"It's Pretty Bad Out There": Challenging Teacher Perspectives Through Community Engagement in a Mentor Training Program

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Abstract

Though a variety of studies have considered the impact of mentoring on beginning teachers, there is little research that explores effective ways to support their work. This qualitative study addresses that gap in the literature by describing how one mentoring program sought to develop mentors' understanding of their local context by sharing elements of asset-based pedagogies and by engaging community members in the training process for new mentors. Initial interviews revealed that most mentors viewed the community through a deficit lens. Even after engaging in conversations with local stakeholders and learning about community resources, mentors indicated that little changed with respect to their perspectives of—and practices in—the community. We consider reasons for the program's limited success and discuss implications for programs that seek to develop mentors who actively engage with the school community in ways that value stakeholders' assets and experiences.

Key Words: mentoring, community engagement, asset-based pedagogy, teacher perceptions, practices, mentor training program, communities

Introduction

Researchers have documented positive outcomes associated with mentoring programs for beginning teachers, including higher teacher retention rates

(Ingersoll & Smith, 2003), increased student achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), and improved classroom- and time-management skills (Lindgren, 2005). However, researchers emphasize that these gains are not the automatic result of simply pairing a mentor with a beginning teacher. Rather, researchers highlight the necessity of properly training mentors in order to carry out the goals defined by induction programs (Carver & Feiman-Nemser, 2009; Gasner, 2002; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009).

A recent body of literature focuses on mentoring programs that are designed to support beginning teachers who work with diverse student populations (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005; Hammerness & Matsko, 2012; Lopez, 2013). Though this work details the knowledge base that mentors must possess in order to help beginning teachers understand their context and build upon students' assets, it does not explicitly consider the process by which mentors develop this knowledge. In fact, in a comprehensive review of current mentoring practices, Bullough (2012) finds that "rather little research has been conducted on the problem of mentor induction—the transition from teacher to mentor and how teachers become effective mentors" (p. 70). This article addresses that gap in the literature by describing how one mentoring program sought to develop mentors' understanding of their local context by engaging community members in the training process for new mentors. In particular, we consider how mentors responded to structured interactions with a wide variety of local stakeholders, including parents/guardians, grandparents, members of local nonprofit and/or religious organizations, and school staff members who serve as community liaisons.

To that end, this qualitative study, situated in the Smithville Public School District (Note: all names of places and people are pseudonyms) examines the work of a district–university partnership as it implemented a new mentoring program in a high-needs district. While the partnership sought to provide mentor training in a variety of areas, this article focuses on efforts to enhance mentors' knowledge about the community. When we reference "community" throughout this article, we are referring to both students' families and the neighborhood. Though we acknowledge that families and neighborhoods are each complex entities, we explore them both through the lens of community because we are focused on the wide range of cultural wealth on which teachers can draw in their practice—the collective knowledge, skills, and material resources that are available both in students' homes and in local Smithville organizations.

Specifically, this article describes the impact of the Smithville Community Board, a group of parents and community members, whose purpose was to share information about Smithville with mentors. Thus, in order to provide

context for our findings, we begin with some framing questions, including: What are mentors' initial perceptions of their students, their students' families, and the city where they work? How do mentors describe their involvement with the community, and what is the purpose of this engagement? From there, this study focuses on what happens when community members work with mentors to share insights about their children and their city. Therefore, our research questions are: How do mentors' perceptions of the community change (if at all) after structured opportunities to engage in dialogue with local stakeholders? How do mentors share their understanding of the community with beginning teachers?

We begin by reviewing the theoretical frameworks that guide this study; in particular, we draw on work that highlights the necessity of approaching students from an asset-based perspective. We then discuss literature that describes mentoring programs designed to nurture this stance in beginning teachers. In our methods section, we describe how our program tried to prepare mentors to support beginning teachers in developing asset-based perspectives, and we detail how we utilized qualitative methods in order to collect and analyze relevant data. Finally, we share our findings based on our analysis of mentor interviews, surveys, and participant observation. Though mentors had some positive perceptions of Smithville and its residents, most mentors approached the community through a deficit lens. Even after engaging in conversations with community members and attending professional development sessions focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, mentors indicated that little changed with respect to their perspectives of and practices in the community. In our conclusion, therefore, we consider reasons for our limited success and discuss implications for programs that seek to develop mentor teachers who actively engage with the school community in ways that value their assets and experiences.

Literature Review

Pervasiveness of Deficit-Based Perspectives

Due to changing demographics, teachers are increasingly working in classrooms with students whose racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds differ from their own. Data from the National Center of Education Statistics demonstrate the increasing racial/ethnic diversity in public schools in the United States. In 2000, 38.8% of public school students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools belonged to a racial/ethnic minority; by 2010, 47.6% of the of public school students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools belonged to a racial/ethnic minority (Synder & Dillow, 2013, p. 86). At the same time, however, the teaching force does not reflect this growing diversity. Results

from the 2007–08 Schools and Staffing Survey showed that 83.1% of teachers in public schools were White (Coopersmith, 2009). In addition to a growing racial divide between teachers and students, many public school teachers lack prior experiences with low-income communities—and these communities are home to some of the most difficult-to-staff schools where beginning teachers are often placed (Cochran-Smith & Villegas, 2016; Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Despite the growing need for teachers who are prepared to work with diverse student populations, research has demonstrated that teacher education programs do an inadequate job in preparing candidates for this task (Cochran-Smith et al., 2015; Gay, 2002; Howard & Milner, 2013; King & Butler, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As a result, many teachers harbor deficit-based views of—and lowered expectations for—students who come from low-income and/or minority communities, rather than valuing the knowledge and skills that marginalized students bring to the classroom (García & Guerra, 2004; Paris & Alim, 2014; Ullucci & Howard, 2015; Yosso, 2005). These perspectives make it difficult for teachers to maintain high expectations and shape instruction that values their students' backgrounds, which may lead to lower levels of student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014; Ullucci & Howard, 2015).

Asset-Based Pedagogies

In order to work against this type of deficit thinking, researchers have increasingly emphasized the value of approaching culturally and linguistically diverse students from an asset-based perspective. Asset-based pedagogies take a variety of forms, and while there are differences among these approaches, they each emphasize the importance of educators learning about the students and communities where they teach.

To start, Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) argue that teachers must develop an understanding of students' households in order to appreciate their students' "funds of knowledge," or the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being" (p. 133). In this way, teachers may come to better recognize—and draw upon—the resources that students bring to the classroom. Building in part on this work, Yosso (2005) outlines a theory of community cultural wealth and highlights forms of capital that that exist in "Communities of Color," including: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (p. 77-81). Yosso (2005) argues that researchers and teachers must move beyond the (often implicit) goal of advancing White, middle-class values and should instead recognize the cultural capital that "marginalized groups bring to the table" (p. 77).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is another form of teaching that is grounded in recognizing students' assets, with researchers emphasizing the importance of integrating students' home culture into both the content and delivery of lessons (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Gay, 2002; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014). In order to implement culturally relevant pedagogy effectively, teachers must reflect on their own identities and endeavor to learn more about their students' identities (Howard, 2003). Teachers must move beyond generalities and acquire specific information about their students' cultures, such that they have a clear understanding of "values, traditions, communication, learning styles, contributions, and relational patterns" (Gay, 2002, p. 107).

Not only does focusing on students' assets help teachers develop classroom practices that are more engaging, but it can also lead to greater academic success for students (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In addition, some studies have found that beginning teachers are more likely to stay in a district when they experience community support (Donaldson, 2009). When teachers appreciate the resources in their school communities, they are less likely to blame students or families when they encounter challenges in their classrooms. Instead, teachers engage in self-reflection and work to improve their own pedagogy (Quartz & the TEP Research Group, 2003).

Asset-Based Mentoring

While learning about the community in which one teaches is essential for approaching students from an asset-based perspective, research demonstrates that teacher education programs provide few opportunities for preservice teachers to work with parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Shirley et al., 2007). Though some beginning teachers arrive at their initial placements well-versed in elements of multicultural and/or culturally relevant pedagogy, these teachers may have little concrete experience in connecting with their students and their families outside of the classroom, especially when the context in which they teach is different from where they were raised (Emdin, 2016). To address this problem, some mentoring and induction programs now focus on supporting new teachers in meeting the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Research in the area of asset-based mentoring focuses on the knowledge and skills that mentors must possess in order to help beginning teachers engage in self-reflection and to work with members of the community. Some programs emphasize that mentors must be able to explore issues of equity and diversity through a critical lens. For instance, describing a "collaborative mentorship" model, Lopez (2013) argues that mentors should understand that cultural

diversity encompasses more than simply the "celebration of holidays and food" (p. 303). Mentors must be familiar with research and theory relating to issues of equity, and they must know how to engage in dialogues where mentees feel comfortable discussing potentially risky topics such as race and class.

Moreover, mentors should have experience in developing lessons that incorporate their students' cultures, and they must know how to hold all students to high expectations (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005). In order for mentors to help beginning teachers construct their own culturally responsive lessons, mentors must be familiar with the context in which their mentees are teaching. In a case study exploring an induction program that is part of an urban teacher preparation program, Hammerness and Matsko (2012) argue that mentors must approach the context of their work not merely as a "setting," but rather as "important and unique content" to explore with beginning teachers (p. 561). To that end, mentors must have knowledge of a wide variety of contexts, from the overall policy environment to the specific neighborhoods in which schools are located.

Researchers agree that mentors must be supported in this work (Alkins et al., 2006; Hammerness & Matsko, 2012); however, there is little literature detailing what this support should look like (Bullough, 2012; Hobson et al., 2009). While there is some research that broadly outlines the form that mentoring support may take (Achinstein & Athanases, 2005; Moir & Bloom, 2003), this literature does not systematically consider the impact that these supports have on mentors' work. In this article, we begin to address this gap by describing mentors' perceptions of the community in which they teach and by exploring how engaging community members in a mentor-training program impacts those perspectives.

Methods

Study Context

This study developed out of a grant-sponsored, district–university partnership. The purpose of the grant, as outlined by the state department of education, was to pair institutions of higher education with high-needs districts in order to create partnerships that would "develop and implement innovative plans for training teacher leaders to be mentors who will support beginning teachers" (Notice of Grant Opportunity, April, 2015). After receiving the grant notice, administrators from the Smithville School District contacted the college of education where we are faculty members, and we began working with the district in Spring 2015.

The Smithville School District is comprised of nine schools, serving students in Grades preK–12, with approximately 5,000 students total. Smithville qualifies as "high-needs" as determined by the state grant requirements, with at least 20% of its families below the poverty line and a high percentage of teachers with emergency, provisional, or temporary certification. The city of Smithville has recently undergone an economic decline; once home to a variety of industries, Smithville lost many of its manufacturing jobs during the last 30 years. Smithville still has a strong agricultural base. As a result, the town is home for many seasonal farmworkers, and 44% of the population are non-native English speakers. According to the 2015 American Community Survey, Smithville has an unemployment rate of 13.1%, and 32.0% of the population lives in poverty. In terms of racial diversity, 14.6% of the population is White, 33.6% is African American, and 48.9% is Hispanic or Latino.

For the first year of the grant, district administrators selected a cohort of 24 teachers (from a pool of 35 applicants) to serve as mentors to beginning teachers (those in their first through third years of full-time teaching). Applicants for the program were evaluated in terms of their overall effectiveness rating based on the Danielson Evaluation Instrument (Danielson, 2014), their attendance, their contributions to the district, and their years of teaching experience. The mentors represented six of the district's nine schools and included teachers from Grades preK–8, reading specialists, special education teachers, and bilingual instructors. The mentors were primarily female (only one mentor was male), though somewhat more diverse in terms of race, with 15 White mentors (62.5%), 5 African American mentors (20.8%), 3 Hispanic mentors (12.5%), and 1 Multiracial mentor (4.2%). These numbers are somewhat representative of the overall racial distribution of teachers in Smithville: according to data posted on the state department of education's website, the teaching staff in the district was 77.1% White, 11.4% African American, 10.4% Hispanic, and 0.4% Multiracial in 2015–16. However, the composition of the mentors is clearly not reflective of the student population of Smithville. For a detailed list of the mentors, including race, sex, and years of teaching experience, see Table 1.

Table 1. Smithville Mentor Demographics

Pseudonym	Sex	Race	Grade(s) Taught	Years in Smithville	Years in Other District(s)
Aguda	Female	African American	5	10+	0
Becker	Female	White	2	10+	0
Bowen	Female	White	5	<5	5+
Briggs	Female	White	4	10+	1–2
Butler	Female	White	2	10+	1–2
Carson	Female	White	3	10+	2–4
Cole	Female	White	4	10+	2–4
Crawford	Female	White	K–8	10+	5+
Flores	Female	Hispanic	K	10+	0
Foster	Female	White	5	10+	0
Glover	Female	African American	PreK	5–9	0
Griffith	Male	White	6–8	5–9	0
Leonard	Female	White	3	10+	0
Lowe	Female	White	4	10+	0
Maxwell	Female	White	PreK	10+	0
McGee	Female	White	1	10+	0
Medina	Female	Hispanic	PreK	5–9	0
Moreno	Female	Hispanic	1	<5	5+
Payne	Female	Multiracial	6–8	10+	0
Reed	Female	White	3	10+	0
Shelton	Female	African American	5	5–9	5+
Steele	Female	White	2	10+	0
Thompson	Female	African American	4	10+	0
Wood	Female	African American	5	10+	0

Related Grant Activities

During year one, grant activities focused exclusively on working with mentors and community members on the Smithville Community Board, an advisory board created as part of the grant initiative. Mentors met once per month from January to June of 2016 for professional development sessions that covered topics including teacher leadership, critical friends groups, culturally relevant pedagogy, and anti-racist pedagogy. Each meeting was three hours long and was facilitated by outside presenters who provided opportunities for mentors to engage with current research and to explore data from their own classrooms. Outside of these sessions, mentors were asked to post monthly responses to questions posed on the "Teacher Leader Blog," a password-protected forum (housed on edmodo) through which teachers engaged in online conversations relating to topics covered in the professional development sessions.

The Smithville Community Board was created for the purpose of working with mentors to develop and/or support asset-based perspectives of Smithville students and families. In this way, mentors would be able to share positive perceptions of the community as well as strategies for engagement with future mentees. The board met three times during the spring of 2016. Members were recruited from the community, and while attendance at board meetings varied, in total the group consisted of 17 members, including: seven parents, two grandparents, three district employees (two parent liaisons and a grant administrator), and five representatives from community organizations. The board focused on developing a Community Resource Guide to share with mentors. Board members gathered relevant information about local community organizations, including services available for both parents and teachers. Additionally, the board created an open-ended survey in which they asked parents to share their goals for their children, positive and negative experiences they have had in Smithville schools, and advice for teachers. Mentors were invited to distribute surveys (in both English and Spanish) to their students' parents and then return completed surveys to the board. While the overall response rate was low, over 70 surveys were collected.

Ultimately, the Smithville Community Board produced a 12-page booklet which was assembled by a graphic designer. The Community Resource Guide presents information from community organizations, including specific educational resources available to schools. Responses from the parent surveys comprise the bulk of the Community Resource Guide in a section entitled "Debunking the myths about the city of Smithville through sharing parents' experiences." In these pages, the board presents common myths they have heard about their city, including: "Smithville parents do not care about their

children's education," and "Teaching in Smithville schools is a punishment." After each myth, the board wrote a response, offering their perspective and sharing a selection of direct quotes from parent surveys. For instance, after the myth, "Smithville parents are difficult to work with," the board wrote, "Parents want to work cooperatively with teachers, but teachers need to do their part, as well." They listed tips teachers could follow to help make parents feel welcome in schools, such as inviting parents to participate in activities and making an effort to understand parents, even when they do not speak the same language. The board shared the Community Resource Guide with mentors at a joint meeting at the end of the 2016–17 academic year.

While this study focuses on year one of the grant, it is helpful to note the trajectory of year two. During the second year, the first cohort of mentors engaged in "turnkey training," teaching concepts discussed in the first year to the second cohort of mentors during professional learning sessions. Beginning teachers were also invited to the second half of professional learning sessions, to meet with the mentors to discuss the focus topic, as well as any specific issues they encountered in their classrooms. Because of recent layoffs in the district, the number of beginning teachers was small ($n = 6$), so during year two, beginning teachers often met with groups of five or six mentors.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, we employed qualitative research methods, including interviews, observations, open-ended surveys, and document analysis. We interviewed each of the 24 mentors participating in the program. Interviews were semi-structured and focused on the mentors' teaching background, goals for mentoring, and their perceptions of and involvement with the community (for the complete interview protocol, see Appendix). These questions were developed by the authors in order to elicit general information to assist in the overall implementation of the grant, and—with respect to this particular study—to establish an initial understanding of mentors' levels of engagement in and perceptions of the community. This baseline was used to help us to determine if and how mentors' engagement and/or perceptions changed as a result of working with local stakeholders through this grant. At the beginning of year two, we sent mentors a brief survey (through the group blog and over email) asking them to detail what (if anything) they learned about working with the Smithville community and how their engagement had changed (if at all) as a result of participating in the grant.

In addition to interviews and surveys, we attended relevant meetings (often serving as facilitators), including the professional learning series and the Smithville Community Board meetings, and recorded field notes. We also had

access to a variety of documents that provided further context for our research. Mentors posted monthly responses on a group blog, a platform that was used for the purpose of sustaining conversations outside of formal meeting times. In addition, the Community Resource Guide is an important artifact that reflects the perspectives of the members of the Smithville Community Board. Finally, per the grant requirements, we hired an external evaluator. Her quarterly reports provide a helpful outsider perspective with respect to how well we met our objectives as outlined in our grant narrative.

Data were analyzed using grounded theory, and we used the computer program atlas.ti to assist in coding interviews, field notes, and surveys (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). We relied on a system of open and then axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In our first round of open coding, we broadly categorized the mentors' responses to the interview questions, focusing solely on the issue of community engagement for this study. We noted the various forms of community engagement they described, different perceptions that they had about Smithville, and how they conceptualized the purposes of working with parents and families. While we focused on responses relating to questions about community engagement, we analyzed the interview transcripts in their entirety, as ideas and issues relating to working with the community sometimes emerged in response to more general questions. In our second round of axial coding, we aggregated the base codes according to broader themes and tallied mentor responses in different categories, creating tables that illustrate perceptions of the community and different forms of engagement (discussed below). In addition, during year two, we revisited the topic of community engagement with the mentors, asking them to reflect on the blog about how their engagement with or perceptions of the community had changed as a result of their participation in the grant. Twenty of the 24 mentors responded, and these responses were coded and tabulated, as well.

We undertook a variety of measures to ensure the validity of our data (Maxwell, 1996). First, we triangulated our data by utilizing different data collection strategies (interviews, surveys, observations, document analysis). Furthermore, by working with an external evaluator, we received regular feedback (through conference calls every three weeks and reports each quarter) about successes and obstacles we encountered in our grant activities' implementation. In particular, the quarterly reports contain aggregated data that illustrate mentors' satisfaction with grant activities, as well as de-identified quotes that demonstrate what mentors had—and had not—learned from their engagement in the project.

Finally, we must account for our positions and identities with respect to the research. Certainly, as principal investigators, we were invested in the success

of the grant-related activities. However, we firmly believed that we could ultimately achieve more success if we looked at our work through a critical lens, and therefore we invited constructive feedback from each other and from our district partners, with whom we spoke every three weeks. In addition, as three White women who do not live or work in Smithville, we were also acutely aware that we were by no means experts about the community. Thus, as we engaged with members of the Smithville Community Board as well as with the mentors, we endeavored to take a listening stance, facilitating conversations in which we were partners in learning. Practically speaking, this meant that we tried to create fairly open-ended agendas for board meetings in order to be responsive to community input, and we explicitly shared the belief that we do not know nearly as much about Smithville as the people who live there.

Findings

In this section, we first review the mentors' initial perceptions of the community, categorized as neutral, positive, and negative. Next, we describe the specific forms that mentors' engagement takes, before considering if/how the mentors' perceptions and engagement practices changed as a result of their participation in this grant.

Initial Perceptions

In order to consider how, if at all, mentors' perspectives about the community changed as a result of their participation in this grant, we had to determine their initial perceptions. Therefore, during initial interviews, mentors were invited to share what they knew about the Smithville community and were asked to consider what beginning teachers should know about working in the Smithville School District. Their responses were coded, and each code was categorized as "positive," "negative," or "neutral." To be classified as "positive," the code had to address elements of the community that teachers believed supported them in their classroom practice. In this category, four codes addressed characteristics of families in the city (close-knit and caring, culturally/linguistically diverse, hard-working, supportive) and one addressed the town itself (rich in history and local landmarks). To be classified as "negative," the code had to address elements of the community that the teachers believed hindered or complicated their ability to provide instruction. Four of these codes encompassed characteristics of families (culturally/linguistically diverse, difficult home lives, lack of education, low socioeconomic status) and one addressed the town more generally (unsafe environment). In some cases, mentors simply shared demographic information without discussing any perceived impact on

Table 2. Mentors' Perceptions of Smithville

Pseudonym	Positive					Negative					Neutral	
	Caring	C./L. Diverse	Hard-working	Sup-portive	Land-marks	C./L. Diverse	Difficult home lives	Lack of education	Low SES	Unsafe	C./L. Diverse	Low SES
Aguda							x				x	x
Becker				x								
Bowen	x		x								x	x
Briggs	x											
Butler						x			x			
Carson						x					x	x
Cole				x			x				x	x
Crawford					x		x			x	x	x
Flores				x			x				x	x
Foster						x	x		x			
Glover											x	
Griffith						x	x			x		x
Leonard	x			x	x	x			x			
Lowe	x			x	x					x	x	
Maxwell												
McGee							x	x				
Medina												
Moreno											x	x
Payne		x										
Reed						x	x		x			
Shelton	x			x			x			x	x	x
Steele				x			x				x	x
Thompson					x		x			x	x	x
Wood										x		
TOTAL	5	1	1	7	4	6	11	1	4	6	12	11

Note: SES = Socioeconomic status; C./L. = Culturally/Linguistically

their teaching practice. In these cases, the code was categorized as "neutral." Table 2 provides an illustration of teachers' responses.

As evident in Table 2, many mentors had mixed opinions about the community and the families who live there. Overall, there were 23 comments coded as neutral from 13 different teachers, 18 comments coded as positive from 10 different teachers, and 28 comments coded as negative from 15 different teachers. While these numbers provide a general sense of mentors' perspectives, the qualitative data paint a fuller picture.

Neutral Perceptions

First, in response to the question, "What do you know about the Smithville community?" many mentors shared perceptions about the town with no judgments immediately attached. In particular, mentors frequently described the population of Smithville as racially diverse and as working class or "poor." Comments such as, "It's a low socioeconomic area. It's got a lot of immigrants" (Ms. Carson, Interview, 3/10/16) or "It's a depressed community, economically" (Mr. Griffith, Interview, 4/21/16) exemplify this sort of neutral response. Certainly, these observations mesh with census data regarding the city. Typically, however, mentors shared more than simple demographic observations of the town; the majority of the mentors (11 of 13) who shared neutral observations also shared positive and/or negative perceptions they held regarding Smithville.

Positive Perceptions

In terms of positive characteristics of the community, five mentors described students' families as close-knit and caring. For example, Ms. Briggs discussed how Smithville residents supported one another after members of a student's family were involved in a fatal car crash. Ms. Briggs worried about how she was going to approach her students with the news, but when she arrived at school the next day, her students were waiting to share support and information with her. She explained, the "community is very close, and they take care of each other, and they already are arranging a fundraiser [for the student's family]" (Interview, 2/18/16). On a related note, Ms. Bowen said she was impressed by the way in which her students' entire families support their efforts in school, noting that at back-to-school night, "every member of the family shows up… the mom, the dad, grandma, grandpa, brother, sister, aunts, and uncles" (Interview, 2/22/16).

Mentors also described parents as being supportive of the work of teachers in school. Seven teachers explained that parents provide either moral support to them by emphasizing the value of education to their children or material support in the form of resources or gifts. Ms. Shelton said she "gets presents, cards, handmade everything.…[Parents are] just so appreciative.…You know

they don't have a lot of money, but I see the support from the families from everyday little things" (Interview, 4/21/16). Notably, three of these seven teachers expressed the belief that Hispanic parents were more supportive than other parents in the district, as they generally "tend to value the education more… and participate more than other people do" (Ms. Cole, Interview, 3/23/16). In this case, these mentors' positive perceptions of one segment of the community contained an implicit critique of other parents.

There were a few other positive comments. One mentor described her students' parents as "hard-working" (Ms. Bowen, Interview, 2/22/16), and four mentors referenced specific community resources they appreciated, from good Mexican restaurants (Ms. Lowe, Interview, 3/17/16) to "300 years worth of architecture" that serves as the basis of community-based art lessons (Ms. Crawford, Interview, 2/22/16). Finally, while 18 of the 24 mentors referenced the cultural and linguistic diversity of their students and their students' families, only one mentor discussed this diversity in specifically positive terms. Ms. Payne noted that—unlike other teachers—she does not discourage her students' use of Spanish in her classroom. Though acknowledging that her students must become fluent in English, she also wants them to continue to speak their first language, explaining, "If it's not disrupting class, I'd leave [speaking Spanish in class] alone, you know? We don't want them to feel bad about it either, you know? Because actually, they have more of a skill than we do" (Interview, 2/18/16).

Negative Perceptions

On the other hand, six mentors approached their students' linguistic and cultural diversity from a negative perspective, noting how at times a "language barrier" makes communication with families challenging. Ms. Reed said, "It's hard.…I think I have five or six families that are not Hispanic, and some of those Hispanic parents do speak English, but the majority don't, so it's hard to communicate" (Interview, 3/10/16). Ms. Reed explained that she would like to learn more Spanish in order to be able to speak with her students' parents, indicating that she accepts some responsibility for communication challenges.

In addition to referencing a language barrier, some mentors spoke in more oblique terms about the culture and socioeconomic status of their students and their families, using somewhat coded language to convey that students come from families who do not value school or support the work of teachers. For instance, Ms. Butler noted, "Sometimes it's really hard to move to make a connection with these types of kids." While it was not immediately apparent what she meant, she went on to explain that, in general, her students have limited experiences outside of school, adding:

> Because once you're working with the kids, then it's like a light bulb goes off, and you're like, okay, wait, these kids have never been exposed to this, this, and this. But I try to show [beginning teachers] other ways of how we can expose [students] to it without [students] being naturally exposed. (Interview, 3/23/16)

In a similar vein, Ms. Foster explained, "the main thing I notice is what comes into the classroom is the very large households, just a whole different culture in this area." When asked how that impacts her work as a teacher, she conceptualized the "culture" in terms of what her students are lacking, explaining, "They come with all different kinds of needs.…You have hunger, you have just getting enough sleep…there's not much follow-up, and there's no real core structure for what they're expected to do" (Interview, 2/18/16).

Frequently, mentors' comments focused on their students' difficult home lives, with mentors citing overcrowded houses, transitory families, and abusive or neglectful parents. In many cases, mentors positioned themselves as the only positive influence in their students' lives. For instance, Ms. McGee explained that her students "love to come to school" because:

> for some of them, that's when they get the most, I wouldn't say attention, but…sometimes their parents work a lot of hours, or they come from broken homes, so when they come to school, they sometimes often refer to you as their mother. (Interview, 4/21/16)

Mr. Griffith warned that teachers should be careful about how they approach students who do not do their homework, "because they might not have had a bed to sleep in the night before—and it's all this cliché stuff you see in like, Hilary Swank movies, but it's true; it's real" (Interview, 4/21/16).

Six mentors also described the Smithville community as "unsafe." According to the state police website, Smithville's crime rate is higher than the state average: in 2014, Smithville had a violent crime rate of 10.2 per 1,000 inhabitants (compared to the state average of 2.6 per 1,000) and a nonviolent crime rate of 39.0 per 1,000 inhabitants (compared to the state average of 17.4 per 1,000). However, mentors' comments relating to safety were coded as "negative" because the teachers emphasized the detrimental impact of the unsafe environment on their teaching practice. For instance, Ms. Wood explained that the community "is not as safe as we'd like it to be," and, as such, "to…go to [students'] homes just by yourself, I wouldn't recommend that" (Interview, 3/17/16). Ms. Lowe described the town as "rough," noting, "there's a couple of my high school students that I wouldn't want to meet on the street" (Interview, 3/17/16). And while Ms. Shelton emphasized a lot of the community's assets in her interview, she offered the following assessment of the town: "You

don't wanna think it, but it's pretty bad out there. It's dangerous" (Interview, 4/21/16).

In sum, mentors' initial perceptions of the community were mixed. We do not want to mischaracterize mentors who cited valid statistics about the town as having deficit perspectives, and therefore the context was scrutinized in order to accurately categorize mentors' remarks. When a mentor's comment was neutral, it was coded as such. Taking that into account, mentors' descriptions of Smithville were more negative than positive. While 12 teachers did share positive descriptions of the town, eight of those same teachers shared negative perceptions as well. Moreover, the qualitative data demonstrate that while mentors' positive descriptions tended to be brief (e.g., describing parents as "hard-working") or sometimes superficial (e.g., complimenting Smithville's Mexican restaurants), mentors' comments regarding negative aspects of Smithville were more detailed and more pervasive throughout the interviews.

Practices and Purposes of Engagement

In addition to exploring how mentors perceived Smithville, we also asked mentors to share ways in which they have worked with members of the community. Mentors discussed seven main ways they interacted with the Smithville community—primarily parents—and these forms of engagement are outlined in Table 3. While some of these interactions took place outside of the schools, the majority of the exchanges between teachers and students' families occurred in schools and often at events that teachers were contractually obligated to attend. Mentors emphasized that they valued these interactions because they provided opportunities to build rapport and to improve classroom management. With a few exceptions (discussed in more detail below), mentors generally explained that the purpose of these interactions was to share information with parents; occasions where teachers engaged with the goal of learning from members of the community were rare.

Table 3. Smithville Mentors' Forms of Engagement

Pseudonym	Attend Student Events	Contact Students' Homes	Work with Families in School	Church/Charity/ Volunteer Work	Visit Community Sites	Additional Employment*	District-Sponsored Activities
Aguda	x	x	x	x			x
Becker	x	x	x			x	
Bowen		x	x				
Briggs	x	x	x				
Butler		x	x				
Carson	x	x	x	x		x	
Cole	x	x	x	x			
Crawford		x	x				
Flores		x	x	x			
Foster		x	x		x		
Glover		x	x				x
Griffith	x	x	x				
Leonard		x	x				
Lowe		x	x				
Maxwell			x				
McGee	x	x	x				
Medina	x	x	x				
Moreno							
Payne	x	x		x			
Reed		x					x
Shelton		x	x	x			
Steele	x			x			x
Thompson		x					
Wood	x					x	
TOTAL (out of 24)	11	20	18	7	1	3	4

*That Provides Opportunities to Interact with Families

The most frequent form of engagement that mentors referenced was reaching out to students' parents/guardians at home, with 20 out of the 24 teachers describing contacting families in this way. Teachers shared a variety of strategies they employed to contact parents, including calling home, sending letters, creating newsletters, and using ClassDojo (a phone application through which parents and teachers can text each other). Two teachers, both employed at the early childhood education center, explained that they were required to complete home visits, so they "do get out" into the community (Ms. Glover, Interview, 2/16/16). Mentors said that they used this contact to check in with parents regarding students' academic progress and to share their general classroom expectations. Moreover, several teachers mentioned that by proactively contacting parents, they had fewer classroom management issues. For instance, Mrs. Aguda said that by reaching out to parents early in the year, it mitigated future problems: "When maybe a bad situation comes up, the parent will be more…on your side, rather than being defensive" (Interview, 2/22/16).

Mentors also shared ways that they work with parents in the school. Most frequently, mentors referenced meeting with parents at conferences and back-to-school nights. In general, mentors reported a good turnout for these events, though a few mentors noted that "sometimes it's the only time you'll see [the students'] parents" (Ms. Medina, Interview, 2/17/16). As with contacting students' homes, mentors used these events to give updates regarding students' progress. In addition, some mentors took advantage of the opportunity to share resources with parents; for example, Ms. McGee explained that she used conferences to encourage parents to visit the free library in order to access online programs that can help students in reading or math (Interview, 4/21/16), and Ms. Foster noted that parent nights can be a good occasion to help parents sign up for ClassDojo (Interview, 2/18/16).

Parents were also invited to take part in educational activities at the school; typically, parents were positioned as the learners, with the mentors sharing skills and knowledge. For instance, Ms. Maxwell described hosting an "ornament making day" every December, in which parents were invited so that teachers could "show them how to teach their child" by discussing concepts such as patterning and counting (Interview, 2/19/16). Ms. Glover listed several different workshops that the schools offer parents, including an "eating healthy program" and a "creative arts workshop" (Interview, 2/16/16). At the same time, Ms. Glover also has welcomed parents to act as teachers, noting that she extended invitations to "families that have talents," creating an "open door policy" for parents who want to participate in class activities (Interview, 2/16/16). Likewise, Ms. Aguda invited parents' knowledge into her classroom—albeit one step removed—through their children. She explained how she invited children of Mexican immigrants to share their parents' expertise:

> Some of the parents have been to the university, and I challenge [the students]. They will tell me, "Oh, my mom taught me differently." I will tell them, "There is a smartboard, there is the computer." Let them create a PowerPoint, and "You teach us."…They have knowledge, so let's share. (Interview, 2/22/16)

Notably, these examples from Ms. Glover and Ms. Aguda are the only two occasions in which any of the 24 mentors described situating parents as experts in their classrooms. At the same time, it is important to note that Ms. Aguda privileges the knowledge of parents who have "been to the university," which indicates that even in some promising cases, certain forms of cultural capital are still more valued than others.

Mentors also described attending student events as a way of engaging with the community; 11 of the mentors shared how they used these activities to make connections with students and/or their parents. For example, Ms. Becker noted that she attended many of her second graders' first communions as a way of showing her students that she cared about them outside of school (Interview, 3/10/16). Beyond building rapport with the students, these events also helped mentors show parents they were invested in their students' success. Ms. Carson said that when she goes to various sporting events, "it builds a relationship with [the student's] family…it shows you care about their child as a whole" (Interview, 3/10/16). In fact, Ms. Carson hypothesized that attending one of her student's sporting events helped her have a "better relationship" with a parent who had a reputation for being "very difficult" (Interview, 3/10/16).

There were a few additional ways in which mentors said they were active in Smithville. Seven mentors discussed how involvement in their church or local volunteer organizations helped them interact with community members or "give back" to the community, such as donating blood, buying Christmas gifts for students whose families cannot afford them, and participating in book and food drives. Three mentors explained that they had opportunities to engage with the community through their work in grant-funded initiatives or as coaches. One mentor noted that when she was first hired in the district, she tried to go "to all the different places" in the area, including the local zoo, historical sites, and restaurants, in order to "to try and see about the area" (Ms. Foster, Interview, 2/18/16).

Finally, four mentors described district-sponsored events that were designed with the purpose of connecting teachers with the community. In years past, the district offered a bus tour of the community; however, mentors only recalled the tour in vague terms, sharing comments such as, "[it] was so long ago, I don't remember…we went around…to see where all the different schools were" (Ms. Reed, Interview, 3/10/16). The district also sponsored a "community walk" in

which teachers canvased local neighborhoods during the summer to share information about the first day of school. This event produced mixed reviews: while Ms. Steele said it was "interesting to…see what the kids are up to in the summertime" (Interview, 3/17/16), Ms. Lowe shared the story of her colleague who attended the walk and was flagged down by Smithville police who said, "you should not be walking out here alone" (Interview, 3/17/16).

In general, most forms of community engagement shared by mentors can be conceptualized as occasions that mentors used to impart knowledge to parents and to build rapport with students and their families, largely for the purpose of improving classroom management. In a few instances, mentors noted that they were able to improve their teaching practice by learning more about their students' families and culture. For example, Ms. Aguda explained that in her class:

> We talk about culture…I get to know the kids, where they are academically. I tailor their work based on where they are….In the morning…[I] bring in something interesting—music, a poem, the headline news [and ask], "What do you think?" (Interview, 2/22/16)

Ms. Shelton said that in her classroom, they "talk about racism.…Like I'm not afraid to talk to them about that stuff. Like today, we just, we listen to everyone's music. We're listening to Spanish music…right now" (Interview, 4/21/16).

On the other hand, some mentors reported lowering their expectations in response to learning more about their students' lives. Ms. Reed talked about the importance of being "realistic" in terms of being able to reach every student, explaining, "You have to be aware, and you have to be diligent in looking for certain things. If a kid is not doing his homework, [don't just say], 'Do your homework, do your homework.' Maybe there's a reason" (Interview, 3/10/16). Mr. Griffith noted the importance of having a lot of patience with students who do not do their work or who have behavioral problems:

> [The students] don't wanna come [to school] to get yelled at because they're getting beat when they're at home. Beaten, beaten. Not like slapped in the face, like, beaten with [a] closed fist. I didn't experience that growing up, so it was culture shock. Not just being White, not just coming from a middle-class family, but just, the way they're raised—and I don't mean all of 'em, obviously, but you need to have patience. They hate it when you yell, some of them will break down into tears because you remind them of their dad, or their uncle, or their grandpop, when they get drunk or mad. (Interview, 4/21/16)

Mr. Griffith went on to explain that he does not "make excuses for the kids," but it was not clear how he framed his expectations for his students, as he did not elaborate (Interview, 4/21/16).

In sum, the engagement practices of the mentors largely positioned the teachers as experts who share information with parents regarding their children and educational support strategies. A few mentors discussed ways in which they learned from their students and their families in order to invite their knowledge and experiences into the classroom; notably, all three of these teachers (Ms. Aguda, Ms. Glover, Ms. Shelton) are African American. However, many other teachers emphasized perceived deficits they identified in their students' families, for which they believed they had to compensate in the classroom.

Perspectives After Participating in Grant Activities

As discussed above, there were two major grant activities geared toward helping mentors develop more asset-based perspectives about the community. First, mentors participated in a monthly professional learning series that focused on a variety of topics. In March 2016, the session focused on culturally relevant pedagogy, and a presenter shared key ideas as outlined by Gay (2002), Rychly and Graves (2012), and Ford, Stuart, and Vakil (2014). Discussions focused on how mentors could employ culturally responsive pedagogy to build bridges between students' homes and school (field notes, 3/17/16).

Second, members of the Smithville Community Board met with the mentors during one day of the Mentor Summer Institute in June 2016. During this two-hour meeting, board members shared the Community Resource Guide they created with the mentors, and they engaged in discussions based on topics raised in it. In particular, there were six groups composed of three to four mentors and three to four board members. Each group explored one of the "myths" that was debunked in the guide, then groups were asked to engage in discussion regarding how they could encourage beginning teachers to reach out to parents and to make use of Smithville's resources.

In order to consider if and how mentors' engagement with and perceptions of the community changed as a result of any of their experiences in year one, we consulted various sources. First, during year two of the grant, mentors were sent a brief survey (through the group blog and over email), asking them to detail what (if anything) they learned about working with the Smithville community and how their engagement had changed (if at all) as a result of participating in the grant. Of the 24 mentors, 20 responded to the survey, and their responses indicate that engaging with the Smithville Community Board did not have a significant impact on their work with the community. Table 4 summarizes their replies. Nine respondents noted that their engagement did not change appreciably because they were already actively involved in the community. The majority of respondents (13 out of 20) emphasized the value of the list of community agencies in the Community Resource Guide, which

Table 4. Smithville Mentors' Self-Reported Changes Through Involvement in Program

Pseudonym	Already Involved in/ Knowledgeable of Community	Learned More About Community Resources	Gained Resources to Share with New Teachers/Parents	Gained New Perspectives about Students/Families	Reinforced Negative Beliefs
Aguda		x			
Becker		x	x	x	
Bowen					
Briggs		x	x	x	
Butler	x			x	
Carson	x				
Cole	x	x	x	x	
Crawford	x				x
Flores	x	x			
Foster	x	x	x		
Glover		x	x	x	
Griffith					x
Leonard	x				
Lowe	x	x			
Maxwell					
McGee					
Medina		x	x		
Moreno		x	x		
Payne				x	
Reed		x			x
Shelton		x			
Steele	x	x	x		
Thompson					
Wood				x	
TOTAL (out of 20)	9	13	8	8	3

Note. Shaded = Did not complete survey.

was "helpful because the resources were in one place" (Ms. Shelton, blog post, 1/19/17). Eight mentors mentioned the guide would be helpful to share with parents or with new teachers.

However, fewer of the mentors indicated there was a change in their perceptions of students or in their actual practices. Eight respondents said that the work with the Smithville Community Board provided new perspectives about students. Some mentors discussed these perspectives in general terms, noting the parents' comments were "enlightening" (Ms. Payne, blog post, 1/19/17) and provided "new insight into the lives of my students" (Ms. Becker, blog post, 1/19/17). Two mentors shared more specific changes in perceptions. Ms. Wood said that she "learned that people in the Smithville community really do care about their children and their education." As a result, Ms. Wood reported that she is "more patient and caring" in her interactions with parents (blog post, 1/19/17). Ms. Briggs shared that she "learned that at times, we can be unintentionally unwelcoming to the community, especially the Spanish-speaking members," and she found that some of the training around culturally responsive pedagogy provided help in addressing that issue (email, 1/19/17).

As a final note about the survey, three mentors said that they learned about the community through their engagement in the program; however, rather than offering new perspectives about community assets, these teachers shared deficit-oriented views of their students and their families, views our program sought to challenge, not to reinforce. For instance, Ms. Crawford said:

> I learned that urban youth in Smithville face hardships [that] other students may not face due to their immigration status, ethnicity, economic status, gang influence, drug addiction, violence, high temptation to drop out, unemployment, [and] lack of stability in their family to name a few. (blog post, 12/18/16)

Ms. Reed spoke in more vague terms about being appreciative of the opportunity to "gain insight into…what our students are going through" (blog post, 1/18/17). Mr. Griffith felt that discussions about the community helped him "[get] a sense of what teachers at all schools in town are dealing with" (blog post, 1/12/17). Phrases such as "going through" and "dealing with" indicate that these mentors focused on perceived deficits of the community. These three mentors all shared predominantly negative perceptions of Smithville in their initial interviews. In this respect, it is not necessarily surprising that they maintained deficit views even after engaging in the program, but it is particularly disappointing as these were precisely the views the Smithville Community Board wanted to challenge.

Additional data highlight the mentors' lack of growth regarding community engagement. For instance, during year two, the external grant evaluator

asked mentors to complete surveys regarding their perceived skill levels with respect to various attributes associated with effective mentorship. The majority of mentors indicated they were only "somewhat skilled" or "not skilled" in seeking out and providing additional community resources to beginning teachers. Moreover, when the evaluator asked mentors about how they intended to apply the knowledge and skills related to participation in the program, no one discussed the intent to draw on more community resources in their classroom practice (external evaluator, second quarterly report, 2/26/17).

Though our data consists largely of self-reports from the mentors, we did have one opportunity to see mentors share their knowledge about the community with a new cohort of mentors and beginning teachers. During year two of the grant, mentors were invited to facilitate the professional learning series, drawing on what they learned during the previous year to share that information with a new cohort of mentors through a "turnkey" approach. In October 2016, three mentors created and presented a session about working with families, entitled "Contacting parents: Your options, your obstacles." Hoping to empower mentors to become teacher leaders, we played a limited role in planning this session, helping them to brainstorm some initial ideas but leaving the details to them. In retrospect, this was a mistake. The three mentors created a PowerPoint that emphasized traditional means of reaching out to parents, including phone calls, emails, and progress reports, as well as the importance of documenting this contact, so "if the parent had a gripe, you can show [the administration] that they had an opportunity to speak to you" (field notes, 10/20/16).

After sharing the PowerPoint, the facilitators broke the teachers into groups and asked them to discuss six different "common" scenarios involving parents and brainstorm "positive" ways to approach the situations. The six scenarios included: (1) angry parent, (2) a student without book bag/school supplies, (3) concerns of neglect/abuse, (4) parent who goes straight to the principal, (5) a non-English speaking parent, and (6) parents' phone number is not listed. Indeed, as the title of the presentation indicated, in all of these scenarios, parents were positioned as "obstacles" to success in the classroom. Rather than sharing any of the available community resources or asking the group to think about parents' perspectives (two areas of focus with the Smithville Community Board), the presenters emphasized strategies regarding how to deal with various perceived deficits of Smithville families.

In sum, while there were some self-reported signs of positive change, most data indicate that the grant activities involving the community did not expand mentors' asset-based perspectives nor their willingness/ability to draw on local resources. This finding is especially problematic as a large number of mentors

(15 of 24) shared deficit perspectives of Smithville and its residents in their initial interviews.

Discussion and Implications

Similar to what has been reported in much of the literature (García & Guerra, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014; Ullucci & Howard, 2015; Yosso, 2005), we found that many of the teachers involved in our program held deficit perspectives regarding their students and their students' families. In an attempt to change these beliefs, we engaged community members to share their experiences with the mentors in order to highlight the various assets that exist both within families and within the neighborhood at large in Smithville. Our data illustrate that our interventions—including the creation of a Community Resource Guide and structured interactions with community members—were largely ineffective, and mentors continued to discuss their students and the local community in terms of perceived deficits.

After reviewing our findings, we considered what we could have done differently in order to change some of the mentors' negative beliefs regarding Smithville students. First, we believe that mentors would have benefitted from spending more time with local stakeholders, preferably in a setting more integral to the community. Our professional development sessions occurred in a meeting room at a local restaurant; instead, we could plan to host future meetings at some of the local community organizations represented in the Smithville Community Board, such as the public library or adult literacy center. In this way, mentors would gain firsthand knowledge of at least one community resource and perhaps be more inclined to work with them in the future. In addition, these meetings should be linked with more instruction relating to asset-based pedagogies. While mentors had the opportunity to learn about culturally relevant pedagogy, they could also benefit from discussing concepts such as funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth. This theoretical grounding could make mentors more receptive to listening to what community members have to teach them.

Moving forward, we also suggest looking critically at the recruitment and selection process for mentors. While our mentors were representative of the racial diversity of the teaching force in the district, they were not representative of the student population. Though we did not note any strong patterns linking the mentors' race and initial perceptions of Smithville, we did find that the three teachers who invited students' knowledge and culture into their classrooms were all African American. Though anecdotal, this connection between the teachers' race and openness to community input meshes with other

research that advocates for selecting mentors who reflect the diversity of the student population (Achinstein & Anathases, 2005).

In addition, we believe that district administrators would be wise to reconsider the weight they place on various selection criteria. Currently, "years in the district" is one of four criteria used to choose mentors in Smithville. Though it is important for experienced teachers to serve as mentors, there is also the possibility that after several years in the community, teachers become entrenched in their views of students and their families. Additionally, the district does not have any criterion that screens for asset-based perspectives. While administrators currently evaluate applicants based on their "contributions to the district," it would also be helpful to think about how teachers invite the community to contribute to their classrooms. To that end, potential mentors could respond to a question on their application that asks them to share their perceptions of the community and their experiences in working with local stakeholders.

Finally, while it is important to look critically at our work, we also want to acknowledge successes upon which we can build in the future. Given that over 60% (15 of 24) of the mentors started the program with some negative perceptions of the community, perhaps we should expect change to happen slowly. After the joint Smithville Community Board and mentor meeting that occurred at the Mentor Summer Institute in 2016, we asked mentors to reflect briefly in writing about what they learned from talking with community members. Many mentors wrote comments such as, "Parents want to be part of the educational process" and "Parents do care about their children's education" (questionnaire responses, 6/29/16). Though it is a bit alarming that mentors did not hold these beliefs after years of working in the district, it is encouraging to know that some of their negative perceptions were challenged by engaging in conversation with local stakeholders—even if their new perspectives did not immediately translate into changes in their classroom or mentoring practices. Thus, we believe that engaging the community in the process of mentor training has the potential to help mentors approach their students from an asset-based perspective. However, this community–mentor collaboration may be more productive when mentors are selectively recruited and if joint meetings with stakeholders occur more frequently, are grounded in theory, and take place in locations that are important to the life of the community.

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Appendix. Interview Protocol for Mentors

1. Describe your teaching background:
   a. How long have you worked in Smithville?
   b. Have you worked in any other schools/districts? If so, where and in what capacity?
2. How prepared do you feel to mentor new teachers in Smithville Public Schools? Why?
   a. What past experiences do you have as a mentor or teacher leader?
   b. What prior training have you received in mentoring or teacher leadership?
   c. What type of training would you find most helpful for your current role as a mentor/teacher leader?
3. Reflecting on your experience in Smithville, has the district offered any mentoring or teacher leadership programs that have been particularly successful or unsuccessful? What do you think made these programs successful/unsuccessful?
4. How do you see your role as a mentor/teacher leader in the district? What goals do you have for yourself and the new teachers with whom you work?
5. What do you think are the most important things new teachers need to know in order to be successful in general and to be successful in Smithville public schools in particular?
6. Tell me what you know about the Smithville community. From what sources did you learn about the community?
7. In what ways, if any, do you work with the Smithville community in your role as a classroom teacher? If you do not work with the community, why don't you?
8. What advice would you give new teachers about engaging with the community in general and with their students' families in particular?
9. Is there anything else you think we should know about supporting teachers and teacher leaders in the Smithville Public School District?