

A Case Study of School-Community Alliances that Rebuilt a Community

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Abstract

This case study examines how the leadership of a principal in the worst elementary school in her district, located in what William J. Wilson describes as a socially dislocated African American community, worked to change the nature of an entire community by transforming how she and her faculty communicated with parents. Drawing on data gathered from teachers, parents, and the principal through semi-structured interview questions, observations, and documentation, this study provides a vivid example of how school leaders can work effectively with the community to create meaningful change in the neighborhoods surrounding their schools.

Key Words: social dislocation, Traditional African American Schools, alliances, parental involvement, community collaboration, businesses, law enforcement, media, elementary school, turnaround leadership, principals, urban, large districts, teachers, parents, case study, interviews, change, neighborhoods

Introduction

In the movie *Back to the Future*, the characters had to return to the past in order to correct problems they were having in the present. As in the movie, sometimes educators must refer to successful school programs of the past in order to address problems prevalent in public schools today. This article will revisit the leader's roles in Traditional African American Schools (TAAS) in order

to help principals working today in diverse settings have a better understanding of how to build relationships with African American families.

In 1991, Kozol predicted that desegregation would have a devastating impact upon the African American community. Research by William J. Wilson (1988) supports Kozol's point. Wilson's findings showed that prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s most African Americans lived in segregated communities. Residents within these communities included poor, working-class, and middle-class families. Even so, 95% of them lived below the poverty level (U.S. Census, 2000). By 1980, 54% of African Americans moved into the middle class (West, 1993). With the elimination of segregated housing, during the 1970s and 1980s, hundreds of thousands of newly middle-class African American families left their old communities, leaving many poor parents alone to raise their children in communities inundated with negative influences. In fact, over 151,000 African Americans moved from African American ghettos located in five cities alone between 1954 and 1980 (Wilson, 1988).¹ This mass exodus created large pockets of extreme poverty.²

Wilson (1988, 1991) called this mass exodus and its impact upon the African American urban community the "theory of social dislocation." Families remaining in the African American urban communities became isolated in pockets of impoverishment. In these isolated communities, crime, joblessness, out-of-wedlock births, female-headed families, welfare dependency, drug culture, and high dropout rates became the norm rather than the exception within the community (Osterman, 1990; Wilson, 1988). Wilson surmised that once a community becomes socially dislocated, it cannot return to its former state without the return of the middle class.

However, while addressing social issues, Wilson's exodus theory did not address school desegregation's devastating effect upon urban African American communities. Desegregation in public schools led to the termination of Traditional African American Schools (TAAS). Traditional African American Schools were homogeneous schools that were prominent in many Midwestern and Southern states prior to the Civil Rights Acts of 1965. These schools were characterized by all African American teachers and students and were located within the communities they served. Although these schools were a part of the local school systems, they often had their own school boards and relied heavily upon the African American community for their economic survival.

Within the confines of the TAAS, principals, parents, and teachers played distinct roles in the children's education. Their reliance upon each other resulted in school communities that created and promoted African American school traditions (Phillipsen, 1994). According to research by Vivian and Curtis Morris (2000), "African American principals played the roles of superintendent,

school administrator, supervisor, family counselor, financial advisor, community leader, employer, and politician” (p. 15). Hence, their jobs extended beyond academics into providing services for entire families.

Meanwhile, the role of African American parents was to support teachers and the principal financially, but not to teach. They also prepared children at home in how to behave in school (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Parents only came to school upon request by a teacher or the principal. Parents were not required to attend parent-teacher conferences, volunteer in classrooms, or help with homework (Siddle-Walker). Instead, they were free to visit unannounced to talk to the principal for individualized conferences. The parents’ presence was expected when they needed to advocate against any inequities towards their children or towards their children’s schools. Hence, in the Traditional African American School, being vocal on the behalf of one’s child was not only acceptable and encouraged by school principals, it was expected of good parents. This finding is important because a study by Balkom (2002) revealed that many African American parents who presently live in socially dislocated communities still base their roles and the roles of principals upon standards set in TAAS, which often creates a disconnect between the home and integrated schools.

This disconnect began as a consequence of school desegregation and the firing of 91,009 African American teachers and administrators between 1954 and 1989 in the Midwest and the South (Irvine & Irvine, 1983; Philipsen, 1999). Even though the number of African American educators was drastically reduced (and in some districts completely eliminated), the number of African American students remained the same (HEW Report, cited in Ceceleski, 1994).

Fired African American educators were replaced by White teachers and administrators. One report by the Department of Health Education and Welfare found that between 1968 and 1971, 1,000 African American educators were dismissed from one school district while it simultaneously hired 5,000 White educators (Ceceleski, 1994). The disparity between White and African American teachers initiated by this firing still haunts principals today. Today, over 90% of teachers are White, while only 8.4% are African American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) in comparison to 12% in the 1950s. The problem is that relationships traditionally formed between home and school in the African American community differed from parent-school relationships promoted in integrated schools.

Despite the fact that the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) requires schools to design parent roles based on the local community and national standards call on educational leaders to understand, respond to, and influence the community, both acts fail to recognize that in dominant society, principals’ roles do not include addressing parents’ social challenges (see Melmer, Burmaster,

James, & Wilhoit, 2008). Equally alarming is that principals may know what they are supposed to do, but just do not know how to do it, which shows the “dichotomy between theory and practice” (Osterman, cited in Sullivan & Glanz, 2005, vii), especially in regards to handling educators assigned to predominantly African American schools who have negative preconceived perceptions of children and their families (Fine & Weis, 1998; Howard, 2003; King, 1999). This confusion increases socially dislocated parents’ alienation from mainstream America.

Alienation within the context of integrated schools had a negative economic impact upon urban African American communities, thus increasing social isolation. According to Shakeshaft (1993), the “integrated” school setting creates psychologically unsafe and sometimes hostile learning environments for African American children. Children experience “more frequent racism and loss of community” (Noddings, cited in Katz, Noddings, & Strike, 1999, p. 11). Students’ reaction to their inhospitable environments is often poor performance or disassociation with learning (Ogbu, cited in Delpit, 1995), which leads to higher dropout rates. Lower school completion rates create a culture of unemployment. For instance, less than 27% of African American male high school dropouts find jobs in mainstream America, thus opening the door for crime and welfare dependency. Ironically (or paradoxically), although African American parents now have a greater need to advocate on their children’s behalf, they actually have less accessibility to those in power (Fine & Weis, 2003).

The dilemma for African American parents is how to be recognized as good when their traditional roles for participation are no longer recognized as acceptable. Recognition is important because poor African American parents value education as much as White parents (Lewis, 2003; Fine & Weis, 1998; Robinson, 2001), and they are very involved in their children’s education, despite the fact that they are not visible in their children’s schools (Brooks, 2005; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). The dilemma for today’s administrators is how to incorporate traditional roles of African American parents into integrated settings.

While collecting data for a different research project, I learned that the neighborhood surrounding Mumford Academy was previously considered socially dislocated, yet it is now a thriving working-class and business community. Parents and teachers attribute this change to the Academy principal’s alliances with the community. The principal stated that she based these alliances upon tactics learned from her experiences in TAAS. These tactics reconnected parents and the community to the school. Their reconnection fostered relationships between socially isolated parents and mainstream America. This knowledge framed the primary questions for this study; specifically, what alliances did the principal make, and what strategies were used to rebuild a socially dislocated community?

Methods

I used the qualitative case study format, because it enabled me to have “an in-depth study of a single or a few programs, events, activities, groups, or other entities defined in terms of time and place” (McMillan, 2004, p. 12) to gain greater insight into the strategies, practices, and policies utilized by the principal to improve the community. A purposive sample of 15 participants (8 teachers, 7 parents, and the principal) were interviewed. All participants responded privately to semi-structured interview questions during two-hour sessions. The principal was interviewed five times. Data also included field notes from observations of formal and informal interactions between parents, teachers, and/or the principal. I also used newspaper articles, local and state exam reports, school report cards, and school newsletters. (Please note: Within this article, all names of persons, places, and local publications are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the participants.) The multiple data sources provided for triangulation. “Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Lincoln & Denzin, 2005, p. 454; see also Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this case, data collected from the principal, parents, and teachers were compared against each other in order to validate the voices of others. Lastly, the data were analyzed with the constant comparison method. The school site selected for this study initially had less than ten parents attend its open house or parent-teacher conferences (Simon, 1994) when Dr. Hubbard arrived at Mumford Academy in the city of Bivens in 1994. Also in 1994, there were only 314 students enrolled in Mumford Academy; however, by 2003 there were 650 students enrolled with over a 90% parent participation rate (Brooks, 2005). At the time of this study, Dr. Hubbard had worked at Mumford Academy for 10 years.

Table 1: Context of Mumford Academy

Location - Large Urban City		1994	2004
Grade Levels		K-8	K-8
Students’ Characteristics	Enrollment (Ages)	300 (5-14)	519 (5-14)
	Need Free & Reduced Lunch (%)	83	High 63
	Race/Ethnicity (%)	100	98
	African American		1
	Caucasian		1
	Asian American		1

Findings

This section describes how the principal, who attended TAAS, applied her previous knowledge of those schools' partnerships with the community to the situation at Mumford Academy. Dr. Hubbard's goal was to re-create this partnership despite the fact that 95% of her teachers lived in White suburban communities. This section shows the conditions of Mumford upon Dr. Hubbard's arrival, the strategies used to redefine it, the surrounding socially dislocated community, and the results of her efforts.

Mumford Academy: School Context in 1994

Mumford Academy housed grades kindergarten through eight. Prior to Dr. Hubbard's arrival, Mumford had approximately 300 students. It was surrounded by an impoverished homogeneous African American community inundated with crime, drugs, absentee landlords' rental properties, violence, single-parent households, and the very poor. Of Mumford's students, 83% qualified for free or reduced lunch. As described by one parent, "We had a lot of drug deals going on. We had drug houses up and down the street." The school was an extension of the impoverishment and violence. The school's grounds were often used for drug transactions. Although the violence and drugs were accepted as daily occurrences, even by the children, the teachers who taught them were often frightened and disillusioned by the environment. Teachers recalled crying daily enroute to and from work.

Likewise, teachers' expectations for students were low, reflecting their perceptions of Black inferiority: "Learning took place, but it was very minimal. If you gave an exam and the scores were low, it was, "These kids couldn't do this," (Brooks, 2005, p. 166).³ A parent said that initially, student performance was poor: "Half the children could not read, couldn't write, and spell" (Brooks, 2006, p. 483).

Parents were instructed to drop off their children at the door without entering the building. They could not observe in their children's classrooms. As stated by one parent, "You could not come in and sit in classrooms. I was told that it was distracting to the teacher" (Brooks, 2005, p. 167). They could only visit during open house and parent-teacher conferences. Teachers never held programs for them; the school's doors remained locked. Yet teachers were appalled when most parents refused to attend either open house or parent-teacher conferences. As a result, interactions between teachers and parents were often strained.

This strain made transiency rates high among teachers, principals, and students; loyalty was low. One teacher stated, "People were constantly moving in

and out” (Brooks, 2005, p. 169). This teacher began teaching at Mumford in November. She was her students’ fourth teacher since September of that year. Transiency among principals was high as well. One teacher stated that in four years, the school had three different principals. A parent stated, “They were sending in principals that were basically working to increase their pensions. A lot of times they were absent, and the gym teacher would take over the principals’ jobs because they weren’t here” (Brooks, 2006, p. 484).

The feelings of hopelessness were summed up by Principal Hubbard, describing the conditions when she arrived: “Discipline, parent involvement, and student achievement were the lowest in the district. It was an ineffective environment: children were not learning, there were discipline problems, and the parents were not present” (Brooks, 2005, p. 170). Whether the previous principals ignored or were unaware of cultural differences among African Americans, the result was the same: An underperforming school remained in a socially isolated community with staff who did not know how to improve the situation.

Setting the Stage for Improvement

In 1992, the CEO of a Bivens’ local bank stated that the growth or death of a city was dependent upon its schools. He said, “Good schools will help attract families to Bivens and will bolster property values and, hence, the city’s tax rolls. Poor schools drive people away, undercut property values, and drain revenue from City Hall” (Stouffer, 1992, cited in Brooks, 2005, p. 172).

To prove his point, in 1993 this CEO pledged to build a partnership with the city’s lowest underperforming public elementary school, Mumford Academy. The bank pledged \$500,000 to Mumford annually under the conditions that it chose the principal from a national search, the school had a governing board which would act independently from the district’s board, and the bank’s funds would supplement, not replace, district funds to the school. The district agreed to the partnership as long as its superintendent and a representative for the teacher’s union could be board members. Both agreed to the terms. One year later, Dr. Beverly Hubbard was hired.

At the time of her recruitment, Dr. Hubbard had been recognized as one of the top six secondary principals in the country and was ranked among the 100 most influential women in her city for her success in changing a failing, predominantly Latino urban middle school into an institution of high academic achievement. She taught classes at the university level and built alliances with community agencies, including the police department and social services. She also had over 13 years experience of using Site-Based Decision Making (SBDM) in her building.

Beverly Hubbard, an African American woman, grew up in a very large urban housing project. She had a B.A. in Elementary Education, a M.A. in Guidance and Counseling, and a Ph.D. in Educational Administration. Dr. Hubbard was a single parent. Dr. Hubbard firmly believed that parents had a right to participate in their children's education and expected them to be active in her building. She informed her teachers that they were accountable to both administrators and parents for doing their jobs well.

Dr. Hubbard also aided in the change process through the conditions of her initial contract. One condition was that the assistant superintendent with jurisdiction over her school sit in if the district superintendent was unable to attend the SBDM meetings, and that the teachers' union representative had to put the best interests of the children before commitments to his or her special interest group. She required that five parents, one community leader, and three teachers from Mumford Academy sit on the board. Dr. Hubbard also requested that the bank commit financial assistance for a minimum of eight years. She felt that total transformation would be achieved when the incoming kindergarteners became eighth graders.

Next, Dr. Hubbard felt that the filth, graffiti, and dull colors in Mumford made it a terrible place for learning. All of the graffiti and trash had to be removed, the inside walls painted, and the floors cleaned before school started. Structural changes included rewiring the building for computers in the classrooms and for up-to-date science and computer laboratories. The bank used its leverage to side-step the district's construction workers' union. This action enabled repairs that normally took up to 10 years for completion to be finished within a few months. Most requested structural changes were completed before the first day of school. One teacher commented, "The outside of the building is well-kept. The inside of the building is warm and inviting. Now it's like a home" (Brooks, 2005, p. 175).

Dr. Hubbard's experience as a single parent made her sensitive to the fact that most of the children lacked access to medical and dental care, yet their parents were too proud to seek public assistance. Therefore, the principal insisted that a full service clinic be provided for all students, not just for those insured or on public assistance. The clinic had a nurse practitioner who was authorized to diagnose, give shots, and prescribe and administer medications. A partnership was established with a community pharmacy so that school-written prescriptions could be filled at the nurse's request and then be delivered to the school. By ensuring healthier children and a cleaner learning environment, Dr. Hubbard felt that student performance would improve.

Strategies for Partnerships

Controlling Drug Trafficking

Dr. Hubbard's introduction to Mumford's parents was a result of drug trans-actions on the playground. Dr. Hubbard recalled her unexpected welcome by parents, "This was my very first day. This group of parents came up to me and asked what was I going to do about the drugs? And I said, 'Well, we are going to get rid of them,'" (Brooks, 2005, p. 179). The seasoned principal went into action. "Immediately after that I sent out notices to the parents. I called the parents; I called the police department; I called the stations, and the media, so they could see it," (Brooks, 2005, p. 179).

Although fewer than six parents came to the meeting, police officers, city officials, and the media did come. Not deterred by the minimal presence of parents, Dr. Hubbard sent home flyers asking parents to make complaint tele- phone calls to city and board officials. She also asked teachers to help during their free time. The principal recounted what occurred:

We called downtown to the council people. We had just had people from all avenues here. They saw it, and they televised it. It made the headlines, and the drug houses were closed down because of the outcry within a week. (Brooks, 2005, p. 180)

Parents and teachers recalled that over 5,000 telephone calls were made in less than one week, along with daily media coverage televising the playground con- ditions. This action was the first major step towards reuniting the socially dis- located community to the mainstream. The residents realized that their voices did count. It also informed the principal that parents would support a school that cared about their children.

Facing reality, neither the principal nor the parents believed that the one time raid would stop drug trafficking in the community. So, the principal helped the parents and community members form a partnership with the po- lice department by starting a neighborhood block watch, the first block watch in the city. The parents initiated a parent patrol. The principal helped this group work in conjunction with the police department to provide crossing guards at two busy streets before and after school. This group used members of the community to help children cross other streets, supervise the playground before and after school, and greet visitors entering the building.

As the school's leader, Dr. Hubbard supported parents' efforts by prosecut- ing trespassers, drug dealers, and people who vandalized school property:

I let it be known that any trespassers on the school grounds after they had been warned would be arrested. A few tried. So I did have them

arrested. I did follow them to court. I did stand up in court, and the judge would ask me what did I want to do? At that point I would say, if they don't come back, I'm fine. You don't have to do anything, but if they come back I want you to do what you have to do. The word got out. The thing is you have to deal with the fine details. You have to follow through, and you can't make empty threats. So the word is that we protect what we have, and we really value the safety of our children. (Brooks, 2006, p. 487)

By creating the parent patrol and block watch, Dr. Hubbard enabled parents and law enforcers to come together as one. Parents felt that from this alliance, they received quicker responses to police and emergency calls. In essence, the principal's initiation of partnerships between parents and city officials to remove drugs from the school's premises led to the removal of drug houses nearby and made the school cleaner and safer. These collaborative efforts brought non-threatening police visibility into the community, ensured the continuance of justice, and established a connection between the community and the legal side of mainstream society. Children concentrated more on their studies because they knew adults were protecting them. Providing a safer commute to and from school increased student attendance. These changes improved student performances on standardized exams. Hence, the entire city benefited from the unified efforts of the principal, parents, law enforcement, and politicians to protect the children.

The principal also established relationships with area store owners. If a student from Mumford misbehaved in a store, she literally left the school to reprimand the student and make that student apologize to the owner. She instilled in students that whether they were in the building or on the street, they represented Mumford Academy and misbehavior would not be tolerated. As a result of this initiative, businessmen felt more comfortable working in the community and serving neighborhood youth. An alliance was built, eventually leading to the opening of new enterprises in the neighborhood.

Stopping the Violence

Dr. Hubbard used the school to demonstrate to parents and students an alternative to violence for handling disputes. She believed that changes in disciplinary procedures within the school would eventually curb violence in the community. However, to make teachers feel safer during the change, Dr. Hubbard allocated part of her budget toward the training of her staff in self-defense. Most importantly, she created a discipline committee with parents, clergy, teachers, and students as members. They worked with her to determine challenges for teachers and implemented discipline procedures to address them.

Teachers had to follow the procedures, and students had to respect them. The rules and consequences were written in a discipline book.

If an inappropriate act was not listed in the discipline book, the student had to go before the committee. At that time, a consequence was given. The challenge and decision were added to the discipline book in order to provide consistency. Gradually, violence in the school subsided, and the interactions between teachers, parents, and students improved. Over time, as the rules became part of the school's culture, the discipline book was no longer needed. New teachers, students, and parents were informed of these rules during their introduction to school policy by the veterans.

Embracing Parent Advocacy

The parents' positive response to removing drug traffickers confirmed the principal's belief that parents would advocate for their children. She stated, "Parents will gather around a crisis, especially if it affects the safety of their children, if they have someone to lead them, guide them, and help them along the way." Dr. Hubbard informed parents that their voices were respected, expected, and needed to ensure that their children received a quality education.

Dr. Hubbard also felt that to gain respect from teachers and city officials, parents had to learn school protocol. Therefore, she trained the parents in how to advocate effectively on behalf of their children and Mumford before public officials. This training began at the Coffee Sip. The Coffee Sip was an annual event held at the beginning of each school year on a chosen day between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. This time was chosen because it enabled parents to attend prior to beginning their work day. During this event, the school offered free coffee, tea, and donuts to parents while they sat in the auditorium. Parents were entertained and taught effective tactics for gaining social capital in the dominant culture. They learned about telephone campaigns, form letters, and petitions. Parents also learned tactics for addressing the city council and school boards. They selected spokespersons for the entire group and advocates to support them. Also during the Coffee Sip, parents gave testimonials about their advocacy during the previous year. At the end of the meeting, parents were asked to sign up for whatever role they wanted to play in parent advocacy. Parents who could not attend meetings were expected to have other family or community members come in their places. One parent explained how she advocated for the school: "I did write a letter to a couple of the Regents people. I did write to Bivens News. I did write a letter to the Columns; I did address the board," (Brooks, 2005, p. 211).

The rationale behind advocacy training during the Coffee Sip was to instill in parents that in order to improve their children's education, they had to

communicate effectively with policymakers in mainstream society. This lesson proved to be extremely effective on numerous occasions. One parent explained her role as an advocate, "If there's a crisis, I get called because I know a lot of people in Bivens. I've been here from the old school to the new school," (Brooks, 2005, p. 210).

Since the principal and most of her staff did not live in the community, Dr. Hubbard relied upon parents to keep her abreast of community issues needing advocacy on behalf of the children. A parent recalled one of her missions as the school's liaison person:

If there is something going on in the community and it is vital that the parents know, she'll either call a meeting or she'll send a letter home and let them know what is going on in the community. I am in charge of the parent volunteer group, and we go out and either put flyers out or take letters to the parents' homes. (Brooks, 2005, p. 211)

On one occasion, Mumford's teachers did not receive their paychecks for working in the after-school program. The parents volunteered to advocate on their behalf at a school board meeting. The teachers were disgruntled, but the parents said, "We'll take care of that" (Brooks, 2005, p. 219). As a result, the teachers received their paychecks, and the bond between parents and teachers deepened.

In addition to helping parents learn school protocol, the Coffee Sip was a place for recognition. Dr. Hubbard used the Coffee Sip to thank representatives from the local media, elected officials, and businesses for helping Mumford. The rationale behind this action was to give helpful politicians good press coverage and to change the school and community's images in the general public. Eventually, positive coverage about Mumford was prevalent, while negative portrayals became minimal. Parents who advocated on the school's behalf during the previous year were also congratulated.

Dismantling Unemployment

Dr. Hubbard helped curb unemployment in the African American community. One tactic was to hire parents at the school as teacher aides. She also encouraged parents to get their GEDs and higher. All staff was encouraged to talk to parents about topics unrelated to their children's education. The purpose of these conversations was to help teachers become more comfortable communicating with minorities and to help minority parents become more comfortable talking to persons outside of their community. Next, all faculty members had to volunteer for three school committees or set up programs of their own. Some interested staff members provided educational classes for parents. Parents were also welcome to sit in classes to learn skills their children

were studying, so the parents could help with any homework that their child did not understand. The principal attested that at least six parents returned to school as a direct result of her encouragement and support. Mumford's guidance counselor and a sixth grade teacher at the time of this study were two of these parents. Both continued to live in the surrounding community after receiving their degrees (Brooks, 2005).

The Results of Their Effort

After three years, Dr. Hubbard and the disenfranchised parents finally saw the impact of their hard work. The school's alliance with the media sent positive portrayals of its successes throughout Bivens and its suburbs. The school's image had changed into a school in demand. School violence was practically gone. During the summer of 1997, the enrollment for the upcoming school year increased from a little over 300 students in June to over 600 students with a waiting list by September. As Mumford's reputation continued to improve, so did parents' desires for their children to attend it. Mumford continually keeps an annual waiting list of 300 students.

Mumford's popularity influenced the neighborhood. Since Mumford was designated as a neighborhood school, only students living in its surrounding community could attend it. Therefore, the only way parents could ensure that their children could attend Mumford was to return to the neighborhood. A parent explained this policy's impact upon the area: "There was a time when parents were moving out of the area so fast to keep their kids from going to Mumford. My daughter bought the house across the street so that her kids could go to Mumford."

To aid in a reverse exodus back into this neighborhood, member banks of the Bivens Business Alliance set aside funds for low-income loans to first time homeowners and small businessmen. This gesture enabled parents to purchase the dilapidated rental properties and turn them into residential quarters, as Principal Hubbard described:

I have a parent that I worked with in the community that had moved out of the area then moved back in the area. She and her husband bought their first home so that their child could go to Mumford. What was hurtful about that is that at the time she did it, her child couldn't get into Mumford because we were at max limit. The next year she got her child in, but she waited. She said that was why they bought their home, and they were going to stay. It's because of the school. She went through our neighborhood housing for first time homeowners. It was one of the houses that they had revamped and sold. She bought it. (Brooks, 2005, p. 234)

After cross-referencing real estate sales for first time homeowners among urban adults in Bivens from 2001 to 2004 to the addresses of Mumford's new students during that same three-year period (Sidney Clanton, personal communication, February 8, 2004), I found that many of Mumford's students lived in the newly purchased homes. Some of the parents purchased the homes while their children were preschoolers in order to ensure acceptance into the school. The real estate sales documents also showed that most new homeowners paid more than the asking price for their homes. One family paid an additional \$10,000 for a home in the Mumford community.

Dr. Hubbard stated that professionals were moving back into the area so their children could attend Mumford Academy, "Over these seven years, we've had more parents who are professionals enrolling their children into the building." Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau's 1990 and 2000 census showed that the area surrounding Mumford Academy was one of few sections of the city that was not only experiencing growth, but growth at a much higher rate than areas growing with similar demographics. Even though the population in the City of Bivens had been dropping over 12,000 people annually since the late 1980s, the population surrounding Mumford had grown. Also apparent was that the number of persons without high school diplomas decreased, while the number of persons with a college education rose.

This education improvement had a positive economic impact upon the community. The New York State Report Card reported a decrease in the number of free and reduced lunches at Mumford. For instance, during the 1998-99 school year, 83% of Mumford's students qualified for free or reduced lunch. By the 2002-03 school year, only 74% of its students qualified. The number of free lunches dropped by 12%, while the number of reduced-price lunches increased by 11%. In 2004, the number of free/reduced qualifiers decreased to 63% (NYSED, 2004). These data suggest that families' incomes were also increasing. By the time of this study, this once socially isolated community was a thriving residential and business area. As stated by one parent:

The neighborhood surrounding the school is a business community and also a residential neighborhood at the same time. I sit on one of the boards that interact with the businesses and the residents of the area, and we get a lot of things done through our school to help the community. Dr. Hubbard controls over the school and the community just to make sure that the environment is safe for our kids.

The bank's CEO was right. The houses surrounding Mumford are now part of a normal neighborhood. Mumford was televised nationally for its academic achievement and partnership with parents. The changes in this school give evidence that a good school can have a positive impact upon a community.

Discussion

In order to dismantle social dislocation, principals must lead others in the fight for social justice (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Although Leithwood and Riehl considered “others” as members of the principals’ staff in high poverty, predominantly minority populated urban schools, others must include members of the surrounding community, such as law enforcement and the media. Principals in urban schools must realize that “schools cannot shut their gates and leave the outside world at their doorsteps” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998, p. 7). Shutting the gate enables negative external forces, such as crime and drug culture, to have greater influences upon students and school climate than the principals within the buildings do. To counteract the negativity caused by social dislocation, Hargreaves and Fullan suggest that “principals move towards forming new alliances” (p. 105) with parents and other entities outside of the school in their fight for social justice within it. The case presented in this article demonstrates that connecting to the outside community to fight negativity within the school can have a positive ripple effect upon the surrounding community. However, in order to have a positive effect, principals must change their mindset toward school public relations.

Throughout the history of U.S. mainstream public education, school administrators have systematically discouraged input from parents and other individuals whose perceptions of the “melting pot” differed from their own. This discouragement is shown toward European immigrant parents in *Children of the Mill* (Cohen, 2002) and toward minority U.S. parents in Spring’s (2007) *Deculturalization and the Struggle for Equality: A Brief History of the Education of Dominated Cultures in the United States*. Schools typically isolate themselves from the communities they serve. However, with the U.S. population becoming more diverse and the manifestation of violence in schools escalating, administrators must solicit alliances with the public in order address the social ills that have impacted education. Schools cannot continue to work in a vacuum when attempting to solve problems. One model for reaching out to the community is found in the Traditional African American Schools (TAAS). By adopting a mindset that changes previous practices of ignoring parents to exploring new solutions, principals could “base risk on security” (Hargreaves & Fullan, p. 105). Giving value to parents’ perceptions and experiences is a start.

Moving Towards Alliances with Local Businesses and Organizations

In the past, TAAS were totally dependent upon the African American community to provide needed resources. However, due to declining property taxes

and high unemployment in socially isolated communities, a better way to attack social injustice (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003) and inequity in school funding is to form alliances with mainstream businesses, service agencies, and social organizations. These commitments can be monetary or service oriented, such as setting up a clinic or dental students providing oral care for children. In this case study, one bank committed \$500,000 annually for eight years, another company rewarded its employees for serving as mentors to students, another company volunteered to beautify the grounds, while others committed to giving loans to first time homeowners. Before soliciting businesses or service agencies, the principal first determined the school's needs and the time commitment required. Once determined, the principal matched the need to possible organizations that could help. She stated that the alliances did not always work out, so she continued soliciting partners until the alliances worked. Alliances with businesses and service organizations served multiple purposes: they provided access to resources formerly unavailable; they made an unnoticed community become visible to the general public; they exposed students and their parents to opportunities outside their neighborhoods; and they instilled pride in ownership as the school excelled and renters became homeowners.

Moving Towards Alliances with Parents

In the case of building alliances with African American parents in socially isolated communities, school administrators must understand the basic difference between White middle-class parents' and African American parents' perceptions of rights. Middle-class White parents believe their children have a fundamental right to a good education, so they demand it. Therefore, scholars such as Marzano (2003) and Hoy and Miskel (2008) forewarned principals to protect their schools from external special interest groups and parents whose goals may have a negative impact upon the schools' organizational health. On the other hand, Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) believe that principals should "respect those you want to silence" (p. 105); this is especially true in regards to African American parents.

Before silencing African American parents, principals must understand that these parents' perceptions of rights are often contrary to those of White parents. African American parents WANT their children to have a good education; they WANT to demand it. Research by Gay (2000) found that African American parents who live in socially isolated communities are less likely to know the proper manner in which to voice their concerns to school personnel. Prior to advocating to the principal, African American parents weigh the consequences. Once they consider the consequence of humiliation for voicing their children's needs, they often choose to remain silent. This silence often alienates an entire population from school leadership.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) suggested that by listening to the concerns of minority parents and using their input to understand the historical and contextual significance of the schools' dynamics, principals learn about internal and external practices that impede student learning and parent involvement. Ignoring the voices of minority parents allows the continuation of false security with unhealthy school climates based upon illusions of good school culture. By listening and acting, principals can create a healthy school climate for all of their students.

Principals must also be sincere in their efforts to end asymmetrical relationships with parents and to end injustices within their buildings. To do this, Hargreaves and Fullan's study (1998) found that principals must manage people emotionally as well as rationally. When forming alliances with African American parents, managing emotionally means changing the school's norms, values, and relationships to include people whose views may differ from their own. However, principals must also manage rationally. According to Hargreaves and Fullan, managing rationally means principals must express how they feel about issues, ask for help when unsure of what to do, and empathize with others who do not share their own viewpoints. They must convince parents that they sincerely want to form a more egalitarian alliance with them that leads to positive results. There were several practices the principal in this study incorporated into her schools' culture to change power relationships into alliances with minority parents. One practice was initiating forums that taught school protocol and enabled two-way conversations between the principal and parents in non-threatening atmospheres. These forums helped the school administrator realize that parents' understanding of the system affects their behavior towards it (Shujaa, 1996).

The other important part of this conversation came from parents. The principal encouraged parents to explain their expectations for their children's education, how they could be involved, and concerns about practices that endangered their children. Both parties came away from these forums with a better understanding of how to work with each other to enhance student learning and a common commitment to end social injustice as a team. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) suggested that both groups agree to "fight for lost causes (being hopeful when it counts)" (p. 105). In the case school, the first lost cause was to rid the school of drug dealers and traffickers. This concern was put on the table the first day of school. Not only were both parties concerned about getting rid of drug trafficking on school grounds, but making sure that it did not return. This united effort conquered the lost cause and set a collaborative tone for the remainder of the year.

A second united effort was the appointment of parent liaisons. Parent liaisons informed the principal of events or changes in the community that had the potential to interfere with student learning and/or safety. In the case school, these events included destruction of school property, school participation in a city-wide program, or preventing the establishment of a drug treatment center on a street in the children's path to school. Since most teachers and principals did not live in the community, a parent liaison provided awareness of negatively influential outside occurrences that could interfere with student learning within the building. By changing the mindset for relationships, the school increased student safety, which helped parents perceive school personnel as caring.

Another practice which shows that the administrator cared was enabling African American parents to advocate against perceived social injustices. In TAAS, parents were expected to advocate against unfair practices. African American parents advocating against social injustice should not be confused with feelings of privilege or unearned entitlement. Parent advocacy means parents' reports of perceived discriminatory practices within a school that they believe are hindering their children's abilities to learn. Dismissing such concerns without investigation can turn children off to education for the rest of their K-12 experiences.

The principal's efforts to educate parents were not in vain. Parents became successful in advocating before board and city officials on the school's behalf. When the parents and school personnel worked together against injustices, both groups found that the board of education, city officials, and local state representatives responded positively. This newfound empowerment gave parents courage to align themselves with other officials to fight against negative forces in the community and to seek opportunities outside of their community.

Moving Towards Alliances with Law Enforcement and City Officials

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) stated that schools should not be socially isolated; they need to connect to the community. Today, more principals and parents realize that forming alliances with local and state elected officials, law enforcement, and the judicial system are necessities in order to conquer negative external influences that interfere with schools' daily functions. These alliances were unheard of in mainstream or TAAS public schools during the early part of the twentieth century. Today, these alliances help principals and school disciplinary committees plan preventive measures for deterring misbehavior within their buildings, as well as blocking the infiltration of negative outside influences into the school. They also enable principals to have input into the types of consequences used by law enforcers against violators at their schools. This was

exemplified when the principal worked out a punishment system with the city's judges for trespassers. Enabling the community to have input on the type of consequences rendered for particular crimes helped residents develop a sense of trust in law enforcement to make a fair judgment. As a result, the community block watch was the first of its kind in the city. In the case presented, parents felt that their alliance with police reduced misunderstandings and crime. In essence, four-way alliances (principal, parents, law enforcers, and community leaders) made members of a socially isolated community form a positive relationship with law enforcement, ending a legacy of distrust.

Making Alliances with the Media

Normally school administrators are fearful of the media because reporters are often quick in conveying negative school events before gathering data from principals. Alliances make the media more sensitive about reporting any negative publicity without first communicating with the administrators. This alliance gives principals a better chance of having good news reported and having greater input into what and how negative incidents regarding the school are reported. Principals need to partner with the media to expose the school's accomplishments, whether big or small, to publicize disparities due to lack of resources, and to overpower the impact of negative external forces upon learning. Therefore, it behooves principals to form alliances with the media. Seeking alliances with such an influential sector of the community gives principals the opportunity to improve the school and its surrounding community's image in the mainstream.

In summary, principals working in socially dislocated communities cannot ignore outside forces, but must build alliances with them in order to ensure student success. This study demonstrates that alliances between schools, businesses, social organizations, parents, lawmakers, and the media can rebuild a community. However, none of the groups can achieve this rebuilding working in isolation. The uniting element in battling social injustice in this case was the school principal.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

Schools' partnering with communities and businesses is an important, necessary change strategy when working in socially isolated areas. This case study clearly illustrates that school leaders can make significant improvements in minority urban children's education and in their communities by adopting proactive strategies that address issues that impede education. School leaders also need to be proactive about marketing the good aspects of their schools.

Leaders must also be determined to reduce negative press releases by building positive relationships with reporters. None of these tasks can be accomplished without alliances with external sources. When principals make alliances with the positive external community forces to help overcome the negative forces within, they find that it rebuilds a community as well as the school.

School leaders must prepare in order to build alliances with any community of marginalized people, whether in impoverished urban or rural communities. Understanding of how the people normally address or overcome challenges is needed before leaders can develop effective tools for resolving issues. Therefore, professors should encourage future principals not to be afraid of parental involvement, but to welcome diverse viewpoints and empower their communities. Principals need to exhibit sensitivity to the uniqueness of their schools' constituents and to reach beyond just the immediate community through cross-cultural understanding and collaboration, awareness, knowledge, and skills. Hence, when developing future school leaders, instructors should encourage them to be less hierarchical in their thinking and more expansive in their approach to building partnerships with parents and their community. Just as the teenager in *Back to the Future* had to learn from the past how to come to terms with his present, the Traditional African American School offers insight into how principals today can and should empower their communities.

Endnotes

¹This article focuses on middle-class Black flight as it pertains to Wilson's theory of social dislocation. White flight is not discussed because the situation around it in this city/area is unique and requires an entire article in its own right. There are books and articles on this complex situation, including works by Taylor & Jacobson.

²According to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, Blacks are 4 times more likely to live in poverty areas than not; 1 in 3 lives in poverty, while 1 in 25 lives in extreme poverty.

³Quotes were all gathered as described in the Methods section; those also cited in previous publications are cited as such within this article.

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