HOW FACULTY MEMBERS IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS EXPERIENCING ENROLLMENT DECLINE
MAKE SENSE OF POLICY: EVIDENCE FROM MICHIGAN.

By

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ABSTRACT

HOW FACULTY MEMBERS IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS EXPERIENCING ENROLLMENT DECLINE MAKE SENSE OF POLICY: EVIDENCE FROM MICHIGAN

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This multi-sited qualitative case study explores how faculty members that are in school districts experiencing enrollment decline made sense of a policy that has potential implications to disrupt the work that they do in the school. The study is based on the notion that the context that a policy is playing out in matters for how the policy is enacted. While not a novel idea, this study seeks to examine what can happen when a policy is potentially in conflict with the local context.

The push to increase the number of students going to college, something that is a feature of recent legislation, has the potential to create tension in places where school districts are losing students because of the threat of future enrollment decline and the negative consequences of enrollment loss. When making sense of the policies in question, there were not major differences with respect to the rural or urban nature of the school that were not associated with the size of the school district or school. The study found that while faulty members were sensitive to their respective contexts, they did not use it directly to help them make sense of the policy. The study also found that faculty members' connection to community as defined by the study did not prove to be valuable when looking at how faculty members made sense of policy as individuals, but it did help explain why one district was better able to adapt to the policy changes in question.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Beginning with the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the United States has consistently emphasized a need for education reform as a way of maintaining national security and international competitiveness. This push was further extended with the publishing of a Nation at Risk in 1983. A document which boldly claimed, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war," (Nation Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). This argument was made in order to help deal with what was thought to be a rising tide of mediocrity in public schools. In the thirty years since the publication of a Nation at Risk, the federal government has become increasingly involved with education policy. One of the most recent of these educational policy shifts, which rhetorically began in the 1990s, has been the movement to expand college for all children.

College for all became a popular policy idea as early as the Bill Clinton administration. It had however been a discussed as far back as the 1940s when trying to address how to educate non-elites. College for all was discussed more as an ideal and not an expectation for the better part of the 1900s (Goyette, 2008). In the late 1980s children who did not attend college either had trouble finding employment or worked in dead-end jobs, which required little training and paid too low to support a family (Rosenbaum, 2001). Furthermore, the children who were able to get jobs were very likely to just be continuing the same jobs that they had prior to graduating high school and even in their thirties most high school graduates still remained in unstable jobs with high turnover rates (Rosenbaum, 2001). To address these gaps, a policy solution that emerged was to prepare everyone for college. The idea is that if high school students are struggling to find employment and if employers are complaining about the preparedness of students that are graduating high school, then preparing everyone to attain a college degree would help address these gaps.

While the rhetoric about sending everyone to college has become less of a driving force in the current presidential administration, this does not mean that the emphasis on college has greatly diminished in recent times. President Obama and his secretary of education, Arne Duncan, have pivoted

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away from the notion of college for all and have become invested in college and career readiness standards. President Obama announced during his 2013 state of the Union address that, "Now, even with better high schools, most young people will need some higher education. It's a simple fact: the more education you have, the more likely you are to have a job and work your way into the middle class," (State of the Union, 2013, p.6). This movement has been couched in the rhetoric of international competitiveness. The President went on to state that the reason for achieving more and better education is to be competitive internationally when he states, "Right now, countries like Germany focus on graduating their high school students with the equivalent of a technical degree from one of our community colleges, so that they're ready for a job," (State of the Union, 2013). Similar sentiments have been shared by the secretary of education advocating for America to regain its position as the country with the highest college going rates by 2020, being 16th in the world is unacceptable, and that we are paying the economic price for our low international ranking (United State Department of Education, 2012).

Even though the administration has been clear in the fact that students should attend some form of post-secondary training, they have also often conflated postsecondary training with college, or attempted to rebrand college to mean "anything beyond high school". As late as 2012, the president's agenda contained the notion of expanded higher education as well as lowering the cost barriers to attending postsecondary school. While this does not in of itself signal that everyone should attend college, the lower barriers to entry and expansion of higher education would in theory make attending college much more commonplace than it is currently (Wood, 2012).

The idea of increasing who does go to college as an ideology has been growing in rhetoric, alongside the growth of the standards movement. This has lead to the ideas behind College for All being codified in standards for student achievement and graduation. Both have been used as solutions to the lack of competition on international achievement tests. Subsequently, College for All is encapsulated into the common core state standards that have been adopted by all but five states. While in effect a policy that was generated by the states, common core has reflected the movement nationally to make students more

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prepared for careers and colleges. The standards do not provide a separate track for students who are going to college and those who are not. In effect, the common core standards seek to make all students college ready.

When it comes to how policies such as curriculum standards will be enacted, the situation is complicated because we know that people and teachers are not blank slates and what information they come in with helps to shape how they make sense of policies (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Weick, 1995; Jennings, 1996; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 2009) and in particular curriculum policies. While policy implementation literature often looks at teacher interpretations of content standards and how those standards are understood given the previous content knowledge that teachers bring to their understanding (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Jennings, 1996; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 2009), there is less work done on how contextual factors and the knowledge those factors may generate impacts how teachers make sense of policy.

An understudied, and potentially important source of knowledge for school actors is local, community knowledge. This is in spite of the fact that, the school and the community in which it is situated are not always seen as having aligned interests (Peshkin, 1995; Merz & Furman, 1997). Schools are embedded in local contexts and the embedded nature of schools leads them to have many different responsibilities that school actors must be responsive to (Peshkin, 1995). Schools also are placed simultaneously in disparate circles of being both an institution of society and one of the local community (Merz & Furman, 1997) because of their embedded nature and their historical forces placed on them. This positioning of schools, likely impacts the way teachers think about and make sense of policy.

A major contextual phenomenon worth exploring that might impact local knowledge is depopulation. Population decline is an issue that is quite old and the policies that regulate it are almost as old as the problem itself (Coleman and Rowthorn, 2011). Historically, people have moved from one place to another in search of jobs. As the mechanization of labor in the United States created more jobs in the city and eliminated them in the country, people flocked to city centers for better work prospects. Young people in particular moved out of the country at first to get a new job and later to continue their education

(Carr and Kefalas, 2009). This type of regional population shift has been categorically dismissed as something that has limited consequences and is a result of an "adjustment to changed realities of a comparative regional advantage" (Coleman & Rowthorn, 2011, p.219).

Population decline has become a large concern in urban areas as well over the last fifty years. In 2014, two edited volumes, *Shrinking Cities: International Perspectives and Policy Implications* and *Shrinking Cities: A Global Perspective* attempt to explore how countries in both the developed and developing world respond to shrinking cities. There are assumptions in both of these works about the nature of schooling, but it is largely absent from the discourse. While many western European countries have faced national population decline, the United States has remained immune due primarily to immigration (van Dahlen & Henkens, 2011). The United States has not, however, remained immune to population shifts within the country, which also can have negative externalities. One of the negative ramifications of declining populations is its potential damage to the local economy. As Coleman and Rowthorn (2011) write, "A falling population base implies higher taxes to maintain existing infrastructure or to fund indivisible new projects. Eventually, the state may have to abandon some of the infrastructure - amalgamating schools and hospitals, and restricting repairs... If decline occurred across the board, smaller communities could become unviable," (p.227). The ramifications of population decline are far-reaching, but while population shifts tend to be thought of as positive or negative depending on context, how do these population shifts affect local schools?

The literature about population loss focuses on the impacts of the loss of population for regional growth, or for local growth. Studies that have been done in the past that involve schools that are losing population (Corbett, 2007; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Sherman & Sage, 2011; Haarsten & van Wissen, 2012) explore sites where both the local schools and communities are losing population. While this is incredibly helpful to know, these studies unintentionally make the case that school level population loss, otherwise known as enrollment decline, and community level population loss are the same when they are likely different because schools serve a sub-population of the community. Loss of community members does

not necessitate a loss of students in a local school system. Given that many states now have inter and intra-district choice policies, municipalities could be gaining people or staying relatively the same size, while school districts, because of expanded schooling options, an aging population, or a decline in the number of children might be shrinking.

Enrollment decline can impact a school regardless of the community population because it can lead to cuts in financial expenditures based on the funding formulas many states use. Often framed in recent literature as a rural phenomenon, large population losses in schools also have affected larger city districts in recent years. In 2010 Kansas City approved a dramatic change to the schooling structures that closed a large number of schools in order to deal with the decrease in students (Esselman, Lee-Gwin, & Rounds, 2012). Detroit has engaged similar proposals in 2010 and 2011 and did lay off all of its teachers in an attempt to save money (Kain, 2011). More recently, two school districts in Michigan, Saginaw Buena Vista and Inkster, were both dissolved due to budget impacts from declining enrollments and resulting financial mismanagement (Smith, 2013). The enrollment decline faced by these school districts have led to them to make dramatic changes to the way salary structures are set up for employees of the district and are emblematic of how declining population affects schools and districts more broadly. Furthermore, these urban districts exist where policies about charter and choice can exacerbate population loss within schools, making school district population loss a larger issue than it is often categorized as. Given the lack of understanding as to how enrollment decline in schools, or districts, impacts the schools, school actors, community, etc., this condition deserves attention. It is especially important in regard to policies like College for All, that suggest that students need to be college educated in order to be successful because attaining a college education often forces youth to leave the community and often for good.

Places experiencing population loss are important to study in respect to this particular policy because the potential pressures on teachers due the contextual factors could potentially lead to interpretations of the policy that are driven by their context, and not by their knowledge of college-going. Given that previous studies have that have explored schools that have been losing population looked at

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the community and school coterminously, this study seeks to parse out this distinction. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1) How do faculty members in school districts experiencing enrollment decline make sense of college-going policies, or policies about college preparedness?
    a. Are there differences across rural and urban contexts?
    b. Are there differences based on community population loss?
    c. Are there differences based on the faculty members' connection to the community?

Background

Depopulation in communities is not studied directly as a contextual factor in educational literature. It is an important contextual factor to consider because of the stress a loss of population can put on the institutions and people in both contexts. Another benefit of studying population loss as a contextual factor is that it can potentially help link rural and urban contexts. Even though the idea of shrinking areas is often thought about differently in rural and urban contexts, both contexts undergo the same phenomenon, even if it plays out differently or for different reasons. This potential uniting factor can help shift the focus off of whether an area is rural or urban to the factors that lead to the changing population trends and the shifting school enrollments within a district.

The best examples of studying the phenomenon as it relates to schools and schooling are done indirectly, or through studying the loss of industry, and are often limited to single site case studies of rural locations. It is, however, likely that population loss impacts schooling opportunities, structures, resources, etc. both directly and indirectly and in rural, urban, and suburban contexts. In order to understand how population loss might be impacting school actors' interpretations of policies about college-going, it is first important to consider how depopulation impacts communities more broadly. It is important to consider the literature in economics, urban planning, and geography because they provide a nice support for thinking about population loss and the impact it can have on communities.

Depopulation from an Economic Lens

In order to understand how depopulation can affect schools and communities, it is important to understand how it impacts municipalities more broadly. The terms depopulation, outmigration, population loss, population aging, and population decline often get used interchangeably, despite distinct differences. Population loss, depopulation, and population decline are very similar concepts. All three terms describe the process of having fewer people over a duration of time. I will use all three interchangeably in this literature review. Outmigration and population aging can contribute to population loss, but neither is a necessary condition for a community to lose people. Some of these distinctions are put forth by Coleman and Rowthorn (2011). The authors argue that while it is clear that population decline has drawbacks, these drawbacks are only relevant if the decline happens too quickly for the community. The authors further argue that smaller populations have benefits that reach across the social, economic, and environmental spectrums that might offset the negative externalities.

Feser and Sweeney (2003) posit that there are two schools of thought about declining population. One of them, the neoclassical growth model, says that population decline is a natural extension of the way that the market plays out and is an adjustment to demands for labor within an area. This viewpoint sees issues such as high unemployment and poverty as markers that precede a correction within the local system. An extension of this idea is that programs should facilitate population adjustments in places there is high unemployment or persistent poverty.

While the neoclassical growth model explains population shifts as natural, cumulative causation theories posit that migration may impede economic recovery because it exacerbates the economic issues associated within a community. The theory suggests, "that it is appropriate to focus development resources on places facing high rates of out-migration and population decline if there is a risk that such demographic trends will engender a sustained downward economic spiral," (Feser &Sweeny, 2003, p. 39). In this model, it is wise to invest in areas that are losing people that cannot otherwise fix things themselves.

Depopulation in Geography

Looking at trends of shrinking cities nationwide, Beauregard (2009) argues that the forces that have led to population decline in large cities recently have occurred historically for the same reasons. The question is not what new forces are leading cities to shrink, but rather the same forces that have been at play for the last century are continuing to play out. The study finds that loss is regional and that the most recent depopulation trends have impacted the South and the Midwest almost exclusively.

While more recent population losses in large cities tend to be concentrated in the Midwest and South, similar trends took place in the 1970s. Frey (1987) attempts to explain the shifting population trends from the city to the country, looking at the United States over the 1970s. He uses the regional restructuring perspective, which indicates that the disinvestment in old manufacturing areas precipitates population shifts, but also predicts a growth in other sectors. He also uses the deconcentration perspective, which sees the western world's population shift away from large urban centers. He finds that the deconcentration perspective is supported by his analysis.

Population loss in rural contexts is looked at slightly differently from a global perspective. Rural areas have historically lost population with people leaving to go toward cities for the opportunities for more jobs (Woods, 2011). These trends make exodus from rural areas somewhat normal. This does not mean that rural youth are not conflicted about the possibility of leaving and the decision over doing so is often deeply difficult balancing economic opportunity with connection to local context (LeyShon, 2008; Rye, 2006).

Rather than losing population regionally, rural areas tend to lose it more generally. Albrecht (1993) found that typically there is little population growth in rural areas and that the counties that do have it tend to be located near metropolitan areas. He finds that the majority of non-metropolitan counties in the 1980s had natural population increase in that the birth rate grew faster than the death rate, but that those increases were offset by the outmigration that those counties experienced. The author finds that the hope expressed by some scholars of growing non-metropolitan counties that existed in the 1970s had been

eliminated by the end of the 1980s. Based on this literature, it appears that the rural areas that are not

located near a city tend to have limited economic opportunities for the people in the community, while

urban areas tend to not have the same issues.

Depopulation in Urban Planning

Shrinking cities have also recently become a concern in urban planning. Several different factors

can contribute to and cause the shrinking of cities: governmental corruption and political instability

(Richardson & Woon Nam, 2014, p. 3); natural disasters, deindustrialization, suburbanization, and natural

economic cycles (Hollander, 2011). Hollander also identifies that the loss of people in a given community

is often met with no action on behalf of the local governments, which often choose to ride out the

problem. Hollander also argues that policies around population loss from a development perspective do

not appear to do anything to fix population loss, but that the problem might be the focus on growth.

Applying Depopulation Literature to Education

Schools being traditionally locally funded by a community and school attendance being based on

the community one lives in would help the depopulation literature apply evenly to school population loss.

The new schooling climate, which often allows for inter and intradistrict choice, makes this application

more difficult. The idea that shrinking municipalities can be positive translates well into education

because having smaller schools can in fact be viewed as a positive. Swidler (2004) looking at one-room

schools in Nebraska argues that part of the push of the charter school movement has to do with the idea

that smaller schools are better schooling options than larger schools. While Swidler's point is well taken,

small schools are also potentially more susceptible to the pressures put forth by losing students. For

example, a loss of twenty students in one year is much harder to adapt to in a school that has one hundred

students than in one that has one thousand students.

Cumulative causation theory and the neoclassical growth model are helpful to explore further

when thinking about schools. School consolidation as a method of correcting for the loss of students, for

example, aligns quite well with the neoclassical growth model. While it does not necessarily see the correction as good, it does see it as logical. It is easy to just dismiss the loss of schools as being something that is a correction in the local economy or an extension of this theory rather than try to understand the phenomenon and how it impacts schools.

Since being near a metropolitan area matters for the growth of rural areas, it appears that places near urban areas are less likely to deal with the problem of depopulation or, at the very least, deal with it differently. This also likely translates to schools as well. While these studies do help explain the process of depopulation and how it impacts a community, they do not directly deal with how depopulation plays out in schools and across school districts. School districts are forced to confront the pressures of local population loss because schools in most states are funded by the number of students the school has.

Literature Review

The literature on depopulation helps to explain the context of communities losing population and the pressures they are under. Other relevant literatures are the literature on sensemaking and on schools experiencing enrollment decline because understanding how school actors make sense of policies in areas experiencing population loss will require an exploration of both.

Enrollment Decline

Once a major research area in anticipation of the loss of students in educational system as a result of the exit of the baby boom generation, enrollment decline was a fast growing research base trying to answer the question of how schools would adapt to fewer students. Since population trends in schools have evened out in the mid- 1980s, little research on enrollment decline has been conducted. The research from this time period discussed both the fiscal and programmatic impacts of decline, with school finance and school closure being main topics of focus (Zerchykov, 1981). Zerchykov's (1981) thorough review of the literature focused on four major issues related to enrollment decline: fluctuating enrollments,

enrollment decline combined with fiscal retrenchment, the difference between contraction and expansion, and a lack of consensus on whether enrollment decline is a problem or an opportunity.

When looking specifically to compare schools experiencing enrollment decline and those not, several findings attempt to illustrate the similarities and differences between the contexts. One of the struggles in comparing the contexts is making sure to not capture other potential confounding variables such as wealth (Wilken & Callhan, 1978) or rurality (Rodekohr, 1976) of the districts experiencing decline. The trouble with doing so is that declining enrollments are likely not random. Dembowski (1979) found that districts with declining enrollments had narrower course offerings, longer material replacement cycles, less corporation within the district in terms of sharing resources, greater propensity for requiring teachers to be certified in more than one subject area, and a greater perception of the program quality of what the district provided. Freeman and Hannan (1981) found that districts experiencing decline respond slower to enrollment trends than those gaining students, administrators decrease in districts experiencing decline, and as the staff shrinks, the teaching staff shrinks more than the administrative staff.

Schools Undergoing Enrollment Decline

There are a few ways in which schooling has been studied within the context of declining population. Recently, Haarsten and van Wissen (2012) using data from the Netherlands have explored the impact of what happens in areas that are experiencing depopulation. In that country, most of the places experiencing population loss are located in rural or remote regions. They find that the smaller the schools are is negatively associated with their performance. The schools that have experienced a sharp decline are mostly considered weak or very weak and the schoolboards in depopulating areas find it very difficult to keep giving students a quality education. This finding suggests that school districts that are losing students are restrained from being able to execute the services they would otherwise provide. It also speaks back to the market theory notion that more schooling options will force schools losing students to recruit other students to maintain their vitality.

Looking at a similar issue in a different way, Carr and Kefalas (2009) explore the nature of the community and the students that are within the community. Seeking out a place that had high levels of outmigration as well as an aging population, the authors sought to understand the cause of what they termed "hollowing out". The authors posit that hollowing out is dangerous to a community and occurs when the high-achieving students flee the countryside for a chance at a life elsewhere. The authors find multiple groups of students they dub, "the stayers," "the seekers," "the achievers," and "the returners." The authors argue that leaving is something that students have to be pushed and prodded to do, whereas staying is just something that happens. The high achieving students are pushed by the adults in the community and the teachers at school, forcing them out of the small town where they have grown up.

In both of the previous studies, the authors were exploring a specific context which included losing students, and people as well as how that loss impact the people living there. The other two studies below took place in areas where population decline and school population decline were occurring but that were not necessarily the focus of either study.

In *Learning to Leave*, Michael Corbett (2007) attempts to explain the actions of a small coastal fishing community and how the school structures the learning experiences of the students within the community. Conducting a longitudinal case study, Corbett sought to answer who stayed in the community, who left and why. He found that students who stayed tended to be those who had ties to the local fishing industry and the ones who left were the ones who were successful at school. In this way, the schooling structures pushed students towards a life of schooling or towards the industry in the local community. The students who actively resisted schooling stayed in the local area and had ties to the local fishing industry, whereas the ones that left tended to have fewer ties to the community. Even though the fishing industry was prominent in many narratives, the industrialization of the industry led many students to have a false perception of the employability in the field. For example, the school itself and the community more broadly had lost almost a third of the population over the forty years of data he collected. This further limited the sustainability of fishing as a concrete option for all students. A

limitation of this study is that the author does not explore specifically how the teachers thought about this situation.

Sherman and Sage (2011) explored what happened when a key industry was lost in a Pacific Northwest community. After the industry was lost, the community experienced outmigration, which lead to population loss in the community and school. The authors find that the school system perpetuates the outmigration process for some by reinforcing views of success within that community. They find that the school can either exclude students from or include students in the support of the community. The kids most likely to be included by the system were also those most likely to leave the community, where the ones that were least likely to be successful were the ones most likely to stay. They find that there is an increased emphasis for the students that are better off that they need to leave the community to attain better jobs on the hope that communal ties will lure them back to the community. The members of the community and teachers assume the worst of the students that are from the most economically disadvantaged backgrounds rather than trying to construct a schooling experience that benefits everyone.

It appears as though one of the answers that schools exercise in regard to population loss is to educate the best and the brightest with the hopes that they will return (Farmer et al., 2006; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Sherman & Sage, 2011). In these studies the community appears to understand that people will leave, but hope that enough are willing to return to offset the loss. Farmer et al (2006) conducted focus groups with parents in resource strapped communities in search of uncovering what parents thought successful early adult outcomes were for students. In this study the community members find it infeasible to expect the youth to find jobs in the community.

Alan Peshkin has conducted two separate studies in schools that had been experiencing depopulation. In *Growing up American: schooling and the survival of community*, Peshkin (1978), finds that growing up in a small, cohesive community is something that runs deep. He finds that the school and community are matches for each other. When talking with teachers, they often cite the individual needs of children and the national identity as the reasons why they make the decisions they make, but in practice, the actions of the teachers are reflective of the ethos of the community. The community selects teachers

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and a superintendent in the course of the study that they believe will help perpetuate the type of school they want.

In a later work, Peshkin (1982) studies the relationship between a town that is experiencing population loss in its school and the school district. He posits that the school is something that the community takes pride in and would rather have their students receive less of an education and have the school remain in the community, than have the students have a greater educational opportunity in a larger school that lies elsewhere. He further argues that it is the school's symbolic functions that make it so attractive to the community.

Both of these studies highlight the tension that exists in schools that are losing students. In both cases the school is an important part of the community's identity, but both of these schools serve a larger group of people than just the local individuals. These studies help to illustrate the issues that schools face when forced to deal with population loss in their communities.

Enrollment Decline Insights

Many of the above studies that focus specifically on schools are case studies under which individual districts are adapting to enrollment decline. Two of these studies also are research conducted in contexts outside of the United States, but are included specifically because they help to add ideas about what enrollment decline might mean for districts.

The dearth of literature on the topic from the United States since the 1980s has left a void that must be filled for at least two reasons. First, the context of schools experiencing enrollment decline have shifted dramatically since the introduction of the literature base in question. During the ensuing 30 plus years, these changes to schooling have occurred rapidly and include a growth in direct federal policy, the opening of school systems to choice policies, the development of charter schools, the proliferation of online schooling options, and the push by states to equalize state aid funding formulas to make schools more equitable. Second, in the time period since the tapering off of the enrollment decline literature, rather than enrollment decline being of concern for the entire system because of fewer students overall, it

has become a concern for individual school districts. In fact, individual districts losing students has become a feature of the system as a result of charter schools and schools of choice. In many areas across the country, an ever-increasing number of school options are competing for a finite number of students.

School Actors and Policy Implementation

How actors within schools will respond to policy will ultimately be shaped both by the previous contextual considerations and how policies play out more broadly. Honig (2006) posits that, "Overall, these three dimensions of implementation -policy, people, and places- come together to form a conception of implementation as a highly contingent and situated process," (p. 19). It has long been argued that the actors within a system shape policy. In his work about street-level bureaucrats, Lipsky (1980) argues that people who interact directly with the clients are the people who make policy informally through their actions. These workers by the nature of the jobs that they do, have to be able to express high levels of discretion in their work in order to be able to adjust to the realities of human interaction and this results in the creation of informal policy as well as the interpretation of formal policy through implementation. It is this discretion that allows bureaucrats to interpret and implement policy in a way that adapts the policy to the local context. Teachers, a type of street-level bureaucrat, also bring other knowledge bases to their jobs and the tasks they perform. Subsequently, how teachers interpret and fuse their preexisting viewpoints is ultimately how the policy will get carried out (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Jennings, 1996; Cohen & Hill, 2000).

Sensemaking

How teachers interpret policies is often thought about as how they make sense of the policy. Sensemaking theory is conceptually about understanding the meaning of events. According to Weick (1995) sensemaking has seven components. It is: grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. Since understanding one's own identity is a dynamic process,

sensemaking appeals to instances when policies potentially conflict with understandings of larger phenomenon.

Citing a constructivist perspective, Spillane (2000) argues that people use their prior knowledge and experiences to frame their understanding of a situation. He posits, "The particular social, cultural, historical, and material contexts enable and constrain human sense-making," (p. 167). In other words, one's surroundings and past experiences will impact individual actors within the school or district.

Adding to the conversation, Coburn (2001) argues that, "Action is based on how people notice or select information from the environment, make meaning of that information, and then act on those interpretations, developing culture, social structures, and routines over time," (p. 147). She points out that meaning of information is difficult to discern and that it is up to the actors in the situation to determine how to interpret and make sense of what is going on. Coburn elaborates that sensemaking is not inherently individual and can instead be done in groups. She argues that it is collective because it is rooted in social interaction and embedded in the teachers' context within the school. She finds that the patterns of interaction and conditions supporting deep engagement both impact teachers abilities to sensemake.

Not only is teacher sensemaking sometimes collective, other actors that have different positions can also influence it. In her previous work, Coburn (2001) focused on how teachers made sense of policy individually and together. In later work, Coburn (2005) finds that at times principals can play a buffer role because they interact more directly with policy, they also can strengthen and intensify policy messages that are being sent in based on what they prioritize. She further finds that principals influence teacher sensemaking indirectly through interactions with the staff. School administrators are not however helping teachers to negotiate sensemaking, but instead set the parameters for which the sensemaking teachers do can take place. In this way, principals are themselves sensemakers.

In *Standards Deviation*, James Spillane (2009) seeks to understand how the actors within a school district make sense of academic standards. He finds that everyone at the school does their best to interpret

the policy, but that the variation that occurs is attributable to the local actors understanding of the policy, beginning at the district level and filtered all the way down to the classroom. Spillane (2009) posits that "as policy moves from the statehouse to the schoolhouse, school districts work to figure out what the policy entails for their work," (p.169). He further equates this process to a game of telephone, where the government passes a policy and then it is filtered down levels until it gets to the actors that attempt to implement the policy. Complicating how policies can get misunderstood is that districts tend to not just take a policy in directly, they tend to try and add to or make policies about the policy that is being implemented at the state level. So, even though the policy is meant to be administered top down, it does not always act in this way because of the nature of policy implementation.

Curricular reform has not been the only type of reform studied in schools. Other authors still have explored how faculty members make sense of less concrete phenomena. Evans (2007) explored how school leaders make sense of race and demographic change. Using Weick's framework she analyzed school leader interviews about the demographic change within their schools and found that the school leaders made sense of race and the demographic change in their schools in ways that reflected their perceived notions of organizational ideology, values and other key features of the school's environment. The author also found that how school leaders made sense of the context was dependent on their own sociopolitical identities.

Furthermore, how teachers make sense of reforms has been studied looking specifically at factors that might mediate their sensemaking. Schmidt and Datnow (2005) explored how emotions of teachers impacted teachers' ability to make sense of comprehensive school reform. The authors found that teachers had little emotional attachment to the education reform at the school level, but were much more emotional in regard to the how the reforms impacted their classroom practice. The authors found that teachers had similar meanings of the more structured reform and more diverse meanings of the less structured reforms. Additionally, the more ambiguous the reform, the more emotionally laden it was for the teachers.

These studies help to elucidate the ways in which faculty member makes sense of educational reform and policy. The latter two studies provide a useful consideration for this study because one explores a construct that is more abstract and the other explores how a particular factor mediates sensemaking of a policy.

Policy Context of College for All

The final thing to understand in order to grasp how depopulation might lead to changes in interpretation of policies is how the context for College for All has evolved over time. A continued push for more education is difficult to critique in the face of some of the social benefits that more education can produce. And on the surface, the push toward a more college-educated workforce appears to make sense. Since World War II, the wage gap between a college-educated worker and those without a college diploma has widened considerably (Osterman, 2008). On some level, this could be a signal that employers are searching for more educated workers and are willing to pay the cost of hiring such workers. This particular policy initiative has not been without criticism. Osterman (2008) finds that much of the speculation to expand college appears to be because of an atypical surge in the return to attending college that came at the end of the late 1980s and that there are now diminished returns to education.

Coupled with the movement for college for all has been a shifting of postsecondary plans for students as well. Over the last few years there has been a rise in willingness of students to go to college and their expectations of doing so irrespective of family background (Goyette, 2008). Goyette, (2008) found that the growth of student ambitions to attend college also coincided with their increased willingness to become professionals as well. The author raises issues with whether the push toward more college and higher ambition is good for the students involved or not. It may be that expanding the expectations of students to attend college will be damaging to individuals who are unable to attain that position, or it may be that every student seeing college as a legitimate option may be good for the students involved.

The current focus of the national education reform agenda has led to a shift toward college and career readiness standards. These have been reflected in the standards movement and have culminated with the creation of the Common Core State Standards. As written in the common core website's mission statement, "The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers," (home page). While this is a seemingly different policy on the surface level, the broader context is important for at least three reasons.

First, the Common Core State Standards is a relatively new policy set to roll out in many states in the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. Because of the fact that common core is new, the previous national policy context, and individual state contexts are important to consider and probably will influence how individuals make sense of the policy in question. Second, the goal of the new policy is also to increase college-going, albeit indirectly. This policy shift is attempting to change the standards and raise the achievement of students making them better prepared for college. The idea to increase the preparation of students for college and careers but is coupled with a plan to increase the access of students to college opportunities. Third, Spillane et al (2002) identify that a key problem with sensemaking is that agents can misunderstand new ideas as familiar, hindering change. So, the new policy may not actually be interpreted as new at all.

College for all, and its embodiment in state curriculum standards, can potentially be damaging to local communities that are losing people in the aggregate, and students in particular. Since most places that are losing population do not readily have employment opportunities for people with a college diploma, the process becomes cyclical. Students who do well in the educational system also set themselves up to do well in college. Many of the communities that are losing population do not have extensive college options nearby, so being successful in education will require these students to continue their education elsewhere. This in effect sends the highest-achieving students out of the area to further their education. This issue was chronicled by Carr and Kefalas (2009) in *Hollowing out the Middle*. In

their study, the authors found that the community was aware of the pressures put on their high-achieving students to exit the community.

Instead of pushing primarily high-achieving students out of the area to attend college, an expansion of college opportunities for students in areas losing population would mean that even more students would be educating themselves out of a community as long as credentials were able to keep their value over time. This would in theory exacerbate the pressures of losing population and lead to more population exodus. Policies that expand college-going appear to be policies that could have a devastating impact on communities that already struggle with losing people.

Finally, an increased emphasis on education beyond high school puts actors within a school, and teachers in particular, in a difficult situation. Being successful in increasing educational opportunities in the context of depopulation could potentially lead to more outmigration in communities, and this could put teachers' well-being in direct conflict with the goals of the education system. Since most communities that are losing population are thought to be doing so as an adjustment to the local or regional labor markets, there does not appear to be an emphasis on addressing the problem of depopulation at the community level. Regional labor adjustments like this will likely mean that the region will "adjust" itself out of a school over time. This issue is further compounded at the community level where state-level policies emphasizing charter and choice make student populations potentially more fluid.

Theoretical Framework

The research questions being asked are attempting to explain the ways in which school population loss, or enrollment decline, impacts how the faculty members make sense of policies about college-going. In addition, both questions attempt to explore how faculty members view the school ties and their individual faculty member ties to the community and how that influences their sense making of policies about college-going. The theoretical framework will address these contexts and variables.

Expansive policy research accounts for the fact that individuals' prior knowledge impacts how they make sense of policy (Cohen & Ball, 1990; Weick, 1995; Jennings, 1996; Cohen & Hill, 2000;

Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 2009). In education, much of this research has been focused on curricular standards and how prior knowledge of the content can shape teachers' understandings of these content standards. Less consideration is paid to other factors that also can come with a particular set of knowledge or information that may help shape how faculty members make sense of policy. Spillane et al (2002) in their comprehensive overview of sensemaking and policy nominate several reasons why policies will not be interpreted in the way they were intended. Two of particularly importance to this study are that informal communities provide a social context that affects sensemaking in implementation as does the historical context. Both of these tie into contextual factors that are important to consider.

Schools and Communities

Schools are located within communities that they have historically served and which were often responsible for their creation (Tyack, 1974;Merz & Furman, 1997; Rury, 2005). Schools have not, however remained entirely local institutions. In fact, over the course of the history of American schooling, schools have shifted to being largely a tool of the society writ large (DeYoung, 1995; Merz & Furman, 1997; Rury, 2005; Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Merz & Furman (1997) expound on the work by German Sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies who argues that there are two main classifications for relationships, Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft. Gesellschaft loosely translates to society and explains ties through economic connections where Gemeinschaft loosely translates to community and explains ties through the land and perceived similarities.

While schools have become more society orientated, this movement has not been openly rejected by the communities that schools are situated within. In fact, several authors discuss how the school serves the interest of the local community to educate the children in spite of not directly preparing students for the local contexts (Peshkin, 1978; Farmer, et al, 2006; Carr & Kefalas, 2009; Sherman & Sage, 2011).

Faculty Members and Community

   Peshkin (1978) argues that in Mansfield (the site of his study) the teachers are selected by the school district because they reflect the values of the local community. In fact, almost all of the teachers are either from the local community or from other communities like Mansfield and prefer to live there. These factors make the teachers a vital part of the community replication.

   This narrative is challenged by Corbett (2007) in his work about schooling in rural Nova Scotia. He makes the argument that teachers are strangers in the communities they serve because they have been educated and return. Even though teachers may come from the community they are teaching within, or other similar communities, their previous exit from, and return to, the community makes them agents of the state and implicit supporters of student outmigration. Furthermore, teachers enact the curriculum of the state, which helps children become more mobile in the society, potentially leading to student exit.

Depopulation

   The loss of population is seen as something that is natural and an extension of regional labor adjustments (Feser & Sweeney, 2003). Coleman and Rowthorn (2011) argue that smaller communities can have benefits for the community itself unless the population loss occurs too quickly. Given the fact that most schools tend to be funded based on the number of students they have, it seems likely that losing students and people in a community could potentially impact the ways in which a faculty member might make sense of policy.

   When using the framework put forth by Merz and Furman (1997), it seems that when faced with depopulation it is likely that one of two paths will emerge. Either faculty members will become more loyal to their work in a movement toward societal, economic pressures, and less loyal to the community, or that faculty members will become more loyal to the community and the associations they have with it because of the population loss and the toll it is potentially taking on the local context.

Context of Michigan

Michigan is an illustrative example of the problem of enrollment decline and depopulation in communities and how it can impact school actors perceptions of policies about college-going for three reasons: 1) it has been undergoing population loss as a state, 2) most of its districts have been undergoing population loss, and 3) the movement toward College for All has led to changing standards in the state predating the Common Core State Standards.

From the 2000 to 2010 censuses, the state of Michigan was the only state to lose population. While this potentially could make the state a bad case to extract from, a more careful look at the statewide data identifies one county where much of the population loss is occurring. It is Wayne County, which is also the county that is home to Detroit. Avoiding municipalities and schools in this county should avoid any biasing that may occur. Previous research indicates that population loss in urban areas is most common in the Midwest and South regions of the United States, and Michigan falls into this group of states.

A concern with looking at school population loss and not just community population loss is that any state from which sample districts are taken must have school districts losing population. For example, in a state where massive recent consolidation has taken place it would be next to impossible to study school population loss. The general trend in Michigan is that over the last twenty years, most school districts have been losing students. This gives an opportunity to explore the phenomenon in multiple places within the state, and not just limited to isolated rural areas that are far away from urban centers, or large deindustrialized cities.

Defining College-Going Policies

Finally, when looking to study the policy in question it is important that the state is relatively active in creating standards preceding the Common Core State Standards. In the state of Michigan, the concept of College for All manifested itself in increasing state standards for high school graduation. As of the mid 1980s, the only required course in the state of Michigan to graduate was a single civics course.

The state has since expanded its requirements for graduation, and culminating with the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) in 2006, for the high school class of 2011, the state added an additional science course, to raise total science credits to three, an additional math course and Algebra II, to raise total math credits to four, and the requirement for all high school students to participate in an online course or learning experience. In addition, for all students in the class of 2016, there is an added requirement of two foreign language credits in order to graduate to from high school. The legislation also changed the state test for 11th grade students from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) to the ACT test.

The stated goal of the MMC is, "To ensure that Michigan's high school graduates have the necessary skills to succeed either in postsecondary education or in the workplace," (Michigan Department of Education, p. 2). This is in line with much of rhetoric that also exists around College for All. More recently, the state of Michigan has adopted the Common Core State Standards for the year 2013-2014. This adoption at the state level was linked heavily to helping to train students to be more prepared for life after school and fits in line with the notion of expanding career and college readiness for students. The idea behind the common core is that the type of thinking associated with it will make students career and college ready.

Finally, Michigan also has its own college access network, the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN). Its mission is "To increase college readiness, participation, and completion in Michigan, particularly among low-income students, first-generation college going students, and students of color," (MCAN). This network has the stated goal of increasing Michigan's college enrollment by the year 2025 to 60%. College as defined by this network is any type of post-secondary education. They work on developing local area college networks for regional networks to take advantage of. The organization has six main strands that it believes are important for the success of students to achieve their stated goal: culture, academic readiness, financial readiness, college enrollment, college persistence, and college completion. MCAN believes in creating a college-going culture within schools in order to foster the support necessary to boost the enrollment of students into college pathways. They also believe that schools need to help boost the academic readiness of students to ensure students aren't taking remedial

courses, which will help boost graduation rates. They believe in helping students understand the financial situations they are in to make informed decisions. They believe college enrollment is necessary because one can no longer rely just on a high school diploma in order to be successful in the workforce. By increasing enrollment and persistence, the organization believes it can increase college completion to help reach the overarching goals it ascribes to.

CHAPTER 2: Methods

To address the research questions, a multiple embedded case study was used. Gerring (2004) argues that a case study is "best defined as an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units" (p. 342). In this way, a case study hopes to illuminate a larger phenomenon. This particular study was instrumental in nature, which Stake (2004) argues has the goal of illuminating a larger phenomenon, with the case itself secondary in nature. In this instance, the case of the schools plays a supportive role in telling the story of how the faculty members make sense of policies in these schools. This case is also descriptive in nature. Yin (2003) argues that descriptive case studies seek to describe how a phenomenon plays out. In this case, I am seeking to explain what happens to faculty members' interpretations of policy in schools that are undergoing enrollment decline.

This study is a multiple embedded case study (Yin, 2003) focused on multiple units of analysis at three high school sites within the state of Michigan. Since sensemaking is influenced at different levels within the educational system, such as administrators (Coburn, 2005) and districts (Spillane, 2009), data was collected at multiple levels within each site. Analysis was conducted at the district, the school level, and also for subgroups within the school, such as teachers, counselors, and administrators. In this way the case study attempts to address how all of these units make sense of college-going policies. It is important to explore sensemaking at different levels within the school system because different actors in the system may view the policy differently and since sense-making can be either an individual or group activity (Coburn, 2001), analyzing each level will provide insight to how the district approaches the issue.

The reason for selecting multiple cases is to use theoretical replication. Yin (2003) describes this as predicating "contrasting results but for predictable reasons" (p. 47). By selecting multiple sites in different contexts, these different locales should provide the ability to generate different results because of the varying constraints on the three locales. For example, one of the rural communities is geographically isolated and is potentially under pressures that do not exist in the urban area that has to deal with charter and choice.

Site Considerations

For the purposes of this study, three sites have been selected. Given that depopulation of a region and student loss do not always go hand in hand, the study seeks to focus on three places where the school districts are losing students, of which two are also experiencing population loss at the community level. Population loss, aging populations, school of choice, and various other factors have led to some schools having fewer students over time. An assumption of the study is that different forces will be at play in places losing students and people than in places just losing students.

It also appears important to include both a rural and an urban site because the tensions that exist could be much different in these locations. Urban locations have schooling options that families can take advantage of that are perceivably closer and are easier to access than many of their rural counterparts. Additionally, while the populations of urban areas have fluctuated over time, rural outmigration has been going on for several generations in the United States. Many of the studies that are referenced in the literature review are studies of rural communities whose findings are often generalized only to those contexts. In several states, especially in the Midwest, large cities have seen populations diminish over the last fifty years. This may mean that districts serving these areas are under similar pressures to the rural areas. However, these places may be under different pressures or the tensions at play may be different because of their proximity to other schooling options and potentially viable places to live. Because of these factors, the study incorporates rural and urban sites experiencing enrollment decline. In this way, the study will attempt to control for factors that may impact schools differentially based on their location.

Since 1994, when Proposal A was passed in the state of Michigan changing the state funding formula to be more centralized and based in part on the number of students a district had, sixty-three percent of Michigan school districts that existed in 1994 have lost students. For the purposes of addressing the research questions, four districts were initially sought: an urban district losing students, in a community losing people; an urban district losing students, in a community staying roughly the same size or growing; a rural district losing students, in a community losing people; and a rural district losing students, in a community staying roughly the same size or growing. After compiling the statewide data

over the last twenty years, only three urban districts fit the profile of shrinking but having a community growing or staying the same size. Given that they appear to somewhat of an anomaly, they were not considered for study.

The sites were selected based on their relative representativeness of other sites throughout the state. Michigan is a diverse state with many different variables to consider for the selection of sites. Given the percent of districts that have lost students since 1994, an important site consideration is not just whether the district lost students, but what percentage of students the district lost. A variable was created subtracting the number of students in 1994 from the enrollment figures in 2012. The districts were then rank ordered from lowest population change to highest. Sites were next labeled as urban, rural, or suburban based on the census classification and the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban continuum codes. The classifications by the census label all municipalities under 50,000 residents as rural, or microurban, while the Rural-Urban continuum codes at the county level help provide nuance, identifying if municipality is in a county that is part of a metropolitan area and if so how big the metropolitan area is, if the county is adjacent to a metropolitan area, or if the county contains municipalities of certain sizes below 50,000 people.

To capture some of the relative nature of what is thought of as rural and urban outside of sheer population distinctions, sites that were the center of a metropolitan area were also considered urban for the purpose of the study. Based on these labels, districts were compared to ones they were next to in terms of population loss to assess whether or not the district was representative of the other districts that had lost similar percentages of students. Additionally, the districts experiencing population loss were broken down into three categories: greater than 40% student population loss, between 40% and 25% student population loss, and between 25% and 10% student population loss. Given the number of total districts in the state and the number of district undergoing enrollment decline, districts with less than 10% population loss were not considered for study.

For rural site selection, careful consideration was paid to the above criteria. Since the rural sites are fairly evenly distributed throughout the student population loss list, sites can be selected from any one

of the groups. An important consideration with the rural sites is not just the Rural-Urban codes, but also where the area is located geographically. The two rural sites should be located in different geographical areas to avoid only capturing a single region's population loss. Albrecht (1993) acknowledges that proximity to an urban area is important in the context of population decline, so at least one rural site should be more than an hour's drive of a metropolitan area.

For the urban site, the selection criteria are slightly different. The urban districts are less equally distributed in the data, and instead tend to appear in clusters around 20% loss and greater than 60% loss, with a group in between spread out sporadically and having a slight cluster at 40%. In terms of student population loss, the districts greater than 60% are almost entirely urban districts and are among the largest districts in the state. Selecting one of those districts, while informative in some ways, could also be limiting because very few rural districts in Michigan are similar to this group of urban districts in terms of enrollment decline, and the districts that are tend to be amongst the smallest districts in the state. Comparing the smallest and largest districts in the state may be fruitful, but would not necessarily address the research questions for the study.

The other two groups of districts are equally desirable to select a site, but both have limitations and benefits. The group clustered around 20% have districts that are roughly the median in terms of student population loss overall for the state, whereas the group clustered around 40% could potentially be more representative of the urban districts as a whole. While much research implies that there are great differences between rural and urban sites, this study is employs a hypothesis that places undergoing population loss have similarities whether they are rural or urban. Therefore, any urban district that is included should be selected based on the criterion that is relatively similar to other urban districts but is also reflective of traits of the rural districts chosen.

Whether a community was losing people was determined by whether the municipality the school was located in had negative population growth between the 1990 and the 2010 censuses. Since this consideration was secondary, the comparisons and categories were less rigid. A three-category construction was used for whether or not the community lost or gained people: if the community lost

more than five percent, it was labeled loss; if the community gained more than five percent, it was labeled gain; if a community fell between gain and loss, or experienced less than five percent change in either direction, it was labeled no change. These three categories were created to help make simple distinctions among the communities. Because the Rural-Urban continuum codes were used, consideration was paid to the population gain or loss of the counties as well, but only to cross reference and make sure that the county was experiencing similar trends as the municipality.

Finally, access was also a careful consideration in the selection process. The nature of data collection requires that one can get access to individual sites. Given the study I conducted and that Michigan is a large state and my residence was not centrally located within it, I chose to value sites less that were farther than a three-hour drive from my residence.

Three Sites

The three schools described below are high schools in single high school districts.

Garrettsville. Garrettsville district is in the thirty-sixth percentile in terms of district size in the state. It has recently moved to having all of its students in connected buildings. The district is located in Garrettsville, which has fewer than two thousand people. The school district is quite large geographically and pulls students from two separate counties. The area the district covers also has four K-8 schools that feed into Garrettsville after eighth grade, but are not a part of the district enrollment until students transition into 9th grade. This means that Garrettsville has several students that only go to the school district for their high school years. The county Garrettsville is in carries a rural urban continuum code that distinguishes it as being in a county not adjacent to a metropolitan area that has a city with a population greater than 2,500 but less than 20,000. The other county that Garrettsville school district pulls students from is adjacent to a metropolitan area but also does not have a city greater than twenty thousand people.

Garrettsville school district has lost forty-three percent of its students since 1994, ranking it in the top thirteen percent of students lost over the time period in question. Garrettsville has lost eighteen percent of its population since the 1990 census. One of counties that Garrettsville school district serves

has gained roughly seven percent of its 1990 population, while the other has lost slightly over five percent of its population.

Declining enrollments have also impacted surrounding neighboring districts. Of the districts located in the same county as Garrettsville, all but one suffered enrollment loss over the time period in question. All of the districts bordering Garrettsville have suffered enrollment decline over the time period in question.

Oakdale. Oakdale school district is in the top three percent of the largest school districts in Michigan. It is in the metropolitan area of the 3rd largest city in the state and in the city of Oakdale, which has roughly thirty thousand people. Oakdale is classified as urban for the purpose of the study in that it is the city center of a metropolitan area greater than 70,000 people. Oakdale's county is labeled "metro" and is technically classified this way because the county is in a metropolitan area that has greater than one million people.

Oakdale school district has shrunk by twenty-percent since 1993, placing close to the median school district in terms of population loss in the state. Over the same time period, Oakdale has lost twelve percent of its population. Oakdale reached its peak population in 1950 and has seen the population of the city drop 34 percent since then.

Wheaton. Wheaton school district is in the fiftieth percentile in terms of district size in the state. Wheaton school district is located in Wheaton, which has fewer that 1,000 people. The school district is surrounded by other districts of similar size and is located in a county whose largest city is larger than 2,500 people, but smaller than 20,000 people. The county is adjacent to a metropolitan area. Wheaton is also located in the middle of the county and the district is contained within the county boundaries.

Wheaton has gained roughly two percent of population since the 1990 census. The county that Wheaton district is in has grown by roughly nine percent since the 1990 census. The school district has, however, lost roughly twenty-three percent of its students over the same time period placing it in the twenty-fifth percentile of the percent loss of students since 1993.

Data Collection

When sampling faculty at each site, it was important to consider the how the policies played out in schools to determine who I would interview within each site. In each site, I sought a principal because we know from previous research (Coburn, 2005) that principals help to make sense of policies. In addition, it was important to interview math and English teachers because the Common Core State Standards were adopted in Michigan in both subjects. In addition to having writing standards in all subjects, it was important to add both social studies and science teachers for other reasons. Adding a social studies teacher was important because the subject they teach often directly ties into ideas about community and society. It was also important to have science teachers in the study because science is often linked to the increase in STEM degrees. Having a counselor was paramount because part of the study looked at non-curricular policies that the guidance counselor would in theory have a lot of interaction with. Finally, having a foreign language teacher in the study from each site was also important because the requirements for students to pass two years of a foreign language per the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) would likely result in a disruption to their teaching position. In each site I interviewed at least one principal, one guidance counselor, two math teachers, two English teachers, two science teachers, one social studies teacher, and one foreign language teacher.

Refining Instruments

Prior to finalizing my interview protocols, I met with three colleagues of mine who were employed as as either teachers or administrators. One of the teachers has an education specialist degree and both of the other two individuals have master's degrees within education. I interviewed one of those teachers and the guidance counselor. In both cases, I attempted to conduct the interviews as I would to potential interviewees. Afterwards, I asked them about how they thought it went and also about ways to refine my protocols. The other teacher read through the protocols and provided me with feedback over the phone. I incorporated their feedback into the design of the questions with the end goal in mind.

Collecting Data

The intention was to interview every one of the teachers in two separate interviews and the administrators in one long interview. The logic behind this decision was that the administrators' interview was a little shorter and that teachers would have an opportunity to do the interview during a scheduled planning hour. In fact when scheduling the teacher interviews, I often mentioned that this was an option. In the case of dividing the teacher interviews, the first teacher interview that I conducted was about background information and declining enrollments and the second teacher interview was about college-going and policies I had deemed in advance to be related to it. In practice, this did not always work out this way. There were three different interview protocols depending on if the person was a teacher, a part of the administration, or both. The administrative and teacher interview protocols can be found in the appendix. The interviews with all of the teachers except for one were conducted in two separate segments. While some idiosyncrasies developed with individuals, all of the interviews that were split were done so roughly in the manner that is portrayed in the appendix. In the case of the administrators, I was only able to interview one administrator in one interview and I interviewed the others in two separate interviews. Where the interview was split depended on the administrator's time window and preferences.

When setting out to begin the interviews, I wanted to interview the all of the administrators before talking to staff. The logic behind this desire was that it allowed me to draw a clear distinction between the data that provided by the administrators and the faculty who taught. I was unable to interview all of the administration before interviewing teachers at any of the three sites. I was however, able to interview one administrator before interviewing the teachers at every one of the sites. This allowed me to set up a context for each of the schools and communities so that I could then adjust questions that I asked the rest of the interviewees. In no instance, did conversations with one of the staff members lead to dramatic shifts to the questions I asked other members of the faculty.

All of the interviews were audio recorded. In three instances the audio recorder did not record the interview in its entirety. After this occurred the first time, I began using two separate tape recorders to make sure that one of them captured the interview. I also changed how I did the recordings so that I could

visibly see the recorder. In the instances where the recorder failed, I sat down after the interview and wrote down everything I could remember from that point of the interview forward and cross-referenced it will the audio second audio recording of the file to see what I missed. In two of the cases, I missed very small amounts, and in one of the cases, I missed roughly half of an interview.

In the interview protocol I sought to find out answers to questions related to my research questions, but I also used it as an opportunity to ask questions about where and if faculty discussed the things I was talking about with their colleagues. I had planned to attend a faculty meeting at each of the sites, but I was unable to do so at one of the sites due to the timing of my data collection there. In the two instances where I did get an opportunity to attend a faculty meeting, my attendance had two purposes. The first and primary purpose was that I wanted to confirm or disconfirm the attitudes of the faculty about whether or not the meetings served as a place where they discussed college-going or issues related to it. If they did, the second purpose was to explore what they talked about. My assumption going into the meetings was that my presence would make the faculty more likely to discuss college-going because I was talking to the administrators and some of the teachers about my interest in college-going prior to attending any meetings. So, if they didn't discuss it at all, then my attendance at a faculty meeting would confirm that it was unlikely to be talked about. If however, they did discuss college-going, I would be less sure about how frequently they talked about it except to ask faculty about how typical the meeting was. In any event, if it were discussed, my goal was to see how it was discussed. In the case where there were conversations about college-going, I took notes about the conversations around it. In both cases, I took field notes over what the faculty did and what they discussed.

Data Access and Decisions About Participants

Getting access in the three districts played out very differently but all followed snowball sampling (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), where I began by reaching out to one person and allowed them to put me in contact with others. In Wheaton, I began by contacting the superintendent. He formally agreed to meet with me and we discussed the project and the ideas it involved. He agreed to participate and help initiate

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contact with the principal who also agreed to be a part of the study. After my meeting with the principal, she emailed the entire staff to tell them briefly who I was, what I was doing, and that the superintendent agreed to have the district participate. She also sent me an email with each teacher's class schedule so that I could schedule my interviews accordingly.

I scheduled interviews with staff members through email, with one exception. When I showed up to interview one of the social studies teachers, he sent a different social studies teacher to meet with me instead. This is the only social studies teacher in the sample for Wheaton because I chose to not follow up with the teacher who initiated this conversation and took this gesture as a sign of not wanting to participate. There are only three social studies teachers total in the high school and I did not have an opportunity to interact with the other teacher. I also added a science teacher to the study after meeting with the superintendent. This meant that other than the two social studies teachers, I interviewed every teacher who taught a core subject (math, English, social studies, and science) in the high school. At times during this process, the faculty in Wheaton granted me the opportunity to work from the office and allotted me a space to conduct interviews in the administrative corridor of the building. This was generous, but also at times necessary because not all of the teachers were able to meet during their prep periods and instead some of them met during an hour in which they had a student teacher. In the interviews, I asked faculty members if they discussed the policies I was interested in at the school in staff meetings or in other spaces. For the most part, they said that they did not. So, in addition to the interviews, I attended a single staff meeting, where I confirmed that not a single conversation about college-going, or the policies in question, occurred. Instead, the majority of the meeting was devoted to complying with state level and district initiatives that are disconnected to college-going as I have constructed the idea.

In Garrettsville, I already had connections to the district. As a part of a previous study, I interviewed a teacher who worked in the district and he introduced me to the superintendent with the potential of working with the district down the road. I exchanged emails and phone calls with him, and after a formal sit-down meeting, he agreed to have the district be a part of the study. The superintendent

introduced me to the principal, who emailed me a course schedule and a faculty directory. After an interview with one of the teachers, I was brought by the faculty lounge so I could be introduced to multiple faculty members before interviewing them. This made the circumstances different than with Wheaton, where I often interacted with the faculty for the first time face-to-face for the first interview. I interviewed every teacher in the school who taught math or English and all but two teachers overall. These interviews took place in the rooms of the faculty either during an opening in their schedule during the instructional day, or outside of the school day. As in Wheaton, I asked the faculty whether or not they discussed the policies in meetings. In Garrettsville, however, some of the staff had brought up that school faculty meetings were often where conversations about non-curricular policies took place. When attended a single faculty meeting, I was able to confirm that conversations about college-going did indeed take up most of the faculty meeting in question.

In Oakdale, my route into the school was dramatically different. After trying several times to contact various urban districts with no results, I began to wonder if I would have an urban district in my study at all. I reached out to a colleague, and he put me in touch with a colleague of the principal in Oakdale. After a few emails, the principal agreed to meet with me to discuss my project. She then acted as a gatekeeper, putting me in touch with various faculty members that she selected because she thought they would be of use to my study. With one exception, she actively recruited teachers to participate. This often entailed my going to the site and sitting for long periods of time in the lounge to principal's office while I waited for our meetings. After we conversed for the day, the principal would call people to ask them to participate in the study. Over time, her description of the study to potential interviewees changed slightly but never did it lose fidelity to what I was saying to potential participants. Given how she reached out to potential interviewees, the selection appeared to lack any discrete criteria and appeared to depend on when I arrived and who had the period off, or occasionally who could get it covered, during that time. One of the limitations to this method is it was inconsistent with what I attempted to accomplish at the other sites. Despite spending the most time at Oakdale by far, I was unable to meet my target goal of interviewees at least partially because every faculty member but one that I talked to was first screened by

the principal. I met one of the science teachers in the study when he walked me to the science wing of the building for an interview of one of his colleagues. In doing this, it was brought up that he would be more than willing to participate and so I scheduled an interview with him personally. I also ran this participant by the principal to make sure it was okay with her as well. He was also the gentleman at the site who did the entire teacher interview protocol in one sitting. After being interviewed by me the first time, I was for the most part allowed to set up the second interview with the other faculty members on my own.

I conducted the majority of my interviews in the principal's office or in a room adjacent to her office; I also conducted some interviews in the classrooms of teachers as the study got off the ground. In this school I do not know how many teachers teach across multiple content areas unless it came up in the interview with that teacher or was listed on the school's website. I did ask what the teachers taught in the trimester I was interviewing them and tried to chart their answers as best as I could. I did not interview the majority of teachers in the school, but instead interviewed a sample that was pre-screened for me; I have no indication of whether or not this sample is representative of the rest of the faculty members in the school. Because conducting a survey of the teachers was beyond the scope of the study, and I was not given the information about who taught what, I did ask several of the teachers if the majority of the staff were from the surrounding area after several teachers I interviewed mentioned being from the local area. When asking faculty members later about whether or not the majority of the teachers at the school or just the ones in my sample were from the local area broadly defined, several teachers stated that they believed so and no one presented disconfirming evidence. I was unable to attend meetings at the school because at the time of data collection I was informed that there were no more remaining meetings, departmental or otherwise, due to it being the end of the school year. While I had initially planned to return the school in the fall, I decided not to because of the situation described earlier about the shift in ideas regarding the policy at the state level. In all, I interviewed 17 participants at Oakdale, short of the 24 I aspired to. I was unable to interview the interterm superintendent.

Handling Data

Upon receiving a faculty list, or creating one, I supplied each faculty member with a unique identification number. This is how I referred to them throughout the process of handling data. I conducted all interviews using at least one tape recorder. As soon as I could, I transferred the data from my recorder to my computer and labeled it based the unique identifier I had previously given to each faculty member.

Potential Limitations of Access

Due to the way that the sampling took place, I do not know how many of the staff members participated simply because they were interested in the study, or how many felt pressured to do so. One of the limitations of working within the types of constraints these school districts are under is that there is a constant concern, especially amongst the less experienced teachers, that their job is on the line. This pressure in the ether of the school may or may not lead to people feeling more or less inclined to participate. Given that my entrée into the districts was facilitated by authority figures, it is difficult to say conclusively that everyone felt as though they had the option to not participate. I did have two potential participants choose to not participate once they began interacting with me. One of those people provided me another faculty member to interview and the other one upon reading the consent form wanted no part of the process. It is my hope that these were the only ones who felt uncomfortable during the process. I also did not persistently pursue interviews with any staff member specifically because of the concerns about my push to interview faculty being coercive given the circumstances of my data collection. Furthermore, I was clear to remind anyone when the interviewee appeared cautious what the process for de-identifying the data was so that I was the only one who would know who said what. In several cases this led to a notable change in the demeanor of the individuals in question and often led to a relaxing atmosphere. I hope that this also helped people feel comfortable throughout the process.

Data Analysis

Because of the pace at which I collected data I was unable to analyze the data in detail as I was collecting it. Instead, I chose to finish data collection at each site and then to go back and analyze the data. Even though I had initially planned to interview the administrators first and use the codes I developed from those interviews to see if the themes generated there could help inform my questions with other faculty, I did not end up doing this. As a result, when I began coding I purposively began coding the teachers' data first for each site. I did this because given the literature, the influence of the administration should mean that the same themes would emerge between both groups. If they did not, then I would know that the administration and teachers have fundamentally different understandings of the policies. My concern was that if I coded the administrative data first, I ultimately would end up only looking for things that the administrators talked about. By switching this up, I was able to see which codes played out differently for administrators and other faculty members.

I resorted to coding the interviews for themes related my questions of interest. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe how when one begins analyzing data it is easy to experience data overload. Coding helped me understand what was important and what needed to be looked at in more detail. In order to help me with this, I kept track of these codes and notes I made about them in the program MAXQDA. This software allowed me to keep everything in one central location. The first step I took was to make preliminary codes about each of the questions I was asking in the interview protocols. In doing so, I sought to better understand how the answers to the questions and the language being used by the participants differed. I used deductive codes such as, "all kids should go to college," "only some kids should go to college," and "going to college is good for students" to begin the coding process. Through the first run of coding, it became clear that the definitions of college mattered a lot in each individual case. So, the data were again examined looking at this data. The same codes used for the initial interview were set up to analyze any other interactions I was privy to, but did not produce any useful analysis. From these simplistic codes, I broadened the categories out to establish more interpretative codes from the data.

When I began going through the data, I took take careful notes about the coding process to make sure I am reflecting on the codes and the inferences I made based on them. I began working with one of the sites and coded the entire first interview for each participant before coding the second interview. I repeated this process for each site. I began by making notes with each individual interview. I returned to these notes to see how my thinking evolved over time. After the data was coded for the initial codes, I tried to go through and add to the data using in vivio codes to capture other themes. Once coding was complete, the data were analyzed at the administrator and teacher levels.

Once initial coding and analysis was completed, each individual was compared to others in the same job (i.e. teacher), subject (i.e. math), and tie to community to gain a better understanding of how the school roles that individuals have make sense of college going policies with a district and the community-school relationship. Finally, a cross-case synthesis was conducted. Yin (2003) argues that a cross-case synthesis treats all cases as their own independent studies. In doing this, I was able to see what features appear to exist as a result of being a school undergoing enrollment decline and what things were attributable to other variables of interest.

Yin (2003) outlines a few techniques to help navigate the complex process of data analysis. After my data were collected, I used both pattern matching to explore what themes come out of the data and explanation building because I am trying to explain a less-known phenomenon. While Yin sees these as being different options, the different levels of analysis I am using make both possible. Because of the differences associated with the cases of interest and the different levels of analysis, explanation building and the process associated with it appears to fit well.

Establishing Validity

Establishing validity is a tricky endeavor for qualitative researchers who are often left explaining how they came up with the findings that they have. Glesne (2011) lists criteria that can help establish validity and I attempted to do several of these. First, when gathering data, I often asked staff members about statements other colleagues had made and ideas that were coming out of the site to make sure that I

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wasn't off base in my understanding of their world. For example, in one of the sites one faculty member mentioned an initiative launched by the district. When I interviewed subsequent participants, I asked them about the initiative to learn more about its prominence in what the district did.

Second, I was able to have a colleague check my interview data with me. First, I generated initial codes based on the research questions and the answers that I anticipated. Then I coded a couple of interviews using those codes. After I completed this task, I had a colleague code one of the interviews using the coding scheme I had developed. After he did, we discussed his thoughts on my codes.

Finally, I performed negative case analysis on several of the themes as they developed. I learned it was easy to let one or two prominent voices overshadow the holistic picture of the data. The best example of the negative case is that my results are counter to what I expected to find. When entering the field, I had several potential hypotheses that I felt were likely given the nature of the study. The one that made the most sense to me in advance of the study was that faculty members with strong community ties would disrupt the system and resist the policies that could be viewed as contributing to the loss of people in the local context. While I found some evidence of resistance, it was from a single teacher who taught some agriculture related classes and was not from the local context. This teacher had weak ties to both the community and society as conceptualized by the study. I found no such resistance from teachers who were from the local context or had strong ties to the community as I had come to define them.

Bounding the Cases

I have chosen to bound the cases by the site for three distinct reasons. First, if the literature from earlier work on sensemaking is any indication, understanding of these policies will be greatly influenced by the administrators' understanding of the policies and the actions that administrators take to buffer policies out of the district. Taking down these barriers for the purpose of constructing cases based on teachers and their ties to community ignores the role that administrators play in relationship to this shared understanding.

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Second, all three districts have different structures within the district and individuals that play different roles at the administrative level. It is difficult to argue that a school with 100 teachers and school with 10 have the same structures, especially given that one of them is the center of a metropolitan area and the other is a geographically isolated district. Roles play out differently throughout each of the schools. For example, take the guidance counselor positions at the three locations. In Oakdale there are multiple guidance counselors, including one who is solely in charge of dealing with students' college and career pathways. In Garrettsville the guidance counselor is part time and does not have the same role as any the other guidance counselors in the sample. The guidance counselor at Wheaton has a hybrid of the roles of the counselors at Oakdale. The differing roles that faculty play make collapsing categories difficult to do.

The third and final reason is the most compelling. It is difficult to collapse these cases because they are each situated within a local context that is complicated and multi-faceted. These local contexts are not unique flowers that cannot be compared, but rather were chosen to be distinctly different for the purposes of illuminating contrasts amongst the sites. For example, in Wheaton there are jobs to be had if the training aligned with the available jobs. Due to fewer students and the subsequent budget cuts that follow, the school is in many ways unable to train for jobs available locally. In the other two cases, however, there are not jobs readily available for local graduates whether graduates have a college degree or not. In order to provide thick and rich description, it is important to first explore what each individual case represents, and then the distinctions made for the purpose of comparisons can be further illuminated in the cross-case chapter. In doing this, I can best explore how the positions relate to each other through the lens of their cases.

CHAPTER 3: Who Are the Participants?

When looking at the school actors in this study, it is important to take the time to identify descriptive traits of the participants to get an overall sense of the study's population. I have chosen to look at each site individually and to present the information from each site in a way that displays where the teachers and administrators are from, how I chose to define ties to the community and ties to society through the school, and discuss some of the idiosyncrasies of each of the sites. The goal of this chapter is to be descriptive of the participants of the study because in other chapters, many of the distinctions drawn here are necessary to slicing the data in productive ways.

In order to get a sense of the composition of the staff, I have chosen to include several different ways to consider the staff make-up. No one school's staff is particularly unique, but each staff's demographics help to describe the site. One of the ways to chart the make-up of the school staff is to chart where staff members are from. It was impossible given the nature of the data collected to know exactly how far away from their current job each person went to school, so in order to calculate that information I measured the distance from the school they worked at to the high school the staff member attended. This was done using google maps and the distance used was the distance that was the closest in terms of miles. A similar exercise was used to calculate the distance from the high school to the city center of where the individuals lived. This is the best measurement I could get given that I was lacking the addresses of the participants. Both of these measurements are used to construct the descriptive data about the staff. Neither is perfect, but both will provide an illustration of the proximity of the staff's living situations and schooling backgrounds to where they work now.

Finally, when organizing this data, it is helpful to think about how to describe the ties that individuals have to the community and society. Parker (2003) argues that typologies are classification systems and should be handled gingerly as a result, but for the sake of trying to contextualize some of this data, I am going to refer to distinctions I have drawn. When looking at the data, there are strong and weak ties that individuals have to both the community and the society. Community ties are associated with both the school district and the community. The reason for including both is that the local culture is

what determines whether or not one is a part of a community. In a rural farming town, one may have a stronger tie to the community by owning a farm and living in a remote area than if they live across the street from the school. Limiting ties to the community to just living next to the school would greatly limit the usefulness of the categories of looking at ties in the first place.

Ties to the community are considered strong if the school actor attended school in the local district. This tie is considered strong because in the data there did not appear to be any connections to the school district or the community that were stronger than graduating from the district and returning. A medium tie to the district is if a school actor married someone from the local community or has chosen to live in the local school district. This tie is considered weaker because while choosing to live within the school district's boundaries is a choice, it does not mean that one is as strongly connected to the district as someone who is from the district originally. Weak ties to the community are considered if the faculty member saw similarities between their home community and where they currently work. Most faculty members saw a connection between the two.

Ties to society are considered in reference to the individual's working relationship at the school and the length of time one has worked there. Societal ties are considered weaker than community ties, but also do have variations of strong and weak. A strong tie to the school is if the job the individual has was preceded by student teaching in the district. A medium tie is if they have only worked in the local district. Both of these factors would in theory make the connection to the school much stronger because of a perceived potential loyalty about the job and school district. A weak tie is if they are employed by the district at the time being. All participants of the study have a weak tie to the school in which they work by the nature of being an employee of the school district. Having weak ties to a community or school does not preclude one from having strong ties. In fact, many of the individuals that have strong ties to the community also have medium and weak ties as well.

Table 1: How Ties are Created

Tie strength	Community	Society
Strong	From the local community	Student taught in the district
Medium	Married someone from the community or live in the school district	Only worked in the district
Weak	See home community and work community as being similar	Works in the district

Table 2: Totals for Interviewees

Tie strength	Community	Society
Strong	10	7
Medium	20	22
Weak	23 (excludes Oakdale data)	42

In addition to constructing a way to look at the community and society ties, I also asked school actors directly if the individual felt as though they are a part of the community they worked in. When asking the school actors if they felt a part of the community, all but five in the entire sample said that they did. The three most common distinctions that were drawn about what does and doesn't make someone a part of the local community had to deal with being born in the community, working at the district, and attending local events, whether those events were school sponsored or community sponsored. In fact, all five people who did not feel a part of the local community drew their rationale as to why based on these three distinctions. For the school actors who felt a part of the community, their belonging was not restricted by where they lived, or even how long they had lived there. Some of the individuals discussed

how the length of time they had worked at the school made them more a part of the community, but the members who said that they were not, had all worked at the school for an extended period of time.

This idea is juxtaposed with the notion that being recognized in public by former students, or people that the school actors didn't know, made them a part of the community. This held even when the school actor is recognized at events or places outside of the physical boundaries of the community in question. In this vein, the public act of being a part of a school is associated with being a part of a local community. This distinction muddies the waters regarding where the school ends and the community begins and was true in all three of the sites.

The Average Staff Member

A way in which to describe the characteristics of faculty members in the study is to identify what the average traits of a given participant are in the study as a whole in order to contrast them with what that looks like in each individual site. Table three shows the averages of the mean participant in the study and how that compares to the mean participant at the individual sites. The average distance of where faculty members worked in relationship to where they graduated high school in the study is 53.9 miles. The average distance a staff member lives from the school they work at is 9.6 miles. The average faculty member went to school at a college that was relatively close to the school they worked at, has worked at their school for 12.8 years, has worked in education for an additional 2.9 years, and considers herself to be a part of the community because they work at the school.

Table 3: Average Staff Member

	Distance from home school district	Distance lived from school	Went to college	Worked at current district	Worked in education	Thinks he or she is a part of the community
Average staff member	53.9 miles	9.6 miles	At the nearest teacher training institution	12.8 years	15.7 years	Yes
Average Garrettsville faculty member	57.2 miles	8.9 miles	At one institution	10.25 years	13.8 years	Yes
Average Oakdale faculty member	42.3 miles	5.5 miles	At one of two colleges	15.5 years	16.8 years	Yes
Average Wheaton faculty member	66 miles	15.7 miles	At one of five institutions	11.5 years	14.3 years	Yes

Garrettsville

The distance from home to Garrettsville's school is only slightly over the average of the rest of the study overall. The average for Garrettsville is 57.2 miles, but seven of the 12 faculty members were from Garrettsville, a district that bordered Garrettsville, or a district that bordered a district that bordered Garrettsville. Only four faculty members were not from the general area and of those four, only two chose to work there for the opportunity to have a job. The other two individuals were looking to be close to Garrettsville, or were looking for a community like Garrettsville.

With a few exceptions, Garrettsville is made up of a staff that wants to work in the local district. This is evidenced by where the members of the staff choose to live. The staff members lived on average 8.8 miles away from the school where they worked. Of the twelve faculty members interviewed, only five

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lived outside of the district and only one of those five lived in a school district boundary that did not border the district directly. The teacher who lives furthest away is less than forty miles away and lives in his hometown. Many staff members mentioned that they chose to work at the district because it was in the county where they wanted to be. With the exception of the principal, all of the staff members had some sort of tie to the surrounding area outside of their work and were interested in being a part of the school district because it allowed them to be near and in places that they valued. In fact, two women mentioned that they changed their career path to be able to remain local. Both had been in serious relationships and decided that one of the few jobs that they could get and still stay local was to become a schoolteacher. For one of the individuals, this meant a pretty drastic change from interior design to an art teacher and for the other, it resulted in a change from biology to a teaching degree. Both of those women stated that they actively changed their major or career path in college for the opportunity to keep the lifestyle that they valued.

To fill potential vacancies, the district relies on the idea that there will be qualified candidates that live in the local area that want to be a part of the Garrettsville school district because of its location and the ties that people have to it. The district gets half of the faculty members and sixty percent of the teachers from the closest four-year college that trains teachers, even though the college is over 70 miles away. Of the three teachers who graduated from the district and returned to it, two of them went to college at this institution, as did all three teachers that went to a neighboring school district.

One thing is certain; no one ends up in Garrettsville on accident. It is a place where wanting a job there usually requires some combination of planning and patience, but it doesn't happen as a result of work-related circumstances. The average person has worked at Garrettsville for a little over ten years and has been in education for almost 14 years. Several recent hires the district has made and those individuals' relative inexperience in teaching bring down these numbers. These teachers are amongst the least experienced in the study, and have been able to be hired likely due to the enrollment trends in the district. While only two teachers didn't begin working somewhere else before working for Garrettsville, several

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faculty members worked in neighboring districts before becoming full time teachers at Garrettsville. Some of these teachers wanted to work at Garrettsville and worked other jobs in the area until they could return. One of the teachers even worked for a few years at the local parochial school before taking the job at Garrettsville high school. The current superintendent of Garrettsville previously worked as a principal within the district, and then after successful stints as a superintendent elsewhere returned to Garrettsville because of his connections to the local context.

Connection to Community

Only one member of the Garrettsville staff saw his hometown as being fundamentally different from the community of Garrettsville and did so because of how much larger his hometown was in comparison. All other individuals either saw the community as being very similar to their hometown or went to school in the district in question. Over half of the faculty either live within the Garrettsville school district or are married someone who went to school in Garrettsville. Twenty-five percent of the staff interviewed attended the Garrettsville school district as students and returned because they wanted to teach in Garrettsville.

There are not strong societal ties to the school district by anyone that works at Garrettsville and only three members of the district have only worked at Garrettsville. One of the ways in which to think about this is that the only societal ties the majority of members have to the district are limited to the fact that the district employs them. They do not have any longstanding association to the job of being a faculty member in Garrettsville. Because of their strong community ties to the district, however this is unsurprising. Being a faculty member allows them to live the lifestyle they want to live, which involves being a teacher at Garrettsville. It is not unreasonable to think that if there were other employment opportunities in the local area that involved having a college degree, something that many staff members mentioned was not available, that these individuals might have chosen a different career path altogether.

Table 4: Ties in Garrettsville

Tie strength	Community	Society
Strong	3	0
Medium	7	3
Weak	11	12

Garrettsville teachers were likely to present a multi-faceted view of what the community entailed and often would delineate between the different communities that they felt as though they were or were not a part of. Regardless, attending the local festival in town was a sure fire way to be considered a part of the community. An interesting component of being a faculty member, but especially a teacher, at Garrettsville is the amount of commitment that is expected beyond a normal teaching schedule. I did not talk to one teacher that did not have at least one commitment that lay outside of teaching classes. The teachers from the local community talked the most about all of the things they were involved in. One of the teachers volunteered as a coach for a few sports, was a class sponsor, organized student council, and did several other things. Another one of the teachers took on the job as guidance counselor to provide avenues for students to pursue educational opportunities as well as organized prom, was a class sponsor, was active on school improvement teams, etc. These teachers were engaged at the school in ways that went far above and beyond their teaching responsibilities. In addition, the school shared many of its facilities with the local community and a recent problem was created when the school district decided to include a security system that cut off community members' access to the building facilities.

Teaching Responsibilities

Only one teacher in Garrettsville teaches in a single content area in the high school. All of the other teachers in the school either teach across multiple content areas, have shared responsibilities across

more than one school, or both. All teachers are also in charge of a study hall type class to help tutor students in math and reading. The school only has two science teachers, and each one of them teaches at least one math class, with one of the teachers splitting his time equally between science and math classes. Three of the four high school English teachers spend at least half of their time committed to other aspects of the school and the fourth one teaches only one class in the high school. One of the English teachers is also the band director and spends roughly half of his time teaching band classes. Another English teacher teaches primarily art classes and a section or two of English a year. The third teacher also serves as the school's guidance counselor and spends half of her time working on duties related to that position. The fourth member of the English department teaches both the seventh and eighth grade English classes in the middle school and teaches one English class for the high school. The two social studies teachers also handle all of the physical education and health course responsibilities for both the high school and middle school. Finally, the foreign language teacher is shared amongst the high school, middle school, elementary school and two parochial schools located in town. The main characteristic of the Garrettsville teaching staff is that they are versatile and that being a good teacher at Garrettsville requires one to be versatile.

Oakdale

Oakdale's teachers are from near and around Oakdale. The average distance from the faculty members home district to Oakdale is only 42.3 miles and only six of the 17 staff members interviewed went to school further than 20 miles away from the local district. This is of note because Oakdale has three faculty members that went to school more than 100 miles away, including one that went to school over 200 miles away. What this means for the data is that many of the teachers at Oakdale went to schools in and around Oakdale before working at Oakdale high school.

Some of this is reflected in where faculty members who work at Oakdale high school choose to live. The average faculty member working in Oakdale High School lives less than six miles away from the school district. The faculty member living the farthest away from the high school lives less than

twenty miles away from the school. The relative proximity of these faculty members' residencies highlights the multitude of schooling and housing options available to both students and faculty members. Working in Oakdale allowed many faculty members the opportunity to remain physically very close to an area they grew up in and still have a steady job nearby. In fact, three members of the faculty mentioned that they currently lived in the house that they grew up in.

All of the faculty members who were interviewed from Oakdale attended one of five teacher training institutions and the furthest distance away any of them are is less than 70 miles. This puts Oakdale in a position to have multiple pathways into teaching at the school. Three of the faculty members interviewed stated that they student taught in the district prior to being hired in their first year as a teacher. At least three of the teachers that work at Oakdale started out as long-term substitutes filling in for a position that either wasn't filled or that opened up mid-year as the beginning of their careers at Oakdale. These opportunities allow teachers to understand what being a part of the high school entails before they get officially hired as a certified teacher. While I have no data on how many people get hired in this capacity and then do not continue on as teachers, these two opportunities also allow for the teachers to be screened prior to becoming members of the school district.

Based on the faculty members I interviewed, it appears that many faculty members in Oakdale work most of their careers at Oakdale. Only one faculty member has worked less than 70% of his educational career at Oakdale and this teacher spent nine years teaching in another country. All of his domestic teaching experience is at Oakdale. This helps to illustrate that much of the interviewed staff is made up of faculty that enjoy being a part of the school district and have intentions of remaining at their jobs.

Connection to Community

Oakdale is a place where there are both strong community and strong society ties. Six of the interviewed faculty members were from the local district and seven have chosen to live in the Oakdale school district. One of the things that make the data on Oakdale incomplete is that because so many

people were from and around the district, I did not ask all of the staff how much they felt like their district was similar to or different from the community in which they worked. I am unable to say with any confidence how many people felt as though the community they grew up in was similar or different to Oakdale because of incomplete data. Of particular interest is that close to one-third of all faculty members in Oakdale went to school there, and with having only three faculty members going to school a long distance from Oakdale, all faculty members were aware of the reputation of Oakdale and how they themselves perceived it if they attended districts in the relative proximity of Oakdale.

Oakdale also has a large portion of its staff that have strong and medium societal ties to the district. This means that these faculty members have a connection to the district that goes beyond just being employed by the district. The fact that so many faculty members have worked all of their careers at the school should not go unnoted and may mean that there is a sense of loyalty to the district.

Table 5: Ties in Oakdale

Tie strength	Community	Society
Strong	6	3
Medium	7	12
Weak	Incomplete	17

Oakdale is the district that had the highest percentage of people saying that they felt as though they were a part of the local community with 16 out of the 17 participants agreeing that they were a part of Oakdale. These faculty members leaned very heavily on the distinction that just teaching in the school district automatically makes someone a part of the community. This particular distinction stands out because it was the primary way that school actors felt a part of the community. Despite the largest number of people having attended the local district, only two faculty members mentioned that they were a

member of the community because they were born in the district. No staff mentioned that they were considered a part of the local community because of things that they did outside of the workday at the school. In other words, attending functions that were put on by the community and the school were not considered by any of the interviewed faculty to be a major contributing factor to whether or not someone was considered to be a part of the local community. In addition, running clubs or sports teams also did not necessarily make one a part of the local community.

Teaching Responsibilities

Oakdale's teachers rarely teach across more than one content area and many of them only teach a couple of different subject areas within a content area. In fact, of the 14 teachers interviewed, only three teach across multiple content areas. One of those teachers teaches an elective class, one teaches both math and English, and the third teaches mostly foreign language classes with one English class mixed in. From conversations with the interviewed staff members and the faculty directory, this pattern appeared to be representative of the teacher workforce as a whole. These content assignments are in place despite the fact that the district operates on a trimester based schedule, which creates more classes for individual teachers to teach over the course of the year than it would if they were on a semester based schedule. Several Oakdale teachers mentioned that they were certified to teach subjects that they were not asked to teach.

Wheaton

In Wheaton, the average distance from the school district the staff members work in, to the school district they attended high school was 66 miles, and this average is reflective of both the range of distances and also the median distance. Only five of the thirteen individuals included in the study went to school closer than 40 miles away from Wheaton. The median distance for a faculty member was 43.4 miles and three faculty members were from further than 100 miles away.

Wheaton's staff also chose to live at various distances from the school district. Wheaton's staff live on average, 15.7 miles away from the school and four of the staff live further than 25 miles away

from the school. Two of the teachers in the study wanted to only work at Wheaton. One of those teachers is from the local community and waited for her opportunity to take over the job of her favorite high school teacher. The other teacher who wanted to work at Wheaton married someone who was from Wheaton and spent two years substituting within the district until the opportunity arose for her to work at the school.

The staff members in Wheaton overwhelmingly considered the local community and school district to be similar to their hometown. In fact, only one member of the interviewed staff saw their hometown as being different than the community in which they worked during the study. This teacher was from the city center of a metropolitan area that was highly industrialized and saw it as very different from the local, rural context.

The proximity of Wheaton to three teacher training institutions allows them to utilize a specific pathway into the district. This is perhaps part of the reason why the school has so many teachers who grew up so far away from the local school district. Nine of the 13 staff members at Wheaton graduated from one of two local institutions. Four of the ten teachers that I interviewed student taught in the district the year prior to their first full year of teaching and one of those teachers subbed in the district part time for two years prior to being fully employed.

The average years of working at Wheaton was 11.5 and the average years of working in education for Wheaton faculty was 14.33 years. These indicate that there is not much transiency involved in the teaching staff at Wheaton. In addition, of the ten teachers I interviewed for the study, six of them have only taught in the district and none of them have taught fewer than fifty percent of their teaching careers in the school. This illustrates that once teachers come to the district they tend to stay and indicates that many of the teachers likely have a commitment to the district that goes above and beyond just working at the school.

The teaching staff at Wheaton appear to have been hired in several clusters over the years. Three teachers have between 20-25 years of experience within the district. Two teachers have around 15 years in the district and three teachers have between six and eight years in the district. These hiring trends

indicate the fluctuating enrollments of the district. The second least tenured teacher on staff in the study had been teaching for six years in the district.

Connection to Community

Wheaton's faculty's major ties to the community were in relationship to how similar the school actors felt their hometown was to the community of Wheaton. While all faculty tended to mention some differences, the discussion of similarities focused on the understanding that Wheaton was just like any other town of its size with a school its size. These towns happen to be perceived to be very similar to the towns that most people who worked in Wheaton grew up in. Of the people that live within the Wheaton school district boundaries, three of them are either from Wheaton or married someone from Wheaton. This means that only three of the teachers who live in the district choose to live there with little other attachment to the district.

Wheaton also has many staff members who have strong societal ties to the district as well. Again, many of the teachers in the district began teaching in the district and have taught their entire careers there. Four of the teachers began their entry into the profession by student teaching within the district and then stayed on afterwards to fill a teaching vacancy. In addition, the guidance counselor also has only worked within the district. This makes Wheaton a place where the main connections of strength are in regard to the societal connections to the school district.

Table 6: Ties in Wheaton

Tie strength	**Community**	**Society**
Strong	1	4
Medium	6	7
Weak	12	13

One of the things that Wheaton faculty championed as being important in order to being considered a part of the community was whether or not someone went to the sporting events at the school. Because there are not clear boundaries between the town and school district, people who didn't attend sporting events were considered less a part of the community. Faculty also mentioned whether individuals shopped at the butcher that was located in town as an indicator of someone being a part of the local community. This is one of two local establishments that have persisted in town for the last several decades. A few of the faculty members specifically stated that shopping at that store made them a part of the local community. A couple of other teachers mentioned the store in passing when saying that they considered themselves a part of the community even though they didn't shop at the local butcher.

Teaching Responsibilities

Individual teachers in Wheaton are asked to teach a diverse array of courses. Half of the teaching staff (7) at the high school teach in only one content area while half teach at least two (this includes the teachers that were not interviewed). Only the Spanish teacher consistently teaches classes across multiple content areas. This is perhaps unsurprising as she is certified to teach math, business, Spanish, and English and her teaching assignments outside of Spanish are often dictated by other holes in the schedule. Because of the small nature of graduating classes, no teacher teaches just one subject, but four teach a limited number of preps in their preferred content area. This group of teachers includes the two primary math teachers, one of the English teachers, and the primary science teacher. What is worth noting with the staff at Wheaton is that with the exception of the foreign language teacher, the teachers who teach across more than one content area all do it in conjunction with an elective. This is in spite of the fact that most teachers at Wheaton are certified to teach multiple content areas.

Comparisons

When considering how to slice the data, it is interesting to note that the ways in which people talked about being a part of the community were different in rural and urban areas. In Oakdale, very few faculty members mentioned that they were a part of the community because they attended local events or worked activities for the school outside of their jobs, whereas these distinctions were very important for the members of Wheaton and Garrettsville staff. Another distinction important for Wheaton and Garrettsville is that being a part of the community entailed some idea of geographic proximity. While some members of Oakdale also felt this way, they were few and far between. This implies that the things that make up membership in the local communities and ideas about community are different based on their rurality.

Both Garrettsville and Oakdale look similar in terms of the proximity of the faculty members to the local communities the faculty member is from. Even though the average differences from their home communities are different for the two staffs, the limited number of schooling options and general isolation for Garrettsville's school has their faculty living further away than those of Oakdale. Many faculty members live in the communities that they grew up in and work at both districts, or have chosen to live in the local school district. In this way, the schools act as conduits to tie individuals interested in being able to stay near places they want to be a part of and work nearby.

Oakdale and Wheaton are similar in terms of the societal ties to the district. Both districts have faculty that are trained at nearby teacher training institutions and are able to have access to teachers who student teach within their district in order to glean potential future faculty members. While Wheaton's faculty members often teach in more than one content area, many members of Wheaton high school are eligible to teach subjects that they are not asked to teach, similarly to Oakdale.

Faculty with Strong Community Ties

One of the features of the rural schools in particular is that the faculty with the strongest community ties also hold leadership positions within the school. This puts them in a position to serve on

multiple committees, teach advanced classes, and help organize the curriculum. These roles are taken up by the faculty in question because they have a strong affinity for the school and the opportunities that it provides students. Two of the teachers in Garrettsville in particular see this as an essential part of their role at the school. This puts these faculty members in a rather unique position as people who graduated from the district and are interested in helping shape its future direction. Interestingly, three of the four teachers in this position in the rural schools teach primarily advanced classes.

CHAPTER 4: Enrollment Decline

Enrollment decline is a feature of all sites within the study. According to a review of the literature, most of the studies done on enrollment decline tend to focus on individual cases that focus on how enrollment decline impacts individual districts (Zerchykov, 1981). This chapter begins by describing enrollment decline in individual cases, but also attempts to explain how enrollment decline has affected the sites as a whole.

Impact of Enrollment Decline

A common theme that emerged from the districts in the study about declining enrollments was that it led to the district having less money and the possibility of positions being cut. These were not always linked directly, but were both mentioned as possible outcomes of having fewer students. Staff might say that losing students would invoke one, or both outcomes. Subsequently, the fear of losing students was seen through the lens of potential cuts to positions, or to potential elimination of programs by all three sites in the study. How these pressures manifested themselves was different in each site.

Garrettsville

Steep enrollment decline has been a reality in Garrettsville for the past twenty years. According to two of the teachers, when the district began to forecast a significant downturn in their enrollment, the superintendent at the time went to two staff members (the art teacher and the band teacher) who had both the teaching assignments and the credentials that would make them part time if the numbers continued downward. He presented them both the information about district enrollment trends and what would happen to their positions if current trends continued. The way it was presented to both teachers was that the school district could not justify paying an art teacher and a band teacher full-time, without having a specific number of students. While it is unclear whether these two teachers are the only two that were told this information, both of the teachers recounted the same story. This discussion allowed the two staff

members the chance to return to college to get another degree rather than becoming part-time, shared, or unemployed staff. Both of these teachers chose to get a second degree in English, although, according to both, the superintendent did not specify what subject a potential degree needed to be in, but only that if they did not get an additional one, the school district would not be able to support a full time position for either one of them. For both of the teachers, this was a difficult position to be put in.

Mr. Madden, the band teacher at Garrettsville, is the staff member in the district who grew up second farthest from the district. His mom was a teacher and he went to school to be a band teacher. Despite being from a large metropolitan area, Mr. Madden both went to college in a rural area, and then took a job in a smaller rural area. He has worked at Garrettsville his entire career and feels very strongly connected to the district. Mr. Madden chose to live in town because the amount of time that he has to spend in school after hours is quite high by the nature of being the band director. Later in his teaching career, Mr. Madden also married someone from the local community and their son now attends the district. When the previous superintendent came to Mr. Madden to inquire about him to expand his teaching credentials, he was not concerned about it. As he put it, "I was told the year before I started my English minor classes...you'll be the last full time band director this district will ever hire. And my thought was, what do I care? Hire somebody part time after I'm gone, I don't care," (Interview April, 2014). He later articulated that he didn't understand the urgency of the message and the time frame under which this would happen, but was glad that he went back to get his minor. He was given the opportunity to pursue a couple of different options, but he preferred to expand his credentials in English because that was something he was more interested in teaching.

Mrs. Fletcher on the other hand had already had experience with enrollment decline in a previous district. She began her teaching career in a nearby district as a long-term substitute. The year before she arrived there the district had laid off the art teacher and never called the art teacher back to work. While Mrs. Fletcher was subbing she tried to convince the district to begin the art program again and once they agreed to, they hired her part time to run it. Her role there expanded to half time, but when a job opened up at Garrettsville she interviewed because the position was full time equivalent between Garrettsville and

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a different neighboring district. After she accepted the position she spilt her time between the two districts up until they both started to have enrollment issues. The other district, Waterloo, had a much more difficult time with population loss than Garrettsville did. As her job became less stable because Waterloo dramatically cut back the art classes it had available for students, Mrs. Fletcher began taking the credits to ensure her employability at Garrettsville as an art and English teacher. Mrs. Fletcher is from a district that borders Garrettsville and lives within a district that borders Garrettsville.

The decision to approach staff about getting more credentials preserved the positions of the faculty and allowed the school district to maximize the number of full time teachers relative to their full-time equivalency positions (FTE), or the number of classes taught at the school divided by what one full-time teachers' schedule would be.

While accepting that one will have to teach multiple preparations at Garrettsville is a built in feature of the position, not everyone is impacted in the same way by enrollment decline at the school. The way in which enrollment decline impacts teaching positions within the district is perhaps best illustrated by the most extreme case. A teacher at Garrettsville teaches multiple math and science courses and in order to make his course loads more bearable, the school has adopted a couple of innovative models. The first is that the teacher has recorded himself doing videos for two of his classes so that he can flip his classroom. In doing so, the students come into his class with questions about the introduction to new material, which they were tasked with watching the night before as homework. He is clear that teaching four different preparations would be impossible without the benefit of the flipped class because it would entail so much preparation throughout the year. This way he can prepare for these courses over the summer and go ahead and do the bulk of the work by recording himself doing the content part of the lesson. In addition, they also have given him a hybrid class that is partially online and has him responsible for 60 students at a time. In this position, he only meets with students a couple of times a week in the school and they also do work outside of school. When asked about the process he said that he accepted long ago that he will have four to five preps as long as he is working there.

Enrollment decline at Garrettsville was also thought to be a major culprit of shifts in class sizes. This had both to do with the number of students needed to justify a course and the number of students in courses. In the past ten years the district has removed AP classes because they could not support a small number of students in a class. One teacher mentioned that unless they are trying to provide course options, they do not have classes enrolling under 15 students. Also, many teachers talked about how the class sizes had gone up recently as the school tried to squeeze the most out of the money it received. Finally, enrollment decline was considered the main reason jobs at the school that were non-core academic positions were eliminated or greatly reduced. Both the band director and the art teacher discussed how the enrollment decline limited the programs that they were able to offer at the school relative to what was being offered when the district had many more students.

Oakdale

Oakdale High School has a long legacy of enrollment decline. As recently as the early 1970s, the district had two high schools and both of them were roughly the same size that the single high school in the district is now. This came up frequently when talking to staff, specifically staff who either attended the district during the time of consolidation, or staff who worked at the district during the consolidation. When talking about how enrollment decline impacted the district and if having fewer students over time was a concern, faculty often mentioned that the district used to be much bigger and the realities of a shrinking district were a part of the context for working in Oakdale that was important to understand. More recently, the district had to eliminate some positions and it is something that directly impacted the guidance counselor in the sample as he saw his teaching position eliminated because of district policy. He described how cutting positions worked at the district. First the district removes the positions that are no longer needed in the staff based on enrollment projections and seniority. Second, anyone who has enough seniority can bump anyone else out of a position so long as his or her certification matches. What this means is that no one on the lower end of hiring timeline has a safe position, unless they have a unique certification. In addition, the three most recently hired faculty members that are in the sample are also the

three with the most diverse certifications that I talked to. While other faculty were able to teach different core areas, these faculty members were specifically hired to teach across multiple content areas. A lingering reality of the district is that working at it requires one to understand that their job can be eliminated over the year, or just for part of the year, if there is enough of a drop in enrollment.

While a major feature of the other two schools, one of the ways in which enrollment decline was linked differently in Oakdale was that only two staff or faculty members mentioned that a program was cut by the school as a result of declining enrollments in the school. The major way in which faculty were concerned about the potential impact of a drop in students is that the district would have much less money over time. Many of the teachers were aware that the district was losing roughly 100 students a year and that this was something that would potentially harm the district through cuts to jobs. Only one faculty member focused on talking about the elimination of positions and she also happens to be the department chair of the largest department in the school. Her concern was with having fewer teachers in that department if the school continued to shrink.

Oakdale has something that the other two schools do not and that is a person whose position is entirely dependent on outside funding. This individual's salary is determined by grants and makes her much less connected to the school and some of the issues surrounding declining enrollments. She identifies that the concern with fewer students is financial, but does not connect it directly to the school. Rather, she discussed how the problem was about less money in the area and how it contributed to a trickle out of people that would only grow over time.

Wheaton

During data collection, Wheaton's school board went through the process of voting to eliminate positions for the upcoming school year. One of the things that came up in conversations with the staff, and at times quite awkwardly, was the fear that it would be their position that would be removed. All three of the newest hires interviewed were potentially up for losing their jobs, but it was not solely on the basis of seniority. One of the English teachers mentioned that because of the changes to the teacher

evaluation policies, it would be an elimination of the person who was most expendable in terms of fit. In other words, things like who can teach what would be also taken into consideration. This did not diminish the concerns of the faculty in question. The guidance counselor began our first interview by letting me know that her position was safe. At the time, I did not have the context for why this was important information, but from our interviews it was clear that she figured after the initial announcement was made that the district might be cutting staff members that she would lose her job. She was the last person hired and her position overlapped with the middle school guidance counselor as well. The newest math teacher had similar fears about his job, "just as a staff member you think fewer students, fewer teachers. I mean personally I would think that my job could be in, (pause) you know, losing it," (Interview March, 2014). Finally, the most recently hired science teacher was in a similar position, but it was especially trying for her because not only did she teach only a couple of core science courses, she also mainly taught courses that could be considered electives if strictly following the Michigan Merit Curriculum. Wheaton faculty also mentioned that there were cutbacks that had to happen to programs as well. Much like Garrettsville, Wheaton had already begun to scale back many of their electives in trying to meet the crunch of losing money.

What makes the enrollment decline particularly interesting for Wheaton is that they are not undergoing population loss in the community more broadly like the other two sites. This puts them in a situation where there are roughly the same tax base over the time period in question and in a policy environment where funding was not centralized at the state level, they would be in a position to make choices about the budget that may include raising taxes to potentially keep their staff intact. The level and duration of enrollment decline and the policies in the state, however, put the school at mercy of the school's decline in students and put the school in the position of considering cutting positions during the time of data collection. This consideration was taking place, in spite of the willingness of the community to further support the school by raising taxes.

<center>**Perception of Enrollment Decline**</center>

How the staff at any district within the study interprets the enrollment decline appears to depend on the relative positions of neighboring districts. In all cases, the districts next to districts in the study were undergoing enrollment decline, however, how neighboring districts were perceived to be doing had a large impact on how the staff made sense of enrollment decline.

Garrettsville

Most of the K-12 districts neighboring Garrettsville were undergoing enrollment decline over the last twenty years at roughly the same rate as Garrettsville. Two districts worth noting here are Waterloo and Mission. Waterloo's district is smaller than Garrettsville both in terms of the number of teachers and students that it has. Unlike Garrettsville, Waterloo does not benefit from a factory in town. Waterloo has actually struggled so much with enrollment decline that it often shared teachers with other districts in the county, as it shared Mrs. Fletcher. During the time the study was conducted Waterloo was struggling financially and during the time of data collection at Garrettsville, it was announced that Waterloo would officially close its doors after one more school year. This mattered in two ways to the staff at Garrettsville when it was mentioned. First, the staff was hopeful to pick up some students from Waterloo's student body. At no other time, did staff talk directly about competition for other district's students, but this appeared to be a way in which Garrettsville could potentially grow its enrollment. Second, the staff saw themselves in a relative position of strength to Waterloo, as in, because they did not have to lay off teachers that year, they were in good shape.

Mission as a town is very similar to Garrettsville. Mission district also was also struggling during the same time period. During the time of the study, they were holding school board meetings to discuss the budget deficit the district faced for the upcoming school year. At the time of data collection, it was unclear how exactly the district planned on dealing with the proposed deficit, but it did seem clear that the perception of Garrettsville's staff who mentioned the district was that it would require the Mission district to eliminate some staff. One of the teachers pointed out that the neighboring district had roughly the same

<center>66</center>

number of students, but had more staff than Garrettsville had. These two cases led to an understanding in Garrettsville that things were not necessarily as bad as they could be.

Oakdale

The district that is often brought up by Oakdale staff is Oakdale parochial school (OPS). This school is a chief athletic rival of Oakdale and Oakdale often loses students to OPS for athletic purposes. Over the last few decades OPS has seen its numbers drop dramatically and while there is not publicly available data to reflect the shrinking of the district, one of the staff who went to Oakdale as a student put the drop in students OPS at 75% from the late 1980s. Whether this is accurate or not is mildly irrelevant, because its purpose is illustrative. It showcases that the loss of students is seen by the staff as being something that is not just a problem of the local district, but that neighboring districts are undergoing as well, and in comparison to other districts, this district also sees itself as fairly well off.

A factor that helped explain enrollment decline in Oakdale, but was absent elsewhere, was school competition. Part of the reason why people perceived Oakdale to struggle with losing students had to do with a bevy of schooling options available nearby. At the time of the study, the local community college had partnered with the ISD to create a magnet school set to open in the upcoming year. Since Oakdale offers an expansive curriculum and the new school was trying to brand itself as an accelerated pathway to college, one of the concerns was the immediate threat of losing students to this institution. This concern was not however just limited to this school, the theme permeated into how the staff at the school talked about their own school as having strengths relative to other schools in the area.

Another aspect of the position of the district was what Oakdale was able to offer Oakdale students that other districts in the area simply did not have. One of the major things that staff at Oakdale said they had was diversity. In all but one of the nearby districts, the racial composition of the district is very homogenous. Oakdale on the other hand, had various different racial groups in their school and while one of the racial groups was bigger than the rest, the student body was considered by the staff to be very heterogeneous, especially compared to other districts in the area. The school also had many more

programs and courses that it offered compared to neighboring districts. Many of the staff felt that this put Oakdale at a position of strength compared to the other districts in the area because the students at Oakdale had access to academic courses not available elsewhere. In fact, the school often accepted students from neighboring districts for part of the day so that they could take advantage of the extra programs and courses offered by Oakdale.

Wheaton

All of the districts that surround Wheaton are experiencing enrollment decline and all of them are experiencing the same type of percentage drop in students that Wheaton is. This factor seems to influence the people in Wheaton to think enrollment decline is a concern, but they see it as something that is commonplace. The worry in Wheaton is less about enrollment decline and how it generally impacts Wheaton, but rather is about school district consolidation. Unlike in Garrettsville or Oakdale, this is a concern voiced by some of the staff. The state of Michigan has provided consolidation incentives for districts in the past, and two calendar years before the study was completed; there was a push to consolidate services at the county level. Also, there are places in Michigan that have not been able to escape consolidation in the past, but Wheaton does not exist in one of these places. Further complicating matters are that two of the districts that border Wheaton are roughly the same size and the schools of these three districts are less than 10 miles apart. In other words, if there is a place whose circumstances are set up for consolidation, Wheaton is the place. Furthermore, given that Wheaton is the district in the middle of the three, it would only make sense that it would be a part of any consolidation effort. The main focus of this problem by the faculty in Wheaton is not what it might do the town but rather that it makes their jobs expendable. The guidance counselor at Wheaton talked at length about consolidation, and was in favor of it because it would give the students more opportunities to do things like: take better classes, take different classes, and compete in sports. Like a few other faculty members, she was clear though that this would more or less end the existence of the town as it is currently known. While faculty members

talked about the link between the town and the community, their primary focus was on their own employment.

Much like Garrettsville, Wheaton's struggles around enrollment decline are buoyed by the perception of another neighboring district. Many staff looked at this district as a bellwether of sorts and believed that if this district can hold on through enrollment losses that they can as well. In reference to consolidation, Mrs. Benson articulated, "Well, that conversation happens around here occasionally, you know. 'Is there going to come a time when there's a need for us to join with a neighboring school?' And then we look at [Brookings], who has held on for years and years, and if they can make it, maybe we can too" (Interview February 2014). What makes this case particularly interesting is that the concern isn't necessarily directly related to the loss of jobs in the district, but rather, if the district will get too small to function on its own. Brookings school district is about two-thirds the size of Wheaton, but is not undergoing enrollment decline at the same pace, and at the time of the study was not in danger of being financially insolvent. Because consolidation is about both of these conditions, and usually more about financial insolvency than school size, the comparison to Brookings underscores how the positioning of the other districts is important for the staff to situate what is going on in Wheaton.

Ties to Community and Society

In the data there were not any strong relationships between how the faculty talked about enrollment decline and their ties to community with one exception. In all of the cases, the staff members least concerned about enrollment decline have the strongest ties to the community. While some of the other staff also do not appear to be concerned about the enrollment decline; the faculty most okay with it were the ones who grew up experiencing the drop. This could be for any number of reasons and determining why is in some ways beyond the scope of this study. There are at least two reasons, however, that make sense in explaining this relationship. First, these people have often spent the most time in the area in question. Whether they are explicitly aware of the decline in their communities as children or not, they have been surrounded by decline for most of their lives and it is a natural state of the community for

them. Second, they are the ones who will not lose the connection to the local context, even under the circumstance where they lose their job. The connection was strong enough to have them return to work in the area and likely will not be severed even if they work elsewhere.

How the perception of enrollment decline is shaped by ties to society is that the faculty that have strong societal ties are acutely aware of the pressures being exerted by the loss of students. While all faculty seem to be cognizant of what losing students could do to their jobs, the faculty most aware of this have strong societal ties. What is also clear is that enrollment decline itself impacts the ties that faculty members have to community and society and the role they play in understanding polices. Declining enrollments can put pressures on the staff that emphasize the societal connections that staff have. The main way that enrollment decline impacts people is that it places them in a position of societal stress because if one loses their job, they no longer have employment, and not only, no longer have societal ties to the school, but also their entire relationship with society is jeopardized because they no longer have a job. For example, when asked specifically about the role that losing students has, a faculty member with strong societal ties and medium community ties directly states that it could cost him his job. It does not however impact, or appear to impact, how the staff thinks about community and their ties to it. In other words, staff do not say that if enrollment decline continues that they are worried about their inability to continue to be members of the community, but rather, that they are concerned with the stability of their job and other people's jobs. This often means that even the people who have ties to the local community because they choose to live there, or have married into a family where their spouse had graduated from the local community, are more concerned about their jobs than potentially losing connection to the local context.

Synopsis

While it is relatively clear that enrollment decline does not impact every school in the same capacity, it does have a strong impact on the staff of the school. Given the nature of the funding formula in Michigan, the decline likely puts pressures on the staff in these schools that are mostly absent in

schools that have the luxury of adding students. This pressure adds to the idea that the school is something that belongs to the state and is increasingly divorced from the local context in which it is situated. Enrollment decline in this policy environment disrupts local connections and ties to the school that are important. For example, Wheaton has the local capital, and will, to raise taxes to maintain the positions of the faculty at the school and is unable to make the changes necessary in order to do so because of state policy. Instead they are left trying to solve the problem indirectly by hoping to attract more students through a technology initiative. While both Garrettsville and Oakdale are undergoing enrollment decline and population loss in their communities and school districts respectively, the support that the community is able to provide the school in each is somewhat limited.

When it comes to the issue of enrollment decline and how it impacts schools and school districts, Oakdale holds at least two perceived advantages over the other districts in the study: 1) it is the biggest district in the area it is located in by far and 2) it has the lowest rate of enrollment decline over the period in question. Both of these factors make the pressure that enrollment decline has placed on the district different. The biggest way in which this showcases itself is through the notion that Oakdale is not as concerned about the loss of programs, and having to teach more content areas is not something that anyone from Oakdale mentions. Both of these factors are prominent in how the other two sites think about and handle enrollment decline. While being larger and undergoing enrollment decline at a slower pace are in theory advantages, the schooling options that are nearby make projecting enrollments, and the number of teaching positions needed at Oakdale, more challenging than it is at the other two schools because neither Garrettsville nor Wheaton has much variability in their enrollment projections from one year to the next due to limited schooling options. In fact, in the case of Wheaton, there was little conversation about enrollment variability. In the case of Garrettsville, who has a school district that borders them closing, there is not an expectation that there will be a large uptick in the number of students they have for the upcoming school year. These situations showcase how the schools have relatively stable projections. When coupled with small school size, stable projections make decisions like cutting staff something that occurs every once in awhile and not something that staff need to be concerned about every

single year, even under dramatic enrollment decline forecasts. Administrators at Oakdale on the other hand, do talk about laying off teachers as something that happens from year to year. In this way, cutting staff is an occurrence in Garrettsville and Wheaton, but it is a feature of Oakdale.

CHAPTER 5: Garrettsville

Michigan Merit Curriculum

The staff members make sense of the policy differently depending on what their role is at the school. For example, the administration is focused on aspects of the curriculum that the majority of teachers are not because they are drawn to aspects of the policy that directly affect their role at the school. A part of how the teachers make sense of the policy is that they see it for what it does to their daily lives, but see little application to other parts of how it may impact the school. In addition, people who do not have curriculum directly defined by the policy still see how the policy impacts their scheduling, teaching assignments, or courses they are assigned to teach.

Administration

The principal at Garrettsville does not believe the Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC) to be useful for his staff and the school. He sees it as something that impedes his ability to provide a diverse array of classes that might be of interest to all of his students, and not just the academically successful ones. This is something that a few of the teachers mention being brought up at staff meetings by the principal. The only other faculty members who discussed this specifically were the teachers who had split roles at the school.

According to the principal, the MMC also hinders the ability of the school and the district to hire faculty who are not qualified in everything that they will be asked to teach. For example, a few years prior to data collection, the district posted a job that was seeking a teacher highly qualified in two science subjects and one math subject. This position, ended up being filled through hiring and someone else picking up part of the position, but the principal said that they had trouble finding applicants. For the most recent hire, the foreign language position, the search produced two qualified applicants. This was in part due to the fact that in order to meet the changing foreign language requirement, they were looking for

someone who was able to teach foreign languages K-12. This decision was necessary for two reasons: 1) having everyone take a foreign language course was not a feature of the district until very recently and 2) in order to make sure that every student would receive two years of a foreign language, they would need to catch up everyone currently in the high school and also begin having students take foreign language classes in elementary school so as to avoid the same type of logjam of students trying to get in these credits further down the road.

Given the size of the school and the enrollment decline the school has undergone, the perception is that the MMC has forced the district and school into decisions that they would otherwise not consider. This problem is perhaps best displayed by the teaching load of the Spanish teacher in the district. In order to meet the needs of the district in relationship to the policy, the Spanish teacher teaches classes to both of the parochial schools in town three days a week. Due to the fact that the schools in question only go until eighth grade and there is no other brick and mortar option for students to attend in the community, the students in those schools need to have similar access to foreign language classes as the students at Garrettsville because if they don't, all of these students will need to get caught up when they get to the high school. For the classes she teaches that contain high school students, it is relatively common for her to have students who are taking both Spanish I and Spanish II in the same classroom. She also will have students in different elementary grades in the class at the same time. Both of these are done to ensure that all students receive the credits they need before graduating. When talking to the principal about the load put on the Spanish teacher he said, "That goes to show you the disconnect in the Michigan Merit Curriculum as a policy and the reality of implementation for a small school," (Interview April 2014). He sees the merit curriculum's emphasis of two years of a foreign language as being the root cause of this problem. This is exacerbated by his assertion that without the policy in place that many students wouldn't take any foreign language classes.

A larger problem that these graduation requirements have in relationship with enrollment decline is that they have caused this school to limit the options of courses that students can take. This is especially true of elective courses where student's options are limited. In fact, one of the electives that the students

have access to is a version of study hall that almost all students take in order to fill elective requirements. In this course, the teachers each run a section that allows students to go to the faculty members that teach math and English courses to get extra help on the academic work in those classes. This is something that is initiated both to provide academic support and because there are very few other electives that can be offered to students outside of the core subjects based on the certifications of teachers.

Electives are further limited at the school and for students who might be interested in what is traditionally thought of as vocational education, they do not have the option to take them unless they are relatively successful academically. The vocational courses that are offered by the district are at the countywide career center. Students have to travel more than 30 minutes away, and if one wants to take these courses they have to forfeit one elective a semester for each semester they decide to enroll in these courses for a maximum of two years. This presents some limitations for students who are not academically successful and may not have the credits to lose if they need to take a course over again.

Teachers

There was a split amongst the teaching staff that determined how they felt impacted by the MMC based on what courses were taught. For the teachers who only taught core subject area classes, they talked about the impact that the merit curriculum had on them as being mainly shaped by the High School Content Expectations that came with the MMC. Many teachers discussed that because it was the content that they taught with, that it was hard to say that it didn't impact them. This impact was limited to helping the teachers identify what to teach and what the tests that they would be given were aligned to.

The other group of teachers all taught a core subject area and a non-core area. These teachers saw the MMC more from a programmatic and scheduling perspective. The teacher who teaches both social studies and special education talked about how scheduling classes for students that needed special education services had become more difficult for staff as a result of the MMC. The two teachers who went back to school to get a degree in English both saw the MMC as something that impacted them programmatically. The art teacher commented on how the merit curriculum pushed more kids into taking

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an art class because of the fine art credit and limited elective options, but also excluded students from

being able to take multiple art classes because of the firm guidelines about the courses that needed to be

taken and some of the ways in which the policy is carried out. For example, the students in the district

attending the countywide career center do not have many spare credits as a result of the curriculum and

depending on the course they take at the career center, they can earn fine art credit without enrolling in art

courses. This potentially keeps a specific segment of the students out of things like art and band. The

band director talked about how the MMC really shaped how he taught but also about how it moves his

position around a lot. Because he only teaches one English class in any given year, the band director can

see a lot of fluctuation between assignments and his schedule. Also, he discussed how the limited number

of curriculum options makes getting kids into band more complicated.

Finally, the Spanish teacher, discussed how the merit curriculum was impacting her program. She

talked about the teaching assignment at length, specifically about how even though the district had been

offering Spanish prior to her arrival, it didn't count toward the requirements related to the MMC because

it wasn't necessarily tracked properly.

Connection to College

All but two faculty members interviewed thought that there was a direct connection between the

Michigan Merit Curriculum and college-preparation. The principal identified that the components of the

curriculum, specifically the addition of Algebra II and two years of a foreign language were set up

specifically to prepare more students to go to college. Several faculty members mentioned these two

features of the MMC as well. The case was made by multiple people however that these changes were

made specifically to increase the number of students who went to four-year institutions, and not the

number of students who attended other types of post-secondary training options. These changes were seen

as not being in the benefit of all of the students and many faculty specifically mentioned how these

changes were difficult to implement precisely because not all students in the school would be attending

four-year institutions. The MMC was seen as having a strong relation to college, but it was not seen as

being a good relationship for the students because it emphasized a one-size fits all education that was focused on only one target.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

While the principal discussed the impact the standards had on the school as a whole, he limited it more to the training(s) that people had to attend to keep themselves up on the standards. The perceived impact of the CCSS in Garrettsville was dependent on what subject you teach and specifically if a teacher taught English. All of the English teachers talked about how the change to the common core state standards led them to change what and how they taught content. Two of the English teachers in particular were quite disgruntled over the change because they saw the newer standards as being confusing, partially because they were new and partially because they required them to change the content that they designed what they called their "curriculum calendars" around. One of the other English teachers was adamant that the common core allowed her much more room to be creative about what she taught the kids. She saw it as really opening up the options she had for her instruction and the content she could include.

In addition to the English teachers, the common core standards were also seen by two other teachers as impacting their teaching: a social studies and a science teacher. The rationale for the social studies teacher was that it impacted how the faculty in general planned because they were required to spend so much time of their curriculum calendars and that rolling out the common core allowed him time to think about how to implement aspects of it into his classroom. The science teacher similarly saw the push of the common core to include more technical writing as a vital part of her science curriculum.

Several teachers however did not feel like the common core impacted their teaching at all. There were varying reasons why these teachers felt this way. Interestingly, the two teachers who felt the strongest about this were the math teachers. One of the math teachers teaches many different math courses, but she doesn't see any change between the CCSS and MMC. The other math teacher teaches both math and science, but specifically teaches only upper level math classes and as he said, quite frankly,

"I don't teach anything that is Common Core right now," (Interview, 2014). Subsequently, he doesn't see how it impacts him.

Another reason why teachers thought it didn't impact them was because they were waiting for the state to adopt other standards that tied to their subject area, or they abided by standards that lie outside of the CCSS and the MMC. Both the art teacher and the Spanish teacher mentioned that most of what they taught had nothing to do with the common core. They both mentioned other standards the state had adopted specifically for those subjects that they paid way more attention to than the CCSS. Furthermore at the time of data collection, the state was debating the possibility of adopting the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and the science teachers talked about how excited they were to potentially have these as guidelines. If passed, however, both were clear that the common core would have much less emphasis for them than these new content standards.

Connection to College

The staff at Garrettsville did not see the Common Core State Standards as being strongly related to college-going. All of the staff that said that they were related were deliberate in saying that the connection was the CCSS would make students more prepared to be successful in college. One of the teachers thought that this would occur because if students were successful with the curriculum, then they would have more skills to make them successful in college. Another faculty member thought the relationship between the CCSS and college was that it would allow all students to be on the same page regardless of where they went to school. The overarching understanding is that college will increase the preparation of students, but there was no talk that the common core would lead to more students going to college from the school.

<center>**Definition of College**</center>

There are two people who are more or less in charge of the non-circular policies related to college-going at Garrettsville: the principal and the English teacher, who is also a part time guidance

counselor. The guidance counselor/English teacher who is in charge of this has spent time building up an understanding amongst the Garrettsville faculty that college is defined as anything post high school. This definition was first implemented the year of the study in Garrettsville and prior to the most recent school year; Garrettsville had no unified definition within the school. This definition is something that was established as a part of a partnership with regional college access network and is consistent with the definition put forth by the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN). This definition led the majority of the staff to agree that as long as college is defined this way that all students should attend college because some type of post-secondary training is necessary for the majority of jobs in today's world.

School or District Policies/Actions Related to College-Going

The guidance counselor /English teacher at the school level has taken the initiative to enact various aspects of her regional college access network to help support this definition. She has taken the time to have all of the staff that work at the school put a poster outside of their room or office that informs the students at the school which college the faculty member attended and that it is something that the student should ask the faculty member more about. She also has worked with the teachers and the administration to have five minutes every Friday where the faculty members talk to their 1st period students about their college experiences. Once a month these five minutes are used to discuss a topic with the students that the guidance counselor provides them.

In addition to promoting where the staff went to school, the school also did several things to develop a culture centered on college-going. The school held a college application week where the counselor got every single senior to apply to at least one college. During which she gave them posters to put on their lockers that said where they applied. Garrettsville also had scheduled a school assembly for college decision day where every single senior announced what their plans were for the upcoming year in front of the rest of the school. During the assembly the teacher planned to do a college trivia game where she would give out free things from colleges based on students' correct answers.

Some of the changes made around this new definition involved slight rebranding. The counselor changed the name of the academic advising center to the "college connection". She also made a few changes to how the students interacted with college. First, she created a manual that she gave to every senior called a "Senior College Knowledge Manual" that had guidance for the seniors and she used it in class to talk to them about the aspects of applying to college. Second, they have a panel right before winter break where she invites students who have graduated and went to college to return to talk to seniors and juniors about those experiences. Third, she helped students fill out the FAFSA because she saw this as a barrier to students attending college. Fourth, she began exposing students to college earlier in their academic trajectories beginning in ninth grade.

Finally, the guidance counselor increased students' interaction with colleges. They had many visits to the campus by college recruiters who were there to talk about the colleges they worked at. This was also her first year trying to get students to visit college campuses. The goal moving forward was to get every single class to visit at least one college, but they fell short in her first year. In the year of the study she was able to only take the freshmen and the junior class to visit colleges and she took them to a private school that specializes in business and a regional public school that many of the students might be interested in attending, respectively. Her plans moving forward included keeping the same colleges in tact for the juniors and the freshmen and then adding a trip for the sophomores or the seniors. The goal here was to make sure that all kids in the school had an opportunity to see multiple college campuses.

Teachers

While many of the staff brought up the things that the counselor did to help along the process of students being more prepared for college, most of the teaching faculty see their tie in the college-going process quite limited. The main thing the faculty talked about was their executing of the guidance counselor's activities that she has laid out for them. A few of the faculty talked about how they help prepare students for college simply by teaching the courses that they are assigned to teach. In the case of some of the faculty, they teach multiple higher-level classes and see a direct connection. There was no

conversation amongst the staff that preparing students for college required a different type of teaching than not doing so.

Dual Enrollment

Dual enrollment is often seen as a way to increase college opportunities for students by allowing them to take college classes early. It is also policy of particular interest at Garrettsville because it highlights a tension that exists between the principal and the guidance counselor, but more largely between the pressure to offer more courses to kids to help them be prepared for college and the local prospects of doing so. At Garrettsville the part-time guidance counselor handles much of the advising when it comes to college and career training, but does not schedule classes for the students. She would like to see more students take advantage of dual-enrollment opportunities available to them. In particular, she is trying to break down the barrier that doing dual-enrollment requires students to physically attend the college in order to participate. She works with a local community college and teaches a class through it on the school's campus, but is also interested in expanding opportunities for students to take college-level classes through other channels. The principal however does not necessarily think that this is in the best interest of all of the students. He has some students who are interested in taking classes online that he would prefer don't because he is concerned about their ability to stay on top of the workload. This is complicated by the fact that the district allows the students to take dual enrollment classes for courses that the school district also offers. Doing so directly puts the interests of the school in conflict. The school pays most of the money that students would pay to take dual enrollment classes, but in this case the school is paying what amounts to extra money for the students to take a class that already costs them a set amount of money to take at the school district, but is rolled up in the school's yearly costs. This tension was not hostile between the two individuals, but their interests were wrapped up in the role that they served at the school.

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Career Readiness

One of the things that the counselor does is actively emphasize careers by both having the students do a career unit in their English classes and in her push to complicate her students' understandings of the local businesses in the area. She took all of her juniors and her non-college English seniors to tour the large plant in town and one a few towns over. Her goal in doing so was trying to get the students to see that even though they might identify the plant as something that has primarily manual laborers, that there are diverse opportunities to work at the plant from manual laborer all the way to engineer. This exposed students to the idea that many jobs, even those available locally, require some type of post-secondary training. When broadening the conversation to discuss whether or not it was helpful to prepare students for college and career readiness, the biggest issue that Garrettsville is presented with is that it is unable to enact the policy in the way that it has interpreted it. While there is no definition of what career and college-going means in the larger rhetoric, what is clear is the staff thinks career preparation is related to taking vocational classes and that it lies in direct contrast with preparation for a four-year institution. The school, due to multiple factors, (mainly enrollment decline coupled with the MMC) has shifted all of the vocational classes to the countywide career center. This has put the school in a position where it can only offer classes related to what the staff refers to as "trades" at a center that is a full thirty minutes away from the school. The staff feels as though that part of career preparation is something the school cannot offer.

CHAPTER 6: Oakdale

Michigan Merit Curriculum

In Oakdale, there was a lack of familiarity of what the merit curriculum did and the impact that it had on the statewide curriculum. This manifested itself in many ways, but perhaps the most prominent was that a few of the teachers didn't know what it was. It is of importance to note that three of the teachers in the sample did not actually ever interact with the merit curriculum outside of the graduation requirements and this is because all three of them joined the staff after the implementation of the common core and it is the only curriculum standards that they are familiar with. The merit curriculum is largely seen by the staff as a whole in Oakdale as being about the content standards affiliated with it. There was a firm partition between the understanding of the merit curriculum by the administration and the understanding by the rest of the staff. In particular, not one teacher discussed the aspect of the curriculum focused on graduation requirements for students, but all three administrators did. Only the college counselor mentioned that the merit curriculum restricted how she can work with kids because of the graduation requirements it establishes.

Several of the teachers argued that the MMC changed both what they taught and how they taught it. The meaning of this statement differed from person to person. Two of the teachers meant that it greatly restricted what they were able to teach. In the case of one of the math teachers he discussed how the need to get through the content that they knew would be on the ACT or the Michigan Merit Exam (MME) often led them to omit specific content from the curriculum that would not be on those exams. One of the science teachers lamented that it fundamentally changed what he taught because it split up his content area, biology, into several new components, each which had their very own set of standards. Other teachers mentioned that the merit curriculum changed what they taught specifically because it was the standards that they had to use and therefore was the onus for how they went about planning. Finally, a few of the teachers mentioned that the change to the merit curriculum was good for the curriculum because it made sure that teachers were teaching what they were supposed to be teaching in particular subjects.

The idea that the merit curriculum had an impact on one's teaching was far from a universal concept. Two of the English teachers commented on the lack of impact that the curriculum has on their teaching overall. Both argue that good teachers create curriculum, and one of them argues that he uses it more as a place to begin with than as a list of set rules he has to follow. Both of the foreign language teachers did not think the merit curriculum impacted their job at the school and saw it as being unrelated to the foreign language part of their teaching. This is of note because the merit curriculum changed who has access to and has to take foreign language classes, but neither faculty member cited the change in graduation requirements associated with the curriculum as being related to this change.

Connection to College

Whether or not the MMC was linked to college-going or college preparation was a point of contention amongst the staff. Half of the faculty members that were familiar with the policy and what it did said it was linked and half said it wasn't. In the administration, the college counselor thought there should have been more link up to what students were expected to do. One of her points of contention is that she sees the foreign language component as being mismatched for students trying to get into state schools because the only one that requires two years of a foreign language is the University of Michigan and the majority of students are not going to schools like the University of Michigan, even if they do end up in college. The other administrators, on the other hand, highlighted the increased requirements for a foreign language, students taking Algebra II, and the addition of the ACT for all students as things that made the policy strongly linked to increasing college-preparation. These were two of the three faculty members to mention the tie to any one of these three things when discussing the policy and its connection to college.

Of the remaining faculty, the reason why the curriculum was or wasn't related to college-going had to do with variations of the following idea: the curriculum was or wasn't aligned to what the expectation of college was. In the negative cases, people used this to argue things like, the ACT doesn't really measure whether or not a student can be successful in college. In another, it was because the

curriculum didn't foster enough critical thinking and instead was more about specific, and at times, fact-based standards. Finally, one of the teachers was convinced that the standards could not fully dictate what was and wasn't taught.

When discussing why faculty thought that it was linked to college-going and college preparation they often found reasons that trumpeted the positive value the curriculum brought. In one case the standards were equated to things necessary for students to do well in college. One case dubbed them as a better method than what was around before. One thought that is was a curriculum that championed higher-level thinking, which was well suited to collegiate success. The split amongst the staff indicates that there was no commonly agreed upon connection to college preparation.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

In Oakdale the faculty were split on whether or not the policy impacted their role in the school. All of the people in administrative positions did not feel as though the policy played a major role influencing their jobs. The principal stated that she thought it did minimally because anytime there is a change like the CCSS that fundamentally changes the standards for the state that there is some impact for everyone, but that the largest change is actually for the students. In Oakdale whether you perceived the common core impacting the way you taught hinged on what subject you taught, and specifically if you taught math or social studies.

All of the math teachers that took part in the study saw the common core as impacting what they did in their classroom. The main way it mattered is that the school adopted a new curriculum in math called springboard that was aligned to the CCSS. This meant that for all of the math teachers that both the content and the process by which it was taught changed in what the teachers described as fairly dramatic terms. One of the math teachers talked at great length about how the common core has shifted from teaching how to do a mathematics problem to making sure students understand the how and why behind the math. He argued, "it should have been the way it was before this, because that's the pinnacle of what we're trying to get, is this deeper level of understanding," (Interview May, 2014). A colleague in the

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department mentioned that it hadn't entirely changed what she taught, but did change how deeply she taught it.

In addition to the math teachers, all of the social studies teachers also felt like the common core had infiltrated their practice. An initiative of the social studies department was to try and incorporate more writing into their classrooms. This purposeful department push coincided with the adoption of the CCSS and led the social studies teachers to include standards related to CCSS into their classrooms.

Interestingly, the English teachers in the study did not think the common core was all that useful to their practice. The English department chair saw the move to the common core as being a step backwards in terms of curriculum. In fact, she identified the rollout of the policy as being part of the problem. When the district agreed to adopt the CCSS, they did it before they fully knew what the standards entailed. This led to confusion amongst the staff about what exactly the changes entailed. While she acknowledged that the CCSS changed a little bit of the content that was taught, she did not think that it changed the way in which she taught the content. This sentiment was shared by all of the English teachers interviewed. One of the other teachers said that he felt as though the changes that were made were somewhat incremental and primarily resulted in more paperwork and filling out different lines on a lesson plan.

The other teachers at Oakdale didn't have any interaction with the policy. One of them bluntly stated that they didn't interact with the policy because they taught an elective course. Both of the science teachers said that they hadn't heard much about the policy in general. In all, nine of the faculty members felt like the CCSS helps to foster deeper critical thinking skills and those were lacking in previous curriculum.

Connection to College

From talking to the faculty, the connection of the common core to college was unclear. While the majority of the faculty argued that the common core does a good job fostering critical thinking skills, these faculty differed on whether or not they thought the CCSS, or these skills, were connected to college

preparation and college-going. A few of the faculty thought that it would not have any substantial impact directly on college-going necessarily, but it might have an impact on college preparation. This group talked at length about how the CCSS were set up to build and foster critical thinking skills and that these skills would make students better suited for many things, but that it would not necessarily help them when going to college. This idea co-existed with another subset of teachers who saw this critical thinking component as being vital for students' collegiate success.

There was a subset of teachers that thought the CCSS's connection was about college access and would indirectly increase college-going and not necessarily college preparation. Two of the teachers thought that the best thing the CCSS would do, would be to better prepare students to take the ACT and raise the number of students who did well on the test. This would in theory lead to more students having the opportunity to go to college.

Seven of the faculty members are confident that the common core does not have any potential relationship to college or college-going. The reasoning for two of them were that the students who were going to go to college and the students who weren't would not change as a result of the curriculum being enacted or changes in the curriculum because it was based on other factors than academic success in school. Two other teachers talked about how the nature of standardized curriculum and how that impedes whether or not the policy relates to college. One of the teachers wasn't sure whether the curriculum would have any impact on college-going or college preparation, but was clear that if it would was more dependent on the teachers and if they were willing to enact the curriculum or not. Another teacher was convinced that the curriculum left too much open to interpretation and that it would lead to variation both within schools, through tracking into different courses, and across schools. The other three teachers did not explain in detail why they thought the common core wasn't related, they just were clear that it wasn't.

Definition of College

There was no uniform definition of college in the school and definitions ranged all the way from everything post high school to only four-year institutions and everything in between. All three

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administrators, however, had similar definitions, which was any post-secondary training. Interestingly, the faculty as a group were conflicted over whether or not every student should be prepared for college, even when defining it as anything post-high school. This was not the case for the administration who thought that all students should attend some post-secondary training. The principal viewed the training the school provided as that they are training everyone for the highest possible outcome, college, but that if the student decided to do something that didn't require it, like go into the military, then that was okay.

The college counselor talked about how the shifting definition of college actually hinders her ability to reach students. Simply put, trade schools look very different than four-year colleges and trying to equate the two was often difficult. In fact, even the materials sent by trade schools and other institutions are different than those sent by colleges. She cites several examples where she attempts to get in touch with parents who have underperforming students and how they react negatively based on the assumption that she was helping their student go to college, specifically because of her title. When she reaches out to parents, they see college as a four-year degree granting institution. So when talking to parents whose student may have a 2.5 grade-point average, her name betrays what her goal is for the student; help them get into a good trade school. She thinks that positioning her as a college-counselor creates these problems for how she is perceived amongst students and staff, but isn't sure if a simple name change would matter all that much.

School or District Policies/Actions Related to College-Going.

Just like in Garrettsville, Oakdale is a part of a regional college access network. Unlike in Garrettsville, the person affiliated with it is not a member of the local community or someone who worked at the school and expanded her position, but rather is a part of a program where she is on loan from a nearby four-year university for two years. The year of data collection in the site was her second year in the program. Her job entails spending a full day at the campus of Oakdale and allots her a room within the school. In being here, her job is to help push college opportunities for students defined as any type of post-secondary training. She tries to work with the staff at the school to provide enriching

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opportunities that will help support students going to college. In doing so, she offers events for students such as financial aid nights and understanding ACT workshops. One of the major ways in which she argues the school is helping to better prepare students for college is to give the students access to web key links to the college and career access center's site. Doing so gives students access to valuable information about the FAFSA, financial aid, scholarships, resume writing, etc. This puts the students in the driver's seat about seeking out information regarding their own future. In order to advertise these events she sends emails to teachers and puts posters up around the school.

In addition to planning special events, the college counselor also tries to plan special events that provide students with a particular culture related to college going. One of the first things they did is a college-decision day where all of the seniors got together and found out where each student was going to college for the upcoming year. She also posts in the building about where students decide to go to school so that all students can see the opportunities available for them. Finally, the school makes a big deal about the scholarships that are awarded and make sure to announce all of the scholarships that are awarded for each and every senior every year.

In reference to whether or not the staff talks about college, the college counselor said, "If there's a really big thing going on in the county, the principal will talk about it, but a lot of the promotional college stuff gets left up to me because it seems like the teachers have a lot of other things on their plate and I get it. It's a little bit frustrating, but I get it," (Interview May, 2014). One of the frustrations voiced by the college counselor is that some staff would just send students to her when they had questions about the college-going process or college. She tries to send email blasts to the staff to have them announce what she is up to with some success, but finds that staff members still often just use her as a resource to cover things they don't have time to accomplish. This was highlighted in interviews when one of the staff told me that if I had questions about college that I could just go and ask the college advisor.

The role the guidance counselor played overlaps some with what the college counselor does. He is in charge of trying to steer individuals into particular classes to make sure that they have opportunities to enroll in things like AP courses. He also advocates that each of the students have a four-year plan

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where he sits down with them and tries to plan for each student what all four years of high school look like. As the principal identifies, in total the school district offers up to fifteen AP courses and has 25% of their students taking at least one AP course. She also discussed the over 30 college visits that the recruiters paid to the school and the campus visits the students from the high school got to go on. One of the features of these visits was that students were able to sign up on a first come first serve basis and it was not just limited to the students who are very successful in school academically. Both the college resource center that the college counselor works in and the school cafeteria have pennants hanging in them from various colleges and universities.

An interesting overlap occurs between the perceived duties of the guidance counselor and the college counselor. The size of the school dictates that the guidance counselors have a particular list of students that are arranged in alphabetical order for the seniors and each counselor is in charge of one grade-level. While the college counselor provides services that are inherently valuable to the district, the fact that she is the only person in that role, and the person in this position rotates every two years, requires her to take on as many students as possible in order to plan and foster relationships. By the nature of the position she cannot see every student she has. When you add this to the size of the school, she is limited to mostly working with the juniors and the seniors. While she is a part of the school, she does not feel necessarily integrated into the staff and this makes planning for students over the course of their careers quite complicated for both her and the guidance counselors and means that some students inevitably do not have conversations about college until their junior year of school.

Teachers

Some of the teachers echoed the initiatives that the district puts on either through the college counselor or from the principal. One teacher specifically cited an example that was credited to the college counselor that involved circulating the GPAs and ACT scores of the top colleges in Michigan, which she shared and discussed with students. Some of the teachers though, were quite cautious about college being

pushed as a desirable outcome for every student and mentioned that they are careful when talking to their students about college because they do not want to hurt anyone's feelings if they do not get into a college.

Three of the teachers mentioned that they taught their course content in a way that prepared students for college because that is the purpose of the standards, while several others saw themselves as incorporating specific practices to help prepare students for college. What was important to the teachers who do incorporate college preparation into their teaching was having something that they thought was fundamental tenant of the college experience folded into their classroom. One staff member mentioned that he prepared students for college by grading them very hard and not accepting late work in his higher-level classes. One of the foreign language teachers makes writing a much larger component of her class because she is attempting to prepare students for college. Another teacher directly models what he does based on his college experiences and what he remembers about his time as a student. This leads him to do lecture in some of his classes because that's what some of his college classes looked like. One of the math teachers who teaches both advanced and struggling students noted that he makes content based decisions for his struggling students to help prepare them for college and that he makes pedagogical decisions for his higher achieving students to help prepare them.

These decisions by teachers about informal ways in which they prepare students for college play an important role to helping understand how the faculty members make sense of the content and process of college preparation. The lack of a common theme here means that by and large, these are idiosyncratic decisions that are made at an individual level that may or may not help prepare students for collegiate opportunities down the road.

Additionally, in this particular school, the view of the department chair appeared to reflect views that were espoused by the other members of the department. While I was not able to interview the department chair in science, in all of the other departments, the views presented by the department chair were repeated in interviews with other members of the department. This influence helps to explain why the social studies department is incorporating ideas from the CCSS and sees it directly related to what they are doing, while the English department, which has standards that change as a result of the

movement to CCSS, does not see as directly how this relates. It is important to note here that the teacher who is in both the math and English departments would provide a great way to further flesh out this concept, but she is in her first year teaching and sees the CCSS as the standards that she teaches and nothing more.

CHAPTER 7: Wheaton

Michigan Merit Curriculum

Save for one faculty member who began teaching at the district recently, the faculty at Wheaton

thought the MMC influenced them in some way. Both teachers and administrators discussed the

administrative issues presented about the curriculum.

One of the major drawbacks of the merit curriculum and its influence had to deal with what

courses the school was able to offer some of the students. Two staff members, the principal and one of the

science teachers, thought the MMC shrank the amount of electives that could be offered to students. One

of the science teachers, who also was in charge of developing the Future Farmer of America (FFA)

program, felt this crunch and noted that the MMC changed what counted as a science credit and made

getting students into her program more complicated. The principal mentioned that students had 28 credits

they needed to fill and the MMC pushed the number of state required credits to 20. This means that

students not only do not have as many opportunities to take electives, but that the school doesn't have the

ability to offer as many either because of the required courses they have to offer. Specifically, the

business department had taken a pretty big hit since the implementation of the MMC. The business

teacher, who is also the Spanish teacher, has seen her foreign languages increase and the number of

business classes drop off over her time there. She mentioned that the MMC for her was impacting what

teaching assignment that she would have. None of the teachers discussed how the school shifted focus to

the ACT, except the counselor who now is saddled with carrying out and coordinating the testing efforts

of the school.

One of the ways in which the merit curriculum impacted teachers is that it changed which

students the staff taught and also how they taught their content. Two of the elder teachers on staff

discussed how who they saw in their classrooms changed after the merit curriculum because instead of

just teaching the college bound students in classes like Algebra II or Biology, they now had all of the

students in there. One of the science teachers was adamant that this changed how she taught. She felt like

she could no longer teach the class in a lecture-based format, but that she now would have to be more

hands-on to help involve every student and make sure that the content reached them all. In addition, the math teacher who taught Algebra II also thought it changed how he taught because he shifted from using drill and kill with his students to doing more real life word problems as a result of having a wider cross-section of the students in his classroom. Both of the English teachers and one of the science teachers thought that the MMC played a valuable role in identifying what they taught. The teacher who did not see the merit curriculum as having a large influence on what he taught mentioned that when he came into the district they were already using it, so it was what he knew.

Connection to College

There was varying support from the staff at Wheaton for the connection that the MMC had to college. The principal at the school did not see the curriculum's relationship to college-preparation as being important. The guidance counselor and two of the science teachers at the school also see little connection between the curriculum and college.

Only three faculty thought that the curriculum does a good job in terms of preparing students for college. One of the math teachers believes that the curriculum when executed correctly helps students succeed once getting to college. The other two faculty members think that the curriculum does a good job because it involves having a more well-rounded education which is critical for success in college.

The other connections drawn to college were drawn to the notion of what the curriculum prepares students to do, instead of being successful in college. Specifically, it prepares students to do well on the tests that determine if one can get into college. Two of the teachers expressed that the connection to college was specifically in regards to helping students prepare for the ACT. A third teacher who expressed this sentiment is concerned that even though the curriculum might prepare students to do well on the test and get them into college, it was no guarantee that they would be successful once they got to college.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

The faculty at Wheaton do not necessarily feel the impact of the CCSS. One teacher mentioned that it changed the process in which they taught, four mentioned that it changed the content that they taught, and one mentioned that it changed both the process and the content. The math teachers were the ones that talked about how the common core changed the process by which they taught content, although one of them thought it changed his teaching somewhat incrementally. The other math teacher thought that the common core radically changed both the content he taught and how he taught the content. One of the ways in which it did so was to restructure the questions he asked students. He argued, "Instead of telling students this is how you do things, it's more of leading them to the answer. You use previous knowledge," (Interview March, 2014).

The other four teachers, two English teachers and two science teachers, all cited that it changed the content, although it changed the content in different ways for different subject groups. The English teachers both saw the change to the content as being somewhat incremental. They still continued to teach what they had historically taught and the changes the CCSS made were more an emphasis on particular critical thinking skills or on which novels they included. One of the English teachers noted that it changed what objective she wrote on her lesson plans as well. Similarly, the change made by the CCSS was felt by the science department, but in a smaller way. As a result of the common core, two of the science teachers took a position of trying to include more technical writing. The idea was that science was the place where the most technical writing could occur so it only made sense that the science teachers would increase the amount of writing in their classes in accordance with CCSS.

Three of the teachers were very frank about the lack of impact that the common core had on their teaching. A third science teacher (the one who also taught some elective courses), the foreign language teacher, and the social studies teacher in the study all said that common core had no impact on them because their respective subjects were not a part of the common core. The principal and the guidance counselor echoed this sentiment and said that they did not see what they did as being impacted by the common core at all.

Connection to College

        The principal believes that other programs the school puts on like the course they do in eighth grade related to career selection and awareness has far more influence over students outcomes than any curriculum does. She articulated, "I think the Common Core is our curriculum vehicle. That's, those are the things they want us to look at so those are the things we're teaching. I think it's the other things that send kids to college," (Interview February, 2014). Other faculty members echoed this sentiment when they questioned whether or not the curriculum would have any impact on college preparation. One of the science teachers stated that the common core was completely divorced from college preparation because what would make students ready for college were traits such as work ethic and determination. The guidance counselor and one of the math teachers questioned whether the common core being connected to college should matter because they were unclear about whether or not preparing students for college should be the goal of the school district. In addition, both the social studies teacher and one of the science teachers were adamant in the fact that the curriculum would have little impact on college going, because as the science teacher framed it, "I think common core or no common core the kids that are going to college are going to college," (Interview February, 2014). The social studies teacher added that the curriculum would not shape who did and didn't go to college, but that this would be determined by what the students wanted to accomplish.

        Four faculty members did, however, see utility in the common core in relation to college. In particular, both of the English teachers saw it as being related to college preparation. One of them taught community college in the years prior to working at Wheaton and sees the CCSS as being more closely aligned to the curriculum of the community college at which she taught. The other three staff, another English teacher, a math teacher, and the Spanish/business teacher, feel that the curriculum fosters critical thinking skills and that these skills will help students be more successful in college.

Definition of College

In Wheaton the two people in charge of the non-curricular policies are the guidance counselor and the senior level English teacher. There is not a uniform definition of what college is to the staff, but the majority of faculty members identify it as a two or four year institution. The two members of the administration at the school, the guidance counselor and the principal, have different opinions about the definition of college. The guidance counselor sees college as being limited to just four-year universities, while the principal sees college as being either a two-year or a four-year institution. When talking about college, the staff did not think that everyone needed to go to college because there was sentiment that there were opportunities to potentially do better financially if one went the route of what was often referred to as "skilled trades." Skilled trades encapsulated training that involved both post-secondary education and alternative tracks at the high school that led individuals to take vocational courses.

School or District Policies/Actions Related to College-Going

Part of the role of the guidance counselor at the school is to help provide opportunities for students to have access to college and she coordinates events and programs that help reach this goal. One of the things the counselor did is coordinate a FAFSA night for students so that they could come to the school and fill out a FAFSA. She also is in charge of coordinating college visits where colleges come to campus to share information with the students. Recently, she has decided to open these up to juniors, whereas previously they were only offered to seniors. Her decision to have a broader audience had to do with trying to get students more exposure. Finally, she is in charge of helping initiate the AP and dual enrollment opportunities and notes that the school only has five students taking advantage of these options and three of the students doing so are juniors.

The teacher who teaches the seniors in English also takes on a large part of the role of helping students to prepare for college. She takes time out of class to have every one of her seniors fill out a college application, FAFSA, and scholarship information. She also helps the students in her class work on writing a good resume as well. Another teacher does work for the school in the middle school with a

career unit in which he helps students map out what pathway to take after they learn about careers they are well suited for.

A major way in which the district prepares students for college is through offering two different tracks of educational courses for students, one that is geared toward the students that are perceived to be going to go to college and one that isn't. This comes up often from faculty, although not in this direct language, and is clear that there are two pathways, one for the kids who go on to a four-year university and one for the kids who do not.

Wheaton faculty members see the process of preparing students for college as containing a particular social element that is clearly an informal policy. In talking about how to prepare students for college, the faculty at Wheaton discussed particular behaviors and environmental factors that were important to ensure that students would be successful in college. One of the main ways in which students could be prepared for college was have more exposure to the type of academic environment that students would encounter once they arrived at college. The environment the faculty envisioned was one that valued fewer grades, lecture-style instruction, harsher grading, less homework, and more note taking. These things were often justified with an explanation about how these activities were features of the faculty members' college experiences. This type of instruction was not necessary for all students to interact with, but only the students that were going to college.

In Wheaton, there is also a formal policy within the district that all students take four years of science classes, which is one above the state requirement. This decision moves chemistry to a mandatory class in their curriculum. There were varying reasons listed for the rationale behind this decision, but the most salient was that a local industry nearby required the passing of high school chemistry to hold any position within the firm. By including this requirement it guaranteed that even students who were interested in becoming a secretary at the institution had the opportunity to do so because of the high school requirement.

Career Readiness

In Wheaton, many of the staff do not believe that all students, if any students, should go to college. Many of the faculty members bemoan the fact that the curricular changes and the push toward college have more or less removed emphasis on skilled trades, or manual labor, based occupations. All of the faculty in Wheaton believe that there are plenty of non-academic college-based options for students and that it is important to prepare kids for these as well. They do not however think that they are in a position to do so based on the emphasis of the school.

CHAPTER 8: Cross-Case Analysis

The three cases as developed in the three previous chapters help to illustrate how these policies play out in each particular site. What is needed is to explain how this relates to literature and to further explore themes that exist across the sites. In addition, this chapter will also serve the purpose of directly addressing the research questions.

Administrative Role in Understanding Policy

A major takeaway from Coburn (2005) is that principals play a significant role in how faculty members interact with and understand policies. While her work and other work by Spillane (1998; 2000; 2004) find that principals help to shape understandings specifically of curricular policy, here I am looking at broader understanding of how the staff members understand the policy in and of itself. When looking at curricular policies through the lens of college-going policies, it is much less important to consider the parts, then the sum of those parts. Not inconsistent with previous literature, the principals' understandings of these policies, as well as other peoples' understandings in positions of power, greatly influenced how faculty viewed the policies' importance and their relationship to college-going.

Curricular Policies

One of the major features of the curricular policies was that the perception that the principal had of the policy was reflected in how the staff thought about and made sense of the policy and its relationship to college preparation. This was the case for both curricular policies and came out both in how the policies were discussed and how the nature of the relationship to college was discussed.

Impact of the Policies

One of the more interesting ways in which authority figures' perception of policies filtered into other avenues at their schools was in how faculty members saw the impact of the policy on their position at the school.

Garrettsville. In the case of Garrettsville, the MMC was thought of as impacting the curriculum taught for individuals who were unaffected by staffing changes. For the administration and all faculty impacted by the staffing feature of the policy, they focused on the how it impacted their teaching positions and not the content associated with the policy. This was something that was brought up often and even was brought up at staff meetings. The principal did not necessarily express much about the CCSS, except that it was a curricular policy and was thought of as such. This was also the stance of the faculty, who unless they taught English did not see the common core impacting what they did at all.

Oakdale. In Oakdale the impact of the policy was set by how the principal thought about the CCSS. When asked if it impacted her role, she said she didn't think it did very much. This idea is something that many staff echoed in their conversations about it, with a few exceptions. In the math and social studies departments, the CCSS was thought to be very important. All of the math teachers mentioned how it changed their curriculum and all of the social studies teachers discussed how they integrated it. The English teachers also all shared similar opinions about the lack of usefulness of the common core. It is of note here that in the case of all three of those departments, I interviewed the department chair in each department and all of the answers were consistent with his or her stance. In this particular case, the ideas of the administration allowed for the department chairs to play a more central role in how the faculty members within the department thought about the policy. Subsequently, the opinions of those department chairs appear to filter to the rest of the faculty members within the department.

Wheaton. Many of the faculty thought that these two policies did not impact them very much. The exceptions for the CCSS were the math and English teachers. All four of them thought it changed something about their teaching and the science teachers mentioned how they added in more writing into their curriculum because of the focus on technical writing. In this case, the principal was not instrumental in filtering these experiences, except in that she allowed the staff to make decisions about the policy on their own. In such small departments, the teachers who primarily taught these subjects did see how the

standards and how they related to the work that they did, but it was something they arrived at on their own.

      Discussion. It is also important to note here that faculty members that did not interact with the policy implementation do not appear to have had to make sense of the policy at all. This makes inherent sense, but is important to note for a couple of reasons. First, policies, like the MMC, have legacies that impact what happens in classrooms and school districts today, despite being signed into legislation almost ten years prior to the study. Teachers and other faculty members however appear to view the policy as just a part of the ether of schools or the way schools are, and not as something that directly impacts them because it didn't disrupt their experience. The extension of this is that the only time a policy appears to potentially impact a faculty member is when it is perceived by that particular faculty member to influence him or her. This helps to explain why there is such a large variety of understandings across the sites. Given the fact that the CCSS is a change in standards in math and English, it is reasonable to expect that at a minimum all of the English and math teachers would feel impacted by the policy, but they did not. Second, it is not that there isn't an understanding of the policy that exists within the school context, it's that policy has already been made sense of by the faculty members who have been in the schools or the system the longest. This makes new faculty members who come into schools that have recently implemented policies potentially reliant on the understandings of these policies offered up by other faculty members.

Relationship to College

      The theory of action about how changes in academic standards will increase the number of students going to college is that if teachers teach specific academic standards, the students will learn more material, and by doing so, the change in standards themselves will make the students more prepared to go to college. If more students are academically prepared to go to college, then more students will choose to go. A similar line of thinking is included in changing the graduation requirements for students to graduate high school. If students have to take certain classes (like Algebra II or two years of a foreign language),

then students will be more prepared to do well in college. An implicit feature of this theory of action, however, is that it assumes that more students will be motivated to go because they feel as though they are more prepared to do so. While this may be the case, this was not identified by the staff in any one school as a probable, or even a possible, outcome of the changes in the standards and graduation requirements. In fact, the link between the curricular policies and college-going was often thought of as vague and lacked a direct connection. When one did exist it was in the same train of thought as the theory of action.

Garrettsville. Garrettsville's principal placed a lot of emphasis on the Michigan Merit Curriculum and this was shown in how the staff talked about the policies. While he saw the policy as being linked to college-going, he did not think that making every student take both Algebra II and a foreign language was a good use of his school's resources. While not all of the staff felt that way, many staff specifically argued that students shouldn't be forced to take those classes. The principal did not discuss CCSS's relationship to college at all.

Oakdale. Oakdale's staff saw the two curricular policies as not being specifically related to college-going. It was however important for many staff to mention that the critical thinking components of CCSS were important, but that they might not necessarily help students get into college or be prepared for it. This was a message that was conveyed by the principal and evident in the teaching faculty interviews as well.

Wheaton. The principal at Wheaton is certain that the curriculum and the role that it plays in relationship to college-going is quite minimal. This message was very clear and emphasized when talking to other staff members. Three staff members in particular were found saying the exact same thing about the policies and their relationship to college preparation, while several other staff talked about the policy and its effectiveness in similar ways articulating that the policies in question might lead to bumps in student achievement on tests that function as entrance exams, but that it wouldn't specifically impact students going to college.

Discussion. Embedded in the CCSS are career and college readiness standards that propose to make students better prepared to pursue college and career training. The irony is that given that the CCSS are only in two subjects at the time of the study (even though there are reading and writing standards in both social studies and science), those are the only two subjects in which students will be exposed to increased preparation. As the sites here demonstrate, it may be a bit of stretch to suggest that the CCSS will be carried out with fidelity even in those two subjects. There are however spillover effects into other subjects, part of which are the writing elements and how they get picked up by faculty that teach other subjects at the schools. An increased focus on writing in science and social studies is something that is attributed to the CCSS in the study in the places where it occurred.

Non-Curricular Policies

Similarly to the curricular policies, how the people in positions of authority made sense of the policy was often related to how the administration made sense of the policy. What makes these policies function differently is that because some of them are voluntary, how they get utilized is very different, than how policies about curriculum standards are understood.

A way in which administrators in these schools choose to buffer policies is to pass them along to others in the administration. All three principals defer the implementation of policies that are non-curricular to a guidance counselors or college counselor. This is not in of itself a surprising development. Part of the purpose of the guidance counselor in most schools is to provide students with "guidance" to help them get through school. Often these positions are quite complicated and take up many roles including but not limited to: emotional support, course scheduling, academic planning, etc. With the counselor having control over the non-curricular policies to college-going, the counselor is put in a place to help shape perceptions of staff about some of the non-academic aspects of preparing students for college, but whether or not that occurs also depends on the role the principal plays.

Garrettsville

      The part time guidance counselor at Garrettsville and the principal divide up the responsibilities that fit within what is often thought of as the traditional role of a guidance counselor. The counselor, Mrs. Whitman, has almost unfettered access and control over everything the school does in relationship to the informal aspects of preparing students for college. She uses this to advance what she believes to be her main purpose as a guidance counselor, preparing the students for the training they will embark on after high school. The many initiatives that she has launched at the school help to shape others' perceptions of how students should think about college. When asked what the teachers did in relation to college-going and college-preparation, they often deferred to the work done by Mrs. Whitman. Her close relationship to the principal allowed her access to every staff members and ensures that her actions reach all of the staff.

Oakdale

      The college counselor splits the duties of helping students prepare for college with the guidance counseling staff. Between the four of them, they are in charge of helping students figure out their post-secondary plans; with the guidance counselors taking all of the responsibilities of planning what courses students take. The college counselor has tried many initiatives at the school and her role is more or less isolated from the rest of the staff. While she does have access to the staff and what they do, the events and meetings that she plans are not always implemented by all, or even most staff members. She has spent time fostering relationships with some of the staff, and tries to see every junior and senior to help them prepare for college. This does not preclude the guidance counseling staff from also working on these things with students and helping them with thinking about the opportunities for college.

      Several of the staff members, including both administrators, discuss what an asset it is to have the college counselor as a member of the school. This does not however mean that her views about college-going permeate throughout the rest of the staff. Specifically, the college counselor laments that the way she often gets treated is as the person who will take care of the college piece if the teachers are too busy.

This relationship means that she interacts with many students, but her specialized knowledge about the college-going process is not disseminated to many other staff members.

Wheaton

In the case of Wheaton, the guidance counselor and one of the teachers are in complete control of what goes on in the high school in relation to college-going. This does not happen by chance. The principal at Wheaton purposefully sends all of the non-curricular college related policies to the guidance counselor. When prompted about what the school district does specifically in relation to college-visits, the principal said, "No, that's her [the guidance counselor's] question," (Interview March, 2014). The guidance counselor does not however interact much with the staff, so much of what she does is somewhat procedural with helping students figure out their future plans and scheduling college visits for the school. The English teacher who helps her by tackling specific aspects of the college-going process keeps most of the college-preparation in house.

Another aspect of college-going at Wheaton has to deal with the types of schooling experiences their students get. It is unclear where the idea originates that students will have access to a different type of education if they are on the college track, but it is mentioned by several staff members and is mentioned by both the principal and teachers. This is something that essentially sets up two tracks within the school: one where students are exposed to what is perceived to be a college environment and one where students do more hands-on work.

Discussion

In all three cases there is a particular person who has the ability to help shape how the school organizes and thinks about how it makes sense of non-curricular polices. Whether or not this influence takes place hinges on the person's connection with the administration and their ability and time to interact with the other staff in the school. In all three cases, several faculty referred to the work the three counselors identified here were doing, but in two cases this indicated what was thought of as a

compartmentalization of the role as belonging mostly to the counselor. In other words, they saw the non-academic side of preparation as being the role of the counselor and only in the case of Garrettsville was the referral to the counselor's efforts used as a way to talk at length about specific things that she had done to help prepare students for college opportunities.

This is important because the notion that non-academic college-preparation is perceived as a task that the guidance counselor does, leaves the guidance counselor with a lot of influence over how the district thinks about the non-curricular parts of college-preparation. If the counselor isn't well integrated into the school, as is the case with both Oakdale and Wheaton, then it is difficult to see how the information that the counselor has will get to other faculty and students within the school. In the case of Oakdale, this situation is more pronounced by the fact that the college counselor is attempting to reform the way the faculty think about college preparation. This lack of integration is particularly troubling given that the non-curricular policies are what college-preparation is boiled down to in these sites minus the socialization that may occur in classrooms.

Definition of College

What makes parsing apart how the faculty are interpreting these polices as a bundle particularly difficult is that faculty are not simply trying to make sense of both the college-going polices (curricular and non-curricular) but they are also attempting to make sense of college, its definition, and its utility. Complicating this picture even more is that the two types of policies in question, and the two curricular policies, actually are presenting a somewhat different definition of college.

All three policies that were explored in this study in detail attempt to prepare students for somewhat different outcomes. In doing so, they define college in different ways that are at times incompatible with each other. The Michigan Merit Curriculum when passed was attempting to increase college-going in the state and implicitly defined college at the time as a four-year degree granting institution. The changes in the graduation requirements that come with the curriculum are evidence of this. The goal of the Common Core State Standards was that they would make students more career and

college ready, by aligning with career and college-readiness standards that had been developed. This shift

would imply that the definition of college the standards align with is at the very least more inclusive than

that of the MMC. On the other hand, the Michigan College Access Network, of which only two schools in

the study utilized, seeks to redefine college as being any type of post-secondary training. This definition

is fundamentally different than what was intended with the original passing of the Michigan Merit

Curriculum, but idea that students should not just pursue a four-year degree was much more aligned with

how the faculty in all three sites thought about post-secondary education and not how they defined

college.

In all three cases, faculty expressed concerns over all students being forced into college when it

was defined as a four-year, degree granting institution. In fact, when framed that way, no one interviewed

thought that all students attending college was a desirable outcome. When discussing post-secondary

training, however, most faculty members thought that getting training beyond high school was a good

idea for students. This position was often framed as a result of the reality of attaining a job in today's

economy requiring more than just a high school diploma.

Definitional Struggles

Not only is the definition of college fundamentally different in each site, the way the definition

plays out in each case underscores the concern of having different definitions of college presents in the

policy environment.

Garrettsville. In Garrettsville college was defined as anything post-high school. This consensus

helped streamline how Garrettsville was able to align many of its programs to fit that message, but it did

not work perfectly. One of the major limitations to the definition that Garrettsville is trying to employ is

that it doesn't have many opportunities to execute this definition in a way that isn't skewed toward four-

year degree granting institutions. For example, the guidance counselor has the staff put images on their

door of the college that the faculty member went to and tells students to ask them about it. She also has

the staff talk about their college experiences in their classrooms on Fridays. While both of these practices are thought to be good in order to help increase students going to college, the examples they are given are all examples of institutions that grant bachelor's degrees. In addition, in the first year of going on college visits, all of the visits she took were to four-year degree granting institutions. Both of these examples highlight the problem that even the actions most well intentioned to align with the policy can potentially undermine the policy.

Oakdale. Much like in Garrettsville, the major player in non-curricular college-going aspect of the school had a firm definition of college being anything post-secondary. The college counselor talked at length about how conveying this message to parents and students was quite complicated. While there was no direct resistance to this definition amongst the staff, what was clear was that the majority of staff did not define college in the same way as the college counselor. When coupled with how her work was often compartmentalized, this meant in theory that students would sometimes interact with several different definitions of college around the school. This is further complicated by an assertion of the college counselor that students would also often get different messages about what college meant at home as well. Attempting to shift the definition of college in this context was quite complicated.

Wheaton. Wheaton's staff did not have a consensus on what the appropriate definition of college was, but it did involve going to a two or four-year institution. This was perhaps best illustrated by the fact that they developed an informal curriculum that was different for the students they thought were college bound and those they thought were not. Not only were students tracked into different classes, but the instruction that took place in these classes was different depending on which group the students were in.

Discussion. The multiple messages about what college is that are sent through policies make what each school is trying to prepare kids for somewhat difficult to discern in a couple of the cases. It is worth noting here that the traditional definition of college, while having the benefit of having historical momentum, does not apply well to the shifts in the policy environment advocating for a more expansive role of post-secondary career options. Conversely, the more inclusive, redefinition of college, has the benefit of being broad enough to capture almost every students' educational experience, but has the

downside of trying to redefine a word that traditionally has a specific definition in policy, schools, and society. All of the schools bring up this tension in one way or another.

Revisiting the Research Subquestions

Rural and Urban Contexts

The first research subquestion asked if there are differences across rural and urban contexts in terms of making sense of the policy. This is a question that is difficult to answer. There is not any one thing that clearly stands out as being a difference attributable to the sites being rural or urban with the exception of the conversation about vocational education. The urban site is not concerned as much about some of the programs being cut, but this is possibly due to any number of factors, one of which is the shift long ago of such programs from the urban high school. In addition, while the cases included in this study all understand the relationship between policies and college-going differently and there are specific differences between the rural sites and the urban site, the differences do not appear to be due to the rural or urban nature of the school exclusively, but instead appear to be largely due to school size. This does not, however, preclude them from being differences due to the schools being rural and urban. In fact, one can make the case that a feature of rural schools is that they are small and that a feature of urban schools is that they are large, but there is no evidence to suggest that outside of the consideration of school size that the differences can be attributed to the nature of the school being rural or urban.

While the school size of Garrettsville makes offering a diverse curricular experience difficult, which is the primary way in which schools have differentiated to non-college track students in the past (Reese, 2005; Rury, 2009) and is also the way in which the other two sites differentiate schooling experiences still, it is a factor that allows the guidance counselor to have much influence over the staff and the ideas about college-going in the district. Her connections to the local community and her strong ties to it have led her to understand the policy in a way that is integrated into her understanding of the local context and the small nature of the school. Her status and role within the district have allowed her to disseminate this definition amongst the staff. In contrast, while the college counselor at Oakdale has a

similar view of the policy, she is unable to adapt the policy locally. In addition, her position within the school as well as having weaker ties to the local context both get in the way of her ability to influence how others make sense of the college-going aspects of the policy.

Michigan Merit Curriculum. The focus of Wheaton and Garrettsville when discussing the Michigan Merit Curriculum, were almost exclusively about two things: 1) how it changed which students enrolled in what classes and 2) how it impacted teaching assignments. There are several examples of how this manifested itself. These were not themes of how faculty made sense of the policies at Oakdale.

Versatility of teaching assignments. A feature of teaching in both Wheaton and Garrettsville was the possibility of teaching across multiple content areas, or sharing positions at multiple schools within the district. This was something that was common, and for hiring and firing decisions, the versatility of one's teaching certification was one of the factors taken into consideration. This is a more pronounced problem for Garrettsville than Wheaton but it is starting to become the reality there as well. This reason for its pervasiveness in Garrettsville is due to its small size. If Wheaton continues to shrink it is reasonable to assume this will become more of a concern for their staff as well. While teachers at Oakdale did have split teaching assignments across multiple content areas, it was not nearly as common as it was in the other two sites.

Class composition changes. While limited in the discussion, faculty at both Wheaton and Garrettsville discussed how the changes present in the Michigan Merit Curriculum led to changes in what students took what classes. The biggest change noted in Wheaton was that three teachers that taught subjects that were affected all noted that they had to change how they taught because they now had students present in their classes who would not had taken them before. Meeting the state requirements also changed how some classes were approached in Garrettsville, with the best example being the foreign language teacher who now taught literally every student in the district.

Foreign languages. All of the foreign language teachers across the three sites mentioned that the curricular aspect (changes in standards) of the Michigan Merit Curriculum did not impact them. Where

the differences existed was with how they felt like the policy did affect them. In the case of the two rural schools, both foreign language teachers discussed how the curriculum impacted what courses they were able to teach. Garrettsville's teacher was impacted by the fact that she had so many different teaching roles and amalgamations of courses in Spanish that she was forced to teach because the school was trying to meet the graduation requirements that were implemented for upcoming classes. Wheaton's foreign language teacher's assignment was in constant flux to make sure that all of the students in the school had access to and completed the same graduation requirement. Both of these teachers thought the curriculum was important and saw how increasing the number of students taking a foreign language was connected to college preparation. The other two teachers in the study were both from Oakdale and neither saw any connection between the policy and increasing college preparation.

The explanation for this is relatively simple; both of the foreign language teachers in the rural schools were forced to interact with this part of the policy specifically because of how enrollment decline impacted their schools. As both schools have cut positions for budgetary reasons, the teacher's positions have become indispensable because of the requirements in the MMC. It is safe to say that without the policy requiring that future classes of students all attain two years of a foreign language, neither the foreign language teacher in Wheaton nor the one in Garrettsville would be saddled with the same teaching loads they currently have, if their positions would even exist. This is not true in case of the Oakdale staff. While neither one of the staff members at Oakdale taught only foreign language courses, both of them taught mostly foreign language courses. One of the teachers split time between foreign language and English while the other also taught yearbook. Neither one of these teachers had yet to experience their course being perceived as mandatory. In contrast, the teachers at the rural sites discussed how the shift to foreign language being mandatory forced kids to take a language requirement who had no interest in doing so and how this limited the ability of the staff to put together upper level foreign language courses.

Adjusting to Policy. One of the major ways in which the school size plays out is in the school's perceived ability to respond to policy. Both Wheaton and Garrettsville expressed a concern over how to respond to policies that are enacted. In Wheaton, this was often framed about an inability to keep up with

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constant policy churn. Many teachers talked about how the target they were trying to hit kept moving right about the time they figured it out. Some were pessimistic in the ability of newer policies to do what they were supposed to and others were sure that current policy trends wouldn't last. Garrettsville in particular struggles with meeting the type of definition of college that they are trying to implement with curricular offerings within the school district. The main struggle that they have is that they have cut most of the non-academic part of their curriculum completely out of the school. They are thrilled over the new definition of college, but are unable to change what they offer to potentially provide more options for their students because of the limitations they are placed under through the MMC. This is a problem that is beginning to become a reality at Wheaton as well, but again appears to be avoided at Oakdale because of the school size.

Population Loss

The second research question was: Are there differences based on community population loss? While population loss in the local context is something that is of great interest and intrigue and shapes the local context in many ways, it is difficult to conclude that it plays a direct factor in how the district made sense of policies about college-going and college-preparation. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that the employment opportunities in the area, which is one of the factors related to population stability according to the literature, are a key component to helping explain how the school thought about college-going.

Wheaton is located less than an hour's drive from two major metropolitan areas. While this is also true for Oakdale, Oakdale is itself the center of a metropolitan area and the job prospects in Oakdale and the areas surrounding it were historically tied to the automotive industry. Wheaton happens to also be located near two metropolitan areas that have transitioned away from car manufacturing as their main source of industry. It also is located within an hour's drive of multiple colleges and universities, making it a place that has the potential for job opportunities nearby that are not available in the other two cases if a student was interested in staying in Wheaton.

The central location of Wheaton plays a role when discussing whether or not the faculty members at Wheaton think that college is for everyone, or the need to redefine college. Unlike in the other two sites where the limited job opportunities are a prevalent part of the discussion and skew towards thinking about ways in which to convey to kids that post-secondary education is important because it is becoming increasingly hard to get jobs in the economic climate, in Wheaton, there there is a perception that there are job opportunities nearby. There also are many more options to do work that does not require a college degree or much post-secondary training. This is something that is brought up by several of the faculty members in interviews. In fact, a company that just moved to the local community was looking for welders and could not fill all of the positions that they had. Examples like this illustrate that college even when using a more inclusive definition is not a necessity in Wheaton.

Why this matters specifically is that one of the potential reasons why the other two schools have to consider shifting the definition of college and participating in a college access network is because of the lack of jobs available locally. In both Oakdale and Garrettsville students may stay after high school, but the availability of jobs makes getting some type of post-secondary training necessary, something that does not appear to be true in Wheaton.

How Ties to Community Matter

The final research question asked if there were differences based on faculty members ties to the local community. There are two ways in which community ties appear to matter in relationship to the idea about college preparation and college-going: 1) what people with strong community ties do and 2) how administration thinks about policies.

People with Strong Community Ties.

At the case level. As mentioned in chapter three, these cases have different ties to community and society, which makes them, in some ways, unique places. As discussed in chapter four, ties to society appear to play a much more prominent role in determining faculty members understandings of enrollment

decline. The differences that do exist in each case in terms of community ties do not appear to be the cause of any findings relative to the college-going policies at the individual level.

Individually. In his work on schooling in rural Nova Scotia, Corbett (2007) identifies that teachers are agents of the state because they have left and return to an area. This makes them in someway strange to it and interested in carrying out the state's motives. While my study confirms the existence of this idea, it is with one caveat; it is somewhat of an accidental occurrence. Most of the teachers who work in the places present in this study come back from a genuine interest to be a part of the local community. They have gotten their degree and are now in a position to return to a place they want to be. Their ability to resist the functions of schooling is in some ways out of their control.

For example, in all three sites, the teachers who take on the most extra duties are the ones from the local community. These faculty members take on an extraordinary amount of responsibility at the two rural schools volunteering to be on committees, working with student councils, being class sponsors, coaching sports teams, developing improvement plans, and helping to set curriculum at the schools where they work. One of the more interesting findings is that with one exception, in their teaching positions the faculty at the rural schools who had returned to the local district worked almost exclusively with very high-achieving students. This puts them in a unique position of interacting with students that are often very much like themselves and leads them to teach mostly upper level students who are likely to also leave the community to seek an education from a four-year institution. These teachers are not immune to the idea that a policy looking to increase college-going may be problematic in a place where there is enrollment decline, but they are interacting primarily with students who are conceivably unaffected by this policy, the high-achieving students. In this case, there does not appear to be dissonance for the faculty members because they do not necessarily think the policy will significantly increase the number of students who go to a four-year college. Consistent across sites is the notion that there are people who will go away to four-year schools, and subsequently leave the area, and people who will not.

In urban Oakdale, there are no greater school advocates than the teachers who graduated from the local school district and returned. They also do a lot of extra work at the school, but being an active member in the school district is less of a feature of their identities. In addition and unlike at the other two sites, Oakdale is under state pressure to improve in a way that the rural sites are not. This appears to focus the staff's attention toward academic outcomes despite the perceived want to devote attention to other features of education and to some extent, the local community.

At the individual level, however, there are no distinguishing characteristics that consistently make ties to the community matter for all of the staff's sense making of college-going policies. Even teachers who are very isolated from the context of the school are not more or less likely to understand the policies in a way that is solely consistent with their community and society tie distinctions.

Administratively. Another potential way to consider the influence of ties to community and society is by looking at the sites as a whole. When looking back at chapter three, it is of note that Garrettsville is the site that has the most members with strong community ties. If there is going to be a case where the policies are thought of differently that is related to community ties, then Garrettsville is the most probable case. In the case of Garrettsville, there are differences between the adoption of the policy and what appears to matter in this particular case is the administration's ties to the local community. There is only one administrator in the study who has strong ties to their school's community and that person is in Garrettsville. This makes her unique within the sample and also appears to make her relatively unique as an administrator more generally, but the connections her ties locally allot appear to be important for how college-going polices are enacted here.

The counselor at Garrettsville is from the local community and lives in town. Both her and her husband graduated from the school and they have a strong affinity for the local community. She sought out her position with the school as the place she wanted to work. Prior to the year of the study, she had been a full time English teacher. After getting a masters degree in educational leadership from the nearest teacher training institution, she sought to expand her role. She noticed that kids were not prepared for college and decided to try and carve out a position where she got to work with students on their post-

secondary plans. Prior to her push to attain this role, the students did not receive much help with their college plans. Once she became the guidance counselor, she got connected with the local college access network and began implementing the ideas that they had within their school. Her relatively new position allowed her to build everything from the ground up and perhaps most importantly, adapt it locally to fit the needs of her students in the best way possible given the restraints the district has.

While other schools have connections to the local community, strategically planning trips within the local community to help the students see what the major employers in the community are looking for in their workers is one of the ways in which the non-curricular policies allowed Mrs. Whitman and Garrettsville the opportunity to adapt the ideas in the policy to the local context in a way that elevated the options for students locally.

When choosing where to take students on trips in the local community, Mrs. Whitman wanted to go to places where she could showcase what was available for the students interested in potentially doing manual labor there, as well as trouble that all there was to do was manual labor at those institutions. She mentioned that the most surprising things to the students about the trips were the opportunities for people with a four-year degree. In this way, Mrs. Whitman is trying to leverage the opportunities locally to both disrupt the notion that there are no job opportunities for people with four-year degrees and to expose students interested in a more career-orientated pathway to the idea that they will need some training in order to be employable locally. By doing this, she is able to capture the spirit of the policy and adapt it to the local context. Her position as a member of the administration, and close ties to the local community and the school make her an almost perfect fit for the school and for implementing this policy at the school.

In the other sites, people who hold the administrative positions do not have strong ties to the local community as defined by the study and only one administrator outside of Garrettsville holds moderate ties to the local school district. Having these minimal ties appears to make adapting the policies and in particular the non-curricular policies to local context more complicated.

Synopsis. Ties to community as defined by the study do not appear to affect how teachers interact with and make sense of curricular components of the policies in question. While they do matter in terms of the amount of work teachers participate in at the school, there is nothing specific about the policies in question that is related to that work. Where ties to community do appear to matter is with the administrators and specifically with regard to adapting the non-curricular policy to the local context. Strong ties to the community in the case of Garrettsville allowed the guidance counselor to make decisions that were reflective of opportunities in the local community.

CHAPTER 9: Conclusion

Implications for Research

One of the major implications of this work is that it expands the idea that contextual factors, specifically about the local community and one's ties to it, potentially matter in how policy is implemented and understood. While this insight is not in of itself novel, what is new, is the particular contextual factors that are taken into consideration. As educational policy continues to become more centralized, policymakers will need to take into consideration the conflicts that they may create locally. Specifically, as policy is shifted to contexts that lie outside of the local community, ties to the local community become increasingly important to explore.

The fact that faculty did not interact with the policy unless it directly affected their role is perhaps unsurprising, but is important nevertheless. This is especially true because what it means is that if the people in these schools did not see how the policies in question related to what they were doing, they were in a position where they did not have to make sense of them directly. In the case of curricular policies like the CCSS you have some teachers focused a lot on these standards and others who don't interact with them much, if at all. In that case, if this policy is expected to reform ideas about post-secondary preparation, it will have to filter through from people who interact with the policy to people who do not.

Loss of population does not manifest itself in the districts in the way that was anticipated when the study was designed. Only one faculty member in the entirety of the study makes the case that the school might be contributing to the exiting of students, but even he is unwilling to stake a claim about the role that any one individual, or a school system might make in contributing to the population loss locally. While other work has explored how teachers specifically act as agents of the state, even in these contexts, what is often missed here is that these teachers are not intentional in their role and they are advocates for the district and often chose to work there because they have strong ties to the district. They just do not see the school's potential role in contributing to what is going on. This is exacerbated by the fact that the

faculty at the schools with the most responsibility outside of the administration are faculty members that graduated from the local context and returned.

One of the major points established here is that enrollment decline is something that appears to affect schools whether they are urban or rural, but only in as much as that is a relationship to the size of the school in question. Further work needs to be done to explore the relationship between enrollment decline and school and school district size to parse apart how the size of the school matters when it comes to responding to enrollment decline. Evidence from this study suggests that the effects of enrollment decline when coupled with being a small school and district make nimbly adjusting to policy significantly more complicated.

Implications for Practice

Of note here is that the new definition of college is much more amenable to aligning with the economic realties and job opportunities of the three communities in the study. While there are jobs available in the local context, the amount of jobs that are available for students who get a traditional college degree are somewhat limited, and limited mostly to working in schools. By making the definition of college more inclusive, the schools can both pursue opportunities that are locally sustaining and not have it conflict with the broader mission of school district or school.

The attempt to redefine college as being something more than just a four-year institution makes inherent sense, but is a departure from how college was conceptualized by earlier policy initiatives. In the case of the Michigan Merit Curriculum, the push was to increase access to four-year institutions and the policy changes enacted by it were aligned with making that increase both possible and likely. As more and more policy is passed with a different agenda, states like Michigan, may struggle to reconcile these differing policy ideas.

Michigan is simultaneously trying to balance two curricular policies that are attempting to provide students the opportunity to be better trained and more prepared but have disparate visions of what postsecondary training makes sense in the 21st century. How to increase the number of students that are

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being prepared for attending a four-year degree granting institution while also trying to increase the number of students who attend trade schools and community colleges will likely prove to be quite difficult given the incongruity of the policies. As long as the only curricular reform in Michigan that is implemented is the CCSS and it is only in two subjects, the preparation for both career and college readiness, even if ideally a good policy shift, will not occur according to plan even with perfect faculty understanding and buy in.

A further implication of this study is that there is knowledge that is important for guidance counselors to interact with. If the responsibilities about non-curricular college preparation are going to be within the counselor's sphere of influence, and I am not suggesting they should lie anywhere else, then one way to streamline the preferred policy ideas would be to train counselors specifically on them. While this is a somewhat simplistic solution to a very complex issue, one of the things that it requires is that we first streamline what our priorities are for students both while they are in high school and after it. I met many faculty during this process who are incredibly well intentioned in their thinking but have disparate views of what the future of education should look like.

While changing the definition of college can be advantageous, a potential drawback is that it will take time and potentially be messy. As an illustration here, even in the case of these sites, both of the individuals who bought into the expanded definition of college were more focused on four-year institutions than on other options. For the expansion of the definition to work, we need to have a clear expectation of what post-secondary training looks like and how it aligns with our conceptions of what college is and is not. This will require more coordination at the state and national level. As more and more states drop out of and make changes to policies like CCSS, this will potentially be a problematic mission to accomplish.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of this study has to do with the study design. When originally planning the study I made the assumption that individuals working with the study would have, in some

cases, been working long enough to interact with the main curricular policies being implemented. This was not always the case and as a result, several of the more recently hired staff members were not aware of earlier curricular reforms. This was particularly an issue in the case of the Michigan Merit Curriculum, which given the implementation timeline, the only parts of the curriculum that some of the newer faculty would interact with were the graduation requirements. Even in the case of the change in graduation requirements, however, the only faculty that tended to interact with them were faculty at the rural locations. This means that how the faculty made sense of older policy shifts was at times less clear than it could have otherwise been.

Another limitation of this study is that all of the districts included were in fact single high school districts. While this was done for study design purposes so as not have the contexts be too different, it might also mean that the findings are only generalizable to these types of schools and school districts and not to other types of schooling structures.

A further limitation of the study was that at the time of the study the common core was not officially going to be tested in Michigan until the following year. There was no "requirement" that any school change over curriculum until that particular year, even if all three in the study had, but it was assumed that most schools would for fear of performing poorly on the upcoming aligned tests. Over the course of the data collection, Michigan voted to postpone the test by a year, which meant the test assessing the CCSS was two full years after the study's completion. This is important to note because the loose tie between the curriculum and the test the students had to take might also have affected the fidelity to the policy in the year of the study and in turn affected how faculty members interacted with and made sense of the policy. Additionally, because the data collection was not done when the policies were enacted, it is difficult to trace the understandings over time and there is the possibility that the study did not capture the true understandings people had, but only where they are at the snapshot in time of the study.

Another limitation from this study is that this study relied almost entirely on interview data. While there was an attempt to collect data outside of interviews, much of this data was difficult to analyze

in relationship to the research questions and was used to verify faculty responses to interviews. For example, attending faculty meetings only proved fruitful to confirm how the faculty discussed or interacted with the policies in question. This meant both that there was a lot of interview data and that the data analyzed was almost exclusively interview data. Additionally, in one of the cases, no meeting between staff members was observed. In this site I did witness a lot of informal meetings between the principal and other parties because I spent an inordinate amount of time in the principal's office lounge. I did not take thorough notes during these meetings, but I did note the conversations that happened related to the policies in question. I also did not seek to validate, or triangulate this data by looking extensively through community data and interviewing community members. This is not a major limitation, but given the focus on the ties of community and society of the faculty members, some potential insights were missed by not reaching out to community members.

Future Research

This study has opened up various routes for future research that will continue to provide extensive knowledge both about the sense making of policy and about contexts experiencing enrollment decline.

While the call from the declining enrollment research base 30 years ago was to do more systematic studies of schools and districts experiencing enrollment decline, this study does not fill that void. There is still space for that type of study to be done and it is something that should be done given the changes in schools and society over the last 30 years. There is still space to explore a large-scale quantitative study of enrollment decline in multiple states. While educational contexts have changed, enrollment decline is also a phenomenon that has evolved during that time period. The proliferation of schooling options, school of choice, and changes to funding all make landscape of declining enrollment for these schools and districts more complicated than it was thirty years ago. While my study does add to the knowledge base about districts undergoing enrollment decline, it is bound by the contexts of the sites

and a larger study could best explore other contextual factors to see what is true in particular states versus what is true in the US more generally.

An original goal of the study was to explore community population and district enrollment decline as different contextual factors, however from doing this research something that is clear is that Michigan may not be the best place to examine the difference between enrollment decline and population loss. There were differences that appeared attributable to these factors that surfaced, but those differences were site to site and while they appear to be in response to differences in population loss locally, exploring enrollment decline and population loss in a place where staffing decisions are less directly tied to state level funding through enrollment projections would provide different and in some ways more compelling evidence for differences.

In establishing the enrollment decline and school size appear to work in concert in the cases here, due to the nature of the study, it is impossible to say whether this is something that is just a part of these three districts or is true in all cases experiencing enrollment decline. Future work that studies this relationship more directly and is designed specifically to explore this relationship will be useful.

Finally, further exploring how contextual factors (like connections to community) matter in the sense making of faculty members around curricular policies specifically and outside of places experiencing declining enrollments will improve our understanding of the role of context in sensemaking. With the increasing push of curriculum that is perceived to have more of a national focus, the tensions that can arise around these policies have the potential to become stronger, the more they are perceived to not relate to the local context. While curricular policies are included in the study, the curricular policies in question are mainly looked at in their relationship to college-going and how college-going itself is relatable to the local context. Given the evidence from this study that the ties to community can matter, exploring this relationship further would add to the sense making literature.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

OVERARCHING GRAPHIC

Figure 1: Overarching Graphic
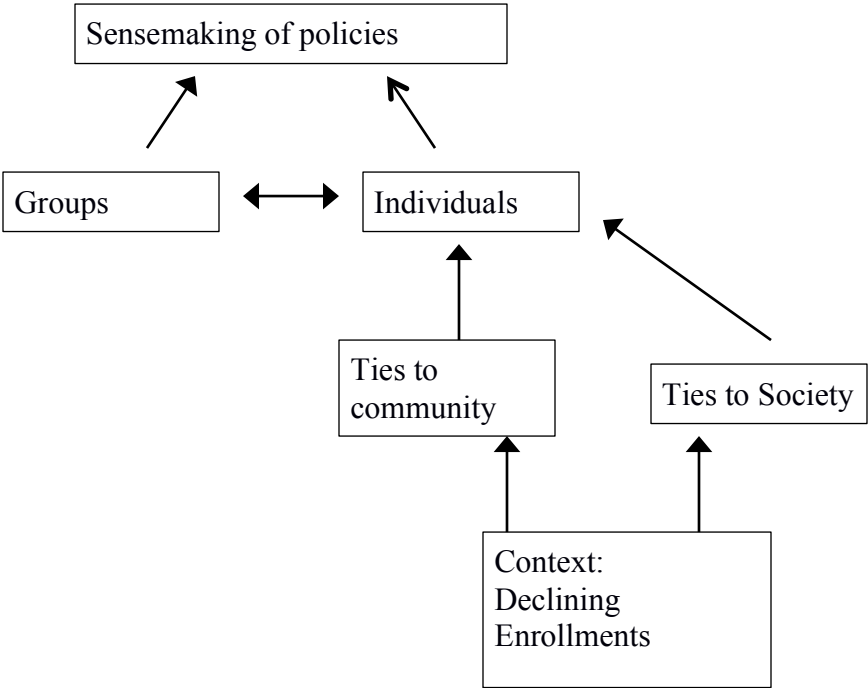
APPENDIX B

TEACHER INTERVIEW

1) Tell me a little bit about your own K-12 schooling experiences. Where did you go to school? (district, city)
   a. How close is where you went to school to this district?
   b. How similar is the community you grew up in to where you work?
      i. In what ways is it similar?
      ii. How is it different?

2) How long have you worked in the district? How long have you worked at this school?

3) What are you certified to teach?

4) Where do you live?
   a. How close is that to this district?
   b. How long have you lived there?
   c. Have you ever lived in this community?

5) How would you define community?

6) Do you consider yourself a part of the community?
   a. If so, why?
   b. If not why not?

7) What do you feel like is the school district's role or main objective? (probe further to get at what they think the job of the school is)
   a. What goals is the district trying to accomplish?
   b. Who does the district serve?

8) What is the biggest challenge faced by the school district?
   a. Is having fewer students over time a concern?
      i. In what ways does it impact your teaching?
         1. How you teach?
         2. What you teach?

9) What is the biggest challenge faced by the community?
   a. Is having fewer people in the community over time a concern?

10) Do you think the community and school district have similar or different goals and concerns?
   a. Do you see them as being tied together or separate altogether?

11) Is there anything you wish was different about the relationship between the community and the school district?

12) Do you feel like there is a lot of talk related to international competitiveness?
   a. If not
      i. why not?
   b. If yes
      i. Can you list examples?
      ii. What level are they at?
      iii. Why do you think there is?

13) Recently Arne Duncan said, "In a knowledge-based, global economy, where education is more important than ever before, both to individual success and collective prosperity, our students are basically losing ground. We're running in place, as other high-performing countries start to lap us"
    a. What do you think is meant by this comment?
    b. Do you agree with his assessment?

Interview #2
14) Describe for me your teaching responsibilities.

15) What would you say your teaching philosophy is?

16) Do you think the Michigan Merit Curriculum has influenced your teaching?
    a. If so, what's the connection?
    b. If not, why isn't there one?
    c. Do you talk about the MMC with your colleagues? Where?

17) What do you think the purpose of the Michigan Merit Curriculum is?
    a. Does it function in that way? Why or why not?

18) Do you think the Common Core standards have influenced your teaching?
    a. If so, what's the connection?
    b. If not, why do you think there isn't one?
    c. Do you talk about the common core with your colleagues? Where?

19) What do you think the purpose of the Common Core is?
    a. Does it function in that way? Why or why not?

20) Do you a slight or dramatic change from Michigan Merit Curriculum to Common Core?

21) Do you see any connection between the Common Core Standards and college-going?
    a. If so, what's the connection?
    b. If not, why isn't there one?

22) Do you see any connection between the Michigan Merit Curriculum and college-going?
    a. If so, what's the connection?
    b. If not, why isn't there one?

23) Do you feel like there is a lot of talk related to increasing college-going, or college preparation?
    a. If not
        i. why not?
    b. If yes
        i. Can you list examples?
        ii. What level are they at?
        iii. Why do you think there is?

24) At recent speech, Arne Duncan said, "Our nation needs the students and teachers who are here today to influence the next generation to pursue college and career training"
    a. What do you think is meant by this comment?

b. Do you agree with his assessment?

25) Do you think it is important to prepare all students for college?
    a. If yes, why?
    b. If no, why not?

26) Who tends to go to college in this district?
    a. What types of schools do these students go to?
        i. Do these students tend to return?
    b. How many students go to on to college?

27) Do you incorporate any college-preparation into your teaching?
    a. If so how?
    b. If not, is it something you have considered?

28) Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX C

ADMINISTRATION INTERVIEW

1) Tell me a little bit about your own K-12 schooling experiences. Where did you go to school? (district, city)
   a. How close is where you went to school to this district?
   b. How similar is the community you grew up in to where you work?
      i. In what ways is it similar?

2) How long have you worked in the district? How long have you worked at this school?
   a. Have you taught previously?
      i. Where?
      ii. What subjects?
      iii. How long?

3) Where do you live?
   a. How close is that to this district?
   b. How long have you lived there?
   c. Have you ever lived in this community?

4) How would you define community?

5) Do you consider yourself a part of the community?
   a. If so, why?
   b. If not why not?

6) What do you feel like is the school district's role or main objective? (probe further to get at what they think the job of the school is)
   a. What goals is the district trying to accomplish?
   b. Who does the district serve?

7) What is the biggest challenge faced by the school district?
   a. Is having fewer students over time a concern?

8) What is the biggest challenge faced by the community?
   a. Is having fewer people in the community over time a concern?

9) Do you think the community and school district have similar or different goals or concerns?
   a. Do you see them as being tied together or separate altogether?

10) Is there anything you wish was different about the relationship between the community and the school district?

11) Do you feel like there is a lot of talk related to global competition?
    a. If not
       i. why not?
    b. If yes
       i. Can you list examples?
       ii. What level are they at?
       iii. Why do you think there is?

12) Recently Arne Duncan said, "In a knowledge-based, global economy, where education is more important than ever before, both to individual success and collective prosperity, our students are basically losing ground. We're running in place, as other high-performing countries start to lap us"
    a. What do you think is meant by this comment?
    b. Do you agree with his assessment?

13) Do you feel like there is a lot of talk related to increasing college-going, or college preparation?
    a. If not
        i. why not?
    b. If yes
        i. Can you list examples?
        ii. What level are they at?
        iii. Why do you think there is?

14) At a recent speech, Arne Duncan said, "Our nation needs the students and teachers who are here today to influence the next generation to pursue college and career training"
    a. What do you think is meant by this comment?
    b. Do you agree with his assessment?

15) Do you think it is important to prepare all students for college?
    a. If yes, why?
    b. If no, why not?

16) What does the school district do to prepare students for college?
    a. How do you define college?
    b. What courses do kids take?
    c. What activities are available?
    d. What programs are run?
    e. Is it part of the district's mission?
    f. Do you promote who gets into college, or college acceptance?
    g. Do faculty member talk about college-going, if so, where?
    h. Do you have dual enrollment opportunities?
    i. What do you personally do?

17) Who tends to go to college in this district?
    a. What are the traits college-going students?
    b. What types of schools do these students go to?
        i. Do these students tend to return?
    c. How many students go to on to college?
    d. Are there students who are mismatched in their post-high school plans?

18) How would you feel about a policy was implemented to evaluate the school district based on increasing the number of students going to college?

19) Do you see any connection between the Common Core Standards and college-going?
    a. If so, what's the connection?
    b. If not, why isn't there one?

20) Have the common core standards impacted your job?
    a. If so, how?

      b.   If not, why not?

21) Do you see any connection between the Michigan Merit Curriculum and college-going?
      a.   If so, what's the connection?
      b.   If not, why isn't there one?
      c.   Has the MMC changed things about the school district?

22) Has the MMC impacted your job?
      a.   If so, how?
      b.   If not, why not?

23) Do you a slight or dramatic change from Michigan Merit Curriculum to Common Core?

24) Do you have any questions for me?

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