'll pass and graduate them but they're not at any kind of level that they're going to be functioning well. It does not seem completely ethical and I'm sure there are legal ramifications for it. Our climate numbers look great, but our school is failing to educate everyone. So it's that kind of shortsightedness that's hurting us too. (Interview, 4/10/14)

Mr. Raymond interpreted the tracking of students through the Success Academy as a threat to the overall charge of the school to "educate everyone." By isolating the "problem kids", the school was able to control the damage done by the school's forced

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enrollment of "American" students, mitigating the risk of behavior problems and violent incidents. However, in doing this, teachers and administration felt that they shirked their duty to provide equitable educational opportunities to the entire study body. Mr. Raymond's excerpt distills a deep, underlying concern among the staff that the "shortsightedness" of strategies focused purely on improving climate numbers would implicate their moral responsibility to treat all of their students as pupils to be educated instead of risks to be managed.

The American vs. ELL Faculty Rifts

Many staff throughout the year voiced grievances in teacher professional development meetings and in their interviews, drawing attention to the necessity of meeting differential student needs but also the climate and school identity issues resulting from the growing chasm between these students. They cited the budget cuts as damaging for opportunities for contact between ELL students. Aside from the loss of funds for extracurricular activities and elective classes like music where "American", or non-ELL, and "ELL" students could mingle, one teacher, Mr. Cassidy, discussed the consequence of expanding class sizes and loss of teacher labor for mediating cross-generational relationships.

> Yeah, because the class sizes are bigger, you're just running around trying to get things together. A lot of teachers now are trying to teach as many kids as they can in that 40 or 50 minute frame and putting so much, like 40 kids sometimes, it's hard to do the fun things. If you have a really integrated class, it's hard to say, "Oh, today we're not going to do equations. We're going to do 1v1s and rotate." Teachers can't afford to do that anymore. We need smaller class sizes and less testing to do that.

Mr. Cassidy points to a few issues that staff across both the SHELTER and general programs highlighted. The lack of "fun" things to do, those not pertaining to test

preparation, made it difficult to cultivate a cohesive school culture where students could build on a common identity. Many teachers especially felt that without fieldtrips, classes like music and art, and school-wide events, the chasm between the "American" and "ELL" populations widened considerably.

With the growing number of ELL students, the number of teachers dedicated solely to the instruction of ELL students also experienced a dramatic increase. Similar to the students, the bifurcated student identity structure of ELL v. American mapped neatly onto the teaching staff as well with more than half of the teachers working with primarily ELL students and the other half with the native-born population. As the budget crisis of AY '13-14 escalated stress levels with swelling class sizes and workloads, tensions arose between teachers of primarily ELL students and teachers of the native-born. Perceptions circulated among teachers of "American" students that ELL teachers "had it easy" and did not inherit the same disciplinary issues in overcrowded classrooms. Mr. Cassidy, a Success Academy teacher, describes the staff rift.

> Well, there's some tension I think because sometimes when the ELL teachers get on their soapbox and say, like, when we're talking about discipline or kids running around in the hallways or terrorizing these congested classes, some of the ELL teachers will say, "Oh, well I'm out in the hallway and I tell these kids to move on and they don't listen to me but MY KIDS, they come right into class and they sit and do their work." So, they kind of separate them without separatin' em, ya see? "My kids" ya know, or "our kids", so it's kind of like "our kids" and their kids. (Interview, 3/19/14)

ELL teachers, conversely, oftentimes villainized the native-born students and accused their teachers of ignoring incidents of native-born students bullying ELL students. After an incident one day where an African-American student shoved a Bhutanese student into

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a locker in front of an African-American teacher, Ms. Betty, a white ELL teacher, complained to me in the privacy of her classroom.

> I just don't understand how you can't see the humanity in your students. They work with these tough American kids and they lose their empathy for *my kids*. They just don't understand them or what their backgrounds are. They're Philly teachers, the kinds of people that have a pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps type of approach. And Mr. Keo, well, he was a refugee, but now is too so afraid that people will think he's favoring "the Asians." That's a very real thing here, especially now with so many ELLs coming in. The American teachers think we baby the Asian kids and that they get everything and the Black kids get nothing. (Fieldnote, 10/14/13)

Embedded in Ms. Betty's grievance is a racialized critique of alliances between students and faculty. She frames teachers that taught mostly native-born students American as callous, not empathetic to the needs of her students, and hardened by years of working with "these tough American kids." American, in this case, is synonymous with native-born students exhibiting the behaviors associated with African-American boys, and ELL, with first-generation Asian students. She alludes to Mr. Keo, in spite of his background as a Khmer refugee, as paralyzed in his management of the race politics of these tensions. He explains the predicament he confronts as he mediates heightened racial tensions among students and staff.

> I sometimes try and convince myself it's only in my head that I'm seeing it, but it's happened too many times. I had one of my supervisors ask me in a meeting, "Are you trying to convert this into an all-Asian school?" I said, excuse me? I run a neighborhood high school. I don't have control over that. And the teacher tensions, I mean, that's the elephant in the room I'm trying to tackle. I want people to understand this is not about *who* you're teaching; it's about *what* you're teaching. It does not help knowing that we have no common planning time for them to meet to plan accordingly and build relationships. The ELL teachers all specialize in working with the ELL students and the American teachers, you know, teach the American students. We try to get everybody into the same pod, but it's just like they're in here, and they're in there. No they're not mixing, and I see that. *I want to resolve that tension but I don't know how.* (Interview, 5/5/14)

Already fielding accusations by community members and district-management that he is trying to "convert [Johnson High] into an all-Asian school", Mr. Keo pointed to the underbelly of attracting ELL students in order to boost student numbers: strained staff relations. His identity as a former Asian ELL student, and now an Asian principal of a school with growing numbers of Asian students, complicates his leadership role as advocate for two disparate interest groups. Plagued by anxiety around the school closure threat, he internalizes the imperative to build the school's reputation around its ELL program, with the aim of improving climate statistics to protect the Johnson High from district-level scrutiny.

Yet, at the same time, as teachers' working conditions worsen under the budget cuts, perceptions over how the administration and staff were distributing scarce resources and privileges between ELL and American staff emerged. These resources did not just amount to materials and supplies, but the energies that affective rewards of that staff perceived stemmed differentially from working with ELL versus native-born students. Mr. Keo acknowledged that this is the "elephant in the room", but without resources and time to support teachers dealing with the bulk of the behavior problems, he is at a loss, admitting, "I want to resolve that tension but I don't know how."

Teacher Professional Development: Exposing the Fault Lines

The fault lines between ELLs and American teachers became more glaring in fraught conversations at teacher professional development meetings (PDs). Of the four held throughout the year, the administration dedicated large chunks of each to discuss the implications of increased enrollment of "problem kids" from charter schools and other district schools, as well as their implications for school climate. At a PD in February

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2014, many of teachers that worked mostly with the native-born population voiced

criticism that they felt unsupported by the administration in their classrooms when then

disciplined their students. The conversation involved four teachers of solely native-born

students (Ms. Alexis, Ms. Ralley, Ms. Abruzzi and Mr. Cassidy) and the principal, Mr.

Keo.

> **Ms. Alexis**: If there are rules, then they need to be enforced. If a student threatens me or someone else, we can't just have them get a 30-minute detention. That's not appropriate. I'm saying that the school climate is slipping.
> **Ms. Ralley**: I mean, these kids are disrupting every other kid in that classroom. We've discussed this, and you said come up with an alternative plan. Guess what, I don't have one. What do you do with the kid who's suspended and nobody comes to pick them up, who just comes back to the classroom and disrupts all of the other kids that can barely keep it together themselves? I don't know what the answer is, but this year it's getting worse, and *only some of us* have to deal with it.
> **Mr. Keo**: We are dealing with more kids that have problems that are transferring into our school from other places. We've been working on it and trying to find other options, but we can only do so much. We have to keep these kids here because everyone dumps them on us. We don't have the resources to have in-house suspensions anymore and the state limits the number of out-of-school suspensions that we can have. I thought I would have more autonomy, but with no resources, it's hard.
> **Ms. Abruzzi**: But it jeopardizes the education of everyone else in that classroom, especially the general population.
> **Mr. Cassidy**: We're just in a bad spot. We're getting these kids that are coming out of these charter schools and then we can't move them no matter what they do because there's nowhere to move them to. By law we have to take them.
> **Mr. Keo**: I think the other issue is that these charter schools have lots of mental health services, but we don't have that and there's nobody here to work with these really tough kids. (Recording, Teacher PD, 2/5/14)

The issue of inheriting "problem kids" from other schools (i.e. magnet, charter, parochial)

throughout the year introduced further complexity to the divide between ELL teachers,

American teachers, and the administration. Ms. Ralley stresses, "This year it's getting

worse and only some of us have to really deal with it." As resources to support

disciplinary mechanisms like in-school suspensions waned under the budget cuts,

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teachers of the native-born students felt that they were unfairly called to handle the issues associated with "problem kids" while ELL teachers classrooms' remained relatively unscathed. Mr. Keo laments the lack of resources like mental health services for the "really tough kids" and the bureaucratic red tape around remedies like in-school and out-of-school suspensions. He admits that "with no resources" it's difficult to find effective solutions to Ms. Ralley's grievance. He also draws attention to the absurdity of charter schools with resources "dumping" students onto neighborhood schools that lack state-funded supports.

"Problem Kids" and In-school Suspensions

The previous section exposes the widening rift between staff teaching native-born students and those teaching ELL students. With the budget cuts and a lack of support staff, teachers saw the emotional costs of teaching native-born students, particular those with behavioral issues, as higher and disproportionately falling on some teachers' shoulders and not others. To return to the related issues of school climate data and the threat of closure, teachers of American students also felt discriminated against in their handling of what they perceived to be an unfair workload. In another PD in late April, an assistant superintendent and Mr. Keo jointly approached the staff with a document that ranked the top five high schools across the city in terms of annual in-school suspensions. Johnson High ranked at the top of the list. In-school suspensions were the preferred method of disciplining students to preserve attendance numbers. Instead of sending students home, "in-house" removed "problem students" from the classroom and held them in a discipline room, not ironically, in the basement next to the Success Academy.

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Without an assistant principal or classroom aides, and overcrowded classes, teachers of

American students felt that in-school suspensions were their only tool to maintain order.

> **Mr. Keo**: We made it to the point where we are the highest school with in-school suspensions in the city of Philadelphia. So in-house suspensions, if you look at this, we made it to the top where [The Superintendent] actually asked him what the hell just happened at Johnson High.
> **Mr. Cassidy**: I think that we need to take into account that a lot of these numbers are inflated. If you look at the in-houses, I would say that 90 percent of those are the same kids.
> **Mr. Keo**: At Dr. Hite's level, he sees the number and it goes to the associate superintendent and then it comes to me. *They don't look further than the number and that's a problem based on where we stand on a closures list.*
> **Ms. Betty**: It always feels like you get penalized when you do the right thing[12]. Doesn't it feel like that every time? You can't say that these problems aren't happening in the other schools! They're just not doing anything about it.
> **Mr. Rudolph**: This could be one possible read though. Maybe we're being more vigilant in enforcing the disciplinary standards so perhaps our numbers look higher because of that. Is that one reason that our numbers look higher?
> **Mr. Keo**: We can't speculate because it doesn't matter. They see the numbers, so we need to give them numbers. (Recording, 4/5/14)

Frustration mounted in the voices of the teachers as they felt "penalized" for doing the

"right thing." The idea of not being able to "win" permeated the remainder of the

conversations at the PD, many of them complaining that their only option to cope with

the spike in behavioral problems without additional resources was to send students to "in-

house." By sending students home through an out-of-school suspension, the teachers

damaged their attendance numbers, another key statistic considered in the school closure

survey. Backed into a corner, teachers like Mr. Rudolph beckoned Mr. Keo to "read" the

statistics differently, to consider that maybe the teachers were actually doing their jobs by

enforcing "disciplinary standards."

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[12] Ms. Betty is referring to the disciplining of students by enforcing rules with in and out of school suspensions.

However, Mr. Keo could only entertain the teachers' protests, not act on them. Citing "numbers" as the bottom-line criteria for the death or survival of the school, Mr. Keo dejectedly meets the teachers' protests with an inevitable conclusion: "They see numbers, so we need to give them numbers." The administration elided issues of school stratification, resource scarcity, and support for the schools' neediest students, issues which the teachers voice as central to foregone production of in-school suspension numbers, and instead placed the onus back on teachers to improve those numbers without subsequent support. Pressure from the district to keep those numbers down without considering the multitude of factors influencing their production, reinforced Mr. Keo's fears that, at the end of day, the decision to keep Johnson High open will hinge on the same blind, "evidence-based" process. Regardless of whether he wanted to support his staff or not, Mr. Keo felt that he no choice but to accept the ultimatum handed to him by the superintendent to improve the school's climate numbers.

Following the PD that day, I sat by the fence in the schoolyard with Mr. Keo where he admitted that he felt not only burnt out, but also morally compromised.

> This numbers game is just too much sometimes. I've gotten our attendance numbers up, which is a good thing because it keeps us open, but it's a bad thing because these knuckleheads come from other schools and [District office] doesn't support us with the staff. Do you know that [charter school in the same neighborhood] has a school culture administrator and four assistant principals and they still don't have a good school environment? *They send all of their problem kids to us and we still outperform them with a quarter of the staff. I want to serve everyone, even the problem kids, but I can't! Not when we're evaluated by these standards with no support.* I haven't heard anything about us closing recently but there's always the rumor that we are on the list. I don't know what's going to happen in May - probably something similar to last year until they bleed us dry by 2017 and 90 percent of the city schools are charters except for the [magnet schools]. There will be nobody left to fight. Even my union - we've accepted a freeze these last two years and this year we're taking a salary cut. I'm just tired. I'm not sleeping. (Fieldnote, 4/5/14)

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The exhaustion in Mr. Keo's voice was apparent as he described the moral dilemma that the "numbers" game imposed on his leadership. By improving statistics in one area, enrollment and attendance, Mr. Keo struggled with keeping climate statistics in shape. This quote is rife with a critique of school stratification, what he perceives as the root of this issue. Calling attention to well-staffed charter schools that eject "problem kids" which ultimately land on Johnson High's doorstep, he felt that his hands were tied in terms of serving them without support staff like assistant principals and counselors. He also felt guilt in placing the responsibility on teachers of native-born students to manage students with behavior problems without the proper supports. The energies that educating these students required, compounded by pay and benefits cuts, compounded feelings of burnout among teachers. Returning to the strategy of rejecting students with problematic behavior from outside the catchment and confining 'problem kids' he was forced to accept from the school's catchment in the Success Academy (see Chapter 3, pg. 18), Mr. Keo mourns the fact that he feels he has no other option but to treat these students as risks instead of as children in need of support. These risks took the form of not only poor climate data, but also the risks to the affective rewards required to sustain staff as they endured deplorable working conditions and hostile politics at the state and district levels for public schools and their teachers.

The Multicultural Day Debacle

By May 28th of AY 2013-2014, the principals' union had already accepted pay and benefits cuts, and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), the teacher's union, was in the midst of a battle to stave off a 13 percent salary reduction and cuts to their

healthcare coverage. This prospect compounded a 5-year pay freeze. Morale among staff

was at an all-time low as teachers questioned their future in a district that they sensed was

trying to "drive [them] out" (Fieldnote, 5/28/14). Attempting to "salvage" what was left

of an "ungodly year" for the students, teachers dug into their own pockets through

donations and fundraising to support "Multicultural Week", an annual school celebration

(Fieldnote, 4/30/14). Multicultural Week consisted of two half-days, one of which was

dedicated to watching musical, dance, and cultural performances in the auditorium,

prepared by overwhelmingly ELL students, and another half-day of food sampling where

teachers provided students with small stipends to cook tasting menus of foods from their

countries. The following passage comes from an extended fieldnote from the cultural

performances day.

> The day of cultural performances turned out to be more controversial than
> I anticipated. Sitting in on a class of mostly 9th grade 'American' students in the
> morning before the performances, Ms. London fielded grumbles from students
> that felt that the performances did not reflect their culture (Fieldnote, 5/28/14).
> Walking into the auditorium where the performances were taking place was a
> clear divide. The front two thirds of the room consisted of mostly ELL students,
> while classes composed of mostly of American students to sat in the back. As I sat
> by the wall, chips of paint and plaster fell onto my shoulders from the decaying
> auditorium ceiling. A tearful ELL teacher, Ms. Dowd, grabbed my shoulder with
> tears in her eyes as the stream of students carrying their countries' flag streamed
> down the aisles. Bollywood music, Vietnamese, Indonesian bamboo instrument
> songs, Spanish rap, AA breakdancing, Chinese pop, and Burmese ethnic songs
> and dances induced resounding applause from the crowd. There were break
> dances, Mexican and Karen-Burmese rapping, and a poetry reading in Chinese by
> an African-American senior female. A Pakistani senior girl sang a song in Urdu
> and the Nepali boys erupted with shouts of encouragement, recognizing the words
> from a language so similar to their own.
> The two culminating performances included a Bollywood tandem dance
> by a Nepali junior male and an Indian sophomore girl and 15-person Nepali crew
> with one Karen freshman female putting on a hip hop dance. The sole Karen girl
> admitted to me after that her Karen friends' performances were too "calm" for her
> and that she preferred the hip-hop "feeling." The audience throughout was mostly
> quiet, captivated by the performances, but cheering raucously at their conclusions.

Ms. Lavery, another ELL teacher, looked over at me and asked, "Why can't we have more of this and less testing?" Another teacher circled the room, snapping photos to post on the website and hall by the main office. Mr. Keo and other teachers sitting on the sides beamed with pride. Exiting the auditorium, I said to Ms. London, "My heart was full today. I have to remember days like today, because they were so rare this year. If only there were more opportunities to celebrate these students." She remained silent, turned, and walked away (Fieldnote, 5/28/14)

The cultural day, while a point of pride for the school, and a bright spot in a year devoid of extracurricular activities, also exposed the effects of the shifting school identity as a result of the ELL-ification of the school. Admittedly, my own involvement as a participant observer in mostly ELL and shelter classes throughout the year positioned me to admire the resilience of the staff and students to put on such a performance. I was also more familiar with the performers as most of them were ELL students that I had worked with in classrooms. My interaction with Ms. London in the latter half of the fieldnote did not go without recourse. Ms. London, a teacher of both SHELTER and general population history classes, later that evening, emailed me with critique of the event.

At some point, I'd like to give you another perspective. Your feelings about yesterday may be tempered if you sat in my seat. I was in the back - by the section where mostly African-American students sat. I also heard a lot of "I'm not going to that" in my 2nd period class. It is two schools - the ELLs (note who performed - not reflective of the entire school) and the US born. There is no effort by administration to address it - it is taboo to bring it up. There is a lot of frustration by the non-ELL teachers. Anyway, while yesterday was nice for the students who participated, from the "back of the room" (or of the bus...) it was very different. (Email Correspondence, 5/29/14)

After receiving this email, I found myself experiencing the same kind of tension permeating the staff. I had made an inadvertent comment in a moment of pride for the students I had come to know and love during my three years at Johnson High, but had simultaneously angered a teacher that saw the performances as "not reflective of the entire school", and actively marginalizing the native-born and largely Black population.

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In her email, she draws an explicit connection between the "back of the room" and the "back of the bus", tethering the spatial dimensions of the assembly to a larger critique of the racism that textured the treatment of Black youth in the school as the ELL population grew. In an interview with another teacher briefly following the event, Mr. Glyn echoed Ms. London's concerns about the growing chasm between the native-born (American) and ELL students, as the ELL population became the majority of the student body.

> It could have been a great opportunity for the whole school to get involved in something like that and bring the whole school together a little bit, but instead there's this sense that culturally there are some other aspects of the school that are a little bit bleached out. Like we have this richness and multiculturalism in the school, it's unbelievable! But are we being truly inclusive? Some people are seen as having legitimate culture versus an American kind of whateverness. We want people to see our "culture" so that they won't close us down but it's a specific kind of culture they want them to see, ya know? (Interview, 6/3/14)

Mr. Glyn introduces the idea of "legitimate culture" versus "American culture", a notion that Ms. London understood as divisive in terms of representation in the multicultural performance day as well as the strategy of marketing the school as a haven for ELL students. Though many of the teachers voiced that turning the school into one which attracted high numbers of ELL students to both bolster numbers and improve climate statistics was a strategy of necessity, a public educators, they felt conflicted by the ultimate consequences of the school's identity shift. In being "multicultural", first generation immigrant youth became the face of Johnson High, oftentimes at the expense of the native-born students, two thirds of which were Black. Mr. Glyn refers to perceptions around American youth as "bleached out" culturally, or a kind of cultural "whateverness" that was dismissed in favor of celebrating students from other countries.

Through the marketing of the school's mission as a supportive environment for ELL students, the administration and teachers exploited cultural politics to as a resource to fuel positive perceptions of the school as "diverse." However, as teachers like Mr. Glyn and Ms. London point out, this drawing on culture as a resource legitimated particular student types over others. This problem manifested itself through the fraught spatial dynamics of the multicultural performance assembly, the relations between staff teaching ELLs and those teaching the general population, as well as relationships between American and ELL peers.

<p style="text-align:center">********************************</p>

> **Mr. Keo**: Are the students affected by the cuts? Absolutely. Some are more than others of course because the cuts take the special education support, making them the most vulnerable. We're losing the resources. I think the ELL population is doing pretty well here in this school. We didn't lose any students. In fact, the ELL population gained more in this school because I've allocated I guess—I'm more biased toward the ELLs because I was one myself. They've gained more support because we also have more dynamic ELL teachers who help bring in resources from the outside. The regular ed students too, are also being affected because we're limited on supplies and classroom assistance.   (Interview, 5/5/14)

Teachers and administrators across the school, even those that taught primarily ELLs, often said that they felt that the impact of the budget cuts and school closures had disproportionately adverse impact on the native born students of the school, primarily African-American students that made up the majority of the native-born at Johnson High. In Chapter 3 I argued that the strategies to improve quality hinged on two overlapping processes of value creation and risk management through the ELL-ification of the school and the exclusionary enrollment and tracking practices of students with behavioral issues.

Throughout this chapter I have sought to answer my third research question by illustrating the dilemmas in educators' ethics, purpose, and praxis that surface when neighborhood schools seek to brand their schools around selective student populations.

Given that school closures implicate districts like Philadelphia's suffering from fiscal crises that compound the trauma of school closures, I drew on Downey's (2007) theory of teacher work to explore branding as not only a process that seeks to create value in neighborhood school deemed substandard in urban districts stratified by charter and magnet schools, but also as means to convince down-trodden educators that their work is meaningful. Many teachers articulated a profound sense of burnout and hopelessness, citing pay and benefits cuts amidst a background of intensifying standards without resources, demands on their time, and imminent threat to their livelihoods (via closure) as responsible for their demoralization. Struggling to make sense of their predicament and fighting to salvage import from their labor and care, administrators and principals placed higher premiums on their students' demonstrations of gratitude, respect, and effort. In other words, the "affective rewards" stemming from positive, energizing interactions with students became the lynchpin of sustaining their work in the face of what many perceived as attacks to the integrity of their profession.

The "meaning-making" process is not unique to the craft of teaching, as it pervades many forms of care work. What I argue in this chapter is that branding the school around ELL students accomplished more than merely giving the school a marketable reputation. The unstable and desperate state of affairs induced by the district's fiscal crisis and impending plans to consolidate schools, precipitated a staff-wide trauma for which the affective rewards of working with ELL students served as the antidote.

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Though many teachers pointed to the implicit racism is favoring ELLs in their preferences for and treatment of their students, surviving the grueling days required minimizing the expense of negative energy and maximizing feelings of efficacy. They admitted that under different circumstances – a district climate and school environment with adequate resources, compensation, and staff morale – that they might have more patience and care to offer students with greater needs. Yet with growing responsibilities in their personal lives and classrooms, compounded by existential fears of the future unemployment, persisting required distancing themselves from sources of stress.

In turn, the branding process created a moral economy that traded on the affect produced by positive educator-student interactions with ELL students. If one likened the school to a company that not only branded itself to broaden its consumer base but to also expand employee satisfaction, ELL-ification and risk management accomplished both goals. A school with a hopeful trajectory, bolstered by an atmosphere of customers' praise and appreciation for their work, enabled teachers to tolerate what they perceived as the "district's bullshit" and allowing the branding process to continue (Field note, 11/5/13).

However, the consumer-producer relationship did not laminate as neatly onto traditional notions of student-public educator relations at Johnson. First, if one employs the market metaphor, companies the produce commodities tend to have control over their inputs and materials. Many teachers voiced that an illusion of control existed at the district-level as officials expected the school to deliver a quality "product", evaluated vis-à-vis quantification, without the kinds of resources, supports, and autonomy afforded to privately managed schools like charters. Second, if markets are predicated on choice,

both consumers through purchasing and producers through branding effectively "choose" one another. Many students and teachers noted that the core mission of the neighborhood school was free and unfettered access to public education for *all students*. Even in their efforts to behave like a business, the district still required the school to admit all students within their catchment, ultimately mitigating the "choice" both students and teachers felt around their school and students. Teachers of native-born students highlighted these discrepancies in their frustration of ELL teachers' "easier jobs" and Mr. Keo in the opening vignette where he condemned the district:

> You devalue the work we do with the toughest kids, the ones that are hardest to get to, the ones that nobody is looking out for….What's happening is we're dismantling public education piece by piece. We've made it into a commodity and the irony of it all is that the kids at the bottom don't have any choice, even though we're supposedly all about "choice" (Fieldnote, 1/28/14).

These educators' narratives and actions, or the process of sense making that informed the school's branding strategies, reveals that when administrators and teachers' work shifts in scope and scale from pedagogic and democratic to managerial and entrepreneurial, their praxis damages the compassion and care available for the students' with the greatest emotional needs. By understanding teachers' labor as part of a care economy that trades in affect, one can see the moral dilemmas that surface when marketization forces schools and educators to frame their students in absolute terms of risk and value. Backed into a corner by the threat of closure, these educators reluctantly and remorsefully employed these strategies in an effort to "save" the school for the students they believed would sustain their numbers and their declining energies.

In the following chapter I delve deeper into a different economy of service provision that the school created to signify school value and consequently attract higher

enrollments: partnerships with non-profit organizations. As the fiscal crisis worsened in the district from 2011 to 2013, these private partners came to play an increasingly central role in filling gaps in resources and labor. However, these organizations also had tapered missions and targeted student populations based on their or the funders' theory of the schools' problems. This next chapter therefore examines both another branding mechanism and the quandaries it generated for equitable governance and opportunity at Johnson High.

CHAPTER 5: FRAUGHT COLLABORATION: PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS IN CRISIS

"The Vultures Come Heavy"

In spite of Johnson High's missing guidance counselor, nurse, and adequate staffing, the school boasted 16 "community partnerships" with a host of philanthropic, non-profit, and for-profit organizations. Mr. Drew, a part-time coordinator of a non-profit organization, Guitars and Hoops, highlights the strange bedfellow relationship that his organization and other partners developed with Johnson High as fiscal conditions worsened in the district.

> We're not really hustling for that because we have so many kids. We're actually getting 9 more slots next month to meet the demand. Our program is growing like crazy because our utilization is through the roof. We can't even get students to not come when it's snowing. We're like, no, you can't come, there's no school! I teach guitar, piano, coach soccer, and also do urban farming. *I mean, yeah, like any decaying object, the vultures come heavy. Just being a vulture myself, you know, it's kind of like a carcass. The school system is already dead so we're all just scrambling to feed on what's left of it.* (Interview, 1/30/14)

Mr. Drew discussed at length in his interview how austerity policies like school closures and budget cuts across the district, policies that framed neighborhood schools as disposable, created a dual-imperative for schools to both fill chronic resource gaps in labor and supplies as well as to market the school through programming to potential students as well as the district. Comparing the partners to "vultures…feeding on what's left" of a dying public school system, partners also wielded the crisis as an opportunity to demonstrate "impact" and justify the significance of their continued presence. Moreover, the imperative to "save the school" through partnerships factored heavily into the administration's school branding plan. Each principal saw partnering service-providers as promoting a culture of opportunity for students as well as building political capital with

well-connected individuals that had influence at the city and district levels. The district's own efforts to facilitate the partnering of non-profit organizations in its resurrection of the Office of Strategic Partnerships further reinforced administrators' understanding of partners as a means to demonstrate "quality" to district-level auditors looking to close schools.

While Johnson High did work with a major partner to offer career-oriented curriculum throughout the last fifteen years, until 2011, it was the only consistent partner working in the building. The district also facilitated this partnership, linking Career Ready, this particular partner, to the school in order to build an integrated curriculum through federal funding that targeted monies toward career readiness. However, the number of independently established partners increased dramatically after Johnson's placement on the school closures list in May of 2011, attracting upwards of 13 additional partners (Interview, 2/28/14). Many organizations also deepened their resource and labor commitments following the budget cuts in May 2013 (Interview, 3/11/14). The dire circumstances stemming from the budget crisis therefore mobilized and justified the presence of private entities in the school. These 16 "public-private partnerships" (PPPs) were therefore forged in response to different dimensions of crisis, driven by school's need for labor, resources, and political allies that many of the leadership of these non-profits organizations maintained, as well as the non-profits' own needs to frame their services as critical to their funding stakeholders. Under these unprecedented conditions, partners at Johnson High had an almost unfettered freedom to pursue their organizations' mission, allocate resources, and dramatically influence the cultural politics of the school's branding process.

Public-Private Partnerships in Education

Scholars have termed public-private partnerships in education as "the new mode of educational governance" (Robertson et al. 2012), a medium which ranges from corporate support for school reform (Bhanji 2012), for-profit and non-profit school management contracting (Bartlett et al. 2002; Cucchiara, Gold, and Simon 2011; Cucchiara 2013; Koyama 2010), philanthropic interventions in schools (Brown 2012; Reckhow and Snyder 2014; van Fleet 2012), and "community schools" where organizations tied to health and adult literacy, offer family-centered programming (Jacobson and Blank 2011). Extant scholarship has however largely focused on the relative value or danger of relying on PPPs in furthering educational improvement without adequately depicting how politico-economic shifts in funding and policy agendas are currently shaping PPPs' role in educational provision nor the internal politics of public schools (Smith and Wohlstetter 2006). Further, little is known about the ways in which increases in private organizations' coordination with schools in crisis are affecting the school governance and distribution of educational resources.

This chapter explores PPPs as a resource garnering and marketing strategy for "failing" urban schools. I examine Johnson High's reliance on 16 non-profit partnerships throughout three years of continual cutbacks and closure threats as part of the larger project in urban public education to brand schools within expanding educational marketplaces as well as an index of the increasing privatization of public services within public institutions (Katz 2010). I targeted five partners with deep resource commitments to the school to study the paradox that emerged when partners became embedded in school's survival strategy. For, on one hand, Johnson High as a public school was

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constitutionally mandated to provide "a thorough and efficient education for all" and was

held to strict standards of accountability for achieving this mandate (Education Law

Center, 2014). Yet, at the same time, school leadership desperate for support, relied on

PPPs that, by their very design, served students selectively and lacked accountability to

school leadership. This dilemma implies two central questions at the heart of this chapter

that relate to my second and third research questions (Chapter 1, 37): 1) How have

austerity and school competition shifted the role of PPPs in neighborhood schools? 2)

What are the implications of relying on PPPs as both marketing mechanisms as well as

core public education service providers for ensuring equitable educational access and

opportunities for vulnerable student populations?

I conceptualize how the schools' need for private partnerships has become part of

a broader strategy to bolster the traditional neighborhood and charter schools' appeal and

reputation through external programming in order to attract larger enrollments. However,

the forging of partnerships is also a product of a fiscal and existential crisis in public

education that creates a necessity for partners' to fill resource voids, shifting their role

from traditionally supplemental service provision to becoming central providers. In order

to analyze this change in school governance in relation to equity of educational access

and opportunity, I turn to theoretical frameworks developed in anthropological studies of

poverty and the privatization of government social services (Roy 2012; Soss, Fording,

and Schram 2011). Vincanne Adams (2013), in her ethnographic analysis of the

privatization of disaster relief in the reconstruction of post-Katrina New Orleans,

highlights the role of *affect* in the work of private sector organizations, which in the case

of Katrina involved a constellation of grass-roots, community, faith-based, and for-profit

organizations. Adams defines affect as a type of purposive ethics, informed by a sense of emotional urgency that then prompts social action (Roy 2012: 107). She employs the concept of an "affect economy" to explain how with privatization, affect concerning the plight of the poor incites calls for "emotional responsiveness" and induces action, having the ability to "generate new business investments and free labor for a struggling economy" (2012: 209). Her analysis illuminates how replacing government responsibility for vulnerable populations with privatized or market-mechanized forms of care results in an unregulated, uneven distribution of services that puts critical state-led safety-net infrastructures and the people they protect at risk. Resources, in turn, are allocated selectively in relation to how poor citizens are positioned along a spectrum of "deservingness" of care.

Important insights can be gained from using the concept of an affect economy in analyzing how the shift from state-provided educational resources to private ones through PPPs are both affecting the distribution of services in schools like Johnson High as well as the brand messaging that school leaders imagine as valuable and therefore competitive in the marketplace. Financial crisis-induced suffering has triggered a kind of moral imperative, similar to Adam's depiction of the humanitarian imperative in post-Katrina New Orleans, affectively mobilizing a network of PPPs to rescue imperiled schools. The constellation of private organizations that have responded to these needs are largely unregulated and unevenly distributed (Interview, 3/21/14). The PPPs providing educational services are also called to action in relation to differing "moral panics," or understandings of educational issues and problems that inform how they target and prioritize resource allocation. This sets in motion a cultural politics of recognition within

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the schools where particular social categories of students are affectively identified as "deserving" of educational care (Ticktin 2011). I argue in this chapter that PPPs' cultural politics of recognition, where certain student categories are valued over others, are closely related to the ways that administrators and staff strategize around developing school brands around particular students. By attracting and retaining partners that serve valued student populations through selectively-serving PPPs, schools can reinforce other branding strategies that target these same students. Attention to the role of affect as a generative force underlying PPP's allocation of resources and care, then, provides a powerful window on the processes and resulting cultural politics of PPPs educational resource allocation as well as the implications for ensuring educational equity for all.

I argue in this chapter that the conditions precipitating from this district-wide crisis forced a kind of *fraught collaboration* between private providers and the school as the administration felt they had no choice but to rely on these non-profits to provide core educational services, labor, and political leverage in an increasingly ominous district climate. I show that the demands of marketing the school of the school as " deserving" of remaining open through partners introduced questions of equity in resource distribution as well as coordination among competing partners. The desperation engendered by the retrenchment of state-funded supports in district schools inevitably intensified the need for PPPs as not only branding mechanisms, but also to keep the school solvent in the middle of the "doomsday" budget crisis of AY 2013-2014.

Targeted Tracking

In order to more fully understand how partners influenced both the social dynamics of the school as well as the distribution of resources across the student body, I

selected five of the organizations with the deepest resource and staff commitments to track. These five organizations all contributed full and part-time staff, provided supply budgets to the school, and influenced curricular planning.

1. **Career Ready**[13]

Mission: To expand life and economic options for Philadelphia public school students through career-focused programming that prepares young people for employment and post-secondary education using the career academy model.

Targeted Population: General student body

Impact Measures: Graduation rates, postsecondary enrollment, income

2. **Service for Salvation**

Mission: With your support we are breaking the cycle of poverty, illiteracy and low expectations through youth service programs in many of America's most under-resourced high schools and by building schools in some of the world's poorest villages

Targeted Population: General student body

Impact Measures: hours of engagement, numbers of students engaged, graduation rates, college enrollment rates

3. **Guitars and Hoops**

Mission: The primary goal of this program is to provide learning opportunities through innovative activities through Project Based Learning instruction. Youth work together in groups on creative projects for a minimum of two hours daily for two days per week during the school year. These projects sessions are hands-on experiences where students learn and solve problems reflected in everyday life and develop 21st Century Skills.

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[13] All organizations and names of staff are pseudonyms.

Youth cleverly tackle difficult subjects that impact their lives. Youth address a

community need through various projects ending with culminating events, presentations,

and/or shows through the uniqueness of program offerings such as digital media, music,

fitness, dance, photography, and poetry.

Targeted Population: 40 slots available – first come, first serve enrollment

Impact Measures: enrollment, graduation rates, participation rates

4. **Refugee Aid**

Mission: Refugee Education is a federally funded program that supplements educational

support services for migratory children. The program assists school districts and charters

in coordinating the continuity of educational services for children who have had their

schooling interrupted.

Targeted Population: K-12 students whose parents work with raw food products

Impact Measures: reading and math standardized test scores, enrollment, graduation

rates, college enrollment

4. **College Dreams**

Mission: Through grants to high poverty schools, to prepare students to enter and succeed

in postsecondary education

Targeted Population: members of senior class

Impact Measures: 4-year college admission rates, matriculation rates,

I hypothesized that these organizations would have the greatest influence on the

school's culture and also speak to broader trends across the partners, namely which

students were being targeted for services, how these partners' framed the needs of the

students and school, and how these services shaped perceptions of equity and school

quality among students. More closely tracking the activities of these organizations

allowed me to "go deep" with these organizations, conducting interviews with 15 of their

upper-level management in addition to observing their activities closely in in-school,

after-school and weekend programming. It was my initial work with Refugee Aid as a

teacher and volunteer that first directed me to Johnson High as a site to explore the

experiences of ELL students. In turn, I had closer relationships with several of the

partners, namely Refugee Aid, by the time I began Phase II of the study (see Chapter 1,

section under "Methodology").

The Work of Crisis: Creating a "Need" for Partnerships

> **Mr. Wood**: The more partnerships you have, the better your resume right? If
> every school is on an equal playing field, I mean, if you look at the school from a
> data perspective then they all have a justification to close it right because of
> NCLB standards[14]. The next question is, what's the point? It costs money to keep
> this school that was built in 1913 open because you'll have to rebuild it. When
> you have the numbers against you and the facilities against you, the things you
> can put in your pros column to balance out your cons column is your community
> partnerships and the positive things you can point to that are in your school.
> Partners are a huge part of promoting your school. You hope that people pass
> through your doors and get you exposure to networking, resources, and more
> partners. (Interview, 3/5/14)

Mr. Wood's acutely captures a set of interrelated pressures that engendered a

"need" for community partnerships as a marketing mechanism, beginning in AY 2011-

2012 when the School District of Philadelphia released its first school closures list. In a

destitute district, particularly in the context of the AY 2013-2014 budget crisis, Johnson

High administrators and teachers knew that the district releasing funds to renovate their

building was unlikely. Additionally, with high numbers of ELL students and charter

school refugees entering their doors and decreasing resources like staff and supplies,

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[14] No Child Left Behind.

improving test scores also felt increasingly like a pipe dream. Therefore, as Mr. Wood so

eloquently explains, the school saw partnerships as an opportunity balance out their

overwhelming "cons" column to draw positive attention to the school.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, the number of partnerships increased at

Johnson High during the tenure of the previous principal, Mr. Brown. Many teachers that

worked under his reign cited the "juice," or entrepreneurial spirit, that he brought to the

building. Many attributed the growing number of partners to Mr. Brown's efforts to

market the school and entice students through partners' offered opportunities to enroll.

However, in the wake of the budget crisis, partners took on a new role: filling major

service gaps. Many teachers indicated that during their tenure, they had seen large

increases in the number of partners coming to the aid of the school.

> **Mr. Wood**: Well, originally Career Ready was the only game in town. They were
> the only external organization that we partnered with. Service for Salvation, just
> as recently as two years ago, was just an after-school club that met on
> Wednesdays. They decided this year to implement a full roll out of being here
> everyday with two full-time staff. And how do you say no to someone when they
> say that, *especially now with no resources*? Of course, no problem, it's good just
> to have the extra person to help you coordinate and do things. I mean, Guitars and
> Hoops, they're more after-school and they're picking up where we no longer have
> extracurricular money to pay teachers do these things. We used to have choir, we
> used to have the Gamer's Club. I was paid to run that club three days per week.
> But as that money dried up, we've had partners like Guitars and Hoops come in
> and say, "Oh, well we'll run after-school programs in your school and you don't
> have to pay for them anymore." So it's really the quest for private money to pay
> what used to be covered by the district. (Interview, 3/5/14)

Another teacher, Mr. Darling, a 16-year veteran teacher, corroborated Mr. Wood's claim

that the partners have increasingly come to fill critical service gaps, even in classrooms.

> Yeah, [the partners] definitely have made an imprint in the school and have
> showed up at teacher meetings and filled in the gaps that were needed because of
> time and resources. Some teachers could not step up to the place as they have in

the past and Service for Salvation and other organizations have filled those footprints. (Interview, 1/7/14)

With overcrowded classrooms, no supplies, and a chronic lack of support staff like a school counselor, nurse, classroom and lunchroom aids, secretaries, and janitors, Mr. Wood and Mr. Darling again highlight the lack of choice that Mr. Keo felt in terms of allowing partners to enter the building, shifting partners' role from supplemental to core service providers. Whereas the school only had one partner providing in-school staffing and resources prior to AY 2011-2012, by AY 2013-2014 it had five.

This shift became apparent in "community partners meetings", a gathering of the 16 partners on the first Tuesday of every month where one of the partners, Guitars and Hoops, provided a "partnerships coordinator" to orchestrate and synthesize services and programming (Fieldnote 10/4/13). I attended nine of these meetings throughout the school year, intrigued by the paradox emerging from the budget cut: though the school supported a student population of high-need students (e.g. refugees, special-education students) without a guidance counselor, reading specialist, and school psychologist, it had a force of privately sponsored labor that amounted to almost half of its remaining teaching staff after the budget cuts. Mr. Keo oftentimes attended these meetings, voicing the emergent needs of the school and drawing on partners to fill in the gaps. The full-time coordinator for College Dreams and part-time staff from Refugee Aid, and Career Ready offered fieldtrips, financial aid workshops, and application help for select students enrolled in their programs. The Service for Salvation and Guitar and Hoops coordinators, two full-time staff with an office in the building, provided budgets for fieldtrips to service projects, and school-wide assemblies. After receiving word in a professional development

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meeting from the superintendent that the former year's School Improvement Grant (SIG), a release of funds from the state for schools that demonstrate the greatest need, had been changed from delayed status to rescinded, Mr. Keo admitted,

> Well that's how it goes, it happens every year. I just have to find someone private who will get me what I need. That's why I have all of these non-profit people in here. I care about the kids. As the principal of a school I feel like I am the CEO of my building, pretty much running it with the staff I have, with no support from anywhere else. There's nothing in the school so you have to look elsewhere and make deals with these people. They provide something for the school and then they get their data and they can keep applying for grants. (Recorded Conversation at PD, 11/6/13)

Mr. Keo here employs a kind of "market-speak", comparing himself to a CEO of a building instead of a principal. Instead of merely managing state-provided resources, he felt responsible for recruiting and employing private organizations to provide programming formerly funded by district budgets. In exchange for providing the non-profits with the "data" they needed to apply for grants and therefore perpetuate their own missions, Mr. Keo received programming for his students that he could not provide with a retrenched budget commitment and little promise of improvement in the future. Other teachers employed a similar "market-speak" as the principal, questioning whether non-profit organizations could accomplish the same goals as teacher-run extracurricular and in-school programming with greater "efficiency."

> **Mr. Glyn**: We don't have a choice. I mean, that's kind of presupposing that educators are the best people to deliver those services. Maybe the people with unique experiences like the Service for Salvation and Guitars and Hoops coordinators bring a different scope? *They're not exactly building programs that are driven by an educator's point of view*. I don't know. There's resourcefulness to it because we're getting these groups in and we're kind of discovering how much more efficiently we can work. I mean, the budget cuts have just totally decimated us. (Interview, 4/9/14)

Many teachers and students that I interviewed even lauded administrators like Mr. Brown and Mr. Keo for looking to outside organizations to give the students opportunities. Commenting one day on the role of College Dreams' coordinator to an independent evaluator of the program, Mr. Wood lamented,

> These kids are woefully underserved with no one to help them navigate the application system. I've tried to do it, but I have so many other responsibilities. There's no counselor. These kids are getting from College Dreams what the School District and the state don't provide. We need five of your coordinators, not just one. (Fieldnote, 10/30/13)

Mr. Wood and Mr. Glyn point to a resourcefulness in drawing on partner services in light of the budget cuts. Mr. Wood's comment of needing "five" of College Dreams' coordinator underscores the critical services several of the organizations provided in the absence of support staff in AY 2013-2014. Hence, the affective dimensions of the crisis on two fronts, impending closure and resource shortages, shaped productive relationships between school staff and partner staff. Teachers and administrators, desperate for "bodies" in hallways and packed classrooms, felt lucky that these organizations were there at all.

Accountability Ironies

On the surface, the employment of partnerships accomplished an increasing number of goals as conditions worsened. Teachers and administrators drew on partner staff in a multitude of school-wide initiatives, administrative processes, and in-class projects. However, as partners became progressively more embedded as core service providers, questions around the ethics of their work and their implications for the schools' trajectory began to circulate among both staff and the providers themselves. In

an interview with the former principal of the school, Mr. Brown, he described the

importance of selectivity in terms of allowing partners into the building.

> I think you really have to be selective of whom you bring into your building and
> why you're bringing them in. I don't think you say yes to everybody, and that's a
> tough thing. You have to have the smarts to know your school community and
> what is going to support your kids, because people want to get into your building
> for multiple reasons and they're not always up front with them. (Interview 4/7/14)

Mr. Brown, the principal before the budget cut AY 2013-2014 budget cut, corroborates

Bryk's (2010) notion of program coherence and making sure that programming,

regardless of where it comes from, a private or public entity, blends in such a way that it

aligns with the vision of the school and the needs of the students. He also points to the

tensions that can arise from an administrator's interpretation of the needs of the students

and the "multiple reasons" that a partnering organization might want to enter the school.

While Mr. Brown had more latitude in his selectivity of partners to market

Johnson High, the AY 2013-2014 budget cuts severely compromised Mr. Keo's ability to

deny partners entrance to the building. Returning to the vignette from Chapter 3, with so

few staff in the main office, he oftentimes did not know who was in the building or had

time to observe their programming. Mr. Keo felt that he did not have much choice in

terms of the kinds of programming he allowed in. Citing the need for "bodies" and

"things for the kids," he repeatedly argued in interviews and after-school conversations

that the pressure to admit external programmers in order to bring some relief to an

overworked staff made it difficult to implement a coherent vision for the school.

However, Mr. Keo was critical of the position that the budget crisis and district overhaul

of its neighborhood schools placed him in.

I don't have a reading specialist or basic staffing. I'm accountable for what happens to our test scores regardless of what kinds of resources I have, which *ultimately means that the school could close*. What pisses me off though is these organizations are not staffed by educators. They're non-profits. They have no certified teachers, yet they get money from the state and foundations, whereas, we, the school, cannot apply for that. *The only reason I need them is because nobody will give me money to run my fucking school. I know it's a game that we're playing*. We make each other look good, but the reality is, they are not educators. They're just passing through. (Recorded Conversation, 12/4/13)

Mr. Keo's appraisal of the partners here was wrought with resentment. He needed them because "regardless of what kinds of resources" at his disposal, the district held him accountable for the performance of the school and continued failure foreshadowed closure. As he pointed out though, the partners were eligible to apply for private funding and in the end were not liable for the school's overall outcomes (as evaluated by the district). They also are not "certified educators" and, as Mr. Keo understands, do not harbor a long-term commitment to the public education system like he and the school's teachers. In "the game" that Mr. Keo and the partners play, they partners offer resources to the school and in turn, make the school more alluring. In return, the school bolsters partners' engagement data and promotional narratives of helping a school in the midst of a budget crisis.

As Mr. Keo indicates, he is forced to engage these non-profits because "nobody will give [him] money to run [his] fucking school." He and many teachers drew attention to this irony, that in an era of high-stakes accountability where the absolute consequence for poor performance was school closure, they, as public educators, were held accountable for the school's fate as an institution. Even though they had no control over the district and state's decision-making around the parameters and conditions that produced school failure, they ultimately shouldered the bulk of the responsibility. Yet,

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Mr. Keo and the teachers also relied on non-profit organizations to accomplish this mission that were accountable to neither them nor the district. "Just passing through", most of the organizations had informal agreements with the school and no written contracts for the kinds of resources that would be exchanged. Not in a position to bargain, Johnson High remained subject to the whim of the partners' fluctuating material and labor commitments. Ms. Betty, an ELL teacher, levels of an extrapolated critique of how the employment of partners has diminished pressure on the state to properly fund schools.

> I'm glad they're here because we need stuff and Guitars and Hoops and Service for Salvation have given me supplies, support, and money for fieldtrips. But just from a purely critical standpoint, that means that the district doesn't have to do it. *I'm sure that they love all of these people coming in and supporting our schools. It takes the pressure off of them and they use it as a marketing tool for schools and for the quality of what's going on and I resent that.* I feel like the state doesn't fund us appropriately but they still get the benefit. But it enables them to cut and cut and I do resent that. *It's a **double-edge sword** because they hold us to the same standards whether we have the resources or not.* It affects us as a school if we fail. Are we failing by the standards that I care about? I don't care if we fail by PSSA or Keystone standards, but I care if we fail because kids are getting hurt and they are. (Interview 12/23/13)

Comparing partners to a "double-edge sword", Ms. Betty captures both the benefit of their presence as they allow the school to acquire resources to accomplish their goals, yet simultaneously, "enables [the state] to cut and cut." She postulates that perhaps in the absence of the partners, political pressure would mount on the state to properly fund the district for its activities. In her critique, Ms. Betty refers to partners as a "marketing tool" and a metric to measure the "quality" of what's going on, begrudging the ways in which partners sanitize the politics behind precipitous drops in school funding that make their presence possible and necessary. Like Mr. Keo, she ties the roots

of the school's predicament to a larger district reform strategy to compensate for budget shortfalls through contracting.

Cucchiara, Gold, and Simon (2011), in their work on marketization in the School District of Philadelphia thoroughly document the contracting of school management and curricula to private for-profit and non-profit organizations. They also mention briefly that district since the mid-2000s began to increasingly look for private sector "partners" to assist in reform efforts. These partners included local non-profits, universities, and community organizations. Cucchiara and her colleagues however focused specifically on the formalization of partners' work in schools through contracts with the district instead of informal agreements, and the implications for partners' to "act independently, voice criticism, and hold the district accountable" when potentially criticizing the district could imperil partners' collaboration with schools (2480). My work at Johnson High and conversations with administrators at the district level in this political moment suggest a shift in accountability from the district and the partners that work with schools, to the schools themselves. Mass budget shortfalls at the district level severely truncated the oversight of partnerships at the district-level and also compounded school-level pressure to operate and market one's school through the resources that partners provided.

Drawing on Adams (2013) work on the moral affect economy of post-Katrina New Orleans, this void in oversight of partners due to diminished capacity at the district-level, opened up a space for the proliferation of private partners to do the work of the state. I will show in this next section that given these conditions, PPPs enjoyed almost complete autonomy to define the needs of the school based on their missions as well as distribute critical resources based on these missions. Such resource distribution initiated a

cultural politics of recognition for certain student groups, introducing questions around equity, the invisibility of particular groups of students' needs, and overall efficacy when each of the organizations acted in the name of their organization and its constructed mission, and not necessarily administrators', teachers', and students' voiced needs.

Defining the Problem and Missing the Mark: The College Dreams Case

Though I conducted participant observation in six classrooms, I draw on my more consistent experiences in one class to explore these tensions. It was part of my agreement when I came to the school as a hybridized "researcher/tutor" to spend 6th period of every day helping with this group of students. This class, a group of 18 sophomores, was hand selected by two teachers who were trained by an appendage program of College Dreams. The program was supposed to be purchased through a School Improvement Grant (SIG) and rolled out in middle school for students to prepare them through a specialized curriculum for postsecondary education. However, in a neighborhood high school like Johnson High, the implementation of such a program, like many of the programs provided through the partners, faced many challenges. First, the state did not release the SIG grant at the beginning of the year due to cuts in staff at the district level stemming from the budget crisis. The program required the purchase of a $5,000 library and paid training for a team of teachers that would work closely with these students. Again, due to mass layoffs and uncertainty hovering in hiring throughout the fall of 2013, selecting a team of teachers to structure the program became impossible for Mr. Keo.

So while the stability of the school certainly hindered the efficacy of the program, the real pitfalls of the College Dreams program laid in the one-size-fits all approach to a narrowly defined problem, an approach that many of the non-profits shared. College

Dreams, a program designed to improve postsecondary education matriculation and persistence rates, framed college access issues among low-income youth as a matter of skill-based deficiencies and a lack of long-term vision. By targeting those deficiencies through a curriculum which stressed the acquisition of higher-level "critical thinking" skills as well as surrounding promising students with other college-bound youth and trained teachers in every subject, the students could overcome these obstacles and persevere in their quest for postsecondary education, namely enrollment in 4-year colleges. The program also incorporated "volunteer" college students as tutors, recruiting from universities in the area to offer role models to aspiring college goers.

Unfortunately, this program did not align with the nuanced context of the school. With so few staff and an ongoing budget crisis, the time and resources to recruit a team of teachers to implement the program were nonexistent. To complicate matters, the students started the program several years late. Johnson High's student body was composed of an amalgam of students coming from a mix of neighborhood, charter, and parochial schools across the city, most of which did not have the program. Thus, regardless of the district's stability, any neighborhood high school administrator would struggle to maintain the cohort continuity from middle school to high school. Finally, Johnson High's ethnic and linguistic diversity made the curriculum of the program almost impossible to implement. The curriculum was predicated on a high degree of English fluency as well as literacy. The two teachers, Ms. Allard and Ms. London, designated to recruit students and oversee the program, admitted that did not receive enough applications to field a class, and, from the applications they did receive, very few students in the school were adequately

prepared to handle the curriculum (Fieldnote, 11/16/13). In addition, the school's lack of

proximity to a major university made the recruitment and maintenance of tutors difficult.

These issues converged particularly around "the tutorial", or the break out of

small groups of four students to go over their assignments and present confusing material

to be solved by the group. Since the program administrators were unable to arrange for

consistent tutors, the teacher and myself struggled to go between groups to facilitate the

tutorial. Below is an extended fieldnote describing a typical tutorial class in late

February.

> From there I sat with one of the groups of all ELL students to complete the
> tutorial. Most of the kids couldn't understand one another and were straining to
> decipher through the accent. They couldn't take notes because they couldn't make
> out the words. Most of the tutorials either were incomplete. Even *I* couldn't
> answer their questions about the layout of the tutorial worksheet. Ms. Allard
> confided in me at the end of the class, "Even I don't understand this stuff, so I
> don't know how they're supposed to. The head of the program at the district told
> me that this has been a mess in the city schools because nobody can afford to pay
> for it or be trained to teach it. *This also wasn't designed for a school that is
> majority ELL*." We finally found out today that the tutors will not be coming at all
> this year because their class schedules changed and the commute was too difficult
> to swing. (Fieldnote, 2/20/14)

In the fieldnote I highlight a range of issues with partner programming which I will

address more in depth in the coming sections. However, College Dreams' incompatibility

with the school-level context drove its implementation troubles. Most of the students in

the class struggled with basic literacy and English, therefore regardless of how much the

teacher modified the curriculum, most could not access the program's sophisticated

academic language. Ms. Betty, confided:

> Most of these partners' programming is bullshit. Everybody is drinking the Kool-
> Aid trying to get kids into college, but there's no reading specialist to figure out
> why my kid can't spell dog. They aren't looking at the cold hard reality: our kids
> can't read. They expect that a non-profit intervention will get these kids from

point A to point Z. Most of these kids can't write a coherent sentence and nobody wants to have those hard conversations about why. This is about illiteracy but nobody wants to fund that. (Fieldnote, 10/14/13)

Ms. Betty points to a glaring discrepancy between the design and intent of partners' programming, particularly those pushing college, and the unique needs of the student body. With so many first-generation immigrant students, many of whom had interrupted educational backgrounds (e.g. refugee and undocumented youth), the program did not address their actual needs. This discrepancy also points to how organizations' oftentimes operate on a blanket definition of a social problem from which they generalize and scale their efforts without taking context into account.

Moral Dilemmas of Partner Work

The coordinators of College Dreams, one who offered full-time counseling in the school, Mr. Lytle, and the other who coordinated tutors part-time district-wide, Ms. Collie, both admitted that oftentimes they felt a severe disjuncture between the mission of their organizations and the needs of the school. With so many ELL students and students labeled as having learning disabilities and behavior issues in the school, they felt their top-down organizational mandates did not map well onto the students' needs as well as the school's ability to support their program with matching resources.

> College Dreams does function predominantly in neighborhood public schools. They haven't had much success in Philly, but I think it would do well in our more selective schools that have more advanced kids. I mean, they still need support, but the program is better suited for those kinds of students, and there's a little bit less crisis in those schools. If you have crisis, then you need more funding, which this school doesn't have. (Interview, 3/6/14)

Her testimony highlights not only the mismatch between the program's curriculum and the needs of the students, but also the debilitating effects that the school's overcrowded,

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understaffed condition have on the full implementation of their programming. Without time and resources, the principal could not afford to train the team of teachers it would require to carry out this program with fidelity.

Because of these mismatches between top-down mandates and the school's nuanced needs, partner staff often experienced moral dilemmas over the purpose and efficacy of their work. Sitting in one day at the end of AY 2013-2014 with Mr. Lytle in his office, I observed him as helped one of the school's best students, a first-generation Mexican senior, Juan, navigate a financial aid portal for a Pennsylvania State branch campus. Living with an aunt while his parents remained in Mexico, Juan saw a $20,000 differential in the cost of the school and the financial aid he received. Mr. Lytle explained the difference between the subsidized and unsubsidized loans, already part of the package. Juan replied, "I don't think I can afford this even with the scholarships that I applied for. Most of them are only $300 for one year." Mr. Lytle responded, "You, my friend, are learning what so many students who want to go to Penn State are learning: it just ain't cheap" (Fieldnote, 4/2/14). Of all of the Latino students, Juan was one of few that had his citizenship, had scored high on several AP exams, and was extremely motivated to apply for scholarships in order to pursue his dream of becoming an electrical engineer. However, at the end of the day, Mr. Lytle could not guarantee that funds would come through to support his postsecondary education.

Between cutbacks and the state and federal levels for Pell grants that created situations like Juan's, and the myriad of other financial, logistical, psycho-emotional issues that arose throughout AY 2013-2014 for immigrant and native-born students alike, Mr. Lytle admitted that within the senior class, the cohort selected by College Dreams to

receive his services, most of the students would not be going to 4 year colleges. Having

been responsible for following this group of students for three years of high school, he

lamented on the unforeseen difficulties.

> I expected much higher rates of kids going to 4-year colleges. It felt like there were so many challenges with this school that I was just figuring out as I went along. When they chose this school, they were looking at schools with primarily low graduation rates and low college attendance. That was it. *But they didn't really understand the reasons perhaps why this was happening that were outside of the school's control.* The immigration status and FAFSA forms were two of the biggest issues. We have kids who are undocumented here who don't get any financial aid. There is a glass ceiling for them. I bring these issues to the spokesperson for College Dreams and he's like, "Hmm, that's tough. I guess there just aren't a lot of options for them, or here are what the limited ones are." What was really eye-opening was going through their forms and seeing some of the parents' incomes. You know that people are low-income but you're not exactly sure what that means. Some of these kids have one parent making something in the low teens. *There's also special ed. and the Success Academy that I haven't really touched at all.* I just didn't have time and also, even if I did, didn't know how if they could barely graduate. I was spread so thin. There was just so much that we had no idea about. (Fieldnote, 5/12/14)

Acting on behalf of his organization's mission, to increase college admission rates

through heavy investments in information, college trips, workshops, and counseling, Mr.

Lytle committed three years of his life to a group of 160 students. With only 34

matriculating to four-year schools at the end of his tenure with College Dreams, he

doubted the overall efficacy of a program that failed to consider factors beyond the scope

of both the school and program's control: immigration status, access to financial aid,

poverty, and a severe lack of preparation. While the Latino population only comprised 12

percent of the student body, lacking social security numbers barred many of the higher-

achieving Latino seniors from the financial aid application. Also, with so many "special

ed" and Success Academy students missing necessary credits in the senior class, Mr.

Lytle admitted that they weren't "really touched at all" as meeting the needs of students

that might actually qualify already "spread [him] so thin". Exhausted and melancholy by

May, this jaded idealist wrestled with his conscience, trying to make sense of his

relationships with these students and the impact his work had on their lives.

The Quest for "Meaning" amidst Instability

Like many of the partner staff working the school, Mr. Lytle questioned the

underlying assumptions of his organization: assumptions that narrowly constructed the

problem and therefore their interventions in ways that did not heed the major issues that

prevented children from accessing postsecondary education: poverty, language, and

preparation. These moral dilemmas arose frequently among these partner staff as many

were underpaid and overworked, accepting contingent contracts without full-time

benefits. They felt that "making a difference" in the lives of these students could

compensate for the insecurity of their labor. Mr. Drew, the 31 year old, white, male

coordinator of Guitars and Hoops, explained his arrangements with his organization.

> My job description says that I'm supposed to come and show up as a group leader
> at 2 and leave by 6. However, I come in from like 12 to 6, sometimes earlier. I
> design all of my programs and 100 percent of the recruiting. I work with
> administrative staff here, do payroll, lesson plans, sit in partner meetings,
> community events, um, whatever is pretty much asked of me. I mean, they've
> been talking about it for three years to bring me on for full time and benefits but it
> hasn't really worked out. I do work 40+ hours a week a lot, even though I'm only
> part-time. *Thank god I'm healthy because I don't get health insurance.*
> Sometimes the grants fall through and the full-time thing doesn't work out, but I
> actually enjoy my job because I get to work with kids and make a difference in
> their lives. As long as you make the best of it and there's some money, then you'll
> always do successfully *in this business*. (Interview, 1/30/14)

While Mr. Drew's organization was one of the more stable partners with the school, his

testimony captures a theme running through these positions: high degrees of

unrecognized labor and insecurity. Comparable to the teachers' discussing the escalated

significance of affective rewards in their work (Chapter 4), the professional insecurity

that partner staff endured was offset by their perceptions of "impact" on the students they

worked with. To reiterate, "making a difference" atoned for the mounting responsibilities

amidst inadequate compensation and few pathways to promotion.

However, for many staff, this insecurity wore on them as they began making

commitments in their personal lives. Almost all of the partner staff worked for

organizations that operated from a mix of public and philanthropic-corporate grants,

though usually more of the latter. The impending threat of a layoff at the end of a grant

cycle scared many struggling to support families, mortgages, and crushing student loan

debt. With a master's degree in educational policy, Ms. Shore, the coordinator of the

partner meetings and an employee of Guitars and Hoops, faced a heavy predicament as

the grant supporting her approached its end. Not knowing whether it would be renewed

or that she would be out of a position, she described her difficulty in remaining

committed to her chosen work.

> I'm nervous because I'm going to need a job in June possibly. I'm not
> complaining, but the personal piece of this is that it's a non-profit and it's not like
> I'm making a ton of money anyway. I mean, I have a master's from an Ivy
> League school and an undergrad degree in mathematics and now I have to figure
> out how to market what I do to funders so that either someone will fund me now
> or possibly hire me down the line. Part of me is constantly looking to see what
> other opportunities are there, but then I'm with these kids and part of this great
> school, and I'm like, wow, I want to continue to do this. For me, personally, that
> internal battle is always there. (Interview, 5/28/14)

As the AY 2013-2014 wound down, Ms. Shore's struggle to balance what she

perceived as meaningful work with the perpetual uncertainty of her position mirrored

became a prominent topic in my unstructured interviews with partner staff. Yet these

conversations differed slightly from those with teachers and administrators in that this

group of partner staff, though clearly worried about the future, understood job instability as par for the course, a permanent feature of grant-funded non-profit work. Ms. Shore claims that she's "not complaining" but that questions whether her credentials that might serve her better in another industry, one which potentially would not induce as much anxiety about her career's direction. Ms. Shore fought her reconcile her urge to be treated as young professional with promising career but also to pursue her ideals through her organization. The precarity that Ms. Shore experienced also suggests a lack of investment that these organizations encourage as their staff must continuously hedge their bets on other opportunities that might be more stable. This lack of investment raises questions about the sustainability of PPPs as core service providers, as their instability creates a contingent, insecure workforce that cannot afford to remain committed to their organizations' work.

Equity in Service Provision?

The moral dilemmas of partner work lay in the production of meaning within a zone of professional precarity. Negotiating tensions between mandates of their organization, their commitments to the youth they served, and pressures in their personal lives, these partners worked tirelessly to provide opportunities for students in the face of the budget-cut imposed tumult of the AY 2013-2014 school year. They collaborated with teachers on planning field-trips, offered after-school programming that would not have been there otherwise, and went beyond their job descriptions to act as security guards and lunch monitors to stymie the chaos in the hallways and cafeteria. In other words, they were an undeniable factor in keeping Johnson High afloat, and, in spite of criticisms, the teachers and administration were largely grateful for their presence.

Yet the crisis-induced "need" for partners to fill resource and labor gaps introduced a set of paradoxes that the principal felt was both troubling and unavoidable. First, though the partners were operating as core service providers, the partners' ultimate allegiances were to their organizations, their funders, and not Johnson High. Second, as the school relied on these organizations to provide essential services for a school designed to serve all students, the partners, by their very design, targeted selected, limited groups of students. Therefore, questions of equity in partner resource distribution surfaced as the partners rallied around particular categories of students to target for services and largely neglected others.[15]

"Refugee Porn" and The Marketable Immigrant

Of the five organizations I followed, Service for Salvation, Guitars and Hoops, and Career Ready all had "open access" or allowed any student in the school to sign up. College Dreams and Refugee Aid worked with students that met particular criteria. In the case of College Dreams, the coordinator only offered services to the senior class while Refugee Aid solely targeted first-generation immigrant students whose parents worked with raw food products. Of the five organizations, all, with the exception of Service for Salvation, had limited slots available. Many of them operated on a first come, first serve basis, interested in both raw participation numbers as well as recruiting particular kinds of students that they felt would be demonstrate the "impact" of their program. Thus, the composition of a partner's served population hinged equally on these criteria, leaving partner staff some leeway to recruit students and target them for services.

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[15] Mr. Lytle testimony in the previous section somewhat alludes to this problem, as he admitted that large proportions of the senior class, an already restricted group, went untouched by his services.

The skewed provision of resources to first generation Asian students, namely refugee students, arose as a point of contention throughout the year. As I mentioned in the Chapter 2, Johnson High was home to a large number of recently resettled refugee students, specifically ethnic minorities from Bhutan and Burma. It was actually through my preliminary fieldwork these students in their communities through Refugee Aid that I found myself at Johnson High.[16] I initially assumed when I followed these youth into the school that they would not be recognized as refugees and that other categories of racial and linguistic difference would replace the category (i.e. Asian, ELL, immigrant).

Though these latter categories did matter, particularly in terms of how teachers processed and acted upon them, it surprised me that refugee youth received the most support in the school in terms of non-profit services. Bhutanese and Burmese students constituted ninety-eight percept of Refugee Aid's caseload in AY 2013-2014, therefore qualifying these students for access to five part-time staff that interfaced with teachers and administrators over their issues, after-school homework help, home visits, and a Saturday program that provided supplemental English classes to themselves and their parents. While the disproportionate enrollment of these students wasn't problematic in isolation, the fact that the school did not have a counselor to serve the *entire study body* in September of 2013, complicated the question of equity as the school continued to rely on partners like Refugee Aid to selectively fill in service and resource gaps.

Its qualifying criteria and funders, a mix of federal and philanthropic grants legally bound Refugee Aid to only serve students whose parents worked with raw food products. For refugees coming to Philadelphia to work in meatpacking and produce

packaging factories, this meant that their children were able to participate and benefit

from the program. The coordinators at Refugee Aid always voiced that the stipulations of

their federal grants limited their work to students that fit this criteria. Further, they also

felt the need to market themselves to private funders as public funds for the programming

became increasingly unavailable. When discussing how the refugee category affected the

ways in which their organization marketed itself to funders and collaborating

organizations, Ms. Kraft, the assistant program director, explained the power of the

category.

> Well I think the problem is that everyone wants to help a refugee. Ya know, who
> doesn't want to help a refugee? You know what I mean? So a lot of funders and
> volunteers come to us because it's like shooting fish in a barrel. I mean, you see it
> on TV all the time and there are all of those commercials that have like kids with
> the flies on their faces and if people say, "Oh, I help refugees," then people
> always think they're so great. Honestly, it helps us to have refugees in our
> program (Interview, 1/14/14)

To describe the affective cache of the category in attracting funders and volunteers, Ms.

Kraft deploys the metaphor "like shooting fish in a barrel." Analogous to the

phenomenon in medical "voluntourism" where companies sell the affective experience of

being the "white savior" (McLennan 2014; Cole 2012), Ms. Kraft believes that having

refugees in the program offers the same experience to funders and volunteers that

contribute money and labor in exchange for "think[ing] they're so great." In other words,

Refugee Aid capitalized on affect generated by the global circulation of refugee suffering

and white humanitarianism rampant in media portrayals of the Global South, mobilizing

energy and resources to support their organization's mission.

Another program coordinator at Refugee Aid struggled not only with his organization, the multitude of other organizations at the city and neighborhood levels that used refugees as a way to garner support.

> **Mr. Michaels**: People see the word "refugee" and they want to help and donate. Nonprofits are really good at selling that for grants and it's definitely a dichotomy that I struggle with. I hate selling people this picture of helping "poor refugees." They're good people and they need help just like a lot of other groups who need help, but I think with non-profits needing funding, they need to like sell the sob-story and be like, "Look at these persecuted refugees that we're helping." I don't know if I ever told you this before, but some of the staff at [my old organization], well, they would tell these like extreme refugee stories to get money. We would call it "*refugee porn*" like where these non-profits are one-upping each other with one more fucked up story after another. We're all drawn to those extreme stories but I think that's one of the biggest problems is that people care about the "refugee" but there's less compassion for an undocumented person. I think that [our organization] doesn't do that good of a job at bringing all of those people in because we're just so busy with our different programs out looking for donations and funding. People aren't as drawn in when you say you're helping immigrants in Philly, but if paint this story like, "Oh, they're brand new! And they're from Bhutan! And they wear these colorful clothes! And they're refugees!" People like eat that up. They love that. People get recognized for extreme stories but not just for the mundane, regular, difficult needs in their lives. (Interview, 1/23/14)

Mr. Michaels points to a critical issue of the marketization of particular categories of students to perpetuate the organization and the moral dilemmas that arise from that. If Refugee Aid worked in a well-funded school and provided supplemental services to refugee youth specifically, the issue of equitable resource distribution would be less convoluted because the underlying assumption is that school-provided supports (i.e. counselors, reading specialists, classroom aids) for *all students exist*. But as organizations like Refugee Aid bring resources selectively into a school without those supports, Mr. Michaels highlights there are dangers to relying on partners that must market themselves in specific ways to survive. Serving refugee youth was not only part of their mandate, but

also advantageous as it enabled them to entice exploit the affective power of the refugee category in the philanthropic world to garner more funding.

Invisible Immigrants

The issue of selective service provision that Mr. Michaels discussed in his interview played out throughout the year, raising red flags among teachers and staff that felt both critical of partners but also grateful for their support. In an after-school meeting one day among several teachers and the Service for Salvation coordinator, Ms. Crowley, these tensions peppered the conversation. Ms. Crowley wanted to elicit feedback, ideas, and commitments from teachers to help her put on a school-wide service day where she could reach her "engagement goals" for the year and spend the money allocated for larger events. Distributing sheets around the room with pie charts and bar graphs of the number of students and hours of service logged, Ms. Crowley told the teachers that she was mandated to "touch" at least 150 students through this event (Fieldnote, 3/19/14). As she described her vision for the day, a combination of speakers coming into the auditorium and excursions into the neighborhood to do park cleanups, the teachers scrunched their faces in concern, voicing worries over overcrowding in the auditorium, having the right number of chaperones, being responsible for collecting permission slips, and what to do with the kids that would inevitably not turn theirs in. Proposing alternative ideas, like smaller service projects for specific grades, Ms. Crowley interrupted them one by one, citing the need to reach her "engagement goals" through a school-wide service day. "I have to hit 150 students. I have no choice. That's how I have to spend this money." Uncomfortable with silence in the room, Ms. Crowley ended the meeting by thanking the teachers for their input. Following the meeting, Ms. Betty and Ms. London hung behind.

Ms. Betty: I don't know about these programs sometimes. Only the kids who can actually do stuff after-school and on weekends can participate in these. All of the kids from Central America have to work. Maybe she should ask why her "engagement" data doesn't always look so good.
Ms. London: Yes, I know, the refugee category is so political. These kids from Honduras are refugees and aren't recognized as such and it makes all the difference in the world in terms of what kind of an education they get with all of these partners here. The Burmese and Bhutanese have support services from Refugee Aid and all of these organizations because they fit that category."
(Fieldnote, 3/19/14)

The strain of the meeting over the issue of the service day and the exchange between Ms. Betty and Ms. London highlight the obfuscating effects of partners' data pressures as well as the invisibility of particular kinds of student needs within this economy of partner programming. Again, with mandates to meet specific benchmarks of "impact" like Ms. Crowley's "engagement goals", coordinators oftentimes did not pay attention to the input of teachers and staff. As the 8 teachers attempted to give Ms. Crowley input, she eschewed their ideas by citing her lack of "choice" in manipulating the top-down directives of the event. This issue arose often in collaborations between partner staff, teachers, and administrators, as partners would be broached to use resources beyond the 'scope' of their organization's mission.

Ms. Betty and Ms. London also point to how a singular focus on these top-down directives conflict with questions of accessibility and need. Ms. Betty underscores the lack of support for Latino students, specifically those from parts of Central America that fled violence and poverty, and entered the U.S. without supports, oftentimes as undocumented, unaccompanied minors. The school experienced, like many districts across the U.S. in AY 2013-2014, a spike in students from Central American countries. Many of the students were living in homes with cousins or siblings and oftentimes had no

running water, or electricity. Though this trend culminated in a national state of emergency in April of 2014 (Children on the Run 2014), teachers in the building experienced a heightened consciousness of this issue as students would broach them with their personal issues and ask for help.

Overwhelmed by the need and with nobody to turn to, the teachers voiced criticisms of partner programming that did not take into account perhaps why only specific kinds of students were attending their programming, or were legitimizing certain forms of suffering and immigrant categories over others (i.e. refugees). Complaining one day about a mural arts project introduced by one of the partners to the students in her class, Ms. Betty boiled over.

> [*yelling*] There are all of these issues in the Latino community like pregnancy, immigration status, extreme poverty, and this woman is painting murals. She has a degree in Fine Arts and that's awesome that she painted murals in Ecuador, but is that really what the community needs? I see this all over the place and it drives me nuts. They wanted these kids to stay after school to paint murals, but if they knew anything about undocumented kids, they would realize that they have restaurant jobs to run to after-school. How can you be that out of touch? They want everyone to go to college without realizing that there is a glass ceiling for the undocumented kids. The refugees and documented Asian immigrants get everything, all of the volunteers and non-profits in the world, but there's nothing to be done for the undocumented kids. They're invisible. (Fieldnote, 4/24/14)

As more and more mental health issues arose amongst the Central American and undocumented Mexican students in the school, oftentimes resulting from trauma crossing the border or spiraling home finance situations, teachers like Ms. Betty searched for partners that might be able to help address these problems. At these junctures the line between researcher, advocate, and social worker blurred for me as much as the teachers. As I sought out other organizations doing mental health work under the advisory of

several of Refugee Aid's caseworkers, their staff advised me to attend a neighborhood-level school partners meeting where I might make some connections.

At a meeting in June 2014, I met a social worker that had established a storefront mental clinic in the neighborhood. When I asked her which populations she worked with, she responded, "I work mainly with Burmese and Bhutanese refugees. We are actually expanding our program at Johnson High next year. I've just met with the principal to discuss possibilities of doing pull-out therapy with those kids." I asked her whether she would have flexibility to work with undocumented Central American and Mexican students. The social worker politely declined, "I know, I would like to, but nobody will give me money to do that." (Fieldnote, 6/2/14).

These two instances point to a central issue among all partners – that their funding streams, mission, and structure induced a top-down approach to managing the socio-emotional and academic issues. Instead of performing needs' assessments or doing due diligence and research on the needs to the school, PPPs staff and leadership of PPPs consistently looked to fit the square-pegs of their work into oftentimes the round holes of the school's and student body's wants. This uneven mapping of missions onto the needs' geography resulted in a mismatch, rendering essential needs and opportunities of many students invisible.

Unmarketable Minorities: The Marginalization of the Native-Born

Like the strategy to enroll Asian students, the strategy to employ partners to save the school mobilized staff and students around particular categories of racial, ethnic, and political difference to both statistically and affectively brand the school as one deserving of staying open. However, also like the first strategy, the second marginalized native-

born students as partners also funneled resources toward students that they felt would demonstrate the most "impact" and market themselves to future funders. I described the affective dimensions of the refugee category in the distribution of partner resources in the previous section, a within-group analysis resource distribution among ELL students. However, teachers also noticed large rifts between attention paid by partners to ELL or "immigrant" and "American" or "urban" students.

> **Mr. Cassidy**: *We used to have more stuff for everyone, but we don't anymore*. I mean, there are some American kids that benefit, but I do think the ELL kids dominate these non-profits. The American kids don't want to participate because they might be treated differently 'cause technically, the ELL kids are nicer right? They do target the more Asian nationalities and it takes away from the American students. I get the sense that they feel that. We preach diversity but we're not diverse. *The partners too, they're like, the ELL kids are nice kids so why am I going to take a chance on an African-American kid who's questionable*? I'm going to have to deal with his attitude or something when I could just have this nice Bhutanese kid that I can just teach guitar to. See? (Interview, 3/28/14)

Mr. Cassidy underlines not only the affective dimension of partner resource provision, or partner preferences for servicing ELL students because they believed they were "nicer," but also the ways in which the snowball effect of partners focusing on ELL students created feelings of exclusion among native-born students. Teachers and partners alike said that even when they noticed skewed enrollments of first-generation immigrant students, most of Asian descent, they did not always know how to address the disparity or have time to address it given the many demands on their time.

When I asked Mr. Keo in an interview whether he noticed partners' disproportional enrollment of Asian ELL students in their programming, he admitted that it was a problem, but not one that he was in the position to fix because he needed the partners so desperately.

Race still matters a lot here. Guitars and Hoops has mostly Asian kids with no black kids. *I'm aware of it but having them is better than having nothing*. There's definitely some friction between the Black and Asian kids but I don't know it's about race or whether it's just kids being kids, you now, the boys trying to act up to defend their manhood. For the most part, we speak 24 different languages here but all manage get along which is one of the highlights n this school and something I take pride in. It's a neighborhood high school, but the race issue with the partners is something that I can't seem to touch on, but I've seen it for years. *I don't know whether the Black kids don't feel comfortable joining in or that they see no value in these extra programs. The Asian kids, they value their education and take advantage of it*. (Interview, 5/14)

Teachers that saw the skewed enrollment of Asian students in partner programming as indicative of greater "care" for their education, felt similarly to Mr. Keo that they could not disentangle native-born students' feelings of discomfort from those of academic complacency. Even if they could, they did not feel much control in terms of changing the social dynamics of partners' programming. At the end of the day, "having [the partners was] better than having nothing," as Mr. Keo claimed.

Partner self-criticism textured my conversations with partners concerned that they were potentially exacerbating social rifts between ELL and native-born, mostly Black students. Service for Salvation tried to atone for these rifts by facilitating a tutoring exchange between College Dreams' students and a rudimentary level ELL class. However, many admitted that the draw of working in a school like Johnson High was the "immigrant hope" that fueled participation in their programs. A high-level administrator overseeing the implementation of the College Dreams program described the advantage of partnering with schools with lower percentages of "American" students.

Ms. Tolentine: The most refreshing part about working in this school with more immigrants is that there's a level of hope and focus that's different than other schools with multi-generational poverty in that those kids don't see that education is going to make a difference. They don't see that there's something—if I work hard, something will shift. So like at a school with lots of native-born students,

like *it's a harder sell in some ways* because the immigrant kids are like, "Oh we're going to college." (Interview, 3/21/14)

Engaging in the same "market-speak" that many of the partners often used in community meetings, Ms. Tolentine explains that part of working as a partner is "selling" the idea of social mobility through education to children. In order for one's program to have the kind of "impact", measured usually through attendance, hours of participation, and ultimately graduation and college admission rates, each program had to attain a level of "buy-in."

While Louie (2012) referred to this phenomenon as the "immigrant bargain" or first-generation immigrant youths' attempt to recompense their parents' sacrifices by making it to college, I see this "immigrant hope" as being somewhat different. Many of the first-generation students that attended Johnson High did not have the language, foundational skills, or means to pursue higher education. However, this was often not of interest to the partners who oftentimes cared about attracting hard numbers and the marketing of individual success stories to funders. It was this buy-in to their program that they desired more than longer-term outcomes in terms of college admission rates. In this case, the partners traded on "immigrant hope," a kind of currency in a funding climate where programs lived and died by the sword of evidence-based "impact." Such a trade exacted a value from first generation immigrant students, namely refugee youth, which increased their value as organizations in the grant-funding marketplace. However, partners framed native-born students that lacked the "buy-in" discussed by Ms. Tolentine, as disinterested and not worth the investment of their time, energy, and organization's funding.

A Sustainable Strategy?

By the end of the 2014, three of the five major partners in the school pulled their

programs. College Dreams' largest grant elapsed and Career Ready decided to implement

a new model where they would be consolidating their resources and crowding them in

just a few high schools (Fieldnote, 3/12/14). Service for Salvation's national office

announced that they could not develop an enduring, self-sufficient funding plan in

Philadelphia and therefore had to pull out (Recording, 12/13/14). With their pullout, the

school lost four full-time staff, one of which served as a counselor for the entire senior

class, funds for college trips, financial aid workshops, internship opportunities, and

political capital in a district that had declared "partnerships" as a key reform strategy in

its Action Plan 2.0, a document outlining the direction of district policies. Career Ready's

instability was not unprecedented, as they had promised funds for a new biomedical

program and donated lab renovation years before and had lost their grant (Interview,

3/19/14). The principal and collaborating teacher of Career Ready both were disappointed

but not surprised by the retracted commitment to the school.

> **Mr. Cassidy**: I mean, when we first started, we had three different career track
> programs and it was really positive. The staffers designated for each program
> were here all of the time, we had tons of trips. But ya know, that was the high
> time and of course you have the low times with the budget crisis and all of that.
> They lose money too because they're a non-profit and businesses aren't putting as
> much money in so the first three years were great and then funding started
> stopping around 2010. I mean, yah, I was in hog heaven. Anything I asked for I
> got from them, which was great. It's not that way anymore, and now they're gone
> for good just like that. (Interview, 3/19/14)

With the pullout of the Career Ready and College Dreams, many of the teachers worried

about their students and what kinds of resources they would need to attract to fill the void

left. At community partner meetings in the last two months of school, Mr. Keo would

approach the partners, desperately asking whether they could pick up slack. While some partners obliged his entreaties, oftentimes an awkward silence permeated the room, many partners reluctant to commit more resources to objectives outside the scope of their mission. The coordinator of Service for Salvation, Ms. Crowley, one day in May, frustrated with having had to play a "security guard" throughout the year and play a role on disciplinary committees, finally broke down. "I'm sorry, Mr. Keo, but I can't use my organization's money and time to do all of these things that you ask of us." At the meetings conclusion, I conducted an interview with a coordinator of Guitars and Hoops that had take it upon herself to run these meetings. Exasperated and despondent, she vented to me.

> **Ms. Shore**: I think that's where I get to that point where I'm like, jeez, how is this helpful? It's such a difficult thing because when you market a program, you want something quick and concise and simple, but those are just Band-Aids. It doesn't really get to the real issues. It's not systemic. We can't always do the things he asks of us and even if we could, is that really our responsibility? (Interview, 5/28/14)

Ms. Shore's questions about employing partners as a strategy to combat resource scarcity in the school highlights another problem, the moral dilemmas that arise from perpetual "mission slip" as new and old partners come and go. Calling the partners "Band-Aids", she is uncertain of the sustainability of leaning heavily on partners that are inherently unstable and subject to fluctuations in grant cycles and the whims of the market. Partners made no bones about their missions and the objectives of their programming. They were accountable to their funders and evaluation measures before the needs of the school. However, as the crisis deepened and Mr. Keo became more desperate, their role as core service providers raised questions about the limits of their work and whether they could,

in good conscience, eschew their organization's priorities in favor of attending to the

immediate needs of the school.

A Slippery Slope: Internal Privatization and Paranoia

In the second half of the year, partners' relationships with students, families and

other institutions, particularly charter schools, posed further questions about whether the

"agendas" of the partners actually aligned with the school's interests. Earlier in the

chapter, Mr. Brown, the former principal, discussed the importance of selectivity in

allowing partners into the building, explaining that partners may have ulterior motives.

With the expansion of charter schools in the district in the previous years and the mass

closure of district schools in May 2013, many teachers voiced a criticism that private

partners, while necessary in the context of the budget crisis and harsh school performance

evaluation system, introduced a dangerous encroachment of the private sector on a public

institution.

> **Mr. Wood**: I think people are fine with marketing ourselves to private funding
> sources as long as it's happening the way is now. If more community partners
> came and wanted to help out, of course we would say yes. What you fear the most
> is someone going to come in and say, "We're going to make this the Beautiful
> Sunshine Academy and turn it into a charter school because we have this other
> model that we think works better." Now you're out. Especially when you look at
> the growing number of seats that have been turned over to charter schools, and the
> shrinking numbers of seats in public schools, the bottom line is with the charter
> schools, there's private money flowing through there, and private money serves
> itself, not the students. Partners also serve themselves before they serve us
> (Interview 3/5/14)

Many teachers, like Mr. Wood, drew parallels between the private nature of partners and

the private nature of charter schools, fearful of the slippery slope of forfeiting too much

control and power to private entities. Mr. Wood warns that "private money serves itself"

and that partners also "serve themselves before they serve [the school]. Concerned about

the overall survival of Johnson High, his anecdote highlights the contradiction between resisting the ultimate consequence of neoliberal education policies, closure, through partners, while also engaging private entities, the perceived root of the closure threat.

Pigeon-holed and feeling a lack of choice, Mr. Keo proceeded throughout the near to nurture relationships with the partners and integrate them into the school community. However, a series of events beginning in January heightened paranoia that the partners might actually be subverting the school's survival strategies, rather than bolstering them. In several Facebook posts of Burmese refugee students, I came to learn that many had applied to a large charter high school in the same neighborhood and had been accepted (Field note 1/6/14). These students had received application assistance from Refugee Aid and their staff, specifically a prominent Burmese staff member that had cultivated a strong relationship with an ELL teacher there. As a long-time tutor and volunteer with Refugee Aid, I consulted another staff member about these students, questioning whether they, as an organization, supported charter school applications. Ms. Kraft, the co-director, explained the predicament.

> I mean, it doesn't matter if it's a charter school or a public school. *Whoever has our students, we'll work with them.* I mean, the charter schools are pulling our good kids and the parents think the schools are safer and have better staff to student ratios. *If our students want to go to charter schools, we support them.* A lot of the Burmese and Bhutanese have applied. Actually, most of them, because the word on the street is that [Mastery] Charter School is the best. One of our Burmese-speaking staff is a huge proponent and now everyone is drinking the Kool-Aid. I mean, not many of the high school kids will get in because they want the little ones that will move through their programs. But if someone drops, they're might be free spaces. (Interview, 1/14/14)

As Ms. Kraft highlights, their allegiance is to the students they serve and not to Johnson High.

As the semester wore on, several teachers and Mr. Keo got wind that staff at Refugee Aid were deliberately enrolling their high-achieving refugee students at a local charter school. A confrontation ensued where Mr. Keo called a co-director at Refugee Aid and accused the organization of undermining the standing of the school and imperiling its numbers. He also accused the staff of "brainwashing" vulnerable refugee parents into thinking that a charter school would serve them better. Indignant and offended, a series of heated emailed exchanges ensued, Mr. Keo drawing support from a vocal ELL teacher, Ms. Betty, and the part-time bilingual counselor responsible for corresponding and translating for Burmese families, and the staff of Refugee Aid. In a conference between his staff and those of Refugee Aid, Mr. Keo's anger boiled over.

> I have little control over what you people do and how your missions contribute to what's happening here academically. I have no choice but to let you come in here, and so I opt to trust you because what's the alternative? Having nobody? I assume you are the lesser of two evils, but then you go and do something like this, *help these people poach my students*. What am I supposed to think? (Fieldnote, 4/29/13)

Refugee Aid staff, fearful that they would lose their standing in the school, insisted that they respected Johnson High's ELL program and encouraged their students to come enroll there. They assured Mr. Keo and Ms. Betty that the scale of the impact was small and that the majority of the students probably would not be accepted anyway. Mr. Michaels, a case manager, assured him,

> As you know, we are always encouraging our students to go to Johnson, largely because of the support and dedication they received from you and other excellent teachers and staff. We just want our advanced students to have more opportunities. We don't want to deny them those opportunities if a charter school and not a neighborhood school is able to provide them. As an organization, we have to support what's best for the students" (Email Correspondence, 4/28/14).

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However, independent consultations with each camp following the confrontation revealed a deep level of mistrust and uneasiness. My conversation with Ms. Betty and Mr. Keo after the Refugee Aid staff left the main office was fraught with anger and moral dilemma.

> **Mr. Keo**: *We have charters poaching our good kids here already*. There are non-educational institutions popping up left and right. With everybody trying to compete for that money and students, the ethical piece is thrown out of the window. For us, it's more difficult because we are a neighborhood high school, and as a neighborhood high school we have to take students from all over who the charter schools don't want. *Having an organization like that who's willing to enroll kids in charters under our nose challenges the integrity of our school. We need our numbers because if we don't have that number, we close.* The good kids get into the charters, but what happens to the rest of them?
>
> **Ms. Betty**: [Refugee Aid] is so shady. I don't think they get it. They keep telling me that if there are opportunities, then we shouldn't prevent our good kids from going, that we can just take the low-level ELL crowd. Well, I take that personally. *Just because we're a neighborhood school doesn't mean we're a bad school.* I told them that these schools aren't going to take the [names of three low English-level Burmese students], that they want the quiet, high achieving [names of three high-level Burmese students]. *So what happens to them when our school closes? Where do they go? Do they get warehoused somewhere where they won't be part of a community or acknowledged for who they are*? I'm an invested teacher and I think it's fucked up when you use our school for your program and then you undermine my livelihood and hope by taking my kids away from me. We have so little hope already so this feels like an assault [crying]…like we're being used and dumped because we're not good enough. The partners don't see our fate wrapped up in this seemingly innocent act, that when they close schools like us, charters open in our place. *I don't think they see it that way because they're advocating for a very select group of kids, but what about the rest of the kids that those schools don't want?* I believe that equitable, nurturing public education is what's best for all of our kids, and it's a serious philosophical difference that we have. (Recorded Conversation, 4/29/14)

Listening to this conversation was one of my more difficult moments throughout my fieldwork. I felt caught at the center of an ideological battle where the question over what was "best for the kids" straddled two camps where I held dear friends. My two years of prior fieldwork with Refugee Aid, an organization responsible for my entry into the

neighborhood's newer refugee communities and ultimately Johnson High, was a result of working and teaching in their program. Caught in the middle, I was asked to "choose" a side, between a teacher and principal that I had grown to respect and ache for in their struggle to keep the school alive, and a partner that did thorough, well-intentioned work with, what Ms. Betty correctly describes, as a "very select group of kids."

<p style="text-align:center">************************************</p>

Throughout this chapter I have detailed the pressures that created need for partnerships – the confluence of an extraordinary budget crisis that intensified the material needs of the school as well as the expanding education market in Philadelphia that placed the onus on neighborhood schools to compete with charter schools for enrollments. In spite of their reservations about partner accountability and their potentially ulterior motives for being there, both principals and teachers felt they had no choice but to allow partners to enter the building in order to either replace lost services or make them a more palatable option for students and families. Returning to my second and third research questions – aimed at understanding how partners worked in conjunction with the schools' other strategies to brand Johnson High as a quality high school – Johnson High's administrators, teachers, and staff developed strange bedfellow relationships with non-profits not just due to austerity but also because of market pressures to compete with charter schools. Understood as a mechanism to bolster the school's reputation in the larger neighborhood and city, Mr. Brown and Mr. Keo forged partnerships with non-profits that would extend their ability to not only attract great enrollments but influence people of persuasion by forming relationships with well-connected individuals at the city-level. If powerful individuals and their organizations by

extension were making investments in the school, administrators hoped that the district would be less likely to subject the school to closure.

As the fiscal crisis in the district worsened in the last years of Mr. Brown's tenure and the first two years of Mr. Keo's appointment to principal, partners served a more practical purpose: plugging their resources into service and material voids left by budget cuts. Becoming core service providers in the absence of district-funded school supports, Mr. Keo especially saw partners as the only way to keep Johnson High afloat on an everyday basis. Partner staff became disciplinarians, hall monitors, chaperones, and funders of school events and fieldtrips. Further, by bringing in partners that specialized in serving ELL students, Mr. Keo recognized partners as a means to attract the kinds of students that would not only strengthen enrollment but also fortify his climate data.

However, this strategy to build the schools' service capacity through partners was rife with moral as well as practical dilemmas. College Dreams, a particularly committed partner, served as a ideal case to examine the chasms between the top-down mission of an organization and the ways in which mission elided the more nuanced needs of the school through program's implementation. Partner staff struggled to reconcile their organization's mission and accountability to funding sources with the student's and larger school community's unique needs and personal dilemmas.

Partners, similarly to the administrators and teachers working to build an ELL-centric brand, confronted equity in service provision as their design targeted select group of students for their programs. Specific categories of student, namely first-generation refugee youth, triggered an affect that both attracted partnering organizations and allowed them to frame their work as "impactful" to their funders. As many partners articulated,

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the humanitarian appeal of a refugee cause allowed them to market their missions as more worthy of philanthropic funding sources, cashing in on the global circulation of "white saviorism" that they incited humanitarian care for these students. However, these narrowly constructed targets rendered the needs of other high need populations, namely the undocumented students and the native-born, invisible. As one partner explains, undocumented students narratives do not trade as well in the non-profit marketplace as "refugee porn", or the horrific atrocities that made refugee youth more attractive to save.

Questions over the sustainability and utility of partnering organizations also arose often as partner grants elapsed and partners shifted their foci, leaving the school without resources it so desperately needed. Vignettes fraught with teachers' and administrators' doubt around partners ' trustworthiness and intentions also indicated an unease and borderline paranoia over partners' as possible agents of privatization and the charter school movement. In the case of Refugee Aid actively helping some of their cases to apply to charter schools, administrators like Mr. Keo had to ultimately reconsider whether the motives of the partners and their missions were compatible with the overarching goal of the branding process: to save the school from closure. Moreover, as partners began to exert more influence on the student body and school, teachers also wondered if the short-term relief that they brought with them, mitigated the political pressure that continued resource scarcity would place on the district and state to properly fund their schools.

The employment of partners to brand the school, however, contributed to an existential questioning not only among the teachers, administrators, and students, but the partner staff themselves. As the school felt an amplified sense of accountability to the

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district and state for their "performance" across a range of aforementioned criteria, partners lacked accountability to the school and state. Partner loyalties conversely lied in demonstrating "impact" to their funders; impact defined by their missions and prescribed interventions. As the school came to increasingly rely on partners' services after the budget cuts, teachers especially questioned the ethics of building "on top of" partners that selectively served particular student populations.

Looking to Vincanne Adams' (2013) observations in post-Katrina New Orleans, this non-profit network at Johnson justified its presence through the crisis and also operated without oversight or coordination. Several actually used the crisis in their promotional materials and "impact" evaluations to demonstrate the utility of their services and market themselves to philanthropic funders. Yet it was this strategy that also rendered them unstable, as grants and subsequently staffing, came and went.

This strategy therefore demonstrates what happens when state and district manufactured crisis removes supports for neighborhood schools, forcing them to look beyond their walls for resources to continue to provide basic educational services and compete in the education market. Highly volatile non-profits prioritizing their perpetuation as organizations serving select populations over the inclusive and democratic mission of the neighborhood school played a role in the uneven distribution of school resources. While partnerships functioned as a stopgap measure to stymie the exodus of state-funded supports, they also became another mechanism through which the school funneled resources to students deemed valuable to the school's brand. In many ways, the non-profits drew on the same affective power of first-generation Asian students as the school's leadership, namely refugee youth, to promote and market the mission and

impact of their organization. In other words, they became valuable commodities that non-profits could "sell" to raise money and please stakeholders. Aggregated with the administration's internal strategies to enroll ELL students and minimize the visibility and numbers of native-born, largely African-American, students, partnerships exacerbated feelings of marginalization and segregation among the latter group. This next chapter will detail students' responses to the emergence of what Ms. London termed as "two schools" (Chapter 4) and its implications for their educational trajectories.

CHAPTER 6 – "YOU PLAY THE HAND YOU'RE DEALT": STUDENT VOICES
AT JOHNSON HIGH

"A Lost Opportunity"

> Everyone is afraid of the school closing, so people want to make notes of the bad
> things. I'm pretty sure more good things happen than bad things. If they closed us,
> it would be bad for the neighborhood because the school plays an important role
> in the how people relate to one another. If I see you in school and in the
> neighborhood, and I have to work with you in a group here, then I know that
> you're not a possible threat. It would be a lost opportunity to know your
> neighbors. *The school is the meeting ground, the connection place*. It would be
> that missing (pause) *like if everybody goes to charters, nobody cares about the
> place that they're from*. That's why I go here. I can say, hey, that's MY school in
> [Johnson High's neighborhood]. But if I go up to North Philly, it's just another
> place. I pay more attention to what's going on in my neighborhood and my school
> if I feel like they're mine. The school enlightens people. In this city, not many
> people leave their neighborhoods. The school presents the opportunity to know
> different kinds of people and see through their eyes. You need knowledge to fight
> ignorance. Kids know OF each other, and that's a good thing, even if they don't
> hang out. (Interview with Eric, 2/20/14)

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Eric is an 18-year old African-American senior at Johnson High, a student that in

his four years has experienced the full gamut of the strategies used to try to save Johnson

High. His four years also coincided with unprecedented tumult at the district level across

two superintendents. When I asked him to imagine the feelings he would have should

Johnson High close, he insightfully addressed the implications that a closure would have

for not only his own sense of belonging, but also the macro-level relations of the larger

neighborhood. Describing the school as "the meeting ground, the connection place," Eric

invokes notions of a community and place building through an educational space. A

school, according to Eric, establishes bonds between diverse neighborhood constituencies

through children. Embedded within his quote is a critique of the ways in which the

expansion of charter schools erodes feelings and understandings of neighborhoods as

places of belonging and family history. "That's why I go here," he explains, "I can say, hey, that's MY school…but if I go up to North Philly, it's just another place."

Eric opens this chapter because his insights encapsulate the critiques, fears, and hopes of the Johnson High's student body as they bore witness to the devastating effects of the austerity policies at the district level in their classrooms, hallways, and neighborhood. I dedicate this chapter to their voices because their narratives ultimately reveal the youth-centered impacts that this constellation of market fundamentalist policies exact on their lives and trajectories as emerging adults and citizens-in-the-making. I focus particularly on their perceptions of their educational quality as well as how the school-level strategies to save Johnson High from closure influenced their peer-to-peer relationships. Their responses to the micro-level influence of these policies, I argue, expose much about the limits of these reforms.

Further, their responses they illuminate the ways in which neighborhood schools responding to these reforms structure youth inclusion and exclusion. By focusing on students' reactions toward the triangulating influences of the school-level strategies, I also show how these policies (i.e. which frame particular student types as threatening and others as worthy) fracture possibilities to facilitate successful, sustained relations across diverse student bodies. No study within the school closures literature has focused on how attending schools slated for potential closure influence students' perceptions of school value or the ways that they relate to their communities. Their perspectives matter to the degree that they reflect feelings of respect and belonging as well as their willingness to enroll and invest their time and energy in the school's health and future.

The chapter moves from students' perceptions of neighborhood schools within the schema of "school choice" in Philadelphia. I discuss how the stratification of schools within the expanding range of options affect students' understandings and attitude toward the traditional neighborhood school. I then move into students' critiques of the community partners, noting their instability and selectivity in service provision. I finally discuss students' understandings of their peers as particular strategies racialized students along the ELL-American spectrum. Together these sections craft an account of the instability of the school's brand as many students lost faith in the school to serve the needs of the entire population as well as survive as a divided institution.

Perceptions of Neighborhood Schools

The "Hierarchy" of Schools

Of the six classes that I observed regularly at Johnson High, I spent almost every day in the College Dreams sponsored class of 25 sophomores. The group was a mix of higher-level ELL students and native-born students, and the ratios fluctuated throughout the year pending the attrition and transfer rates. Of the 25 students, there was one 15 year old, White student, James. James was an anomaly in a school that at the time of the research, was less than 10 percent White, and of the White students, many have been ejected from parochial schools and charter schools for behavior problems. James was quiet and generally kept to himself, completing work so that he could retreat behind a textbook to sleep without the teacher noticing him. Playing the class tutor meant that I spent many classes sitting with him, keeping him "focused" as per the teacher's request, and asking him about his life.

James was born and raised two blocks from the school to an Irish mother and Italian father, streets of the neighborhood that are interestingly still home to those white ethnic populations. His older brother graduated several years prior from the other neighborhood high school and then lived on marine on base in California. His mother also attended another neighborhood high school where she became pregnant at 17 with his brother and subsequently dropped out. She worked as a temporary receptionist for dentists around the area, but often did not have regular or consistent hours. His stepfather, a construction worker, also only worked when he was "called in" for a job. On a day in late September, as Johnson High roiled in the chaos imposed by the budget cuts, James described to me his predicament as a student attending a "neighborhood school."

> I mean, I really wanted to go to Catholic school but they've gotten a lot more expensive, like $5,000 a year. I mean, I don't mind it here that much. Like you have the magnet schools and Catholic schools up here [gestures with hands high], and charters are here [lowers hands down] and then there's the neighborhood school here at the bottom of the barrel [lowers hands further]. I mean, Johnson High isn't as bad as [other neighborhood high school], not as dangerous, but it's still down here because it's a neighborhood school. And then with all of the budget cuts, it sucks even more, ya know? (Fieldnote, 9/26/13)

Delineating the rungs of school "quality" in Philadelphia, James places his Johnson High at "the bottom of the barrel" echoing similar sentiments as Mr. Keo in Chapter 3 toward the overarching perception that neighborhood schools are "bad" because "bad kids" go to them. James distances himself from the school's reputation by pointing that he himself "wanted to go to a Catholic school but they've gotten more expensive, like $5,000 a year," citing his lack of choice in attending Johnson. In a system where charter schools have further injected "choice" into the marketplace of urban school options, James points out that those at "the bottom" do not enjoy that same choice for prohibitive tuitions at

Catholic schools or losing in a charter school lottery ultimately relegates them to non-selective high schools. Further exacerbating his plight, he feels, are the budget cuts that have disparately affected district-run neighborhood schools that rely solely on state and city-level tax revenues. When I asked James whether he had plans to apply to college, he told me that he probably would not. In spite of his placement in the College Dreams' cohort, he explained, "I mean, I go to Johnson High right? Didn't I just explain that to you? Like, I'm not that smart. I'm tryin' to just find a job now down at Modell's so that I can pay for my shoes and stuff. With mom not working, I gotta pay for my own stuff" (Field note, 9/26/13)

Many students in addition to James felt compelled to transfer to "better schools" like charters and magnet schools, particularly when stressful situations arose regarding the building's infrastructure and the lack of cleaning staff. A bed bug problem descended on several classrooms mid-year, but with no funds to hire a fumigator, the students and teachers had no choice but to bring personal repellent cans (Fieldnote 2/5/14). With a leaking roof, asbestos-ridden 4th floor, disintegrating dry wall, and only two part-time cleaning staff to cover a building large enough to accommodate 2000 students, the air quality suffered enormously. Ms. Allard, the teacher of the College Dreams class, was hospitalized on three separate occasions for in-school asthma attacks (Field note, 5/4/14). During one of her absences, I sat with two native-born Asian and Latino male students, discussing the possibility of transferring. Brian, the son of Vietnamese refugees, Tony, the son of two Lao refugees, and Leo and Joseph, the sons of first-generation Mexican parents.

Leo: I applied to charters in the 8th grade but I didn't get accepted.

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Joseph: I wanted to, but my parents didn't know what to do. They don't speak much English.
Tony: I really want to transfer though. This school is so gross with all of the shit on the floor and stuff. Like, Ms. Allard ain't even here because it's makin' her sick. I want to transfer to an arts charter school or somethin'. Johnson, it's just not me. I'm better than this so I want to graduate from a better school.
Brian: Yeah, it's too late though. I mean, we are in 10th grade.
Joseph: My parents can't really help me so I guess I'm staying here. (Fieldnote, 10/1/13)

In the middle of this conversation, Joseph turned to me and asked, "Ms. Julie, do you think you could help me apply to a charter school? We don't have the counselor this year to help us." Telling him that I was not familiar with the charter school lottery process and that I would look into it for him, I still felt conflicted. Privy to the principal's worries that students might leave, I didn't want to encourage students to flee the school in search of the greener pastures of a charter. At the same time, I wanted them to know that their grievances with the "shit on the floor" and their perceptions of the quality of the education they were receiving did not fall on deaf ears.

This conversation however pointed to a larger problem – that students like James and Joseph felt the stigma of attending a "neighborhood school" based purely on the fact it was non-selective. Their feelings reflected Mr. Keo and the teachers' views that the schools' non-selectivity and its inability to completely exclude "problem kids" made it difficult to appear valuable and worth saving as an institution. Collectively these responses raised questions about deservingness and public education. First, what message does increasing educational "choice" send to students like James and Joseph, that, because of their parents' inability to send them somewhere else, have no choice but to attend an increasingly underfunded neighborhood school? Second, what other recourse did educators like Mr. Keo have but to compete in the marketplace?

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The American Dream Denied: ELL Student Perspectives

While native-born students like James and Joseph certainly voiced criticisms

about the ways in which the budget cuts and school closures imperiled their education,

they always dismissed the crisis as just another district-produced calamity that would

come and go. Eric, the senior that opened the chapter, when questioned about the budget

cuts, would constantly say, "You play the hand you're dealt" (Interview, 2/20/14),

accepting his lack of control over the state of his school. However, the responses and

perspectives of diverse first-generation immigrant population, students that were coming

into contact with the American education system for the first time from a multitude of

contexts, differed in their level of shock and alarm. These students, arriving at Johnson

High from refugee camps, war zones, and collapsed economies, compared the

educational quality their schools to Philadelphia's in essays, senior projects, and district-

budget meetings, voicing their concerns about the potentially false promise made to them

through the Horatio Algiers narrative.

Lila , a Pakistani student from the Swat Valley, a contested territory in northern

Pakistan near the Afghan border, immigrated to the United States because extremist

groups closed the schools in her region. Hell-bent on making it to college, she battled her

family to attend public school in Philadelphia and even convinced them to allow her to

apply to community college. At an SRC meeting, she stood in front of 200 people, after

having only learned English 9 months prior, and rebuked district and state officials for

the current state of the system.

> You need to do better. This school district is one of the biggest in the United
> States and you should not cut the budget because the education is the most
> important. I mean, in Pakistan, we studied a lot of science classes and I don't have

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as many here. We had books for everyone. Here, 4 of us have to share in class. In our ELL classes, we should not have 35 students. What do you want for your new citizens? This is a developed country! There is no excuse! (Fieldnote, 4/14/14)

Several other students took on the district budget crisis and mass school closures in their senior projects. Barat, a Bangladeshi student that force-transferred to Johnson High in September of her senior year after her former high school closed, lamented that not only had the school closures hurt her support network as she applied for colleges, but that it had ended her family's history in the school.

> I was surprised, because in my country they don't shut down schools. When I heard it's the whole school, I mean, I know we didn't have enough students. I was disappointed because a lot of my favorite teachers got laid off. It was my first kind of home when I came. My uncle went and a lot of my family and community went to that school and they have good careers now – pharmacist, finance. So they all got like a good education there. (Interview, 4/15/14)

Both Barat and Lila 's quotes reflect a general incredulity among the immigrant students that the state of public education in the U.S. could be worse than their own countries. Though many appreciated the fact that school was "free", grateful for the opportunity to attend school without paying fees, they frequently felt resentful that educational attainment, their ticket to upward mobility and the primary reason for their family's migration, could be subject to such political whims. Many students echoed the "hierarchy of schools" discourse deployed by many native-born students, citing the shame they felt for attending a neighborhood high school. David, a recent Tunisian immigrant, explains his disappointment when he discovered the meaning of a "neighborhood school."

> I have a lot of friends in charter schools and *I feel like they have their education. I think that their students are different in that they are chosen. But in here, it's a neighborhood school, so whoever wants to come, Mr. Keo has to accept them.* It's like the reputation of the school you see? So when I first came here, a lot of my father's friends were like, "David, what high school are you going to?" and I was like, "Johnson High School." And they were like, "Johnson? It's a bad school

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right?" But the thing is, like when I came here, I wasn't so excited to be honest because they made me feel like I was going to a horrible school, but I didn't know about the schools here. Why should it matter so much? (Interview, 4/10/14)

David "didn't know about the schools" but learned through interactions with other students and family friends that the non-selectivity of his high school qualified it as a "bad" school. Thus, he entered Johnson High feeling like it could not provide him with a decent public education. However, in later conversations and informal interviews with David, an active member of several partners' programs as well as the National Honor Society, he said that his experience at Johnson High did not warrant its reputation. Citing to caring, hard-working teachers, and the numerous partnerships Mr. Keo and Mr. O'Donnell had brought into the school like Service for Salvation and College Dreams, David said that he felt the opportunities were available if students applied themselves.

Again, David points to the central issue of perceptions of value driving the enrollment in neighborhood schools. As a recent immigrant, he initially felt that a free public education was a blessing bestowed upon him. The discourse of choice that influenced his extended family's conversations over school value tainted his own faith in the school until he could see opportunities expressed through his personal experiences with faculty. He remained in the school through senior year even after receiving an opportunity to leave for a special admission school across the city (Fieldnote, 11/13/12). However, the administration's fear of losing students like David to charter and magnet schools prompted them to both continue seeking out private partners to increase the school's appeal, and minimize the risk that particular student populations posed to the school's reputation.

Student Critiques of Community Partners

Noting the Fissures

While most students, first-generation immigrant and native-born alike, praised the school for allowing private providers to fill the gaps in services pre and post-budget cuts, several criticized the accessibility of those programs and their overall diagnoses of the schools' needs. Sondra, one of the few white senior female students, came to Johnson High from South Jersey after her mother and four siblings moved in with their aunt following her parents' divorce. In between the move to the neighborhood and the divorce, her family lived in a Red Roof Inn by the airport and then a shelter in Center City. At the time of her interview in early 2014, she lived with her siblings, three cousins, and aunt. Working at a grocery store as a cashier a few blocks from Johnson High, her mother struggled to establish an independent household. When I met Sondra in a calculus class at the beginning of the 2013 school year and asked her about her future plans, she planned to attend a college in central Pennsylvania where she would study to become a veterinary technical assistant. In continuous conversation with Mr. Lytle, the coordinator of College Dreams, Sondra received his help with the applications for the college as well as financial aid.

However, when it came to funding the trip out to take the placement test in November, Mr. Lytle could not directly provide the funds for the $60 round-trip bus ticket or the hotel costs. Not able to ask her mother for help, Sondra forwent the placement test and decided to apply for a job at the local grocery store with her mother. In a conversation in Mr. Lytle's office, she sighed.

I mean, what can I do? I can't ask my mom for the money because she doesn't have it. And then what would I do if I got out there? How would I afford to get home if I had to? Also, with my migraines and eating stuff, I don't know if I could even make it on my own there. The doctors at the clinic here know my case. I appreciate all Mr. Lytle can do, but he can only do so much, ya know? (Fieldnote, 11/10/13)

I learned later in a formal interview that Sondra suffered a serious carbon monoxide leak in her home several years ago has left her with chronic migraines and an inability to keep food down. She felt that between her responsibilities at home caring for her siblings while her mother worked, her relationship with several doctors at the public clinic, and the prohibitive living costs of attending a college so far away, that the barriers to pursuing a career as a vet tech were too steep.

Even though Mr. Lytle provided information and assistance through the application process, Sondra points out that sometimes the keys to persistence go beyond the program's capacity. Perhaps Mr. Lytle could help her navigate a university admissions website, but he could not resolve the difficult realities introduced by her family's poverty (i.e. $60 bus ticket). Sondra was additionally vocal about the discrepancy between partners' constructions of student needs and consequently, their programming, and what she perceived as their actual needs. Nostalgic for her earlier high school years before the budget cuts, she complained,

I don't mind community service, it's fun an all, but I already do a lot of service on my own. All of these [community partners] want you to do service after-school and on the weekends. Like that's going to get me into college? I mean, ya know, yes and no right? It's really about money for me. They want us to do so much community service. You go home, you gotta work and take care of other people, but then you also have to take care of your community. It's overwhelming for kids. Sometimes you just need to do somethin' artsy. You wanna do somethin' with your inner self and not always help other people. (Interview, 2/7/14)

Sondra specifically refers to the mission of Service for Salvation that ran after-school and weekend service programming for students. Service for Salvation, a national organization founded by a finance executive, rooted its mission in addressing poverty and illiteracy by "breaking the cycle of low expectations" in poor communities in the U.S. and abroad through service education (Interview, 1/10/14). This particular organization constructed the "education crisis" as a global struggle, framing service education as antidote to structural educational deficits in both urban areas of the United States and developing countries. Sondra directly critiques this construction of the education crisis and more importantly, the remedy they propose to solving it: service. Pointing to her unrecognized forms of service (i.e. childcare for siblings, responsibilities in a single-parent household), Sondra finds fault with Service for Salvation's failure to recognize the impediments imposed on her trajectory not from her "low expectations" of herself but because of the structural constraints of living in poverty.

Partner Instability

Sondra 's testimony, in addition to pointing out the organization's misdiagnosis of students' needs, laments the loss of teacher-led creative after-school programs that she enjoyed prior to the budget cuts. "Sometimes you just wanna do somethin' with your inner self and not always help other people," referenced the outlet that a music teacher provided her through an in-school choir to express herself through song.

> Yeah, I mean, we don't have as many things like we used to in the 9th grade. I used to be in choir, ya know? We still got chess club but Mr. Lytle [College Dreams coordinator] runs it but he'll be gone next year. And all of the sports got cut. Like everything we used to have in 9th grade, there's nothin' anymore. And I think that's what's really hurtin' the school. Nobody wants to be here because it's like borin' – there's nothin' to do after-school and there's nothin' to do during school. Even the Work Ready folks, they're leavin'. I came here for that program

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and they'll be gone next year. There's nothin' really to do except go to class. I mean, granted that's what school's for, but you always want to look forward to somethin'. (Interview, 2/7/14)

Even though the school had 16 community partners, many of whom provided after-school programming either at the school or a neutral site, Sondra felt like "there's really nothin' to do." This comment points to two issues: 1) partners missing of the mark 2) their instability. One of the reasons Sondra attended Johnson High was to benefit from Career Ready's "academy" programming, a combination of in-school and after-school curriculum and internship experience intended to prepare students for careers in specific fields like hospitality and tourism and urban education. Throughout Sondra's time at Johnson, Career Ready had truncated their funds and staff dedicated to implementing the program, culminating in mass pull out from the school at the end of AY 2013-2014 (Fieldnote, 6/18/14). Understanding partner programming as unstable as the extracurricular funding, Sondra's critique draws attention to the ways in which partner programming exacerbated the instability of the school's resources.

Selective Service Provision

A final yet ubiquitous critique of the community partners industry, shared by both native-born and specific groups of ELL students, stressed how partners' narrow constructions of the problems of the school and the missions of their organizations rendered visible certain groups for targeted services, and invisible others. In a community partner meeting in February of 2014, Mr. Keo asked the community partners whether they would like to function as class sponsors for the following year. With no extracurricular budget to pay teachers to take on the additional responsibilities, Mr. Keo implored the non-profit staff to volunteer their labor.

We don't have enough money to pay for a sponsor for every grade. I barely have enough money to buy envelopes. The District is broke. Next year's budget is coming out and it's not going to be pretty. There isn't going to be money for the teachers' pensions, so there isn't going to be any for class sponsorship for sure.

Several of the partners raised their hands as potential volunteers for next year with the caveat that should their grants elapse and not be renewed, they might not be employed by their organization and able to take on the responsibility. Listening intently to the conversation, an invited student to the meeting, Jorie, voiced his frustration with the proposed arrangement.

I think it's a problem that we don't have a sponsor for the junior class so that we can come together and plan events. We don't get anything. It also bothers me that the seniors get everything. Everyone wants to help them. Like, Mr. Lytle helps them and he won't help me. Isn't that what we need for a quality education? Isn't that what we need to learn to lead? Is this America? Really? Equality for all?

Mr. Keo responded,

Yes, you're right, the seniors are spoiled because they get College Dreams, but you have to remember that he's paid for by a grant and not by us. *Mr. Lytle isn't my employee so I can't control whom he decides to help.* As long as our educational system is based on taxes, this is the America you're going to get. You're going to have to take it up with the governor. (Fieldnote, 2/20/14)

Jorie furrowed his brow and put his hand in his chin. While Mr. Keo continued on with the meeting, David, who had also been invited to attend the meeting, turned to me and confessed,

To be honest, I wish I lived I the suburbs. I hear a lot of good things about the schools. I like Johnson but I don't feel like I have an advantage. I'm an immigrant so I don't know a lot of things. I want to go to Drexel for engineering but I need to find information and Mr. Lytle [College Dreams coordinator] isn't allowed to help me. And Refugee Support, they can't help me because I don't qualify.

This idea of seeing resources in the school and not being able to access them because of partners' stringent qualifying criteria frustrated both ELL and native-born students.

Because College Dreams targeted only the senior class, other students did not have the

option of receiving help from the coordinator. In addition, the case managers and tutors

provided through Refugee Support only offered services to students that qualified for

their program. David and Jorie alike, both first-generation immigrants, did not have

parents that worked with raw food products. Their fathers drove cabs and their mothers

ran their households. Without a counselor that year and no promise of that position

stabilizing with the budget in the coming year, David and Jorie were incredulous that

such inequity could exist in the system. Jorie in fact asked, "Is this America? Really?

Equality for all?"

Racial Triangulation and Peer Relations

The Performance of Care

> **Juan**: I hear that many schools are closing and all of that stuff, but I also know that many American students don't want to study. *The people who care are the immigrant students.* When I was in Mexico, if you're a good student, they send you to another school to study. I mean, I don't know if they can do that here, but if the *school is getting so poor or old, they can close it*, and *the students who care can move to another school*. I think that's a good idea because they're going to a school that has students that care about what they're going to be. (Interview, 4/7/14)

Juan's recommendation encapsulates the rift in student categorizations that the

school traded on in its branding process of Johnson High. Not dissimilar to the ways in

which teachers and the administration differentiated between student "types", the

injection of increasing numbers of immigrant students to boost enrollment numbers and

improve perceivably mutable statistics like "school climate" exacerbated the social

distance between ELL and native-born students (i.e. "Americans"). Students took up

these discourses and circulated them amongst each other, immigrant students oftentimes

characterizing "American" students, as lacking reverence for both their education and their teachers. Such insubordination, as Juan explained, warranted the closing of schools disproportionately attended by students who don't "care about what they're going to be." This imperative to perform "care" for one's education intensified as resources disappeared and the punishment for appearing apathetic as a collective student body loomed.

Immigrant students oftentimes cited shock at the "behaviors" of "Americans" and feared them in their classrooms and hallways. They also saw them as a threat to the "quality" of the education they were receiving. One day in the back of a calculus class I was observing, I spoke with a first-generation Vietnamese student about my project. I told him that I was interested in immigration and education and thought that Johnson High would be a good place to conduct the project because of its diversity. He responded,

> Oh! That's a big issue here. The problem in this school is that there are a lot of students that don't care. You know, the ones that are born here, they say bad things, are loud, and fight. *Some of the Asians were born here, so maybe they're just like African-Americans*, like cursing, beating people up. Like the Chinese boys, you know, with the yellow hair and earrings. They fight with the Black kids. I don't understand. How can you not care? *The Cambodian girls are pregnant and think that Obama is going to take care of them*. Every day I go home, I see Cambodians walking with a baby stroller. *It's like Asian minds right, Asian people, like teach their kids to look toward the future*. Our parents teach us that education is important and that's why we came here. *I'm not their friend because they destroy my education. They're why they think we have a bad school and they want to close us* (Fieldnote, 12/18/13)

Peter, by linking behavior and race, constructs a particular kind of student that poses a threat to the "quality" of his education. Students that "say bad things, are loud, and fight" demonstrate a lack of "care" for their education and in turn dilute the quality of the education he and his parents "came here" from Vietnam to attain. Through association

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with students demonstrating these problematic behaviors (i.e. "beating people up, cursing", teen pregnancy, dress), Peter feels that the value of his high school is diminished.

Like Juan, Peter tethers a deficit analysis of his peers to the school's overarching categorization as a "bad school." Their perspectives demonstrate that perceptions of value of the neighborhood are highly racialized, indexed by their feelings toward students that exhibit behaviors that they find unbecoming. Again, the term "American" becomes slippery as Peter notes is disdain for "Asian students" that were "born here" and act "just like African-Americans". Asserting that he's "not friends with them because they destroy [his] education" he harbors resentment for the students that "don't care" and refuses to associate with them. Like Mr. Keo and Success Academy teachers in Chapter 2, second-generation Cambodians that rely on public assistance (i.e. "think that Obama will take care of them") are equally indictable for threatening Johnson High's reputation. Both Peter and Juan assign blame to "American" students for diluting their perceived "quality" of their education and bringing risk to the sustainability of the institution.

It Ain't About Race?: December 2013

This idea that the "American" students were responsible for degrading perceptions of the school therefore was not limited to the administration and teaching staff. First generation immigrant students consistently asserted that abstaining from contact with "Americans" was the best policy. This included not only African-American students, but also "dangerous Asians" like Cambodians as well as White students that they felt exhibited the same behaviors. Aware that the school had also suffered at the hands of the budget cuts, oftentimes first-generation students eschewed blaming he

district for Johnson High's predicament and instead villainized their native-born or "American" peers.

As the school became a pressure cooker throughout the fall with so few staff, morale dropped and tensions began to mount in hallways, classrooms, the lunchroom, and schoolyard. By December, several skirmishes between students in the hallways escalated into violent incidents after school. By the end of the month, questions over whether the incidents were "racially motivated" circulated amongst the staff, administration, and study body. Given the violent events several years prior at Johnson's sister neighborhood school where African-American students allegedly attacked Asian students, Mr. Keo worried that should the media construe the incidents as "racial", that the school would further increase its consideration for closure. Calling a meeting of the community partners and the police chief, Mr. Keo addressed the room:

> Johnson is very quiet. We usually don't have racial conflicts. For some strange reason this December we had four incidents. These incidents were inside and outside the school to the point where some of our students, low-level ELL students who speak limited English, were being targeted. *I don't believe that we have any hate-crimes going on but I want to make sure that if there is a perception that we address it.* December 5th, we had an incident at after-school with a Chinese student having his cell-phone stolen by African-American students from here. On December 13th we had an incidents with Nepali students and two African-American students. On December 17th we had a fight involving a transfer white student on his first day here that was challenged by an African-American student. The last fight was an unusual incident in the cafeteria: an African-American student decided to take a Chinese-American student's lunch. *I'm bringing this up because I can understand where this perception comes from.* In each of those four incidents, we suspended the students who committed the crime. Because many have heard about what transpired at [sister high school], the lower level students expressed concerns. (Meeting Recording, 1/6/14)

The ambivalence in Mr. Keo's account of the problem pervaded the rest of the school as labeling the incidents as "racial" might influence perceptions of the school as hostile to

vulnerable "ELL" students, the primary pillar of the first strategy to keep the school open. As Mr. Keo points out, even though he doesn't "believe" that "hate-crimes are going on", should perceptions of the school as "dangerous" travel through the neighborhood, both enrollment and their climate evaluation would drop.

When the teachers and principal got word that several of the ELL students, mostly first-generation Asians, and their parents were reconsidering sending their kids to school out of fear that they might be attacked by "Americans", in the following violence prevention meeting Mr. Keo and the superintendent begged partners to draft a "climate improvement plan" to evaluate whether the tensions in the school were in fact, "racial." Mr. Keo enlisted Ms. Shore and Ms. Crowley, the partner coordinators of Service for Salvation and Career Ready, as well as myself to implement a staff and student survey and focus groups to gage perceptions of racial tensions school-wide. My responsibility was to gather representative groups of students from a range of categories – racial, ethnic, English-language status, generation, and grade – to conduct focus groups around issues of peer relationships.

In five hour-long focus groups with heterogeneous sampling across grades, I found remarkably similar patterns in student perceptions of race tensions. All groups admitted that large increases in the number of ELL students in recent years, the bifurcated curriculum put in place to address linguistic differences between the native-born and ELLs, and the favored treatment of ELL students by staff, teachers, and administrators exacerbated the segregation and relations between "ELL" students and native-born students. It was also apparent that ELL students felt more strongly that tensions existed between the native-born and themselves than the native-born. The

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native-born however reported, particularly the seniors, feelings of exclusion and a devaluing of their contributions to the school community in the last several years. These trends mirrored survey results that suggested that ELL students were more likely to report feeling respected by their teachers than non-ELLs and that they felt that their culture was valued (Survey Results, 2/20/14). In a senior focus group with five students – Sondra (white-female), Eric (African-American male), Michael (African-American male), Sally (African-American female), and Sam (second generation Cambodian-American) – these students processed their opinions around these issues.

> **Sam**: Well, I think it's because those ELL teachers are nicer.
> **Sondra**: Well at the end of the year there's like this award ceremony that we all have, and we all come to get our awards, but then it's like all the Asians. *They get all of the awards and we don't get nothin'*. Don't they care about what we do?
> **Sally**: I mean, I think they deserve it because they work hard. I would never work that hard (*laughing*).
> **Eric**: Yeah, because like I said, that's what they be comin' here for! We in general take education more lightly because it's like, education.
> **Sondra**: What are you talkin' about?! I take it seriously! I get straight As and I was homeless for like 2 years! I work my butt off.
> **Sam**: I try hard too because I want to be an inspiration toward my younger siblings but yeah, sometimes I feel like everybody in this school likes the ELL students more.
> **Michael**: Yeah, the ELL teachers give em' whatever they want. They give em' breakfast and stuff. We don't get no breakfast. We gotta be somethin' special to get breakfast.
> **Eric**: They might nurture the ELL students a lil' bit more because they not from here, and maybe the American students don't understand. I don't have a problem. They just wanna welcome 'em to America.
> **Sondra**: I mean, yeah, they do get help a lot, like from the partners right, but I don't take offense to it because sometimes they do need it. Because like, I do the IDs and stuff, and most of the kids don't know what I'm sayin' and I am real glad that they have someone to help them learn English and stuff. (Focus Group, 1/18/14)

This focus group, while admitting that they felt that the ELL students had more caring teachers and received most of the accolades at the beginning of the year, overwhelmingly

respected the work ethic of the ELL students and appreciate their need for extra "help"

from the partner staff and teachers because of the language barrier that they faced.

However, Sondra asks, "Don't they care about what we do?" pointing to a sensed

marginalization as the school became increasingly ELL-dominated.

In a focus group of heterogeneous, native-born sophomores, their analysis of the

source of the violence between the native-born and ELL students in December centered

much more around perceptions of weakness and not necessarily "race." In focus group,

Sean is a White male, Kevin is an African-American male, Nina is an African-American

female, and Jackson is a Cambodian-American male.

> **Julie**: What do you think about the ELL students in this school?
> **Kevin**: They be easy targets.
> **Julie**: Because of their race?
> **Kevin**: People see 'em walking home and they think they weak and won't fight back so they just want to go and jump 'em. I don't be havin' classes with 'em though, so I don't know.
> **Sean**: The Pakistanis be [referring to Bhutanese refugees] smellin' and loud and they be aggravatin' us so people bang their heads in lockers.
> **Nina**: Yeah, but people always be messin' with people. It ain't about race though. They can be like disrespectful because we don't know what they sayin', and they be laughin' at you and lookin' at you.
> **Julie**: Do you think if they mixed the classes and lunches more, things would be better? Like you could communicate more and get to know each other?
> **Jackson**: It would be way worse. The hallways ain't got like, no teachers, so you would have kids fightin' in class and then callin' 'em into the hallways. *If the schools keep closin' and we get more, it's gonna be bad up in here*. (Focus Group Recording, 1/30/14)

This conversation spoke to several additional issues that complemented the seniors'

perspectives on ELL-native-born relationships in the school. The students deployed terms

like "us" and "them" to signify two crystallized categories of students: "American" and

"ELL." As Jackson points out, these categories gained traction as the administration

deliberately enacted practices to enroll ELL students from both closed schools and other

neighborhood high schools across the city. Without additional staff, an increasingly isomorphic curriculum, and no resources to implement programming that would facilitate sustained conversations between these groups of students, the students, both ELL and American were left to develop their own judgments of "the other." Perceiving ELLs as "weak" and unable to defend themselves, Kevin underscores an opportunism that native-born students saw in bullying ELLs. Jackson warns that "should school keep closin' and we get more, it's gonna be bad up in here", pointing to his fears that further injections of ELL students might exacerbate relations between the two groups.

The students of this group stayed close to the notion that the treatment "ain't about race" but rather based on expression of an identity through particular behaviors. While ELLs at Johnson were overwhelmingly of Asian descent, that category broke down across a wide range of ethnic groups and generational statuses. Lydia, a college-bound African-American senior and a transfer student from another closed high school, explained the linkage between behavior and race.

> And it's also not even about race, because the Asians—the foreign Asians, they don't communicate with the American Asians at all. *So it's much more about behaviors and actions. I don't care what race you are, if I can't connect with you, it's hard.* Like—Cambodians come here and they have American Cambodians. The American Cambodians, they live their lives the American way and haven't had the chance to experience their original culture where their parents came from. *I see the tension between those two groups also.* Our culture is totally different – like the way we talk, what music we listen to, who we see on TV. Because even in my old school, which was majority black, we had a lot of Haitians and Jamaicans and it was still separate. They stuck with themselves; we stuck with ourselves, even though we quote-unquote look the same. So I don't think it's race at all. It's like how you represent yourself. (Interview, 4/11/14)

Lydia introduces the generational status differences that obscured simple breakdowns in race-relations at the school level. Drawing on her experiences as an African-American

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student with many first-generation black immigrant populations, she compares first and second generation Cambodian relations at Johnson to her old high school. Arguing "it's so much more about behaviors and actions…it's like how you represent yourself," Lydia echoed Peter and several ELL students claims that race in this context was permeable based on the kinds of behaviors that a student exhibited, specifically for the second-generation Asian students of Cambodian and Vietnamese descent that they felt did not align themselves with the values of 'authentic' Asianness.

<div align="center">***</div>

> It depends, if they're parents are born here, they're probably like the Americans, but if they were born in other countries, they're probably harder workers.
> (Interview with Miguel, 4/1/14)

Being "ELL" or "Asian" among the students meant consistent performances of hard work, self-discipline, compliance, and passivity. "Americanness", conversely, indexed an opposite set of behaviors: laziness, unruliness, defiance, and brashness. As demonstrated in previous chapters, the administration and teachers understood the latter set of behaviors attached to "Americanness" to endanger the school's collective performance via the district's evaluative criteria (i.e. climate statistics, utilization) for closure consideration. In other words, the conflation of "risk" and "Americanness" at the school-level was driven by the school's response to the district's definition of failure. The branding process of the school as a response to this interpretation of the policy, traded on the category of "ELL" or "immigrant" to both enroll less risky students and attract private partnerships.

However, by reifying these categories through closure resistance strategies, American students largely felt marginalized as a result. As a school, deep fears that

"Americans" posed a danger to their safety as well as the school's fate still permeated the ELL student body. First-generation immigrant students like Juan and Peter criticized these "types" of students for bringing a "bad" reputation to their school. Others like David felt that the non-selectivity of the school made it less appealing to attend. The ways in which the strategies to "brand" Johnson High as school worthy of remaining open exacerbated relations between "ELL" students and "American" students, manifest in December 2013's violence and students' narratives "othering" each group. The racialized pitting of "risky" students against "model" students within these strategies represents what scholars have termed "racial triangulation", or the relative valorization of "Asianness" over "Blackness" (Kim 1999; Tang 2011). Few native-born students in interviews, focus groups, and informal interactions expressed overt hostility toward ELL students and oftentimes expressed both how grateful they felt to meet students from diverse origins. In fact, they internalized the valorization of ELL students, underscoring their hard work ethics and persistence in learning English. On several occasions in the hallways, I witnessed African-American students saying hello to ELL students in passing (Fieldnote, 2/4/14). In the College Dreams class, friendships blossomed between ELL and American students as they enjoyed the rare opportunity to interact on a daily basis in group-work.

While many ELL students attributed the "poor quality" of the school to the American students, ELL and American students alike also felt that with the proliferation of school choice in Philadelphia, attending a neighborhood school meant that they had failed, that they weren't receiving the same kind of education as their peers that went to charter schools or, in David's case, like the students in affluent suburban schools.

Internalizing notions of themselves as "failures" without choices, students like James lamented that even though he attended one of the "better" neighborhood schools, the budget crisis and his school's consequent resource deprivation symbolized a lack of investment in schools attended by students like him. First-generation ELL students' contrasted their educational experiences in their countries of origin, disbelieving that in America, public schools could be worse than their own. The fact that their parents had "come here" to better their lives vis-à-vis the immigrant bargain magnified their resentment.

Together, ELLs and American students also critiqued the school's reliance on partnerships, stressing the incongruity between partner constructions of the students' needs and their actual needs. Students like Sondra felt that organizations like Service for Salvation proposed an all too simple solution, "community service", to the structural issues of poverty embedded in her day-to-day life. Other students like David and Jorie highlighted the selectivity and instability of these partners in their services by targeting only students that met particular categories of difference, and/or losing grants and having to withdraw from the school. Overall they felt that partners could not serve as stand-ins for teachers and that the discrepancies between their construction of students' and consequently the school's needs and their inability to consistently and equitably provide services to all of the students, rendered problematic the strategy to mobilize them compensate for absent state-funded supports.

Across ethnographies of educational policy, student voices are relatively absent as researchers have tended to focus more on "official" policy making bodies and adults as actors exercising power. I showed in this chapter that students generated sophisticated

analyses of the unintended effects of the school closure policy as it related to their school's strategies to remain open. I further demonstrate that student perspectives on school closure are not divorced from larger trends in the district like charter school expansion that degrade the value of the traditional neighborhood school through stratification of school types. BY including their voices, I hoped to illuminate the ways in which students make meaning of these reforms in their lives, crafting critiques that shed light on issues of equity and choice as they relate to the current direction of education reform in Philadelphia.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION: THE BRAND UNRAVELS

I concluded my full-time data collection in June of 2014 with plans to write this dissertation during 2014-2015. However, through social media, personal relationships with Johnson High's staff and teachers, and my home being in close proximity to the school, I have continued to receive updates regarding the school's climate and everyday anecdotes about its activities, events, and problems. Within this final chapter I want to use the developments following my fieldwork to trouble the notion that the branding of neighborhood high schools is a sustainable, just process for institutions struggling to establish their value in an education market that renders them substandard. Further, I want to use Johnson High as a cautionary tale to illustrate the problematic, long-term effects of treating the traditional public school like a commodity that requires branding in order to compete in the marketplace.

Disbanded Success Academy

In the beginning of AY 2014-2015, Ms. Betty alerted me further budget cuts required the Mr. Keo to dismantle the Success Academy (Fieldnote, 9/23/14). The principal cited that he could not commit to two teachers to only 38 students as other classrooms in the building had close to 40 students with 1 teacher. Reactions to this development were mixed. At a soccer game that I officiated[17] later that year for many of Johnson High's first-generation immigrant youth, Kai, an Burmese-Karen refugee senior,

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[17] The neighborhood in which I live and Johnson High is located has a thriving soccer community. Leagues at local parks and rec centers host players from a range of countries, including many of Johnson High's first generation Latino youth and refugee youth from South and Southeast Asia. I serve as a referee for these leagues and therefore keep close contact with these youth through bi-weekly contact at their games.

a student that had graduated from the ELL program and now took classes with native-born students, said that the school was "*getting bad*".

> Yeah, there are fights everyday in the hallway. The kids are scared and there aren't enough teachers to do anything about it. All of the crazy kids are upstairs now. Kids be starting to leave this school soon. (Fieldnote 3/13/15).

While racially skewed, discriminatory, and illegal, the Success Academy served as a risk management mechanism within the Johnson High's branding process. The closing of the Success Academy reintroduced students, overwhelmingly African-American, but several White and racially mixed students, that exhibited behaviors associated with "urban deviance", to overcrowded classrooms. As many of my participants noted, the school's labeling and tracking of these students as "failures" or "dangers" was highly racialized but did reflect a painful reality that many of them had prior records of violent outbursts and arrest (Interview, 1/16/14).[18] Minimizing the risk of "serious incidents" remains today an essential task for schools like Johnson High that are always at risk of closure. As Kai explains in his statement, "kids be starting to leave this school soon", serious incidents not only jeopardize the school's hard climate data that the School District of Philadelphia collates to score and prioritize school's for closure, but also fuels the damage that the media can inflict on the school's reputation and enrollment. In spite of its racialized effects, school leadership like Mr. Keo faced a real hazard in integrating students with potentially undiagnosed socio-emotional issues with the necessary supports like reasonable teacher to student ratios and staff like counselors, nurses, and school psychologists.

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[18] I would like to note that I do not accept the terms or strategies that leadership employed to describe an track Success students, nor do I condone its illegality.

Partnership Recession

In Chapter 5 I described a length the network of private resources accomplished through the recruitment and admission of non-profit partners to the school. Of the sixteen in the school, I followed five more closely to understand how they came to affect the distribution of resources within the school and students and families' understanding of the "quality" of the education that was possible at the neighborhood school. I further described the fraught relationships that teachers and leadership had with these organizations, boasting strong friendships with many of their coordinators and benefitting from the resources they contributed to the void left by budget cuts, yet resenting the need for them. A central tension also surfaced between these organizations' selective missions and the non-selective mission of the neighborhood school, exacerbating students' and staffs' perceptions that first-generation Asian students were "getting more" than native-born students.

As my fieldwork concluded, several coordinators of non-profits voiced their organization's plans to withdraw from the school as grants funding their work elapsed. College Dreams, an organization that provided essentially a full-time college counselor for the senior class and resources for college trips, financial aid workshops, and information sessions, ended its activities in May as the students graduated and the grant concluded (Interview, 5/16/15). While College Dreams made its temporality more explicit from the onset, other organizations achieved more surprise in their decision to leave. By June of 2014, Career Ready, a non-profit that had had the longest standing relationship with Johnson High, of over two decades, ceased its operations within the building after truncating their resources committed for several years. Citing that the

school's potential for closure and also their central organization's loss of philanthropic and corporate grants, the school opted to "consolidate" their investments in two other high schools that seemed more "promising" in their futures (Fieldnote, 6/8/15).

Even with both College Dreams' and Career Ready's withdrawal from the school, teachers and students still felt encouraged by the contributions of the three remaining central non-profit partners, namely Service for Salvation that offered two full-time staff and an annual supply budget of $150,000 for service programming within the school, including a service trip to a developing country every spring for 8 outstanding students to build a school. Service for Salvation avowed an impressive following of over 200 students, the largest of all of the non-profits, and the least selective in its criteria for participation. Interviews with their staff in AY 2013-2014 foreshadowed a continued commitment to the school, financial health, and promise as a non-profit that had logged thousands of service hours for Johnson's students. However, by December of 2014, just 18 months after Service for Salvation had forged this partnership, rumors circulated that they too would withdraw before the end of the school year. In March, I sat in on a Skype conversation with the national director as students pleaded with him to continue their program in Philadelphia. He explained,

> Last year we spent about $300,000 more than we were able to raise which is very difficult because we've been doing that in Philly since 2002. Over the years it has added up because since 2002 we have invested a little more than $4 million in running and operating our programs in Philadelphia. Since we weren't able to raise the dollars in Philly, we raised it from other regions. We just can't sustain it that way and if we keep doing it, it's going to cause us to be in a challenging financial situation. Some people have asked why we are expanding our programs in Boston and closing them in Philly and that's a very good question. People in the Boston community started reaching out last year and were able to get major funding they raised about half a million dollars for the programs even before we agreed to come up there. The philanthropic community really rallied there. They

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were able to raise the money. You have changed the landscape in Philadelphia through your service. You have changed communities around the world. Nobody can take that away from you. We did not do 148,000 hours of service in Philadelphia: you did. Please keep going and serving your communities. You can do it without us. That's who you are. (Phone Call Recording, 3/5/15)

Not only did the loss of Service for Salvation result in bottom line resource losses, but their two coordinators also lost their positions. Given their reach in the school to so many students and staff, morale plummeted, reinforcing the notion that Johnson High was an unworthy institution. As one student, Miguel, put it, "Nobody, if they have the choice, sticks around here for long" (Fieldnote, 10/9/13). The two remaining non-profits, Refugee Aid and Hoops and Dreams, while providing essential resources for targeted populations (i.e. refugees), work with narrow reach. Refugee Aid has strict criteria for qualification for their services while Hoops and Dreams has a limited number of slots available. As an employee in Refugee Aid's summer English immersion program, I witnessed firsthand the financial instability implicating their organization as block grants from the state suffered from partisan gridlock in Pennsylvania's Congress, and philanthropic funding sources threatened to pull out unless their students demonstrated measurable growth in their standardized test scores.

Therefore, in the short year since the end of my "official" data collection, Johnson High watched three of their five major non-profit partners leave for reasons endemic within the non-profit community: cyclical grant funding, consolidation of resources, and mission change. The literature on the non-profit industrial complex corroborates these findings, citing the unstable, oftentimes competitive nature of the non-profit world and its insufficiency in delivering services formerly provided by the state (Smith 2007; Finley, Esposito, and Hall 2012). While the School District of Philadelphia continues to

encourage struggling neighborhood schools to become more porous through the recruitment of partnerships, the strategy becomes a smokescreen for a more insidious problem: that without steady funding from the district and state, partners reify and exacerbate the instability in staffing and resources. Moreover, using partners as a way of "branding" the school ultimately results in the funneling of resources toward select populations deemed "worthy" of service and care in accordance with the missions of the non-profit organization. If one likens this strategy to the approach that charter schools take to developing partnerships with outside organizations to supplement their budgets, it sets up a false expectation as charter schools are guaranteed per capita funding from the state in a way that neighborhood schools are not. In turn, the fallout from developing internal networks of private capital adversely affect neighborhood schools that cannot rely on consistent funding, resources, and staffing through both the state and their partners.

Further Segregation

Related to sustained austerity at the district level, class sizes surged in AY 2014-2015 and several teachers pointed to increased segregation between the ELL and native-born populations in classes. To deal with potential friction from the disbanding of the Success Academy, one teacher, Ms. London, noted the administration and several ELL teachers' efforts toward spatial management of conflict.

> This year, all "American"/non-ELL 9th graders are in the 2nd floor wing with the doors. So, *they are isolated all day from the rest of the school*. ELL 9th graders are not. The numbers are stark in the AP classes. Even in 2012-2013, there were only Asian students in Calculus. This year there are 4 students in Calculus - all Asian. Same with physics. *They have had some push back this year and it has gotten nasty*. An honors writing class was started this year and people from outside of the school had to argue for including students who aren't Asian. Kids

notice it whether or not the adults admit it. The demographics are also changing. *Fewer Asian students in 9th and 10th grade*. (Email Correspondence, 11/20/15).

Ms. London points out that not only are there separate classes for ELL and native-born students (i.e. "American", non-ELL), but that the school has taken steps to place them in an entirely different part of the building to discourage contact between the populations. In the same vein as before, only Asian students populate the most advanced courses in the school.

While consistent with observations during my fieldwork of those classes, the "pushback" that Ms. London cites in parents and teachers arguing for the inclusion of non-Asian students in an honors writing class is unprecedented. While students noticed the exclusion in Chapter 6 and many teachers in Chapters 3 and 4 were critical of de facto segregation as a strategy to maintain attractive climate numbers, business as usual carried on throughout my fieldwork. With budget cuts, resource scarcity and rising stress levels among the staff, resistance to these branding strategies from within rarely amounted to more than a frustrated comment in passing or a diatribe in an interview. The fact that "people outside of the school" such as community members and parents began to question the racialized direction of internal reform raise questions about how brands and their perceived "value" mutate when consumers begin to magnify their contradictions. The looming paradox of the construction of a selective, racialized identity in a non-selective neighborhood school – rationalized as part of an institutional strategy to survive a competitive urban education market – ironically has brought into question the "value" of the neighborhood school when the premise of its very establishment is violated.

Current Moment

As I move into the completion of this dissertation, Johnson High's fate as a
neighborhood school in an increasingly menacing district climate is far from conclusive.
The School District of Philadelphia announced in October 2015, during the final drafting,
that it would be voting on recommendations in January to close and or convert 15 schools
to charters (Mezzacappa 2015). Cited as chronically "low-performing", "under-enrolled"
and in "urgent" need of "change", district officials have advertised these conversions and
closures as a necessary step for offering low-income children access to "high quality"
schools closer to their homes (Community Meeting, 11/17/15). After attending several
meetings with parents and teachers in an 100 percent African-American elementary
school slated for charter conversion, officials have made it clear that school communities,
parents, and staff will only be involved in decision-making to the extent that they will
have input over which charter provider will come take over the building. Ultimate
authority over the fate of these schools rests with the School Reform Commission (SRC)
this coming January.

The lack of democratic participation in a process designed to dramatically
reconfigure Philadelphia's landscape is both a mechanism and symptom of the market
fundamentalist logics that I have argued have been both taken up and resisted at
traditional public schools like Johnson High. The education market, created through
policies in the last 20 years to privatize and deregulate urban public education, is not
guided by principles of democracy and collective decision-making, but the codes of
"good business." School communities are expected to control their "performance" and be
held accountable for their "failure", yet the resources and participation necessary to

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establish stable, consistent, educational environments for children to thrive hinge on the whim of policymakers at the state and district levels that both define the parameters of success and failure and the coffers available for its remediation. Facing this lack of control over the ability to plan and/or define their own goals and possibilities for their students within this framework, school communities like Johnson High's respond like actors in an education market – they chart their own paths based on assessments of risk and value as they compete with charter and other traditional schools to keep their doors open.

At Johnson High these assessments translated into reading students as posing degrees risk to the climate, performance, and reputation of the school instead of evaluations of pupils' potential and promise. It meant relying on model minority stereotypes and building a school brand around first generation Asian youth that would circulate notions of "education quality", "opportunity" and "safety" beyond the school's bounds to attract larger enrollments and private resources through community partners. It meant segregating African-American students and other native-born students from their peers in order to "protect" their valued customers: Asian families. As critical policy scholarship argues, policies like school closure that extend the marketization of public education operate as live "texts", negotiated, contested, and struggled over between groups both within and outside the formal machinery of official policy making (Ozga and Jones 2006; Shore, Wright, and Però 2011). They create new relationships and semantic spaces based on the politics, value and risk regimes that they invoke in their rollout. At Johnson High and in urban districts across the country where closure and charter conversions are imminent, school-level actors like administrators, teachers, parents,

students, and community members do no interpret these policies in a vacuum. Drawing on their own understandings of risk and value, their communities' histories, contemporary social dynamics, and politics, they craft ethically fraught responses from backed corners.

Policy Implications

As I have demonstrated, these ethically fraught responses challenge the foundations of the traditional public school, the institutional fruit of historical battles for mass public education. Within the mainstream of education policy research, ethnographic studies that challenge the status quo are oftentimes criticized for not offering specific policy recommendations. While this may be true for some studies, I contend that this one is rife with recommendations to alter the machinery and assumptions of current educational policymaking in U.S. cities. Policies that marry markets to reform stratify youth along lines of race and class, not just between charter, magnet, and neighborhood schools, but also, as Johnson High shows, within schools. They encourage zero-sum competition between institutions in environments of resource scarcity and need, inducing leadership and teachers to work toward marketing their schools and not necessarily improving them. Based on the oftentimes perverse motivations encouraged by closure-as-reform, I make several more targeted recommendations.

1) Suspend the closure of neighborhood schools until the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has established a funding formula that allows neighborhood schools the same advantages afforded to charter schools.

At the moment, neighborhood schools do not receive per capita funding for their students, allowing them to receive students exiting mid-year from charter schools without

supplemental funding. Legislative stalemates also have prevented the passing of an education budget and consequently have deprived neighborhood schools of teachers and supplies since 2011. Closing and converting schools to charters based on "underperformance" places the onus for "failure" on teacher and administrators negotiating the effects of austerity at ground-zero. Copious studies, both quantitative and qualitative alike, have pointed out how flawed the use of purely numeric systems of evaluation for "quality" schools can be for poor urban schools (Bryk 2010). The quantification of failure therefore does not necessarily measure performance but the poor conditions under educators and students operate as well as the income-levels of students' homes. Issuing punitive measures like closure and conversion does not only destroy schooling communities but also misdiagnoses the roots of underperformance: poverty and underfunding.

Further, research on the effects of school closures on children who transfer (achievement/socioemotional), neighborhood communities, property values, and the vacant buildings is still nascent. Existing research shows that the cost savings of consolidating and closing schools falls far short of what districts have predicted (Pew Charitable Trust and Philadelphia Research Initiative 2011; Jack and Sludden 2013). Emergent research also suggests that low-income, largely black neighborhoods are disproportionately targeted by closures (Research for Action 2012; Bierbaum 2014). In light of limited empirical work on the reform, coupled with the overwhelmingly negative impact that this work suggests for students and communities, moving forward with plans for more mass closures and charter conversions is shortsighted at best, irresponsible and impulsive at worst.

2) Build democratic participation and local control into the process of potential charter conversion.

My goal in this dissertation was not to indict charter operators, teachers, and the families that choose to enroll their charter schools. Many charters do right by their students and push the limits of innovative praxis. My qualm lays in the risk that charter schools as well as their unfettered expansion in Philadelphia poses to the fiscal and political health of democratic institutions like public schools. In AY 2014-2015, the School District of Philadelphia allowed two district-run elementary schools to vote whether they would like to become charter schools the following year. Overwhelmingly the parents, staff, and students decided against the recommendation and remained neighborhood schools (Medina 2014). In October 2015, the SDP removed this option for 15 schools by vesting the SRC with the decision-making power. If communities decide that they would like a charter operator, they could broach the district and the district decides to work in conjunction with them to match a provider. Unilaterally leveling a school community, firing teachers, and holding schools accountable for their performance in this climate wrecks both irrevocable damage on neighborhood schools and is wholly unjust.

3) Restore funding to neighborhood schools. And then some.

I would like to issue a disclaimer that I have not argued for the sufficiency of current neighborhood school conditions or their historical performance in the service of poor black and brown children. There is no "golden age" for the neighborhood school in the last 50 years for poor youth of color, largely due to chronic underfunding and budget crises that have plagued districts like Philadelphia's. I also realize that suggesting equal

or more funding (provided vis-à-vis the state) is a politically charged issue without much support across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. However, equity in funding is both a material and symbolic starting point for Philadelphia's public schools. Without a formula that overly relies on property taxes and/or hinges on the political whims of conservative legislators in Harrisburg, Philadelphia's neighborhood schools will continue to languish and decline in infrastructure, morale, and sustainability. Students and families also lose confidence that the traditional public school is stable enough to provide the "thorough and efficient" education promised by the state, and will continue to flee the district for charters or the suburbs.

4) Identify and employ more holistic evaluation systems of schools and teachers.

Pulling hard data on climate, test-scores, and enrollment and scoring neighborhood schools' quality has obfuscated the increasingly difficult contexts in which educators and students work. A recent report prepared by Research for Action, an independent, non-partisan Philadelphia-based research firm, stated that 90 percent of school profile scores throughout Pennsylvania rely on standardized test scores in spite of the original intention to incorporate a wide array of measures (Chute 2015). This reliance on test scores to develop "quality" ratings, favors more advantaged schools. It further punishes neighborhood schools coping with the effects of austerity and unable to plan for the future. These metrics both drive and warp perceptions of school quality, unfairly earning educators and students in these schools "failing" labels and shuttering their doors as consequence. Systems that more accurately capture the social and political dynamics that come to influence a school's performance are sorely needed.

A Note on the Educators in this Study

Before moving into final comments, I would like to issue a note regarding my profound concern for the ways in which readers might construe the actions of the educators in this book. I have used only a small fraction of the mountain of data to frame the argument for this dissertation. Among that data are anecdotes and demonstrations of courage, integrity, and resilience as teachers and administrators worked amidst not only budget cuts but pay freezes and assaults on their pensions and healthcare. I watched them cry as they spent 6 weeks proctoring tests to frustrated students that they could not help. I saw them dip into their own pockets to make proms, school traditions, and back-to-school nights possible. They were passionate but tired, caring but discouraged, compassionate but fatigued. While the branding of Johnson High certainly manifested racial tensions and service inequities, at the heart of these educators' efforts was a belief in the neighborhood school – that if they could just save it, albeit for a selective population, they could preserve a space to create a more inclusive educational environment in the future.

My biggest concern is that in sharing their testimonies, readers will label my participants as racists – as individual perpetuators of educational practices that marginalize black and brown children. This narrow reading would preclude a deeper and more important criticism of the disturbing racism in the reform movement at large, robbing low-income communities of color of the ability to participate in the fate of their schools; a movement predicated on narrow self-interests that allow families and children to flee a public system for charters instead of strengthening precariously divested neighborhood schools. Reform efforts that deprive communities of color of participation in determining the direction of their schools presume that these same communities and

their educators do not know how to properly educate their children. Further, these

reforms break teacher unions and close schools in cities' poorest neighborhoods. By

treating neighborhood schools and their employees like dying businesses, they respond

like dying businesses: with desperation.

As I conclude this note, I am reminded of an interview with Mr. Raymond, the AP

biology teacher in Chapter 4 that lamented internal organization changes like the Success

Academy and their long-term effects on the mission of the school. Later in his interview,

he explained,

> I don't see the District lasting 5 years, honestly. I warn students that are
> considering teaching to maybe look for a different [field] because right now it's
> tough. They don't honor any kind of advanced degrees anymore and there's been
> a pay-freeze for about five years. This district isn't unique in its problems but
> there's a big push for the disposable teacher that comes out of some kind of
> certification program, like [Teach for America]. It's just a stepping stone in the
> path to your next career. You can say that "I taught" and "I know what it's like to
> be a teacher" and now "I'm going to be a bank executive or a politician". It
> deprofessionalizes us. It think I'm ok now just because I'm younger. *I can't
> imagine doing this with kids or even starting a family with the kind of stuff that I
> do now.* As a single person, unattached with lots of energy, supporting myself on
> this salary, it barely works. I don't have an extravagant lifestyle. But a lot of the
> other teachers have been in the game a lot longer than I have and [more
> responsibilities]. They can't afford to stay in it. (Interview, 4/10/14)

Mr. Raymond's testimony highlights the difficult choices facing public educators as they

wade through uncertain waters in their career trajectories. Popular media and political

pundits oftentimes villainize teachers for "not putting the kids first" but I would like to

challenge the notion that "what's good for the kids" and "what's good for the teachers"

are mutually exclusive. Imperiling the livelihoods of public school administrators and

their staff, blaming them for society's ills, and requiring them to work in progressively

more difficult conditions with less pay, disintegrates morale, leaving educators no other option but to pursue different professional paths.

I therefore want to preempt essentialized interpretations of these staff and administrators as racist, unethical individuals that deserve shame. Johnson High's educators are my friends and have taught me a great deal about persistence in the face of awesome adversity. I have a deep respect for them and would encourage my readers to see them as actors operating in a sociopolitical field of constraints that force them into both complicity and resistance to the market fundamentalist project to decentralize and privatize public education. In spite of their faults, at the heart of their work is a concern for the wellbeing and lives of the youth that they serve. I entreat my readers to foreground their compassion and understanding for the multitude of challenges that face educators in schools like Johnson High, but not to excuse the racist implications of their strategies.

Future Research

I ethnographically capture in this dissertation how the threat of closure shifts the organizational mission of neighborhood schools from the non-selective service of all youth to the selective service of those that enhance their imagined brand's value. Emergent literature looking at the impact of school closures on districts and communities has not yet explored school closures as an agent of educational commodification, nor the effects that this policy has on the organization and governance of existing neighborhood schools. Thus, unlike the bulk of research on this policy that looks at the impact of closures on districts and communities, I uniquely explain how risk, uncertainty, and value-creation, induced by closure-as-policy, shift the practices and purposes of public

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educators' work from pedagogical and democratic, to entrepreneurial and managerial. Moreover, understanding how those practices embed racialized notions of risk and value illuminates how school branding processes, prompted by closure threats, exacerbate and extend inequities in educational opportunities. Tethering notions of "value" to their strategies to purge the school of Black children, school actors appropriate anti-black logics to structure their responses to market competition. This study is therefore first of its kind to understand how perceptions of potential closure become a catalyst for problematic cultural and ethical changes that neighborhood schools make in order to "merit" staying open. Moreover, this study uniquely captures what happens when policymakers relinquish responsibility for defining and structuring a school's failure by placing the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of students and educators.

This final chapter has also demonstrated that school brands, like those of commodities, are fragile. They remain susceptible to media and public discourse that frames them as factories of failure, dropout, and violence; as bastions of lazy, union-protecting teachers and administrators; as outdated institutions that promote complacency and stagnation in praxis. Neighborhood schools are also at the mercy of top-down, accountability directives from the district and state that unabashedly move forward with assumption-laden, context-devoid education reform that further deprives them on the resources that they need to improve. Therefore, the branding processes neighborhood schools engage become merely stop-gaps, staving off closure temporarily but compromising their missions in the interim and exacerbating the treatment of native-born, Black children.

The School District of Philadelphia's recent announcement to close 15 more schools and convert many to charters makes the reality of closure ever more prescient for neighborhood schools district-wide. In the coming years, I plan to initiate ethnographic research in additional schools in Philadelphia to gather comparative data for a book on variegated responses to school closure policy as a way to explore responses to the deepening marketization of public education in American cities. I hypothesize that schools with different demographics, needs, leadership, and histories will invoke and enact problematic and fraught ethics around their strategies to compete in the market and remain open, raising questions about the racial, ethical, and political dimensions and unintended implications of market-driven reforms like closures in low-income, urban contexts.

This is the first ethnographic case study for this book project, laying the foundation for further inquiry in future years into the consolidation of public infrastructure through school closures and its implications for democratic governance and social welfare in post-industrial cities more generally. As high-poverty urban school districts across the U.S. like Philadelphia's continue to grapple with discordant pressures to stabilize their finances while simultaneously enabling the expansion of charter schools, closures will also continue to implicate *all* urban schools. This study is central to understanding not only how school closure as policy, as a signifier or the deepening marketization of public education, transforms educational practice in schools under consideration, but more importantly, how the racialized and classed processes that the policy sets into motion potentially undermine the public entitlement to equality of educational opportunity promised to vulnerable youth.

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