The Alliance Schools Project:
A Case Study of Community-Based School Reform in Austin, Texas

by

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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

In a Public Broadcasting System (PBS) television special entitled *Emerging Powers: Mexico*, the rector of Monterrey Institute of Technology (Monterrey Tech), Mexico's premier engineering university, questioned the integrity of students who study liberal arts.[1] He commented that subjects such as European and Russian literature should be areas of academic interest to students in developed countries such as the United States. Mexican students, on the other hand, should restrict their studies to subjects such as engineering, finance, and business - studies that promote Mexican economic development and industrialization. The rector argued that today "it is not enough to be an idealist. Today we have to make our students realize that the best way to develop our society is to create jobs, to create businesses, to create opportunities" (1996, p. 4). Monterrey Tech students, the rector argued, should therefore limit their studies to subjects that refine their practical skills and expertise in areas that will expand economic opportunities for Mexico and the Mexican people. In so doing, the rector recognized the important nation-building role that education plays in Mexican society.[2]

Like its neighbor to the South, education in the United States also has played a formative role in the nation's development. Time and again, issues of public concern have been debated and resolved on the doorstep of the American public school. At times, these issues have even transcended the national agenda, as in the case Sputnik. National outrage over the fact that the Soviet Union launched a satellite into space before the United States resulted in a crusade of 'back to basics' curriculum reforms in America's public schools in the late 1950s. Later, in the 1960s, the issue of the day returned to a national focus. At that time, issues of social desegregation were largely advanced within the hallways and on the familiar yellow school busses of America's public

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[1] In addition to engineering, Monterrey Institute of Technology also is Mexico's "...most advanced educational institution for managers and (public and private) administrators" (Emerging Powers, 1996, p. 4).

[2] In the 18th century, Fichte and Hegel spearheaded the idea that the chief function of the state is educational. Germany first recognized education's nation-building role when it became the first country to undertake a system of education that was "public, universal, and compulsory." Germany was also the first country to regulate both public and private schools, including institutions of higher education (Dewey, 1916, p. 96).

schools. More recently, in the 1980s and 1990s, general dissatisfaction with the quality of public education has again resulted in two waves of reforms in America's public schools. The first wave reinforced state and federal controls over public schools. The second, and current wave, is focused on reexploring the value of returning control over public education to local communities. Right or wrong, the American public holds public education responsible for many of America's problems. Right or wrong, the American public looks to education as a vehicle to solve these problems.

Over the past century, public schools have successfully advanced many of the issues and ideals expected of them. For example, the American democratic commitment to an egalitarian ideal, equality of opportunity for all, is more of a reality today than it once was. This is evident in the fact that a more diverse student population graduates from high school today than has ever graduated from American schools.[3] This means that more women, more ethnic minorities, and more low-income students are graduating from public high schools today than at any time in our nation's history. But in the United States, it is common for policymakers to revisit and redefine yesterday's ideal and, based on the lessons learned from moving toward that ideal, to articulate a different, more refined ideal. One commentator on public policy in America, Aaron Wildavsky, maintains that this kind of policymaking is unique to the American experience. Public policy in the United States, he contends, must therefore be viewed on a continuum. That is, public policy issues in the U.S. must not be viewed as having a permanent solution; they simply evolve over time. Wildavsky (1979) explains how in America, "each policy solution creates consequences that foster new problems. Hence, policies are ongoing and successive rather than definitive" (pp. 4-5).

In light of Wildavsky's explanation of public policy evolution in the United States, one should not be surprised to find an abundance of critics who refute the egalitarian accomplishments of the current system of public education. Critics, unfortunately, do not have to look too deeply to find real problems in schools today. Jonathan Kozol, for example, points to data from inner-city urban schools as evidence that serious problems persist. Kozol's book, *Savage Inequalities*,

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[3] In *"Is the Education Crisis a Fraud?"* David Ruenzel (1995) cites the following data as evidence of the democratic inclusivity of American public schools: "Almost 85 percent of all Americans, from all racial and socioeconomic groups, now graduate from high school, as opposed to 10 percent in 1910 and 45 percent in 1940" (p. 31).

provides a detailed account of poverty and inequity in America's inner-city schools. His book provides compelling evidence that America's public schools are actually producing a two-tiered educational system of haves and have-nots, a system that defies the premise of equal educational opportunity.[4]

And so, despite public education's apparent successes, evidence shows that many youths, including a disproportionate number of urban minorities, still do not benefit from the spoils of the current system of public education. The sociopolitical implications of public education's failure in these communities is awesome and many citizens demand reform.[5]

Research Question

Frustration with America's public schools has resulted in a myriad of policy proposals that aim to "fix" the problems. As in the case of Mexico, some policy proposals focus on curriculum content while others focus on school governance. One important policy alternative to capture the agenda of both the American public and its policymakers is privatization of public education. In the extreme, privatization supporters, such as Milton Friedman, John Chubb and Terry Moe, believe the current system of education is so inefficient and substandard that it is unworthy of preservation. Their objective: to minimize, if not dismantle, all governmental involvement in public education. Others, such as Larry Cuban (1995), view privatization with skepticism. Cuban believes that privatization not only eclipses the accomplishments taking place under the current system of public education, but he also contends that privatization overlooks many of the benefits and solutions to current problems that are endemic to the current public system. To demonstrate this point, Cuban points to some of the programs which, "...over the last decade, have established

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[4] Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* provides a poignant overview of the problems in American public schools today. Social problems, particularly in inner-city communities, such as poverty, violence, drug addiction, and disintegrating families, are a few of the "problems" identified in Kozol's book.

[5] Discontent with public education has been expressed by parents in the inner-city, suburbs, and in rural communities. It is interesting to note that, when asked to rate the effectiveness of their own children's schools, parents, on average, give schools a 'B' rating (A representing the best, F the worst). When asked to rate schools in general, however, this rating falls below a 'B.' Most parents of students in public schools feel that their children's schools are doing a fairly good job; they do not perceive other schools, however, to be doing an adequate job of educating other children.

school-by-school changes and created networks of improving schools across the country" (p. 39).

This research study is about the Alliance Schools Project, a program that is much like those programs recognized by Larry Cuban as exemplary. Despite the fact that the project has been recognized as a model of effective school improvement by former Secretary of Education Madeline Kunin, little documentation exists that describes how the project actually improves schools, and what this school improvement actually looks like at an Alliance School. As a consequence, this particular research inquiry seeks to explore and document the kind of transformations occurring at schools participating in the Alliance Schools Project. More specifically, this research explores and documents those aspects of Alliance Schools that promote characteristics of 'effective schools,' tangible characteristics of successful school reform found in a review of the literature on school reform.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is threefold: First, it is hoped that this research project will provoke readers to revisit the ideals of public education within the historical context from which the current system has emerged. The future of public education in America is tenuous. The American electorate--and, increasingly, mainstream politicians--have been publicly debating policy options that may result in the demise of the public educational system.[6] This paper argues that the remedy prescribed by such policy advocates ignores the historical charge and purpose of public education. Second, by documenting the role and evolution of education within American society, this paper promotes community-based school reform as a superior policy orientation to that of either privatization or school-based reform strategies. Third, by documenting how the Alliance Schools Project promotes characteristics of effective schools in selected school locations, it is hoped that this information may then be used to sensitize and assist other schools in Texas in recognizing the processes involved in community-based school decentralization and revitalization.

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[6] Just this year, for example, former Secretary of Education and avid supporter of public school privatization, Lamar Alexander, abandoned a campaign for the GOP's presidential nomination.

The documentation gathered to satisfy the tertiary--and most important--purpose of this research is presented in Chapter 5. This chapter synthesizes and summarizes data gathered in six interviews with stakeholders at actual Alliance Schools, schools that have applied and have been accepted into the Alliance Schools Project network. For verbatim transcripts of these interviews, see Appendices C through E. These data serve as the primary source of documentation on how the Alliance Schools Project promotes characteristics of effective schools. From these data evidence either supports or fails to support the research's working hypotheses.

Chapter Summaries

Having established the utilitarian role that education plays in many nations' sociopolitical and economic livelihood in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 then turns to the American educational experience as a framework for exploring the research question. In summary, the chapter synthesizes the literature on school reform and the history of public education in America, as well as the evolution of public schools in American culture. This chapter also traces the democratic heritage of public education in the United States, drawing special attention to the origin and evolution of two competing theories of public education in America: the traditionalist and progressive perspectives. And finally, the chapter focuses on the pros and cons of two policy objectives that currently compete for the education policy limelight--namely, privatization and school-based reform. Chapter 2 concludes that, in light of the democratic heritage of public education in America, a variation of the latter policy objective, community-based school reform, is more congruent with the nation's educational orientation than either privatization and/or school-based reform models. Working conceptual hypotheses are then proposed regarding the presence of three characteristics of effective schools on two campuses participating in the Alliance Schools Project.

Chapter 3 introduces the study's setting. The local (state and community) public school environment is explored in detail, while only cursory references are made to the state of education at the national level. The chapter also describes relevant historical origins, theoretical tenets, and organizational features of the Alliance Schools Project. The working conceptual hypotheses introduced in Chapter 2 are further operationalized in Chapter 3 in an effort to provide a more measurable barometer for exploring the characteristics of effective school at the selected research sites: Becker and Zavala Elementary schools, both located in the Austin (Texas) Independent

School District.

Chapter 4 provides the reader with an overview of the methodology used to structure the applied research project and to test the hypotheses developed in chapters 2 and 3. For example, Chapter 4 begins with a discussion about the criteria used to select the case study research method as the design strategy for this particular inquiry. Later, the chapter explores the strengths and weaknesses of this research method relative to the standards of social science research. In addition, the chapter describes the specific research instruments used to gather and explore the data. Lastly, in lieu of a formal case study protocol, a more informal, albeit descriptive guide explaining how the actual research was carried out is provided in this chapter.

Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the applied research project and addresses some general implications of these conclusions on the theory discussed in the literature review. The strategy employed to summarize the data is a hybrid of two recommended reporting structures: comparative analysis and theory-building structures.

Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: to provide an overview of the relevant literature on the history and culture of public education and school reform in the United States; and, in so doing, to identify evidence within the literature that supports the theoretical framework for this research inquiry. The chapter accomplishes this objective by outlining an historical and theoretical context within which the current system of public education and school reform efforts may be reflected upon. The aim of this chapter is achieved in three steps: First, specific founding principles and governance design features of the current system of public education are explored as manifestations of a system that was designed to promote identifiable social and political democratic ideals. Second, parallels between these ideals and John Dewey's prescriptive theories of education are discussed. Third, the current state of education is reflected upon as it promotes (and/or inhibits) the social and political ideals that it was designed to foster. The chapter concludes with an analysis that draws from John Dewey's theory of pragmatism to evaluate current school reform models.

Public Education's Democratic Tradition

Roald F. Campbell et. al. (1970) cite two American traditions that define the culture of public education in America. The first tradition is inherited from the American "faith in education," and the second evolves from the American commitment to localism. The authors explain that "faith in education" reflects the American commitment to egalitarianism, a belief in the equality of all men. It is worth noting that the scope of this commitment originally referred exclusively to white men. "How else," Jim Carnes (1995) asks, "could the same government that wrote the American Constitution turn a blind eye to slavery?" "We the people," he concludes, "clearly did not include everyone" (p. 4). As the American cultural, legal, and political scope of equality broadened, however, so did the scope of the egalitarian spirit to include people of color and women.[7] Today,

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[7] For an historical perspective on the broadening of the proposition that "all men are created equal," see *Us and Them: A History of Intolerance in America* by Jim Carnes.

the "faith in education" tradition is manifest in the free, compulsory education laws of all states. All America's youths, regardless of gender and ethnicity, are expected to attend school.[8]

The origin of America's "faith in education" dates back to the nation's formative years, evident in the Declaration of Independence's assertion that "all men are created equal." Later, in the 19th century, the "father of American public education," Horace Mann, argued that education was so important to the nation's democratic heritage and longevity that government had an obligation to provide a free, secular education to every child. Today, equal educational opportunity is the outgrowth of the American cultural commitment (faith in education) to free public schools in every community and for every child.[9]

The second tradition described by Cunningham et. al. that has shaped the culture of public education in America is a commitment to localism. John Dewey (1957) observed the importance of localism as it is promoted within the U.S. Constitution when he wrote, "(t)he imagination of the founders did not travel far beyond what could be accomplished and understood in the congeries of self-governing communities" (p. 111). The U.S. Constitution guarantees that all powers not reserved by the federal government are reserved by the states.

In the United States, education is a power that is reserved by state governments. Most state constitutions recognize the importance of this power, especially as it relates to the nation's "faith in education" (Campbell et. al., 1970, p. 48). Article VII of the Texas Constitution, for example, cites a system of 'free public schools' as being a fundamental duty of the State of Texas:

> A general diffusion of knowledge being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people, it shall be the duty of the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools ("Long-Range Plan," 1995, p. 2).

In *Democracy and Education* (1916), John Dewey describes how these traditions, "faith in education" and a commitment to localism, form the democratic foundation of public education in America. Beginning with the "spirit of localism," Dewey explains how a political democracy requires the fruition of social democracy. Social democracy, Dewey explains, is contingent upon

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[9] Two landmark cases depict the American struggle to advance the "faith in education" ideal. These cases include the following: *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) declared segregated schools to be inherently unequal, thereby overturning the separate but equal ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).

free communication and the sharing of experience because it is through these activities that people develop their personal intellect and collective vision for their communities (p. 99). In a democracy, Dewey continues, a public system of education is therefore imperative for two reasons. First, a democracy based on popular suffrage demands an educated populace. Those who elect their governors, Dewey rationalizes, must themselves be educated (p. 87). More importantly, however, Dewey believes that education is the key to social and political freedom in a democracy in that it is the glue that unites people of diverse backgrounds. In this regard, education is much more than a curriculum: it is a way of living; a way of seeing, perceiving and existing in the world. Dewey explains this view of education in this broader sense as follows:

> A democracy is...primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint experience...A society which is mobile...must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability. Otherwise, they will be overwhelmed by the changes in which they are caught and whose significance or connections they do not perceive. The result will be a confusion in which a few will appropriate to themselves the results of the blind and externally directed activities of others (pp. 87-88).

For Dewey, the only guarantee that a fluid exchange of knowledge and ideas will take place (a requirement of 'associated living'), is if education is made available to all and for all the democracy's members. The hallmarks of a democratic society are therefore a fluid exchange of knowledge and ideas (p. 87). When knowledge and ideas cease to be exchanged within a given community, the community's collective interests suffer within the greater social and political realm, inviting social stratification and alienation from the political democratic process. For Dewey, one of the greatest threats to political democracy is the social isolation of people and communities who do not share the experiences and knowledge of the greater (dominant) community. When people share their experience and knowledge with the greater community, social divisions evaporate. When people cease to share their experience and knowledge, social divisions thrive. Dewey explains this social phenomenon as follows:

> The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity (p. 87).

With regard to "faith in education," Dewey describes how a society committed to political democracy must therefore "...see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and

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adaptability" (p. 88). According to Dewey, education is the tool that channels dialogue toward politically relevant issues and application.

Governance Features of Public Schools

America's "faith in education" and commitment to localism influenced important organizational features of the American public school governance structure, which remain to this day-- albeit malfunctioning in most communities. Representative school boards were designed to institutionalize the spirit and intent of the nation's commitment to localism in public education. According to *Facing the Challenge* (1992), a study on the state of contemporary public school governance, school boards "were founded on the belief that citizens would control the policies that determine how the children in (their) communities are educated" (p. 1).[10] It is noteworthy to mention that the organizational design of local school boards sought to maintain local political control of public schools and local autonomy and thus, independence from centralized political and bureaucratic control, such as by regional, state, or federal authorities.

Local Control and Local Autonomy

By providing local communities with independent governance bodies at the local level, namely in the form of local school boards, both the federal and state governments recognized that local communities should be responsible for meeting local education demands. Thus, these governments supported the establishment of various "systems" of education, as opposed to one monolithic federal system.[11] "Ideally," it was believed, "the composition of a school board would

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[10] In *Free to Choose*, Milton Friedman (1980) agrees that the most important factor determining how schools in the 19th century operated was decentralization (localism). He writes, "states mostly left control of schools to the community, the town, the small city, or a subdivision of a larger city. Close monitoring of the political authorities running the school system by parents was a partial substitute for competition and assured that any widely shared desires of parents were implemented" (p. 154-155).

[11] Various systems of education, however, should not imply that state governments absolved themselves of their implied power to "support and maintain an efficient system of public free schools," as outlined in the Texas Constitution. On the contrary, states recognized that it was in their interest to promote a "system" of education and, throughout much of the 19th century, states focused on establishing their own systems of free public schools. Later, in the 20th century, the federal government consolidated more power over these state systems of public schooling in an effort to guarantee, for example, federally protected rights. This is evident in the case of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

encompass the spectrum of individual and collective interests within the school district" ("*School Boards*," 1986, p. 14). Just as Dewey idealized in *Democracy and Education*, communities were expected to participate in the education of their children. Parents were expected, by virtue of the system's organizational design, to participate in the exchange guiding the education of their children, which, Dewey believed, was the primary mechanism for integrating the student into the greater society.

A general overview of the history of public education reveals how the American education system has evolved and how this participatory, democratic ideal for education has similarly transformed.

The 19th Century Community School

Even though it has been purported that no system of public education existed in America at the turn of the century (Chubb and Moe, 1990, p. 3), evidence shows that a decentralized network of public schools indeed flourished well before the turn of the century; some of these schools were even coordinated under the rudimentary matrices of state-promoted school systems.[12] In fact, as early as 1800, some communities in America levied their own taxes and funded their own schools, many of which were community-erected, single-room school houses, remembered in history-- albeit romantically--as the quintessential public (community) institution of the American frontier. "The small district pattern of organization...remained for that century and even much of the 20th century the predominant pattern of organization" (Campbell et. al., 1970, p. 9).

Nineteenth century schools were largely rural in location, homogeneous (in wealth, gender, and ethnicity) in composition, and religious in affiliation. These attributes made them fundamentally different from the public schools of today. In addition, these schools also based their curriculum and instructional methods on the "traditional" method of instruction. The "traditionalist" method was modeled on the British educational system. The traditionalist method of instruction refers to a teacher- and curriculum-centered approach to education, which relies heavily on drill and rote memorization for the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Under the

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[12] "The first comprehensive plan for a state school system was presented to the Virginia Assembly in 1779 by Thomas Jefferson. This plan later paved the way for Virginia, and later other states, to provide for statewide systems of public education" (Rivlin, 1992, p. 43).

traditionalist model of education, tough disciplinary retribution assures student docility and conformity, hallmarks of the traditionalists' definition of appropriate classroom conduct (Rockefeller, 1991, p. 227).

By the end of the 19th century America had begun to transform as a result of rapid immigration, industrialization and urbanization. As the economy evolved, an ever-growing, multi-ethnic middle-class also began to make political demands upon the dominant Anglo-Saxon ruling class.[13] As cities grew, the educational needs of an increasingly pluralistic and urban society began to challenge the traditional methods of the 19th century community school. Debates over the appropriateness of diversifying curriculum to include vocation-oriented material, for example, prevailed. Opposition to traditionalist pedagogy emerged as educators began to challenge the relevancy and adequateness of traditional teaching orientations in preparing students of the 20th century. Whereas the "great books" may have provided adequate educational training for the homogeneous community schools of the 18th and 19th centuries, 20th century schools were reacting to popular demands to make public education more relevant and applicable to an increasingly urban and industrial society. In response, theories advancing counter curricula and alternative teaching methodologies emerged. These techniques generally fell under the umbrella of "progressive education."

Although progressive education is most commonly associated with a specific kind of pedagogical innovation, the actual progressive movement encompassed a much broader educational reform agenda. Progressivism, as shall become more evident later in this paper, is actually a comprehensive theory of education, which synthesizes concepts from a number of fields, including--but not limited to--philosophy, sociology, psychology, and history. Despite progressivism's rich theoretical framework, the movement is more commonly remembered as theoretically fragile, tending to faddism and overly experimental approaches to education reform. An overview of the era that produced the progressive education agenda will illuminate the challenging issues that progressive educators sought to

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[13] Multi-racial demands did not have as significant an impact until later in the 20th century. By the early part of the 20th century, however, large numbers of Irish, German, Italian, Jewish, and other Anglo immigrants of European origin did successfully begin to attain political clout in shaping domestic and foreign policy outcomes. For a discussion of foreign policy impact, see "*Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy*" by Alexander DeConde.

confront using innovative and integrative techniques. In addition, this overview will also illuminate how strains of the progressive and traditionalist movements continue to impact public education today.

The Progressive Era

The highly centralized and bureaucratic characteristics of the nation's current system of public education are, for the most part, by-products of 20th century political developments. Many of these characteristics can be traced to the governance reforms begun during, and subsequent to, the Progressive Era, 1890-1920 (Snauwaert, 1993, p. 16). Unfortunately, the progressive movement sacrificed much of its broader, comprehensive social and political agenda to concomitant and immediate demands. For example, the institutionalization (professionalization) of education throughout the 20th century ultimately replaced one unresponsive, top-down system of control (political bosses) with another (scientifically trained professionals). Whereas progressive reformers were motivated by an ideal vision of social and political democracy, their ultimate imprint on public education has been considerably distinct in contribution.[14] These issues are explored in the following section.

Progressivism: The Political Aggrandizement Theory

Facing the Challenge: A Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on School Governance (1992) upholds the argument that the motivation behind the progressives' agenda was political power.[15] The following passage from this report illustrates this argument:

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[14] Hofstadter (1955) explains how although it is both feasible and desirable to formulate ideal programs of political reform, "it is asking too much to expect that history will move, so to speak, in a straight line to realize them" (p. 19). He explains how liberal inclinations in the nation's politics have "softened in countless ways" the harsh undercurrents of "opposing forces."

[15] Privatization supporters, such as Milton Friedman (1980), argue that progressives "...expected to enjoy greater certainty of employment, greater assurance that their salaries would be paid, and a greater degree of control if government rather than parents were the immediate paymaster." (p. 153).

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A fundamental change in the decision-making structure was the primary objective of the (progressive) reformers. To do this, they first set about to replace decision makers. Under the ward system, school board members had been elected by constituencies in individual city wards. Hoping to gain control of the schools and bring order, the new elite (business and professional groups) sought to insulate education from the vagaries of political influence and partisanship (p. 45).

Insulating education from the vagaries of political influence, the report continues, was achieved by redirecting local control away from the political bosses and placing it under the control of non-partisan professionals. At-large elections replaced ward elections. As a consequence of this change in the electoral process, the report explains, the number of school board members has, over the years, decreased--even as the size of the nation's cities has grown. As a consequence, at-large elected school boards have become less representative of urban diversity (p. 46). For example, there are three times fewer board members representing America's community interests today than there were in the 1920s (p. 15). The report contends that centralization and depoliticization of public education has, in effect, disenfranchised the American public from contributing to what is often recognized as our nation's "largest collective undertaking as a society: the education of our children" (p. v).

Progressivism: The Social and Political Ideal

Whereas the *Report on the 21st Century* attributes political aggrandizement as the principal motivation behind the progressive's agenda, the writings of progressives during the Progressive Era reveal a counter motivation: the attainment of a sociopolitical ideal based on a complex web of theories. The progressives, it is clear, offered more than the mere opportunity for a number of self-serving bureaucrats to establish a political power base in Washington.

In defense of the progressives, Richard Hofstadter (1955) explains how the progressive agenda tried to reconcile the changes and benefits of the emerging industrial, urban society with many of the traditional values of the 19th century agrarian era. His book, *The Age of Reform*, describes the ethos of this social tradition as reflecting

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"...unusually widespread participation of the citizen in the management of affairs, both political and economic" (p. 215). Progressives, he argues, observed the strain on communities posed by urbanization and social diversity (both socioeconomic and ethnic). More specifically, progressives were alarmed by the threat to American democracy posed by the increasing consolidation of economic and political power in the hands of a few powerful monopolies at the expense of a weak and divided many.[16] Progressives therefore sought to construct a blueprint, via public education, for securing a nation-unifying, participatory democracy within an increasingly diverse nation. To understand the progressives, Hofstadter argues, one must therefore think "...of them (progressives) not as stupid or incapable men who fumbled through a simple task, but as men of reasonable and often indeed of penetrating intelligence whose fate it was to attempt, with great zeal and resourcefulness, a task of immense complexity and almost hopeless difficulties" (p. 217).

Deweyism

John Dewey is often identified as the father of Progressivism. His faith in social and political democracy, coupled with his unique perspective on the role of education in society, provided much of the rationale behind many of the progressive education reforms adopted in the 20th century.

Dewey's ideas regarding education emanated from his understanding of human psychology and his personal conviction for the ideals of social and political democracy. More specifically, from psychology, Dewey (1916) recognized that individual behavior is both motivated by self and an interest in the whole of society. If behavior were not motivated by the latter, Dewey ponders, "...no such thing as a community would be possible" (p. 24). For Dewey, a curricular orientation that recognizes this natural predisposition would be more successful than a curriculum that does not. As a consequence, he criticized the curriculum orientation of the traditionalist approach to

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[16] More specifically, Hofstadter (1955) cites "the growth of the large corporation, the labor union, and the big impenetrable political machines" as responsible for "...clotting society into large aggregates and presenting to the unorganized citizen the prospect that all these aggregates and interests would be able to act in concert and shut out those men for whom organization was difficult or impossible" (p. 216).

education. He found the approach to be too rigid and methodical to accommodate the different learning styles of the newly arriving immigrants. Education, he believed, should be student-oriented: it should redirect and shift the activities already going on in the student's head. Dewey predicted that any other orientation would ultimately "...go amiss" (p. 26).

Dewey was adamant about his theory of pedagogy in public education precisely because of his belief in the integral role that he believed education plays in American democratic socialization. "Through education," Dewey argued, "society can...(progress) in the direction that it wishes to move" (p. 226). For Dewey, social democracy was the natural precursor of political democracy. Education (a tool for achieving specific social outcomes, such as social democracy) therefore provided Dewey and his followers, the progressives, with a practical blueprint for achieving a political ideal. Much of Dewey's turn-of-the-century work therefore focused on defining a systematic and "scientific" approach to achieving the harmonious integration of social and political democracy in the United States. Education, he argued, provides the vehicle for connecting what America is (actual) and what America could be (ideal). For Dewey, education is art based on scientific knowledge: "the most perfect and intimate union of science and art conceivable" (p. 233).

Dewey and the progressives believed that a cadre of trained, professional educators would be far superior in implementing this educational orientation than the political bosses who dominated ward politics. Hence, progressives advocated their replacement with apolitical, efficient public administrators--never knowing that they would be criticized at the end of the century for having replaced one unresponsive and inefficient system for another.

Dewey's philosophy of education is both pragmatic and process oriented. For Dewey, schools are mini-communities in which the process of socialization takes place. Education is therefore the process of socializing children within their communities. Pragmatism applies to the approach that Dewey proposed educators use to engage and guide children in the process of education. A teacher employing the pragmatic approach, for example, would explore the child's experiential framework and then look for ways to relate educational material to the child's personal wisdom. At the turn of the century,

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educators were looking for an alternative pedagogical framework to the traditionalist perspective. Deweyism provided many of the ingredients that defined this alternative framework--namely, Progressivism.

Progressivism, as it evolved as an education reform movement in 20th century politics, borrowed elements of Dewey's theoretical framework to advance an educational orientation for America's public schools that was ultimately far narrower than the ideas elaborated above. In fact, Progressivism, as it evolved in the field of public education, became almost exclusively pedagogical in orientation, having lost much of its social and political orientation as the decades passed. To this day, progressive education is more commonly associated with concepts and theories that are almost always limited to pedagogy.

Dewey's prolific writings include critiques of the progressive movement's agenda of the 1930s and 1940s. For example, in *Art and Experience* (1934), Dewey criticized educators who, under the false guise of "progressive education," abandoned all principles of traditionalist education in favor of extreme versions of 'child-centered' education. For example, Dewey lambasted experimental "progressive" schools which adopted radical ideas, such as the abandonment of books as teaching tools or the dismantling of all classroom structures, such as a predetermined curriculum. Dewey believed that many of these "new" pedagogical techniques were extreme interpretations of progressivisism. For the most part, Dewey found the experiments to be "really stupid for (they) attempted the impossible, which," Dewey believed, "is always stupid." Dismantling classroom structures, Dewey argued, simply "misconceives the conditions of independent thinking" (p. 32). For Dewey, independent thinking depends upon guided instruction. Just as a child depends upon a parent, so do students depend upon the teacher. Teachers, through books and structured classroom settings, guide students to the point of independent thought. Dewey believed that schools that are so unstructured that guided learning cannot take place are as absurd as schools that are so structured that there is no flexibility to meet individual students' needs.

According to Darling-Hammond (1994), Progressivism failed at the turn of the century precisely because it created demands that could not be met: "progressive

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education...demanded infinitely skilled teachers, and it failed because such teachers could not be recruited in sufficient numbers" (p. 5). She explains that, among the consequences for public education in America, are the following: a system of education that is out of touch with many of its students, unable to meet many of society's demands, and functionally inefficient for many who come in contact with it. The failure of Progressivism gave way, according to Darling-Hammond, to the standardizing influences of traditionalists: the efficiency movement of the 1920s, the curricula reforms of the 1950s, and the "back to basics" movement of the 1970s and 1980s." (pp. 5-6). The centralized and ever professionalized bureaucracy launched during the Progressive Era, however, has endured, supported by the methodical and standardized practices of the traditionalists. Whereas strains of Progressivism periodically counter waves of traditionalist reforms, "the system" has generally never been willing to commit to the kind of educational system that Dewey and his followers envisioned for America. By the end of the 20th century, the Progressive Movement had inherited a solid reputation for tending to the dogmatic and to the extreme.

The Changing Governance Features of Public Schools

Even though the official organizational features of public schools lodged the responsibility of school governance with local school boards, a design feature that was established to preserve local control and autonomy, the qualities that make public schools a bulwark of democracy have diminished over the years. Local control has been the victim of community alienation. This is evident in the chronic levels of voter apathy, particularly at school board and school bond elections.[17] School bond elections, albeit dynamic in debate, often attract only a few extreme interest groups whose perspectives tend to dominate debate and rarely represent the majority of the community's opinion, if such a majority opinion even exists.[18]

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[17] The voter turnout for the last two school bond elections in the Austin Independent School District was 23,000 in 1989 (bonds failed) and 32,000 in 1990 (bonds passed) (*Would 5000 Voters* handout).

[18] According to Jim Fishkin, mastermind behind the recent National Issues Convention, most political campaigns are focused on "...a public that *is* barely attentive" (Kay, 1996, p. A 11).

In education, local control and autonomy have been increasingly overtaken by external controls, such as state and federal agencies, legal mandates, regional education service centers, state boards of education, and state legislative committees--to name a few. School boards' traditional role, to "...filter, interpret, and translate the education goals of the people into a mission for the school district," has dissolved over the years ("School Boards," 1986, p. 14). Today, filtering, interpreting, and translating the education goals of the local community into a mission for the school district are often mitigated by a web of competing forces, many of which cater to non-local constituencies.

Among these competing forces are state mandates. Ironically, state mandates are often the result of years of policy deliberation--deliberation which has been undertaken, presumably, in the students' best interest. As discussed in Chapter 1, it is not unheard of for good-intentioned policies to result in unintended consequences.[19] Because of this, public education's democratic tradition should be periodically retrieved from the tomes of history and used as a yardstick for measuring the appropriateness of policy changes before they are embraced. This perspective should be rejuvenated before drastic policy shifts are undertaken in the future. Rekindling local democratic control and local autonomy, as well as a community-based commitment to student achievement, however, may be a difficult process to achieve given the current state of public education today.

The State of Education Today

In his January 1996 State of the Union address, President Bill Clinton proclaimed that the state of the union is strong, but that precautions should be taken to maintain its strength. If the President were to give a 'State of Education' address today, he might similarly conclude that the state of education in America is strong; however, precautions should be taken to maintain its strength. As evidence of public education's strength, the United States produces college graduates who compete on world-class levels in areas such as medicine, law, and engineering. In addition, American workers are, in general, among the most productive workers in the world (Ruenzel,

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[19] It is the premise of Christopher Whittle's book, *The Manufactured Crisis* that the worse a school performs, the more politicians intervene with well-meaning, yet ultimately destructive constraints (mandates, etc.). What is needed, according to Whittle, is more local autonomy (Discussed in Ruenzel, 1995, p. 31).

1995, p. 31).

Despite the aforementioned proof of a strong educational system, however, evidence also suggests that the state of education is simultaneously weak. More specifically, the same system that produces top-notch college graduates is also the same system that produces high school graduates who require remedial courses before enrolling in Freshman English courses at colleges and universities throughout the United States. In the extreme, high school graduates from one school do not learn to read and write while their counterparts from another public school (and often from the same school) head for Ivy League colleges. At best, America's public education system is serving a few, but not all.

In some urban school systems, students with such distinct destinies begin at separate neighborhood elementary schools. Depending on the academic integrity of their school, many of these students are tracked, albeit *defacto*, by their sixth or seventh year of school: students from high performing schools enroll in "advanced" classes while their counterpart from low-performing schools enroll in the only courses for which they are prepared--that is the "easy" courses. The former students are college-bound; the latter are not.

In addition to *defacto* tracking, critics of public education, such as Richard Cohen, also contend that the "dumbing-down" of academic standards in general is such a pervasive problem in public schools that even college-bound students receive, at best, a mediocre education.[20] These critics believe that, as teachers cater to the more academically challenged (and often more behaviorally demanding) children, average and above-average children suffer. As evidence, they point to the diminishing test scores of all American students on the national Standard Achievement Test (SAT).[21]

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[20] Richard Cohen's *Washington Post* article, entitled *Johnny's Miserable SAT Scores*, is cited in Ruenzel (1995, p. 30).

[21] Ruenzel agrees that yes, there has been a decline in the average test score of American students over the decades. However the average American student's profile is significantly different today than yesterday: "At the SAT's inception, the test-takers were virtually all white males, almost half of whom attended private prep schools in New England. By 1990, 30 percent of the test-takers, more than 50 percent of them female, had family incomes under $30,000; and 29 percent were minorities" (1995, p. 30).

Jonathan Kozol, in *Savage Inequalities* (1991), provides eye-opening testimony to the weak state of public education in the United States today. Kozol travels from coast to coast and documents a number of schools where education is weak. In New York City, for example, Kozol describes a school where more than 50 percent of the students drop out. In another city he describes an entire community where less than 50 percent of the community's youth graduate from high school. All the schools cited in *Savage Inequalities* have two common characteristics: all of them are urban, and all reside within poor communities. Kozol concludes that America's system of education consists of two tiers: On the higher tier are schools in affluent communities where students are destined to succeed (these are schools producing top-notch college graduates), and on the lower tier are schools in poor, marginalized communities where students are destined mostly to fail.

Kozol describes the social implications of this two-tiered educational system in America. On one level, there are affluent, suburban communities where issues of crime, poverty, and violence are distant realities, evident only in the daily news. In these communities, schools are successful at maintaining high academic standards. On the second level, there are poor, urban communities where issues of crime, poverty, and violence are real obstacles to daily life. In these communities, schools have been less successful at maintaining high standards. Kozol describes this dual system of education as producing a stratified society of education haves and education have-nots[22]:

> ...children in one set of schools are educated to be governors; children in the other set of schools are trained for being governed. The former are given the imaginative range to mobilize ideas for economic growth; the latter are provided with the discipline to do the narrow tasks the first group will prescribe (p. 176).

An abundance of policy proposals have evolved--all of them advocating solutions to the problem of low-performing schools. Kozol argues that proposals that fail to address the larger social issues surrounding school reform, however, will invariably fail.

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[22] This scenario is reminiscent of an earlier discussion in which Dewey's theory of 'associated living' is explained. In brief, Dewey theorizes that when knowledge and ideas cease to be exchanged within a community, the community's collective interests suffer within the greater social and political realm as a consequence, thereby encouraging the marginalization (stratification) of that community from the greater whole of society.

Pragmatism: A Policy Orientation

In addition to providing a blueprint for social and political democracy, as well as a methodology for teaching, Dewey's theories also offer policy analysts a framework for analyzing education policy orientations--namely, pragmatism. *The World of the Policy Analyst* (1991) describes pragmatism as an inclination to move from the actual to the ideal. Like the educator who teaches by addressing the child's experiential point of reference, the pragmatist's approach also begins with practice (the actual) and then moves to theory (the ideal) (p. 175). In contrast to this approach, two alternate policy orientations dominate the American political culture: "politics of self-interest" and "politics of conscience." These two policy orientations begin with theory as it applies to practice (p. 174).

According to the authors of *The World of the Policy Analyst*, (1990) "politics of self-interest" and "politics of conscience" are distinguished as follows: whereas the former policy orientation promotes the individual to the extreme neglect of the common good, the latter policy orientation obscures the common good by way of an exaggerated concern for a group of individuals (p. 174). In contrast to these two perspectives, the pragmatist's policy orientation assesses local reality, such as the scope of regional issues, budget cycles or interest group influence, and then assesses how policy ideals might be "pragmatically" obtained. Pragmatists are interdisciplinary in orientation, taking from multiple subject matters to define the problem and the problem's potential solutions. Pragmatists, Shields (1989) explains, "...have neither the service orientation of the social worker nor the tight, idealistic, theoretical framework of the economist" (p. 70). Pragmatists use multiple sources of information to solve policy problems. This paper uses a pragmatic approach to analyze current education reform strategies below.

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Current School Reform Strategies

A review of the literature on school reform generally recognizes two reform strategies as contenders for the public policy limelight in the 1990s: privatization and school-based reform.[23] Both reform strategies recognize the failure of schools to promote acceptable levels of student achievement and both emphasize the need for schools to decentralize and revitalize by enhancing local autonomy and local control (Snauwaert, 1993, p. 89). However each reform strategy employs a fundamentally different theoretical framework for arriving at these similar, albeit fundamentally different ends. Because of the important historical creeds that have defined the American educational landscape, and because the principles that define privatization, for example, are so fundamentally different from those of school-based reform, it is important to explore the compatibility of these policy proposals with America's national educational heritage and objectives, especially during this time of tentative support of public education.[24]

Privatization (Politics of Self-Interest)[25]

The major organizing principles that shape privatization as a model for school reform are adaptions of *laissez faire* economics. According to *laissez faire* economic theory, government should intervene in the economic matters of society as little as possible. Limited intervention is

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[23] In light of this, a recent report by the public opinion research organization, Public Agenda, concluded that about one-half of the American public may be considering private, market-oriented solutions to the problems within America's public schools (Bradley, 1995, p. 13).

[24] A recent study found that, even though most Americans want public education to work, their support for schools "disintegrates at the slightest probing" (Bradley, 1995, p. 1). The study also found that Americans prefer the private school choice (voucher) model of privatization to other models of privatization (p. 13).

[25] Privatization refers to the kinds of school reform models that promote less governmental involvement in the control of public schools. Privatization models range from having a private (private non-profit) enterprise 'take over" an entire school and/or school district to models that allow student to select the school of their choice. There are two main types of school choice: two of them are public school choice models--one is based on choice within a district, the other is based on choice among competing districts. The second type of choice model involves private schools. This model is commonly referred to in the literature as the voucher system, or simply 'school choice.' Some choice models are hybrids of public and private school options (Kozol, p. 88). This paper focuses on the more popular model of school privatization: choice via a voucher which could be redeemed at a private and/or public institution, hereafter referred to as "choice".

based on the belief that voluntary exchange and allocative efficiency are economic stabilizers: government intervention, on the other hand, destabilizes the economy's natural tendency to stabilize. Proponents of a government-free capitalist economy, such as Milton Friedman (1980), believe that voluntary exchange and allocative efficiency result in the following dynamic: "(I)f an (monetary) exchange between two parties is voluntary, it will not take place unless both parties believe they will benefit from the exchange. (T)he prices that emerge from the voluntary transaction between buyers (consumers) and sellers (producers)...(therefore) coordinate the (efficient) activity of millions of people, each seeking his own interest, in such a way as to make everyone better off" (p. 13).

In a nutshell, the privatization of public schools is based on a theoretical framework that modifies and adapts the organizing principles of a free enterprise economy to fit the arena of politics and society. For example, privatization supporters look to the fact that the cost of education per pupil has increased over the years while measurable levels of student achievement have decreased. They observe, in the words of economist Milton Friedman, that "input (is) clearly up; output (is) clearly down" (1979, p. 156).[26] They argue that what is needed is more voluntary exchange between consumers (students and parents) and producers (teachers and principals). Allocative efficiency (inputs decrease and outputs increase) occurs when the inhibiting forces of government intervention (bureaucracy) subside and allow the market to stabilize the exchange. In short, supporters of privatizing public education apply the economic assumptions of a free market economy to the world of public education.

Milton Friedman explains, in *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), how these assumptions apply to one of the non-economic aspects of public education. In this particular treatise, Friedman recognizes the social function of public education as promoting a "neighborhood effect" (p. 90-93). He describes the neighborhood effect as a function in society in which "...a common core of values (that are) deemed requisite for social stability" are disseminated (p. 90). Parochial schools,

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[26] Economists who seek to privatize public schools, such as Milton Friedman, emphasize quantitative qualities, such as inputs (per pupil expenditure) and outputs (SAT test scores) over qualitative distinctions, such as the significantly different student profile that has evolved over the years. These kinds of demographic details play a more peripheral role in the framework of public school privatization models of education than they do in the frameworks of school-based reform and community-based school reform advocates.

as opposed to state-supported public schools, Friedman explains, convert "education into a divisive rather than a unifying force" (p. 90). It is this particular function, however, that Friedman, and other supporters of privatizing public schools, find to be unnecessary to continue in our nation's public schools. These individuals believe the diversity of earlier, turn-of-the-century America no longer prevails and that the U.S. is today adequately homogeneous.[27] Friedman (1962) expresses this observation as follows:

> ...the major problem in the United States in the 19th and early 20th century was not to promote diversity but to create the core of common values essential to a stable society. Great streams of immigrants were flooding the United States from all over the world, speaking different languages and observing diverse customs. Our problem today is not to enforce conformity...Our problem (today) is to foster diversity (pp. 96-97).

School Choice Supporters

Supporters of school choice, a form of public school privatization, believe that parents, not public school officials, should have the decision-making authority to select the school of their choice for their children.[28] Whereas the models of school choice vary considerably, advocates of choice seek a common goal: to minimize governmental intervention in public education via an infusion of market controls, allowing parents to by-pass bureaucracy. Hoping to run schools "more like a business," choice advocates seek to dismantle the current system of public education and to replace it with a market-driven system.

In *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (1990), for example, choice advocates John Chubb and Terry Moe blame low student performance on the inadequacy of the democratic institutions of education. "((L)ow performance) is one of the prices Americans pay," the authors contend, "for choosing to exercise direct democratic control over their schools" (p. 2). Moe and Chubb also criticize the highly bureaucratic and centralized structure of education decision-making

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[27] In contrast to the homogeneous society envisioned by Friedman, others, such as Ann Lieberman (1988) predict that the next generation of workers "...will be the heirs of the greatest immigration wave in our nation's history - mainly from the Third World" (p. 9).

[28] Choice models range from simple public school choice, providing parents with the option to send their child to the public school of their choice, to voucher programs in which parents receive a sum of money redeemable at participating public and or private schools. Some choice models allow parents to supplement the voucher; other models do not.

evident in public schools today. Under a decentralized market system, they argue, students and parents (consumers) would enter into efficient exchanges with teachers and principals (producers): the former in pursuit of the best program and the latter in pursuit of the most (and quite possibly the best) students.

According to Chubb and Moe, an additional benefit of a decentralized market-driven exchange would be a more democratic representation of parents in public schools. They argue that producers (teachers) would be forced, by the nature of the market relationship, to be more responsive to parents and students to attract consumers (students). In addition, schools that fail to satisfy consumer demands would consequently go out of business because parents would proactively withdraw their children from the unresponsive school and place them in an alternative institution (Chubb and Moe, 1990, p. 32).

School Choice Critics

Critics of school choice argue that the theoretical framework within which private school choice advocates operate is ill-suited to the murky worlds of society and politics. Schools, they contend, are not businesses in the implied definition of the term; and, therefore, schools should not be run like a business. Critics fear that policy proposals, such as school choice, will only exacerbate social and political inequities already evident in public schools as opposed to ameliorating them. According to one critic, Jonathan Kozol, the problem with the school choice theoretical framework is that it is flawed in its assumptions as they apply to social issues. More specifically, choice is flawed in assuming that real choices are possible in a society: For Jonathan Kozol (1992), the truth is that choices in any society are not equal: "...while everybody theoretically has the right to choose any school (under a voucher system), the affluent, the savvy, the children of academics...end up in the same three little boutique elementary schools," (p. 88). "Market mechanisms rest on the assumption of informed consumer sovereignty" (Shields, 1989, p. 71). Consumers are not always informed nor sovereign in their ability to purchase. Real, tangible restraints, such as a drug-addicted guardian, call into question the ability of a consumer to ensure quality education. To further demonstrate this point, Kozol wonders how a voucher for $1,000, for example, would help a poor kid from Washington, D.C. pay for a private school like Andover, which boasts an annual tuition of $15,000 (p. 92). Some kids would clearly have more

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of a choice than others under a "choice" model system: hence, nothing would be resolved, only some of the traditions of public education, such as "faith in education" would be abandoned.

Jonathan Kozol (1991) cites the Massachusetts 2000 public school choice program as further proof that choice does not guarantee the kind of democratic scenario that choice supporters purport. Massachusetts 2000 is a statewide program that offers inter-district school choice to public school students. The program, Kozol contends, is inherently flawed. Drawing from a sample city that shares many demographic similarities with those of cities and towns of Texas, Kozol describes the city of Brockton, Massachusetts, where one-half of the student population is non-white and poor and approximately 1,000 of the students are bilingual. Under MA 2000, 5 percent of the student population transferred out of Brockton, a poor city. Of the 5 percent who transferred out of Brockton, only 5 percent of these students were low income and only 1 child was bilingual. To make matters worse, for each student who left the Brockton school district, "the school system lost the per-pupil funding for that child" (1992, p. 91). Brockton, an already poor district, consequently lost $850,00 in funding to Avon, a neighboring affluent school district.

Choice critics further criticize the alienating impact of school choice on the "neighborhood effect" of public schools. Whereas choice supporters such as Milton Friedman believe America's sociopolitical and economic homogeneity is sufficient to justify the privatization of public education, choice critics fear that America's sociopolitical and economic diversity is sufficient to justify the need to further promote public education. For example, choice critics view the following statistics as proof that the gap between rich and poor is expanding, not decreasing, in America:

> Over the past 20 years, the median family income has risen just 6 percent. While families in the middle (have been) stagnating, the bottom (has been) losing ground. After adjusting for inflation, low-income families lost more than 10 percent of their income in those 20 years. But at the top, things were going much better. Families near the top gained 25 percent or more. This widening of the gap between rich and poor reversed a trend toward greater equality during the 1950s and 1960s (*Income Disparity Series*, 1996, p. 1).

School choice critics fear that private school choice (vouchers) will only further galvanize the rich and poor. Rather than encourage a sense of common loyalties among people, as in the case of public education, critics believe that school choice will particularize loyalties and will exacerbate differences. Kozol, for example, argues that choice may so severely fragmentize

ambitions that individual parents would be reduced to "claw and scramble for the good of her kid and her kid only, at whatever cost to everybody else" (Kozol, 1992, p. 92).

Choice critics also do not accept the assumption that the world of education will respond to market forces in the same way that economists theorize. Data documenting sluggish consumer response to market forces, for example, provide evidence of how imperfect market dynamics can be, particularly when applied to social situations. Jim Smith, an economist with the Rand Corporation, for example, explains his bewilderment at the slow public response to the demand for higher skilled labor. "The market is screaming as loud as it can scream. And I thought people would react. (But) it hasn't happened yet." (*Income Disparity Series*, 1996, p. 6). In summary, choice critics simply do not believe that the application of market theory to the world of society and politics takes into consideration the non-market dynamics of politics and society.

In addition to disputing the theoretical assumptions of school choice, critics also cite the lack of empirical evidence as indicative of choice supporters' unrealistic claims. A 1995 study (Parry), entitled *Education Decentralization: How Will Schools Respond to the Incentives of Privatization?*, points to the sparse empirical evidence in the United States to support privatization's claims to effective school reform (p. 4). Having studied privatization in Chile, Parry's study reveals that, "contrary to expectations," empirical evidence does not support the argument that private schools exhibit the kinds of improvements that choice advocates advance, such as greater innovation or better leadership. Privatization, Parry found, did not make a difference in the quality of education in Chilean schools.

School-Based Reform (Politics of Conscience)

The major organizing principle that distinguishes school-based reform models from school choice is the former's commitment to an educational system that remains a state responsibility. School-based reformers contend that it is government's role to promote and guide the diverse backgrounds and self-interests of individuals via a system of education that benefits all in the same way. For these reformers, a social and political democracy depends on a free, public system of education. In *The School and Society,* Dewey (1900) explains this disposition of school based (progressive) reformers: "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted

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upon, it destroys our democracy" (p. 1).

School-Based Reform Supporters

A myriad of reform strategies under the school-based reform umbrella emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.[29] Much like their choice counterparts, school-based reform advocates were moved by data suggesting that schools had increasingly received more money to produce an increasingly less educated citizen. Much like their choice counterpart, school-based reformers began to view the layers of bureaucracy that had evolved over the years as an impediment to successful reform. They began to criticize the lack of local autonomy and local control evident in public schools as symptomatic of education's inability to respond to public demands (Snauwaert, 1992, p. 91). Unlike choice supporters, however, school-based reformers do not believe that the institutions of education are irreparable. On the contrary, they argue that the maladjusted institutions simply need reform. Their goal is to promote and redesign schools so that they may better foster local, community control, an objective consistent with a participative and democratic civic culture (Snauwaert, 1992, p. 69).

To achieve school-based reform, many school-based reform strategies begin with the structure of school governance. Such strategies encourage campuses and districts to create a school-based structural appendage to promote institutional responsiveness to local needs. For example, some school-based reform strategies call for the creation of a campus- (and/or district-) based council, committee, team, or board that is composed of stakeholders in student achievement. These stakeholders might include campus administrators, members of the campus teaching and support staffs, parents, community members, and students--or any combination thereof (Malen, Ogawa and Kranz, 1990, p. 32).

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[29] The current school-based reform strategies associated with the second wave of school reform (post 1986) is an offshoot of Progressivism in education in the 20th century. It is differentiated by the first wave of reform (early 1980s) in its focus on issues such as decentralization and autonomy, teacher empowerment and professionalization, and educational outputs. The first wave concentrated on inputs (longer school days, higher teacher salaries, stricter disciplinary policy), with little consideration for the institutional arrangements of public schools. School-based reform strategies currently include foci on issues such as, school-based management; site-based management; shared decision-making; site-based decision-making; campus decision making...(1993, Praskac & Powell).

In other instances, school-based reforms address the process of decision-making at the campus and community levels. They emphasize decentralized authority and encourage collaborative processes. Hill and Bonan (1991) offer a variety of collaborative systems of authority for districts and campuses to consider: cabinet system; a co-leader system; a modified co-leader system; a formal constitutional decision-making process; and, a cabinet co-leader system (p. 24).[30] In addition to the structural and process orientation of some school-based reform strategies, other school-based reform efforts emphasize the need for adopting a guiding theory, or set of guiding principles.[31] The key for each campus, however, is to adopt a structure, process and set of guiding principles that is compatible with the unique collaborative forces that are endemic to the campus site. The list of possible reform models is therefore virtually infinite.

The appeal of school-based reform has become so extensive that many state legislatures have recently mandated statewide school-based reform strategies. Some critics argue, believing that the only kind of meritorious school-based reform is one that springs from the bottom up, that state-mandated, school-based reform strategies are destined to result in more layers of bureaucratic red tape as opposed to less. On the other hand, supporters of state-mandated school-based reform strategies argue that such legislative initiatives provide incentives for both bottom-up reform by changing the mood and legal environment for campuses to explore bottom-up reform. One campus administrator, for example, found that the state-mandated school-based reform effort in her district encouraged her to "learn how to ask better questions," making her a more responsive administrator and suggesting that school-based reform had encouraged her to ponder questions she might not have explored had such reforms not been imposed from above (Delehant, 1990, p. 18).

Recently, theories proposing the integration of top-down and bottom-up school-based reforms have emerged, particularly as they relate to systems of accountability. For example, a

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[30] The literature on school-based reform lists a number of school-based reform theories, ranging from theories of action (Malen) to theories based on "who gets control" (Wohlstetter and Odden), all the way to theories based on classifications of decentralized decision types (Praskac and Powell, 1993, p. 8).

[31] These can be based on familiar and well-documented models, such as those provided by Comer, Edmonds, Goodlad, Hopfenberg, Levin, and Sizer, or they can be spontaneous and unique to the individual campus (Hill and Bonan, 1991, p. 30).

holistic integration of bottom-up/top-down reforms is discussed in a report entitled *Preparing for the 21st Century*. The report (1991) suggests that only a systemic school reform effort will guarantee that both lateral (campus to campus) and vertical (campus to school district, and vice versa) dynamics of school-based reforms would facilitate accountability efforts (p. 5). Hill and Bonan believe that issues of coordination among decentralized schools will be no more difficult to resolve than issues of coordination among centrally managed schools (1991, p. 31). They point to the common experience of teachers in centralized schools who regularly complain that students are coming to them unprepared, either from within the same district or from across district borders. The best thing about school-based reform, according to Hill and Bonan, is that it presumes that "(a)ccountability starts at home, with a clear vision of the school's identity and the experiences that it intends to provide children..." (p. 49).

School-Based Reform Critics

Critics of school-based reform come from both the liberal left and conservative right. On the right, Chubb and Moe (1990) argue that the reforms are superficial because they "...do not get at the underlying causes of the problem: the institutions of direct democratic control" (p. 2). In their opinion, any attempt to reform will be hindered by the monolithic public school bureaucracy. As a consequence, they argue, the "system" of public education must be dismantled and replaced by market forces before any real reform can take place.

On the left, a "small group of revisionists" argue that "schools are as good as they have ever been--and probably better" (Ruenzel, 1995, p. 31). For these critics, there is no school crisis to discuss.[32] While some find the whole discussion on school-based reform simply pejorative, others on the left believe that school-based reformers are just missing the point. For example, Richard Gibboney, former teacher and Vermont commissioner of education, laments how the

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[32] Ruenzel (1995) explains how many "liberal-minded" reformers, such as John Goodlad, Jonathan Kozol, Ted Sizer, Deborah Meier, and David Cohen, have muffled their attacks against the current state of education (and hence support of school-based reform, in general) in an attempt to deflate popular discontent with public schools and, hopefully, subvert the appeal of privatization as an option. These reformers, Ruenzel writes, simply "aren't willing to go that far; they still believe in the traditional public school ideal. It is in this critical belief that many of the liberal critics and revisionists are united" (p. 33).

school-based reform movement has skirted away from the most important aspect of its reform agenda: "the cultivation of intelligence and the cultivation of the democratic spirit" (Ruenzel, 1995, p. 33). The book, *The Shopping Mall High School*, suggests that this is because Americans do not hold this kind of 'intellectualism' as a priority of their public schools. Is it not true, the book questions, that most Americans simply want their kids to "...go to little league, watch television, date, and save money to buy a car?" (quoted in Ruenzel, 1995, p. 33). Community-based school reform advocates contend that the scope of school reform must be much broader than that which school-based reformers have considered in order to combat the minimal expectations that communities have of their public schools.

Community-Based School Reform (A Pragmatic Approach)

Similar to school-based reform advocates, community-based school reformers believe in the basic premise of public education. Community-based school reformers, however, believe that school-based reformers are merely tinkering with the institutions of public education from within. Community-based reformers seek to jump-start the system from without. The guiding principles of community-based school reform begin with the reality of public schools and ask, "how can schools be better than the society of which they are a part" (Ruenzel, 1993, p. 33). Community-based school reform is therefore distinct from its school-based counterpart in that it is self-directed from the community to the school, and not vice versa--as in case of school-based reform.

The theoretical underpinnings of community-based school reform can be traced to the social and political orientations of the early progressive movement. In an interview, Gibboney illustrates this progressive orientation of community-based school reform when he states that it is based on the following Deweyan assumption:

> ...that a healthy individual of ordinary intelligence can be an intellectual-someone who enjoys ideas, knows how to use information, participates in civic life. This means reading, conversing, considering ideas. This is what intellectuals do, and it's not really that difficult (Ruenzel, 1995, p. 33).

Gibboney argues that the problem in America, at both "privileged and poor schools alike," is a "spooky absence of passion regarding the environment, the justice system, the Republican Congress--any number of fundamental issues." He asks, "How can schools be any good if they

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are rampantly anti-intellectual, if, according to *Publishers Weekly*, only 10 percent of our college graduates are serious readers?" (Ruenzel, 1995, p. 33).

Community-based school reform observes that America's public schools have the governance structure in place to respond to the will of their communities only if communities demand so much. Communities, therefore, must be galvanized around the important role that education plays in their future; and they must act upon this understanding to demand improved education for their youth.

It has been stated that school-based reforms, unlike school choice, promote the kind of direct participation in the democratic institutions of public education that is presumed necessary for the preservation of democracy within America. *Facing the Challenge* (1992) contends that the real hurdle is to "achieve and assure effective local governance" (p. 24). The appeal of community-based school reform lies in the revival of discussion (of Dewey's "associated living") and direct democratic participation by local communities on local concerns, such as the education of our nation's youth. Creating a campus-based committee of teachers and parents, however, does not necessarily mean that teachers and parents will have the knowledge to participate in the running of their school. A community-based reform effort that focuses on stimulating and guiding effective local control and autonomy of public schools, on the other hand, would provide this crucial ingredient.

Conceptual Framework

Community-based school reform focuses on developing the capacity of schools and teachers to be responsible for student learning and responsive to student and community needs, interests and concerns (Darling-Hammond et al., 1994, p.3). Community-based school reform is guided by three fundamental theoretical tenets: local control (democratization), local autonomy (decentralization), and student achievement (Snauwaert, 1993, p. 91).

Local Control

Local control (democratization), the first theoretical tenet of community-based school reform, fosters a climate that promotes local autonomy (the second theoretical tenet) by encouraging and directing active parent and teacher participation in the public education process.

Proponents of local control, such as Ann Lieberman, recognize the need for public schools to undergo a political/cultural transformation in which parents and teachers become more involved in the issues affecting their children. Local autonomy, Lieberman (1988) believes, depends upon local control: "Collective autonomy from external regulation is achieved by the assumption of collective responsibility through self-governance" (p. 65).

One community-based school reformer, Dale Snauwaert (1993) refers to this kind of cultural transformation as "developmental democracy." According to Snauwaert, developmental democracy, as it applies to school reform, refers to a system of public education that is sensitive and responsive to the collective concerns of the community. Such a system encourages and thrives on the decisive participation of parents, the community, and other parties (stakeholders) who recognize the important social and political role that education plays in maintaining the nation's free and democratic civic culture. Linda Darling-Hammond et. al. (1994) corroborate this belief that local control (democratization) is a process of creating a bottom-up, participative community around a central focus--namely, student achievement. The study refers to local control as the process of "building an inquiry ethic, a community of discourse in the school, that is focused on students and their needs rather than on the implementation of rules and procedures" (pp. 14-15). This inquiry ethic, the study contends, is the "engine for school change...the catalyst for a community's political and educational development" (p. 15). In light of this discussion, the following conceptual working hypothesis (WH) is proposed:

WH 1: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Local Control
(Processes of Democratization)

Research will explore how the Alliance Schools Project helps schools engage in the kind of political/cultural reform that promotes local control, a characteristic of effective schools found in the literature on school-based reform.

Local Autonomy

The concept of local autonomy is based on the observation that a decentralized system of public education empowers teachers, parents, and communities so that they may assume the responsibility of their youths' academic and personal success; a responsibility that the current

system of public education discourages through its alienating and unresponsive, top-down power structure and culture (Chubb and Moe, 1990, p. 26)). For Ann Lieberman (1988), local autonomy emerges when a school cultivates a "community of learners and of leaders." That is, when schools become places where "every mission is to ensure that students, parents, teachers, and principals all become school leaders in some ways and at some times" (p. 131). To achieve this broader role for campus stakeholders, campuses must explore staff and community development opportunities that encourage teachers and community members, for example, to transcend their roles and to take on campus leadership roles. In addition, autonomy is achieved through other kinds of changes, such as institutional and organizational changes which return control over campus decisions to the campus and community leaders. In light of this discussion, the following conceptual working hypotheses (WH) is proposed:

WH 2: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Local Autonomy (Processes of Decentralization)

Research will explore how the Alliance Schools Project helps schools achieve the kind of organizational/professional reforms that promote local autonomy, a characteristic of effective schools found in the literature on school-based reform.

Student Achievement

The most important characteristic of effective schools is their uncompromising focus on student achievement. As a consequence, effective schools typically promote ambitious academic programs that demand high levels of student achievement. Schools that are autonomous are free to select curriculum and other programs that meet the needs of their students. Consequently, programs at these schools may be unique: they will cater to local needs, thereby reflecting the input of local control. In light of this, the following conceptual working hypotheses (WH) is proposed:

WH 3: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Student Achievement

Research will explore how the Alliance Schools Project helps communities identify areas of student need and, in response, implement appropriate programs and services. Achievement in these areas, as well as in state-defined areas of student assessment, such as the Texas Assessment

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of Academic Skills (TAAS) test, also will be assessed. Before this, however, public education's contemporary setting is explored in an effort to better understand the significance of the research findings within the current social context.

CHAPTER 3
Public Education's Contemporary Setting

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: first, to provide an overview of the setting for this research inquiry and second, to provide an introduction to the history and organizational features of the Alliance Schools Project.

The Texas Public School Setting

Most Texans are familiar with the motto, "Texas: It's like a whole other country." No doubt, Texas is a big state: bigger in geographical size, population, and economic wealth than many sovereign European nations. In light of this, it is not surprising that Texas' system of public education also is big. In fact, Texas is home to about one-fifth of the nation's school districts. More specifically, during the last school year, almost 1,100 public school districts in Texas, encompassing approximately 6,000 individual school campuses, educated more than 3.6 million young Texans ("*Decade of Change*," 1993, p. 1).

The diversity of these districts is as awesome as the size and geographical dimensions of Texas. For example, Texas' largest school district, the Houston Independent School District, educated more than 200,000 students while Texas' smallest district enrolled only two students ("*Decade of Change*," 1993, p. 2). Unlike the homogeneous society of the 19th century community school, the society of today's young Texans is characterized by diversity. Based on data collected in the 1991-1992 school year, Texas' rural districts counted only 28 percent of the student population as racial and ethnic minorities, while the state's urban districts counted almost 80 percent of the student population as racial and ethnic minorities.[33] Despite the state's vast

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[33] Of the nation's 100 largest public school districts, 13 are located in Texas. The average school district in America has about five schools, 140 teachers, and 2,618 students. Of the nation's 100 largest school districts, however, the means jump to 143 schools, 5,237 teachers, and 99,748 students. Citing data from the Office for Civil Rights, it is estimated that these 100 districts educate more than 40 percent of the nation's 13.7 million minority students (*Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States, 1992-93*, 1995, p. 3).

expanses of ranch lands and oil fields, most young Texans reside in one of the state's major metropolitan areas.

It is estimated that Texas' student population will reach 4.1 million by 1999, and clearly more than 50 percent of these students will be of either Hispanic or African-American heritage. Unfortunately, if recent trends continue, many of these students also will be poor.[34] Studies recognize the eminent challenge for Texas' youth, and for the State of Texas, posed by this demographic reality. For Texas' youth, it means "...that more of them (will have) to cope with the burdens that a low-income family background and language differences confer" (*"Preparing for 21st,"* 1994, p. 3). For the State of Texas, it means that a special educational strategy will have to be developed to prepare "(t)hese schoolchildren (to) become the backbone of state and national work forces, the hope of the state's future, and the strength of a democratic society" (*"Decade of Change,"* 1993, p. 1).

Studies also show that "(p)oor students score at academic levels significantly below students who are more economically advantaged" (*"Preparing for 21st,"* 1994, p. 3). Using May 1995 exit-exam scores as a barometer for predicting future academic performance levels by Texas' youth, Cindy Ramos (1996) captures a trend that must be addressed. Her data reveal that 9.6 percent of African-American students and 9.1 percent of Hispanic students in Texas--almost 10 percent from each ethnic group--failed the exit-exam in May 1995.[35] In contrast, these students' Anglo counterpart within the Austin Independent School district failed the exit-exam at a rate of less than 1.5 percent. Minority Texans are under performing academically at an alarming rate. In a county like Bexar, home to Texas' third largest city, San Antonio, almost 60 percent of the county's black youth in Grades 1-10 failed at least one section of the state's standardized test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test.

For many students, failing the TAAS increases the likelihood of dropping out of school altogether. Mel Coleman, deputy superintendent for accountability in the Austin Independent

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[34] Almost 50 percent of the state's students were "economically disadvantaged" in the 1994-1995 school year, the most recent year for which statistics are available.

[35] The exit and Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests are currently being evaluated by a task force to determine whether or not the tests are discriminatory to specific racial groups (Ramos, 1996)

School District, explains how failing the TAAS contributes to his district's high drop-out rate. Students who fail the TAAS, Coleman relates, often "...end up with a sense that they're not being as successful in school as they think they should. Once they're out of the loop, they're disengaged, and they don't come back" (Berls and South, 1995, p. A8). Low academic performance, combined with other social pressures, such as single-parent homes, drugs, violence, and poverty are among the many factors contributing to the increasing pool of students "at-risk" of dropping out of school in Texas.

The Austin Public School Setting[36]

Of the 10 largest school districts in Texas, the Austin Independent School District's drop-out rate is the third highest, trailing only Houston and San Antonio.[37] In the 1994-1995 school year, almost 6 percent of Austin's students dropped out. The drop-out rate was especially high among minority and low-income students: 7.2 percent for African Americans, 8 percent for Hispanics, and 8.1 percent for students who qualify for free or reduced lunches, the measure used for defining a student as low income. Despite the unnerving evidence suggesting that many of Austin's youth are failing to obtain the state prescribed "basic" public education, others within the same system are doing comparably well. In the same year that 5.7 percent of Austin's youth quit school, many of their peers made grades that would secure them a ticket into college. Ironically, while the district's drop-out rate is among the worst in the state, Austin's high school senior Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores were also among the best in Texas. The average SAT score was 931: white students averaged 988; Hispanic students averaged 863; and African-American students averaged 764.

Not only are Austin's youth segregated by different academic achievement levels, but many of these same students also grow up within segregated communities. A magnifying glass is not

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[36] The Austin Independent School District is the 42nd largest school district in the nation (*Characteristics of the 100 Largest: 1992-1993*).

[37] The state defines drop out as students in Grades seven 7-12 who stop attending class and, to the best of school officials' knowledge, do not enroll elsewhere during a one-year period after they leave the school district (Berls and South, 1995, p. A8).

necessary to observe that Austin, like many other cities within the United States, is socio-economically segregated. To the east of Interstate 35 are predominantly low-income, Hispanic and African-American neighborhoods and to the west of the Interstate are, for the most part, predominantly Anglo-dominated, wealthier neighborhoods. Pockets of exceptions exist, as they do in most American cities; however, to the observant eye, the pattern of segregation is quite obvious. In an editorial commentary ("*Interfaith Sets Example*," 1993) in the *Austin American-Statesman*, the following observation regarding the impact of segregation on the future of Austin, the State of Texas, and American democracy in general was made:

> The warning signs of a future society populated by two classes separated by a wide economic gulf are all too real and all too frightening. An appallingly high drop-out rate, as well as equally appallingly high illiteracy rate and the disappearance of jobs for the marginally educated, are clear indications of where the city, state, and country are headed unless decisive action is taken and taken now.

One year before this commentary appeared, the Alliance Schools Project was established to "improve student achievement in low-income communities throughout Texas" ("*Alliance Schools Initiative*," p. 1). Beginning with 17 schools in 1992, the project now helps more than 70 schools statewide plan and realize programs of action, which address educational problems within their communities. In Austin, two communities have invited the Alliance Schools Project to help them decentralize and revitalize their failing elementary schools. A vignette of these communities precedes an overview of the Alliance Schools Project below.

The Becker and Zavala School Settings

Becker and Zavala Elementary Schools were among the first campuses to invite the Alliance Schools Project onto their campuses and into their communities. Each campus is located within central Austin, the State Capital of Texas. Becker is located in south-central Austin, just south of the Colorado River. Zavala Elementary is located in the heart of Austin's "east side," just east of Interstate 35. In addition to sharing an urban physical orientation, both schools also serve predominantly low-income communities. For example, both schools receive a significant number of their students from nearby public housing facilities. An estimated one-third of Becker Elementary's students, for example, live at Meadowbrook, a housing project like many others in the United States where a disproportionate number of households are headed by single-parents

under the age of 21. Zavala Elementary School, like its counterpart south of the River, also receives a number of students who live in public housing. In fact, Zavala is the only elementary school in Austin to receive students from two housing projects: Santa Rita and Chalmers Courts (the Courts). Table 3.1 captures specific demographic data highlighting the campus' demographic similarities.

Demographic Comparison of Becker and Zavala Elementary Schools

	A	B	C
		Becker Elementary	Zavala Elementary
1			
2	% Low Income Students	88	91
3	% Hispanic	78	85
4	% African American	13	14
5	% White	9	1

Table 3.1

(Source: 1994-95 Annual Performance Report: Austin Independent School District)

The Alliance Schools Project

The Alliance Schools Project is the brainchild of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation (I.A.F), a network of loosely affiliated local organizations, such as Austin Interfaith and the El Paso Interreligious Sponsoring Committee (EPISO).[38] The I.A.F. is an umbrella organization that unites a coalition of independent civic and religious organizations throughout the nation. In brief, these organizations pay a kind of "membership" fee to a local affiliate of the I.A.F., such as Austin Interfaith. In return, the organization receives an Industrial Areas Foundation trained organizer, consultation access to state, regional, and national lead organizers, as well as admission to training workshops which focus on promoting community mobilization. The relationship between the local organization and the I.A.F. is reciprocal. The I.A.F is both non-partisan and non-denominational: It focuses on improving the tangible conditions of poor, disenfranchised communities. The civic

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[38] At the national level, the Industrial Areas Foundation is governed by a five-member managing cabinet. It is clear, however, that the impact that the organization achieves is in its ability to mobilize volunteers at the local level.

and religious organizations are typically located within these communities. In return for the fee, religious organizations receive community rejuvenation that, in turn, benefits its coffers.

The Alliance Schools Project evolved in 1990 when Texas I.A.F. recognized the important role of education in transforming the communities within which they worked. Rogers (1990) points out that, although the primary purpose has been to increase parental involvement in local schools that serve low-income students, "the I.A.F. organizing strategy is to build new core constituencies among people who care about schools and education issues. "In some communities," she explains, "the I.A.F. groups are taking the lead to set up city-wide business and school coalitions to provide guaranteed jobs or college scholarships for high school graduates who meet certain standards of achievement and attendance" (p. 181). Within two years of the project's inception, the Alliance Schools Project was recognized by a U. S. Secretary of Education as a model of successful school improvement ("*Alliance Schools Initiative,*" p. 3). In Texas, the State Legislature has rewarded the project's success by increasing funding to the Capital Investment Fund, the pool of money from which Alliance Schools are funded, from $2 million in the 1993-1995 biennium to $5 million during the 1995-1997 biennium.[39]

Much of this acclaim and financial support has been earned by the people who make up the backbone of the project: thousands of unpaid volunteers throughout the State of Texas, including parents, teachers, principals, community leaders, church organizers and more. As mentioned, the goal of the project is simple: to improve student achievement in low-income communities throughout Texas. The implementation of strategies that improve the education of low-income students is achieved via two broad strategy objectives: The first strategy is to obtain local control--the empowerment of local communities to responsibly self-direct the processes and objectives of school reform ("*Alliance Schools Initiative,*" 1995, p. 1). The second strategy is to promote local autonomy--the deregulation of participating campuses so that each participating campus' stakeholders--including parents, teachers, administrators and community participants-- may more independently self-govern the processes and objectives of school reform at the campus level. These objectives--in addition to student achievement--are the focus of this research project. The

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[39] "Many of the Alliance Schools have received competitive Investment Capital Fund Grants through the Texas Education Agency to support their efforts to deregulate and restructure their campuses" (*Alliance Schools Initiative,* 1995, p. 2).

logistics of how the Alliance Schools Project actually promotes local control and autonomy at an Alliance School, and the documentation of the project's logistical approach, for example, is the subject of the following chapter. Chapter 5 provides a synthesis of documentation obtained in a series of interviews with stakeholders at two Alliance Schools. For an unabbreviated presentation of these interviews, proceed directly to Appendices C through E.

The Texas Industrial Areas Foundation Vision for Public Schools

The Alliance Schools Project is the brainchild of the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation, a Texas based organization associated with the nation-wide Industrial Areas Foundation (I.A.F.).[40] The Texas I.A.F.'s vision for public education is codified in a document entitled *The Texas I.A.F. Vision for Public Schools: Communities of Learners* (1990). In an introductory paragraph, the document describes the project's vision for public education: "This is a statement of a collective vision. It is the distillation of hundreds of conversations among parents, pastors, teachers, administrators, researchers, and public officials..." (p. 1). The synthesis of these conversations, however, does not result in a singular, all-encompassing solution for the problems confronting Texas' public schools. On the contrary, *The Texas I.A.F. Vision for Public Schools* recognizes that the challenges confronting Texas' schools will vary from community to community; and as a consequence, the number of possible solutions to these schools' challenges will be equally abundant.

The document compares Texas I.A.F.'s multi-faceted vision for Texas public schools with a nostalgic interpretation of the 19th century American tradition of the "common school." In the 19th century common schools of New England, the document contends, locally designed schools confronted the needs of local communities. To this end, schools were an important forum for citizens, via democratic government, to deliberate the future shape of their local communities. As school districts grew, this democratic quality of decentralized democratic control was usurped by a

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[40] The Industrial Areas Foundation was founded in 1940 by Saul Alinsky. Although the Foundation grew nation-wide, its presence in Texas was minimal until the 1970s when Ed Chambers took over and established an economic base for the organization in religious organizations. The I.A.F. "is now the center of a national network of broad based, multiethnic, interfaith organizations in primarily poor and moderate income communities..." (Cortes, 1994, p. 12).

system of centralized bureaucratic control. The Texas I.A.F. also reminisces about the 19th century common school as an institution that promoted community building in an ever-growing pluralistic society. Common schools "...intentionally brought together all children of a community--despite differences in family backgrounds--to create a common, shared experience" (p. 3). The Texas I.A.F. admires the role common schools played in nurturing children in the mores of a democratic life. These schools taught values: "They taught virtues of self-restraint and benevolence: they taught notions of fairness and respect for others" (p. 3).

Because the vision embodied in the tradition of the democratic "common school" is essential to the Texas I.A.F.'s vision for public schools today, the Texas I.A.F. therefore focuses on reviving community control and autonomy of participating schools in Texas. The medium of the Alliance Schools Project is grass-roots community building. Community building focuses on putting people in contact with one another over the issues that interest them.[41] Out of this contact arises a network of friends--the essence of community (and of political power) to the Industrial Areas Foundation. In *Cold Anger A Story of Faith and Power Politics* (1990), Mary Beth Rogers describes how this network of friends evolves:

> Members of this community seem to enjoy one another's company, are useful to one another, and have established a powerful bond to one another because they share a common commitment to something larger than self. The result is that they begin to control their destiny--in cooperation with others. People who do this are not poor, no matter what their economic condition. They are strong. In Texas, these strong people are shaping a new grass-roots politics. They are changing their cities. They are influencing public policy in their state. They are capturing a "share" of power-- of life and meaning. Once they have these experiences, no other politics seems as rich, satisfying, or productive.

The I.A.F.'s founder, Saul Alinsky, believed in rejuvenating dialogue and political capacity at the community level for a purpose.[42] He described this purpose as being the restoration of the democratic way of life in a modern industrial society (Rogers, 1990, p. 83). Alinsky's philosophy

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[41] The I.A.F.'s vision for communities is much like Dewey's prerequisite for social and political democracy, "associated living." Without it, Dewey argues, peoples' collective interests suffer within the greater political realm.

[42] Mary Beth Rogers attributes Alinsky's ideas and tactics as contributing to the following movements: the Civil Rights Movement, the community action programs of the War on Poverty, welfare rights organizations, and the neighborhood association activism of the 1970s and 1980s.

of organizing was influenced by two other American experiences: the trade union movement and agrarian populism (p. 84).[43] Despite the influence of these two movements, the organizer proved limited in his ability to "reach deeply enough into the center of the experiences of (his followers, and the I.A.F's members) to make a lasting effect on them" (p. 92). As a consequence, the impact of Alinsky's political style on the I.A. F. was short-lived. When Alinsky died in 1972, one of the changes that his successors--namely Ed Chambers and Ernie Cortes--made was to establish the I.A.F. Training Institute for organizers. The Institute evolved in response to the observation that community based movements, such as that inspired by Alinsky, tended to fade when their charismatic lead organizer departed. The I.A.F. Training Institute therefore provides training for community organizers, most of whom come from the communities within which they ultimately work. I.A.F. training focuses on combining hands-on experience with study of scholarly theories, ideals, and personal reflection. Like Dewey and the turn-of-the-century progressives, the I.A.F.'s approach to restoring a democratic way of life is pragmatic. Leaders are taught to "appreciate the world as it is and the world as it should be, as envisioned by community participants. This means that leaders must operate in the practical, hard-edged, cynical world of politics, while building a new world of justice and freedom" (Rogers, 1990, p. 178).[44]

I.A.F. organizers consequently approach the art of organizing with sensitivity to Dewey-like precepts. Southwest regional organizer Ernie Cortes, recipient of a MacArthur Foundation

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[43] Richard Hofstadter, in *The Age of Reform* (1955), explores the rise of Agrarian Populism in the latter part of the 19th century and Progressivism at the beginning of the twentieth century as the same, evolving movement. He describes Progressivism's general theme as "...the effort to restore a type of economic individualism and political democracy that was widely believed to have existed in earlier America and to have been destroyed by the great corporation and the corrupt political machine; and with that restoration to bring back a kind of morality and civic purity that was also believed to have been lost (pp. 5-6).

[44] Mary Beth Rogers (1990) describes this practical disposition as being based in the I.A.F.'s understanding of the dynamic of change (p. 210). Dewey's analogy is the "stability of change." Stability of change posits that people learn by experience and by using experience combined with working hypotheses, theories based on previous experience. Action is therefore wed to the messy and chaotic "real world." This is similar to "the Importance of Being Unprincipled," an essay used by the I.A.F. to sensitize organizers to the real world of politics in which they must operate. The essay posits that politics is the "practical application of the method of compromise." According to the essay, only two groups of people have the luxury of always being able to act on principle: college professors, who work in social vacuums and never try to get anyone else to act, and Supreme Court Justices, who have so much power that they can get what they want simply by issuing a command. Everyone else who wants to be effective in politics has to learn to be "unprincipled" enough to compromise to see their principles succeed.

"genius" grant and cited in *Texas Business* as one of Texas' most powerful people, is the number one organizer behind Texas Interfaith. According to Cortes, "(o)rganizing is a fancy word for relationship building. No organizer ever organizes a community. If I want to organize you, I don't sell you an idea. What I do...is try to find out what's your interest. What are your dreams? I try to kindle your imagination, stir the possibilities, and then propose some ways in which you can act on those dreams and act on those values and act on your own visions. You've got to be the owner" (Rogers, 1990, p. 17).

Most importantly, the I.A.F. is a political organization. In the opinion of John Sharp, Texas State Comptroller, one of the roles that Texas Interfaith (and the Alliance Schools) plays in Texas is that of citizen watch-keeper of public officials. At a recent Interfaith Conference in Austin, Sharp implored the crowd of 1,000 attendees to continue monitoring state initiatives in the same diligent way as they had in the past. "The only place that I see where people have the spirit, the guts, and when necessary, a touch of meanness (to be the public watch-keeper) is this organization" (Sharp, December 2, 1995). Viewed in this light, the Alliance Schools perform the original role of school boards: they filter, interpret and translate the education goals of the people (the community) into a mission for the school district.

Is Texas Ready for Alliance Schools?

There is little doubt that the Alliance Schools Project clearly provides a model of school reform that is truly comprehensive. Already, more than 70 schools in Texas have applied to and have become Alliance Schools. Recent legislation in Texas suggests that the state's legal framework is preparing for the kinds of changes that Alliance Schools demand to be successful. For example, in 1991, the Texas Legislature passed a bill promoting of school-based education reform, known as site-based decision-making (SBDM). Since then, the climate in favor of site-based management has been twice upheld by the legislature; once when House Bill (HB) 2885 was passed in 1993 and again, in 1995, when SBDM received a second vote-of-confidence by state legislators ("Praskac and Powell," 1993, p.4).

Unfortunately, before 1995 the Texas Legislature had not provided much in the way of guidelines regarding the "what, who, and how" of SBDM: what exactly should districts be doing to comply with SBDM legislation; who should be doing it (e.g. who should be on the site-based

committees); and how should districts be achieving decentralized, local control? In 1995, the 74th Texas Legislature finally clarified some of the law's intent with regard to "who." The new Texas Education Code specifically encourages parents to participate in the decision-making processes of local schools. Three important passages within the code reflect this intent, and they are paraphrased as follows:

> First, the new law requires parental representation on both the campus and district
> level committees.
> Second, the new law requires that a parent-teacher organization be present
> on every campus.
> Third, the new law provides parents with clear and distinct rights to
> participate in their child's education (PTA brochure, 1995).

According to the Texas Commissioner of Education, Mike Moses, "(g)oal one (of the new education code) says that parents will be recognized as full partners in the education of their children" (Ochoa, 1995, p. 4). The Texas Legislature is clearly promoting local control via such legislation. The Alliance Schools Project's objective is to enhance the quality and direction of local control through improved involvement and preparedness by stakeholders in public education, beginning with teachers, parents, and members of the local community. Given the current political climate and the Alliance Schools' objectives, it appears that Texas is prepared for Alliance Schools.

Operationalized Hypotheses

As mentioned in Chapter 2, this study explores how the Alliance Schools Project promotes processes of local control, local autonomy, and student achievement. However, to study how the project accomplishes this task, the conceptual working hypotheses introduced in Chapter 2 require further operationalization. That is, to provide a measurable benchmark (to quantify) for exploring changes promoted by the project, this chapter concludes with a presentation of 12 operationalized working hypotheses (WH) that will assist in gathering and analyzing empirical evidence on the project (Yin, 1994, p. 34). The hypotheses are grouped according to the larger, conceptual categories of inquiry.

Local Control

WH 1: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Local Control

Local control implies that input and dialogue from the local community is both encouraged, promoted, guided, and acted upon at Alliance Schools. In an effort to better describe the processes of democratization occurring at Alliance Schools, four working operationalized hypotheses are proposed this conceptual category. The first for local control is:

WH 1a: Input From the Community/Parents Is Encouraged at Alliance Schools

Effective schools foster climates that welcome the community into the school and encourage collegiality among staff. In Dewey's world of associated living, knowledge is fluid and shared freely among community members. It is therefore expected that this kind of climate will be promoted at an Alliance School, and so the second operationalized working hypothesis for local control is:

WH 1b: Democratic Dialogue with the Community/Parents
and Among Teachers/Administrators Is Promoted at Alliance Schools

Stephen Lindsey argues that effective schools develop a clear set of "shared goals, values, and conceptions of being and doing," around which the organizational composition of the campus is appropriately transformed (1994, p.37). Others (Chubb and Moe) agree that a clear mission is a fundamental characteristic of effective schools. In light of this, the third operationalized hypothesis is proposed:

WH 1c: Alliance Schools Exhibit a Shared Vision/Mission
That Comes From the Local Community

In an effort to ascertain whether or not the Alliance Schools Project is responsible for the kinds of local control characteristics observed (or not), it is proposed that stakeholders at Alliance Schools will recognize the Alliance Schools Project as responsible for the increase of local control in their school.

WH 1d: Stakeholders at Alliance Schools Recognize the Alliance Schools Project
as Responsible for the Increased Local Control on Their Campuses.

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Local Autonomy

WH 2: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Local Autonomy

Chubb and Moe (1990) cite school autonomy, especially from external bureaucratic influence, as the most important characteristic of effective schools (p. 23). Reform advocates contend that local autonomy provides parents and teachers with the kind of autonomy (empowerment)--be it through institutional, organizational, or professional changes--they need to regain control and responsibility over public education and responsiveness to student needs. In light of this, the first of four operationalized hypotheses is proposed:

WH 2a: Alliance Schools Exhibit Organizational Features That Foster and Promote Local Autonomy, Such as a School-Based Committee or Forum

Chubb and Moe recognize autonomy from external bureaucratic controls as the most important characteristic of effective schools. Schools that are autonomous can respond to student needs. Schools that are externally controlled by bureaucracies and red tape respond to the external control instead of student needs. Viewed in this light, it is expected that Alliance Schools will have explored avenues to reduce the influence of external controls over their ability to make decisions impacting student achievement:

WH 2b: Alliance Schools Promote Local Autonomy Through Independence from Bureaucratic Controls, as in the Form of Waivers From State Mandates or Access to Independent Funding Sources

One of the prerequisites for local control is the "knowledge of the principles, theories, and factors that undergird appropriate decisions about what procedures should be employed, and knowledge of the procedures themselves" (Lieberman, 1988). To this end, professional and community development opportunities will be explored as an indicator of success at Alliance Schools and the hypothesis to capture this benchmark reads as follows:

WH 2c: Alliance Schools Promote Local Autonomy via Professional and Community Self-Sufficiency Strategies, as in the Form of Professional and Community Development Strategies That Build Independent Communities of Learners

As in the case of local control, it is important that the stakeholders involved in an Alliance School recognize the Alliance Schools Project as responsible for the evidence of local autonomy

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cited. Therefore, the last of four operationalized hypothesis for local autonomy is as follows:

WH 2d: Stakeholders at Alliance Schools Recognize the Alliance Schools Project as Having Improved Local Autonomy at Their Schools

Research will explore how the Alliance Schools Project helps schools achieve the kind of organizational/professional reform that promotes local autonomy, a characteristic of effective schools found in the literature on school-based reform.

Student Achievement

One of the problems cited in America's public schools is that they are more responsive to standard operating procedures than they are to student needs for achievement. It has been theorized that schools that are locally controlled and autonomous, as opposed to those that are centralized and dependent upon bureaucratic controls, are responsive to community and student needs. The objective is improved student achievement, the hallmark of the most effective school. As noted in Chapter 2, the following conceptual working hypotheses has been proposed:

WH 3: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Student Achievement

Student achievement is further operationalized in terms of specific programs and services pursued and standards of achievement expected and accomplished by Alliance Schools:

WH 3a: Alliance Schools Implement Programs That Meet Community-/ Student-Defined Needs for Students, Such as After-School Activities

Effective schools exhibit an uncompromising focus on student achievement in all the programs that they implement and in all the challenges that they face. It is therefore expected that Alliance Schools will excel in both the programs defined by the local community and mandated from central administration. Academic challenges, such as the TAAS, will be embraced rather than rejected; and the expectation for high standards will permeate the school. These expectations are captured in the following two hypotheses:

WH 3b: Alliance Schools Are Accountable for Student Achievement in the Programs and Services That Schools Implement

WH 3c: Alliance Schools are Accountable for Student Achievement in State-Defined Measures of Student Assessment, Such as Student TAAS Scores

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As in the cases of local control and autonomy, the actual stakeholders at an Alliance School must be able to recognize the improvements in academic achievement as attributable to the Alliance Schools Project. Evidence supporting the following hypothesis suggests that the Alliance Schools Project promotes a feasible model for community-based school improvement. The hypothesis to capture this is:

WH 3d: Stakeholders at Alliance Schools Recognize the Alliance Schools Project as Responsible for Improving Student Achievement at Their Schools

Chapter 4
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the methodological approach to gathering data for this empirical research study. Three aspects of this study's methodology will be described in this chapter: first, a rationale for selecting the case study research methodology will be provided; second, the procedural particulars of this research design strategy as they apply specifically to the exploration of community-based school reform in this study will be discussed; and, lastly, this chapter will conclude with an overview of highlights and shortcomings of this particular research inquiry by addressing research issues, such as validity and reliability.

Case Study Method Rationale

Although there are many research designs from which to choose, the research design method selected for this research project was largely dictated by the hypotheses identified: the research design used is the exploratory case study. Robert K. Yin (1994) describes the case study "as a way of investigating an empirical topic by following a set of prespecified procedures" (p. 15). Because certain concepts are more appropriately studied by some methods than by others, the case study method was specifically selected for its compatibility with the concepts and working hypotheses explored in this particular research project. Using Robert K. Yin's discussion in *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* as a guideline for selecting the case study method for this project, the rationale for this decision is as follows: Yin argues that the nature of a "how" research question invites use of case study research. Yin also states that if the research question deals with a contemporary event over which the investigator has little control, then again, the case study method provides a tool for exploring the research question. (Yin, 1994, p. 9). Because this research will explore and document those aspects of Alliance Schools that promote characteristics of 'effective schools,' tangible characteristics of effective school reform found in a review of the literature on school reform, analysis will be performed within the unique "nested context" of each campus, providing specific references to the obstacles each school has encountered while working with the Alliance Schools Project.

This applied research project meets all the procedural requirements of sound research design as discussed by Yin (1994, p. 20). First, the study's question is discussed in the introduction. Second, the study's conceptual and operationalized working hypotheses are developed in the literature review and contemporary setting chapters. And third, the units of analysis are defined as two schools in Austin, Texas: Becker and Zavala Elementary Schools. Most of the logic linking the data to the working hypotheses (propositions in Yin) is discussed in the literature review chapter. Criteria for interpreting the findings are also found in the literature review. In fact, the literature review provides many of the theoretical links that justify the study's working hypotheses and interpretive findings.

An Informal Case Study Protocol

Yin (1994) contends that a case study protocol is essential in the use of a multiple-case study design. The protocol not only increases the reliability of case study research, but it also guides the investigator in carrying out the case study (Yin, p. 63). It also serves to guide the reader through the procedures undertaken to conduct the case study research. Because only one researcher participated in this particular research endeavor, the procedures for conducting the research were streamlined. As a consequence, an informal case study protocol in the form of a simple narrative suffices for this particular research project.

Intrigued by the topic of site-based decision-making (SBDM) legislation in Texas and having faint knowledge that the Alliance Schools Project promotes processes of decentralization in selected Austin schools, research began with a canvassing of the literature on issues of decentralization and SBDM. In response to the literature and discussions with colleagues, it became evident that the interesting aspects of site-based education reform were much broader and more historical than the researcher had initially conceived. The culmination of this research exploration is presented in Chapter 2. Also, the three conceptual working hypotheses and the 12 operationalized working hypotheses represent a synthesis of the researcher's understanding of the most important characteristics of effective schools.

After selecting an exploratory case study research design method in response to the hypotheses proposed, the lead organizer of Austin Interfaith, Kathleen Davis, was approached to investigate options for gathering empirical evidence. After a brief interview in which Davis

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interviewed the researcher, and vice versa, it was agreed that Davis would arrange research to take place at three Alliance Schools in Austin, Texas. It was further agreed that an administrator, teacher, and parent representative on each campus would be interviewed. Davis would arrange the interview between the researcher and the administrator, and all other interviews would be granted at the administrator's discretion. The schools selected were later narrowed to two at the researcher's prerogative, largely as a consequence of limited time.

The interviews were semi-structured, focused and mostly open-ended (See Appendix B). Interviews were tape recorded with the interviewees' permission and knowledge that interviews would be reprinted in the final report and that anonymity would not be protected, unless otherwise requested (See Appendix A). None of the interviewees requested to remain anonymous. The interviews took place in a number of locations. Both administrator respondents were interviewed in their campus offices. One teacher respondent was interviewed in her classroom during her planning and preparation period while the other was interviewed in the school library while her students were under the care of a student teacher. One parent respondent was interviewed in her office at the school, the office for the PTA campus president, while the other parent was interviewed at a neighborhood coffee shop near her home.

In addition to the informal case study protocol presented, issues such as generalizability and validity also impact the findings of this research and therefore deserve closer scrutiny.

Generalizabitliy

Unlike statistical generalization, the kind of research design employed in this project dictates a kind of generalization that is considerably different from generalizations that can be inferred from statistical data. Yin (1994, p. 31) argues that case study research yields "analytic generalization." These apply a previously developed theory as a template for comparing the empirical results of a case study.

Validity

Case study research has been criticized as lacking qualities that validate research findings, an observation based on the fact that case study investigators often "...fail to develop sufficiently operational sets of measures and that "subjective" judgments are (too often) used to collect data"

(Yin, 1994, p. 34). In an effort to improve the issue of validity as it relates to the case study research design, Yin provides a test of construct validity. To meet this test, the investigator must cover the following steps: first, select the specific types of changes that are to be studied; and, second, demonstrate that the selected measures of these changes do indeed reflect the specific types of change that have been selected.

Step one was achieved in by identifying specific operationalized hypotheses. Each of these hypotheses reflects a specific type of change that is studied. The second step was advanced in the theoretical discussion within the literature review in which justification for the conceptual and operationalized hypotheses is provided.

Internal Validity

Internal validity refers to the appropriateness of a study's research design for reaching valid findings. Babbie (1992) states that the crux of the internal validity problem is that sometimes the research findings "...do not accurately reflect what has gone on in the experiment itself" (p. 247). Steps were taken to enhance the internal validity of the research findings. For example, the fourth operationalized hypotheses of each category (WH 1d, WH 2d, and WH 3d) were designed to minimize the impact of unknown "historical events" on research findings. That is, these questions specifically ask whether the Alliance Schools Project is responsible for improving local control, local autonomy, and student achievement--thereby providing the respondents with a clear opportunity to attribute these activities to the Alliance Schools Project or to some other activity that evolved historically at the school that is unknown to the researcher.

In contrast to the intentional design of the aforementioned questions, selection bias does appear to jeopardize, to a certain degree, the validity of the research findings. Three reasons contribute to this conclusion: Two Alliance Schools (of 16 in Austin and approximately 70 throughout the state) were studied. These schools, and the administrator respondent of each, were selected at the recommendation of the Austin Interfaith leader organizer. The teacher and parent respondents were further selected by the campus administrator. Because the campuses and respondents were not randomly selected, it is logical to conclude that bias may indeed have influenced research findings. The researcher resolves, however, that even though bias may have influenced the selection of survey participants--a factor which may ultimately skew the research

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findings, findings are none-the-less valid and generalizable. Reasoning for this conclusion is provided below.

One of the reasons why the probable bias in this study should not be interpreted as invalidating the research findings has to do with the issue of maturation. Maturation refers to the fact that "(p)eople are continually growing and changing, whether in an experiment or not, and those changes affect the results of the experiment" (Babbie, 1992, p. 247). Because the schools selected were "hand picked," so to speak, by the Austin Interfaith organizer, it is possible that they may reflect more evidence of local control, autonomy, and student achievement than other Alliance Schools. It is not the point, however, to uphold the Alliance Schools Project as an end-all solution to the problems facing so many of the nation's public schools. On the contrary, the objective of the research is to document how the Alliance Schools project promotes characteristics of effective schools. By comparing the two schools studied, it is implied that the findings will vary in degree from campus to campus.

External Validity

Unlike internal validity, the objective of external validity is to know whether the study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study (Yin, 1994, p. 35). With regard to case studies, the issue of external validity, particularly as it applies to specific public administration problems, is moot because the objective is to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory and not to generalize a particular set of results beyond the immediate case study.

Reliability

Reliability in research has to do with the quality of measurement method that suggests that the same data would be collected each time that the the research tool--in this case, the questionnaire--is administered. "The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study" Yin, p. 36). In an effort to improve the reliability of this particular case study, the procedures for gathering data for this study have been documented in greater, albeit general, detail under the subheading, *An Informal Case Study Protocol*, at the beginning of this chapter.

Multiple-Case Study Rationale

As mentioned earlier in the paper, this project explores how the Alliance Schools Project promotes school reform at two elementary schools in Austin. The use of a multiple-case study design in this research project is selected for the following reasons: it is hoped that the multiple-case study will produce both literal replication and theoretical replication (Yin, p. 46). With regard to literal replication, it is hoped that the two case studies will provide some descriptive detail into how the Alliance Schools Project promotes and achieves community-driven school reform. With regard to theoretical replication, it is hoped that the two case studies will provide descriptive detail regarding how the experiences of each campus with the Alliance Schools Project differs. Both chapters on school reform, including the Literature Review and the section on the Alliance Schools Project, suggest that the kind of school reform that the Alliance Schools Project promotes is unique in that it provides both a methodical and systematic approach to bringing out locally defined approaches to school reform and, in addition, the project promotes and accommodates local innovations and strategies to school reform.

Sources of Evidence

The principal source of evidence is from semi-structured, focused interviews with stakeholders at selected school sites. Being the principal source of evidence, interview data are triangulated with other sources of evidence, such as direct observation (Alliance School meetings and events), archival records/documentation, and physical artifacts. For example, archival records and other forms of documentation, such as newspaper articles and books on Interfaith, supplement data extracted from interviews. Data such as TAAS scores, student attendance records and documentation of programs that promote student development will also be explored. Interviews provide the best evidence on local control and local autonomy as the questions are designed to probe these processes and changes in culture at the school level.

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Chapter 5
SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to summarize the results of the case study. Case study research methodology allows for a number of summary report presentation styles. After a period of "playing with the data in an attempt to develop a systematic sense of what is worth analyzing and how it should be analyzed," as encouraged in *Case Study Research*, it became evident that the most appropriate presentation format for this particular study is a hybrid of two presentation structures (Yin, 1994, p. 125). This chapter report, therefore, borrows structural elements from both comparative and theory-building presentation formats for case studies.

With regard to the comparative structure, this chapter compares and contrasts evidence reported by the principal sources of evidence--namely, respondents' transcribed interviews. Social science research expert Richard Yin encourages use of this organizational technique in descriptive, explanatory and exploratory studies (p. 139). This structural presentation style therefore complements this particular exploratory/descriptive research inquiry.

As mentioned, this chapter also interweaves the theory-building organizational presentation style into the body of the comparative structure. This particular structural orientation promotes the overall purpose of this research study: to explore the value of further investigating the general propositions (working hypotheses) proposed in Chapters 1 and 2 (Yin, p. 140).

Local Control Summary

The process of democratizing public schools through the enhancement of local control has been discussed in this paper as a process of promoting parental and educator (site-based) participation in the education process. Local control has been described as a cultural and political transformation in which stakeholders in education, such as parents and teachers, become more involved and participatory in regard to the issues affecting their children's schooling. School reform advocates, ranging from privatization supporters to school-based reform advocates, have identified local control as a characteristic of effective schools. The local control conceptual hypotheses is repeated here for reference:

WH 1: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Processes of Local Control

WH 1a

As described in Chapter 4, respondents in the case study were queried with regard to a series of specific operationalized hypotheses which probe more tangible, and consequently more "measurable" evidence of local control. Again, these attributes were deemed to be exemplary characteristics of effective schools. The first operationalized hypothesis seeks to determine if input from the community and parents exists at Alliance Schools; and if so, how is this input encouraged and promoted. The hypothesis reads as follows:

WH 1a: Input From the Community/Parents Is Encouraged at Alliance Schools

Both teacher respondents at Becker and Zavala Elementary schools recognize that input from the community and parents is encouraged at their schools and that the Alliance Schools Project has positively impacted community involvement at each school. Whereas the teacher at Zavala provides ample evidence of how this input has been promoted since her school became an Alliance School, the teacher at Becker emphasizes that, despite the fact that parental input is encouraged at her school, a "communication gap between parents and teachers" continues to exist. Both teachers cite "neighborhood walks," walks into the community for the purpose of learning about community needs and school-related concerns, as examples of how the project promotes community input in the school. Both teachers recognize the advantages of this proactive technique, especially as it compares to techniques they were using before, such as "sending notes home" to parents with their children. One teacher pointed out that many times she is sure that these notes never even reached the parents' hands.

Even though both administrator respondents at Becker and Zavala acknowledge that input from the community and parents is encouraged at their schools, each administrator describes how the Alliance Schools Project promotes this input differently. The principal at Zavala, for example, cuts to the chase. He explains how the project provides a "formula to elicit community participation and community ownership and partnership with the school," the cornerstone of which is the "house meeting." In addition to the house meeting, he also describes specific examples of how the community and parents are involved in the governance of the school and in the direct organization of important initiatives on campus. For example, he cites the school's Young

Scientists Program, an honor's program designed to prepare select fifth graders for the Kealing Junior High School Science Academy by retaining selected students at the elementary level in a special, science-intensive classroom for the sixth grade. This extra year concentrates on preparing students for the Kealing Magnet School entrance exam in the seventh grade.

Similar to the administrator respondent at Zavala, the administrator respondent at Becker also recognizes the Alliance Schools Project as "definitely responsible for a lot of the input that (her campus gets) from parents and the community." Similar to the administrator at Zavala, the administrator at Becker explains how the Alliance Schools Project helps her to increase parental involvement by providing training in activities such as how to have "conversations" with parents.[45]

The parental representatives of Becker and Zavala Elementary Schools also reveal differing interpretations on the matter of parental and community input on their respective campuses. Again, both parents respond in the affirmative to the question about whether input from the community and parents is encouraged on their respective campuses. Similar to the administrator and teacher representatives at Zavala Elementary, the parental representative at Zavala cites an abundance of program initiatives and governance issues in which parents and the community members play a role in either creating or structuring a campus program or strategy. At Becker, on the other hand, the parent respondent acknowledges that input is "very encouraged," even though actual tangible evidence is again less prevalent in her testimony.

It is interesting to point out that the parent at Zavala communicates a degree of satisfaction with the amount of parental and community input promoted at her school, evident in her enthusiastic account of increased parental attendance at meetings, etc., since the school became an Alliance School. The parent at Becker, on the other hand, expresses frustration with the amount of parental involvement that she observes at her school. Despite the limited number of parents involved with school activities, she notes, the parents who get involved with Interfaith do have a

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[45] The I.A.F. teachers organizers that a conversation is a dialogue with purpose and direction. It is the art of inquiry into other peoples' needs and perspectives. Conversation is the ability to extract from a person their experience and vision for change in a discussion. Conversations are tense; they do not deal with superficial information. I.A.F. organizing begins with this fundamental building block, "one-on-one" conversations. One-on-one's are conversations between organizers and community members; conversations that build bonds and trust (analogous to Dewey's associated living).

stronger tendency to "keep coming back, and (keep) doing more."

Based on the above discussion of the evidence, evidence at Zavala clearly supports WH 1a. Evidence at Becker, however, is unclear with regard to WH 1a. Both schools encourage parental involvement, and both schools use many of the same "Alliance Schools" strategies to promote parental input. However, considerably less evidence of successful attainment of parental involvement is evident at Becker than at Zavala. See Table 5.1 for a summary of activities cited by respondents as strategies that the Alliances Schools Project uses to promote parent and community involvement. The presence of these strategies as they were mentioned in the interviews is indicated by a "+" if a respondent referred to the use of the strategy on his or her campus and a "-" if the strategy was not mentioned by any of the respondents on the campus.

Summary of Community Input Strategies at Alliance Schools

Table 5.1[46]

	A	B	C	D
1	**STRATEGY**	**DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGY**	Z	B
2	One-on-One Conversations	Engaging community in directed dialogue	+	+
3	Community Walks	Canvassing of community via active outreach	+	+
4	House Meetings	Discussion groups on community needs	+	-
5	Study Groups	Focused discussion groups for action	+	+
6	Workshops & Conferences	Structured events to learn or channel opinions	+	+
7	Coffees	Informal activity to increase issue awareness	+	-
8	Power Analysis	A study & analysis of political power for action	+	-

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[46] The strategies identified in this table also serve to promote local autonomy, particularly WH 2a, organizational features, which foster and promote local autonomy.

WH 1b

The second operationalized working hypothesis for local control seeks to determine if dialogue with the community and parents and/or among teachers and administrators is promoted at Alliance Schools; and if so, how does the project promote this dialogue? The hypothesis reads as follows:

WH 1b: Democratic Dialogue with the Community/Parents and Among Teachers/Administrators Is Promoted at Alliance Schools

To begin, it is worth mentioning that all of the strategies summarized in Table 5.1 also serve to promote dialogue among the community, staff and campus administrations. As regards specific evidence in support of WH 1b, the administrator respondent at Zavala elementary provides poignant testimony revealing how dialogue between campus personnel and campus administration has evolved since Zavala became involved with the Alliance Schools Project. He describes this change as part of a cultural transformation that occurs when a school becomes part of the Alliance Schools experience: "In an Alliance school culture," he explains, "the principal's function is to be a talent scout." One of the functions of the talent scout is to engage in a dialogue with the community and staff to identify talent and to promote it. He explains how this function contrasts with what he perceived his role to be as a campus administrator before he began to work with the Alliance Schools Project: "(M)y perception of my function was to monitor compliance...It was my duty to see to it that (teachers') lesson plans conformed to the "100" format and that you had the seven steps, that (they) turned in forms on time, and that you followed TEA and district regulations."

Unlike the administrator respondent at Zavala, the administrator at Becker recognizes the current level of dialogue among staff and administration as a practice that has always been a characteristic of the school culture, a characteristic that predates her administration to the previous campus principal and consequently, even before the arrival of the Alliance Schools Project. Hence, she cannot specifically attribute this culture of dialogue and of exchange specifically to Alliance Schools Project initiatives.

The Zavala teacher respondent, on the other hand, describes how improved dialogue, attributable to the Alliance Project, has transformed staff relations on her campus:

(After becoming an Alliance School) there was more collaboration and sharing; not just closing your door, and if you do a good job, then good for you. If you are a team and your grade level doesn't have good TAAS scores, then you sink or swim together. We were individual before. I didn't know what my neighbor was doing; we never asked. The Alliance made us collaborate and work together.

In support of this observation, the parental respondent at Zavala also provides descriptive testimony as to how a more participatory and sharing dialogue among staff, administration, and the community has evolved since the the school began to work with the Alliance. For example, she explains how parents will now visit the school in the afternoon and form a line, along with other teachers, to wait for an opportunity to discuss their concerns with either the principal or vice-principal of the school. According to her testimony, this kind of activity never happened before when the pervasive belief of parents was: "It was the teachers job to teach the kids, and the parents just dropped them off."

Although all the Becker respondents acknowledge that democratic dialogue between and among the community and staff is promoted at their school, they attribute it more to the historical culture that is endemic to the school than they do to the Alliance Schools Project. Both the parental and teacher respondents, for example, recognize the principal as predisposed to this kind of dialogue among staff and with the community before the arrival of the Alliance Schools Project. Ironically, despite this historically "open" tradition, the parental and teacher respondents at Becker express notably stronger frustrations with the level of dialogue between the community and the school and among campus staff that the staff at Zavala who, presumably, have considerably less experience operating in an "open" culture of dialogue. For example, the teacher respondent at Becker articulates that, despite efforts to dialogue with the community by school staff, the community remains largely disengaged from the educational process of their children. In addition, this same teacher respondent does not observe any kind of change in dialogue at the campus level since the school began working with the Alliance Schools Project. In fact, despite the increase in staff development opportunities, the teacher respondent states that, "...as far as the dynamics between faculty," there has been no observable change, in her opinion.

Based on the above, working hypotheses 1b is supported by evidence at Zavala. Evidence at Becker, on the other hand, is not clear. All three Zavala respondents recognize

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improved campus dialogue with both the community and between staff/administration as attributable to the Alliance Schools Project. Becker respondents, on the other hand, do not recognize improved campus dialogue with the community or between staff/administration as so strongly attributable to the Alliance Project, although respondents communicate that such dialogue on campus has never lacked. The Becker teacher respondent strongly suggest that dialogue, particularly between parents and school staff, has been and continues to be less than ideal. The parent respondent at this school corroborates this testimony, although less emphatically. The administrator respondent focuses on the improvements in dialogue, she fails to cite specific examples in her testimony.

WH 1c

The third operationalized hypothesis within the category of local control seeks to determine if Alliance Schools exhibit a shared vision or mission which comes from the local community. The literature on effective schools recognizes the presence of a well-defined and shared school mission as an important characteristic of effective schools. The hypothesis reads as follows:

**WH 1c: Alliance Schools Exhibit a Shared Vision/Mission
That Comes From the Local Community**

It is interesting that all Zavala respondents can cite their school's mission accurately: to promote responsible citizenship through education, motivation, and inspiration. The statement is further reprinted on the school's official letterhead and monthly newsletter, and it is taped to the window of the front office. When asked if the community is aware of this mission, however, all respondents speculate that the community's mission for Zavala is probably different from that of the "official" mission statement. This discrepancy at first leads one to believe that Zavala's view of its mission differs from that of the local community. Upon closer scrutiny, however, data reveal that this is not the case: everything that is done at Zavala since the Alliance Schools Project is done in recognition of serving the community. In fact, it is clear that both schools' missions are community driven and community defined, but perhaps not yet community-shared. It is the stated objective of the school and of the representative respondents, however, to increase the scope of this vision with as much of the community as possible.

At both schools, this community-driven, community-focused sense of mission is

omnipresent in all interviews. All respondents, at both Becker and Zavala Elementary Schools, discuss the community served by their respective school in great detail. In addition, all respondents recognize the unique socioeconomic problems that their schools struggle to overcome to provide educational opportunities for their students. The Alliance Schools Project is recognized by all respondents as a tool to promoting a community-driven school agenda. The administrator respondent of Becker, for example, believes that, if the Alliance Schools Project promotes anything on her campus, "it keeps us focused on the fact that parents need to be a part of the process, we can't do it alone." Zavala respondents explain how the school dramatically shifted its mission's focus after the school became an Alliance School. In short, the focus became community driven. For the administrator respondent at Zavala, all the initiatives that have occurred since the school became involved with the Alliance Schools Project five years ago are the result of participation in the project:

> The initiatives that we have taken, both instructional and in the engagement of the community, have all come from the fruition of this relationship with Austin Interfaith. We wanted to be successful (in the past) but we didn't have an understanding of what that took in a community like ours. We didn't have the support or engagement of parents, because we never asked them what they wanted. We were not a part of this community; we were apart from the community. The Alliance Program helped us to understand how we were holding ourselves back, how we were an impediment to our own success.

To demonstrate how important the community is in defining the school's mission, albeit the official or unofficial mission, the Zavala teacher respondent provides anecdotal examples of how the community generally "has much more awareness" about the school and the school's function (mission) than before the Alliance Project got involved. She cites the presence of parents selling taco plates on campus as an example of the campus' pro-community orientation. That is, the school proudly invites the culture of its neighborhood, and of the majority of its parents and pupils--that of the Mexican-American tradition culture--to be present on the campus. All Zavala respondents point to increased parental attendance at school-related functions in record-breaking numbers as a further example of how the community is becoming more involved in the school's mission. Lastly, the teacher respondent explains how leaders of the local parish, Christo Rey Catholic Church, are coming together with the school on shared community issues as further evidence of the community's increasing awareness about the Zavala school mission.

The administrator respondent of Zavala specifically describes the intensity of the community-driven mission that has shaped the school since it became an Alliance School. He explains how being an Alliance School is about a mission to change the "received" culture of schools in general, especially of schools with demographic characteristics similar to that of Zavala.[47] The Alliance Schools culture, he describes, is more reflective of a "collaborative culture of sharing" in which the school esteems to nurture and meet community-defined standards and cultural expectations as opposed to the more common accommodation of externally imported expectations.

In conclusion, it is clear that respondents at both Becker and Zavala Elementary schools provide compelling testimony indicating that the mission of both schools is not always shared, verbatim, with the local community. However, respondents also provide ample testimony indicating that the Alliance Schools Project upholds, as a fundamental objective, the integration of the school's mission with that of the local community. And in final conclusion, advancements with regard to the integration of the school's mission with that of the local community are indeed evident at both Becker and Zavala Elementary Schools. In addition, many of the techniques cited as evidence for WH 1a also serve to promote WH 1c. It is therefore concluded that evidence supports WH 1c: many activities at Alliance Schools that promote a vision within the local community that is a vision for their local public school.

WH 1d

The final operationalized working hypothesis on local control seeks to determine if stakeholders at Alliance Schools recognize the Alliance Schools Project as responsible for the increase in parental and teacher input and democratic dialogue and shared community vision evident on their campuses. The hypothesis reads as follows:

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[47] The administrator respondent of Zavala explains how schools are a conduit of culture. That culture is the "received" culture. The received culture is currently one of privilege for white males. Alliance Schools will change the received culture, he argues, to one of privilege for all ethnic groups and genders in society because it is the culture of Alliance Schools to recognize the power and ability in their respective community and to nurture that community culture rather than, as has been the tradition, to impose an external culture from without (For more, see Appendix C).

WH 1d: Stakeholders at Alliance Schools Recognize the Alliance Schools Project as Responsible for the Increased Local Control on Their Campuses.

All of the stakeholders interviewed for this research project attribute the Alliance Schools Project as being responsible for increasing local control on their respective campuses. The Zavala respondents typically provide more tangible evidence of specific initiatives and activities whereas the Becker respondents are less forthcoming with such details. However, it is important to note that the Alliance Schools Program is primarily a programmatic extension of the political organization, Austin Interfaith. As such, the program has a political agenda. Both administrator respondents at Becker and Zavala Elementary acknowledge this point. The political objective is community empowerment (local control) in the area of education. To this end, strategies are employed (See Table 5.1). Conversations and community walks lead to the identification of community concerns, issues for the political agenda. House meetings, conferences, workshops, etc. then provide forums to translate the issues into a developed course of action. The project focuses on mobilizing those communities that are typically marginalized from politics, non-participants in the political process. The project achieves this by involving them in the process controlling their school beginning with step 1, an initial conversation with an Interfaith organizer, to the final steps, making a power analysis that will reveal the politics of achieving stated objectives all the way to following carrying out the political analysis, as in the case of testifying before the local school board of city council. For example, see Appendix D, interviews with teacher Santamaria and parent Van Wart for testimony on how the Alliance Schools Project coached and prepared them to address the Austin City Council (Santamaria) and Austin Independent School District School Board (Van Wart). Evidence, such as this, provides clear support, overall, that the Alliance Schools Project promotes local control at both campuses.

Local Autonomy Summary

Having cultivated an atmosphere that fosters and promotes local control, it follows that Alliance schools also would pursue opportunities to decentralize. Decentralization increases independence from external controls, controls that inhibit efficient local responsiveness to student academic needs. Chubb and Moe (1990) cite school autonomy, especially from external bureaucratic influences, as the most important characteristic of an effective school (p. 23). Reform

advocates contend that local autonomy provides parents and teachers with the kind of empowerment that they need to regain control and responsibility over public education and to respond effectively to student needs. These advocates cite a variety of tangible changes that increase local autonomy. Examples include schools which pursue institutional, organizational and/or professional changes, which empower parents and faculty in the decision-making processes and daily operations. This section summarizes evidence in support of these kinds of characteristics.

WH 2: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Local Autonomy

WH 2a

As described in Chapter 4, respondents in the case study were queried with regard to a series of specific, operationalized hypotheses, which reflect more tangible, and consequently more "measurable" evidence of local autonomy. Again, these attributes were determined to be characteristics of effective schools. The first local autonomy operationalized hypothesis seeks to determine if Alliance Schools use some kind of organizational feature to foster and promote local autonomy. The hypothesis reads as follows:

WH 2a: Alliance Schools Exhibit Organizational Features That Foster and Promote Local Autonomy, Such as a School-Based Committee or Forum

This particular hypothesis is difficult to analyze in that not all organizational features are formal. For example, an administrator's informal "open-door" policy may, in many instances, more genuinely meet the intent of "organizational features that foster and promote local autonomy" than do formal features, such as an official school-based committee.[48] However, because these kinds of nuances may not be foremost in respondent's minds, the researcher was forced to 'read

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[48] In Texas, many "official" site-based committees are frustrated by the relative lack of authority exercised by the formal, state-sanctioned committee arrangement. Some committees complain that their input is relegated to an advisory role (and is seldom taken into consideration in the final decision-making process). Others assert that participants either rarely address salient issues or simply allow traditional decision-makers, such as principals, to control meeting agendas and agenda outcomes so that teachers and parents cannot exert meaningful influence over campus policies and procedures (Malen, Ogawa, and Kranz, (1990), pp. 53).

between the lines' to a greater degree in analyzing respondents' answers to the questionnaire.

The Zavala administrator respondent provides the most compelling evidence of organizational features that foster and promote local autonomy: the school is reviewing criteria for becoming a charter school. As described by the respondent, becoming a charter school would mean "stepping away from the governance requirements imposed by districts and state," one of the more exemplary illustrations of local autonomy. It is interesting to read the respondent's description about how the Alliance Schools Project has helped his school become more autonomous (See Appendix C). His testimony demonstrates the project's emphasis on the three areas of effective school improvement: local control, autonomy and student achievement (the hallmark of an effective (successful) school. The process that he describes is extracted from the interview and provided below:

> The Alliance Schools Project has helped us to become successful. Because we have become successful, and because they have given us the political space through their power to become successful, I think this has given us autonomy. Our success provides autonomy, and the political power that Austin Interfaith has gave us the space to go ahead and become autonomous and to become successful. It's a little circuitous way of stating it, but we could not have become successful without the autonomy that we enjoy by being a part of Austin Interfaith and the Alliance Schools Project.

It is not surprising to find considerable evidence in the testimony from the respondents of both schools indicating that autonomy has been achieved via a number of organizational features, many of which support processes of local control. The parental respondent at Zavala, for example, cites "house meetings" and "coffees" as organizational activities that promote autonomy (again, many of the activities cited as evidence in WH 1a provide duplicative benefits: they reinforce the campus' ability to self-direct (local control) while simultaneously providing an organizational foundation (and initiative) to self-direct local autonomy. The teacher respondent at Zavala credits the Alliance with having "given us a lot of autonomy." Her explanation further illustrates the dual benefits (local control and autonomy) of Alliance initiatives:

> Before, TEA would send out commands, and we never asked if this was good for our children, or if it was what we wanted for them. We didn't think we had the power of choice. Everything we have been doing since we became an Alliance School we have done because we chose to do it (local control). The ownership we have been given for all our programs has given us autonomy (local autonomy).

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In a nutshell, one important informal organizational feature to emerge at Zavala has been the wisdom and empowerment to question traditional practice and to confront the inadequacy of top-down mandates: As all successful schools do, the foremost question asked at a effective school is, "Is this the best that can be done for this student?" The administrator respondent of this school attributes the empowerment to ask this question and to pursue the answer is attributable to the school's organizational relationship with Austin Interfaith. "Interfaith," he explains, "gives us the political space and protection in which to do (community) organizing. (I)t's a very close, symbiotic relationship: we're good for them, and they're good for us."

At Becker Elementary, the respondents cite similar organizational experiences as promoting local autonomy. The administrator respondent, for example, attributes "strengthened committee work" to the Alliance Project. She describes this improved committee work as a reflection of two qualities: first, teachers are taking more responsibility for making decisions; and second, teachers feel more empowered to make decisions about issues, such as programming and curriculum. The work of these committees impresses the Becker parental respondent to such an extent that she states, "Becker is totally autonomous...(t)hey have subcommittees on everything that you can imagine."

Given the abundance of testimony citing a shift in philosophy and culture at Alliance Schools that promotes independent and autonomous thinking, it is therefore concluded that evidence clearly supports the hypotheses that Alliance Schools exhibit organizational features that foster and promote local autonomy.

WH 2b

In addition to organizational features that promote local autonomy, other tangible features also promote local autonomy, such as independence from bureaucratic controls in the form of waivers from state or local mandates. The second operationalized working hypothesis on local autonomy seeks to determine if Alliance Schools have pursued these and other kinds of autonomy-building activities. The hypothesis reads as follows:

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WH 2b: Alliance Schools Promote Local Autonomy Through Independence from Bureaucratic Controls, as in the Form of Waivers From State Mandates or Access to Independent Funding Sources

The following tables synthesize respondents' interviews and provide a graphic display of the unique access to independent funding sources and waivers from state mandates encountered at the Alliance Schools in this study. Only those waivers and funding sources directly attributable to the Alliance Schools Project are listed, even though respondents from both schools provide testimony indicating that a number of other projects on their campus fall within the categories of "waivers from state mandates" and "access to independent funding sources." It is logical to conclude that at the very least, the Alliance Schools Project nurtures an environment in which such alternatives would be pursued.

Table of Alternative Funding Sources at Alliance Schools

Table 5.2

	A	B	C	D
1	**FUNDING SOURCE**	**PURPOSE OF FUNDING**	Z	B
2	Texas Education Agency	Grant for deregulation & decentralization	+	+
3	Capital Investment Fund	Staff development activities	+	+
4	National Science Foundation	Zavala Young Scientists Program	+	0
5	The University of Texas at Austin	Zavala Young Scientists Program	+	0
6	Austin Independent School District	After-School Program	+	+
7	Regional Education Service Center	Waive professional development fees	+	+
8	City of Austin	After-School Program	+	+
9	City of Austin	Health clinic	+	0

Table of Waivers at Alliance Schools

Table 5.3

	A	B	C	D
1	**Waiver from State Mandate**	**Purpose of Waiver**	Z	B
2	State Reading	To use an accelerated reading curriculum	+	+
3	State Math	To use an accelerated math curriculum	+	+
4	Instructional Days	To increase parent conference days	+	+

It is clear from the data presented in Tables 5.2 and 5.3 that the Alliance Schools Project promotes waivers and the use of independent funding sources as a means to increase the campus' autonomy, a characteristic of effective schools.

WH 2c

In addition to waivers and independent funding sources, the literature on school reform recognizes professional and community development opportunities as strategies that foster independent communities and, therefore, autonomous school campuses. The third operationalized hypothesis under the umbrella of local autonomy is therefore related and it reads as follows:

WH 2c: Alliance Schools Promote Local Autonomy via Professional and Community Self-Sufficiency Strategies, as in the Form of Professional and Community Development Strategies That Build Independent Communities of Learners

The administrator respondent at Zavala Elementary cites the following speakers as examples of professional and community development opportunities that school representatives have had the fortune of attending: Seymore Saracin, Ted Sizer, and Howard Gardner. The administrator respondent refers to these experts as "the best thinkers and current researchers in education." These development opportunities have therefore provided parents and staff with an "opportunity to work with, hear from, and be stimulated by the best thinkers in (the education) profession."

Both the Becker and Zavala parental respondents had participated in Alliance-sponsored community development activities. For example, the Zavala parent had attended national training by the Industrial Areas Foundation. The Becker parent respondent, on the other hand, had attended a number of locally sponsored Interfaith-sponsored seminars. Both had similar experiences: the training focuses on teaching the non-skilled social organizer how to advance community issues with political expertise. The administrator respondent at Becker cites Alliance sponsored study groups, workshops and conferences as evidence of strategies that meet the intent of WH 2c.

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In reflection of the above evidence, working hypothesis 2c is accepted: Alliance Schools promote local autonomy via professional and community development strategies.

WH 2d

As in the exploration of local control at Alliance Schools, local autonomy (decentralization) is also explored from the perspective of whether or not the stakeholders in an Alliance School recognize the project as responsible for the increase in local autonomy on their campus. The final local autonomy hypothesis reads as follows:

WH 2d: Stakeholders at Alliance Schools Recognize the Alliance Schools Project as Having Improved Local Autonomy at Their Schools

The evidence is conflicting: At Zavala, all respondents, from the parent to the administrator respondent, recognize the Alliance Schools Project as responsible for increased local autonomy on their campus. At Becker, on the other hand, respondents simply did not elaborate as much on the issue of local autonomy. A comment by the teacher respondent at Becker provides insight into the difference between the two schools. She states that the involvement of her campus with Interfaith is "not consistent." "It's just like anything else," she states in a common sense way, "when you start something, and you don't finish it, it's not consistent. So when a member of Interfaith is at the meeting, you see it happening; but when they're not there...well, it's not the same." Unlike the experience at Zavala, Becker respondents are more hesitant to attribute the kinds of autonomy building activities on their campus to the Alliance Schools Project.

In conclusion, WH 2d is supported, but the support was mixed. Despite the evidence confirming that some stakeholders at one Alliance School definitely recognize the Alliance Schools Project as responsible for the increase in local autonomy on their campus, evidence from another school participating in the project is less compelling.

Student Achievement Summary

It is clear that the most important attribute of an effective school is that student achievement takes precedent over all other considerations. Critics of the current system of education cite bureaucratic red tape as an impediment to the ability of public schools to promote programs that cultivate high levels of student achievement. Effective schools, on the other hand, exhibit an

uncanny ability to focus on and promote programs that are, above and beyond all other concerns, clearly supportive of high academic standards and student expectations. The third conceptual hypotheses explored in this project therefore deals with this issue of student achievement.

WH 3: The Alliance Schools Project Promotes Student Achievement.

WH 3a

The first operationalized hypothesis seeks to determine if Alliance Schools promote programs that are defined from the top-down or from the bottom-up. Successful schools are those in which student programs are defined by the bottom-up, that is, by community, student, and staff input. The first of four operationalized hypotheses reads as follows:

WH 3a: Alliance Schools Implement Programs That Meet Community-/ Student-Defined Needs for Students, Such as After-School Activities

The local organization that provides organizers for all Austin Alliance Schools is Austin Interfaith. As part of its education focus, Interfaith worked with community representatives to establish an official, City of Austin Youth Charter. The number one goal of the Charter is to realize the following: "All children and youth will learn how to make good decisions by actually participating in decision making in their schools, congregations, groups, and families" (See reference cited in *East Austin Youth Charter*, draft of August 18, 1995)." Table 5.4 summarizes the Alliance School sponsored programs cited by respondents as meeting community / student defined needs.

Summary of Alliance School Programs That Meet Community- And Student-Defined Needs

Table 5.4

	A	B
1	**Program**	**Campus**
2	After-school Programs	Both schools
3	Health Clinic	Zavala Elementary School
4	Zavala Young Scientists	Zavala Elementary School
5	Open Court Reading and Math	Both schools
6	Improved TAAS Scores	Zavala Elementary School

Proponents from both campuses cite program initiatives which are the result of Alliance leadership. These programs meet community- and/or student-defined needs. Therefore, working hypothesis 3a is supported.

WH 3b and WH 3c

The second and third working hypotheses deal with the issue of accountability as it relates to student achievement. An attribute of effective schools is that they are accountable and excel in the programs that they implement from the bottom-up. In addition, effective schools also demonstrate a capacity to meet the standards and expectations that are imposed upon them from the top-down. The following two operationalized hypotheses seek to ascertain the presence of these characteristics at Alliance campuses. They read as follows:

WH 3b: Alliance Schools Are Accountable for Student Achievement in the Programs and Services That Schools Implement

WH 3c: Alliance Schools are Accountable for Student Achievement in State-Defined Measures of Student Assessment, Such as Student TAAS Scores

The teacher respondent at Zavala Elementary School describes how Zavala, as an Alliance School, harbors a sense of accountability. She explains how, before the school began to work with the Alliance Schools Project, accountability was based on money-received inputs. That is, the school received money in proportion to the number of poor students that it served. "This money made us accountable," she explains, "but (we were accountable) only to the money." Now, under the Alliance Schools culture, "(w)e work hard to prove that we deserve that money, not because we are poor and unworthy, but because we have a school that does its best for the kids and the community." The result is that the goals and objectives that Zavala has chosen to achieve have produced results (outputs), including improved test scores. For this teacher, everything done on her campus is done with the objective of improving student academic achievement. Her testimony is corroborated by the administrator and parental respondents at her school.

In addition to this testimony, a Texas A&M study by Witt and Baker (1995) provides additional evidence of accountability for the After-School Programs at Becker and Zavala Elementary Schools. Most noteworthy is the empirically deduced observation that participants in the After-School Program indicated significant improvements in math, science, reading. and

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language arts grades compared to students who did not participate in the After-School Program on both campuses (p. 14). Also, the participants general self-esteem post-test scores were significantly higher than post-test scores for non-participants (p. 16).

In addition to the A&M study, a number of studies were cited in the Zavala and City of Austin joint proposal for the Zavala Health Clinic. With the assistance of the Alliance Schools Project, for example, the proposal listed student benefits, such as "improved learning readiness and receptivity" as one of the many benefits of such a clinic on campus (School-Based Health Services, 1992, p. 1). Accountability in terms of student benefits appears to be the underlying denominator in all Alliance Schools Project initiatives.

And lastly, the accountability of the Zavala Young Scientists Program provides yet another example of how Alliance Schools are accountable to the community. The ZYS program is the direct result of community input. Zavala parents were upset to discover that only one Zavala graduate had ever been approved to the Kealing Science Magnet Program in a period of roughly ten years. Working with Interfaith through the Alliance program, the parents implemented a program initiative -ZYS-that is proving accountable in improving the community's demand to reverse this trend. The administrator respondent boasts, for example, how nine students went to Kealing the first year of ZYS and eleven in the second year. That is an improvement of one student in ten years to twenty students in two years. In addition, the administrator respondent points out how this accountability has a broader impact on the whole of the community: he recognizes how this accomplishment, sending twenty students to the Kealing Science Magnet, is significantly transforming the number of minority youth in Austin Independent School District magnet programs. In this case, Zavala is accountable to its local neighborhood community and citywide community.

See Table 5.5 for a listing of program activities at Alliance Schools and a description of how each program accounts for student achievement at an Alliance School :

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Alliance School Student Achievement Program Initiatives:
An Accountability Chart

Table 5.5

	A	B
1	**Program/Activities**	**Student Achievement Accountability**
2	After-School Programs	Student attendance, academic performance, self-esteem
3	Health Center	Student attendance, academic performance
4	Zavala Young Scientists	Academic performance

The administrator of Zavala provides revealing statistics regarding the kind of achievement accomplished since his school became an a part of the Alliance network. First, the school's attendance rate was more than 98 percent during the 1994-1995 school year, up from 96 percent in 1991-92, a statistic he attributes to programs such as the After-School Program. Respondents at Becker concur. Students enjoy the After-School Program and therefore want to come to school so that they can attend!

In addition to student performance indicators such as attendance and self-esteem, both schools' TAAS test scores have also improved over the years that the schools have been involved with the Alliance Schools Project--although test scores have not improved as dramatically at Becker as they have at Zavala. The Zavala principal respondent states that only 21-22 percent of the third graders passed the reading section of the TAAS just a few years ago, before the Alliance School Project. Last year, 88 percent passed, and 55 percent did so with a rate of mastery. Below are separate graphs capturing the TAAS scores at Zavala and Becker Elementary Schools, respectively

Percentage of All Students Passing TAAS

Becker Elementary School   **Graph 5.6**
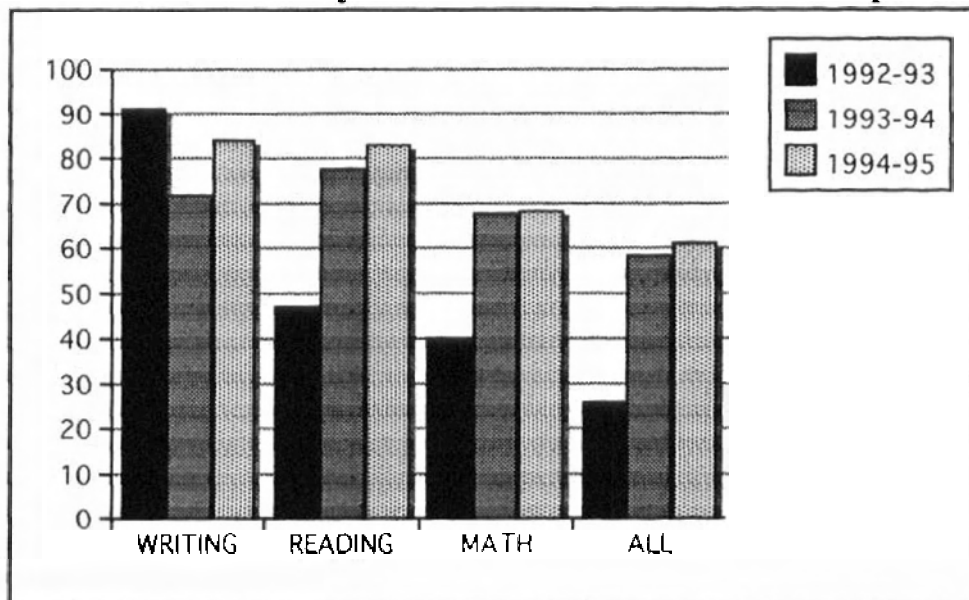
Zavala Elementary School   **Graph 5.7**
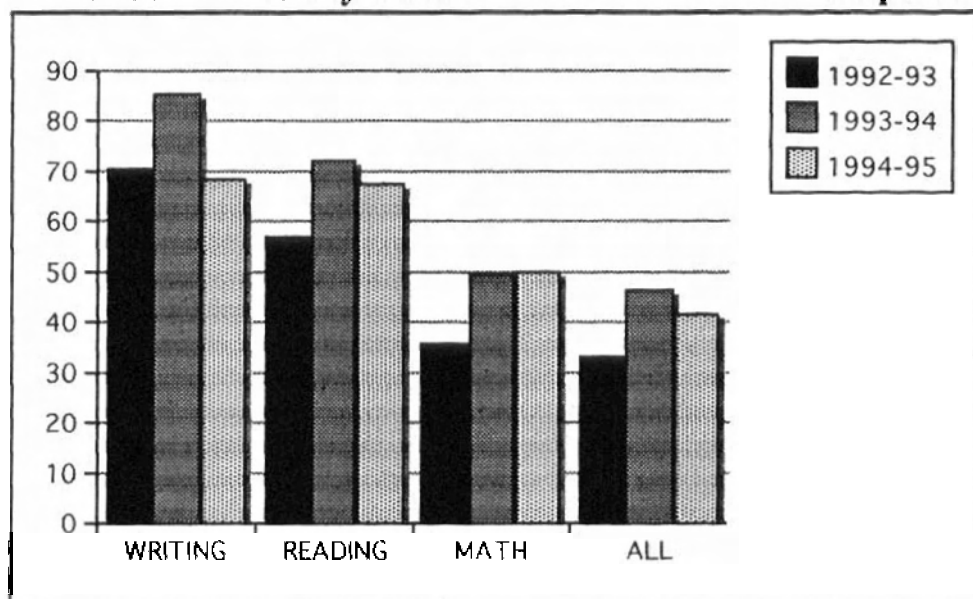
In conclusion, TAAS scores have improved at one school while they have remained relatively idle at another, one of the factors providing mixed evidence in support of WH 3c. With regard to WH 3b, again the programs are mainly on the Zavala campus. For example, of the ZYS program, the Health Clinic and the After-School Program, only the latter program initiative is taking place on both campuses.

Programs that are directly inspired and attributable to Alliance initiatives are more evident in the testimony of respondents from Zavala than they are from the testimony of Becker respondents. Although Becker is the residence of some impressive home-grown programs, such as its nationally acclaimed Green Classroom, the Alliance School connection is more tenuous.

In light of the aforementioned evidence on accountability for student achievement in areas such as the programs initiated at the campus level, as well as in state-defined measures (TAAS), working hypotheses 3a and 3b are supported at Zavala and support is mixed at Becker.

WH 3d

The last hypothesis on the topic of student achievement seeks to ascertain whether stakeholders at each of the campuses studied attribute student achievement indicators to Alliance School Project initiatives. The hypothesis reads as follows:

WH 3d: Stakeholders at Alliance Schools Recognize the Alliance Schools Project as Responsible for Improving Student Achievement at Their Schools

The administrator respondent at Zavala definitely recognizes the Alliance Project as responsible for promoting high standards at his school, as do other respondents at this school. At Becker, on the other hand, where accountability proved more difficult to measure, respondents are generally less inclined to attribute responsibility for student achievement to the Alliance Schools Project. In fact, the teacher respondent pointblank states that she is simply not aware of any improvement in student achievement on her campus. On the other hand, the principal respondent cites improvements in areas such as "self-expression" and "confidence," improvements which fall under the rubric of "self-esteem." As a consequence, evidence is mixed with regard to WH 3d at Becker.

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Summary of Results

It is the intent of this research project to explore and document those aspects of Alliance Schools that promote characteristics of effective schools. The presentation style of the final report uses a "compare and contrast" technique to present the data that was gathered in the interviews and in other sources of evidence. One unintended consequence of comparing and contrasting the data gathered from each campus,however, is that it invites the reader to make value judgments. For example, it is feasible that a reader may conclude, from the evidence discussed in this chapter, that the Alliance Schools Project is, for example, more successful at Zavala than it is at Becker. In addition to not being the intent of the research design, such conclusions would be erroneously deduced from the data gathered. Although it is insightful to recognize that evidence in support of the working hypotheses are more apparent at one school than they are at the other (See Summary Table 5.7), it is more feasible to contemplate the evidence in reflection of the background information presented in Chapters 2 and 3. The final subheading of this chapter, Concluding Remarks, provides this reflection in a summary format.

Summary of Results

Table 5.8

	A	B	C
1		Zavala	Becker
2	WH 1 Local Control		
3	1a Community Input	+	-
4	1b Community or Staff Dialogue	+	-
5	1c Shared Vision/Mission	+	+
6	1d Recognition of Project	+	+
7	WH 2 Local Autonomy		
8	2a Organizational Features	+	+
9	2b Funding or Waivers	+	+
10	2c Professional/Community Dev.	+	+
11	2d Recognition of Project	+	-
12	WH 3 Student Achievement		
13	3a Programs Meet Community Needs	+	+
14	3b Student Achievement Accountability	+	+/-
15	3c TAAS Scores	+	+/-
16	Recognition of Project	+	-

+ = evidence supports hypothesis
- = evidence is unclear

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Concluding Remarks

One of the purposes of this applied research project is to "sensitize and assist other schools in Texas in recognizing the processes involved in community-based school decentralization and revitalization." How the Alliance Schools Project promotes characteristics of effective schools is the focus of the research question. These benchmarks of success, characteristics of effective schools, provide the road map for guiding the inquiry. By documenting "what" and "how" the project promotes these characteristics, other schools in Texas may learn to adopt similar processes. But don't lose site of the forest by looking too closely at the trees! More important than "what" and "how" the project promotes, or fails to promote, these characteristics is "what, "in the big picture, is the project doing at these 70 schools in Texas and "how" is it doing it?

The researcher concludes that the Alliance Schools Project is helping public schools and communities work together as partners in the education of their children. The project accomplishes this by nurturing these relationships toward directed ends, such as improved and innovative educational programs. The project fortifies these relationships, by and large, through conversations, house meetings, workshops and books, and a variety of other surprisingly common tools, such as conversation and one-on-one meetings.. The project, in conclusion, is about building a polity, a community with a shared purpose.

In the 1930s, a study conducted by the Progressive Education Association concluded that "the most successful schools are characterized by their willingness to search and struggle in pursuit of valid objectives, new strategies, and new forms of assessment. It is this process of collective struggle that produces the vitality, the shared vision, and the conviction that allows these schools to redesign education in fundamentally different ways" (cited in Darling-Hammong, 1994, p. 15). The Alliance Schools Project is helping schools embark on this struggle.

Appendix A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear [PRINCIPAL'S NAME]:

Kathleen Davis of Austin Interfaith referred me to you for assistance with an applied research project on which I am working. Last December, Kathleen and I met to discuss my initial research proposal on the Alliance Schools Project. Since then, I have been in contact with her with regard to the direction that my research is taking. This week, Kathleen suggested that I send you this letter.

The title of my research project is *"The Alliance Schools Project: A Case Study of Community-Based School Reform in Austin, Texas."* My research purpose is to explore how the Alliance Schools Project develops the capacities of schools and teachers to be responsible for student learning and to be responsive to community needs. My research focuses on three areas of successful school reform: campus autonomy (decentralization), local control (democratization), and student achievement (from TAAS to self-esteem). In a nutshell, I seek to document how the Alliance Schools Project promotes community-directed, school-based reform.

I propose, pending your assistance and approval, to collect data for my applied research project from two Alliance Schools in Austin: Becker and Zavala Elementary Schools. I would like to interview a campus administrator, a teacher, and an active community member, such as a PTA campus president, from each school. The interviews will be based on an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire that I predict will last about one hour. With your approval, I will interview you (or your campus' vice principal) first. Then, based on your (or her) recommendations, I will pursue interviews with a teacher and community member involved with Austin Interfaith on your campus.

Although I would like to use the names of schools and interviewees in the final report, I would be happy to explore the use of pseudonyms should confidentiality be a reservation. Also, because I will be transcribing interviews verbatim as part of the data collection process, I will gladly provide you with a copy of the transcript before it is reprinted in the final report. Again, your comfort with the integrity of this project will be of utmost concern to me. The professor overseeing this research is Dr. Pat Shields, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, at Southwest Texas State University. Her number at home in Austin is 280-3548. I encourage you to contact Dr. Shields, Kathleen Davis or me if any of us can be of assistance to you in answering any questions or concerns that you might have.

To schedule an interview with me, please call me at work, 467-0071 between the hours of eight and five, or at home, 469-5874 after five.

Sincerely,
Laura A. Sheridan
Master of Public Administration Candidate
Southwest Texas State University

Appendix B

QUESTIONNAIRE

General Questions

How long has _____ been an Alliance School?

How did _____ become an Alliance School?

Describe the community (physical dimensions, demographics, socioeconomic status) surrounding your school.

Local Control Questions
WH 1a &d:

Is input from the community/parents encouraged at _____ Elementary School?

Is the Alliance Schools Project responsible for the input that your school receives from the community and from parents?

WH 1b & d:

Is dialogue with the community and parents promoted at _____ Elementary?

Is dialogue among teaching and administrative staff promoted at _____ Elementary?

Is the Alliance Schools Project responsible for promoting the dialogue that your school engages in with the local community, parents and teaching staff?

WH 1c:

What is your school's mission ?

What does the local community believe the mission of _____ to be?

WH 1d:

How has the dialogue between your school and your school's community changed since working with the Alliance Schools Project?

How has the dialogue among teachers and administrators at _____ changed since working with the Alliance Schools Project?

WH 1:

Does the Alliance Schools Project teach / show techniques for involving local community members and parents in discussions on school related matters?

Does the Alliance Schools Project teach / show techniques for engaging staff in dialogue on school related matters?

Does the Alliance Schools Project teach / show staff and community members how to identify campus needs?

If yes, does the Alliance Schools Project teach / show processes for achieving community and staff identified campus needs?

Local Autonomy Questions
Autonomy defined: If your campus were to become independent from all external controls (free from TEA and AISD rules and regulations), stakeholders at the school would be able to assume responsibility of making and implementing decisions that would keep your school operating in such a way as to maintain current standards or improve them.

WH 2a & d:
> Does your campus have some kind of formal or informal organizational feature which fosters and promotes campus autonomy? (explain)

WH 2b & d:
> Has your campus engaged in any kinds of activities which make it more autonomous from centralized, bureaucratic controls? For example, has your campus obtained any waivers from state mandates or received any funds from independent/alternate funding sources?

> If yes, has the Alliance Schools Project helped your campus to pursue these?

WH 2c & d:
> Does your school engage in any professional and/or community development strategies that help to build an independent and self-sufficient community around and within your school?

> If yes, does the Alliance Schools Project have anything to do with the kinds of community or staff development opportunities promoted on your campus?

WH 2d:
> Has the Alliance Schools Project helped your school become more autonomous?

Student Achievement
WH 3a & d:
> Are there any programs on your campus that meet community and student defined needs for students?

> Is the Alliance Schools Project responsible for any of these programs?

WH 3b & d:
> Is there evidence of student achievement (maybe academic, social, or personal health or growth, etc.) in the programs that your campus promotes?

WH 3c & d:
> Have TAAS scores improved since _____ became an Alliance School?

WH 3d:
> Do you believe that the Alliance Schools Project is responsible for improving student achievement at your school?

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS WITH PRINCIPALS

Al Mindiz-Melton
Principal of Zavala Elementary
Interview on 3/4/96

Q: How long has Zavala Elementary been an Alliance school?
A: This is our fifth year.

Q: How did Zavala become an Alliance School?
A: Mr. Higgs was the lead organizer at the time. He is now with the Interfaith organization in Houston. He met with me and Oralia Cortez, co-chair of Austin Interfaith, and Father John Corsemeyer of Delores Catholic Church, and they laid out for me, in some broad terms, the guiding principles and philosophies of the Industrial Areas Foundation and of Austin Interfaith. It was not an organization that would come and do anything for us; they didn't provide a service and they wouldn't give us money. In fact, they had no money and they wouldn't come and do volunteer work. It's a political organization, and they talked about political power and building a constituency for public education. That intrigued me. It was the first time someone had come and talked to me about having expectations for us instead of wanting to do something for us. I had been principal for a month, and vice-principal for 5 years before that, so I had some history at the school.

Q: Is input from the parents and the community encouraged at Zavala?
A: Yes, I feel that it is, and I think that most schools would answer affirmative to that question. But then you would have to look at what behaviors indicate that that's a true statement. If you look at our campus, you will see that parents are involved in the governance of the school, and they help instructors plan broad things for instructional programs - where we need to emphasize our efforts. Also, parents are involved in organizing our initiatives that have a direct impact on the school. For example, our health clinic, the After-School Programs - these are all parent driven initiatives. The Young Scientists Program, the magnet school within Zavala, is the result of parent initiatives.

These initiatives have all been a consequence of the Alliance Schools Project. The Alliance Schools model, the culture of an Alliance School, is different from that of an ordinary school in that there is a formula used to elicit community participation and community ownership and partnership within the school. That formula, the cornerstone, is house meetings. That's where the parents meet on an ongoing basis and talk about issues that they're willing to coalesce around and work on. Once the issues have been identified and there are enough house meetings going on, then we can go into action to bring resolution to whatever issues have been raised in the house meetings. The school becomes a vehicle for political organizing in the community. It gives the imprint of acceptance and respectability to the political organizing by Interfaith. Interfaith gives us the political space and protection in which to do organizing. So it's a very close, symbiotic relationship: we're good for them, and they're good for us.

You see, parents, at the level they were five years ago, didn't have the wherewithal, the ability to articulate their understanding that their children were not getting the quality education, the access to the magnet programs, the best secondary education in the city. The reason they didn't is that Zavala wasn't doing an adequate job of preparing them. They couldn't say, "these are my expectations as a parent of the reforms that I want to see Zavala initiate so that my student is adequately prepared." Working with Interfaith, parents learn to research, have discussions among

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themselves about what they want - their hopes and aspirations - and they learn how that can translate into action, and how they can hold me and the staff accountable for meeting their expectations. That took some work and development.

Q: What might precede a house meeting?
A: House meetings are usually preceded by walks for success. The walks energize the community. We pick a Saturday, and we do one every year, when all of the staff, parent leaders, and members of the congregations meet and then go survey and canvas the community. We ask people what they like about the school, what they don't like, and we use open-ended kinds of questions so that parents have the opportunity to give their opinions. We don't ask, for example, "what do you think about track and field day?" Well they might not give a damn about it. So we ask instead, "what do you like about the school, or what don't you like about it?" We want to give parents an opportunity to give their opinions. They might have a real substantial concern that they want to express, and it might be about community safety. And then you can see how community safety is a part of the school's mission. We can find that link, and then we can work with that parent and find others with common interests. Then we can put those parents together to work on that issue.

If an issue is identified in a significant number of house meetings, then we'll set up study groups. That might be 30 or 40 parents meeting to discuss this particular issue and do research on the issue. The research is a power analysis - we ask, "who will affect this issue, how we can access those people, what are the financial implications, what is the feasibility given the current political climate in our community, who needs to be involved, and how many need be involved to move the issue?" The parents ask, "Is this doable? Is this winnable?" Then we have a rally where we invite those 'power people' whose decisions can affect the issue that we're working on. So with After-School Programs, for example, we did a power analysis and learned that the district didn't have the funds, but the City of Austin did, so the rally included the Director of the Austin Parks and Recreation Department, the mayor, and members of the city council. We wanted them to respond and to be accountable to the community for their decisions about the After-School Programs. That's how we secured funding for that. We had to demonstrate to the elected officials that we had the power to move large numbers of people to demonstrate their support for it, and that we were willing to do the work so that their investment would come to fruition.

The power analysis for the ZYS (Zavala Young Scientists) Program was different. It showed us that we needed to do the research to demonstrate that low-income, minority students can achieve at high levels in academic programs. Once we did that, we were able to do a historical study to show that our children were being denied access to those programs within our own system. The kids were being shunted off into remedial programs at the secondary level, so we felt that it was logical to assume that out of a population the size of our community, somebody must be intelligent enough to participate at that level. Then we had to develop a rubric for identification and bottle it. We had to meet with the secondary schools and ask them what competencies our students had to exhibit in order to access their programs on a non-conditional basis. We had to design an instructional program that met their entrance requirements, and we had to have allies to advocate for that program. We had to identify allies for a program that deals with science. On a national level that was the National Science Foundation, so they became the primary funder for the pilot project. On a local level, that was the University of Texas, the largest institution in our area that deals with the natural sciences. They became the mentor and developer of the program. Once the pilot is successful, then you have the ability to go to the school district and show them that you have proven your hypothesis. Then you ask the district to fund the program so that it will continue. That's when it's necessary to have parents go and speak to school board members and lobby them for funding of the program. That's also when we start to look for more allies, other schools who are interested in the same initiative. We reached that point last year with the ZYS

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program when two other schools started the ZYS program - Barrington Elementary School (north Austin) and Ortega Elementary (East Austin). This will increase (minority representation at the magnet school) significantly because we now have three predominately minority campuses who will be sending prepared students into the magnet programs for secondary education. Just by having these three schools participate, and if each of them sends just nine or ten students each, it will change, statistically significantly, the percent of minority students in AISD magnet programs because the numbers are so minuscule right now. We had nine students go to the magnet school the first year of ZYS and eleven the second year.

The health program was also an Alliance initiative. They (the different programs and initiatives currently at the school) all came from our understanding and development as an Alliance School. Without their (the Alliance Schools Project) political clout, none of these (programs) would have come to fruition.

Q: Has the dialogue among the teachers and between the teachers and administrators changed much since the Alliance Program came here?
A: Sure, because the Alliance School culture is different. When I first became an assistant principal, my perception of my function was to monitor compliance. I was basically a "compliance officer." It was my duty to see to it that your lesson plans conformed to the "100" format and that you had the seven steps, that you turned in forms on time and that you followed TEA and district regulations. I was focused on compliance with regulations and not student performance, not community involvement, not whether or not this was a fun and successful place to work. This was immaterial to my focus. I didn't realize that at the time, but I do now.

In an Alliance school culture, the principal's function is to be a talent scout. My job is to find talent in the community and in the staff and to provide the resources, the opportunity, and the space for talent to develop.

Q: Does Zavala have a mission?
A: I think it's written down here somewhere. The official mission is to develop responsible citizens through education, motivation, and inspiration.

Q: What is the community's perception of the school's mission?
A: I don't know if it's going to be about citizenship from people who haven't read the mission statement and worked on it. We print it on everything we send out, so some people may have an understanding of it. I think the community would say that the mission of Zavala is to prepare kids to go to secondary school.

Q: Does the Alliance Schools Project teach or show techniques for involving community members and parents?
A: We've already covered some of those, with the walks for success and the house meetings, but we also have education conferences where parents and teachers come together to hear from people like Seymore Saracin and Ted Sizer, Howard Gardner-the best thinkers and current researchers in education come and meet with our parents and talk about education reform and what that means to them. So our parents have the opportunity to work with, hear from, and be stimulated by the best thinkers in our profession.

The Alliance Schools, when they reach a critical mass and there are enough of them, will change the received culture, which is a culture of privilege based on the accident of birth. The received culture is privileged for white males; that's the culture of our society. The schools are vehicles for transmitting that received culture. Schools are one of the primary conduits for transmitting the received culture. Schools take people and make them be the received culture. For

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example, we'll take a black person and make them act white - that's been our function, to take immigrant children and to change them into "Americans." Then we want them to go back into their homes and to change their parents. That is the function of school, it may not be the stated function, but it is true nonetheless. It is the school's function to transmit culture in society. Schools homogenize and prepare people to be Americanized. The Alliance Schools will change that dynamic when they reach a critical mass; it will not be based on a culture of privilege. It will be based on a culture of enough resources for everyone, and it will be based on enough power for everyone, where power is not finite. It will not be about, you know, "I'm in charge and I gotta have enough power for me..." It will not be a hierarchical culture, rather it will be a collaborative culture of sharing, a culture which recognizes that there is power and ability in every community, even this community. Whereas if you ask the average citizen now, they will say that we (this community) are all bums, or are no good, or that we are all drug addicts - that's the perception of East Austin. We are changing that.

Q: Does Zavala have any formal or informal features that promote autonomy?
A: Well, on a formal basis, we are reviewing the criteria to become a charter school. That would mean stepping away from some of the governance requirements imposed by districts and state. To be completely autonomous would mean independent funding, and I don't think that you'll ever have complete autonomy unless you have the ability to control the funding of your institution. There are some things that we don't do because we don't feel that they're germane or logical for us to produce student achievement that are requirements. We have applied for waivers from some requirements, and have been granted some waivers not to do some of the things that the state or district requires.

Q: Has Zavala engaged in any activities that make it more autonomous from centralized or bureaucratic controls-waivers or funds from independent sources?
A: We receive funds from the Texas Education Agency to study and implement the deregulation of the campus. The grant for deregulation and restructuring is all based on community and staff development for the purpose of understanding and implementing decentralization and deregulation. This is an initiative of the Texas Interfaith Education Fund for training of staff and parents. The fund provides time for them to study, reflect, explore, and do research on what deregulation means. This means funds for professional development, attendance at conferences, study groups within the institution.

We've waived the state adopted reading system and the state adopted math system. We've waived some of instructional days for the purpose of having parent conference days. Some requirements we just haven't complied with, we haven't waived them though. We probably couldn't have received a waiver because our district probably wouldn't have approved the waiver requests. In those instances, we chose to be non-compliant.

Q: Has the Alliance Schools Project helped Zavala become more autonomous?
The Alliance Schools Project has helped us to become successful. Because we have become successful, and because they have given us the political space through their power to become successful, I think that has given us autonomy. Our success provides autonomy, and the political power that Austin Interfaith has gave us the space to go ahead and become autonomous and to become successful. It's a little circuitous way of stating it, but we could not have become successful without the autonomy that we enjoy by being a part of Austin Interfaith and the Alliance Schools Project.

Q: Are there any programs at Zavala that meet community, staff, and student defined needs of students?
A: One is the After-School Program. That was a direct expression of a community need. The

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parents needed to know that their children were somewhere after school that was safe for them - a place where learning was taking place, where the kids could be enriched; not just a baby-sitting service. Out of that, working with Austin Interfaith, we did the political organizing to secure the funding for the program. That program is the direct result of parent and student interest. I think it meets their needs.

When you look at the academic achievement indicators, I think that the After-School Program has helped with student attendance. Last year, our attendance rate was over 98%, which was the highest in the City of Austin. That bodes well for us, because that tells us that kids want to come to school. Parents want to send their children to school: they see that what's happening here is valuable for them and meaningful for their kids. We've seen dramatic improvements in TAAS scores from four years ago - when the third grade reading scores were 21-22% passing; this past year we had an 88% passing grade. Even more significant than that was the 55% mastery rate.

We don't denigrate TAAS. We aren't slaves to it but we also don't denigrate it, but we aren't driven by it. There are no discrete skills in the TAAS test that are detrimental to students. It will not harm you to be able to punctuate sentences, multiply, and do long division. So I have a problem with people who denigrate that particular standardized exam because there isn't anything on the TAAS that isn't good for kids to know. So I think it's okay, and one reason is because it is criterion referenced, so everyone can be successful - there's not a mean, so 50% do not have to fail as in norm referencing. I think it's a good test. It's not an easy test, and maybe some people don't realize the level of difficulty. And also there are requirements for levels of mastery and achievement that I think are reasonable expectations for whether or not you are going to be classified as a low-performing or a recognized or an exemplary school. It's good for the public to know the performance of their school compared to the other schools in the state. I don't think TAAS is the only way to measure whether or not a child has learned something, but it is a measurement and it is a good base-line measurement because we can make comparison.

Q: What other types of measurements does Zavala use?
A: Well, with the young kids, we use Mari Clay's measurements in the reading recovery program, which is a reading record of students which denotes reading fluency, word recognition, word recall, some pretty discrete reading skills. These are annotated, anecdotal records out of which we can extrapolate percents and levels of accomplishment for those kids before they take a standardized exam. We haven't really gotten into an organized portfolio assessment, except in writing. We maintain records of student writing so that we can see progress by looking at the product, we do some product assessment on student writing. Writing really lends itself to holistic scoring that we can maintain a record of sample student writing over a length of time.

Q: Do you believe that the Alliance Schools Project is responsible for the improvement in student achievement?
A: Yes, I do. The initiatives that we have taken, both instructional and in the engagement of the community, have all come from the fruition of the relationship with Austin Interfaith. If that relationship hadn't come into being, if we hadn't become an Alliance School, none of the changes that we have discussed would have happened. We wanted to be successful (in the past), but we didn't have an understanding of what that took in a community like ours. We didn't have the support or engagement of parents because we never asked them what they wanted. We were not a part of this community; we were apart from the community. The Alliance Program helped us to understand how we were holding ourselves back, how we were an impediment to our own success.

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Judy Taylor
Principal at Becker Elementary School
Interview on 2/28/96

Q: How long has Becker been an Alliance School?
A: We are going into our forth year right now. Since the 91-92 school year.

Q: How did Becker become an Alliance School?
A: We were a technical assistance school, and I went to a TEA convention. Frankly, none of the sessions I found very useful because our school was pretty much beyond what they were offering; way beyond where other schools were around the state because we had already decentralized quite a bit. The speaker that I heard that I did like was Ernie Cortez, and I thought, "I really want to be part of that (the Alliance Schools Project)!" Really, the only effective sessions that I went to were presented by Alliance Schools folks. I talked to Kathleen Davis, one of the organizers, and told her that I wanted to be part of this. She told me that we had to apply, talk to our staff, our community, and that everybody had to be for it.

I came back and talked to my staff and Al (Melton, principal at Zavala), because he was already in the project. So we applied. We were the second Alliance School. One of the reasons we were interested in the Program was to reach-out to our community; to get more parental participation and to try to reach parents in a different way because we weren't being very successful.

Q: Describe the community around Becker Elementary.
A: It's a very low-income community. A lot of the folks around here didn't finish high school. We have a housing project that serves our community - Meadowbrook Housing Project. I have about 133 children from that project, and there are approximately 430 in the school; so about a third of my children come from Meadowbrook. Of those households, 75% of them are headed by adults who are 21 years old or younger. That's pretty scary. I have a lot of babies raising babies. I've been here for 12 years and I have seen a lot of my former students who dropped out and are now dropping off their four year olds.

Q: Is input from the community and parents encouraged at Becker and is the Alliance Project involved in how that input is encouraged?
A: Yes, our teachers have had training in, as Ernie Cortez would say, how to have "conversations" with parents rather than talking at them. We ask them what they think, what they would like and what they see as a problem. I've also taken parents to the state and regional training sessions that Alliance offers. And we have had study sessions here at school for the parents. So the Alliance Project is definitely responsible for a lot of the input that we are getting from parents and the community. We have gotten away from written communication, except for our monthly newsletter, and have gone more into personal, eye-to-eye talks and inviting them more into the school than before.

Q: Has dialogue and communication been promoted more among the teaching staff and administration since becoming a part of the Alliance Project?
A: I don't know whether to attribute it to Alliance because we have always had a very open school. The principal before me was a very good communicator. We've had training with the district on how to have a local leadership team and where you reach decisions by consensus, that sort of thing.

Q: What is Becker's school mission?
A: To give the kids the skills that they need to be successful in a rapidly changing society.

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Q: What does the local community believe Becker's school mission to be?
A: They would probably say to raise achievement, the TAAS scores, because we always talk a lot about achievement, and it's published in the paper.

Q: Did the Alliance Project teach or show techniques for involving local community members and parents in discussions on school matters.
A: Yes, they believe in what they call house meetings, small groups of people meeting together in the community or in parent's homes or at the school or church, wherever it's convenient. (At these events) they ask parents what their concerns are, and decide from that what the next steps should be. They teach parents how to access the system better, the governmental system, the city council, the school board.

This past year has not been as busy as years past, largely because we lost one of our organizers, Joe Higgs. Kathleen was stretched kind of thin, and hasn't been with us as much, so we have kind of fallen off. We also had two other parent projects that took up a lot of energy and time this year.

Q: Did the Alliance Project train your staff in communicating with each other more?
A: Yes, there is specific training; they have a model that we try to emulate and that is just getting people together for conversation about common problems. So I think that it has opened up communications among the staff, teaching them to disagree more amicably.

Q: Are there any programs at Becker that meet community, staff and student defined needs?
One of our projects was the need for After-School Programs for children. We got a group of parents and teachers together and asked them what kind of programs they would like and to brainstorm ideas. They told us what they would like and now we have that program, and some of the parents are teaching or participating in the program in some way. That was funded by the City of Austin and the Alliance Schools helped us get that funding. We serve about 80 children on a regular basis We have everything from basketball to math lab to crafts courses and computer labs. It's voluntary. The kids just sign up for the after-school classes. It's exciting.

Q: Does Becker have some kind of formal or informal structure that fosters autonomy?
A: Yes, every campus has a campus leadership team, and several years ago we also organized ourselves around committees - so we have teacher committees for technology and for reading, after-school, discipline. And then we have ad hoc committees from time to time and these committees make major decisions and they bring recommendations to the campus leadership team. I think that people feel that their ideas are pretty much implemented.

Q: Is there any organizational feature that promotes autonomy that is influenced by the Alliance Project?
A: Not specifically, but the Alliance school idea has strengthened the work of the committees because teachers take more responsibility now for making decisions and they feel more empowered to make decisions about programming issues, curriculum issues. For instance, in the month of February we just completed a series of meetings within the school in which the staff aligned the curriculum, something we have been wanting to do for a long time, and we just sat down and did it. We described what the child needs to know by the time he or she leaves a certain grade level. We are in the process of editing that and cleaning it up.

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Q: Has Becker engaged in any activities that have made it more autonomous from centralized bureaucratic control - waivers from state mandates or funds from independent sources?

A: Absolutely. We have received the TEA grant for restructuring, and we've applied for it every year and we have gotten it every year so far. And this has been for $15,000 to $25,000. We have been able to fund staff development for things like Project Read, Cooperative Learning.

Q: How is the Alliance Project connected with the opportunity to get these grants?
A: They are a partner in writing the grant. We always build into our grant - because Austin Interfaith participates in the community and we have to have money to pay for stipends and baby-sitters, and for consultants to come, that sort of thing. They help us with the training also.

Q: Has Becker pursued any waivers from state mandates in addition to funding?
We have a waiver from the state agency for a different reading program here, not the state adopted basal. We use Open Court, which is phonetic based and has both the phonics and the writing. The state's program isn't as phonetically engaging.

Q: Does Becker engage in any Alliance related strategies that help build an independent and self-sufficient community around and within the school?
A: We go to the training offered by Austin Interfaith and we go to the state conventions. We haven't gone to the national meetings, but we have taken parents and teachers to all of the other training they provide. I think that Alliance and a lot of other things working together has made us more independent and autonomous. We have a really committed staff and I feel like we have open communication. What we are hearing from Alliance is pretty much what we already believed in.

Q: Are there programs at Becker that meet community and student defined needs for students?
A: Yes. Two years ago we wrote a grant specifically to improve TAAS scores with third graders. This was separate from the Alliance grant. We will find out the results this year. It was designed to allow the kids to relate those questions on paper to specific hands-on meaning when a question is asked: to help them become more familiar with the language that was used in the testing situation, and to help them put some meaning to the vocabulary that was being thrown at them. The results last year were very good: 83% of our third graders passed the TAAS reading section last year. This year we will follow those 3rd graders into 4th grade, and we will help them again.

Another program is one of those parent programs I mentioned earlier. We got a small grant from Southwestern Bell for parent training and we worked with prekindergarten parents (parents of 4 year olds). They had to come once a week until Christmas vacation for training sessions after school, and they would help in the classroom. They would talk about instruction, what they observed in the class, ask questions. And part of the grant was to find out what they could do at home to help their kids in school. We also gave them materials that they could use at home - ABC kits and chalk, and manipulatives of different kinds.

We also provided a teacher to work with our bilingual kids and parents to teach them how to access the system and how to help their children at home. She works with them once a week. We did this independent of Alliance, but they did help us write our staff development grant.

Q: Is there evidence of student achievement in the programs that your campus has implemented?
A: Yes, our achievement has improved. We have to work harder every year just to maintain the

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gains that we've made. I see kids are more able to express themselves more clearly, their writing is better and they seem to be more self confident. They are certainly benefiting from the After-School Programs. In fact two guys who hadn't signed up came in today to find out where they could sign up. The sessions are six week classes - either one or two days a week. They are usually over by five o'clock in the afternoon, except for the class, "explorers" and that is an unusual group because they go out into the community on field trips. Most of the classes last about an hour, until 4 or 4:30 p.m. at the latest.

The (Green Classroom) organic garden was certified by the state. The kids and teachers plant and harvest vegetables and actually take them to Whole Foods or the Farmer's Market during harvest. It's really good because the kids learn to manage their own money, they have to give back to the classroom all the money it cost for the seeds and fertilizer, and then they keep their profits. The Green Classroom has been in operation for 5 years. The teacher is the same one who wrote the grant for the TAAS scores. She's won two presidential awards for environmental studies in five years. She doesn't even have Texas certification, and she's only been teaching for five years, she's paid through grant monies.

Q: Do you believe that the Alliance project is responsible for improving student achievement at Becker?
A: Absolutely. If nothing else, it keeps us focused on the fact that parents need to be a part of the process; we can't do it alone. It's a partnership with parents and the community. I just met with the pastoral care committee from San Jose Church. We are the closest school to that church, so we are getting ready to do some planning on how they can support this community and address some of the problems in the housing project. The person who got me in touch with the committee is the Interfaith contact at that church. So the Alliance has contributed and made a difference for us.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS WITH TEACHERS

Claudia Santamaria
4th Grade Teacher at Zavala Elementary School
Interview on 2/28/96

Q: How long has the Alliance Schools Project been here at Zavala Elementary?
A: I have been here for 6 years and my second year it really kicked off; so for five years we have been involved, since 1990.

Q: How did Zavala become an Alliance School?
A: Austin Interfaith was looking at getting into education. Zavala was really their first experience at this and we (Zavala) were the first Alliance School. Before, they were really more into the agricultural and economic issues; not really education. I don't exactly know how the approach was made or how they found out about Mr. Melton, but I do know that Joe Higgs, who was at the time the lead organizer, and Kathleen Davis and Ernie Cortez, were looking for a school. They had worked in San Antonio to some extent, but not to the extent of creating an Alliance School. They were looking for a poor neighborhood with housing and economic problems, and a school in that neighborhood. When they approached Mr. Melton, that was his first year of being a principal, and he was very open to the idea of helping. For many years, a lot of things going on in this school were negative, he was really open to wanting people to come in and to help us, and that was really rare, because usually principals aren't very open about sharing their power. So I think that their connection with Al, and the fact that Al opened the door and said, "We're in trouble and we need help, and we can use all the help that we can get. You all are looking to help someone, here we are, come help us." So I think that was the initial contact, there weren't any research grants or anything, it was random. They were looking at the AISD schools and wanted us.

Q: Describe the community around Zavala.
A: Over 95% of our children are on free or reduced lunch. I think the annual average income of the parents around Zavala is around five thousand dollars a year. The school sits between two housing projects, which is very important because we are the only school in Austin that two housing projects feed into. Chalmers Courts and Santa Rita Courts are the two. We have 1% white, 20% black and the rest are Hispanic. The majority of our parents are single. We really have a better employment rate now than we did five years ago when we first started. Transition rates are pretty stable; we're not as transitional as other schools, because we do have a lot of parents aside from Courts (the projects). The Courts are considered transitional because they move between apartments, those are really the only housing apartments that we have. A lot of our parents are homeowners, which is a very good thing.

Q: How did you become involved in the alliance school project?
A: The year that they approached Al, they told him that they wanted to work with teachers. So the Austin Interfaith people interviewed every teacher in the school. They asked why we became teachers, what we wanted to see happen in the school. They were looking for teachers who were leaders within the school, so they identified three or four of us and they invited us to come in and meet with them. What they were trying to do is build the partnership between Austin, TEA and the school by bringing in more resources, time off, and money, because they have grant writers, and of course, we don't. This will help achievement.

Q: Is input from the community and from parents encouraged at the school? How?
A: Oh yes, the Alliance trained us in the difference between communication and conversation. We had Saturday and after-school workshops so that we could take a deep look at ourselves and assess how we were communicating with our parents. We were sending a lot of notes home and expecting the parents to come when their children were failing, we expected them to come during our time. The PTA was very small, mostly teachers came to the meetings. We realized that we were just sending information out and we thought that was communication. They trained us to look at it in a different way. Now, instead of always asking the parents to come to our school, we take a Saturday morning and walk the neighborhood and ask parents how they are feeling about Zavala and what they like about it. Nobody had ever done that. It wasn't like me going to Ms. Rodriguez' house because Cindy hadn't done her homework. The mood of it was positive. We stopped asking them to come to us on our time. We started to change the way we did things and it opened up the school. Now we have conferences in the evenings or we let school out early or take the day off and meet the parents. We show up at noon and work until seven at night, scheduling the conferences with the parents at night.

Another issue was that a lot of our parents aren't bilingual, we were sending notes home in English, and our parents couldn't understand them. Some of them could, but the majority couldn't. So we were ignoring the majority of the population and we didn't know that we were. That population wasn't very verbal. That has changed: now our notes are bilingual. These are the major things that we really weren't doing before.

Q: Is dialogue among the teaching staff and administrators promoted at Zavala and has that dialogue changed since Zavala became an Alliance School.
A: There were a lot of internal auditing and interviews by Interfaith. They would come out and conduct workshops, team meetings and discussions. They even had them at Becker (Elementary) where we would bring a parent. Part of the strategy was to bring up things at staff meetings and then direct conversations. The questions we asked ourselves were vital. We were blaming the parents, the parents were blaming us and everybody was blaming the kids. We were blaming the school district: all we talked about was blame, there was plenty of blame. That was what we had always done (before the Alliance Schools). We knew there were issues at stake but we had to stop blaming and look at what we were doing that wasn't working, and what was working.

We ended up weeding out so many things in the curriculum that weren't producing any results and one of the things that helped was the question, "What do we want for Zavala, what are our goals?" They (Interfaith) wanted us to reach this goal together. I was doing a wonderful thing in my room, Richard and JoAnn were doing wonderful things in their rooms and we all knew people who weren't doing wonderful things, and we all just kind of accepted it as being a matter of different teaching styles. We learned that if Samantha was doing a wonderful thing in her room, we all needed to know what it was and how to do it. There is now more collaboration and sharing; not just closing your door and if you do a good job then good for you. If you are a team and your grade level doesn't have good TAAS scores, then you sink or swim together. We were individual before, I didn't know what my neighbor was doing, we never asked. The Alliance made us collaborate and work together. We do units, and we teach that unit to everyone's kids, not just our own. We have to identify our strengths and talents so we can all share what we are doing. We aren't working harder, we are working smarter because of that dialogue. It was so easy once we started doing it. We wondered why we hadn't done this before! Sometimes you need outside people to come in and make you look at things you haven't ever seen before. When you're in it, it's harder to analyze. An outsider has no bias, they are neutral. The Alliance didn't blame anyone, they just looked for problems and solutions.

Q: What is Zavala's school mission?
A: We want to promote good citizenship through education, motivation, and inspiration. We are modeling the kinds of behavior that we want the children to demonstrate. Modeling high expectations all around, not just from me, but from the custodian, the cafeteria manager, the principal, so that the children know that in order to succeed, they have to meet the expectations not just of me, but of all the adults in their environment. We emphasize attendance, because you have to be here to learn. The kids know that, and we reward them with trophies, and posters, and badges for attendance. They all know about TAAS. We aren't trying to be TAAS monsters, but we know that is the tool that the district is assessing us by. We aren't being negative about it anymore. We know that we have to be accountable, and it may not be the best tool, but it is the tool they are using. Since becoming an Alliance School, the mode of that accountability is very different. We knew that we were a priority school: we got this money because we have poor children. This money made us accountable, but only to the money. We don't look at it that way now. We work hard now to prove that we deserve that money, not because we are poor and unworthy, but because we have a school that does its best for the kids and the community.

Q: What is the community's perception of Zavala's mission and has it changed since you became an Alliance School?

A: The community has much more awareness. When we became an Alliance School, the Mayor and the City Council signed it, and we were in the news for positive things instead of being in the news for shootings or low attendance or the bottom of the barrel for grades. For a long time, the first and second year especially, there were a lot of articles in the paper (about our achievements) and we made a point of reading them to the children and we invited guests to the auditorium to talk about the gains we were making and the community involvement that was occurring. This is kind of a cheesy example, but the parents now make taco plates for the teachers, and for the businesses in the community around here, and for the families that want to order them and come pick them up. So we aren't just looking at ourselves in this school, we are branching out. Even our relationship with Cristo Rey, in my five years here, we have never had a relationship with them, and now we are talking and exchanging visits. We aren't so formal in the separation between church and state. When you are talking about the philosophy of opening up your school to churches, businesses, and the community, the community can sense that. We don't shut down at 3:30 p.m. like we used to.

Q: Does the Alliance Project actually teach and show techniques for involving local community members and parents in discussion on school related matters?
A: Community walks and house meetings are the two main things we do to gain involvement. We get together and think of questions that we want to ask, then we take three teachers to a block, and go to every house. With the churches we meet with (church) members who then come and volunteer for all kinds of activities, and they walk with us too. Then we gather that information and talk about it. We write it up and look at how many concerns there were about each issue. We form task forces form those concerns. Like we found 17 people who were interested in getting their children involved in sports, so we found parents, teachers, and volunteers who went and got information about that and went to the parents with that information. We print a monthly newsletter that goes out to the community that has all of the concerns and information about them so that the members of the community know that we are paying attention and doing something, we aren't just talking. We believe in action. There aren't really formal kinds of things that happen in Alliance Schools. That doesn't work.

All of our After-School Programs came from them (the community), that was the result of their concerns. We have sixth grade here because of the community concern that their children were getting bussed to Murchison Middle School and getting suspended or dropping out, because

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it is a rich school, and there was a social clash between the rich and poor. So the concern with a lot of the active parents was that their children were making "A's" at Zavala and weren't doing well in Middle School over there. Then they asked about the magnet program at Kealing, and wanted to know which of our children were going there. None. So through the meetings, we gathered information about sending our kids there. We couldn't really change the boundary lines, and we knew Kealing didn't have a sixth grade. And we couldn't have a full sixth grade here because we didn't have room.

So the parents, and it was all the parents, went to the school board and presented their issues. Students went and talked about wanting to be in honors programs and not being able to go across town because their parents didn't have cars and didn't speak the language. During that time, the University of Texas got interested, because there are a lot of grants and money for that sort of thing. So it ended up being a joint effort between the Texas Education Agency, UT, the school board, and the National Science Foundation. Any fifth grader can now apply to be in the the the accelerated sixth grade program ZYS - the sixth grade science program. They apply by writing a letter, then we look at their TAAS scores and report cards. Their parents have to write a letter and they have to have a teacher's recommendation. A committee formed of teachers, principals and parents from another grade read the applications and either deny or accept.

There are 17 or 18 children in the program now. Mr. McDowell teaches them mainly science and math, but it is a full sixth grade program. At the end of sixth grade they take an entrance exam to get into the Kealing Magnet Program. If they pass, they get into magnet seventh and eighth at Kealing. Then UT has a partnership with those children so that they each get a mentor and a tutor. They go to LBJ (High School) and go to the academy there, and then they are really getting their college paid for if they stick with it.

We wouldn't have known that that (ZYS) is what the parents wanted without the Alliance Program. After-School Programs were the same: we didn't know that the parents wanted their children here until 6:00 at night. We were thinking that we didn't want to insult them by keeping their children late, like implying that their homes weren't good enough or something. We found out that parents wanted them to be in ballet, or Karate, or sports after school but just couldn't afford to pay. So the task force persuaded everyone, like Mayor Bruce Todd, who gave us $30,000, to fund the After-School Program. We got the people who were running for elections, to prove their community support. We, teachers and parents, practiced what to say and how to say it, and then we asked him (Mayor Todd). It was easy to ask because we believed in what we were doing. The parents were behind us and the kids were there, it was almost impossible for them to say "no."

We have an after-school coordinator at each school, usually a teacher. The school tells you how much money is allocated to your budget, and the coordinator, along with the committee of parents and teachers, surveys the parents and students and comes up with what kinds of activities they want. Then we find people to teach them. We found out that a lot of our teachers had all of these great talents in all kinds of things and now they are getting paid $15 an hour, which is a good incentive. Parents make the same if they teach. And they are teaching, like sewing and cooking and other great things.

Q: Does Zavala have any formal or informal organizational features which foster campus autonomy, apart from AISD and TEA?
A: Alliance has given us a lot of autonomy. Before, if AISD or TEA gave us a textbook or a curriculum and told us to use it, we did. We didn't question it. There is not one thing now that we are doing that we haven't selected to do. Knowing that we are accountable has made us aim high. We have a math program for talented and gifted children, we got money for it and bought into it

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and it's a hard program. Before, TEA would send out commands and we never asked if this was good for our children, or if it was what we wanted for them. We didn't think we had the power of choice. Now, the things we have chosen to do have produced test scores. So no one can say we can't do it because our test scores have improved, and we have selected these strategies in order for them to improve. So in a way, I think a lot of the autonomy is already ours, because the district doesn't dictate how we spend our money, because we got the money ourselves and formulated programs. We decide how long the program runs, when it runs, and who gets to be in it. Everything we have been doing since we became an Alliance School we have done because we chose to to it. The ownership we have been given for all of our programs has given us autonomy. There are some strings on our grants, there have to be because we are part of a district. If all of that (TEA and AISD) was left out, I don't think we would be any different than what we are now, amazingly, I really don't. In fact, we probably would just have less paper work. It's not really helping us. If we were completely independent from AISD and TEA, we would probably change our report card, we would have a lot more creative teaching than we are allowed to do now, even though we are doing more now, like team teaching in third grade for the first time in the five years I have been here. I can go to Al (Melton) and say, "this is what I want to do." He will hold me accountable, and the thing about accountability is that it is never ignored. So if we choose to do something, they can't say "no" anymore, because they know that there will be some foolproof way of holding us accountable, it's not just "for fun." That's the way we look at everything now, we focus on achievement, on what will help my kids do better on the test.

Q: Has Zavala engaged in any kind of activities that make it more autonomous form centralized bureaucratic controls, such as waivers and funds from independent sources?
A: Yes. We got a waiver for the book we use for math. We are the only school using that book, Real Math. We aren't using the state mandated book. We are using our own reading program and book, we got a waiver for that. We have gotten a major amount of money because of the political clout of the Alliance program. With all of the articles, Mr. Melton has really made a point of getting lots of money for us. When you're doing well, getting money is easy. Those (the reading and math programs) have affected me the most in my classroom.

Q: Does Zavala engage in any professional or community development strategies?
A: Yes. We get extra money for being an Alliance School, I don't know how much. We use some of that money, believe it or not, to release us from our classroom, so we can pay substitute teachers and get leadership training ourselves, to go to workshops and participate in activities that we wouldn't have had time for even personal days off, in the past. Region 13 has waived some of the fees for workshops if you are an Alliance School. I don't know if TEA just donates it or if it comes out of our budget, but it is just one of the things that TEA does for us.

Q: Is Howard Gardner tied in with the Alliance Schools project?
A: That is a major part of the After-School Program. They are set-up on the multiple intelligences theory. To be successful in school, children can be successful in more than just reading and math. The After-School Program was put in to really motivate children, especially children who have already dropped out in 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade. They have talents in art, or physical activities, or music, or languages, so that's the basis. How do we reach children that we aren't reaching from 7:30-2:30. How do we get them motivated to come to school when they are failing their math class? So at the beginning, we were just trying to reach children we couldn't traditionally reach. Then it became more open to everyone, to enrich those who were already successful, but you still have to reach the one's that aren't. That's why our attendance is so great, because the children want to come and be successful at something.

Q: Are there any programs at Zavala that are meeting community defined needs of

students?.
A: The health clinic is major. That was the first thing we ever got. We knew that there were children that weren't immunized and that had major ear infections when they were little (3rd, 4th grade) that were never taken care of, and major eye problems. That affects achievement of course. Now they don't have to wait, or spend a day out of school to go to a clinic. They can just go downstairs. That was a major help to us. The first walk we did resulted in the clinic. The parents were upset because the local clinic was being closed due to asbestos, or something, and they had to bus across town to the north clinic. Through their concerns, we realized that part of our attendance problems was that the kids were out waiting for a doctor, or were sick from chronic infections. So the City of Austin, with the help of Barrientos and Gus Garcia, got funds for the school based clinic. We also have a social worker who helps in a huge way with counseling. The kids don't have to be referred to social workers all over the city. She works intensively with our children, and the nurse we have through Alliance money does house visits too. She keeps track of immunization records, and does immunizations and TB tests here. So the attendance has increased definitely over the last five years. Last year, we were number one in the district among elementary schools. This is from being 20 something for the ten years previous to Alliance.

We have a campus improvement program, and that will show you where we spend our money. It keeps us focused on achievement. Everything in that plan is a strategy for student achievement. We have teams in all of the different subjects and issues who come up with strategies and success indicators. Some of it is district, like the 6% yearly gain for state money. Last year we didn't get the state money because we lacked in one area. The plan has everything to do with Alliance, it is a document that shows what strategies are in place at this school that promote achievement. We also have site-based management with the campus leadership team from each grade level. That's how we review the plan, which is a working document. We ask ourselves what we are doing to meet these strategies, and how we can change or improve.

Q: Is that (the campus leadership team) an outgrowth of Interfaith involvement?
A: For us it is. Every school has one (a campus leadership team), ours is as a result of being an Alliance School. Being an Alliance School is not defined as doing one, two, three and four things and that's what defines you; it's something that fits different schools in different ways. It's more of a philosophy of thinking - your views and priorities. Our priorities are different from Becker's, and it is also an Alliance School. That way of thinking, that each school is an individual, is very progressive. The district wants each school to be doing the same things, TAAS is an example. TAAS is a generic assessment: it doesn't matter whether your parents are on drugs the night before, or whether you have an IBM computer in your bedroom. So Alliance says that if you want to educate a child, it's not going to happen only in your classroom - it needs to happen because Joe the Baker down the street is doing something to help. Christo Rey is doing something to help, your neighbors, your parents are all doing something.

Q: Is there evidence of academic improvement, is the Alliance involvement working?
A: The phonics reading program has been awesome, we got that through the waiver. The sixth-grade program of course, because we have all of our children at Kealing and half of them accepted to the magnet program. Having one in ten years, then seven in one year is more than a hundred percent gain! TAAS scores have gone up. It is a different school, and we are very proud of it, and of our students.

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Linda Burleson
Third Grade Teacher at Becker Elementary
Interview on 3/5/96

Q: How long has Becker been an Alliance School?
A: I believe three years, maybe four.

Q: How long have you been involved in the Alliance Project?
A: Since the beginning.

Q: How did Becker become an Alliance School?
A: I believe through community here-say. It sounded interesting and one of the other teachers came back to the school, and at an extended faculty meeting, we listened to some details about Austin Interfaith. I believe it started out as some kind of church meeting, and one of the church members knew a member of our faculty and that's how the connection was made. The faculty discussed the Project, and we concluded that we wanted to be involved.

Q: Is input from the community and from parents encouraged at Becker and is the Alliance Project involved in how that input is encouraged?
A: Input is definitely encouraged, but I do think that there is a communication gap between parents and teachers. We haven't gotten parents into the school the way we would like to. There is an improvement, but it's still not where it should be in my opinion.

The improvement is due to teachers actually going into the community and knocking on doors. A lot of it is just extra footwork that we are doing. A lot of it is Austin Interfaith being involved. We are more open.

Q: Did the Alliance Project teach or show techniques for involving local community members and parents in discussions on school matters.
A: They (Austin Interfaith) do have workshops consistently and regularly about parent and faculty involvement and empowerment, so we do have workshops and we are linked with them as to how to get more parent involvement.

One thing the Alliance Schools Project does is we have neighborhood walks. Instead of sending sheets of paper home to parents or sticking them on doors, we actually knock on doors and talk to parents and let them know what Austin Interfaith is. On these walks they gather information by asking parents what they would like to see happening in the community and at school, what they are having problems with, etcetera. We also have started house meetings, and will go to Meadowbrook (housing project), instead of them coming to us. We have workshops at Meadowbrook on parental involvement. Last time we, meaning another teacher and myself, went over to Meadowbrook and asked them what they would like to see happening. Most of our kids come from Meadowbrook.

Q: Has dialogue and communication been promoted more among the teaching staff and administration since becoming a part of the Alliance School Project?
A: There have been more staff development types of things, but as far as the dynamics between the faculty, I haven't seen a change. At the staff development though we get more insight as to what we can do to improve our school as a whole, as far as what we can do for the students to improve academic achievement. But as far as each other, no, I don't see improvement. The staff development is a consequence of our involvement with Interfaith because they give us "x" amount of money for staff development. Without that extra money, I don't think that we could do some of the things that we choose to do here.

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Q: Does Becker engage in activities that promote autonomy from TEA or AISD?
A: I think so, the campus leadership team (CLT) helps to facilitate autonomy. It's been around for about three years, but it's separate from the Alliance Project. It's site-based management: they change the name every year. Each school has their own CLT, based on the needs of its own unique population of children. I think that the Alliance has had some input as to the input on the CLT. When Interfaith comes around and is involved in the actual CLT meetings, it makes a difference. But it's just like anything else, when you start something and you don't finish it, it's not consistent. Our involvement with Interfaith isn't consistent. So when a member of Interfaith is at the meeting, you see it happening, but when they're not there...well it's not the same.

Q: Has Becker engaged in activities that have made it more autonomous from centralized bureaucratic control, such as waivers or access to funds from independent sources?
A: I guess the answer would be yes. I don't know any any waivers except for book waivers. We chose our own books for our own reading program. We also do our own budget, and they give us our money, so we have the right to say, "We want to keep this person," for staffing purposes. Interfaith is not involved in those decisions.

We have done house visits and we have done workshops in the community based on what parents want. We also have done some trouble-shooting. For example, while we were doing our (house) meetings we were told that a lot of the families were getting pressured by the head of the housing authority to make certain decisions that they didn't want to make, and we (the faculty) pushed to let these parents know that they had rights. We learned that from the house visits. It helped a lot of parents and empowered them to know that it was okay not to agree with certain things. The meetings we had were about parental rights and giving them information about the school. Instead of having it in writing it was a dialogue about things like, 'what is it about the school that you don't like, and what could we do to improve our school?'

We learned that parents were not getting letters that we were sending home via the children and their backpacks. And we learned that they (the parents) were bombarded with too much paper and half of them can't read above a third grade level. The reason why these parents stopped coming to school after (their children reached the) third, or really second grade, is because they can't do the work that their kids are doing, so they can't help their children. They feel intimidated by the work itself; not so much by the teachers. Becker has offered tutoring to them and we have an open classroom policy where we want them and invite them to come in and learn. But they still feel intimidate because they always want their children to think that they know everything. That's one of the problems.

Another problem is that research has indicated that minority parents just have had a hard time with the educational system; they haven't had a good rapport with the educational system. That's another thing too to overcome.

The After-School Program was (the result of) Interfaith. It was a way that we found to address the needs (of students) and to bring the parents back into the school. The whole program was initially designed by parents. The parents and teachers said, "this is what we want to do." Interfaith facilitates, they tell us how they can help. It's not one-sided, but sometimes they do things that I don't agree with as a professional; but there is always room to grow. For example, a lot of our parents are very much intimidated by pencil and paper, so I've suggested that we cut back on those kinds of activities and have more dialogue. You see Interfaith sometimes requests written suggestions from parents at meetings - things that are really non-threatening to you and me but to the parents are really intimidated and they won't come back if they can't write. Our whole

goal is to get these parents to come back, we don't want to intimidate them.

We have an Interfaith committee, but we don't have a large teacher involvement with Interfaith. Teachers will get involved at a rally, but the committee goes to the meetings and gathers information and shares it with staff. I am on the committee.

Q: Are there programs that meet community and student defined needs for student achievement?
A: I think the After-School Program really meets community defined needs for student achievement. Also, we had a health program where the health mobile came by the school. The kids got treatment, you know, (they would get) their ears checked - it was a wellness clinic. That was good, but it isn't around anymore. It was a once a month thing, a one -time thing for select schools. Those are the things that help make a difference for each child and whether we can see it or not. I truly believe that things like this, like the After-School Programs, give students something constructive to do, where they can use their talents, is good. At least 120 kids each year are involved in the After-School Program and this is our second year.

Q: Is there evidence of student achievement in the programs that your campus has implemented?
A: I don't know, or not that I know of...

Q: Do you believe that the Alliance Schools Project is responsible for improving student achievement at Becker?
A: I'm not aware of any improvement in student achievement, but I don't believe that Interfaith could do it anyway without parental involvement. I don't know why it (getting parental involvement) is not happening here when it's happening at Zavala. I don't know if it's the principal at Zavala; you know he is very involved. I don't know if it is the teachers; you know, I don't know if the teachers at Zavala are just a little more committed than us; I don't know what they are doing to rally the parents so much. Whatever it is, it's really good. There are little things happening here, but I would say that the majority of the parents at this school are just tired. They have just lost hope, they're just tired of trying to survive from day to day. That's what a lot of it is. What baffles me is that Zavala has almost the same demographics as this school, but I just see our parents as having given up. Interfaith has been good, but we're missing the boat somewhere as far as parental involvement. We have more involvement now then we've had, but after the kids get out of second or third grade, it stops. I ask my parents to do things. Out of 18 parents, 15 came for a conference, which is excellent. But they will only do it when you call. I call, and I beg. I think more involvement, more commitment to Interfaith would maybe make a difference. I don't know.

Q: What is Becker's Mission?
A: That every child can learn and reach his full potential.

Q: What do you think the community thinks Becker's mission is?
A: I don't know, and I don't think that they know. They're aware that we're here, and we do have parents here all day long. They just don't come to meetings, they just don't stay. The kids love hanging around the school, even when it's closed for a holiday. When we closed the school early during the freeze, the kids didn't want to leave.

I had this one child who came to school everyday and I was on her about her work. I would always ask, "Where is your homework?" Finally it was three weeks and still no homework. I was just mad because I felt that she wasn't trying hard enough. Well, when I started breaking it down, and we started talking with each other, she said, "We don't have any lights in our house."

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So she was coming to school every day with no lights in her house for three weeks. I asked her a lot of questions, like "Why is that? How are you making it? How is stuff staying cold? How are you getting showers?" You know I was wondering about all these things and how it's very unsanitary. I went over to the little girl's house and asked her mother about the situation. She said, "I don't have the money to pay the light bill." A single mother raising three kids and she didn't have the money for lights. I told her that there were things she could do, like call the City of Austin or even talk to the Mayor. She could make arrangements to have her lights turned on. I've done that. She had tried to make arrangements and couldn't get any help so I told her to call the mayor's office and gave her the number. Her heart skipped, but I told her to look in her baby's eyes and do it, and she did. She got her lights turned back on.

They (our kids' parents) don't need anyone to feel sorry for them: they need information on how to solve their problems. A lot of them don't know how to solve their problems. That's what we need to do, teach them how or show them how. Not give them things. I could have called for her, but I prefer to try and teach you to fish and not just give you a fish. These people need to learn how to fish.

The Alliance Project here, in my opinion, is not teaching people how to fish. I see other good things, but not this. We need a social service system - our people are just down and out, they don't want to talk about books. The Alliance committee wants to talk about better ways to educate, that's all well and fine, but when people have real basic needs that aren't being met, you don't want to hear about all that stuff. I don't know how to explain it any better.

The Alliance School Project does many great things; they've opened many doors for schools and children. I don't even know if this is an Alliance School's job, maybe it's the community's job. They're still trapped in the system, and the parents need help with social service needs - creating jobs where they can work, maybe a job fair. We don't need to make them dependent, we need to show them how to be independent, to empower them, to show them how to ask for help and how to give it. Of all the offices in the City of Austin, there are businesses that will hire people with less than high school education. But the parents don't know where to go to find these jobs, they're intimidated. Some of them could go, but they lack social skills, just like their children - the fruit only falls just so far from its tree.

We could have so many meaningful workshops for our parents, like how to interview, who and where to go to for help, who to call when there is a crisis - those are the workshops that they need. That is what they want to know. Most of the parents in Meadowbrook are unemployed because welfare gives them only so much, and if you get a job, the government takes it away and you get less working full-time then you do from welfare. It's a dependent system. It's politics.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS WITH PARENTS

TA Vasquez
PTA President at Zavala Elementary School
Interview on 3/1/96

Q: How long have you been involved at Zavala elementary?
A: I have been with the Austin Interfaith program since the spring of 1992. All four of my kids have come through Zavala, and my oldest is now 23. So I have had a long relationship with the school through my kids. At that time it wasn't in the role I have now, just volunteering when there were fund raisers or when they needed extra help, but I was not a part of the decision-making process. I had no idea.

Q: How did Zavala become an Alliance School?
A: I know back in 1992, in a meeting that I was not a part of, members of Austin Interfaith came to talk to Mr. Melton. Father Cortez, Father John, Joe Higgs were a part of the team that wanted to form the partnership, what they could do for the school, because they knew the school was bad off. I came to know about them because Kathleen, one of the education organizers, approached me on the phone. She told me she got my name form other parents because I came to activities, and she wanted to meet me. I said sure, and we spoke longer than thirty minutes. She asked me what I liked about the school and what I thought needed to be improved, how I felt about the community, where I saw myself in five years and where I saw my kids in five years. These are all thinking questions. I couldn't just blurt out answers. I had to think about where she was going with these questions. It was a new experience for me to have somebody ask me how I felt. Ordinarily, I've been in the receiving end of information - what's going on - and that's it; No reason to respond.

Q: Describe the community around Zavala.
A: I'm real bad at percentages and things like that, but most of our children that live in the community come from two housing projects, the Chalmers Courts and the Santa Rita Courts and the average income of those families is like $5,000 a year. So most of them are on some kind of federal assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, things like that. Believe it or not, there are a lot of families who have lived here for ages and are homeowners, so there is a good mix of both. Chalmers Courts has more long time residents and its make up is of older residents. Santa Rita is made up of mostly the younger generation. What they did was the people who are now living at Chalmers were living at Santa Rita; my mom still lives at the Courts. When they were doing the renovations, they shifted all the people that lived at Santa Rita over to Chalmers. Then they had new people who were applying for low-income housing, so that's why it changed.

Q: So your family has been here for a while. Are you from Austin?
A: No, I was born in San Antonio. My parents got divorced and I came to Austin when I was 7 years old and I attended Palm Elementary school, which is no longer a school. Since I was 7 I have lived in this area, I never moved out. I've seen across the board what it was like before. We never had to lock our doors. We knew our neighbors. It was the type of relationship between neighbors where if the kid down the street was doing something bad, it was okay for the neighbor to scold that kid and come back and tell the mom and the dad. You know in our culture what they were doing and it was all right. Now, if you even say one bad word about somebody's kid you're lucky if they don't beat you up or something. I've seen a big difference in how it was when I was

growing up and now. People don't talk as much and the makeup of the family has changed. Then it was two parents. Now it's mostly single parent homes, female headed household, very young. That's what they have at Santa Rita. The turnover rate is very high. When I took a survey there, back in September, one of the questions I asked was "how long have you lived here?" Most of the residents who answered my survey - out of 68 people, 40 something responded and said they had lived there between 3 to 5 years. There were very few who said they had lived there over 5 years. The residents change constantly.

Q: Is input from the parents and the community encouraged at Zavala?
A: Continuously, more so now than before Austin Interfaith started working with us. Before I became involved, I was one of those too, you know, who came (to the school) and left my kid (so I could run of to do) whatever I needed to do. That was the belief of the parents: it was the teachers job to teach the kids and the parents just dropped them off. The teachers, like I have heard Ms. Santamaria say time and time again, the teachers didn't really mingle with each other, they were concerned with what was going on inside their room and that was it.

Q: How did Interfaith change this relationship?
A: I started learning more and getting more involved in conversations with Kathleen about what was going on,and how this was being done, and why this was being done, you know, the agreement that Mr. Melton had made with the Alliance Project. Teachers were in consensus, they needed to see something change and they knew something needed to change, but they didn't know exactly what or how to go about it. That's what Kathleen's job was, to go out and talk with parents to find out from them what needed to be happening now. There was no relationship between the teachers and the parents, and we needed to find out how to make that happen.

One of the ideas was to create this community walk, the 'Walk for Success.' It was an interesting idea. We talked about who was going to take part and what would be involved, how many teachers would really take part in it. We were both (teachers and parents) apprehensive on each of our parts because who at that time would want to go walking out in that community? When we actually decided that yes, this was what we wanted to do, we had the support of the parents and the teachers, members of Austin Interfaith and the majority of the teachers said, "This might be a good thing, let's find out if it will work."

The walk took place on a Saturday morning between 9 a.m. and 12 noon I helped keep tabs on the paperwork, but didn't go out. If anybody needed to call in, I was by the phone. We had three questions, and spent maybe fifteen minutes in each home. We asked: 1. How do you feel about the school? 2. What do you see needs to improve? 3. What kinds of things would you like to see happening in the community or in the school? We had enough people to blanket the community. They went to the Courts and the surrounding community, all around. Mainly, they focused on the parents of the children who went to Zavala.

They came back all excited, all smiling. I don't think I heard one bad comment about their experience. The teachers were really surprised at the comments that they heard, how welcoming the parents were when they knocked on the doors, opening their homes and inviting them in for coffee. The children's attitude towards them when they saw them out on a Saturday morning, they (the children) were like, "What are you doing out here?" The kids were excited, they kept saying, "My teacher's here, my teacher's here!" and things like that. To see them out! That was quite different, because the parents know that's the teacher's day off, and for them to see this was very important and put the teachers in a different light for the parents.

Q: Has the dialogue among the teachers and between the teachers and administrators changed much since the Alliance program came here?

A: Oh, yes, for the most part I didn't really see the teachers talking with the principal much (before the Alliance Project), other than in a faculty meeting, and when they were required to be there. Now you see teachers going in and out of his office, and Ms. Caros' office, the door is always open. You can come after school sometimes and there is a line of teachers, and people just waiting to talk to him. Like yesterday, for example, I wanted to talk to Mr. Melton, I finally caught him, and when I got out, there were four people waiting to see him too!

That's another thing, having access to Mr. Melton makes a big difference. He realizes how important it is for parents to have input, and to have somebody to talk to about what's going on. He has that listening ear. He has demonstrated that to me time and time again. He probably had it inside of him, but because of the do's and don't you couldn't do at that time (before the Alliance Schools Project), I think he couldn't express it or he couldn't exhibit it as much as he does now, because he has the support of the organization behind him. He's got this vision. He just knew that things had to change, but he knew the change had to take place in him first. He's done that.

Regarding the 'do's and don't' I am talking about the bureaucracy. You know principals have to follow a set of rules that are set by the district and I saw him (Mr. Melton) going to his meetings, but then (since the Alliance Schools Project) I saw him slowly starting to do other things like having conversations with parents and teachers, then having conversations with other principals. This wasn't in sync with how the district did things before. This has been really good. I've noticed too that he's pretty vocal; he doesn't make a comment without having thought it through. He backs up what he says and he has the support of the teachers and the parents. That makes a big difference.

Q: Does the Alliance Schools Project show techniques for involving community members and parents.
A: For one thing, when we became an Alliance school, it gave the teachers and the parents more flexibility, and a chance to really dream about how to create a successful school. They ask you these why questions and these thinking questions. For example, they ask, "what does a successful school look like to you?" "What would it have?" What would you want it to have and what would it take?"

Q: What is Zavala's mission?
A: Yes! (laughter) I should have looked at it right before... I know that the official mission is to develop responsible citizens through education, inspiration and motivation.

Q: What do you think that the community thinks that Zavala's mission is?
The community thinks that the mission is to educate our children and to change that mind set about our kids, you know, that just because they're low income, they can't learn. That's what it was before. It's still the mind set in some of these secondary schools when our children leave here. The school that our children feed into still has the attitude of, "Those poor little kids in East Austin, they're not going to be able to handle this. They can't learn, they can't read..." Well, we're teaching them that they can learn and they can read, but it has taken the work that we've done to realize this ourselves. We didn't realize this about ourselves before. It finally came down to who is accountable for whom, and learning what kinds of questions to ask. I know at the very beginning, when Mr. Melton gave a parent the TAAS scores to read out at the PTA meeting, I didn't know we were ranked 33rd out of 66 schools. That's way low on the totem pole. Or maybe it was out of 33 elementary schools. I don't know, but I know we were way down there. And when the parent read this out, this was a surprise to a lot of us, including myself. Because this was how much we didn't know or understand about the school. We didn't know our children were being graded by the TAAS scores or what that meant. This brought everything to light. I

thought my kid was doing wonderfully because she was making all A's! All my kids made all A's during elementary, but she (my little girl) wasn't doing well on the TAAS. I didn't know that. I would see all these good grades, you know, and think, "Hey, my kid's doing wonderful!" Then we find out that the teachers also had the attitude that they should give (the students) an A because the poor kids were at least trying. (The teachers) didn't really believe our kids could do it! And here were our fifth graders reading on a second grade level: there's something wrong with this picture. All of this had to be brought out and questioned and all the anger had to get out.

Today, the community understands more now just by all of the parents coming to these house meetings. You know, at the last potluck dinner - we had 89 parents here that night. We broke up into 8 groups and had 8 little mini-house meetings. Out of that general meeting, 15 parents volunteered to have house meetings at their houses so we could get the parents who didn't come. Four years ago this would not have taken place. Nothing would have taken place. Last year we had between 30 and 40 parents at our potluck dinner.

We have seen a lot of change, it's just taken time. We really have done a lot in four years. It's because, I think, the school has changed its relationship with parents. The teachers used to only talk to us when our kids were doing bad. Now they talk to us because we are important. We both are in sync with each other in that we want our children to succeed, and together we decide what it's going to take to get them to reach their potential. Attitudes have really changed.

Q: Does Zavala have any formal or informal features that promote autonomy?
A: Yes, I would say so, continuously. By having our house meetings and our coffees, yes, I would say so. I don't know if we could run the school now (by ourselves), but we could probably get there. I feel like we have had enough consistency, not only with the achievement of our school and the student achievement, but our teachers have been the same, our principal has been the same and the parents are willing to change. Among those three elements, it would be possible (to be totally autonomous).

Q: Has Zavala engaged in any activities that make it more autonomous from centralized or bureaucratic controls, such as access to waivers or funds from independent sources?
A: Yes. For one, the reading curriculum, Open Court, is different, it's usually for gifted and talented students, but we believe that all our kids are gifted and talented. Mr. Melton believes in inclusion of our special education kids. How can students who are deficient in one area learn if they are kept away form the regular kids? It makes more sense to include them in a regular class, and provide that extra teacher or aid to assist that child to learn at his pace.

Another thing that has happened is that our conference days are different. Instead of having them from 8 to 3, we make it more convenient for the parents and the teachers to come in at a later time, like 7 o'clock at night, so the parents who work during the day can come at night for the conference. I know that the teachers, on their own, if the parents weren't able to make it, go out and have the conversation with the parents during the week, or the weekend.

I think because of the successes that we've had and the progress that we've shown, we get more grant money. We have some terrific grant writers here, Mr. Melton has worked with some of the teachers to get money. The Alliance School grant is provided for a school that is willing to bring in innovative strategies, different ways of doing things, more parental involvement. I know that there are different levels of grant money provided, depending on the achievement of your school. Now we can apply for this money.

They (the Alliance Schools Project) have provided all kinds of ongoing support and training. I

know the Industrial Areas Foundation provides national leadership training that is available to people affiliated with the alliance schools. Mr. Melton has gone, and I have had the opportunity to go. The training was quite an experience. I mean they have you hopping every single day. It is a ten day training and you meet with so many other people from all over the United States, and you realize that we're not the only ones with problems. People are experiencing them everywhere. And that in itself is different; you don't feel alone. It's really important to be engaged with someone who's going to help you figure things out, who can provide more than just resources. I feel that the key is that before you think about organizing, you have to build a relationship, that's really important. Relationships have been built among the teachers, and among the parents, and now they have been brought together by getting the health services here, and the After-School Program, and the ZYS (Zavala Young Scientists) program here. It had to start within the school, and then with the parents, then how to bring them together. It's just kind of snowballed. We know that if something comes up and we want to see it happen, we can make it happen.

Q: Are there any programs at Zavala that meet community and student defined needs of students?
A: Four years ago, I was involved in the beginnings of it (the Zavala Young Scientists Program) because my daughter was getting ready to go to middle school. She had been a straight A, honor roll student at Zavala, which many parents had kids on the honor roll at Zavala at that time. The kids weren't being recommended for honors classes. And I asked, "How come my kid isn't being recommended for honors classes?" And a lot of parents started asking why too. They had done well on their tests and had the grades, but no one would do it. It was during the summer, a group of parents asked Ms. Cortez (the principal at Murchison) to come over and talk to us, to tell us what we needed to be doing to get our kids into honors classes over there. She said that nobody had ever asked for Hispanic kids to be in honors classes. I said, aren't counselors supposed to be recommending kids for these classes if they're doing well? That is where our counselors weren't doing that, because of the attitude we had before. We just didn't have those levels of expectations of our kids. We just didn't really have the vision as a school and as parents that our kids really could be doing better. That's when we started asking why it wasn't happening. It was funny, because the principal said, "Ms. Vasquez, you want your child in honors classes? I'll send over the forms and you can pass them out to all the parents who want to see their kids in honors classes." She said that no one had ever asked for this before! No one was doing their job before then.

The parents of the incoming fifth graders were part of this conversation about the honors classes and they started thinking about what they needed to be doing so that their kids would be seen as kids who could make it in accelerated classes. It took a lot of conversations. At that point the fifth grade parents took over and Mr. Melton got involved and somewhere in there the partnership formed with UT. We asked what it would take to get our kids over to the Kealing Magnet Program. Austin Interfaith did some research and found out that only one kid from our neighborhood had ever made it to the Kealing Magnet Program in the previous ten years. We asked, "why and what is it going to take to make these kids get into this school? What are the skills that they need?" Last year I think 17 of our kids went to honors classes, some went to the Kealing Magnet School. They went through the same process that any other kid from any other part of Austin goes through to apply.

The After-School Program came about through conversations too. There were five schools, ours being one of them, and I had brought in a group of parents to ask them what else they thought needed to be in the schools. At that time, I told them about the YMCA after-school child care. We started to ask what the YMCA consisted of, and noticed that there wasn't any kind of academic or achievement program in it. It was just child care. Parents said that their kids needed to be at school more, and wanted to find out what they could be doing to make school longer.

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One of the ideas was the After-School Program, providing kids with activities they never would have had the opportunity to be involved in, mainly because they have no money in a lot of our families. You know more affluent parents have their kids scurrying around to piano, to ballet. Many of our parents use mass transportation-the bus service, and most of them are poor. Over 300 of our kids are in the After-School Program, and it's providing a chance for teachers who have a special hobby or talent to teach a class. Parents teach too. They do get paid according to their experience. The first year, I taught a sign language class, somebody else taught tortilla making, somebody else taught sewing, knitting. All these parents with special talents surfaced. One of the teacher's aids acquired computer skills. Four years ago, she didn't know anything about computers - now she's teaching the younger kids how to work with the computers.

All these positive things, you know, have surfaced (since the Alliance Project), like the health clinic. We were looking at the attendance at our school and it was below the 50% rating. We were real low, it was sad. We started looking at what was standing in our way, preventing improvement. We talked to teachers and parents. They were talking about the kids being sent to school sick, the teachers were having to take instruction time away from the other students in order to run the kid down here (the clinic), sometimes only to find that it was on a day when the school nurse wasn't here. We only had a school nurse here part time, and that wasn't enough time for her to be able to deal with all the kids coming in with chronic illness, and accidents. So teachers would have to be on the phone, looking for parents to come get their kids. We also found on our walk that many parents had no access to a regular doctor. Even though they had a Medicaid card, the children would have to miss a day of school to wait at the clinic: you know, because of the long lines and the appointments are so backed up at the clinic, kids might miss a whole day of school. And most of our children at that time were being seen only through the emergency rooms. There was no other access to medical care, and there were no follow-ups on the visits, because parents would have to takeoff form work, and they couldn't. So follow-ups just never happened.

We started working with Austin Interfaith and dreaming about what we could do at the school to relieve some of that. Also at that time the public clinic was closing down because of mold buildup, or something, and making a lot of people sick, so there wasn't going to be even a local clinic. And we didn't have any guarantee that they were going to come back. We needed a guarantee from the city that our kids would have a place to go to meet their medical needs, and transportation to clinics or doctors. So in the Spring of 1992, we had a big rally at the school and brought in the Mayor, the City Health Services Director, Beatriz de la Garza, the head of the School Board, Diane Castaneda who a school board representative , a TEA representative, and a lot of other people in different areas in the community that we saw we needed to have here to listen to our concerns about security, health, safety, achievement. We had already decided that we wanted to see more of our children provided with "well child" check-ups and physicals. Our fifth-graders needed to be in the best of health before moving on to middle school. Not all of our children were immunized. We needed commitments from the city that they would work with us, and we got it. And one of the things they committed to work with us on was to provide one hundred and fifty "well child" exams for our children and immunization access too. But the clinic was going to be closed, so we thought about bringing a team into the school so that the kids could just be pulled out of class for just one hour, instead of the whole day, and could be sent back to class. The parents didn't have to take the whole day away time from badly needed work, only the hour. We needed parents' permission to do physicals and to give immunizations. And in the process of talking with the parents about the benefits of this, they started asking "why can't we just go ahead and have a health service provided here: just bring in a permanent staff: a nurse, a social worker and a clerk." Plus now we have a nurse practitioner who can write out prescriptions. We share the staff with Metz (Elementary School), and we are reviewing the program. There are many benefits. One of the benefits we saw right off the bat was the increase in attendance. We had one of the highest attendance rates of all the schools last year, our kids aren't sick any more. We have more follow-

ups and follow -throughs with the children who need it, especially the chronically ill. Parents have easier access to the service and get their questions answered. There is parent education. It's a benefit to the community.

With all of these different things going on and all of the recognition the school has received the self-esteem of parents and the kids is improving. The recognition in the newspapers and the television is indirectly improving our self-esteem. You see it in the kids. They want to come to school. Sometimes you have to carry kids out of here screaming because they're sick and they don't want to go home. We've built that kind of climate that promotes that kind of togetherness, that kind of relationship.

Our TAAS scores have gone up, but aren't to the level that we want to see, but they have really come up, especially compared to the schools around us. I believe that all of our scores are way above the 50% mark in all three areas. I believe 68% of our children are passing all parts of the TAAS test. We have come a long way. That in itself is incredible. It's because of the changes we've made in the curriculum, and the way we see ourselves and our partnership between parents and teachers.

Q: Do you believe that the Alliance schools project is responsible for the improvement in student achievement
A: I believe that they have played a major roll in this. Without their support, we would probably still be floundering out there. I mean, maybe there are some other models and techniques, but this one has worked for us, and I don't believe that we are going to go anywhere else right now. After all, England is coming to us, why should we change what works?

Marie Van Wart
Parent at Becker Elementary School
Interview on 3/11/96

Q: How long has Becker been an Alliance School and do you know the school's history with the Project?
A: I think that it has been about four or five years. I was particularly active at Becker for about three years. I have always been an active parent. All of my children - I have an 18, 15 and a 10 year old and all of my children have gone to Becker from kindergarten on and I have always been very dedicated to public education no matter what. I am really against people putting their kids in private schools and so I also believe that if you want public schools to work that you have to participate. You can't just drop off your kid, like our mom's did, and hope that everything will be okay, so I have always made it a point to interact with the staff at Becker.

I was there (at Becker when the Alliance Project first began) and I had several meetings with the campus representative of the Alliance Schools at Becker. The representative was looking for parental input. Basically my input has been with the After-School Program, which is a really good thing because Becker is surrounded by a very low economic background neighborhood and not only do the kids not have any place to go after school and a lot of their parents can't afford to pay for activities and they don't have any chance at all for cultural enrichment which is what the After-School Program offers.

My involvement with the Alliance Schools directly has been more political. What I have done is attend meetings with the school board and on a couple of occasions I have stood up to speak about Alliance Schools involvement. So I have had input more on that level than with the After Schools program. My input with the after school-program has been more to suggest classes, and things like that.

Q: Is input from parents and the community encouraged at Becker? How does the Alliance Schools help to promote this input?
A: It is very encouraged by the staff and the Alliance Schools promotes that in their workshops. They facilitate their workshops to involve parents directly. They also give money for workshops and they also have Interfaith workshops. I have been to a couple of workshops on Saturdays in which parents go and Interfaith facilitates break-out sessions in which parents discuss a specific topic. The Alliance Schools team is absolutely wonderful at facilitating these meetings! They keep everybody on task. They make sure that everything is done on time; they help groups to write down their goals and it's just really good for people who aren't used to interacting.

I am the parent representative on the campus leadership team at Becker and last year we went to year-round schooling and I helped at several meetings to talk with parents about their concerns and what the change means for their child. Interfaith helped facilitate these meetings and that was really helpful to me because I am not really used to talking with large groups of people.

Q: How has Becker changed since it became involved with the Alliance Schools?
A: That's a hard question to answer. As far as parental involvement, Becker hasn't changed that much. I have always been concerned about quantity - you know I have always thought that parents aren't as involved as they should be, and I do notice that the parents who do get involved with Interfaith keep coming back and doing more. But I think that Interfaith is especially good at speaking out at the school board level. It's a wonderful political organization.

Q: Has dialogue between the teachers and administrators changed much since the Alliance Schools Project has become involved on campus?

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A: No, because Judy Taylor is one of the best principal's that I have ever seen. She has a wonderful relationship with her staff and it is has always been good. The staff at Becker is generally very open minded and very willing to work together and is flexible. I don't know one teacher who doesn't put in lots and lots of extra hours at school. So when the Alliance Schools Project came along the staff jumped on it because it was yet another opportunity for them to improve Becker and to utilize resources in the community to do so.

Q: What techniques does Interfaith utilize to promote parental involvement?
A: The weekend meetings are, as I said, really well done. Meetings are usually with a lot of other schools and we all meet and there is a general statement made by the facilitator and the group is focused on an issue. Everyone hears information and we are informed about what is going on and then we break-up into groups. Each groups writes down solutions to the issue, whatever it may be and then the groups get together and share their group's input and the top two or three ideas are chosen by the greater group and that plan is implemented. And so basically what happens is this large group of people comes-up with a plan to, for example, present to the school board.

The other thing they do is they have walks through the neighborhood to educate the neighbors around the school on certain topics. They have come to my door and it was great!

Another thing they do is they always have a Spanish speaking interpreter at their meetings and that is really important in our city where so many people are native Spanish speakers. (A table of two men sit and converse in Spanish while we interview in a Becker neighborhood coffee shop).

Q: Does Becker do anything to promote campus autonomy?
A: Becker is totally autonomous. Sometimes I think that it is unfortunate that they even have to be a part of AISD. They have a very organized structure. They have subcommittees on everything that you can imagine: they have a committee on technology, etc. They also have wonderful grant writers.

Q: Are you aware of any waivers from state mandates of funding through alternative funding sources that Becker has access to?
I am not aware of any waivers but they definitely have access to money. The After-School Program, which Interfaith helped fund, is one of the priceless programs they have funded. Also, the Galaxy program was funded by a grant that was written by a Becker teacher. And I think that Interfaith has funded money for staff development, such as how to improve teachers' interaction skills with parents or computer literacy and things like that.

Q: Do any programs at Becker meet community defined needs?
Yes, the After-School Program. There is also the PAL and DARE programs, but those aren't funded directly by Interfaith.

Q: Is there evidence of student achievement at Becker?
A: I think that the after-schools programs have been instrumental. I taught art in one of the After-School Programs and it is really important for these kids to develop their self-esteem in these activities. They get to choose the classes they want to attend and they do really well. Some of them just blossom in these programs.

Q: Is the Alliance Schools project responsible for improved student achievement at Becker.
A: I really think that what the Alliance Schools is responsible for is more fundamental than just improving student achievement because it is the infrastructure at so many schools that is collapsing and I just know so many people, especially with similar demographics to me, that just pull their

kids out of Becker and put them in private schools because they are not feeling like their children are getting a good education. I would argue with that. I think that it's a travesty that parents are putting their kids in private schools. I think that education at Becker has improved since my kids have attended the school. Just in the past four or five years I have seen more willingness to explore alternative ways of learning and different kinds of programs. What Interfaith provides is the support, the underlying infrastructure that allows the staff to enhance the academic focus in these ways. Also, the Alliance Schools Project provides a medium to other schools and parents and helps to build a broader exchange among schools and so that we begin to have a collective of people so that we can form a more cohesive political unit. And that is really important, especially with all of the recent funding cuts which just just divides all of our schools; and then here is Interfaith that helps to unite parents and schools.

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