

**EXPLORING YOUTH VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING WITHIN FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY  
SCHOOLS: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **EXPLORING YOUTH VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING WITHIN FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY**

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Full-Service Community Schools are an approach to improving school conditions and providing integrated services for youth, families, and community members. Although Full-Service Community Schools conceptually involve collaborative, student-centered practices; youth voice in decision-making remains an underexplored component within the approach. My overarching goal for this study was to collaboratively explore youth voice in decision-making within the context of Full-Service Community Schools to drive future research, evaluation, implementation, and practice. Utilizing a community-based participatory research design, I conducted a mixed methods comparative multiple-case study to examine factors that impact the integration of youth voice in decision-making across three Full-Service Community School sites. By triangulating data from young people, adults, and documentary sources, I identified similarities and differences in how youth and adults describe youth voice in decision-making, and facilitators and barriers to youth voice within and across the three Community School sites. Based on these findings, I present an expanded understanding of youth voice in decision-making within the unique context of these sites and identify opportunities within the broader Full-Service Community Schools approach.

*Keywords:* Youth voice in decision-making, Student voice, Youth-adult partnerships, community-based participatory research, Youth empowerment

*“Youth voice to me means encompassing the ideas, opinions and desire of young people and students so that in the end it is not only a helpful environment but a healthy and joyful one for the now and future.”*

This dissertation is dedicated to young people with the courage to practice hope,  
especially those that participated in my dissertation.

I am forever indebted to, and inspired by, you.

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## INTRODUCTION

Youth voice in decision-making occurs when young people are recognized as valued members of a community and processes are created to meaningfully involve them in decisions that affect their lives (Zeldin et al., 2008). Youth voice in decision-making can have important beneficial impacts on many aspects of youth development (e.g., self-esteem, identity, social responsibility, emotional, cognitive) while also improving organizational functioning and youth engagement (Eccles et al., 1993; Mitra, 2004; Voight, 2015; Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2018). However, despite the importance and impact of youth voice in decision-making, this practice is seldomly integrated into settings that serve young people, such as schools (Cook-Sather, 2002; Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; Kohfeldt et al., 2011), youth-serving organizations (Zeldin et al., 2008), research and evaluation (Krenichyn et al., 2007; Langhout & Thomas, 2010), and public policy (Kirshner, 2007). Successful implementation of youth voice in decision-making requires attention to the specific facilitators and barriers that impact successful youth-adult partnerships within the unique settings that serve young people (Zeldin et al., 2008).

This study aims to collaboratively explore youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools to drive future research, evaluation, implementation, and practice of this approach. Full-Service Community Schools is an approach at improving school conditions and reducing barriers to learning for youth—especially those living in poverty—through integrated service delivery and collaborative decision-making (Blank et al., 2003; Valli et al., 2016). However, despite the importance of collaboratively integrating youth, families, and communities in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools, conceptual descriptions, research and evaluation syntheses, and practical materials often omit youth voice in decision-making practices or do not provide clear guidance for their implementation (Blank et al., 2003; Heers et al., 2016; Maier et al., 2017; Stefanski et al., 2017; The Center for Popular

Democracy et al., 2016). Given the importance of youth voice in decision-making, both broadly and within the context of Full-Service Community Schools, more research and practice that explicitly centers youth within this strategy is warranted.

This project utilizes a community-based participatory research approach for addressing youth voice in decision-making within this context, as I developed it in partnership with organizational staff of a local implementation of Full-Service Community Schools, to be responsive to their needs and local capacity, while contributing toward broader research and practice of youth voice in decision-making. This project implements a mixed-methods multiple-case study approach to examine youth voice in decision-making within three unique Full-Service Community School sites. By collecting and analyzing a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data including interviews, focus groups, documentary sources, and surveys, I aim to address the following research questions: (1) What are the similarities and differences in how youth and adults describe youth voice within the context of Full-Service Community Schools? (2) What are facilitators and barriers to youth voice in decision-making within and across three unique Full-Service Community School sites? (3) What are the opportunities for youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools strategy more broadly?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Empowerment is a process by which people gain greater control in their lives (Rappaport, 1981, 1987). Empowerment is conceptualized to impact three unique components of research and practice: values, processes, and outcomes (Christens, 2019; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment values inform an orientation toward research that emphasizes partnership with those most directly impacted by the work (Christens, 2012). Empowering processes are those that work collaboratively in partnership with people—instead of advocating for them—by creating opportunities for involvement in developing and influencing decisions (Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment is also an outcome. Specifically, as individuals become involved in empowering processes, they can become empowered in their beliefs and actively engage in behaviors that demonstrate a greater sense of control in their lives (Christens, 2012; Zimmerman, 2000). Empowerment is best recognized as a holistic construct, impacted by individual, relational, and organizational factors, and is most comprehensively examined through an ecological lens, situated in the complex, multilevel nature through which it is developed and experienced in individuals, organizations, and communities (Christens, 2012; Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Rappaport, 1981, 1987; Zimmerman, 2000).

### **Promoting empowerment through youth-adult partnerships**

Integrating empowerment values, processes, and outcomes are especially critical for those that are often marginalized, not viewed as competent, and/or not given control in their lives—such as youth (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Langhout & Thomas, 2010). Empowerment theory pushes researchers and practitioners to work collaboratively with youth and enable them to have control over the settings that impact their life, rather than simply providing services or programs (Christens, 2012). However, adults must create the context for an environment to become empowering for youth (Cargo et al., 2003; Gruber & Trickett, 1987). For instance,

researchers adopting an ecological approach to youth empowerment can consider how the environments in which youth work, study, play, and live impact and bound how youth experience empowerment.

The youth-adult partnership is a framework for promoting youth empowerment through creating intentional structures and processes (Wong et al., 2010; Zeldin et al., 2013). Like empowerment, the youth-adult partnership framework is also multilevel and multidimensional model to guide the values, skills, and methods necessary for youth and adult interactions (Camino, 2000). Youth adult partnerships occur when “(a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberate and act together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time, (d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue” (Zeldin et al., 2013, p. 388). The youth-adult partnership framework has four key components: youth voice in decision-making, mentorship, reciprocity, and community connectedness (Zeldin et al., 2013). Existing scholarship and theory documents how these four components can be integrated into different settings, contexts, and organizations (Camino, 2005; Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Libby et al., 2005; Zeldin et al., 2013, 2018). Within these settings, a framework of youth-adult partnership can be embedded across multiple levels including individual values, interpersonal behaviors and relationships, organizational roles and structures, and broader norms and roles for youth and adults in society (Camino, 2000; Zeldin et al., 2018).

### **Youth voice in decision-making**

While youth-adult partnerships are considered a holistic construct, youth voice in decision-making is a particularly important component for fostering empowerment and civic development within youth across countries and contexts (Krauss et al., 2014; Zeldin et al., 2015). Youth voice in decision-making refers to involving youth in decisions that affect them through design, reflection, and evaluation (Zeldin et al., 2013; Zeldin, et al., 2008; Zimmerman, 2000). Youth voice in decision-making is considered to be both a principle and a process-based

construct (Zeldin et al., 2008). The principle-based nature refers to changing adult mindsets to value youth as partners in decisions that affect them (Zeldin et al., 2008). Addressing the principle-based nature of youth decision-making requires mindset shifts that (a) challenge power imbalances between youth and adults, (b) value youth as experts of their lived experiences, and (c) emphasize democratic values, co-learning, and egalitarian decision-making (Wong et al., 2010). The process-based nature of youth voice in decision-making refers to developing systematic structures and processes within an organization, institution, or program for youth to be democratically included in decision-making (Zeldin et al., 2008). The process nature of youth voice in decision-making requires implementation of egalitarian decision-making structures and processes with diverse stakeholders (e.g., youth, adults, teachers, staff) (Zeldin et al., 2008). Adequately implementing both principle and process components of youth voice in decision-making establishes an adequate context for promoting youth empowerment (Zeldin et al., 2018).

### ***Opportunities and benefits for youth voice in decision-making***

There are a wide variety of opportunities for successfully integrating youth voice in decision-making within settings that serve youth, including schools, community organizations, youth programs, local government, and coalitions. Youth can be involved in decision-making through advisory structures within community coalitions or councils (Collura et al., 2019), school-based committees (Giraldo-García et al., 2020) or youth program settings (VeLure Roholt & Mueller, 2013). Participatory action research and evaluation projects provide an opportunity for youth to identify problems or important questions, collaboratively conduct research to understand the problem, and develop relevant action plans and solutions (Cohen et al., 2019; Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Ozer & Wright, 2012; Richards-Schuster & Plachta Elliott, 2019). Youth and adults can also work together to generate broader solutions that impact education and public policy (Checkoway et al., 2005; Kirshner, 2007). In other cases, young people engage in collective organizing or advocacy efforts to create change within their schools or communities (Christens & Dolan, 2010; Warren et al., 2008). Across a wide variety of contexts

and settings, researchers have consistently documented that youth are ready, willing, and able to be involved in diverse decision-making opportunities (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2004; Checkoway et al., 2003; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011).

Opportunities for youth voice in decision-making can have profound impacts on young people that engage in these efforts (Zeldin et al., 2015). Creating opportunities for youth voice in decision-making supports the developmental needs of early adolescents and adolescents (i.e., middle and high school youth) seeking greater autonomy and choice, thereby providing a context for positive youth development (Eccles et al., 1993). Specifically, youth involvement in decision-making can enhance youths' skills, build self-esteem, promote identity development, and increase social capital and social responsibility (Mitra, 2004; 2008; Mitra & Serriere, 2012; Sinclair, 2004; Zeldin, 2004). Within the context of schools, successful implementation of youth voice in decision-making can contribute to youth empowerment and positive emotional and cognitive engagement (Zeldin et al., 2018). Some youth voice initiatives—such as youth participatory action research courses—can have broader impacts on academic outcomes, including student attendance and reading achievement (Voight & Velez, 2018). Involving youth voice in decision-making opportunities can also be a pathway toward promoting broader civic engagement attitudes and behaviors within young people (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). Engaging youth in decision-making is one example of how the opportunities and expectations adults create directly impact the skills and competencies that youth develop (Langhout & Thomas, 2010; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Youth voice in decision-making also positively impacts the settings and contexts that serve young people. Integrating youth voice in decision-making can promote more meaningful or active youth engagement within community-based organizations or activities (Sinclair, 2004; Zeldin, 2004). Processes for youth voice in decision-making within youth program settings can enhance organizational functioning and connections to the communities they aim to serve through fostering collaborative organizational membership between youth and adults and

enhancing meeting dynamics (Zeldin, 2004). Organizational benefits are especially critical within settings or contexts that do not often give youth a voice, such as schools (Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Langhout, 2005; Ozer et al., 2013; Ren & Langhout, 2010). Youth voice in decision-making within educational settings can improve school climate by strengthening relationships, promoting prosocial behaviors, and fostering youth engagement and responsibility within the school (Voight, 2015; Voight & Nation, 2016). Engaging students in decision-making can also result in important structural changes and resource allocations within the school environment to meet student needs more adequately (e.g., Ren & Langhout, 2010).

### ***Barriers to youth voice in decision-making***

Despite documented benefits and opportunities for youth voice in decision-making, systems and contexts that serve young people often fail to fully integrate them as collaborative partners. The complex and challenging nature of addressing both the *principle* and *process* components of youth voice in decision-making are helpful to understand this disconnect (Zeldin et al., 2008). A failure to incorporate youth voice in decision-making can be linked to power inequities that are typically present between youth and adults that impact frameworks and structures (Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Langhout, 2005). Within the context of educational settings, this requires acknowledging youths' value and changing structures and processes within the institution (Cook-Sather, 2002).

Principle barriers to youth voice in decision-making includes the mindsets, frameworks, or values present within individuals and settings that do not adequately acknowledge or value young people. Within the United States, no formal policies or standards to encourage youth participation and voice within public decision-making exist (Mitra et al., 2014). As such, deficit frameworks and mindsets about youth remain persistent within society, scholarship, and settings that service youth (e.g., social service sectors, helping professions; Checkoway et al., 2003). Within school systems, inequities in roles, knowledge, school responsibilities, and educational expertise between youth and adults can drastically undermine intentions of

egalitarian decision-making (Gruber & Trickett, 1987). Adult mindsets of “ideal” students as compliant and well-behaved—best enforced through a culture of strict discipline and rigid behavior rules—promotes frameworks of control, conformity, and silencing within the school context (Cook-Sather, 2002; Langhout, 2005).

Process barriers to youth voice in decision-making include those related to creating egalitarian structures or systems for young people to be democratically included. Processes for youth voice in decision-making are infrequently embedded within the contexts and setting that serve youth, including: schools (Cook-Sather, 2002; Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; Kohfeldt et al., 2011), youth-serving organizations (Zeldin et al., 2008), research and evaluation (Krenichyn et al., 2007; Langhout & Thomas, 2010), and public policy (Kirshner, 2007). For instance, in their review of community based participatory research projects with youth, an approach that espouses working collaboratively with youth—Jacquez and colleagues documented that only a small subset of these projects (15%) included youth as partners in the research process (2013). Institutional and community conditions—such as those present within schools—can exacerbate challenges when creating authentic partnerships between youth and adults (Camino, 2000; Mitra, 2009). Youth involved in school change efforts experience many barriers due to complexities within the school context, including navigating political dynamics, challenging hierarchical levels of control (e.g., classroom, school, and district levels), and working within resource or barrier constraints (Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Ozer et al., 2013). When opportunities for youth voice in decision-making are created within schools, they are typically more limited in scope, often focusing on generating student input or feedback on extracurricular activities, rather than key educational decisions (e.g., teaching practices, student curriculum; Ozer & Wright, 2012).

### ***Facilitators to youth voice in decision-making***

Strategies for integrating youth voice in decision-making must explicitly address power inequities typically present between youth and adults by combatting these principle and

process-based challenges (Collura et al., 2019; Cook-Sather, 2002; Gruber & Trickett, 1987; Zeldin et al., 2008). Supporting youth voice in decision-making begins when adults actively create a culture that demonstrates valuing the perspectives and insights of young people. Adults can promote a culture that authentically values young people by treating them as “legitimate participants” in problem solving (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011, p. 1685) and explicitly communicating—through multiple channels—the importance of their inclusion in decision-making processes (Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010). Adults in leadership roles (e.g., program staff, teachers) can serve to be marketers, cheerleaders, and advocates for youth voice in decision-making (Zeldin et al., 2008).

Existing research and practice on youth voice in decision-making has identified many effective processes for facilitating the democratic inclusion of young people. First and foremost, thoughtful planning is critical to ensure that any systems or structures for youth voice in decision-making authentically invite young people and provide enough support for them to participate meaningfully (Gruber & Trickett, 1987). Adults can begin by utilizing group processes to build relationships with youth (Mitra, 2009; Stefanski et al., 2017) and ensuring that young people are provided adequate preparation, training, skills, and information necessary to meaningfully participate in these opportunities (Gruber & Trickett, 1987; VeLure Roholt & Mueller, 2013). As youth and adults work together, explicitly defining and re-defining roles within group settings helps call attention to power inequities (Collura et al., 2019). Even within settings that are more hierarchical or structured in nature—such as schools—adults can create opportunities for “micro power compensation,” or unique, tailored avenues for autonomy and choice within the context of broader limits or constraints (Ozer et al., 2013, p. 20). Over time, this requires intentional design to move from a single decision-making event toward genuine, ongoing, and active participation in decision-making (Sinclair 2004).

## **Full-Service Community Schools: A critical context for youth voice in decision-making**

Full-Service Community Schools are a unique and critical context for further exploring youth voice in decision-making. Full-Service Community Schooling is an approach to transforming educational systems with two overarching aims: (1) coordinate and deliver school-based, integrated services; and (2) democratize schools through collaborative decision-making with students, families, and community members (Blank et al., 2003; Valli et al., 2016). Full-Service Community Schools are conceptualized as a student-centered approach to education, and therefore youth are envisioned as important partners in decision-making (e.g., Institute for Educational Leadership & Coalition for Community Schools, 2017; 2018; Valli et al., 2016). Through integrated service delivery and collaborative decision-making, Full-Service Community Schools improve school conditions and reduce barriers to learning for children, especially those living in poverty (Blank et al., 2003; Dryfoos, 2000; Maier et al., 2017). To facilitate implementation, typically an adult staff person (i.e., Coordinator or Director) is placed within a school to oversee leadership and coordination of the Full-Service Community School including planning, stakeholder engagement, partnership development, and evaluation (Sanders et al., 2019). Youth who attend Full-Service Community Schools have shown improvements in attendance and math achievement (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Blank et al., 2003; Dryfoos, 2000; Durham et al., 2019), increased reading scores and college aspirations (Caldas et al., 2019) and decreased school dropout, risky behaviors (Heers et al., 2016), and school suspensions (Dryfoos, 2000).

Implementation of Full-Service Community Schools has rapidly increased in the United States (U.S.) since 1990 (Min et al., 2017; Warren, 2005). To support growing implementation, a national Coalition for Community Schools (NCCS) was developed to provide coordination, collaboration, and resource sharing across the country (Coalition for Community Schools, 2021). The Coalition supports collaboration and resource sharing through creating shared virtual spaces for researchers and practitioners (e.g., Research-to-Practice Network, Superintendents

Leadership Council), providing bi-annual national meetings to share best practices, and developing publications to inform research and practice (Coalition for Community Schools, 2021). After decades of national implementation of the Community Schools model, the Coalition only recently published the Community School Standards—a practice-based tool to support implementation, adherence, and measurement of common practices (Institute for Educational Leadership & Coalition for Community Schools, 2018). Within these standards, several elements of youth voice in decision-making are embedded, thereby further underscoring its importance within Full-Service Community Schools (Institute for Educational Leadership & Coalition for Community Schools, 2018).

Table 1 documents the standards and indicators of Full-Service Community Schools that incorporate youth voice in decision-making. The standards are organized in two categories: (1) Community School structures and functions; and (2) common opportunities in a Community School. *Structures and functions* standards identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for successful implementation of Full-Service Community Schools (Institute for Educational Leadership & Coalition for Community Schools, 2018). Five structures and function standards incorporate youth voice in decision-making. Two standards (1.2, 1.3)—focused on collaborative leadership—describe how students and families should be involved in school leadership teams and become integrated into the life and work of the school. One standard, focused on planning (2.3), states that students need to be involved in regularly occurring needs assessments that guide school improvement plan development. Two standards (6.1, 6.2)—focused on sustainability—describe how students should have shared ownership for the Community School through celebrating success and collective advocacy.

Table 1. Full-Service Community School Standards and Relevant Indicators for Youth Voice in Decision-Making

Standard	Description	Relevant Indicators
<b>Part I: Community School Structures &amp; Functions</b>		
<i>Collaborative Leadership: Nurtures shared ownership and shared accountability</i>		
1.2	A representative Site-Based Leadership Team, including families, <b>students</b> , community partners, unions, neighboring community residents, the principal, community school coordinator, teachers, and other school personnel and community partners, guides collaborative planning, implementation, and oversight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site leadership team is representative of the school and community.</li> <li>• Regularly scheduled meetings agenda and minutes.</li> <li>• Clear definition of leadership team roles, responsibilities, and empowerment to make decisions.</li> </ul>
1.3	The principal works with the community school coordinator, partners, and staff to actively integrate <b>families</b> and community partners into the life and work of the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal is open to and has mechanisms in place to hear and act on input from school staff and <b>families</b>.</li> </ul>
<i>Planning: Incorporates the assets and needs of school, family, and community in the School Improvement Plan.</i>		
2.3	A needs and assets assessment of the school, student, families, and neighboring community is conducted regularly to inform the school improvement plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Input from <b>students</b>, families, teachers, school staff, and community members and partners inform the needs and assets assessment.</li> </ul>
<i>Sustainability: Ensures ongoing operations of the community school</i>		
6.1	A strategy for continuously strengthening shared ownership for the community school among school personnel, <b>families</b> , and community partners is in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partners, school, <b>families</b>, and communities are included in acknowledging and celebrating success.</li> </ul>
6.2	School personnel, unions, community partners and leaders, and <b>families</b> publicly celebrate successes, and advocate for community schools within their organization and across their community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents, <b>students</b>, and families have opportunities for advocacy training.</li> </ul>
<b>Part II: Common Opportunities in a Community School</b>		
<i>Powerful Learning: Engages students as independent learners</i>		
7.2	Youth development principles, <b>particularly with an emphasis on student voice and choice</b> , inform student learning and development strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Students participate in decisions</b> about learning opportunities during and outside of the school day.</li> <li>• Youth surveys (e.g., school climate, development assets) assess whether <b>students have voice and choice</b>.</li> </ul>
7.5	Students have access to enriching after-school programs that are aligned with the curriculum.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Students</b> and families are asked about out-of-school time learning goals, needs, and priorities.</li> </ul>

Table 1. (cont'd)

7.8	Learning experiences incorporate a focus on real world issues and enable young people to be problem solvers in their own communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Students</b> go on field trips and work on project-based lessons to understand real world issues.</li> <li>• <b>Students</b> study challenges facing themselves and their community and have opportunities to propose solutions.</li> </ul>
<i>Authentic Family Engagement: Embraces families and mobilizes family assets</i>		
9.2	<b>Families</b> have equity of voice and power in the community school's leadership and decision-making structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Families</b> are represented on the Site Leadership Team.</li> <li>• <b>Voices of families</b> are included as part of the needs and asset assessment.</li> <li>• Leadership development opportunities are regularly available to <b>families</b> and community members.</li> </ul>
9.6	Leadership development opportunities are regularly available to <b>families</b> and community residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership development opportunities are available in school or community.</li> </ul>

*Common opportunity* standards document the practices and programs often present within Community Schools that must be unique and responsive to local contexts (Institute for Educational Leadership & Coalition for Community Schools, 2018). Five of these standards describe additional ways that youth can be involved in decision-making. Three standards (7.2, 7.5, 7.8) describe opportunities for engaging youth as independent learners by incorporating student voice and choice in programs, curricula, and learning experiences that are relevant to their lives. Additionally, two standards (9.2, 9.6)—focused on authentic family engagement—describe how families should have voice and power in decision-making structures and access to leadership development opportunities. Although not all standards explicitly state “youth” or “students,” I have chosen to incorporate youth within my conceptualization of the term “family” as both are an important but often underutilized component of the Full-Service Community Schools strategy (Shiller & The Teacher’s Democracy Project, 2020). Together, these ten standards describe unique processes, practices, and pathways for incorporating youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools.

Despite the importance of youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools—both conceptually and within the Community School standards—these guidelines provide minimal guidance on strategies for implementation. For instance, standard 7.8 states that youth should “study challenges facing themselves and their community and have opportunities to propose solutions” (Institute for Educational Leadership & Coalition for Community Schools, 2018, p. 14). However, specific strategies for how Community School staff can implement this standard in practice has not been documented. In contrast, other scholarship on Full-Service Community Schools examines the importance of engaging parents or caregivers in decision-making and provides suggestions for implementation and practice (Stefanski et al., 2017). No comparable examination or synthesis for engaging youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools exists.

Given a lack of strategies for the implementation of youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools, it is unsurprising that the existing research on Full-Service Community Schools does not fully integrate youth (e.g., Heers et al., 2016; Maier et al., 2017; The Center for Popular Democracy et al., 2016). For instance, when Heers and colleagues (2016) examined the existing literature on Full-Service Community Schools to extract essential components and outcomes, their results did not include democratic decision-making with stakeholders nor youth voice in decision-making. Similarly, Maier and colleagues' (2017) review of summative research and evaluation on Full-Service Community Schools only briefly mentions youth voice in decision-making. Finally, case study exemplars of Full-Service Community Schools often omit this component from their description altogether (The Center for Popular Democracy et al., 2016). For example, in a recent compilation of exemplar Full-Service Community School case studies, only half of the descriptions discuss ways in which youth voice in decision-making influenced implementation (The Center for Popular Democracy et al., 2016). Community school researchers and practitioners recently underscored the importance of a more targeted focus on research and case studies that explore youth voice within the community school approach (Community Schools Research Practice Network, 2020). Taken together, these patterns in the literature provide consistent support for research and practice that explicitly centers youth voice in decision-making within the Full-Service Community Schools strategy.

### **The Current Study**

Youth voice in decision-making is a critical practice to promote positive youth development and enhance the contexts and settings that serve young people. Prior research on youth voice in decision-making has explored this construct within diverse settings serving young people such as traditional public schools, youth programs, and community coalitions (e.g., Collura et al., 2019; VeLure Roholt & Mueller, 2013; Voight, 2015; Zeldin et al., 2018, 2008). However, there is an overwhelming lack of research investigating youth voice in decision-making within the context of Full-Service Community Schools—despite its theoretical and

conceptual importance. Specifically, identifying the contextually relevant facilitators and barriers to youth voice in decision-making within this setting can support implementation of the approach (Damschroder et al., 2009; Dearing, 2009; Wejnert, 2002). Given that youth and adults often interpret and conceptualize ideas differently, including opportunities to explore youth voice in decision-making with adults and young people will generate a more holistic understand of this setting (Chen et al., 2010; Jacquez et al., 2013). Therefore, the overarching goal of this study is to collaboratively explore youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools to drive future research, evaluation, implementation, and practice of the approach.

Community based participatory research serves as a useful paradigm for addressing youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools as it provides an approach for working collaboratively with community stakeholders to solve problems through research and action (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). By working collaboratively and intentionally with stakeholders, community-based participatory researchers consider the local context, challenge power inequities, and build relationships (Jacquez et al., 2013). This project is guided by the community-based participatory research paradigm, as it was developed in partnership with organizational staff of a Full-Service Community School initiative. Our collaborative partnership began when management staff of a Full-Service Community School initiative sought a community-based research team to support implementation of the approach through routine evaluation, technical assistance, and continuous quality improvement efforts. Throughout this partnership, my research team has supported several evaluation efforts for the initiative, including an implementation assessment, formative, and summative evaluations, and needs assessment processes.

As a member of this research team—and then project lead for the evaluation—I approached management staff of the initiative expressing my interest in partnering to conduct a community-engaged dissertation. For my dissertation, I wanted to explore a topic that was locally relevant to meaningfully inform program practice and connect with broader evaluation

and research on Full-Service Community Schools. Together, we determined to focus this project on exploring youth voice in decision-making, given my emerging expertise in the topic and our prior research and evaluation efforts underscoring the importance of enhancing opportunities for youth voice as an avenue for growth within the initiative. After identifying our project focus, we then held several planning meetings to review and explore ideas together to identify key project components. What resulted was a collaboratively designed project that was meaningful and relevant to each of us, responsive to the needs and capacity of the initiative, and aimed to contribute toward broader research and practice of youth voice in decision-making.

Together, we determined to conduct a multiple-case study project examining youth voice in decision-making within initiative across several unique sites. A case study approach allows for an in-depth analysis of a small sample of sites to gain a deep understanding of a topic of interest along a continuum (Patton, 2015, Yin, 2009). In a multiple case study design, several cases are selected to maximize opportunities to learn about a particular issue across different contexts, across three types of criteria: (1) relevance, (2) diversity in experiences, (3) opportunities for complexity (Stake, 1995; 2006). In addition, single and multiple-case study methods have been a common approach for understanding the complex and emergent nature of Full-Service Community Schools (e.g., Galindo et al., 2017; McKinney de Royston & Madkins, 2019; Sanders, 2018; Sanders et al., 2019).

We selected three school sites to serve as case studies, to incorporate a range of contextual factors that may impact youth voice, including: student age (middle and high school youth), perceived existing levels of youth involvement, and school administrative structure (traditional public school versus charter). Specifically, we selected the following Full-Service Community School sites within the initiative: a traditional public school serving middle school students, grades six through eight (*Site A*); a public charter school serving grades K – 12 (*Site B*), and a traditional public high school serving grades 9 – 12 (*Site C*). Once we identified these sites, I held a group meeting with the school-based initiative staff (i.e., Full-Service Community

School Directors) to see if they were interested in being involved in the project as collaborative partners and participants. All staff agreed to support the project and were excited about the possibility of informing their program practice. We then held several planning meetings to further identify and clarify specific project components (e.g., protocols, timelines, project logistics).

As a result, this project is a community-based participatory research project exploring youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools. Specifically, I employ a mixed methods multiple-case study approach to examine factors that impact integration of youth voice in decision-making across three unique Full-Service Community Schools, through the following research questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences in how youth and adults describe youth voice within the context of Full-Service Community Schools?
2. What are facilitators and barriers to youth voice in decision-making within and across three unique Full-Service Community School sites?
3. What are the opportunities for youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools strategy more broadly?

## **METHODS**

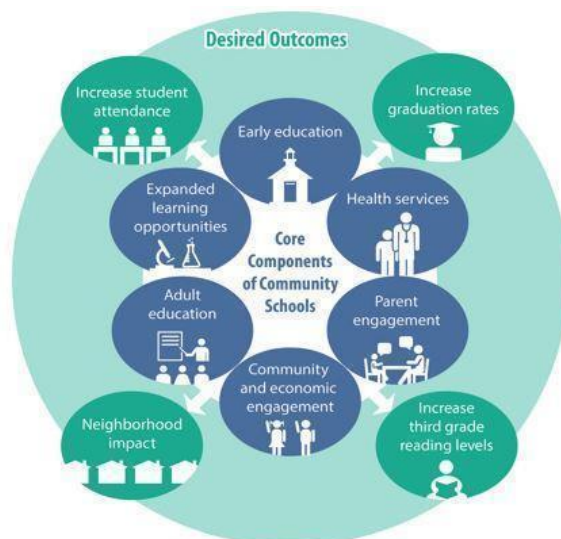
### **Setting**

In this case study, I partnered with a Full-Service Community School initiative within one of Michigan's small legacy cities. Legacy cities are urban centers that have experienced an outflux of industry and manufacturing jobs within the last 50 years, resulting in significant declines in population, employment, and household income (Hollingsworth & Goebel, 2017). As a response to the complex challenges facing this city, community stakeholders organized to fund the implementation of a Full-Service Community School approach within the local public school district, beginning in 2014 and led by a local community-based nonprofit organization. In 2018, the non-profit organization began expanding the Full-Service Community School approach to also include local charter schools to expand the reach of the initiative, which now includes two additional charters in the surrounding area.

In each school within the initiative, a Director leads the implementation of the Full-Service Community Schools approach—guided by a logic model that includes six core components and four main outcomes (see Figure 1). In addition, seven managerial staff oversee district implementation and operations (i.e., Initiative Director, Executive Assistant, Data and Evaluation Coordinator, and four Program Managers that directly oversee a subset of these site Directors). In the 2020-21 school year, the local public school district served approximately 3,000 students, a large proportion of which were economically disadvantaged (92%) and racial and ethnic minorities (74% African American, 6% Two or More Races, 3% Hispanic/Latino). During the 2018-19 school year—the most recent year with publicly available data—the percentage of students within the district meeting proficiency standards on achievement test scores was significantly lower than the state averages in both 3rd Grade English/Language Arts

(11% and 45%, respectively) and Mathematics (10% and 47%, respectively; Michigan Department of Education, 2021).

*Figure 1. Core Components and Outcomes of the Full-Service Community School Initiative.*



## Study Context

Data for this study was collected between Fall 2020 to Spring 2021, during which the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus caused a global pandemic. The state of Michigan—where this study took place—was uniquely impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic due to large number of cases and deaths near the pandemic's onset (Haddad, 2020). Local and state officials implemented a variety of public health measures to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus, such as: social distancing and mask guidelines, mandating virtual or hybrid K-12 schooling, reducing occupancy guidelines, restricting large gatherings, closing non-essential businesses (e.g., dine-in restaurants, gyms), and stay-at-home orders (Haddad, 2020). As a result of the pandemic and these public health interventions, youth and families were impacted in a variety of unique ways during this time, including financial or economic hardship, increased childcare demands, trauma and/or mental health needs (Lee et al., 2021). The context of schooling in Michigan was also uniquely impacted due to the often variable and inconsistent virtual and hybrid teaching approaches during this time (Middleton, 2020). Thus, it is important

to note that data for this study was collected during this unique period, which ground and impact the results described herein (Shadish et al., 2002).

### **Researcher characteristics and reflexivity**

As the author of this dissertation, it is important for me to engage in thoughtful reflexivity to situate myself as an active member of this research project (Finlay & Gough, 2008). I am conducting this research project to fulfill requirements for my doctorate in Community Psychology. As a field, Community Psychology aims to create social change—especially for those who are often disadvantaged—through examining and better understanding the social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, and international influences that impact individuals (Jason, et al., 2019). Through my training in Community Psychology, I have gained experiences in community-based participatory research and evaluation to design, collect, analyze, and report quantitative and qualitative data for academic and community purposes. It was through these experiences that I became aware of Full-Service Community Schools, and I began to recognize its value and importance within communities. Thus, because of my Community Psychology training, I have both personal and professional motivations for conducting this study. Personally, I recognize the inherent value in youth voice and Full-Service Community Schools, and I am motivated to dually promote both agendas within my research and community-based practice. Professionally, I am motivated to conduct this research to fulfill my doctoral requirements and advance my program of research that fosters community and youth mobilization within educational settings.

I am also both personally and professionally committed to supporting the work of my community partners, the local Full-Service Community Schools initiative referenced in this project. When I designed this project, I served as the project lead for the external evaluation of the Full-Service Community Schools initiative. In my role as project lead, I developed relationships with the Community School directors and management staff of this initiative. Furthermore, the directors and management team of the Full-Service Community Schools

initiative are aware of my goals and wish to support me in my academic endeavors. My community partners were both excited to engage in this project and have contributed to the development and refinement of the study's goals, materials, and procedures. However, I do not currently have relationships with any youth who were involved in this study.

Finally, it is important to be reflexive of elements of power and privilege. I am an educated, middle-class, white female. The community in which this project is based is largely African American, many of which experience poverty and other social challenges. As a community-based participatory researcher, I recognize the strengths, value, and knowledge of my collaborators and participants. However, my role as project lead for my dissertation puts me in a position of power. Additionally, my experiences and background have afforded me with many privileges that my participants have not received. Throughout the project, I continued to reflect on how I exhibited these qualities and express my sincere value for the knowledge and experiences that my participants have that I do not. To reduce power dynamics within this project, I intentionally create opportunities for the participants to lead (e.g., through design, in discussion) and continually express gratitude for their contributions.

## **Participants**

Table 2 provides an overview of all participants included in this study.

### ***Full-Service Community School Directors***

Full-Service Community School Directors (i.e., "Director") at each of the identified school sites agreed to participate in this project ( $N = 3$ ). I recruited Directors to participate in the project through an in-person meeting where I described the project scope, expectations, and processes. Directors were able to freely accept or decline to participate, with no ramifications on their employment. These Directors all self-identified as Black or African American, were largely male (67%), and had served in the Director position for an average of 3.5 years (See Table 2). All Directors completed consent forms during our first data collection meetings (i.e., Director Meetings).

Table 2. Demographic Information for Study Participants

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Total
<b>Director participants</b>				
<i>N</i>	1	1	1	3
Race (self-identified)	Black	African American	African American	100% Black or African American
Gender	Male	Female	Male	67 % Male
Age	33	39	31	<i>M</i> = 34
Years in Director position	3	3	4.5	<i>M</i> = 3.5
<b>Youth participants</b>				
<i>N</i>	3	14*	4	21
Race				
Black/African American	100%	92%	100%	95%
American Indian/Alaska Native	-	23%	-	15%
Middle Eastern/North African	-	8%	-	5%
White	-	-	25%	5%
Gender (self-identified)				
Male	-	46%	25%	35%
Female	100%	38%	75%	55%
Genderfluid	-	15%	-	10%
Age	<i>M</i> = 12.67	<i>M</i> = 15.31	<i>M</i> = 17.25	<i>M</i> = 15.30
Grade	<i>M</i> = 7.33	<i>M</i> = 9.77	<i>M</i> = 11.5	<i>M</i> = 9.75
Years attended case site school	<i>M</i> = 5.33	<i>M</i> = 7.54	<i>M</i> = 4.75	<i>M</i> = 6.65

Note. \*One youth from Site B did not complete demographic survey, therefore percentages and averages do not include this student.

### Youth

Directors identified youth from their site to participate in this project. Directors were trained to identify a stratified purposeful sample of twelve youth from each school site to participate in this study (Palinkas et al., 2015), based on specific engagement criteria—targeting those engaged in Community School activities and those who are not (see Appendix A). After identifying youth to participate, Directors coordinated with other school-based staff (e.g., Afterschool program staff, Sports Directors, teachers) to recruit youth to participate in the project, utilizing physical and virtual fliers, word of mouth, emails to students and parents, and phone calls. In recruitment activities, school staff informed youth (or their parents) of the purpose of the project and expectations of youths' involvement, making it clear that participation in this project was voluntary and would have no impact on their—or their families'—ability to

participate in the school-based services and supports provided through the Full-Service Community Schools approach. Fliers for the project included a link and QR code to a virtual consent form for parents to complete on behalf of their child, indicating their interest and consent in their child's involvement in the project (Appendix B).

Given the context of the pandemic, we experienced significant challenges recruiting our intended sample. Nevertheless, the youth involved in this study represent those most willing and able to be engaged in youth voice activities at these sites during time. A total of 21 unique youth, across the three school sites participated in this project (see Table 2). On average, youth who participated in this study were a diverse group of middle and high school students, largely representing systemically marginalized races, and had attended case study schools for several years ( $M = 6.65$ ;  $Range = 3 - 12$ ).

### **Data Sources**

In this study I used a mixed methods design where, I collected both qualitative and quantitative data sources concurrently, and prioritized qualitative data (QUAL + quan; Hanson et al., 2005). Table 3 summarizes all data sources utilized for this study.

Table 3. Overview of Data Sources Across Case Study Sites

Data Source	Measure Source	Type of data	Site A Sample	Site B Sample	Site C Sample
Director interviews	Interview questions guided by the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric	QUAL	N = 1	N = 1	N = 1
Director discussion group	Facilitators & barriers to Youth Voice in Decision-Making	QUAL	N = 1		
Youth focus groups	(Virtual) <b>Youth GO</b> Meetings	QUAL	<b>2 Focus groups;</b> 3 unique youth	<b>2 Focus groups;</b> 4 unique youth	<b>3 Focus groups;</b> 14 unique youth
	<i>Generating</i> Phase (steps 1-2)		1 Focus group; 3 youth	2 Focus groups; 4 youth	3 Focus groups; 14 youth
	<i>Organizing</i> Phases (steps 3-4)		1 Focus Group; 2 youth	N/A <sup>1</sup>	N/A <sup>1</sup>
Documentary Sources	Needs assessment sources (process data, action plans, evaluation reports) Director workplans for 20-21SY	QUAL	4 Sources	4 Sources	3 Sources
Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric scores	Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric scale items (discussed in Director interview)	quan	N = 1	N = 1	N = 1
Director surveys	<b>Youth-adult partnership measure</b> (Supportive Adult Relationships & Youth Voice in Decision-making)  <b>Youth voice in Community Schools</b> (created for study purposes)	quan	N = 1	N = 1	N = 1
Youth surveys	<b>Youth-adult partnership measure</b> (Supportive Adult Relationships & Youth Voice in Decision-making)	quan	N = 3	N = 4	N = 13
Community School Self-Assessment	<b>Community School Self-Assessment</b> (created for evaluation purposes, based on the Community School Standards)	quan	N = 7 (19-20SY) N = 5 (20-21SY)	N = 16 (19-20SY) N = 8 (20-21SY)	N = 11 (19-20SY) N = 10 (20-21SY)

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> Organizing meetings were not feasible across all sites due to personal and professional demands of Directors, site staff, students, and families during the pandemic. As a community-engaged scholar, I value the lived realities of my community partners and the community and context in which this study took place. I determined that pursuing these meetings beyond their capacity could have larger negative effects on the broader partnership.

## **Qualitative Sources**

**Director interviews.** I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol to conduct interviews with all Directors to examine the current context of youth voice in decision-making within each site (see Appendix C). The interview protocol is guided by a collaborative discussion and self-assessment using the Youth Adult Partnership Rubric (Wu et al., 2014). Originally designed as an observational measure, the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric measures the extent to which youth have a meaningful role within an organization or program and is organized by the four components of the youth-adult partnership model: authentic voice in decision-making, natural mentors, reciprocity and community connectedness (Wu et al., 2014). The rubric is intended for use within any setting in which youth and adults interact together toward a common goal and has been used primarily within afterschool programs (Wu et al., 2014). Prior to implementation for this project, the interview protocol was pilot tested with a research assistant, who served as a project support member for the evaluation partnership of the Full-Service Community School initiative. The purpose of this pilot test was to examine feasibility as a self-assessment tool, estimate the interview length, and identify probing questions to facilitate discussion. Within a project planning meeting, Directors involved in this study also reviewed the interview guide and deemed this protocol relevant and appropriate for our project.

During the interview, I asked Directors to first self-assess their Full-Service Community School site on the level of implementation of each item in the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric using a five-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = low implementation to 5 = high implementation). After ranking each item, Directors provided an explanation or justification for why that number is most appropriate for their site. I used additional probes and follow up questions to facilitate discussion about their responses (e.g., *Could you give an example? Why do you think that? Are there any areas where this does or doesn't happen well?*).

**Director discussion group.** The Director discussion group was a virtual facilitated conversation with all Director participants to further explore facilitators and barriers to youth

voice across all sites. The design of this discussion group was guided by the *Generating* phase of the Youth GO protocol for collecting participatory data with community members (explained in subsequent section; Stacy et al., 2018). Within the context of a virtual meeting, Directors were presented two discussion questions to consider: *Who or what has supported you to integrate youth voice in decision-making? What barriers or obstacles have you experiences while trying to integrate youth voice in decision-making?*

**Youth focus groups.** Focus groups were held with groups of youth from each site to explore their perspectives on youth voice in decision-making within the Full-Service Community School approach. The focus groups were guided by the Youth GO protocol, a participatory evaluation and research process that engages youth in collecting and analyzing data (Stacy et al., 2018, 2020). Youth GO has been utilized for research and evaluation purposes within the context of out-of-school time settings and has been documented to be an effective, resource efficient, and positively perceived approach by youth participants and adult facilitators (Stacy et al., 2018, 2020). All project activities were conducted virtually due to the pandemic; thus a modified Youth GO protocol to support virtual implementation of the five-step process: climate setting, generating, organizing, selecting, debrief and discussion (See Appendix D).

In step one, *Climate Setting*, a facilitator provides an introduction and overview of the group session and facilitates a discussion to generate group expectations. In step two, *Generating*, participants individually respond to selected prompts and engage in a group discussion to clarify and explore these responses. For this implementation of Youth GO, the prompts were selected to align with the questions included in the director interview (adapted from the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric, Wu et al., 2014). In step three, *Organizing*, youth first learn basic data organization skills. Then, the facilitator supports youth to create themes for responses generated in step two. Based on insights from Chiaramonte (2020), I used the example of using a hashtag on Twitter to help them understand the concept of theming. Thus, for the site that held the Organizing phase (Site A, as described below), youth-developed

themes are presented in the form of a social media hashtag. In step four, *Selecting*, youth participants create and cross-check categories to organize themes developed in step three. Finally, in step five, *Debrief and Discussion*, the facilitator reviews the purpose of the session and processes a discussion about their experience and next steps of the project.

**Documentary sources.** To supplement my understanding of the context of youth voice within each site, I obtained and reviewed source documents relevant to the implementation and evaluation of the Full-Service Community School approach (e.g., recently updated needs assessment process data and action plans, evaluation reports, and Director Workplans for the 2020-21 school year). A total of 11 source documents were included.

### ***Quantitative Sources***

**Demographic survey.** All youth and Director participants were asked to complete a brief survey to provide information about personal demographics including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and number of years working at or attending their school (when applicable). Youth participants were also asked to provide their school grade and describe the Full-Service Community School activities they have previously participated in.

**Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric scores.** Within the Director interviews, each Director was asked to self-assess their Full-Service Community School site on the level of implementation of each item in the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric (Wu et al., 2014; see Appendix C). The rubric has a total of twenty unique items organized by the four components of the youth-adult partnership model (i.e., authentic voice in decision-making, natural mentors, reciprocity, and community connectedness; Wu et al., 2014). Participants were asked to respond to these items using a five-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = low implementation to 5 = high implementation), with levels 1, 3, and 5 including qualitative benchmark indicators (see Wu et al., 2014). For each item on the rubric, participants were asked to consider on average, how each item applied to the theoretical and conceptual Full-Service Community School space within the overall school structure.

**Youth Voice in Decision-Making scale.** All youth and Director participants were asked to complete the Youth Voice in Decision-Making subscale of the Youth-Adult Partnership scale (Zeldin et al., 2014, see Appendix E). This four-item scale asked participants to rate the degree to which they perceive youth have input on decision-making (e.g., “I have a say in planning programs at this center”). Participants were asked to respond to these items using a five-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Item wording was slightly modified to better fit the context of this study (e.g., “I have a say in planning programs in Community Education”).

**Supportive Adult Relationships scale.** All youth and Director participants were asked to complete the Supportive Adult Relationships subscale of the Youth-Adult Partnerships scale (Zeldin et al., 2014, see Appendix E). This five-item scale asked participants to rate the degree to which reciprocal relationships exist between youth and adults within a specific context (e.g., “Youth and staff trust each other in this center”). Participants were asked to respond to these items using a five-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Item wording was slightly modified to better fit the context of this study (e.g., “Youth and adults trust each other in Community Education”).

**Youth voice in Community Schools survey.** Director participants were asked to respond to ten items assessing the degree to which specific indicators of youth voice in decision-making are implemented within their school (e.g., “The needs and assets of youth are regularly assessed to inform the school improvement plan”). Items were created for the purpose of this study and based on the ten Community School Standards relevant to youth voice (see Appendix F). Participants were asked to respond to these items using a four-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 4= Strongly agree).

**Community School Standards Assessment.** The Community School Standards Assessment is a 64-item questionnaire designed to assess perceptions of the adherence to the Community School Standards. Directors administer this assessment annually to key

stakeholders of the Full-Service Community School at their site (e.g., school staff, community partners, students, teachers, parents/caregivers, community members) to inform ongoing evaluation and continuous quality improvement efforts. This assessment asks participants to rate the degree to which the ten domains of Full-Service Community Schools are implemented (e.g., “To what extent does a shared vision and mission drive community school planning?”). Participants respond to these items using a five-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1 = low implementation to 5 = high implementation). Within the assessment, I identified six specific items related to the degree to which youth voices and needs are included in key decision-making structures (e.g., During this current school year, to what extent did the following individuals (i.e., students) participate on the Community School Advisory Team?), across four domains of Community School Standards (see Appendix G). Data from the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years were utilized for this study.

### **Ethical issues pertaining to human subjects**

Prior to conducting any project activities, this project and all study materials were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University. All research assistants involved in the project had completed and up-to-date research ethics training and were provided a project-specific training grounded in the Belmont principles, which guided the design and execution of all project activities. In recruitment activities, I ensured all youth and Director participants were aware of the project goals, activities, and the voluntary nature of their participation. In my first in-person contact with all youth and Director participants, I provided a more detailed description of the project, reminded them of the voluntary nature of participation, and asked for individual participant consent or assent prior to conducting any project activities. All data files were removed of identifying information (e.g., names used in interview or group discussions) and are stored securely on a Michigan State University server, only accessible to trained project staff.

## **Data collection**

Data collection included the following components: (1) Director meetings, (2) Director discussion group (3) youth meetings, (4) documentary review. In the subsections below, I provide a more detailed description of each component.

### ***Director Meetings***

Data collection began with hosting virtual individual meetings with each Director participant. The purpose of these meetings was to implement the Director interview protocol and administer quantitative surveys. We scheduled each meeting at a time that was convenient for the Director and all meetings lasted approximately one and a half to two hours. One trained research staff served as additional support and note taker during the meeting. To begin this meeting, I provided an overview of the meeting's purpose, objectives, and how the research would be used. I then described the study's possible anonymity procedures (i.e., determine how they wish to be identified—or not—in later research publications, toolkits, etc.) and consent procedures. All Directors completed the consent form (See Appendix H). Then, I conducted the interview, guided by the Director Interview Protocol. After finishing the interview, I administered the quantitative surveys (i.e., Youth Voice in Decision-Making scale, Supportive Adult Relationships scale, and the Youth Voice in Community Schools survey) using Qualtrics. While completing this survey, Directors were able to ask any clarifying questions, when necessary. Finally, I concluded this meeting with a debrief, which will include a recap of the meeting's purpose, main activities, how the findings will be used, and next steps in the project. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for coding purposes.

### ***Director Discussion Group***

After conducting all Director meetings, I held a virtual collaborative group discussion with the Directors to further explore facilitators and barriers to youth voice across all sites. Using a virtual "whiteboard" (i.e., Google Jamboard) I asked Directors to first reflect on two questions and self-record their responses using the "sticky note" function. Participants could record as

many or as few responses as they felt necessary. Once all Directors recorded their sticky notes, I facilitated a discussion about their responses within the group setting. If new ideas were emerged through our discussion, Directors were invited to record them on a new sticky note. Throughout our discussion, I recorded additional notes and themes from the conversation using a Word document.

### ***Youth Meetings***

The Directors and I developed and planned the recruitment process for conducting virtual meetings from youth at each site. The purpose of these meetings was to inform youth about our project, implement the Youth GO protocol, and administer quantitative surveys. Directors identified and recruited youth from their site, collaborating with other school staff to identify youth and obtain completed Parent Consent forms (Appendix B). We scheduled meetings with youth to occur at time that was convenient for the Directors and was optimal for youth to attendance (i.e., intersession, afterschool). Meetings lasted between 1.5 to 2 hours depending on the amount of youth present.

To start the meeting, I provided an overview of the project and the meeting's purpose and objectives. Prior to implementing study procedures, I described all components of the Youth Assent form (see Appendix I) and all youth agreed to participate. Then, I implemented the virtual Youth GO protocol. Due to unique challenges within the virtual context, Youth GO phases had to be split into separate sessions to include *Generating* phases (one and two) in one meeting and *Organizing* phases (three and four) within separate meetings. Scheduling and context barriers prevented us from implementing the Organizing phases with youth from Sites B and C.

Once we completed Youth GO activities, I concluded each session with a debrief to summarizing the meeting's purpose, main activities, how the findings will be used, and next steps in the project. I then administered the quantitative surveys (i.e., Demographic survey, Youth Voice in Decision-Making scale, Supportive Adult Relationships scale) using Qualtrics. While completing the survey, youth were able to ask clarifying questions or request additional

support. In our Qualtrics survey, all youth who participated were able to select their incentive gift cards and Directors distributed incentives directly to students shortly after our meetings were held.

### ***Documentary Review***

Key documentary source materials were obtained and reviewed to explore how (if at all) youth voice is described at the organizational level. First, I requested permission from management staff to use these documents for this study. Then, I obtained these documents through shared folders for our evaluation partnership or requested them directly from individuals within the initiative (e.g., Directors, management staff).

### **Mixed Methods Case Analysis**

Data analysis followed a concurrent triangulation mixed methods case analysis approach (QUAL + quan) whereby quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed concurrently—by each site—and then merged (Hanson et al., 2005).

### ***Units of study***

The Full-Service Community School sites were the primary unit of study in this project. Given the significant differences present at each site, it was important to understand and document the variation of youth voice in decision-making within and across sites. I triangulated multiple forms of data (i.e., qualitative and quantitative) from multiple sources (i.e., youth, adults, documentary) to generate conclusions about the context of each site. Results highlight the different dimensions of the sites that facilitate or inhibit youth voice in decision-making. After establishing site conclusions, I examined data across sites to generate cross-case findings about the context of youth voice in decision-making within these Full-Service Community Schools.

### ***Qualitative analysis***

First, a trained research assistant and I analyzed the Director interview data guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework and utilizing NVIVO qualitative analysis

software. The first phase, *familiarizing yourself with the data*, included transcribing the audio recordings, reviewing the data (including the transcriptions and the member-checked notes from the meetings), and documenting initial ideas. In this phase, after we transcribed all interviews, the research assistant and I reviewed all interview data sources independently, considering our a priori data structure (i.e., youth-adult partnership model), and recorded informal notes. Then, we met to discuss preliminary ideas for a coding structure. Based on our discussion, I created a preliminary codebook, integrating ideas from the youth-adult partnership framework (Wu et al., 2014) and its theorized components (i.e., principles and processes; Zeldin et al., 2008).

In the second phase, *generating initial codes*, the research assistant and I independently coded the entire dataset for interesting and important codes using our codebook we developed. After independently coding all interviews, I conducted a coding comparison query to explore agreement between coding, and our initial coding inter-rater reliability—as determined through Cohen’s Kappa—which was 81%. We then held meetings to iteratively review themes focusing on areas with low agreement (i.e., any individual codes with Kappa below 75%). Through iterative discussions, we reviewed, revised, and refined our codes and codebook together. Most often, discrepancies in coding were resolved because one coder picked up on an idea that the other had missed. In other times, we revised our codebook to more comprehensive to the themes and codes found in our data. For instance, we created one new theme entitled “aspirations for youth voice,” to capture items that were currently neither a facilitator or barrier to youth voice but describe the visions or goals for the future of youth voice within the sites. After reviewing and refining our codes and codebook, our final Kappa was 96%.

In the third phase, *searching for themes*, we analyzed and sorted codes into potential themes—for each site—and identified any potential relationships between the codes and themes. To implement this phase, I used the NVivo Framework Matrix function to gather all codes and themes from one site. Then, the research assistant and I independently reviewed the site matrices to identify key ideas. The research assistant and I then held meetings to

synthesize themes and identify relationships for each site. In the fourth phase, *reviewing themes*, I first created a thematic map for important themes and codes for each site using excel tables. After completing a draft of the thematic map, the research assistant and I reviewed the themes, codes for each site, referring to the transcripts to ensure they adequately captured the dataset. In the fifth phase, *defining and naming themes*, we met again to review and refine the language of our themes to ensure they adequately captured the data and determine which aspects of the data each theme captured. Again, we consulted the transcripts, as needed.

After completing the qualitative thematic analysis for the Director interviews, all other qualitative data was reviewed and analyzed, by site. To analyze these data, I first developed independent summaries for each data source, documenting key findings and notes from each source that was relevant to the context of youth voice at each site. In a multiple-case study design, the methods used within the cases may be similar or unique across the cases (Stake, 2006). Given the context of COVID, youth focus group data was analyzed slightly differently across sites. At Site A, these data were analyzed and themed by a group of youth from that site, a common approach in community-based participatory research. At the remaining sites, I followed a similar process, organizing youth responses (i.e., sticky notes) into key themes. I consulted the audio recordings for the youth focus group meetings, when necessary, to clarify the content or meaning of any particular response.

### ***Quantitative analyses***

All quantitative data—including demographic data, Youth-Adult Partnership rubric scores, Youth Voice in Decision-Making scale, Supportive Adult Relationships scale, Youth voice in Community Schools survey, and the Community School Standards Assessment—were analyzed separately from the qualitative data. Given the small sample sizes for all quantitative data sources included in this study, significance testing was not likely or appropriate to generate meaningful conclusions (Cumming, 2014). Therefore, I analyzed quantitative data using descriptive statistics to document general trends in these data. For all scales, I developed and

compared construct averages and reviewed individual item responses. For the surveys that were completed by youth and adults (i.e., Youth Voice in Decision-Making scale, Supportive Adult Relationships scale), I also compared youth and adult responses at the construct and item levels. After conducting descriptive statistics, I developed qualitative summaries of key findings.

### ***Mixed method integration and interpretation***

After all data were analyzed independently, I implemented a concurrent triangulation mixed method analytical approach (QUAL + quan; Hanson et al., 2005). I first conducted a triangulation phase for each site where I integrated all other qualitative and quantitative data sources together onto the thematic map (i.e., excel table) generated from the Director interview data. I identified areas of convergence and divergence across the data sources, creating new themes or refining the data structure when necessary. After all data sources were integrated onto one thematic table per site, I conducted the final phase of Braun and Clarke's approach (2006), *producing the report*, with my dissertation chair by developing the narrative of each site using the thematic map and theme contents. As a first step in this phase, we created a comprehensive list of all facilitators and barriers for each site and then developed categories to further organize and summarize key themes. We reviewed, audited, and refined our themes and categories for each site relying on data summaries and transcripts. I then developed each case summary examining data in relation to the research questions (RQs 1 & 2) guiding this project. After creating case summaries, the trained research assistant who supported with the director interview analysis conducted a confirmability audit to ensure that the results were clearly linked to the data sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This audit did not identify any major substantive changes, rather it helped to refine illustrative quotes or data sources and confirm no data was missing for the case themes.

### ***Cross-Case Analysis***

After analyzing all cases independently and creating site summaries, I conducted a cross-case synthesis to identify convergence and discrepancies across the sites. To do so, I

first created a word table to summarize all themes and categories into a uniform framework (Yin, 2009, see Appendix J). Using this word table, my dissertation chair and I identified higher-order categories of factors that impacted the implementation of youth voice in decision-making across sites. This allowed me to answer the second and third research questions guiding this project. In this phase, I conducted one additional form of audit, returning to the source data to explore evidence of rival explanations that refuted or denied substantive findings (Yin, 2009), specifically searching for discrepancies between data sources. Any discrepancies among data sources or sites were noted and these nuances were embedded into the case or cross case analysis findings.

### **Techniques to enhance trustworthiness**

I employed two main strategies to ensure trustworthiness in my data analyses and reporting: triangulation and auditing (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In the design of this project, I have included several triangulation features to ensure trustworthiness of findings. First, I include two types of participants in this study—youth and adults—to examine youth voice in decision-making from two different perspectives. For each participant group, I will collect two different forms of data—qualitative and quantitative—to gather unique insights from each participant. In addition, I used other documentary data sources to augment, support, or refute findings from youth and adult participants. I have also created several auditing steps in my analysis to enhance trustworthiness, within the Director interview, case, and cross-case analysis steps. In these audits, I worked with a trained research assistant and/or my dissertation chair to review project themes, categories, and reporting in relation to the source documents (i.e., transcripts, source summaries) to ensure findings were adequately representative of these sources.

## RESULTS

### Case Summaries

#### Aspiring youth voice at Site A

##### ***Site Context***

Site A is a public middle school serving grades six to eight. The Full-Service Community School approach has been in place at this school for the past seven years (i.e., since the 2014-15 academic year). The Full-Service Community School Director at this site is a Black male, who has served in this role for three years. In the summer of 2020, the district transitioned this school from an elementary to a middle school due to budget concerns. This resulted in a large transition of administrators, school staff, teachers, and students; however, the Director remained at this site. Youth participants at this site included three Black female students who attended the school for an average of five years<sup>1</sup> (see Table 2). All youth were involved in sports programs and a range of other afterschool program opportunities provided through the Full-Service Community School approach (e.g., STEM programming, afterschool enrichment).

##### ***Similarities and differences in youth and adult descriptions of youth voice within this Full-Service Community School site***

**Similarities.** The Director and youth from this site had some overlapping ideas when defining youth voice in decision-making. To the young people that participated in this project, youth voice in decision-making reflected two key themes: #MakeYourVoiceHeard<sup>2</sup>—which described how they think about topics and make decisions—and #MakeYourVoiceCount, or

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<sup>1</sup> Although this site currently only serves grades six through eight, several of these students attended this school before and after this transition, thus resulting in an average year of attendance that is greater than the current grades served.

<sup>2</sup> As described in Youth Focus Group section, I used the example of a social media hashtag to facilitate understanding of the theming process. As a result, all youth-generated themes are in the form of a social media hashtag.

*“making your own voice count in decisions.”* Similarly, the Director described youth voice in decision making as ensuring that student voices are heard (e.g., *“Make sure our youth is at the table”*). He also felt that youth voices were powerful, important, and could be leveraged to enhance engagement in programming. Both youths’ and the Director’s responses to the Youth Voice in Decision-Making Scale conveyed that they felt youth voice existed within the Community School (*Youth M = 4.25; Director = 4.00*). When describing aspirations for the future of youth voice at this site, young people, and the Director both described enhancing opportunities for engaging the broader community. For instance, youth developed a theme entitled: #SpreadTheWord, which included facilitating outreach for programs, activities, or events (e.g., *“Helping spread around events that’s happening”*).

**Differences.** In our discussions, there were differences in the way that the Director and youth discussed the existing opportunities for youth decision-making. Item discrepancies on the Youth Voice in Decision-Making Scale also conveyed that young people and the Director differed in how strongly they felt that Community School staff took youths’ ideas seriously (*Youth M = 3.67; Director = 5.00*). When talking about opportunities for youth voice, the director talked about the types of opportunities available (e.g., afterschool programming, youths’ participation in a school needs assessment) whereas young people emphasized their own internal experiences when they participated (e.g., *“It was hard,” “I was nervous because I had to speak up”*).

The Director and the youth also had their own unique ideas for enhancing youth voice at this site. Youth expressed an interest in having decision-making opportunities that focused on learning topics. For instance, youth described that they wanted more opportunities for decision-making that impacts *“what we do in the day, what we learn”* (Youth Focus Group). The Director felt confident that the school’s transition to serving middle school youth might make it easier for staff to engage youth voice and felt that this project would be helpful to *“start a new way with youth voice.”*

### ***Facilitators & barriers to youth voice in decision-making at Site A***

**Facilitators of youth voice.** Through my mixed methods triangulation analysis of all site data, I identified four unique categories of themes that facilitated youth voice in decision-making at Site A: (1) preconditions for youth voice, (2) supportive attitudes toward youth voice, (3) early efforts toward youth voice, and (4) creative adaptations in response to the pandemic. In this section, I describe each category and supporting data.

*Preconditions for youth voice.* This category describes how this site had several supportive conditions that could be leveraged to facilitate youth voice. The Director felt that school staff at this site were very professional, engaged, and enthusiastic about supporting students (e.g., *“Our teachers are happy to help our students explore the different career paths they can go,”* Director interview). Across several sources, this site also demonstrated supportive cultures and practices of utilizing partnerships and celebrating success. For instance, documentary evidence for this site described varied opportunities for community partners to support the goals of the Community School and plans for celebrating youth success (e.g., college visits and college positive events, attendance and “excellent citizenship” celebrations). Open-ended responses to the Community School Standards Assessment from the 2019-20 school year highlighted the power of collaborative partnerships in the school. During the interview, the Director also highlighted celebrations as a point of success at this site: *“We are always trying to celebrate them. Even as simple as just coming to school. I know it’s, um, supposed to attend school every day but that’s not always the case, so we are always trying to celebrate them.”*

*Supportive youth and adult principles for youth voice.* This category describes how adults and young people at this site conceptually value youth voice. The Director felt that—because of the recent transition from an elementary to a middle school—the new supportive

leadership may have downstream benefits for youth voice at this site. Additionally, within our Director Discussion, this site's Director indicated "*School staff (teachers, family facilitator, principal)*" as being supportive of youth voice, both in general and regarding this project. Young people that participated in this project also described the ways in which they felt youth voices were valued within the Community School, which included two themes: #WhenYouListen—describing how staff listen and to students—and #Communication with teachers and peers: "*The community or people around you agrees with your decision that you make.*" Both the Director and youth participants felt that creating opportunities for youth voice can enhance afterschool program engagement. For instance, when reflecting on how an afterschool program provided choices for students, one youth said: "*It was fun, I got the club I wanted.*" The Director conveyed in our interview that he felt the young people at this site enjoyed current opportunities for youth collaboration and would be excited about future avenues for youth voice in decision-making.

*Early efforts toward youth voice.* This category describes how opportunities for youth voice in decision-making—many in earlier stages of development—existed at this site, including: youth leadership opportunities, afterschool opportunities, and youth feedback processes. Youth leadership opportunities included a collaborative needs assessment process and preliminary stages of a student government. The needs assessment process was a recent effort of the Community School to engage key community stakeholders in defining future implementation of the approach at this site. The Director was excited to report that they had one student engaged in this process and felt that this was an opportunity for meaningful youth-adult collaboration. However, the student who was involved in this opportunity (who also participated in our focus groups) described how it felt to participate in this group, stating that although she learned some stuff about her school, "*it was hard being the only kid with the adults.*" The school had also recently undergone efforts to establish a student government (in Spring 2020); however, this process was disrupted due to the pandemic.

The Director and youth from this site identified the afterschool space as providing additional opportunities for youth and adults to collaborate. The Director felt that the afterschool space was distinctly different from the school setting: *“I don’t want to be biased, but I say, like in the afterschool adults are listening a lot more to the students”* (Director interview). The Director’s responses to the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric and interview both described how youth developed a sense of community through program involvement, particularly through arts and music programming. Several sources also documented how the Director was utilizing youth feedback opportunities—such as surveys and discussions—to guide these afterschool programs. For instance, in the focus groups, youth felt that two ways they could be involved in decision-making were picking afterschool clubs and *“having a group discussion about something.”*

*Creative adaptations during the pandemic.* Although the pandemic did create challenges (as described below), one supportive practice developed because of the pandemic was the staff’s ability to make innovative adjustments to support students during this time. Overall, the Director felt: *“the staff, the adults in the building, they are doing the best they can”* (Director Interview). For instance, school staff found new ways to develop virtual “field trips” and college tours to enhance youth’s skills. Open-ended responses to the Community School Standards Assessment also highlighted the ability of the school to meet the additional needs of youth and families during the pandemic: *“Given the challenges of remote school, they have done well meeting immediate needs.”*

**Barriers to youth voice.** Through my mixed methods triangulation analysis of all site data, I identified four unique categories of themes that hindered youth voice in decision-making at Site A: (1) historical context of not valuing youth voice, (2) adult-dominated spaces, (3) underdeveloped and limited opportunities for decision-making, and (4) pandemic and school transitions. In this section, I describe each category and supporting data.

*Historical context of not valuing youth voice.* This category describes how the culture and practices at this site have undermined efforts toward youth voice within this Community School. The Director at this site described youth voice in prior years by stating: “*Youth voice really, it wasn’t always heard, it wasn’t even asked sometimes*” (Director Interview). Additional data sources convey that some of this context may still linger within the Community School operations. Responses to the Community School Standards Assessment indicate that on average, school stakeholders feel that students were only “somewhat knowledgeable” about services and supports in the school ( $M = 3.00$ ). Additionally, this assessment is aimed to be representative of key stakeholders engaged in the Community School Advisory Team—an important decision-making spaces within the Community School—and in both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, no youth participated. The Director also felt as though reciprocal youth-adult relationships were not present within this site, and felt the school was more of a traditional hierarchical structure: “*It’s like that in our school setting. You know, the old way*” (Director Interview). This context was further reflected in the Director’s self-assessment ranking of the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric, in which their average ranking of authentic decision-making dimension as relatively low ( $M = 2.20$ ). The Director’s response to one item on the Youth Voice in Community Schools survey also conveyed that an emphasis on youth voice and choice to inform student learning and development strategies was only minimally implemented.

*Adult-dominated spaces.* This category describes how within several different contexts of the Community School setting, youth are not able to meaningfully participate in egalitarian or collaborative opportunities. In the Director’s Workplan for the 20-21 school year, collaborations or partnerships with youth was not included as a planned strategy, rather services, supports, and programs were created for youth. When completing the self-assessment ranking for the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric, the Director scored his site at the lowest benchmark (i.e., level one) on two practices reflecting youth-adult collaboration: “*Youth and adults create a mutual agenda,*” and “*Youth and adults are co-learning partners.*” When reflecting on this context, the

Director added: *“The agenda is largely created by adults”* and *“There is really not that many opportunities, I would say, where youth and adults are like co-learners, learning partners”* (Director Interview). Furthermore, the classroom structures were a specific setting where youth voice was not typically welcomed: *“I know in the classroom it’s a little tough cause they are trying to get through the lesson, they have like a lesson plan they have to complete”* (Director Interview). As such, the Director conveyed a clear disconnect between classroom and afterschool space, by describing these spaces differently on the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric.

*Underdeveloped and limited opportunities.* This category describes how opportunities for youth voice in decision-making at this site were often underdeveloped or limited in scope. As reflected in the Director’s responses to the Youth Voice in Community Schools survey, overall implementation of Standards relevant to youth voice was low ( $M = 2.11$ ), indicating many processes for engaging youth in decision-making were not yet implemented. Furthermore, the Director’s self-assessment of the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric indicated that there were limited opportunities for youth to participate and have leadership roles in decision-making spaces. Responses on the Community School Standards Assessment conveyed that youth were the least likely, among all other stakeholders (i.e., principal, teachers/staff, community partners, parents/caregivers), to participate and be invited to the Community School Advisory Team—a key decision-making team for the Community School. Youth who participated in focus group discussions for this site described how existing opportunities for decision-making focused on afterschool clubs or opportunities. Youth summarized how it felt when they participated in these opportunities, through the following youth-generated themes: #SpeakUp (*“I was nervous because I had to speak up”*), #Adults&Kids (*“It was hard being the only kid with the adults”*), #IdeaTaking (*“Someone taking your idea or talking over you”*), and #SpeakForYourPeers (*“I was the voice for them”*).

*Pandemic and school transitions.* This category describes how within the last year, the combination of school transitions—from an elementary school to a middle school site—paired

with the pandemic drastically impacted all domains of youth voice and youth-adult partnerships at this site. Several sources indicated how the pandemic disrupted many opportunities for youth voice within the last year. Two opportunities for youth leadership—the collaborative needs assessment process and student government—were both disrupted due to the pandemic. When reflecting on their efforts for establishing a student government, the Director stated: “*They really didn't get a chance to put anything into place yet because of the pandemic*” (Director Interview). Responses to the Community School Standards Assessment also reflected that youth involvement (19-20SY M = 3.71; 20-21SY M = 2.80) and participation (19-20SY M = 4.29; 20-21SY M = 2.60) within the Community School Advisory Team decreased between the last two school years.

From the Director’s perspective, the combination of the pandemic and school transitions also negatively affected relationships and sense of community within the Community School: “*600 new students, I haven't really met personally yet*” (Director Interview). The pandemic had also limited the opportunities for youth to establish community connections. For instance, the Director described how he planned a community service event involving youth, but later had to cancel their involvement due to health restriction guidelines. Finally, the combination of the pandemic and school transitions sometimes made it hard for the Director to reflect on the current state of youth voice at this site: “*We haven't really had any interaction with the students like in person. I did interact with a lot of students at our intersession, but it's kinda hard to tell*” (Director Interview).

## **Emerging youth voice at Site B**

### ***Site Context***

Site B is a public charter school serving students in kindergarten through twelfth grades. Due to the structure of charter schools, this student population is not bound by physical boundaries, rather, any parent may apply to have their child attend this school. The Full-Service Community School approach has been in place at this site for the past three years (i.e., since

the 2018-19 academic year). The Full-Service Community School Director at this site is an African American female, who has served in this role for the entire three years of implementation. Fourteen total youth participants from this site were involved in this study (see Table 2). Youth represented a diversity of systemically marginalized races (92% Black/African American, 23% American Indian/Alaska Native, 8% Middle Eastern/North African) and genders (46% Male, 38% Female, 15% Genderfluid), and attended the school on average for over seven years ( $M = 7.54$ ,  $Range = 3 - 12$ ). These youth were involved in a range of Community School activities: most participated in sports, and several were involved in youth leadership opportunities within the school (e.g., National Honor Society, Student Leadership). One participant, however, indicated that they had not participated in Community School activities before.

***Similarities and differences in youth and adult descriptions of youth voice within this Full-Service Community School site***

**Similarities.** When describing what youth voice in decision-making meant to them, the Director and youth both described this as a broad, multifaceted concept. To this site's Director, youth voice in decision-making included several different domains of youth-adult partnership, including: authentic decision-making (e.g., *"lift the thoughts and ideas of youth in decision and making recommendations and giving feedback"*), natural mentorship (e.g., *"It's an opportunity for young people to build relationships with adults but also strengthen those relationships"*), and reciprocity (e.g., *"an opportunity for youth and adults to collaborate"*). The young people that participated also created a broad definition of youth voice in decision-making, which included aspects of youth freely sharing ideas, the importance of providing unique perspectives, and participation in decisions. These young people and the Director both recognized that there were opportunities for youth to be involved in decision-making at this site, and both felt that they needed improvement, including creating more connections to the broader community.

**Differences.** The young people and the Director from this site had slightly differing opinions on how existing structures should be improved and their aspirations for the future of youth voice in decision-making. The Director emphasized a culture of continuous growth toward best practices and using this project as an opportunity to evolve and learn best practices in youth voice. She felt that significant improvement needed to be made to enhance youth voice as a central focus in her work, and recognized specific opportunities for improvement (e.g., more youth involvement, creating intentional feedback loops, enhancing meeting designs). While the Director described that she felt the site welcomed youth voice, she also recognized that adultism can sometimes “*creep in.*” However, to the youth that participated, overcoming adultism was more central to their experiences of youth voice: “*adults or teachers try to talk as if our ideas aren't as good as theirs.*” When considering their aspirations for youth voice, the young people that participated identified concrete ways to overcome adultism and enhance their experiences with decision-making, including: creating more supportive systems, creating diverse opportunities for decision-making, and engaging diverse youth voices.

### ***Facilitators & barriers to youth voice in decision-making at Site B***

**Facilitators of youth voice.** Through my mixed methods triangulation analysis of all site data, I identified five unique categories of themes that facilitated youth voice in decision-making at Site B: (1) supportive adult perspectives, (2) meaningful and supportive relationships with youth, (3) community connections, (4) processes and outcomes for youth voice, and (5) graciously supporting youth and families during the pandemic. In this section, I describe each category through supporting data.

**Supportive adult principles.** This category describes how the Director—and to some extent the youth—felt that adults at this site held perspectives that were supportive of young people and welcoming of youth voice. The Director felt that adults at this site cultivated an environment of “*celebration and reflection*” toward success. As conveyed in the Director’s response to the self-assessment of the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric, this included: adults

helping youth to think about goals and possibilities for the future and identify steps to achieve them. Youth and the Director both described ways that site staff created a culture that welcomed youth voice within internal and external decision-making teams. The Director felt that overall, adults conveyed a reciprocal, supportive environment for youth that reflected respect, trust, and a shared space for exchanging ideas: “*we welcome youth voice, we welcome young people to sit at the table with us*” (Director Interview). Within focus group discussions, some youth also conveyed elements of this positive school culture: “*In my school staff help us by encourage us to write our ideas on posters and hang them on school walls.*” Within the Director discussion, this site’s Director conveyed that the “School Director and key administrators” were supportive of youth voice. The Director also described the importance of the needs assessment process that she recently led at her site to re-align the work of the Community School with the needs of youth:

*I still feel like with [the needs assessment process], that's given us a real opportunity to go back and right some wrongs, if you will... If I don't feel as connected as I want to be with our youth I think that [this process] has given me an opportunity to go back, and hard reset and to re-align myself in a way that supports youth voice, amongst other things* (Director Interview).

*Meaningful and supportive relationships with youth.* This category describes how evidence of youth-adult relationships existed at this site. Within our interview, the Director conveyed the importance of the relational aspect of implementing the Community School approach: “*this job is absolutely relational, with community members, and youth, and adults, you know, staff, adults as parents and caregivers, the community at large, administration, key stakeholders, partners, right? It's relational.*” Within our Director discussion, this site Director expressed that these “*supportive relationships with youth and parents*” helped to facilitate youth voice at their site. The Director felt that relationships at her site were grounded in active listening: “*...really listening, and allowing the young person to really come up with the decisions*

or the options, and then make up their decisions as to what they want to do, and just being that caring adult” (Director Interview). To establish meaningful relationships, the Director felt that adults supported youth with appropriate boundaries, as conveyed in their response to the self-assessment of the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric and reflection thereafter, stating those boundaries were “*non-negotiable*.” From the Director’s perspective, meaningful relationships fostered a culture where youth (and parents) felt comfortable coming to Community School staff for informal check-ins or to navigate personal challenges: “*They come to us. Parents come to us. They unpack a lot of sensitive things*” (Director Interview). Although data for this theme was largely representative of the Director’s perspective, young people from this site did describe some experiences with supportive adult relationships. Specifically, youth described these relationships within the context of Student Leadership<sup>3</sup>—a structure within the charter school for selected students to facilitate youth-led programs and initiatives, or as one young person described, an “*organization created by students*.” For instance, one youth stated: “*whenever I feel there an immediate change that needs to be made I usually go to someone in power like the [Student Leadership coordinator]*” (Youth Focus Group).

*Community connections.* This category describes how the Director, and the Community School, are establishing strong connections to the community. Several sources documented how the site Director was leveraging collaborative partnerships to implement the Community School approach. Documentary sources included several avenues for community partners to meet the needs of the school community and implement critical actions for the school. The Director’s self-assessment of the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric also conveyed that the adults at this site were resourceful and intentional in enhancing youth’s social capital, specifically through partnerships. In the Director discussion, this site Director stated that implementing youth voice in decision-making required finding “*the right*” partners, or those that could help to

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<sup>3</sup> I used a pseudonym for the program name to maintain the schools’ anonymity.

support youth leadership. Within our interview and Director discussion, this site Director conveyed that the charter school structure also allowed for more integration of the Community School approach into the school day. As a result, the Director was working to intentionally align their work with the youth leadership structures that existed within the school setting (i.e., Student Leadership). The Director was also actively working to ensure that the charter school remained connected to the surrounding community: *“I’ve been working to not allow that to be a barrier for engaging in community events, community activities. I think that because of my community partners, we are able to lift those opportunities. We don’t see any boundaries, even charter-public”* (Director Interview). Furthermore, the Director also echoed a strong personal connection to the community that helped to facilitate these community connections:

*I’m born and raised in [here], I live [here], I work [here], I play [here], my church is [here]. And so, my ties [here] runs deep, and being able to cross over to that charter threshold has just been because I want to work with [these] kids, and I don’t care in what space it happens* (Director Interview).

*Processes and outcomes for youth voice.* This category describes the existing processes for youth voice that existed at this site, and the perceived outcomes it had on youth who participated. At this site, there were several opportunities for youth to have leadership in decision-making, which included: school structures, afterschool space, and community service opportunities. The most established of these was the Student Leadership structure, where youth described this as a specifically important space that valued youth voice and countered their experience within the rest of the school setting:

*Within [Student Leadership] there’s different levels of leadership that allow us to be involved, we get to pick the activities in [Student Leadership] and also get to pretty much run it our way. Outside of that it’s more what teachers would like to see in their classes, disregarding any student opinion.* (Youth Focus Group)

The Director at this site was working to establish other leadership and decision-making opportunities for youth in the spaces she leads. For instance, the Director's Workplan for the 2020-21 school year included identifying one to two students to serve on the Community School Advisory Team as a goal for this site. Within our interview, however, the Director mentioned that many of these roles were not yet filled.

In addition to these leadership structures, the site had other opportunities for youth-adult collaboration within the afterschool space (e.g., youth programs, family nights, community service). For instance, within the interview the Director discussed a Global Youth Service Day where student members of the National Honor Society led and designed a community service activity and beautification project. Within the afterschool space, the Director felt that adults tried to offer opportunities for youth voice and choice in smaller programmatic aspects (e.g., choosing activities, leading mindfulness) within the broader context constraints due to funding or data requirements. Several sources also identified feedback surveys as an additional process for soliciting youth perspectives on programs. The Director felt that these different opportunities for youth voice enabled both youth and adults to grow in different ways, such as: adults learning the nuances of online engagement from youth, youth building academic, social, and other skills, and youth developing ownership within service and collaborative afterschool programs.

*Graciously supporting youth and families during the pandemic.* This category describes that although the pandemic created significant challenges (as described in the section below), the Community School was finding ways to support youth and families. Several open-ended responses to the Community School Standards Assessment echoed how the school was intentionally addressing the needs during this time. For instance, one school stakeholder wrote: “[Community School staff] *have implemented several programs throughout quarantine and virtual learning to support students and families.*” Specifically, the director also emphasized the importance of learning “graciousness” during this time:

*...One thing that I am learning through this whole experience is the spirit of graciousness. I'm learning that, like more than ever. To be gracious to self and to be gracious to others, adults and young people. This is a heavy load that we are all bearing... because it is no easy task. For our young people, after they have been in school all day virtually, or in school all day face-to-face and then to even invite them to hold space, to come to join us, either face-to-face afterschool or face-to-face virtually, you know, that's no easy task (Director Interview).*

**Barriers to youth voice.** Through my mixed methods triangulation analysis of all site data, I identified four unique categories of themes that hindered youth voice in decision-making at Site B: (1) structural and organizational barriers, (2) challenges with youth-adult relationships, (3) underdeveloped spaces and structures for youth voice, and (4) pandemic. In this section, I describe each category through supporting data.

*Structural and organizational barriers.* This category describes how different administrative structures created challenges that prevented or inhibited youth voice within this site. Both youth and the Director at this site described the ways in which the charter school structure created barriers within the school community. In our interview, the Director described an underlying political conflict that creates silos between charter and public schools in the local community. However, the Director felt that young people were not as aware of this barrier: *"But I'm not sure if my youth, or my students feel it, or even my families. I'm not sure. I think we've shunned them from that"* (Director Interview). The Director also felt the charter school structure created uncertainties in defining and understanding their school community, since it is not bound by a geographic boundary. Youth described the significant impact of the charter structure differently, describing how the charter provider limited both teachers and young people's ability to have say in school decisions: *"The biggest barrier that we have in decision making is [Charter School provider],"* and *"whenever we have an opinion and want to change something, no matter how much power they give us its always up to [Charter School provider]"* (Youth Focus Group).

In addition to the structural barriers related to the charter school, the Director described other administrative practices that inhibited youth voice such as: time, competing priorities, capacity (related to current responsibilities and projects), and diversity of age range in the student body (i.e., serving K-12 students). The Director described this challenge by stating: *“I just think that the work sometimes is driving instead of the needs and the feedback that we get from young people being the driving force”* (Director interview).

*Challenges with youth-adult relationships.* This category describes the challenging nuances of navigating relationships between youth and adults. One critical challenge between these relationships was a lack of communication from adults about the value of youth voice, and how it would be used to inform the operations of the Community School. The Director described this challenge in our interview by stating:

*It could be because we have not done a good job in explaining their role or even creating that space to tell the youth and to acknowledge that we want to hear from them and that this is a safe space. To understand that their feedback is encouraged, and this is what our next steps will be. So, it could be on us adults not fully sharing and being transparent in the process.*

Youth also described challenges with communication, related to understanding decision-making processes, and how change would happen after providing feedback. For instance, one youth stated: *“Principals never give exact feedback on what will happen with student ideas”* (Youth Focus Group). Youth also described that sometimes their voices and suggestions for improvement were not acted upon: *“They give us surveys but rarely anymore. We usual just get asked questions by teachers but they don't usually change anything”* (Youth Focus Group).

Another critical challenge within youth-adult relationships was the ways in which adultism was experienced in this context. The Director for this site recognized that navigating adultism was a challenge, conveying that it can sometimes *“creep in”* when adults interact with youth and that this was a barrier for youth voice in decision-making efforts within the Community

School. Within our focus groups, youth also described their experiences with adultism, describing how sometimes adults view youth opinions as “*questionable*,” “*looked over*,” “*shut out*,” or even “*wrong*.” For instance, one youth stated: “*they say stuff like ‘we have been here longer so we know what’s it like & you don’t’*” (Youth Focus Group). The Director also described logistical barriers for youth-adult relationships including: setting and maintaining boundaries and inconsistencies in preparing youth to adequately participate in opportunities and meaningfully connecting with youth (e.g., understanding the breadth of student accomplishments, providing reflective feedback, connecting to external community).

*Underdeveloped spaces and structures for youth voice.* This category describes the ways in which existing opportunities and structures needed to be enhanced to authentically engage youth voice in decision-making. Both youth and the Director described experiences where sometimes youth may be brought into decision-making spaces as “*tokens*”: “*Oftentimes they are just brought up to the table because we need a youth voice, or things like that*” (Director Interview). Youth recognized this as part of their experiences as well: “*I think they give us a false sense of value but over look us in the end*” (Youth Focus Group). Youth also felt adults could be selective about which youth are included in those decision-making spaces, and that not all voices were heard in these spaces (e.g., students who are less engaged in activities).

Other elements of meeting design were described as barriers to engaging youth in decision-making, including: youth participation, availability of opportunities, lack of community connections and ineffective meeting structures. Responses to the Community School Standards Assessment indicated that within both school years (2019-20, 2020-21) youth were ranked the lowest out of all stakeholder groups in their invitation and participation within the Community School Advisory Team. Within our Director Discussion, the Director indicated that “*inconsistent youth commitment and participation*” was a barrier to implementing youth voice in decision-making. The Director stated that many of these decision-making structures were not available to

younger youth at this site. In some cases, opportunities for youth leadership may not necessarily establish community, as conveyed in their self-assessment and discussion of an item on the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric regarding “youth develop a sense of community through program involvement.” The Director also described how ineffective meeting structures sometimes create disengagement for youth and adults. Within our interview, the Director described how because meetings were mostly adult-led, conversations are sometimes de-railed or distracted, which leads to disengagement. Youth described that in some cases, young people may intentionally not participate because of the way these structures are designed: *“Well we’ve been asked questions or been asked to give an opinion on things and regardless our opinions aren’t taken seriously, so people feel as though speaking at all (sic) wastes less time”* (Youth Focus Group).

*Pandemic.* This category describes how the pandemic created unique challenges that increased youth and family needs and prevented efforts toward youth voice in decision-making. Several sources documented the marked increase in youth needs during the time of the pandemic. Documentary sources both highlighted increased needs—specifically regarding reading achievement—and increased efforts to support students. For instance, the Director’s Workplan included a strategy for providing wellness checks for students that were not adequately attending virtual or hybrid school options. One open-ended response from the Community School Standards Assessment echoed this increase in needs by stating: *“The current pandemic has significantly increased the needs for academic, social-emotional support. The current need is much greater than the team can adequately provide. The in-person and virtual learning is difficult to manage with current resources.”* The Director described how although adult staff at this site wanted to increasing the reach of virtual programs to support additional youth at this site, youth participants involved in these programs pushed back on this idea: *“they didn’t want to hear the recruitment strategies, because they said no, we want it to just be us”* (Director interview)—suggesting that youth wanted opportunities for smaller group

discussion and activities during this time, because they didn't have to compete for materials and attention from adult staff. Within our Director discussion, this site Director indicated that challenges experienced due to "*COVID-19/Virtual learning*" were a barrier to youth voice in decision-making at her site.

## **Developed youth voice at Site C**

### ***Site Context***

Site C is a public high school serving grades nine through twelve. The Full-Service Community School approach has been in place at this school for the past five years (i.e., since the 2016-17 academic year). The Full-Service Community School Director is an African American male who has served in this role at his site for over four years. A total of four youth from this site participated in this study (see Table 2). Youth represented systemically marginalized races (100% Black/African American, 25% white), largely identified as female (75% female, 25% male), and attended the school on average for over four years ( $M = 4.75$ ,  $Range = 4 - 5$ ). Youth that participated were all actively involved in Community School activities such as afterschool programming, volunteering, student government, National Honor Society, sports, and Advanced Placement courses. Two youth were highly involved and had participated in many of these opportunities.

### ***Similarities and differences in youth and adult descriptions of youth voice within this Full-Service Community School site***

**Similarities.** When asked to define youth voice in decision-making, the Director described key principles that guided their work at this site. For instance, the Director felt that youth voice was "*the heart of the work*," and crucial to fully implementing the Community School model. Youth and the Director then both described how this guiding framework was implemented at the site through different processes for youth voice, including understanding and fulfilling the needs of young people, and elements of the school that created an engaging and supportive culture for youth. Both youth and adults also described leadership roles and

structures within the school and out-of-school time context that provided opportunities for youth voice.

During our interview, the Director emphasized the importance of ensuring opportunities for youth voice are a safe space, where young people feel welcomed. Within a focus group, one young person described this from their experience: *“Mr. --- always gives us a safe place for talking.”* Both youth and the Director also mentioned the importance of one youth leader at this site, who participated in our first focus group. The Director described this young person as having “a powerful voice” and felt that they had unique knowledge, power, and influence in the school. In our focus group this youth stated: *“I feel like a student advocate. Not only using my voice and hearing my concerns, but I take a look at what other students are feeling and go to them about they are feeling.”*

**Differences.** Young people and the Director from this site also had unique perspectives regarding youth voice in decision-making. When defining what youth voice meant to them, the young people from this site added an additional element that described youth as change makers, for instance: *“[Youth voice in decision-making is] a group of kids who like to get involved and make smart choices (not doing drugs or getting in trouble) to make a change.”* Youth also presented some challenges of existing decision-making spaces that were not fully present within discussions with the Director. For instance, in our focus groups, young people described how sometimes youth feel “*afraid*” to voice their opinions or don’t know “*who to really turn to,*” and that some staff aren’t “*really listening,*” or are selective in whose voices they listen to.

Youth and the Director also had some unique aspirations for enhancing and expanding opportunities for youth voice at this site. Although both advocated for creating enhanced opportunities for youth voice within the context of the school setting (e.g., within each grade level, leadership teams, departments, board meetings, student government), young people wanted to enhance components of existing and future spaces to be more supportive for youth.

Their suggestions included: engaging more diverse student voices, leveraging youth leaders to support their peers, and providing new programming opportunities driven by the student needs.

### ***Facilitators and barriers to youth voice in decision-making at Site C***

**Facilitators of youth voice.** Through my mixed methods triangulation analysis of all site data, I identified five unique categories of themes that facilitated youth voice in decision-making at Site C: (1) preconditions for youth voice (2) effectively utilizing partnerships, (3) supportive adult perspectives, (4) youth-adult communication and conversation, and (5) established processes for youth voice. In this section, I describe each category through supporting data.

*Preconditions for youth voice.* This category describes how this site had many different supportive conditions that are leveraged to support young people. Adults at this site described an intentional and holistic approach that grounded the work of this Community School. The Director described how within this site, they acknowledged young people and the work of the Community School as holistic, and they aimed to intentionally align resources within the site to meet youth needs. One open-ended response from the Community School Standards Assessment also acknowledged this holistic approach by stating: "*The Director is very accessible to the whole school community. He works at keeping lines of communication open between stakeholders.*" Across several sources, this site demonstrated a culture and practice of celebrating success. For instance, the Director's Workplan included field trips and ceremonies to publicly celebrate success and within our interview, the Director highlighted additional opportunities for celebrations for student achievements (e.g., graduation, testing progress). The Director's responses to the Youth Voice in Community Schools survey indicated that he felt youth involvement in these public celebrations was fully implemented at this site. The Director felt this culture was fully adopted within the school: "*Even the staff here, the teaching staff and the principal love it to celebrate success of our youth.*" Additionally, the Director felt that the Community School adequately valued the diversity of youth identities and fostered peer relationships to facilitate engagement in youth programming.

*Effectively utilizing partnerships.* This category describes how community partnerships were successfully utilized at this site to meet youth needs and support their growth. Within our interview, the Director described the importance of partnerships to support several dimensions of the youth-adult partnership model (i.e., authentic decision-making, natural mentors, and community connectedness). The Director interview and documentary sources helped to describe the ways partnerships supported the diversity of youth needs, including: academic and career supports (e.g., AP classes, college advising), medical and crisis needs (e.g., school-based clinic, pregnancy support), out-of-school time supports (e.g., mentoring), and other external resources. For instance, the Director worked with youth to explore their ideas for a graduation ceremony within the context of the pandemic. He then leveraged community partners and external resources to execute youths' vision to celebrate the success of graduating seniors. The Director felt that community partnerships were critical to support student needs, but it also required finding external partners that are committed and "*have an interest in working with youth*" (Director Discussion). The Director stated: "*I look at our partners really helping us build capacity within the work of supporting our youth. It is really meaningful that we can connect our youth to those right partners, those key partners.*" Responses from the Community School Standards Assessment indicate that stakeholders felt that these supports were, on average "Very Effective," in addressing the challenges affecting the school community ( $M = 4.13$ ).

*Supportive adult principles.* This category describes how adults at this site held perspectives that were supportive of youth voice efforts. Several sources converged to demonstrate the Director's commitment to youth voice. Within our interview, the Director described youth voice as being central to the work of the Community School and how he was intentionally "*fulfilling the vision of our youth.*" The Director's responses to the Youth Voice in Community Schools survey indicate that he perceived all Community School Standards relevant to youth voice were strongly implemented ( $M = 4$ ). Within our Director Discussion, this site

Director indicated that he felt management staff of the Community School initiative were supportive of youth voice and helped to implement ideas into practice. The Director also described an intentional effort aimed at changing community perceptions of youth as scholars: *“and I should call them scholars because we are trying to change the mindset of our community to think of our youth as scholars, which they are”* (Director Interview). The Director felt that supportive perceptions of youth voice were now being adopted by new school and district administrators: *“Now I just feel the district is at a point where they have to listen and I am now happy that they are accepting and adopting our model.”* During our interview, the Director described how district administrators were in the process of creating new advisory structures for youth to serve, and they reached out to engage a critical youth leader (as previously described). By the time we hosted our first youth focus group, the youth leader mentioned several school-based leadership efforts he was currently a part of, including a district planning process led by the superintendent.

*Youth-adult communication and conversations.* This category describes effective communication practices that fostered youth voice in decision-making and youth-adult partnerships at this site. Both youth and the Director described the importance of transparent communication and reciprocal conversations. For instance, within our interview, the Director consistently referred to the importance of *“healthy conversations”* as ones where adults actively listen and find ways to support youth. One youth provided an example of this from their perspective by stating: *“I know my voice is valued when the staff of the school take time out of their day and ask me questions like how can we make this school a better learning environment”* (Youth Focus Group). This reciprocal environment is also captured in the Directors responses to the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric, where the Director ranked this site as successfully fostering youth-adult collaboration and co-learning. The Director described how he used periodic check-ins with youth as an established process for *“healthy conversations,”* which occurred in the hallways, when seeing or meeting new youth, when supporting youth success after graduation,

and sometimes through connections with school alumni. The Director described that sometimes these youth-adult relationships can become strained, but he used a “*surgical process*” for repairing harm when necessary: *“it is almost like a surgical process. I have to be meticulous about every point about what the student made and break it down for the adults so they can understand it and conceptualize it.”*

*Established processes for youth voice.* This final category of facilitators describes processes and structures that were in place at this site to effectively facilitate youth voice. At this site, there were several opportunities for youth leadership and decision-making that effectively engaged youth, which included: Youth Advisory Council, National Honor Society, a collaborative needs assessment process that included youth, group conversations or “forums,” and recently implemented structures within the district that engaged youth (e.g., district planning process, board meetings, and student listening sessions with the superintendent). The Youth Advisory Council was a group setting created by the Director, where youth could freely join to engage in decision-making regarding the Community School, including planning programs and family nights. A key activity of the Youth Advisory Council was planning an annual city-wide Teen Summit, which was a youth-led community event focused on learning and dialogue around youth-focused topics (e.g., healthy dating). In addition to these leadership opportunities, the Director’s workplan included additional strategies to gain youth feedback on specific topics through surveys and polls. The Director also described how young people from this site were actively involved within the community: *“Our youth are very active in terms of sitting on different roles in the community whether that is in their faith-based organization or whether that is in their neighborhood engagement hubs or also community centers.”*

Many sources also described the importance of thoughtfully designing these processes to effectively engage youth. Youth and the Director described the importance of creating a safe space for youth voice, being one that is inviting, welcomes diversity, and enables youth to “*fully express themselves*” (Director Interview). Another important consideration—highlighted in our

Director interview—was creating explicit roles, responsibilities, and expectations for youth to participate: *“So we are very respectful to the different levels of, I would say, skillsets that our youth have. You know when it comes to roles and responsibilities, we always give roles and responsibilities to our students.”* A third consideration was creating youth-driven programs to facilitate engagement: *“The programs that our youth come up with, they work. We are able to see participation by youth because it speaks to the need”* (Director Interview). A fourth consideration was having youth create the agenda, which was a practice implemented within the Youth Advisory Council. The Director felt that together, these opportunities—such as the Teen Summit—effectively created community because they were designed and led by youth.

**Barriers to youth voice.** Through my mixed methods triangulation analysis of all site data, I identified four unique categories of themes that hindered youth voice in decision-making at Site C: (1) district’s historical context of adultism, (2) challenges with youth-adult relationships, (3) existing processes for youth voice need improvement, and (4) pandemic. In this section, I describe each category through supporting data.

*District’s historical context of adultism.* This category describes how adultism within the school district’s culture and practices have undermined efforts toward youth voice within this Community School. In our interview, the Director described this context by stating:

*The district has you know, as by tradition, has always thought the adults are right in the room. That is never the case. You lose school population, you are hurting the school environment, you are not really helping to improve school culture in itself, and you are not really looking at the heart of the work which is for the child.*

Within the Director Discussion, the Director for this site described how administrators, educators, and school policies were all barriers to youth voice. The Director felt that the district’s code of conduct and school policies were particularly concerning because he felt that it was not adaptive to student needs and it was creating negative consequences for the school (e.g., punitive culture, not welcoming, students leaving the district). The Director felt that significant

efforts needed to be made to update the district code of conduct in partnership with youth and families to establish a more welcoming culture. One open-ended response to the Community School Standards Assessment also described how the school sometimes faced administrative barriers: *"School has to have permission or be approved to do some things. Can't always do what it wants when it wants."* Additional data sources help to describe how this culture of adultism influenced practice. Item discrepancies on the Youth Voice in Decision-Making Scale conveyed that youth did not feel as strongly that Community School staff took their ideas seriously (*Youth Mean = 3.75; Director = 5*). Within focus groups, youth described how they felt some adults dismiss student needs, preventing students from building trust with adults or voicing their concerns.

*Challenges with youth-adult relationships.* This category describes how, despite the presence of youth-adult relationships at this site, nevertheless, these relationships can be challenging in practice. Specifically, the Director described how adults can take things personally: *"I have had adults mentor youth and sometimes they take things a little personal. The adults takes it personal... youth express a concern, adults overreact and they get on a personal level"* (Director Interview). The Director expressed that often, these relationship challenges were due to culture and age gaps between youth and adults. While not specifically asked about relationships with adults, a few young people highlighted strong relationships with the Director, some describing how this relationship was different from that with other school staff: *"[The Director] always cares. Other staff/people in the school may not. They may care but they don't say anything or don't make it known."*

*Existing processes for youth voice need improvement.* This category describes specific areas for improving existing decision-making and leadership structures at this site. Both youth and the Director agreed that more opportunities for conversations with youth were needed. For instance, one youth stated, *"Thankful for the opportunities that's there, but there needs to be more."* Within our interview, the Director similarly stated: *"We need to have more forums in*

*which youth are comfortable to speak upon, like in terms of the challenges that are going on, especially with today.*" Specifically, the Director described the school's student council as a particular space that needed to be further developed to establish an egalitarian election process and clearly defined roles for youth. The Director also felt that existing conversations with youth could be more balanced in youth-adult discussion. Youth and the Director had slightly differing opinions about youth diversity within in these spaces. The Director described how many leadership opportunities were integrated and involved the same youth leaders: *"It would be like sometime the same kids, we have our kids who are leaders for our advisory council and the same leaders on National Honors Society. So, as you can see there is like this wonderful level of system integration and leadership role."* However, within our youth focus groups, youth described this as a limitation of these existing opportunities, and wanted spaces that engaged *"more student voices,"* because *"they might have important things to say."*

*Pandemic.* This category describes how the pandemic created significant barriers to implementing youth voice in decision-making during this time. Both youth and the Director described how the pandemic created challenges for students to engage virtually. In our Director Discussion, this site Director also described that *"some students don't know how to use tools to express their voice such as email,"* and some students and families have challenges utilizing the different online tools (e.g., Google functionalities). The Director felt that online engagement for senior students was particularly important, but challenging: *"It is sad... It was such a challenge to connect all of our senior class together virtually"* (Director interview).

Youth and the Director also felt that the pandemic created challenges for youth to be involved in decision-making opportunities. In our interview, the Director described how this site used to have an active student council, but unfortunately, they no longer had that opportunity at this site due to the pandemic. Within our focus groups, young people also described barriers related to the online engagement in decision-making spaces: *"Virtual board meetings right now,*

*students might not know how to log in/attend.”* The Director described how some students were experiencing significant personal challenges during this time as well:

*We even have one student who even just said I just felt like giving up, I felt like the world was ending, I feel like you know what is the point of going to college if I can't go there, what is the point I feel like it would be a waste of money* (Director Interview).

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

#### **Facilitators & Barriers to Youth Voice in Decision-Making: Principles, Processes, and Pandemic**

In our cross-case analysis, we identified three higher-order categories of factors that facilitated and hindered youth voice across all sites: principles, processes, and pandemic. In this section, I describe how these factors were represented similarly and/or differently across sites and synthesize concrete facilitators and barriers that were present within these sites. Together, these findings identify key practices for fostering youth voice in decision-making within the context of the Full-Service Community School approach.

##### ***Principles of youth voice***

This higher-order category includes adult perspectives about the value and utility of youth voice within the context of the Community School. In all sites, I found evidence of historical, contextual, and/or structural barriers of adultism that have inhibited youth voice efforts. For instance, the Directors at Sites A and C both described how historically, their schools emphasized adult voices and often did not include youth as critical decision-makers. Despite this challenging context, I also found evidence that some adults currently share perspectives that value or welcome youth voice. However, these sites differed in how these perspectives are currently evolving to value youth voice. At Site A—which seemed to be in the early adoption phase of youth voice—some supportive perspectives were present (e.g., new supportive leadership). However, a culture of adult dominated spaces was also present at this site, indicating that youth voice may be valued as an idea, but not fully implemented (e.g., “the

*agenda is largely created by adults;*" Site A Director Interview). Site B was in a more advanced stage of adopting of youth voice, where it was "*welcomed*" and "*encouraged*," yet both the Director and youth described the ways in which adultism "*creeps in*," and youth voice was not always a focus of the Community School. For instance, one youth described their experiences by stating, "*some students may feel shut out because the environment feels like one where only adults have respect*" (Youth Focus Group). Finally, at Site C—which was at the most developed stage of youth voice—the Director described how youth voice was central to the implementation of the Community School. He expressed that the Community School staff had fully adopted youth voice, but they were trying to push and integrate these ideas into the district: "*I just think that with Community Ed, we have it, but with our school district, they are still learning. There are, they are really still learning how to listen to youth needs*" (Director Interview). Sometimes, this required the Director and his team to "*push forward... and apologize later*" (Director Interview).

### ***Processes for youth voice***

Although all sites had supportive principles for youth voice, a key distinction between these three sites depended on the implementation of concrete processes that adequately engaged youth voice in decision-making. I identified three higher-order categories of process factors that were consistent across these sites, which included: utilizing partnerships, relational aspect of youth voice, opportunities for youth voice.

**Effectively utilizing partnerships.** All sites demonstrated the critical importance of utilizing community partnerships and establishing connections to implement the Full-Service Community School approach. However, sites varied in the ways that partnerships were integrated to implement processes for youth voice in decision-making. Site A utilized different partnerships to meet the goals of the Community School, however, these seemed to be less established. For instance, the Director stated that the teachers utilized "*some of our partners*" and were interested in bringing community-based youth programs to their classrooms. In sites

with a more established presence of youth voice (i.e., Site B and C), the Directors emphasized intentional, diverse efforts that utilized partnerships effectively to meet youth needs and build community.

Across these sites, I identified several successful processes to facilitate youth voice through collaborative partnerships. All sites described the importance of partnerships to build capacity of the Community School. For instance, one of the few items on the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric that all Directors ranked as “fully implemented” was: *Adults are resourceful and intentional in enhancing youths’ social capital*. When discussing how this was implemented, all Directors described the importance of partnerships or external resources to meet this goal. Site C—with the most established youth voice efforts—described the ways in which this site leveraged partnerships across several domains of youth-adult partnerships to support youth needs, growth, and connection to the community. Sites with higher youth voice implementation of youth voice—Sites B and C—specified the importance of finding “*the right*” partners, or those that were willing and able to effectively support youth needs and voices. Additionally, the Community School’s ability to integrate the approach within the existing school structures was a facilitating factor to support partnership utilization for youth voice efforts. For instance, the Site B Director described the ways they were intentionally aligning youth leadership structures, and Site C described how district administrators were recently “*accepting and adopting*” the Community School’s model for youth voice. Given the focus of this study, partnerships were generally seen as a facilitating factor and barriers to were not centrally discussed. Rather in this case, what varied across these sites was how partnerships were utilized.

**Relational aspect of youth voice.** As the Director at Site B stated, the work of Community Schools “*is absolutely relational*.” However, the ways in which these relationships were present differed across sites, depending on levels of youth voice. Sites in later stages of implementing youth voice (i.e., Sites B and C) both described the importance and complexities of youth-adult relationships. At these sites, the Directors both served as a “*trusted adult*,” in

which youth and families from their sites often come to them for support or in times of crisis. Within these meaningful youth-adult relationships, challenges also emerged due to differences in age, knowledge, power, and responsibilities. In contrast, the combination of the pandemic paired with the recent school transition at Site A drastically impacted the relationships with youth and staff at this site (e.g., “600 new kids I haven’t met yet...”) and challenges were not yet identified.

Across the sites with established youth voice, several factors that impacted the relational aspect of youth voice emerged. Establishing consistent processes for communication and supporting youth served as an important facilitator and barrier to youth-adult relationships. To establish and build youth-adult relationships, Directors from Sites B and C described transparent conversations and active listening with youth to fully understand their needs. Specific practices included: periodic check-ins, conversations to co-navigate complex challenges, and supporting youth in their decision-making. In contrast, inadequate or inconsistent communication between youth and adults served as a barrier to youth-adult relationships (at Site B) specifically when adults did not adequately communicate the value of youth voice, and/or processes for utilizing their feedback. Inconsistencies in preparing and meaningfully connecting with youth also served as a barrier, underscoring the importance of establishing systematic processes to support youth through relationships.

The complex interpersonal nature of relationships also emerged as an important factor impacting youth-adult relationships (in Sites B and C). At Site B, setting and maintaining boundaries was both a facilitator and barrier to youth voice efforts. For instance, the Site B Director described how setting boundaries with youth was both “*non-negotiable*,” and yet, sometimes youth can revert to inappropriate conversations with trusted role models (e.g., addressing adults as “bro” or “sis”) and boundaries need to be renegotiated. Directors from Sites B and C also described how boundaries within youth-adult relationships can be challenging for the adults too, because they may take encounters with young people personally.

When tensions arise, the Site C Director described the importance of a careful, “*surgical process*” for repairing strained relationships between youth and adults.

**Establishing opportunities for youth voice.** Existing processes for youth voice in decision-making were described in all sites, however, they differed in the ways they were structured and engaged youth. At Site A, opportunities for youth voice in decision-making were relatively new and engaged minimal youth. For instance, a recently implemented needs assessment process engaged one student who felt that she had to “*speak for her peers*.” At Site B, there existed some unique opportunities within the school structure (i.e., Student Life) that adequately valued youth voice and engaged them in decision-making—but this space was distinctly different than other school structures. The Director at Site B was also working to create additional opportunities for youth voice, but youth were not fully involved in those spaces yet. Site C had the most established processes for youth voice in decision-making and described the ways in which to design these spaces so that youth were able to fully express themselves.

Across the sites, many specific processes for youth voice in decision-making emerged. All sites described different opportunities that enabled youth to be leaders and decision-makers, and they varied in implementation: At Site A, this was limited to few very spaces that either engaged few youth or were either recently disrupted (due to pandemic); At Site B, these leadership opportunities currently existed within school structures; At Site C, these opportunities occurred throughout school and afterschool space and allowed youth to design, plan, and facilitate these efforts. At Sites A and B, the afterschool space was a unique place for youth-adult collaboration, through participation in youth programs, events, and service opportunities. All sites also described the unique opportunity of the collaborative needs assessment process they had conducted to engage or align their work with youth voices. All sites used feedback surveys and/or group discussions with youth to gain direct feedback about programming. Despite these existing structures, youth and adults at all sites described how they wanted to establish more opportunities for youth voice in decision-making, such as: more conversations

with youth, more leadership opportunities, more decision-making power, more participation, and more for opportunities for younger youth.

The ways in which these decision-making processes were designed also served as a critical factor that impacted the success of these opportunities. Creating and communicating a “safe space” for young people to voice their opinions facilitated youth engagement. However, this safe space was not always present or echoed. For instance, youth at all sites described how they were sometimes afraid or nervous to speak up within certain decision-making spaces. Establishing explicit roles, responsibilities, and expectations for youth voices was another factor that impacted these decision-making opportunities. When communicated well, youth enjoyed participating in these spaces. However, lack of transparent communication or feedback opportunities that resulted in minimal changes inhibited youth voice. For instance, youth from Site B described challenges with existing feedback processes by stating: “*They tend to give us surveys. I don’t think many kids take them serious anymore though because nothing changes.*” Ensuring diversity in youth voices was another crucial design element, but this was not fully implemented. Specifically, youth from Sites B and C described how some youth voices were left out due to leadership structures (e.g., requirements for participation), adult gatekeeping, or because of the types of youth perspectives that were often sought out or were able to attend these meetings (e.g., high achieving students, highly engaged students).

Key elements of meeting structures that impacted youth voice in decision-making opportunities were also identified. Practices that facilitated youth engagement within meetings included: youth creating the agendas, creating youth-led events, and identifying opportunities for youth and adults to co-learn. Barriers that inhibited youth engagement within meetings included: youth’s competing responsibilities and ineffective facilitation that created distractions. For instance, youth at Site C described how other responsibilities sometimes prevented them from attending decision-making opportunities (e.g., homework, social events, time management, home environment).

### ***The pandemic's impact on youth voice***

The pandemic significantly impacted efforts toward youth voice at all sites. Barriers to youth voice in decision-making as a result of the pandemic emerged across all sites, including: disrupted processes, enhanced youth needs, uncertainties, and challenges with relationship building and virtual engagement. The significance of the pandemic's impact seemed to vary based on perceived adoption of youth voice processes. In Site A, challenges related to the pandemic and school transitions experienced during this time were described in more detail and impacted all domains of youth-adult partnerships. In Site C, however, pandemic-related barriers were mentioned, but not as a critical challenge as many of the processes for youth voice were already established before the pandemic occurred.

The pandemic also enabled unique lessons to support the youth at these sites. While Sites B and C described enhanced youth needs, they also described the ways in which they were adapting to supporting youth during this time. For instance, this included wellness checks and discussions with youth about the complexities arising during this time. Site A described the importance of creativity during this time to effectively respond to youth needs (e.g., virtual field trips). The Director at Site C uniquely described how the pandemic resulted in learning a “*spirit of graciousness*.” To her, this meant fully acknowledging the challenges youth and families are facing because of the pandemic. While together these lessons were learned within the context of the unique challenges created from the pandemic, these important ideas could be applicable to the future of youth voice (i.e., post-pandemic) as well.

## DISCUSSION

Youth voice in decision-making promotes positive youth development and enhances the organizations that serve young people. Given their emphasis on transforming schools into student-centered community hubs, Full-Service Community Schools are an important setting for exploring youth voice in decision-making. Despite the conceptual importance of youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools, it remains an underexplored and underutilized component of the approach. I utilized a multiple case-study comparison design exploring youth voice in decision-making across three Full-Service Community Schools to identify: similarities and differences in how youth and adults describe youth voice in decision-making, facilitators, and barriers within and across the sites, and opportunities for enhancing youth voice within the broader Full-Service Community Schools approach.

### **Similarities and Differences in Youth' and Adults' Description of Youth Voice in Decision-Making**

Across all sites, youth and adults had some convergent descriptions of youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools. At a broad level, when examining how young people and adults from each site discussed youth voice in decision-making, their relative rankings of each site was similar. At Site B youth and adults both described how opportunities for youth voice in decision-making existed but needed to be improved. At Site C, there was significant overlap in youth and adult perspectives, where both discussed processes, leadership roles, safe spaces, and student leaders. This broader convergence of youth and adult perspectives suggests that—despite their differing access to power (Mitra, 2008; Zeldin et al., 2005)—youth' and adults' perceptions of youth voice and decision-making converged across sites.

Despite broad convergence in youth and adult perspectives across sites, within each site adults described the context of youth voice in decision-making more positively than youth did. For instance, all Directors described a sense of optimism about the future of youth voice: they were hopeful about creating more opportunities, engaging more youth, and making spaces more effective. In contrast, youth often emphasized the complexities of how it felt to participate in opportunities and provided concrete ideas for their improvement. These findings align with prior research that describes how youth and adults provide important different perspectives (Checkoway & Richards-Schuster, 2004; Jacquez et al., 2013), and how young people can describe how policies directly affect their lives (Checkoway et al., 2005; Cohen et al., 2019; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011). On their own, neither perspective—youth nor adults—is sufficient to gain a comprehensive, nuanced understanding of youth voice in decision-making. Taken together, these findings reinforce the importance of considering both youth and adult perspectives to understand the full context of youth voice within a particular setting (Mitra, 2004; VeLure Roholt & Mueller, 2013; Voight, 2015).

### **Identifying critical facilitators and barriers to youth voice within the context of Full-Service Community Schools**

Consistent with prior research, the barriers and facilitators to youth voice in decision-making that I identified in this study can be classified as related to each of two aspects of this construct: principle and process (Zeldin et al., 2008). Principles describe the importance of mindsets and values that support youth voice in decision-making (Zeldin et al., 2008). Processes describe the concrete practices that adult staff can take to integrate youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools (Zeldin et al., 2008).

#### ***Principles for cultivating a youth-driven Full-Service Community School***

Each of the Full-Service Community School sites in this study had adults that valued youth voice. This is consistent with the goals and aims of Full-Service Community Schools, which emphasize student-centered practices through listening to youth needs, supporting youth

with resources, and valuing their perspectives in decision-making (Dryfoos, 2005; Institute for Educational Leadership & Coalition for Community Schools, 2017, 2018; Valli et al., 2016). That said—paralleling the findings of other scholars conducting school-based research (Cook-Sather, 2002; Langhout, 2005)—in this study, valuing youth voice and developing reciprocal youth-adult partnerships often ran counter to the historical and contemporary perspectives of other adults working in the schools. Youth often reported that being supported within specific structures or by certain adults tied to the Full-Service Community School. This countered their experiences within the overall school structure, where they felt their voice was not fully heard, valued, or respected.

This suggests that Full-Service Community School staff, leaders, and youth will have to find ways to transform the adultism present among many adults working in the schools (Gruber & Trickett, 1987). For instance, the Director at Site C—which had the strongest adoption of youth voice practices—had a personal framework of Full-Service Community Schools where youth voice in decision-making was “*the heart of the work*.” Explicitly communicating this framework is critical to ensure these values are conveyed across individuals, structures, and policies within the school system (Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; Medina et al., 2019).

### ***Processes for cultivating youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools***

Researchers have noted that adults’ positive perceptions of youth and their perspectives are not sufficient to foster youth voice in decision-making, structures and processes that systematically include youth in decisions are also required (McKinney de Royston & Madkins, 2019; Zeldin et al., 2008). These observations are consistent with my findings where adult-centered practices prevented sites from fully cultivating youth voice in decision-making. In this study, I identified three key process factors that can be integrated into Full-Service Community Schools to establish youth voice in decision-making: utilizing partnerships, attending to relationships, and establishing effective youth voice opportunities.

**Utilizing partnerships effectively to support youth voice processes.** In this study, each Full-Service Community School demonstrated the importance of leveraging community partnerships to promote youth voice in decision-making. This finding aligns with two key practices of the Full-Service Community Schools, which are to effectively establish partnerships and foster egalitarian relationships to meet the school-community needs (Dryfoos, 2005; Valli et al., 2016, 2018). In this study, I documented the unique ways in which community partnerships can be leveraged to support youth voice in Full-service Community Schools. For instance, all sites in this study utilized partnerships to enhance youths' social capital by connecting youth to appropriate partnerships and resources (e.g., out-of-school time programming, academic resources, basic needs).

Sites that most successfully integrated youth-voice in decision making engaged young people in actively designing the structures that served them, and leveraged partnerships to provide those structures. Site C—with the most successful youth voice practices—utilized partnerships to foster several different dimensions of youth-adult partnerships, including supporting opportunities for authentic decision-making, providing mentorship, and developing community connections. Adults at these sites explicitly discussed the importance of finding the “*right*” partners to foster youth voice in decision-making. This finding aligns with the work of FitzGerald and Quiñones (2019) who suggest that working meaningfully with community partners within Full-Service Community Schools is facilitated by cultivating “authentic partnerships” that value and practice reciprocity, relationship building, dialogue, and minimizing power differences.

**Relational aspects of youth voice.** Relationships with young people served as both a facilitator and barrier to youth voice in decision-making within this context. Researchers and practitioners have highlighted that supportive relationships with youth are both a component and outcome of Full-Service Community Schools (McKinney de Royston & Madkins, 2019; Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2018; Sanders, 2018), and of youth voice in decision-

making (Mitra, 2004, 2009; Voight, 2015). In fact, the most successful youth voice efforts focus on the process of building relationships above the products of these efforts (Mitra, 2009).

In the present study, the quality of youth-adult relationships varied across sites in a way that can be aligned with Wong and colleagues' model for youth-adult engagement (2010). Site A—best aligned with *Vessel* participation—provided opportunities for youth to participate in adult-dominated spaces. In addition, relationships at this site were significantly disrupted due to the combination of the school transitions and the pandemic. At Site B—best aligned with *Symbolic* participation—youth were invited and engaged into different avenues to voice their opinions but had little decision-making power. Supportive youth-adult relationships occurred only with a few trusted adults and within small settings. Finally, Site C—best aligned with a *Pluralistic* participation—captures how youth and adults can work together and build meaningful relationships within Full-Service Community Schools. Importantly, these successful relationships were linked to concrete and intentional practices such as transparent communication, informal check-ins with young people, and processes for repairing harm in youth-adult relationships. These practices align with prior research documenting the importance of reciprocal respect and trust in meaningful youth-adult relationships (FitzGerald & Quiñones, 2019; Mitra, 2009; Voight, 2015).

**Establishing effective opportunities for youth voice.** Although all Directors in this study described their intentional efforts to create opportunities that engaged youth in decision-making, sites differed in their ability to maintain effective processes that fostered authentic decision-making power for young people. Consistent with prior research on engaging youth in school-based leadership teams, the way in which these structures are designed impacts youths' ability to meaningfully engage in decision-making (Gruber & Trickett, 1987). For example, in this study, inviting young people to participate in adult-dominated spaces or asking youth to complete surveys tended to not be effective at engaging youth voice in decision-making. Strategies for effective youth voice in decision-making processes that aligned with prior

research included: identifying opportunities for micro-power compensation (Ozer et al., 2013), explicitly defining youth and adult roles (Collura et al., 2019; Mitra, 2009), cultivating a “safe space” for youth (Wong et al., 2010), and engaging a diversity of voices—across achievement levels, engagement levels, and youth identities (Giraldo-García et al., 2020; Mitra et al., 2014).

The Directors who participated in this study described two strategies to engage youth in decision-making that have not been previously discussed in the peer-reviewed literature. These were aligning school and out-of-school time youth leadership and decision-making opportunities, and engaging youth in collaborative needs assessment. Considered as a whole, these findings demonstrate that implementing the Full-Service Community School approach does not directly result in successful opportunities for youth voice in decision-making. Opportunities to effectively integrate youth voice must be thoughtfully designed and planned, and intentionally executed.

### **Opportunities for the future of youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community School approach**

#### ***Serving as a champion for youth voice in decision-making within educational settings***

Young people have been described as the “missing voice” in educational settings (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 5). My findings align with prior research documenting the historical, organizational, contextual, and pragmatic constraints that create challenges for youth voice in decision-making within school settings (Camino, 2000; Dworski-Riggs & Langhout, 2010; Mitra, 2009; Ozer & Douglas, 2013; Ozer et al., 2013). For instance, Full-Service Community Schools sites in this study were negatively impacted by a range of factors within the school settings including district and administrative structures, mindsets of school staff, political conflicts, and school policies.

Given their emphasis on working collaboratively with youth, Full-Service Community Schools may serve as a useful strategy for centering youth voice within educational settings. Full-Service Community Schools are often operated and funded by external partnerships and

are uniquely situated within the school setting (Dryfoos, 2005; Holme et al., 2020). Because of this, Full-Service Community School staff can influence schools to enhance youth voice and youth-adult partnerships. Site C provides a promising example of how Directors can do this effectively by demonstrating and influencing school staff to adopt models of reciprocal youth-adult relationships.

This influence might be most successful if pursued using a blended insider and outsider approach (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Mitra, 2006; Mitra et al., 2010). A successful blended approach integrates effective strategies to establish the legitimacy of Full-Service Community Schools within the broader school system. Successful strategies include positive framing (e.g., aligning youth voice efforts with the goals of the school), fostering trust and relationships with school staff, and ensuring sustainability in adult leadership and funding (Mitra, 2006). Using a blended approach, Full-Service Community School staff can effectively advocate for youth voice within schools (Zeldin et al., 2008). Directors' establishment of effective opportunities for young people and adults to engage in collaborative leadership and decision-making can disrupt adultism often present within schools (Kennedy, 2018), foster youth-adult partnerships (Zeldin et al., 2013), and create a context that promotes youth empowerment (Zeldin et al., 2018).

### ***Holistically influencing educational settings***

Across all sites, youth voice in decision-making often focused on extracurricular elements, such as youth programs, clubs, and events. Although youth and adults described some opportunities for decision-making related to their educational experiences (e.g., youth feedback on virtual learning, decision-making opportunities with district leaders), these opportunities were often limited in scope or offered only to select youth. This may be a by-product of the fact that Full-Service Community Schools—including the initiative in which this study takes place—are often funded and operated by external partners, which can lead to their being received as an external program or service rather than transformative approach for schools (Dryfoos, 2005; Warren, 2005). These findings also align with research on other school-

based initiatives that highlight how opportunities for youth voice are often limited to decisions about extracurricular activities, and youth are rarely supported in impacting decisions related to their educational experience (e.g., classroom decisions, teaching practices, student curriculum; Langhout, 2005; Ozer & Wright, 2012).

Despite the distinctions that adults often make between the educational mission of schools and the services and supports that are not related to education, the youth in this study considered their experiences within the Full-Service Community School holistically. They conceptualized teachers, administrative structures, classroom practices, and out-of-school time supports as jointly impacting their experiences of decision-making. This highlights an opportunity for Full-Service Community Schools to seamlessly blend decision making efforts so that youth can have a say in all decisions that impact their educational experience, before, during, and after school. Aligning efforts can be challenging because school and Community School staff must be willing to enter a collaborative, mutually supportive relationship (Dryfoos, 2005) and treat young people as “legitimate participants” in decision-making (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011, p. 1685). Collaborative, strategic planning efforts that engage school and Community School staff may be helpful to align decision-making opportunities that address deeper issues that impacting educational experiences (Willard et al., 2012).

## **Limitations**

There are several limitations that place bounds on the conclusions that can be drawn from this study. First, the Coronavirus pandemic meaningfully and persistently disrupted the certain components of the study. The case sites and study participants were all directly impacted by the effects of the pandemic (Haddad, 2020; Lee et al., 2021, Middleton, 2020), which increased the personal and professional demands for Directors and created challenges for recruitment including difficulty recruiting unengaged students and youths’ reduced interest in (optional) virtual activities. The pandemic also required me to adapt all study methods for virtual implementation and modify based on site-specific needs. For example, the additional demands

of conducting virtual research during the pandemic prevented me from engaging youth from Sites B and C in data organizing.

The pandemic also qualifies many of my study findings. For young people, the pandemic tended to be an experience of extreme powerlessness paired with isolation from friends, family, teachers, and others (Haddad, 2020; Lee et al., 2021, Middleton, 2020). These unique experiences create historical threats to validity, with no adequate way to determine how this experience impacted the specific responses that youth and Directors provided in our discussions (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

My use of a small-sample case study design also carries some limitations. Small sample sizes within and across cases limited the complexity of the quantitative analyses that I was able to use. Although case study designs intend to generalize toward theoretical propositions and not toward populations (Yin, 2009), it remains important for scholars to continue to examine how youth voice in decision-making can be effectively incorporated into Full-Service Community Schools in ways that test, and build from, the findings of this study.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Against a context where youth voice in decision-making is an overlooked and under-explored component of Full-Service Community Schools (e.g., Heers et al., 2016; Maier et al., 2017; The Center for Popular Democracy et al., 2016), in this study I've documented several ways in which Full-Service Community Schools can promote youth voice. In future studies, researchers can build upon this foundation using complementary methods to explore whether findings from this study apply to other settings, generating a more comprehensive understanding of youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools. Should the coronavirus pandemic continue to assuage, researchers will also be able to examine the degree to which my current findings apply in more normative, non-pandemic periods. One important complementary approach would be the use of large-sample quantitative designs that include experimental or statistical controls. An important benefit of such designs is that they can

more closely approximate a determination of causality. This is important because, given the epistemology of qualitative methods such as the one that I employed, any speculations about causality are best considered as hypotheses amenable to further testing (VeLure Roholt & Mueller, 2013).

Researchers can also improve from the descriptive foundations of this study. This can be done both by examining the implementation and impact of interventions to promote youth voice in decision-making efforts within Full-Service Community Schools (e.g., Stacy et al., 2020) and by using approaches that incorporate and model youth voice, such as Youth-Participatory Action Research (YPAR; Cammarota & Fine, 2008), which collaboratively engages youth in designing and implementing research and action. These approaches could be paired with a quasi-experimental, randomized control, or longitudinal designs to allow researchers to test the impact of youth voice in decision-making across sites (e.g., Stacy et al., 2020).

### **Implications for practice**

My findings align with those of researchers who have previously documented that adults' belief in the importance of youth voice is not sufficient for the incorporation of youth voice (e.g., Zeldin et al., 2008). Adults must also ensure that there are practices and policies in place that facilitate and support youth voice (e.g., Zeldin et al., 2008). Therefore, a first implication for practitioners is a broad directive to promote both the value of youth voice and the policies and practices that can ensure its support. I've previously provided recommendations for the use of a blended advocacy strategy in these efforts (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011; Mitra, 2006; Mitra et al., 2010).

As a second implication for practice, I note that the adults involved in Full-Service Community Schools must also be intentional about ensuring that said policies and practices meaningfully represent the contexts and needs of youth belonging to marginalized groups. For instance, McKinney de Royston and Madkins (2019) provide guidelines on the structural, pedagogical, relational, and discursive characteristics of Full-Service Community Schools that

support the success of Black youth. Specifically, these researchers argue that Full-Service Community School staff must consider these guidelines not only as a strategy to promote equity, but one that is necessary component of their work (McKinney de Royston & Madkins, 2019).

It would be useful to establish guidelines for practitioners to effectively ensure youth voice in decision-making, particularly as this is an often-overlooked component of Full-Service Community Schools (e.g., Heers et al., 2016; Maier et al., 2017; The Center for Popular Democracy et al., 2016). I suggest that the findings from this study support the incorporation of the following recommendations into such guidelines:

#### Guiding Principles

1. Recognize that supporting youth voice occurs when people both value it and follow practices and policies that ensure youth voice.
2. Ensure that your efforts to promote youth voice meaningfully consider and respond to the contexts and needs of young people who are marginalized.
3. Consider that youth and adults often will have different perspectives on how successful youth voice is within a given context. Youth perspectives should be considered as important as those of adults, and--in some cases--be given more weight (i.e., you can't say that youth voice exists when youth don't feel that it does).

#### Effective Strategies and Practices

4. Promote youth voice using blended advocacy.
5. Select community partners that understand and practice youth voice.
6. Supporting youth voice involves prioritizing relationships of reciprocal respect and trust with youth above the products or goals of these relationships.
7. Practices that promote youth voice:
  - a. Explicitly defining youth and adult roles

- b. Creating safe spaces that engage youth across identities, achievement levels and school engagement levels.
- c. Elevating youth voice wherever you have the power to do so (i.e., micro-power compensation)
- d. Align out-of-school time practices with classroom practices.
- e. Ensure that youth have voice and power in needs assessments.

Finally, it would be useful for said guidelines to be disseminated through national network channels (e.g., Research Practice Network, Coalition for Community Schools) to support broad adoption. Practitioners may need to also identify additional structural supports or changes that are necessary within their Full-Service Community School sites to ensure that youth remain at the center of their work.

## **Conclusion**

Establishing effective youth voice in decision-making processes can promote positive youth development, enhance the organizations that serve young people, and improve fidelity to the Full-Service Community School approach (Eccles et al., 1993; IEL & CCS, 2018; Mitra, 2004; Voight, 2015; Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is a critically important practice for certain groups of youth who are often not consulted in their educational experience, such as those with who belong to groups that are systemically marginalized identities (e.g., race, gender, class)—like those who participated in this study (Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011). Because youth voice is conceptually important to--but often overlooked within--Full Service Community Schools, conducted a mixed methods comparative case study examining factors that impact the integration of youth voice in decision-making within and across three Full-Service Community School sites.

Utilizing a community-based participatory research approach, I collaboratively gathered data from young people, adults, and documentary sources, to identify similarities and differences in how youth and adults describe youth voice in decision-making, and facilitators

and barriers that impact its integration within and across three Full-Service Community School sites. Given the lack of literature exploring youth voice in decision-making within this context, my findings offer a foundational understanding of facilitators and barriers that are unique to Full-Service Community Schools. In doing so, they provide direction for future efforts to ensure that Full-Service Community Schools meaningfully collaborate *with* youth, rather than simply providing services *for* youth.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Youth Recruitment Process

Full-Service Community School Directors (i.e., “Directors”) at each site were asked to recruit youth for participation in the project activities. First, Directors were trained on the following youth engagement domains to identify youth that were most appropriate for this study (see *Table 1*).

*Table 4.* Youth Engagement Domains

Component	Definition	Citation
Program participation	Participation is more than attendance, but rather those students that are <i>actively involved</i> in programs	(Hirsch et al., 2010)
Program engagement	Can interact with an assigned activity without being distracted or socializing	(Cross et al., 2010)
Program dosage	Time spent in programs	(Shernoff, 2010)
Breadth of program participation	Number of programs/program types that they are involved in (e.g., academic, and recreational programs)	(Roth et al., 2010)
Total exposure	Frequency of attendance over multiple years	(Roth et al., 2010)

Then, Directors will be asked to identify specific youth at their site that aligned with these engagement criteria. For this study, we aimed to recruit a mixture of youth that are engaged and not engaged in Community School activities. Therefore, Directors were asked to select twelve youth across the following two categories using all or several of these criteria:

### **“Engaged Youth”**

Moderate - High levels of:

- Program participation
- Program engagement
- Program dosage
- Program breadth
- Total exposure

### **“Non-Engaged Youth”**

Low levels of:

- Program participation
- Program dosage
- Program breadth
- Total exposure

**Necessary component:** *Can* have high levels of program engagement

Once Directors identify youth for this study, they met or connected with management and school-based staff to discuss the project and recruitment process, describing practices to minimize coercion. To recruit youth, staff were asked to describe the study purpose and activities, and what will be expected of youth should they wish to participate. Then, staff inform youth that their participation and engagement in the project will have absolutely no impact on their academic progress or their ability to be engaged in Community School activities or services. Staff also informed youth that they will be compensated for their time in the project. If youth are interested in participating, staff distributed virtual fliers with links to the virtual Parental Consent Forms. To support recruitment, Directors also followed up with youth and/or their parents with virtual and physical copies of fliers (via email and postal mail).

## Appendix B: Parent Consent Form

### WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS FORM?

**Your child is being asked to participate in a research study.** This study is led by researchers at Michigan State University (MSU) and conducted in collaboration with the Flint Community Education Initiative (Flint CEI).

Researchers are required to provide information about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to **empower you to make an informed decision**.

**You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.**

**Study Title:** Exploring youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools  
**Researchers:** Sara T. Stacy, MA – Graduate Research Assistant  
Ignacio Acevedo-Polakovich – Associate Professor  
**Department and Institution:** Psychology Department, Michigan State University  
**Contact Information:** [stacysar@msu.edu](mailto:stacysar@msu.edu) OR XXX-XXX-XXXX

### PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

- Your child is being asked to participate in a research study about youth voice in decision-making within the Flint Community Education Initiative. From this study, the researchers hope to learn how to best support youth leadership and decision-making within Community School practices.
- We are interested in learning from students that are involved and not involved in the Flint CEI to hear from different youth perspectives. Your child was selected to participate *given the unique input they may have on this topic*.
- Your child's participation in this project will consist of participation in one or two (virtual) group meetings that will take place over a few months.

### WHAT YOUR CHILD WILL DO

If your child would like to participate in this project, they would participate in two (virtual) group meetings where students will be asked to discuss and complete surveys about their experiences with this topic:

1. **The first meeting** will be an interactive two-hour group discussion with other students from their school to talk about experiences with decision-making.
2. **The second meeting** will be an interactive half day-to full-day group planning experience with students and adults to discuss our notes from the first meetings and plan for next steps. This will involve students and adults from three different schools.

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Many students enjoy participating in the types of group discussions we will be hosting for this project. Your child's participation in this study will help us learn how to best support youth involvement in decision-making.

### POTENTIAL RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

### PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- The data for this project will remain confidential and all reporting will be de-identified so specific experiences and quotes are not attributed to any specific student.

- School & Community Education staff will only receive information about overall school experiences, not about individual student's experiences.
- All data will be stored using protected research servers hosted through MSU.
- The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.
- *Any data collected online (e.g., surveys) will be collected using unique identifiers (using birthdate and initials) to link student responses. Names of individual students and IP addresses will **never** be collected.*

#### **YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW**

- Participation is voluntary. **You have the right to say no.**
- Participation will have **no impact** on you or your child's ability to seek services and support from the Flint CEI or your child's academic grades. Your child may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
- You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

#### **COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY**

Your child's time and participation are a valuable contribution to this project. Your child will receive a gift card for each meeting they participate in. They will be able to earn up to \$25 total for their participation in this project.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher leading this project:

**Sara T. Stacy**  
[stacysar@msu.edu](mailto:stacysar@msu.edu) | XXX-XXX-XXXX  
 316 Physics Rd. East Lansing, MI 48824

If you have questions or concerns about your child's role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

#### **Would you like your child to participate in this research project?**

☐ Yes      ☐ No      ☐ Unsure

- **IF YES:** Documentation of Informed Consent page displayed (see below)
- **IF NO:** Thank you for your interest in this survey and we appreciate your time.
- **IF UNSURE:** The following message is displayed:  
 If you are unsure if you would like to participate, and would like to discuss this project in more detail, please contact the lead researcher:

**Sara T. Stacy**  
**Graduate Research Assistant, Michigan State University**  
**E-mail:** [stacysar@msu.edu](mailto:stacysar@msu.edu) (preferred)  
**Phone:** XXX-XXX-XXXX

## DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

If you would like your child to participate in this project, please enter the following information:

\_\_\_\_\_  
YOUR initials

\_\_\_\_\_  
YOUR birthdate

\_\_\_\_\_  
E-signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
YOUR CHILD'S initials

\_\_\_\_\_  
YOUR CHILD'S birthdate

### What school does your child currently attend?

- Site A
- Site B
- Site C

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Unless otherwise instructed, individual interviews and group meetings will be audio recorded. After recording, these will be stored on a protected research server hosted through MSU and only research assistants will have access to these direct data.

I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Initials\_\_\_\_\_

### *Would you like a copy of this form to keep for your records?*

☐ Yes

☐ No

## Appendix C: Director Interview Protocol

### Introduction protocol

- Thank you for your time and willingness to meet.
- First, highlight the importance and value of their opinion.
- Primary purpose of the “listening session”: **To explore how youth are involved in decision-making within Community Education.**
  - Knowing how youth are currently involved will help us to plan for enhancing youth involvement.
  - Findings will be used for enhancing practice and research on youth voice within Community Schools more broadly.
- Discuss anonymity and/or de-identification: What would they prefer?
- Consent: It is up to you to participate. There will be no penalty to you or your position if you decline this listening session.
- This listening session will take approximately 1 hour. You may stop or end at any time.

### Interview Questions

#### 1. What does engaging youth voice in decision-making mean to you?

If not sure, provide a standard definition.

- For the purposes of this project, youth voice in decision-making is: *recognizing value in youths’ knowledge, and creating processes to involve youth in decisions that affect them through activities like design, reflection, and evaluation.*

#### Collaboratively administer Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric (Wu et al., 2014)

##### Introduction to the tool

- *Some of our colleagues at Michigan State University have developed the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric to further explore the many different components necessary to support youth voice in decision-making.*
- *For the main component of our meeting today, we are going to collaboratively review this tool and discuss how each of these components are present within Community Education at your school.*
- *For each question, we’d like you to consider—on average—how each item applies to the **theoretical and psychological Community Education space within this school**. This may or may not be different than the overall school itself, so **consider the components that are directly within your control and operations** as the Community School Director.*
- *This tool is **not a test of you**, but merely provides a framework for our discussion, so I’d invite you to be honest and really deeply consider how these concepts are applied to Community Education at this school. If we have an accurate sense of the current state of youth decision-making, this will give us the information we need to build towards improving this at your school.*

##### Administer the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric

- *For each item in the rubric, we can review it together discuss the different levels of the component.*

- *Then, determine which number best fits for Community Education—on average—between one through five, using the benchmarks provided.*
- *After you have ranked your site, please provide an explanation for why you think that number is most appropriate.*

**Dimension 1: *Authentic Decision-Making***

- 1.1: Youth's voices are shared & valued
- 1.2: Youth participate in authentic decision-making.
- 1.3: Youth have key leadership roles or responsibilities.
- 1.4: All youth participate fully in the conversation.
- 1.5: The organization's culture or by-laws supports youth governance.

**Dimension 2: *Natural Mentors***

- 2.1: Adults support youth with appropriate boundaries.
- 2.2: Adults are intentional in utilizing tasks to enhance youths' experiences and skills.
- 2.3: Adults are able to work with youth to maintain an organized, inclusive and collaborative environment for all.
- 2.4: Adults are resourceful and intentional in enhancing youths' social capital.
- 2.5: Adults are active listeners; youth reflect and develop own ideas.
- 2.6: Adults help youth think through the complexity of issues and respect whatever conclusions youth reach.
- 2.7: Adults help youth think about goals and possibilities for the future and identify steps to achieve them.
- 2.8: Adults celebrate youths' progress, strengths, and successes.

**Dimension 3: *Reciprocity***

- 3.1: Youth and adults create a mutual agenda.
- 3.2: Youth and adults exchange ideas as supportive peers.
- 3.3: Youth and adults work collaboratively as supportive peers.
- 3.4: Youth and adults are co-learning partners

**Dimension 4: *Community Connectedness***

- 4.1: Youth develop a sense of community through program involvement.
- 4.2: Youth are active contributors to the community.
- 4.3: Youth gain essential social capital through program involvement.

## Appendix D: Youth GO Protocol (Virtual Modified)

### Step 1: Climate Setting

---

#### TIME

15 Minutes

#### MATERIALS

- Youth assent form (Administered virtually)
- Prepared virtual “whiteboards” for:
  - Social Contract
  - Bike rack

#### PROCESSES

##### Introductions

Ask students to introduce themselves as they enter.

Once all students are present, the facilitator/s introduces them self to the group:

- *I am a student researcher from MSU that has been supporting the Community School initiative for several years. I am interested in helping to promote youth decision-making within Community Education.*

##### Overview & Purpose

Then discuss the purpose, goals, and time commitment for the focus group:

- **Purpose:** We want to enhance youth voice in decision-making within the Flint Community Education Initiative.
- **Goals:** Today, we are here to co-create and understand your perspectives on how youth (students like you!) are currently engaged in decision-making.
- **Time commitment:** The activities today should take about 1.5 hours.
- **What is community education?**

##### Youth Assent

Next, discuss informed assent process.

- Describe all components of the Youth Assent Form.
- Ask youth if they have any questions about the project or what will be asked of them.
- Ask youth to confirm or decline participation, within the virtual meeting (e.g., complete Qualtrics form, Meeting reaction (e.g., “Thumbs Up”), type “Yes” in the chat, or state “yes”).
  - If youth do not wish to participate, they will be dismissed from the meeting.

##### Social Contract

Next, the engage with youth to create a social contract/community agreement.

- **Introduce the Social Contract:** A Social Contract is a tool to guide group interactions and will help facilitate our work together today.
- Allow time for youth to present suggestions for the Social Contract.
- As ideas are presented, write them on a virtual “whiteboard” (e.g., Zoom, Google Jamboard).
  - **Examples**

- *Don't yuck my yum* – Each person's experience or perspective is valid. We all have different perspectives, but don't downplay ideas because you don't agree.
- *One Diva, one mic*: One person talks at a time, and we should respect and listen to the person talking.
- *Las Vegas*: What's said here, stays here.
- *Phones*: shake not shout
- Once the Social Contract is complete, everyone should agree to the contract by virtually signing or stamping.

### **Bike Rack**

- ***Introduce the (virtual) Bike Rack***: The "Bike Rack" is a space for noting questions or concerns that may be outside the scope of the conversation, yet important to our group goals.
- Throughout our group conversation, you may add ideas here or I may direct you to do so to keep us on track.
- At the end of our activities, we will be sure to revisit any items on here as needed.

**Once all activities are complete, proceed to the next step.**

## **Step 2: Generating**

---

### **TIME**

30 Minutes

### **MATERIALS**

- Virtual “whiteboards” with pre-prepared prompts:
  - What does youth voice in decision-making mean to you?
  - How are youth voices shared and valued within Community Schools?
  - How do youth participate in authentic decision-making within Community Schools?
  - What barriers or obstacles do you experience to involvement in decision-making?
  - How can youth have key leadership roles or responsibilities within Community Schools?

### **PROCESSES**

#### **Introduce Activity**

Introduce the group discussion activity:

- Today are going to be discussing a few questions that I have prepared.
- First, I will present the question and then you can write a response to the question on a virtual “sticky note.”
- Then, you can write down your responses to the question:
  - 1 idea per “sticky note”
  - You can add as many ideas/answers as you want
  - This is about *YOUR* opinion and there are no wrong answers.
  - You may use pictures or words!
  - Write as much detail as you can, and if you need any help, just ask!
- After everyone has responded individually, we will process each question with a group discussion.

#### **Process Prompts**

Then, process the questions one at a time using the following steps:

- Present and read aloud first question.
- Provide time for questions and clarifications.
- Provide time for participants to record individual responses on virtual “sticky notes” (Allow about one minute, while playing background music)
- Lead a group discussion about the responses.
- Add in any additional responses or clarifications that emerge in the discussion onto the virtual “sticky notes”.

Use **probes** to prompt group discussion, such as:

- Does anyone disagree?
- Has anyone had a different experience?
- Why do you feel that way?
- Can you talk about that more?
- Does anyone else have something they want to add here?
- Did we miss anything?

**Once all activities are complete, proceed to the next step.**

### Step 3: Organizing

---

#### TIME

20 Minutes

#### MATERIALS

- Virtual “whiteboard” prepared with random assorted images of candy

#### PROCESSES

##### Candy sorting game

Introduce the next activity:

- Now we are going to play a game!
- Once we have learned how to play the game, we will apply what we learned.

Explain game rules:

- *Imagine that your team owns a new store that has a small inventory of candy. Your team buys four bins to organize the candy for the customers and must come up with a name for each bin. The names must be clear enough so that customers who can't see the candy still know what type of candy is inside each bin.*
- Provide instructions for how to virtually sort and organize candy images.
- Allow time for youth work on the task, helping only when needed.

Then, explain the next task:

- *Now imagine that two of your bins broke. Organize the candy again, using only 2 bins and come up with a name for each bin. The names must still be clear enough so that customers who can't see the candy know what type of candy is inside each bin.*
- Allow time for the youth to work on the new task, helping only when needed.

##### Data organizing: Themes

Once youth are finished with the candy game, describe the next task:

- Now we are going to take what we just learned about how to create groups with candy and apply it to our answers to the questions we just discussed.
- We are going to organize the responses into meaningful groups, and create names for the groups, which are called “themes”
- Revisit the virtual “whiteboards” with the prompts and answers (from Step 2).
- Provide instructions for how to virtually sort and organize the responses.
- Allow time for youth to organize the responses for each question into meaningful themes, helping only when needed.
- Repeat this process for each prompt until all questions and their responses have been organized into themes.

**Once all activities are complete, proceed to the next step.**

## Step 4: Selecting

---

### TIME

15 Minutes

### MATERIALS

No new materials needed

### PROCESSES

#### Data organizing: Categories

Describe the next activity:

- You just worked to group the question responses, which we can also call “themes.”
- Now we are going to create big groups for all of the questions and responses. This will help us to determine what we think is *most important* to capture everything we discussed today. These groups will be called “categories.”

Lead a group discussion to determine the categories.

- Allow the youth to present suggestions.
- Have the group to come to a consensus using thumbs up/thumbs down process.
- If youth find this task challenging, use the following prompts to guide the group discussion:
  - What are the most important things we discussed today?
  - Can you group any of these themes together?
  - What would be a good name for these similar responses?
  - What themes are the most important to you?
  - It sounds like there was a lot of discussion about \_\_\_\_\_ today. Is this important to include?

#### Cross checking

Once a few categories are selected, leads a cross checking process to make sure that all categories align with at least one theme and that all themes are included within the categories.

- For example, start with the first question: *What does youth voice in decision-making mean to you?*
- Review the themes created for this question.
- Then for each theme, ask: “What category does this map on to?” (More than one category can be selected.) Indicate the relevant category(s) for each theme.
- If no categories align with a particular theme, a new one may be created.
- Throughout this process, the names of categories may be changed/adjusted if necessary.
- If a category does not align with any particular theme, it may be removed.

**Once all activities are complete, proceed to the next step.**

## Step 5: Debrief & Discussion

---

### TIME

10 Minutes

### MATERIALS

Youth Survey (Qualtrics link)

### PROCESSES

#### Closing Discussion

Leads a brief discussion about how the activities went:

- That concludes our activities today, you all did such a good job working together to help us understand youth decision-making within Community Schools.
- Ask a few probing questions about how they felt the activities went, such as:
  - How did it feel participating today?
  - What did you like about these activities?
  - What didn't you like about these activities? What could be better?

#### Debrief

Conclude the meeting with a debrief:

- Thank you *so much* for participating in the activities today to discuss decision-making within Community Schools
- The discussion and information provided today will be directly used to understand and improve decision-making opportunities for students.
- Provide details about next steps and upcoming Community Forum.
- ***We really appreciate your thoughtfulness and engagement during the activities today and the time you committed to being here. We could not do this work without you!***
- Describe incentives:
  - As a thank you for your participation today, we would like to provide you a gift card to show our appreciation for your involvement today (i.e., virtual gift card).
  - You do not have to answer all questions on the survey, but the final question asks you to select which type of gift card you would like to receive.
  - I will mail all gift cards to the Director, who will distribute these to you in person, as soon as possible!
- Stay on meeting while youth complete their surveys, to answer any questions.
- Once all youth leave, meeting is ended.

**This concludes all group activities.**

## Appendix E: Youth Adult Partnership Scale

The Youth-Adult Partnerships Scale (Zeldin et al., 2014) contains nine items across the two domains: supportive adult relationships and youth voice in decision-making. I created separate versions of this survey for youth and adult participants.

### Youth version

---

#### ***Supportive Adult Relationships***

1. Youth and adults trust each other in Community Education.
2. There is a good balance of power between youth and adults in Community Education.
3. Youth and adults learn a lot from working together in Community Education.
4. In Community Education, it is clear that youth and adults respect each other.
5. In Community Education, adults learn a lot from youth.

#### ***Youth Voice in Decision Making***

6. I have a say in planning programs in Community Education.
7. Community Education staff take my ideas seriously.
8. In Community Education, I am expected to voice my concerns when I have them.
9. In Community Education, I am encouraged to express my ideas and opinions.

### Adult version

---

#### ***Supportive Adult Relationships***

1. Youth and adults trust each other in Community Education.
2. There is a good balance of power between youth and adults in Community Education.
3. Youth and adults learn a lot from working together in Community Education.
4. In Community Education, it is clear that youth and adults respect each other.
5. In Community Education, adults learn a lot from youth.

#### ***Youth Voice in Decision Making***

6. Youth have a say in planning programs in Community Education.
7. Community Education staff take youths' ideas seriously.
8. In Community Education, youth are expected to voice concerns when they have them.
9. In Community Education, youth are encouraged to express ideas and opinions.

## Appendix F: Youth Voice in Community Schools Survey

Table 5. Community School Standards and Modified Survey Questions

Community School Standard		Survey question
1.2	A representative Site-Based Leadership Team, including families, <b>students</b> , community partners, unions, neighboring community residents, the principal, community school coordinator, teachers, and other school personnel and community partners, guides collaborative planning, implementation, and oversight.	There is a Site-Based Leadership Team to guide collaborative planning, implementation, and oversight that <b>includes youth</b> .
1.3	The principal works with the community school coordinator, partners, and staff to actively integrate <b>families</b> and community partners into the life and work of the school.	I work with the principal, partners, and school staff to actively integrate <b>youth</b> into the life and work of the school.
2.3	A needs and assets assessment of the school, student, families, and neighboring community is conducted regularly to inform the school improvement plan.	The needs and assets of <b>youth</b> are regularly assessed to inform the school improvement plan.
6.1	A strategy for continuously strengthening shared ownership for the community school among school personnel, <b>families</b> , and community partners is in place.	There is a strategy for continuously strengthening shared ownership for the community school among all stakeholders, <b>including youth</b> .
6.2	School personnel, unions, community partners and leaders, and <b>families</b> publicly celebrate successes, and advocate for community schools within their organization and across their community.	<b>Youth</b> are involved in public celebrations of success and advocate for Community Education within the school and across the community.
7.2	Youth development principles, <b>particularly with an emphasis on student voice and choice</b> , inform student learning and development strategies.	Youth development principles, particularly with an emphasis on <b>youth voice and choice</b> , inform student learning and development strategies.
7.5	Students have access to enriching after-school programs that are aligned with the curriculum.	Youth have access to enriching after-school programs that are aligned with the curriculum.
7.8	Learning experiences incorporate a focus on real world issues and enable young people to be problem solvers in their own communities.	Learning experiences incorporate a focus on real world issues and enable <b>youth</b> to be problem solvers in their own communities.
9.2	<b>Families</b> have equity of voice and power in the community school's leadership and decision-making structures.	<b>Youth</b> have equity of voice and power in the community school's leadership and decision-making structures.
9.6	Leadership development opportunities are regularly available to <b>families</b> and community residents.	Leadership development opportunities are regularly available to <b>youth</b> .

## Appendix G: Selected Items of the Community School Standards Assessment

### Standard 1: Collaborative Leadership

**1.2** - During this current school year, to what extent did the following individuals ***participate*** on the Advisory Team?

[In this context, *participate* refers to the extent to which that person or group is meaningfully engaged in the Advisory Team meetings, and they have a role in actions or decision-making within the group.]

- Principal
- Teachers & Staff
- Community partners & neighborhood residents
- Students
- Parents/caregivers

**Response options:** Not at all, Very little, Somewhat, Quite a bit, A great deal, I'm unsure

**1.3** - During this current school year, to what extent did the Advisory Team **include** the following people?

[In this context, *include* refers to the extent to which that person or group is invited to the advisory team meetings and/or information is shared with them.]

- Principal
- Teachers & Staff
- Community partners & neighborhood residents
- Students
- Parents/caregivers

**Response options:** Not at all, Very little, Somewhat, Quite a bit, A great deal, I'm unsure

**8.1** - How knowledgeable are the following people about all the services and supports that are available at or through the school--including physical, mental, behavioral, and emotional health, etc.?

- Students
- Teachers
- Families

**Response options:** Not knowledgeable at all, A little knowledgeable, Somewhat knowledgeable, Very knowledgeable, Extremely knowledgeable, I'm unsure

**9.1** - To what extent do ***families*** have power and a voice in the Advisory Team and other decision-making spaces in the school?

**Response options:** Not well at all, Very little, Somewhat, Quite a bit, A great deal, I'm unsure

**10.2** - How effective is the school at addressing the challenges affecting the school and the community?

**Response options:** Not effective at all, A little effective, Somewhat effective, Very effective, Extremely effective, I'm unsure

**10.3** - Please explain why you chose your response for the previous question (10.2). (Open response)

## Appendix H: Director Consent Form

### WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS FORM?

**You are being asked to participate in a research study.** This study is led by researchers at Michigan State University (MSU) and conducted in collaboration with the Flint Community Education Initiative (Flint CEI).

Researchers are required to provide information about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to **empower you to make an informed decision**. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

**Study Title:** Exploring youth voice in decision-making within Full-Service Community Schools  
**Researchers:** Sara T. Stacy, MA – Graduate Research Assistant  
Ignacio Acevedo-Polakovich – Associate Professor  
**Department and Institution:** Psychology Department, Michigan State University  
**Contact Information:** [stacysar@msu.edu](mailto:stacysar@msu.edu) OR XXX-XXX-XXXX

### PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

- You are being asked to participate in a research study about youth voice in decision-making within Flint CEI. From this study, the researchers hope to learn how to best support youth leadership and decision-making within Community School practices.
- Your participation in this project will consist of participation in one or two (virtual) group meetings that will take place over a few months.

### WHAT YOU WILL DO

If you would like to be involved in this project, you will be invited to participate in two meetings:

3. **The first meeting** will be a 1.5-hour interview discussion with members of the research team to discuss your experiences with youth voice in decision-making at your school.
4. **The second meeting** will be an interactive half day-to full-day group planning experience with students and adults to discuss our notes from the first meetings and plan for next steps. This will involve students and adults from three different schools.

*In both meetings, you will also be asked to complete survey materials about your experiences.*

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Your participation in this study will help us learn how to best support youth involvement in decision-making.

### POTENTIAL RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

### PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- The data for this project will remain confidential and all reporting will be de-identified so specific experiences and quotes are not attributed to any specific student.
- School and Community Education staff will only receive information about overall school experiences, not about individual experiences (unless you indicate otherwise).
- All data will be stored using protected research servers hosted through MSU.
- The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants will remain anonymous.

- Any data collected online (e.g., surveys) will be collected using unique identifiers (using birthdate and initials) to link student responses. Names of individual students and IP addresses will **never** be collected.

### **YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW**

- Participation is voluntary. **You have the right to say no.**
- You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
- You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

### **COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY**

Your time and participation are a valuable contribution to this project. Upon completion of this project, you will receive a mini grant to support youth voice activities at your school.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher leading this project:

**Sara T. Stacy**  
[stacysar@msu.edu](mailto:stacysar@msu.edu) | XXX-XXX-XXXX  
 316 Physics Rd. East Lansing, MI 48824

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail [irb@msu.edu](mailto:irb@msu.edu) or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

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### **DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

To indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study, please type your initials, birthdate, and today's date below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Initials

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Birthdate

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Given the nature of this project, you may choose how you wish to be identified (or not) in future reporting or presentations.

I agree to allow my identity to be disclosed in reports and presentations.

☐ Yes      ☐ No      Initials\_\_\_\_\_

Unless otherwise instructed, individual interviews and group meetings will be audio recorded. After recording, these will be stored on a protected research server hosted through MSU and only research assistants will have access to these direct data.

I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview.

☐ Yes      ☐ No      Initials\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I: Youth Assent Form

### WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS FORM?

**You are being asked to participate in a research study.** To help you decide whether you'd like to participate or not, this form explains what this project involves, what you will be asked to do, any risks or benefits, and who you can contact if you have any questions. Feel free to ask us any questions you may have.

### PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in a research study about your experiences with decision-making within the Flint Community Education Initiative.

### WHAT YOU WILL DO

If you would like to participate in this project, we are inviting you to participate in two group meetings where students will be asked to discuss and complete surveys about their experiences with this topic.

5. **The first meeting** will be an interactive two-hour group discussion with other students from their school to talk about experiences with decision-making.
6. **The second meeting** will be an interactive half day-to full-day group planning experience with students and adults to discuss our notes from the first meetings and plan for next steps. This will involve students and adults from three different schools.

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Many students enjoy participating in the types of group discussions we will be hosting for this project. Your participation in this study will help us learn how to best support youth involvement in decision-making.

### POTENTIAL RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

### PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

- The data for this project will remain confidential and all reporting will be de-identified so specific experiences and quotes are not attributed to any specific student.
- School & Community Education staff will only receive information about overall school experiences, not about individual student's experiences.
- *Any data collected online (e.g., surveys) will be collected using unique identifiers (using birthdate and initials) to link student responses. Names of individual students and IP addresses will **never** be collected.*

### YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW

- Participation is voluntary. ***You have the right to say no.***
- Participation will have **no impact** on your ability to be involved in Flint CEI or your academic grades.
- You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time.

### COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY

Your time and participation are a valuable contribution to this project. You will receive a gift card for each meeting you participate in. You will be able to earn up to \$25 total for your participation in this project.

### CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher leading this project:

**Sara T. Stacy:** [stacysar@msu.edu](mailto:stacysar@msu.edu) | XXX-XXX-XXXX

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### ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE

If you would like to participate in the Youth Voice Project, please **type** your initials, birthdate, and today's date.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials

\_\_\_\_\_  
Birthdate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

(Or if presented within the meeting setting, please provide a “thumbs up” using the meeting reaction feature, type “yes” in the chat, or state “yes.”)

## Appendix J: Cross-Case Analysis Tables

Table 6. Cross-Case Analysis Facilitators

Facilitators of Youth Voice in Decision-Making		
Site A	Site B	Site C
<b>Preconditions for youth voice</b>		<b>Preconditions for youth voice</b>
Professional, engaged, & enthusiastic staff		Valuing diversity
Culture & practice of celebrating success		Peer relationships
Culture & practice of utilizing partnerships		Culture & practice of celebrating success
		Holistic & intentional approach
	<b>Community connections</b>	<b>Effectively utilizing partnerships</b>
	Effectively integrating Community School & school setting	Utilizing partnerships intentionally
	Leveraging collaborative partnerships & resources	Utilizing partnerships to meet youth needs
	Director's connection & pride in community	Partnerships build capacity to support youth
	Understanding charter as including the community	
<b>Supportive youth and adult principles for youth voice</b>	<b>Supportive adult principles</b>	<b>Supportive adult principles</b>
New, supportive leadership	<i>Broader perspectives</i>	<i>Youth voice as central to the Community School</i>
Youth voice enhances engagement	Adults cultivate celebration & reflection toward success	Changing community perceptions of youth
Culture of youth voice is (conceptually) valued	Staff set the foundation for reciprocity	<i>New school &amp; district administrators are supportive</i>
Youth enthusiasm for voice	<i>Youth voice</i>	Engaging powerful youth leaders
	Culture of welcoming youth voice	

Table 6. (cont'd)

Youth mindsets of enthusiasm & teamwork	Reset/re-align to prioritize youth through needs assessment	
	<b>Meaningful &amp; supportive relationships with youth</b>	<b>Youth-adult communication &amp; conversations</b>
	Culture & practice of youth-adult relationships	Transparent, "healthy" communication & understanding needs
	Relationships as the foundation	Reciprocal conversations
	Co-navigating challenges & complexities	Periodic check-ins with students
		"Surgical process" for repairing youth-adult relationships
<b>Early efforts toward youth voice</b>	<b>Processes &amp; outcomes for youth voice</b>	<b>Established processes for youth voice</b>
<i>Youth leadership opportunities</i>	<i>Youth leadership opportunities</i>	<i>Youth leadership opportunities</i>
Collaborative needs assessment process	School structures (i.e., Student Leadership)	(New) School structures
Preliminary stages of student government	Establishing roles for youth leadership	<i>Out of school time</i> : National Honor Society, Collaborative needs assessment process, Youth Advisory Council
		<i>Design elements</i>
		Safe spaces for youth voice
		Explicit roles, responsibilities, & expectations
<i>Afterschool opportunities</i>	<i>Afterschool opportunities</i>	Youth create the agenda
Youth collaborate through afterschool programs & service	Youth-adult collaboration in afterschool space	Creating community through youth-led events
Youth-adult collaboration in afterschool space	Collaborative, youth-led service & community events	Youth have active roles in their community.
	Micro-power compensation	Youth-driven programs to address community needs.
<i>Processes for youth feedback</i>	<i>Processes for youth feedback</i>	<i>Processes for youth feedback</i>
Surveys	Surveys	Surveys

Table 6. (cont'd)

	<i>Outcomes for youth voice</i>	Group conversations
	Youth and adults co-learning in the virtual space	
	Efforts result in youth growth	
	Youth develop ownership & pride in afterschool space	
<b>Creative adaptations in the pandemic</b>	<b>Graciously supporting youth and families during the pandemic</b>	

Table 7. Cross-Case Analysis Barriers

Barriers to Youth Voice in Decision-Making		
Site A	Site A	Site A
<b>Historical context of not valuing youth voice</b>	<b>Structural &amp; organizational barriers</b>	<b>District's historical context of adultism</b>
Youth voice not asked, not heard.	<i>Charter school administrative structures</i>	District culture and practices of adultism
The "old way" of youth voice	Challenges with community connection & participation	
	Administrative structures & practices inhibit youth voice	
	Youth feedback & collaboration is secondary	
<b>Adult-dominated spaces</b>		
Adults create the agenda		
Lack of opportunities for collaboration & co-learning		
<i>Classroom structures</i>		
Classroom structures inhibit youth voice		
Disconnect between classroom & afterschool space		
	<b>Challenges with youth-adult relationships</b>	<b>Challenges with youth-adult relationships</b>
	Lack of communication: importance of youth voice & how feedback will be utilized	Adults sometimes take things personally.
	Challenges setting & maintaining boundaries	Youth-adult gaps: culture, age
	Adultism can "creep in"	
	Inconsistencies in adults preparing youth	

Table 7. (cont'd)

	Inconsistencies in adults meaningfully connecting with youth	
<b>Underdeveloped and limited opportunities</b>	<b>Underdeveloped spaces and structures for youth voice</b>	<b>Existing processes for youth voice need improvement</b>
Limited opportunities for youth voice	Limited participation in opportunities for youth voice	Underdeveloped student council
Underdeveloped opportunities for youth voice	<i>Underdeveloped opportunities for youth voice</i>	<i>Need for enhanced opportunities</i>
Limited opportunities for community connection & broader benefits	False sense of value	More conversations
	Need safe space for youth voice	Not all voices heard
	Not all voices heard	Need for thoughtfully designed engagement strategies
	Distractions create disengagement	
	Fewer opportunities for youth voice available to younger youth	
<b>Pandemic &amp; school transitions</b>	<b>Pandemic</b>	<b>Pandemic</b>
Creating disruptions	Enhanced youth needs during the pandemic	Challenges with online engagement
Creating challenges for relationship building	Virtual learning	Challenges with virtual connections
Creating uncertainties		

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