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Where Is the CommUNITY? A Qualitative Case Study of a School Closure in an Urban School District

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Family and community engagement are a proven strategy for strengthening schools. Across the United States, parents and community members have pressed school boards and district leadership for more transparency and broader participation in decisions about school turnaround. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the decision-making process for the school closure of Rocky Mountain High School, a neighborhood school in an Urban School District in the Rocky Mountain West and the impact it had on the community. To better understand this dilemma, a case study method was used to identify real-life perspectives of community members associated with school closures and their beliefs of how their community has been affected socially, emotionally, and financially by the closing of a neighborhood school. Because school closures happen more often in neighborhoods where the majority of residents are people of color, a critical race perspective was cross referenced to examine school closures as a matter of space in educational reforms. The findings to the central research question for this study: *How do school closings affect lower socioeconomic urban communities in which they serve?* yielded five themes: (a) The Community believed a singular focus on data (standardized test scores) was used to justify the school closure; (b) The Community believed historical racialized methods were used to establish the Pebbles community and ultimately used to close Rocky Mountain High School; (c) The Community believed money, power, and influence dictated the outcome; (d) The Community believed the process was manufactured; and (e) The Community did not believe their voice mattered in the process. The collected data highlighted how a particular school closure was decided, how the decision was reached, and the outcomes of the decision. In addition, the overview of the process revealed community perceptions that believe their voice was limited in scope.

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Where is the CommUNITY?

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Family and community engagement are a proven strategy for strengthening schools. Across the United States, parents and community members have pressed school boards and district leadership for more transparency and broader participation in decisions about school turnaround. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the decision-making process for a neighborhood high school in an Urban School District in the Rocky Mountain West and the impact it had on the community. To better understand this dilemma, a case study method was used to identify real-life perspectives of community members associated with school closures and their beliefs of how their community has been affected socially, emotionally, and financially by the closing of a neighborhood school. Because school closures happen more often in neighborhoods where the majority of residents are people of color, a critical race perspective was cross referenced to examine school closures as a matter of space in educational reforms. The findings to the central research question for this study yielded five community based beliefs: (1) a singular focus on data (standardized test scores) was used to justify the school closure; (2) historical racialized methods were used to establish the Pebbles community and ultimately used to close Rocky Mountain High School; (3) money, power, and influence dictated the outcome; (4) the process was manufactured; and (5) did not believe their voice mattered in the process. Data collected highlighted the decision making process, the outcomes of the decision, and the community perceptions associated with the final decision.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the United States, education has proven to be a microcosm of the political tautness that exist between the private rights of individuals and the collective public good. In the colonial era (1607-1776), education began under the auspices that schooling was the sole responsibility of churches, private tutors, and fee-paid institutions (Peterson, 2018). This process gave families the ability to choose the path of education for their children. However, this structure was later challenged due to the influx of immigrants from countries such as Ireland and Germany. Because of this influx, in the 1800s, Horace Mann, (often referred to as the father of the common school), established a Puritan-style system of education that would be state-sponsored and rooted in secular topics (Cheng, 2018). Largely based on the argument that education was necessary and not only for the welfare of children, but the nation as whole, Mann was able to win the support of the public that ultimately led to the passing of legislation that required all children (with the exception of black children) to attend public school (Peterson, 2010). Mann's system also pressed to have legislation passed that minimized religion in educational institutions (Peterson, 2018). Although Mann argued that education was a national matter, educational matters have always been the primary function of individual states

protected through the Tenth Amendment, which limits the power delegated to the federal government. However, beginning in 1868, the stipulation accompanying the passage of the 14th Amendment gave the federal government more control over local matters and challenged the division of power between the federal government and state governments, particularly in education.

In 1868, immediately following the Civil War, Congress believed that to grow the nation, a sound and working democracy would have to be in place. This decision sought to ensure all citizens, including newly freed blacks and poor whites, could fully participate in the process. In doing so, Congress imposed that all states wishing to remain or be reinstated as a part of the Union, adopt the Fourteenth Amendment and rewrite their state constitution in a way that guaranteed every citizen equal protection under the law, including a right to education. However, President Andrew Johnson, President Lincoln's successor and a former slave owner, was openly sympathetic to the Confederacy, and made clear his opposition to the Reconstruction Amendments designed to reintegrate Southern states and newly freed slaves into the United States. The 13th Amendment (1865) abolished slavery, the 14th Amendment (1868) expanded the definition and rights of citizenship, and the 15th Amendment (1870) provided protections to the right to vote. However, President Johnson granted amnesty to most former Confederate officials and championed state's rights.

Between 1873 and 1883, under newly elected southern state legislatures, Congress passed several legislative mandates that nullified most of the work of Reconstruction, thus suppressing many of the rights guaranteed under the

passing of the Reconstruction Amendments. Black Codes established at the state level, subsequently labeled Jim Crow laws, firmly kept Blacks in second- class citizen positions and were firmly in place for nearly a century. To combat these racist measures, beginning in the late 1940s, Black Americans embarked on efforts that led to the Civil Rights movement to end racial discrimination and to gain equal protections under the law as established by the Reconstruction Amendments, specifically the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Role of Government in Education

History often illustrates key moments in time of diverging public opinion about the primary role of the state versus the federal government in K-12 education. While these debates were happening among America's White elite, there has always been a parallel fight and struggle for equal opportunity in education for minoritized communities of color in America. These parallel fights and interests have at times converged.

Federal Role. Although education is primary function of states, the Fourteenth Amendment provided an avenue for the federal government to intervene in state affairs regarding equal access to education and safeguarding students' constitutional rights. A seminal example of this was the ruling in *Brown v Board of Education*, 1954. At the time of *Brown* (1954), America's White elite had an interest in repairing its credibility and reputation among international countries and returning Black World War II veterans as a country grounded in principles of democracy and equality (Bell, 1980). There was also a rising interest among Southern citizens' seeking to bolster a new industrial

economy that would benefit from a desegregated workforce (Motycka, 2017). Subsequently, it has been argued that the *Brown* civil rights victory for desegregated schools only occurred because it converged with the interests of America's White elite agenda to stimulate a new economy and raise national prestige in World politics, thus outlining Bell's theory of interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Motycka, 2017). That is, Blacks will receive societal victories only when their interests converge with the interests of White elites (Bell, 1980).

This interest convergence has often manifested in a philosophical and ideological divide between the role of local and federal rights. That divide has often been steeped in racial and socioeconomic measures (Newlove & Bitz, 2018). Many southern states embraced the philosophy that nothing was more important than local control and nothing was more local than public education (Nichols, 2007). As a result of *Brown's* ruling, southern political and elite members believed the balance of power would be off balance for years to come (Motycka, 2017). Regardless of the decision in *Brown*, states, particularly southern states, were not ready to concede to the federal government intervening with their right to decide what is best for their citizens. The ruling in *Brown* triggered emotions and ideas that the integration of schools would have a wide influence in the future of economic and political life across the nation. As a result, a widespread argument in opposition of *Brown* indicated the federal government was creating a socialist society that would impose too much burden on the masses.

In 1956, several White municipal leaders and local government officials established political pressure organizations under the umbrella *Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties*. In hopes of accomplishing the continued goal of segregated schools, the organization echoed the voice of Milton Friedman and emphasized public choice, free market, and local control.

State Role. In 1955, almost immediately following the court's decision in *Brown I and Brown II*, Milton Friedman authored a paper in opposition to *Brown*, detailing his beliefs about the federal government's role in education. Friedman resolutely believed that competition and limited regulation were the defining characteristics of American liberalism. Friedman's (1951) ideology was rooted in neoliberalism, a term coined in 1938 by Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek.

Neoliberalism, as defined by von Mises and Hayek, delineated a philosophy of political economic practices that proposed liberating the individual by way of entrepreneurial freedoms, free of regulation. Friedman (1951), von Mises, and Hayek believed that a social democracy would inherently lead to a totalitarian system of control. According to Friedman (1955), *Brown* epitomized government overreach, and was the beginning of a path toward a totalitarian way of control. Friedman (1955) asserted education was second to the military as being the largest socialist industry in the United States and the federal government had no business dictating to states how to allocate funds.

Friedman, an educator at heart, was best known as one of the Twentieth Century's leading economists and regarded by some as the father of the educational reform movement (Cord & Hammond, 2016). Friedman's 1955 brief spoke directly to families having a choice to determine where and how to spend their money, particularly where education of their children was concerned. Because of this document, many school reformers have sought ways to either increase or diminish the federal government's role in public education and return control back to the states (Schneider, 2018). In most cases, Friedman's document served as the catalyst of promoting neoliberal concepts of free markets and limited regulation, which ultimately resulted in segregated schools and communities (Logan, 2018). To many, Friedman's 1955 neoliberal ideology brief, was the beginning of a highly political educational reform movement of taxpayer funded but privately-run schools (Barken, 2017). Barken (2017) suggested this was the beginning of the shift from education as a public good to a private good. A simple explanation of a private good emphasizes the private right and specific gains afforded toward an individual benefit, whereas a focus on the public good emphasizes the interconnected well-being of the communal majority. These opposing views often create tension between state and federal control. Federal control often seeks to establish policies and laws to protect individual's constitutional rights, whereas state control ultimately focuses on how individual's exercise their constitutional rights.

Tensions of Division of Power between Federal and State Governance

It should be noted there are times when the two entities share a common language. However, different interpretations of what it means to protect and exercise constitutional rights has resulted in increased tension and stress between both levels of government. Prior to the Civil War, local control often dominated the narrative. However, since Reconstruction, federal interventions through mandates and incentives have been utilized to balance the power between the public and private good. Reconstruction mandated states who wish to be a part of the Union, have a provision in their state constitution universally denoted as the "education article" (Board, 2012). This provision generally guarantees some form of free elementary and secondary public education for all citizens. However, guidelines on how states established these processes were not uniform or consistent (Baker & Nelson, 2019). Thus, allowing states to determine how decisions were interpreted or how resources were allocated.

For example, in the case of *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, the state of Texas was able to justify spending disparities between the wealthier and poorer schools because schools were primarily funded through local property taxes. In *Rodriquez*, the wealthier schools were receiving two to three times more funding per pupil than their neighboring poorer schools (Board, 2012). The court ruled in favor of the local school board and rejected *Rodriguez's* claim of equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, because education was not considered a fundament right of the United States Constitution (Board, 2012). *Rodriguez's* decision demonstrated the local

rationale of taxation outweighed the idea of a compelling government interest. This court holding is a key legislative example that demonstrates the tensions that exist regarding division of power between federal and state governance. Educational influencers such as Milton Friedman, commonly referred to as the father of school choice, used this case to illustrate federal government overreach in local matters, which he argues should be never allowed (Ruger, 2011).

School Improvement

Friedman's position is nothing new to education. Educational reforms are fundamentally political in derivation (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). What is believed to be the beginning of political and governmental influence in education, began in the twentieth century, with the establishment of the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) under President Lyndon B. Johnson. In conjunction with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Johnson, believed poverty was the enemy of building a strong democracy; therefore, it was the government's duty to intervene in educational matters. President Johnson's plan was not designed to dictate what states should do, but offer funding incentives for states, provided they adhere to and meet specific guidelines as outlined within ESEA (Smith, 2017).

Since the inception of ESEA, local education agencies have been offered incentives to aid in turning around low-performing schools. It is commonly believed within the field of education that turning a habitually low-performing school into a high-performing school is an exceedingly challenging task. This became very apparent under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

President George W, Bush enacted the No Child Left Behind Act with the thought of increasing the focus on student performance. Additionally, NCLB stipulated that schools that repeatedly failed to meet academic growth targets might be subject to severe consequences, including school closure (Irons & Harris, 2006). The primary benefit of the No Child Left Behind Act was that it allowed local education agencies (LEA) to cultivate their specific achievement standards (White, 2007). The disadvantage of the No Child Left Behind Act was allocating authority was still largely under federal control (White, 2007). This changed under President Barack Obama's administration and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (Selinger, 2011).

The Obama administration redistributed power back to the states by incentivizing Tier I and Tier II schools through a School Improvement Grants under Race to the Top (Dutton, 2015). However, to access School Improvement Grants, if awarded, states must agree to implement one of four turnaround school intervention models (Dutton, 2015). In hopes of receiving much-needed funds, many states seized the opportunities outlined in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. This was very apparent in the state of Colorado.

School Improvement in Colorado. Between 2009 and 2010, Colorado state officials documented nearly one hundred schools needing improvement. Of those identified, almost twenty schools were identified as participants in the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) Program. Approximately eighty percent of the schools participating in the SIG program were identified by local education agencies to participate.

In Colorado, education is locally controlled. This means that school improvement efforts are largely decided by local educational agencies, i.e., school boards. Local control gives agents serving on resident governed organizations complete sovereignty over the governance of operation within a public-school district. This basic concept is rooted in the belief that individuals closest and most knowledgeable about matters are in the preeminent position to make significant operational decisions. Because of local control, turnaround efforts have been influenced by student achievement, attendance, school funding concerns, and declining school enrollment.

According to data taken from the Colorado Department of Education (2018), schools functioning under state sanctioned development strategies exhibit assorted outcomes that lead to decisions involving turnaround options. According to data taken from the Colorado Department of Education (2015), 26% of students in Colorado attended either Turnaround or Priority Improvement schools. That translates to more than 14,000 students that attended Turnaround Schools and 67,000 students that attended Priority Improvement schools. The study acknowledged demographic data was not reported; therefore, it did not allow a clear aggregation between the impacts on students of color versus White students.

However, most of Colorado's turnaround schools exhibit similar national demographics; a high concentration of minority students, Spanish speaking, low-income families (Trujillo & Renee, 2015). As a result of these findings, Colorado invested a significant amount of time as well as funds received through

federal, state, and local channels to improve low performing schools through the employment of a global school and district accountability structure. This was implemented through Colorado's Senate Bill 163 (2008).

Maintaining Local Control through Senate Bill 163. According to a report generated by the Nation Education Policy Center in Boulder Colorado, Colorado's constitution, specifically Senate Bill 163 requires a balance of power between the local school boards and the state board of education in matters of school governance. Senate Bill 163 (S.B. 163) included turnarounds within the accountability framework. Overall, S.B. 163 outlined criteria that placed schools in categories based on their performance. Additionally, S.B. 163 gives the state the authority to require school restructuring for Turnaround schools who fail to demonstrate growth after two and sometimes three consecutive years. This is significant in that under Senate Bill 163, community voice is encouraged, but not required when deciding to close neighborhood schools. In general, S.B. 163 established a dense agenda to first identify categories of performance and strategies for improvement but also appropriate methods to addressing schools that continue to fail and can do so without outside intrusion. Senate Bill 163 provides that the Colorado State Board of Education has the ultimate authority for choosing turnaround models. However, at present, many school districts can decide on turnaround efforts within their specific portfolios and within this process, there are limited venues that involve community organizations or address community voice in turnaround efforts (Trujillo & Renee, 2015).

Improving Rocky Mountain High School. For example, Rocky Mountain High School was a school in need of turnaround. This high school was in the Silver Oaks School District, which is a large Urban School District in the Central Western Region of the United States. Silver Oaks School District exercised its rights under S.B. 163 to implement a Data Driven portfolio approach to close Rocky Mountain (Whitehead-Bust, 2011). Data taken from the United States Department of Education (2015) cited proposed reasons for the school closing included minimal academic gains over time, low student and parent involvement, and consistent high teacher turnover each year. The decision to close the school was decided by Rocky Mountain High School's administrative team, largely due to repeated failed attempts to improve performance (Whitehead-Bust, 2011). It was further shared with the community that closing the school would afford better choices for students and families within the region (Whitehead-Bust, 2011).

Where is the Community? School closure is not a new phenomenon and the process associated with school closures is often adversarial in nature (Morikis, 2010). The most common disagreement centers on public mistrust of local educational and political agencies making decisions they deem best for communities with limited or no input from the community. (DeWitt and Moccia, 2011). An analysis of literature illustrated that a large body of evidence about school closure exists. However, most of the literature examines economic, political, or policy motivations associated with school closures. Additional research includes which communities school closure affects most and the

negative effects of school closures (Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). This study seeks to fill the gap of community engagement in the process associated with school closure and reveal community voice about the turnaround process and perceptions of the impact associated with school closures.

Mead (2014) reported that turnaround models are regularly touted as strong and beneficial for students and communities. However, this idea is viewed from a myopic vantage point that seeks to serve the ideals and thoughts of affluent, majority policy makers (Mead, 2014, Ravitch, 2016). However, little research has been conducted to give voice to how a community reacted to the shutdown or viewed the events leading to a shutdown. Mead's (2014) assertion focuses on the principal component identified in Critical Race Theory known as *Interest Convergence*, which is why Critical Race Theory will be utilized in this study. History has demonstrated that policies and laws are often written and enacted when it benefits or intersects with the interest of others. This study seeks to illustrate how and where political, educational, and community interests converge as it relates to school closure. (See Figure 1)

According to Backstrom (2019), prior to the School Improvement Grant programs being implemented with fidelity, more than 1,800 public schools were closed across the country. Backstrom (2019) reports that in one single school year turnaround efforts displaced more than one million students with little to no

equitable solution for many of the displaced students. According to Ravitch (2015) some students do land in situations that may be better than their previous school, but often this is not the case for more than 60% of students who are displaced by a closing. Furthermore, current research is limited when demonstrating whether closing a school and transferring students to another school is beneficial for the student or causes educational harm. Additionally, research is even scarcer around how closing a neighborhood school affects the overall community engagement in which it serves.

Critical Race Theoretical Perspective

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework created, introduced, and used by Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado, in the 1970's to study social injustices in the field of law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). The framework is fundamentally constructed on five basic tenets: counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, Whiteness as a property, interest convergence, and a critique of liberalism. Based upon observation, these researchers acknowledged communal and consistent behaviors they believed bore deceitfully sluggish progress following Civil Rights in the 1960s. Due to these observations, CRT was established as a theoretical and interpretive means that studied the presence of race and racism across dominant cultural manners of expression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Dominant cultural manners of expression has dictated the course of American society since the birth of this nation. However, the most prevalent manner is rooted in the law. To appreciate the importance of how Critical Race Theory grounded the impact of racism on the law, an understanding of how racism is defined and acted upon is critical.

It can be assumed American culture was born on the premise of racial disparities and biases. However, Omi and Winant (1993) assert that racism is more often than not, viewed in a limited manner, that acts of racism are sequestered deliberate acts of violence or physical discrimination toward minoritzed individuals or groups. Matsuda, Crenshaw, Peller, and Thomas (1995) argue racism is much greater than a physical action, but more subtle and strategic through a considerable grander venue, the law. Crenshaw (2011) asserts American law was established by societal power relationships and laws as well as court rulings are immersed in decisions that favor one race over all others. This was first illustrated in the Legal Realist movement of the1920s.

The Legal Realist movement reviewed the legal body of scholarship up to the current time to comprehend if the law was in some way influenced by race and race relations. One of the most prominent scholars to undertake this task was Karl N. Llewellyn, a legal scholar and professor from Yale and Columbia University (Twining, 2012). In his findings, Llewellyn illustrated the law was based into two camps, predictability and availability. Llewellyn (2011) suggested that individuals guide their conduct not primarily by legal normality, but social; that the ultimate decision of law rested in the certainty of statues but

more importantly, in how the legal system worked (Twining, 2012). Llewellyn's (2011) review systemically and undoubtedly delineated that legal analyses favored the status quo; that rulings were often entwined in partialities and social situations that favored Whites significantly more than any other race in the nation. Calmore (1992) suggest actions as such are cloaked in self-centeredness and control to further promote the status quo of White privilege. To appear unbiased or all inclusive, Crenshaw (2011) asserts White culture, diminishes this interpretation associated with Llewellyn's findings by suggesting racism no longer exists; it is a thing of the past and that society today treats all people equally.

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) emphasize that racism is engrained in American culture and because of that, White superiority is almost unrecognizable by its beneficiaries. Bell (2018), Crenshaw (2011), and Delgado (1995) maintain the ideology of ignoring race (color blindness) as a root cause systemically continues and perpetuates the status quo while continuing the role racism plays out in the American jurisprudence system. Bell (2008), along with other legal scholars of the 1970s declared this type of legal interpretation favored historical societal power structures that are prejudiced under a disguise of blind legitimacy and continually fails to address the destructive role racial ideology play in the American institutions, particularly education.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), CRT looks at how citizenship and race might interact in different setting and times. Bell believed for Blacks to obtain an equal opportunity in education, their interests must

converge with the norms, values, and interests of White elites. In this study, I focus on school closure through the critical race perspective of interest convergence. One of the ways I examine interest convergence is by examining how space is evaluated and understood.

Critical Race Theory and Space

In his book, *How to Be An Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi (2019) argued that "space racism is a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to resource inequity between racialized spaces or the elimination of certain racialized spaces, which are substantiated by racist ideas about racialized spaces" (p. 166). Spaces are often governed by white norms and measured against white spaces, yet "comparing spaces across race-classes is like matching fighters of different weight classes, which fighting sports consider unfair" (Kendi, 2019, p.172). School closures have often been a matter of space, whose quality is measured by white norms, values, and an ideology of meritocracy. As history has demonstrated, school reform, particularly school closure, targets predominantly communities of color and have disproportionately been predicated upon achievement data as measured by standardized test scores (Howard, 2019). Knowing the history of bias and systemic racism associated with standardized testing, schools with a majority population of students of color have often been the targets of educational reform. This is problematic because the value of the school is dominantly based on comparisons of achievement data across race-classes without considering disparities in resources across race-classes and spaces (Howard, 2019; Kendi, 2019). Kendi argued that is unfair to compare

spaces across race-classes because resources define space, which and if not accounted for yield racist diagnoses and remedies (Kendi, 2019). School closures are often decided based on structures established by norms of Whites, with standardized testing serving as the primary catalyst of reasons. A critical race perspective affords me the opportunity to examine school closures as a matter of space in educational reforms for school improvement. Examining space will also allow explore the ideology of meritocracy, an ideology based on the conception that disparities correlate with individual ability and effort rather than raced and classed infrastructures that govern and determine the usefulness of space. Finally, a critical race perspective, will allow to me to assess whether there was a convergence of interest in the decision-making process between the Rocky Mountain community needs, the aims of educational reform effort, and the Silver Oaks School District initiatives (see Figure 1). From a critical race perspective and emphasis on interest convergence, I will seek to understand the ways the dominant narrative (political and school district initiative) converge with family and community needs.

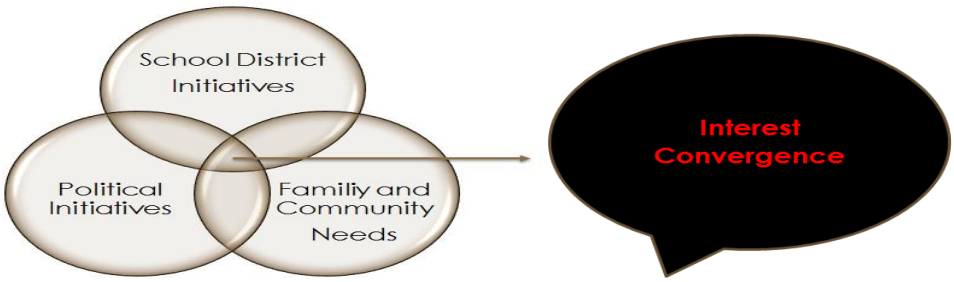

Figure 1. Critical Race Theory Interest Convergence.

Statement of the Problem

Engaging families and community members is a verified approach for supporting school growth. (McAlister, 2013). Across the country, parents and community members have pressed school boards and district leadership for more transparency and broader participation in decisions about school turnaround (Duffy & Gallagher, 2017). The SIG and ESEA waiver guidance make reasonable and useful demands on states and districts to engage families in shaping school turnaround. But those demands are rendered moot when states and districts are held to frantic timelines for implementing rigidly defined models with limited or no input for students, families, and communities of schools in which they serve. According to Backstrom (2019), limited community voice and input often lead to unequitable practice associated with school turnaround efforts. However, unless states and district seriously engage families and communities at large, efforts toward school improvement will continue to be hollow when communities have a limited voice, time, or authority to help shape their neighborhood school or the turnaround effort.

Furthermore, to eradicate historic racial disparities and inequities, ingrained decision-making strategies must be eliminated. Over time, the United States has granted limited power to people and communities of color. America has ignored or silenced a population's voice. An essential element is to identify and dismantle origins that contribute to barriers obstruct true improvement. To do this interest convergence will be used to uncover the decision-making process and resolution.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the decision-making process for the school closure of Rocky Mountain High School, a neighborhood school in an Urban School District in the Rocky Mountain West and the impact it had on the community. My purpose is also to understand how communities can be authentically and systematically engaged in school improvement plans. There is limited research that speaks to community input and how decisions are infused in turnaround efforts or how their voices are considered in the process. Research does suggest that understanding choice and the different options can be a challenge for students and families (Frankenberg, 2016). However, for families and communities to make the most informed decision or express concerns about the turnaround process, states and district must engage with families and allow their thoughts to be a significant part of the process. Subsequently, my research is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do school closures affect the community in which they serve?
    a. To what extent, if at all, did the school closure converge interests between the Rocky Mountain High community and the Silver Oaks School district?
2. How can communities be authentically and systematically engaged in school improvement plans?

Definition of Terms

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the study and transformation of relationship regarding race, racism and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Free and Reduced Lunch a program established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946 that provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children in public and nonprofit private schools and residential childcare institutions (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010).

High achieving students High achieving students are students who meet or exceed the requirements for student performance and achievement based upon the standards set by the Colorado Department of Education

High performing school institutions that meet or exceed the School performance requirements based upon the standards of the School Performance Framework that is set by the Colorado Department of Education

High poverty schools 75% or more of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch program (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006).

Student achieving below grade level do not meet or exceed the requirements for student performance and achievement based upon the standards set by the Colorado Department of Education

Schools performing below minimal state requirements are institutions that do not meet the School performance requirements based upon the standards of the School Performance Framework that is set by the Colorado Department of Education

Traditional Public Schools Traditional "public schools" are establishments that reliably riposte to elected officials and are not permitted to reject admittance to students for reasons unrelated to their educational focus. (Hess, 2004).

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

In this section, I outline the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions for this study. They are listed as follows:

Limitations

The following two limitations are assumed to be true for the purposes of this study.

1. This case study on the closing of Rocky Mountain High School is context-specific and may not be generalizable to other contexts.
2. Although the selected participants have all been impacted by the school closure, their accounts and perspective may not be representative of the community at large.

Delimitations

The following two delimitations are assumed to be true for the purposes of this study:

1. Participants in this study must have either lived in the community, attended or worked at Rocky Mountain High School, or had a child who attended the school at the time of the closing.
2. Participants must have at least one year of affiliation with Rocky Mountain High School during its transition to close the school.

Assumptions

The following two assumptions are assumed to be true for the purposes of this study.

1. The participants will be truthful in their accounts of the school closure.
2. The documents analyzed in this study will contain accurate information about the decision-making process of the closing of Rocky Mountain High School.

Significance of Study

The overview of this study will explore community engagement associated with educational reform, particularly school closure. Often, stakeholders in marginalized communities have been led to believe they have limited influence in decisions affecting the education process. This study will serve as a reminder that every voice matter and the essence of a true democracy gives each person the freedom to participate in public and civic matters that affect them and their neighborhood. The findings in this study will also provide an in-depth evaluation of the turnaround process, particularly school closure. The collected data will highlight how school closures are decided, how and why the decision was reached, and the outcomes of the decision. In addition, the overview of the process will reveal community perceptions of the process. This inquiry will give rise for policy makers and school officials to authentically engage with community members about school reform.

Educational reform has never been an easy task. Policy makers are often tasked with creating a process that require political, educational, and community members to come together as one to solve a complex problem. Nonetheless, all voices should be authentically heard, and provided a clear understanding of a fair and impartial process. The gap in literature highlights a void in community voice related to school closure. Existing literature explores educational reform and whom it primarily affects; however, minimal exploration speaks to the impact associated with power, influence, and the voice of local control. This study will provide insight on how to center community needs and interests in political and district initiatives for more inclusive and sustainable school improvement initiatives.

Chapter Summary

The Constitution of the United States was drafted with the idea of establishing parameters that govern and give equal protection of the law to all citizens of the Union. However, during the era in which the Constitution was drafted and signed into law, Blacks were considered three-fifths of a human and therefore not citizens. This concept was held into place until the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, which granted citizenship to all people born or naturalized in the United States, including Blacks. The background of public perception and policy practice is essential to understanding how public education, engulfed in prejudices and racial tendencies, have changed, but remained the same, throughout the history of the United States. Recognizing those origins reveals a history of policies established to promote equality for all

but is circumvented with all deliberate speed in the name of the neoliberalism, meritocracy, and the law. The most important of these is the law. According to Newlove and Bitz (2018), racial disparities and inequality is not always visible or violent, and the most destructive means lurks and maneuvers through legal and political arenas. Dr. Carol Anderson (2017) emphasized this type of power is more efficient and destructive than a Klansman. The principal component of the law is power, and the origin of power has often eluded minoritized populations and continues to perpetuate inequalities that are still prevalent today. Federal and state laws have not always aligned to promote equality for all citizens.

Historically state laws, particularly southern states, favored state rules that worked against the rights of minoritized populations, thus limiting opportunities in wealth, housing, transportation, and education. However, the passing of the Fourteenth Amendment forever altered the balance of power between the federal and state government. The Fourteenth Amendment gave legal precedence for the Federal government to intervene in matters that were previously held exclusively in state control. The most notable was the landmark case *Brown V. Board of Education,* which mandated states to integrate and provide equal and adequate education to all citizens. Where Brown sought to unite the nation, beginning in 1955, *Brown's* ruling has been legislated numerous times and in various forms, yet the underlying concept still eludes the nation today. Educational segregation dates to colonial times and despite *Brown*, it still persists in some form today.

Whereas legal decisions, such as *Brown*, served to provide equity for all regarding education, inequality of action and procedures are still embedded in educational laws and practices. Beginning with ESEA, incentives and mandates have been established to further promote equity and support of historically marginalized communities, nonetheless, where opportunities exist, these mandates and incentives have been either exploited or misappropriated to serve other means; means that are often decided through local control with minimal input from the communities in which they serve.

Studies involving education reform often explore economic, academic achievement, which communities are more likely to be affected by reform efforts, and the impact that reform measure have on communities. However, minimal research speaks to the voice of the community and their perception of the process. This study will give a history of educational reform measures that led to the school closures while illustrating the history of inequality associated with those reforms. Using the Critical Race Framework, with a focus on interest convergence, this study will explore the decision-making process and how resolutions were achieved in hopes of providing alternative measures that equally support community voice for change. These measures will be explored and highlighted in my review of literature.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a systemic approach of peer-reviewed publications that speak to school closures and the communities in which school closings take place. The information provided is intended to afford the reader a better understanding of previous works, their findings, and what criteria was used to further this project. Additionally, important background information has been included to help analyze administrative and individual mindsets that influence the decision-making process around school closures.

This review begins with how publications were secured, a detail description of the method being utilized, what publications were included, excluded, and why. The next step will be to present results that include a detailed description of results that explains the study and the characterizations of the study, the design of the study, data analysis, and empirical findings from the data collected. In addition, a historical context was undertaken to provide context as to why decisions are typically made to close schools and the pros and cons associated with closings. Furthermore, this process is intended to illuminate a clear understanding of relevance and trustworthiness of this study.

The literature review will focus on three central questions: (a) What are school improvement grants (SIG) and how are they utilized? (b) What are

turnaround models and what are the impacts on school improvement? (c) Why are schools closed and who decides when a school is closed? These major constructs will include a breakdown of sub-constructs that speak more directly to the process around school closures and how it relates to neoliberal educational reforms. This section will be concluded with an executive summary of the finding in the rest of the literature review.

Methodology of Literature Review

In this section, I provide a step-by-step process of how this review was performed. This literature review began with the process of how narrowed the research on school improvement reforms to a manageable size. This is demonstrated by illustrating which search databases were used, how those resources were obtained and what criteria was employed to include or eliminate sources. To begin this process, I established the primary research question that was followed by what parameters would guide which articles and materials be included or excluded for this study. A preliminary screening of article abstracts was conducted in the spirit of adhering to the criteria established for inclusion or exclusion. Finally, an amalgamation of all included material was explained based on the practical usefulness of the material.

Primary Question

To establish a primary question and a trustworthy process, I utilized Khan, Khalid, Kunz, Kleijnen, and Antes (2003) five steps of a systematic review that is primarily used in evidence-based medicine (see Table 1). The systematic review is a significant skill for evidence-informed dogma. The

process intends to bridge research with decision-making.

Although systematic reviews are used prominently in the field of evidence-based medicine, the process can be used in other areas as well, due largely in part because this process is more current and exhaustive than the typical literature review. The basic guidelines first call for the researcher to frame the questions:

1. How has school closure been studied between 2009 and 2019? It should be noted that these years were chosen to align research with the most current data and latest research trends and methods.
2. How many of those articles met the criteria to be used in this project?
3. What are the common themes that should be emphasized?
4. What are the themes that may not be common but are relevant and should be mentioned to further give creditability to this study?
5. Based on these findings what characteristics emerge from the findings?
6. How are the findings regarded on a local, state, and national level?

Table 1

THE FIVE STEPS IN A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW
Step 1. Framing questions for review
Step 2. Identifying relevant work
Step 3. Assessing the quality of studies
Step 4. Summarizing the evidence
Step 5. Interpreting the findings

Source: Khan, K. S., Kunz, R., Kleijnen, J., & Antes, G. (2003). Five steps to conducting a systematic review. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 96*(3), 118-121

Qualitative Synthesis

To secure the most relevant work for this study, I utilized a Qualitative Synthesis approach. (See Figure 2) Qualitative Synthesis requires the researcher to dive into a more complex view of the existing body of work that is specific to a particular construct. This process seeks to place a voice in concert with empirical findings while respecting the essential context and complexity of the given topic. The ultimate findings are often interpreted as bringing a result that provides an outcome that is more than the sum of its parts in that the results go beyond a singular critical component of synthesis. As you will note in Figure 2, 1090 articles were narrowed to 57 articles that were used in this study. This figure is used to illustrate the results the search generated and the process in which articles were included and eliminated. There are four quadrants that represent (1) the screening process: (2) the eligibility after the screening process, (3) the articles that are included and eliminated, and (4) the articles that are actually used for the study. To arrive at the final 57 articles utilized for the study, a through synthesis was employed through eliminating duplicate sources, removal of articles that did not strictly adhere to criteria and information that was outside the scope of interpretation from the framed questions and existing empirical literature.

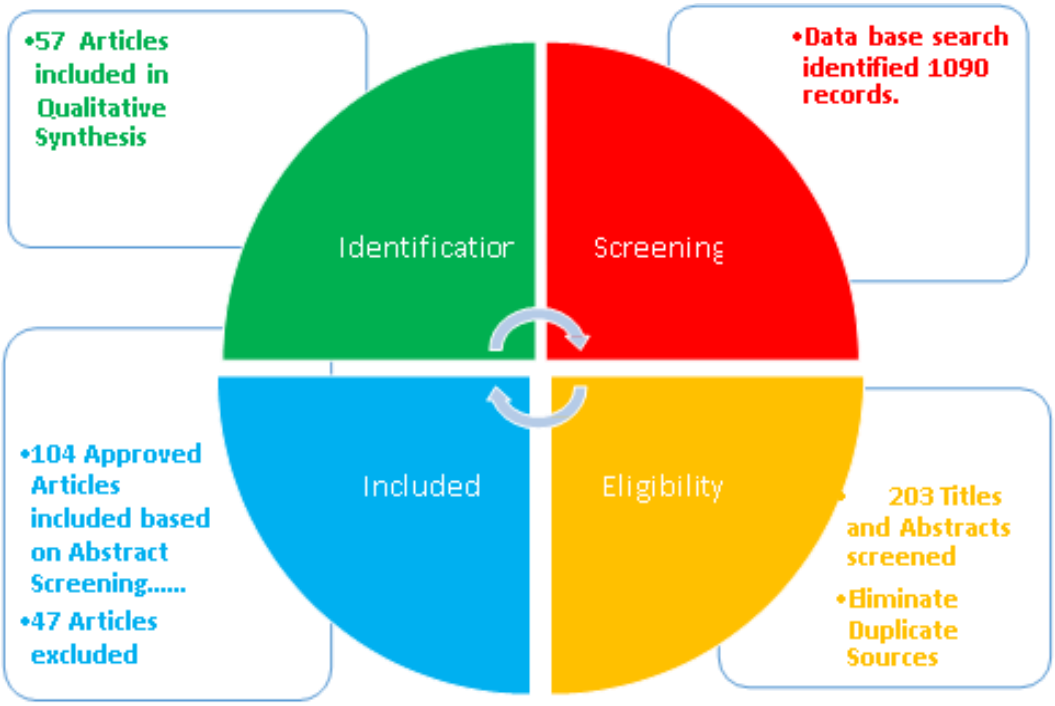

Figure 2. Qualitative Synthesis Approach

Retrieval Procedures

To arrive at my final number of articles to use in this study, I began by searching the Google Scholar data. This search prompted me to retrieve peer review articles through the Educational Resources Institute Clearinghouse (ERIC) database search, Educational Administration, and Education Source using descriptors such as "market based education"; "charter schools"; "school closure"; "neoliberalism"; "public education"; "turnaround schools in urban communities"; "school boards and turnaround schools"; 'parents, students, student achievement and urban secondary school closure"; "neoliberalism in public school education"; "turnaround schools"; "school closing"; "pros and cons of school closure"; "community response to school closings"; and "how students and communities are affected by school closing." These searches were executed disjointedly and in several

assemblages with a focus on secondary educational levels. As noted, the criteria used indicated that all material must have been peer reviewed with a period beginning from ERIC's database of 2009 and ending in present time (2019). Information cited outside of this time frame is solely used to give a historical context perspective and not empirical credence toward the study.

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion of Sources

This search was executed on various and random occasions through Google Scholar and the ERIC database over the time frame over twenty-four months. For articles to be included, they must first meet the criteria of being peer-reviewed and published between January of 2009 and December of 2019. To further be included, the sources must pertain specifically to turnaround school closure in urban public education and the aftereffects related to school closure. The repeated nature of the inquiry was primarily to check for any add-ons to the body of literature and to see if the add-on brought forth new findings that may be relevant to this study. Frequently inquiries also sought to solidify a definition for the term school closure as it relates educational reform and school turnaround.

As previously indicated in Figure 1, the initial search yielded 1,090 potential sources for this study. It should be reported that for this study, though limited within a 10-year time frame, the body of literature was wide-ranging and diverse. Literature would be excluded if the information did not specifically include information about

turnaround schools, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), School Improvement Grants (SIG), No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and what was known or not readily known about school closures. After this initial elimination process, articles were narrowed further if a more in-depth review of the literature suggested the article spoke to other reasons not related to school closures.

Two hundred and three (203) article abstracts were screened based on the selection criteria. This total was arrived after all duplicate articles were removed. Of the 203 articles, 71 were eliminated in the abstract screening as a result of not fully meeting the criteria set forth in choosing sources for this study as relating to the major constructs of the study. Another 38 articles were excluded during a full text review because they did not fully meet the criteria established for full text review or suggested findings not directly correlating with turnaround models and school closure. The final 39 articles were excluded because data cited within the article was earlier than the January 2009 date submitted. These articles were not eliminated until other articles in the review demonstrated similar finding from a more current source. After all eliminations were complete, 57 sources remained to be used in this study.

While articles were the primary components of this study, the initial search produced pertinent information in the form of books, unpublished papers, dissertations, and governmental documents. It should also be noted that an absorbent amount of works provided information that spoke to consolidation, student achievement, and power and influence in relations to the social and political outcomes associated with school turnaround. For the articles that were used for this study, information gathered was obtained from, but not limited to, peer reviewed

articles and resources, such as the *Harvard Educational Review*, *Phi Delta Kappan, Journal of Urban Affairs, Journal of Education, Critical Studies in Education, The Peabody Journal of Education, and Education and Urban Society.* The citations and abstracts of the reviewed 203 articles and other sources were chronicled on a spreadsheet on my personal computer. The logging of these articles was initially grouped according to the outline of the study then later logged in chronological order for the purposes of publication. Many articles fell outside the required time frame, but all were used solely for historical context. As a result, only 57 of 203 (28%) of the initial documents was considered for this study.

Critical Review of Literature

As noted from the criteria selection process, diverse studies have been conducted that illustrate the frequency of school closures but give limited rational as to the preliminary purpose to close a school. Still today, inquiries ascend as to the fundamental motive why districts close school doors. More importantly, why do districts close specific schools? The history of educational reforms suggests the manifestation to have first-rate institutes in all neighborhoods and exceptional instruction relates to why schools close. Furthermore, these beliefs and practices that have risen are what researchers contribute as one major component that has catapulted school turnaround into a significant issue in political debates (Johnson, 2013).

Two basic ideas emerge throughout this research as to the reason school districts nationwide specify as to why a school is closed. The first and most notable proposal submits that the school in question is a low performing school (de la Torre & Gwynne, 2009). A more in depth look resonates that low performing would suggest low academic performance, but in at least three studies, low performance included reasons that include but are not limited to: low student attendance or decline, low teacher retention, and high behavioral matters (Dutton, 2015; Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2015; & Medina, 2015).

A second reason that emerges centers upon low student attendance or a decline in student enrollment (Engberg, Gill, Zamarro, & Zimmer, 2012). As a result, it has been suggested that a building that once was filled with students is now being underutilized due to low enrollment. The expenditures that relate to the daily functions of running the day-to-day operations of maintaining a school far outweigh the probative value of how many students attend. In short, closing the school would suggest economic prudence on the district's behalf. Deteriorating admissions and weakening capital led to fewer funds for building and construction maintenance. Underutilized buildings in underprivileged (often perceived hazardous) locations (Burdick-Will, Keels, & Schuble, 2013), district leadership contend that closures are the palpable and unavoidable interventions (Engberg et al., 2012).

These two reasons were enough to allow school districts, entrepreneurial entities, and political economic extremists to enter the conversation as to how to restructure schools (Jack & Sludden, 2013). An early advocate for restructuring schools was an entrepreneur named Milton Friedman.

Milton Friedman -- The Role of Government in Education

School choice took a dramatic turn after the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. A well-known advocate toward suggesting school choice immediately following *Brown* was, Milton Friedman. Friedman, an educator at heart, but was best known as one of the Twentieth Century's leading economist and regarded by some as the father of the educational reform movement (Cord & Hammond, 2016).

Strauss (2018) noted that the Friedman's interest in refining American learning, began in 1955, shortly after the ruling in *Brown V Board*. Strauss (2018) further alleges that Friedman's ideas, which categorically align with conservative political viewpoints, were a result of his disdain for the Federal Government. According to Strauss (2018) the programs established by the Federal Government, i.e. the Food and Drug Administration, Social Security, and school busing, which were categorically aligned with conservative political viewpoints.

According to Friedman (1982), the America educational system and the current school model has failed our children. Friedman asserts that public schools failed because of governmental overreach and his belief that the government has no formal standing to intervene in education even if funded through public taxes (Ruger, 2011). Because of his conviction, Friedman proposed alternative methods of restoring the public's faith in American education. To ensure this quality education, Friedman believed three basic principles must be present: (1) freedom, (2) accountability, and (3) choice (Gorski, 2013). Friedman has been credited as establishing the birth of neoliberalism in education (Gorski, 2013).

Friedman's most prominent method centered upon parental choice and schools competing for students to improve the educational system while not forcing parents to send their children to low performing schools. Friedman asserts in his book, *Free to Choose,* that governmental interference stagnates or promotes mediocrity that ultimately diminishes the character of American education (Shleifer, 2009).

Friedman (1955) suggested that a system of competition through innovation would change and improve the character of American Education. Under the current model, Friedman (1955) believed schools held a monopoly that needed to be broken to give the students and family (customers) alternatives. To break the American education model, Friedman suggested the American education system adopt a competitive school model that he created from a Swedish design that promoted competition among schools. Friedman's argument furthered claimed competition was not only better for student achievement but also better for the overall economy.

Even though Friedman (1955) believed governmental interactions regarding educational matters should be limited, he did subscribe to the belief that the overall economy would be better served and justified by the "neighborhood effects" that public education provided. Friedman (1955) explained "neighborhood effect" as an adequate education held by all that not only is beneficial to the person but to the neighborhood and the greater society.

Friedman believed education makes all people better citizens and when education is achieved, society is best served, especially when all adhere to and accept a common set of norms and beliefs to sustain a cohesive and acceptable way of living.

Furthermore, Friedman emphasized that the "neighborhood effect" was necessary because it gives government a role to intervene in education as a means of normalizing society while making it feasible to offer the mutual ideals needed for societal constancy (Hammond, 2013). To establish protocols to implement his idea, Friedman and his wife Rose established the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation with the solitary resolve of encouraging parental choice as it relates to education (Hammond, 2013). There hope was to limit governmental overreach and all the negative aspects that flow from it (Ruger, 2011).

Friedman's fundamental concept of educational choice and the role government should be involved in choice was framed in a statement taken from his 1955 article, the *Role of Government in Education*. According to Weissberg (2009), Friedman states the departure of a youth from a guardian who has trouble paying for their schooling is undoubtedly shifting with the American dependence on a family's right to choose the educational path of their children. Friedman (1955) further suggested that children should receive a specific minimum education that is subsidized by the parent and only supported by the government in exceptional circumstances (Ruger, 2011).

Friedman furthered argued that school choice was good due to increasing completion and possible academic merit, while granting students access to better educators that could also help reduce segregation (Gotham, 2012). Throughout Friedman's research and presentations, he maintained that school choice was the best way to improve parental control over their children's schooling, which in the long run, benefits society at large (Weissberg, 2009).

Although Friedman may not have been the designer of the idea of educational autonomy, his legacy has proven to be one of the longest and most powerful (Gotham, 2012). Friedman's primary argument promoted neoliberalism in education and suggests that every child must be provided unabated access to a quality education (Gorski, 2013). However, this reality is seldom realized (Gorski, 2013). The fundamental argument Friedman posed in the mid 60's, led to today's educational structure (neoliberalism) beginning with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The concepts Friedman established began shortly after the ruling in Brown and has continued through each Presidential administration that ultimately led to the Obama Administration's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which is the guiding School Turnaround Act of today.

Education Reform

Educational reforms are fundamentally political in derivation (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).The Office of the President, the United States Secretary of Education, Congress and state Governors drive educational matters today (Ladd, 2011). Over the last 7 decades, whereas Milton Friedman sought ways to diminish the government role in public education, Presidential administrations, beginning with Lyndon B. Johnson, established legislation to increase government involvement in reforming public education (Ladd, 2011). This was established in part through providing funds toward professional development, resources to support classroom instruction, and programs to increase parental involvement or recommending the government should have a limited role in State decisions. Each Presidential agenda has led in some way to the measures that are utilized today.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (1965 – 2000)

On January 8, 1964 in his State of the Union address, Lyndon B. Johnson introduced a proposal to mitigate, at the time, the nation's 19% poverty rate, To give context to this number it should be noted since 1965, the national poverty rate has reached 15.1% twice: once in 1983 and again in 2010 during the national recession. (Trisi, Sherman, & Broaddus, 2011).

Moreover, since 1965, only once has the national poverty rate surpassed 15.1%: in 1983 when the poverty rate reached 15.2% (Trisi, Sherman, & Broaddus, 2011). In 1965, the poverty rate was nearly 4% higher than the poverty rate during the national recession of 2010. President Johnson realized that education was the "great equalizer" when it came to helping elevate citizens from poverty. Working from that premise, President Johnson and his cabinet established policies that they believed would combat inequality, vulnerability, and risk for citizens living at or below the poverty level (Smith 2017). As a result, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 would become an essential component to President Johnson's "War on Poverty".

President Johnson believed the government was responsible for the betterment of all citizens and against heavy political opposition rejected proposals like that of Milton Friedman. Friedman and many citizens that rejected the ruling in Brown

suggested that educational practices that was once funded by the local, state, and federal government, should no longer be funded by public dollars, but should move toward being privately funded. President realized that more than 40% of the nation was living in poverty and nearly 80% of the poverty level citizens were people of color.

Instead, President Johnson created programs to address housing needs, community risks, and equality of education for families living in extreme poverty (Paul, 2017). Johnson messaged to Congress in 1965, a progressive goal for the "Full Educational Opportunity" where his administration focused on increasing the funding eligibility for public schools based upon the number of disadvantaged students enrolled. This funding program would be named Title I.

Johnson believed the distribution of Title I funds would allow more students, particularly historically underserved students, the opportunity at a chance for success in hopes of improving their lives (Smith, 2017). Although Johnson believed that Federal assistance did not constitute federal control, he did subscribe to the idea that the federal government was obligated to oversee the use of federal funds provided to local school districts in hopes of providing equity for all students (Smith, 2017). This was the beginning of substantial governmental involvement with local school matters. As a result, Presidential administrations following Johnson's are obligated to review and reauthorize ESEA every six years. Since inception, each President has complied with reauthorization, but at a distance. However, the trajectory of support dramatically changes with No Child Left Behind under the 43rd president, George W. Bush.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001 - 2015)

In 2001, President George W. Bush proposed and won support in Congress to pass the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The policy mandated that schools cultivate and implement more ridged strategies they trusted would successfully address achievement gaps and student proficiency (Dutton, 2015). The Bush Administration recommended policies to align schoolchildren across the country to a common governing measurement.

NCLB was introduced at a time where educational funding was becoming more and more of a need for states and local school districts. Due to the decrease in funding and schools searching far and wide to fill the gap in budget shortfalls, many schools, particularly urban and rural schools, jumped at the opportunity provided by NCLB and accepted the stipulations that were attached (Casalaspi, 2017). Conversely, the funding that was promised came slowly, and in many cases, never arrived. However, the mandates were still enforced (Ladd, 2011).

NCLB established state systems of support for schools identified for improvement. The basic premise of NCLB was assumed to help advance the academic performance of underprivileged students and students of color, chiefly pupils who attended urban school districts (Dutton, 2015). Standardized testing, school accountability, and focus on teacher qualification was becoming the norm, and many schools were not faring well. Ravitch (2016) believes that NCLB opened the door for school turnaround under the Obama administration.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) 2015 -- Present

The Obama administration embraced educational ideas set forth in President George H.W. Bush's America 2000 platform and George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind educational initiative. President Obama believed that education was vital to the success and pace of American productivity around the globe. In his 2008 presidential campaign he repeatedly touted that "a nation that out educates us today will out-perform us tomorrow" Mcguinn (2012). Then CEO of Chicago Public Schools and a champion for the promotion of Charter Schools, Arne Duncan, who shared the same educational vision of the President, was selected to serve as The United States Secretary of Education. Once in the position of The United States Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan embraced market-based practices in hopes of increasing accountability and rigor through improved standards, teaching, and schools (Hess & McShane, 2018). Secretary Duncan established strategies and protocols to achieve these goals through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) was designed as an economic stimulus package for educational reform (Selinger, 2011). Under ARRA, Race to the Top, which outlined the School Improvement Grant Fund (SIG), reallocated funds to reward states that demonstrated success in improving student performance in identified Tier I and Tier II schools. The policies of ARRA restructured existing programs to address four core areas: 1) more rigorous standards, 2) developing and supporting teachers and leaders, 3) data driven instruction, and 4) turn around the lowest- performing schools (United States Department of Education, 2015). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, through Race to the Top

and School Improvement Grants, empowered states to accelerate the pace for learning while incentivizing and rewarding states that increased student achievement. (Hess & McShane, 2018).

School Improvement Grant (SIG)

It should be noted that a considerable number of the turnaround approaches that are part of the four School Improvement Grant intervention models occurred prior to its introduction through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (Dutton, 2015). The turnaround concept initially appeared in an educational setting in the 1990's (Dutton, 2015) and was defined as an immediate process to close the academic achievement gap for obstinately low performing schools (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008). Moreover, school improvement policies are largely grounded in market-based ideas (Trujillo & Renee, 2012).

Whereas under President Bush mandates were the primary tool utilized to promote educational reform, the Obama administration utilized incentives as a means of promoting change. The Obama Administration examined many of the existing strategies and set out to dodge the perceived inadequacies of the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind educational initiative (McGuinn, 2012). Instead of forcing states to implement rigorous programs, The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) set out to utilize a competitive grant process for school districts to promote changes to be implemented (Selinger, 2011). The Obama administration established clear and specific guidelines under Race to the Top through School Improvement Grant guidelines (Dutton, 2015).

School Improvement Grants (SIG) are one of the largest investments in public education by the federal government that addresses matters associated with low performing schools (McGuinn, 2012). Manna and Ryan (2011) suggested the Secretary of Education under the Obama Administration, Arne Duncan, increased funding measures associated with SIG to help educational entities execute practices they believed would improve student outcomes of low-income students and students of color. According to Dutton (2015), the immense mainstream of habitually low-performing schools (Tier I and Tier II), predominantly consisted of children of color and children from low-income families in urban settings. Data taken from the Department of Education (2015) illustrated that Black and Latinx students made up less than 40 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary students. However, Black and Hispanic students made up nearly 75 percent of students enrolled in Tier I and Tier II schools.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) illustrated a pattern across time how educational reform has promoted and dictated suggestions to improve school quality. According to Highsmith and Erickson (2015) the restructuring of public educational policies are more centered on free market practices, particularly in communities of color in urban areas (Baum 2010; Highsmith and Erickson 2015).

It can be argued that past and current educational policy structures have constantly had an incongruent effect on communities that serve low-income and students of color. Logan et al. (2012) believed that school turnaround models perpetuate this practice. Ravitch (2010) along with Coleman (2009) supports the belief of Logan et al. (2012) in arguing that school turnaround; particularly school closings

have become a complicated matter that undermines American educational reform efforts. Coleman (2009) and Ravitch (2010) argue that educational policies present a plan of action that speaks of helping disadvantaged students, but the very polices that seek to help, hurts students in the form of racial and economic bias.

Data supports Ravitch's (2010) and Coleman's (2009) belief that school closures are typically located in neighborhoods that have a higher percentage of minority students and of low income (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin 2009). According to Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobb (2016), numerous studies have yielded results that indicate diverse educational learning environments are beneficial for all students. Wells et al. (2016) further believe diverse learning environments help to improve critical thinking and problem-solving skills. According to the *Equality of Educational Opportunity* report, Black and Latinx students display lower academic success and accomplishment when they attend schools with a higher percentage of minority students (Borman & Dowling, 2010). Of the approximately 5000 SIG awarded schools, more than 90 percent are majority minority schools with 83% or higher free and reduced lunch eligible students (United States Department of Education, 2015). Wells et al. (2016) states that at present, school turnaround is concentrated in schools that primarily enroll Black and Hispanic students. Logan et al. (2012) believe the separation of races, associated with school reform practices, directly correlates with the educational achievement gap.

Clotfelter (2004) and Minow (2010) further stipulate that educational policies that close schools and most students from their neighborhood school is remarkably like busing in the 1970s. According to Coleman (2009), race is the focus of numerous

discussions around closing schools, whether spoken or unspoken, and is complex, chaotic, and erratic at best. However, to revitalize the American educational system and provide better opportunities for minority and low-income students, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, suggested that turnaround options should be the foremost choice for low performing schools (Dutton, 2015).

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) defines Tier I and Tier II schools as Title I schools who currently low performing and are in need of improvement. To access School Improvement Grants, states must submit an application identifying as a Tier I and Tier II school, and if awarded, must agree to implement one of four turnaround school intervention models for the identified schools (Dragoset, Thomas, Herrman, & Deke, 2017). The four school turnaround models to be chosen from are (1) Turnaround, (2) Transformation, (3) Restart, and (4) School Closure. (See Figure 3) Lachlan-Hache, Naik, and Casserly (2012) outline the stipulations that schools must adhere to when adoption one of the four models for identified Tier I and Tier II schools:

1. ***Turnaround Model****: At least fifty percent of the staff must be replaced, and the principal must be replaced;*
2. ***Transformation Model****: The principal must be replaced under this model. No other staff must be replaced.*
3. ***Restart Model****: A rigorous process must be established to select an outside entity and transfer control other to that entity. This can also be considered a closing and reopening of a school under new administration.*

4. ***Closure Model****: Local Educational Agencies (LEA) closes the low-performing school and have students apply and move to higher performing schools.*

As previously, indicated by Dragoset et al. (2017), Tier I and Tier II school recipients of School Improvement Grants were mandated to implement measures from one of the turnaround models. Furthermore, it was left up to the school district to select which model would be implemented (Lachlan-Hache et al., 2012).

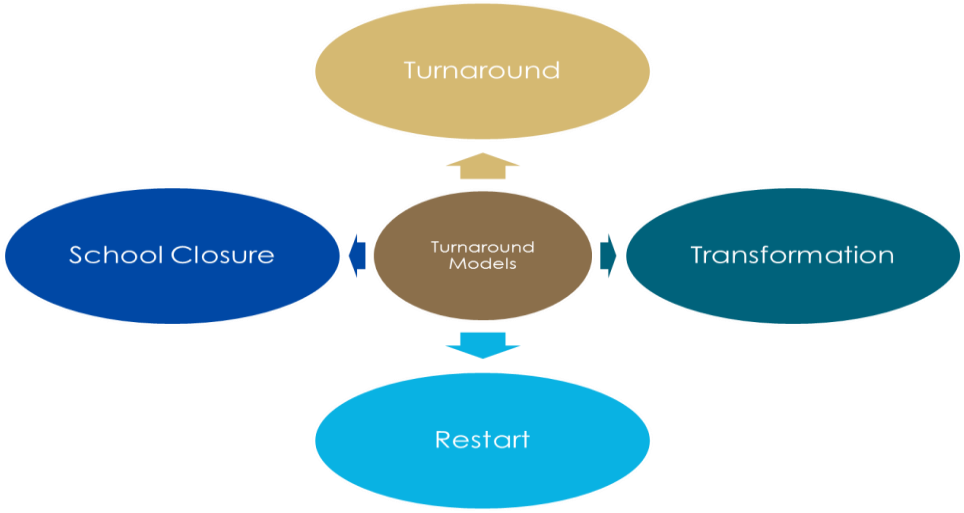

Figure 3. Four School Turnaround Model.

The intervention model most utilized by SIG recipients is the transformation model. According to the Department of Education (2015), the transformational model was used by 74 percent of SIG awarded schools countrywide. At a distant second, data taken from the United States Department of Education (2015) indicated the turnaround model was used in 36 percent of SIG schools. Although more schools utilized the transformational model, data taken from the United States

Department of Education (2015) indicated that the turnaround model achieved the most academic gains, specifically in Math from grades 6 through 12 (Trujillo & Renee, 2015). Dee (2012) suggested a probable reason for one model outperforming another resulted from consistency of implementation of the methods being utilized from a model and how stringent the requirements were of a a model. Of the remaining two models, the restart model was used in only 4 percent of SIG-awarded schools countrywide, while the closure model was implemented by only 2 percent of SIG awarded schools (United States Department of Education, 2015). Although closure model is the least identified model, it illustrates the greatest impact on not just students but entire communities (Horsford & McKenzie, 2008).

Despite data illustrating the turnaround model as the most effective in increasing student achievement, the transformational model was used most by SIG awarded schools countrywide. Trujillo & Renee (2012) asserts the transformational model may have significantly been utilized more than other models due to an increased focus on testing more than on teaching or student learning. Where stricter, the turnaround model provided firmer guidelines to support possible immediate changes. Many districts selected the model to best serve the need to "turnaround" student achievement as quickly and seamlessly as possible by any means necessary (Dee, 2012).

By definition, "turnaround" in this setting, is defined as an immediate intense improvement in performance (Bowers, C., 2010). It should be noted, researchers have not agreed upon a clear definition of an effective successful turnaround, no matter what model is being utilized (Trujillo & Renee, 2015). For

example, based primarily on standardized test scores, multiple researchers, including Herman (2012) suggested market-based principals improved student achievement. Additionally, Barlow (2012) and Stuit (2012) produced findings touting how turnaround models that utilized market-based principles, i.e. freedom of school selection; vouchers, innovation, and competition, systematically improved student achievement, specifically in Math and Reading. Each author spoke to how certain models allowed specific students to achieve substantial academic gains on over a brief period based upon the model being used and the implementation of the strategies accompanying the model. Again, these gains were primarily focused on standardized test measurements and strategies implemented within a specific model.

In contrast, A. Bowers (2010) cited that convenience sampling and a lack of systemic approach were limitations of these studies. One limitation cited, emphasized that success reported in turnaround schools were largely based upon small skewed samples consisting of one year or measurement in which gains were minimal at best (Dee, 2012). In addition, Trujillo and Renee (2015) found that studies were not represented of the nation's population and primarily consisted of a snapshot of evidence versus a thorough evaluation of empirical data.

Trujillo and Renee (2015) advanced their critique in the form of questioning the rubrics used to determine success and growth. Trujillo and Renee (2015) points out that no common standard was used to measure the range of growth, the amount of time measured against growth, and sustainability. Measurements that would possibly yield contextual and empirical data that could be replicated for future

study. Furthermore, Stuit (2012) rejected this idea on the basis that other factors may or may not have contributed to student growth and achievement are not considered.

In contrast to the success of student achievement, Dutton (2015)) reports in some cases, SIG awarded schools demonstrated a decline in test scores over a period of three years. Trujillo and Renee (2015) further supported the belief that standardized tests are a very narrow scope to measure student success. Orr and Rogers (2011) asserted that true measure of success must include the democratic purposes of education that speak more in depth to civic engagement and values combined with skill and knowledge. Instead of test measurement, Carter and Welner (2013) focused on larger socio-political contexts that affected students and communities as it relates to turnaround efforts, particularly school closures.

School Closures

Carter and Welner (2013) believe there is more to student success beyond standardized tests. Yet, in many cases, schools have been closed due to low test scores alone. There are numerous studies conducted on Turnaround, Transformational, and Restart models, however, very few studies have been produced on School Closures (Trujillo & Renee, 2015). The few reports that have been generated, promotes a positive light on the closure process while discounting the minimal appearance of student and community voice on the effects of school closures (Welner & Mathis, 2016). Furthermore, Orr and Rogers (2011) suggested in many instances, the powerful social and political influence associated with deciding to close a neighborhood school is overwhelming to the neighborhoods in which schools are being closed. In some

cases, the powerful and social political influence are promoting district portfolio school models.

School district who are identified as a portfolio model, are often found to offer a variety of school models for students, i.e. Montessori, Charter Schools, and Innovative Schools. Furthermore, portfolio districts are more often decentralized from district control and are heavily regulated at the building level. Mathis and Welner (2016) suggests that portfolio districts, including New Orleans, Philadelphia, Chicago, Nashville, and Denver create an environment where choice is shifted from district superintendents and central administration and places it in the hands of a complex turnaround structure. Mathis and Welner (2018) furthers warned that the portfolio district model in conjunction with the four primary reform strategies utilized are a false promise that is absent community voice and is ultimately driven by societal inequities, including structural racism.

Moreover, A. Bowers (2010) proclaimed closing schools most often negatively affects the morale of a community. Coleman (2009) asserted that a school closure displaces not only students but also community members who work in or with the school. Diane Ravitch (2010) suggested neighborhood schools are time and again, the pillars of their communities, with a sound presence that strengthens and connects neighborhoods. According to A. Bowers (2010) when a neighborhood school is closed, students and community members felt a loss of culture and pride that may have been established through their neighborhood schools over decades.
Mathis and Welner (2018) concluded where best practices may elevate some educational gaps, evidence supports the turnaround approach, particularly school

closure, does little to mitigate the bulk of the underlying issues associated with low performing schools.

In contrast, Medina (2015) believe school closures allow students and communities greater educational opportunities and experiences that may yield positive outcomes associated with their closure. One major benefit of closing a school, is that it reduces financial burdens on districts (Baroody, 2011). School closures are reported to reduce the overhead costs of low performing schools (Baroody, 2011). Other than academic concerns, the operating costs associated with, food, athletics, heat, water, and electricity is greatly diminished once a school is closed. Students may also be afforded the opportunity to attend higher performing schools with more educational opportunities to choose from (Knudson, Shambaugh, & O'Day, 2011). The assumption is that students would be afforded more dedicated teachers where attendance, student achievement, and graduation rates will improve, while behavior and drop-out rates will diminish (Baroody, 2011).

Furthermore, in line with federal obligations, school districts would be considered relieved of duty to allocate organizational and instructional resources to a failing school. The resources would be freed up to allocate to other higher performing schools and programs (Medina, 2015). In summary, school closures can yield significant financial savings for school districts as well as create a warm and inclusive environment where a greater educational experience is present for previously underserved and underprivileged students. Knudson et al. (2011) suggested that school turnaround also affords low performing schools better

opportunities by hiring stronger leaders that focus on improving school culture and climate in conjunction with the implementation of data best practices that lead to an overall improved culture of high expectations.

Although Siegel-Hawley, Bridges, and Shields (2017) believe the opportunities presented as advantages of school closure have some merit, they argued that what is more often the case is that such reassignment subsequently leaves displaced students in a worse environment that is even more academically strained and racially segregated. Stuit (2012) asserted that school closure does nothing to address other factors that may or may not have contributed to student growth and achievement but continue a perpetual cycle of inequality and disarray within communities (Dutton, 2015). As national school turnaround efforts in Chicago, New York, and New Orleans have been reported as a success, the portfolio model in Colorado is still working to improve aspects of the turnaround effort, including involving community input.

What Do We Know About School Closures?

In a study of school closures, between the years of 2006 and 2013, more than 1,200 American traditional public schools were closed. (Green, Sanchez, & Castro, 2019). Reasons behind school closure include low academic performance, high behavioral concerns, and high teacher turnover. According to Howard (2019), these are characteristics often associated with a high population of minoritized students that often demonstrate low performance on standardized test. Howard (2019) would assert as Deeds and Pattillo (2015) did that most closures across the nation predominantly affect minoritized populations. To further emphasize the trend, the Center for Research

on Education Outcomes (2017) disclosed schools that enroll a substantial number of students of color are more likely to be closed regardless of the impact (Macmillen & Pinch, 2018)).

What we know about the turnaround process is that it is largely under local control, which gives a vast amount of autonomy to local education agencies and school district. Stovall (2016) suggested this is the perfect platform for neoliberal policies to develop. Policies can be infused into ideologies and beliefs as a self-serving method to an end (Hilty, 2018). This is highlighted in the first measure of deciding to close a school: standardized test. For nearly two decades, a heightened awareness on standardized testing has placed an emphasis on educational policies and practices. However, in recent years, low academic achievement, (another name for results on standardized test) has become the leading reason to consider school closure. Since Milton Friedman's brief in 1955, policy makers and reformers alike, have targeted standardized tests as a benchmark worthy of school success or to close a school.

Dominant Narrative

According to Pew Charitable Trusts (Trujillo & Renee, 2012), school closures are viewed as good governance and beneficial to students and community. According to Ali (2019) after school closings, students in certain Ohio schools recorded significant gains in academics, Ali (2019) also indicated post-Katrina, New Orleans schools demonstrated higher graduation rates. However, during that same period Milwaukee, Chicago, and Michigan, achievement scores dropped significantly (Ali, 2019). What we have learned from the process is that depending on the school district, city, and state, academic gains vary significantly. The Center for Research on

Education Outcomes (CREDO) conducted one of the leading studies to date on school closures and determined school closures based on test scores do not support student learning (Gaertner & Kirshner, 2017). However, it does disproportionally and significantly affect minoritized populations.

In a similar study conducted by the Education Research Alliance (Forster, 2019), data revealed students who are not fortunate enough to move to a higher performing school tend to perform similar or worse than in the school that closed. In conjunction with CREDO, Green et al., (2019), based on a study of more than 200 school closings in Michigan, reports students who were displaced from a low performing school, experienced modest gains in academic achievement when attending a higher performing school, but often demonstrated other forms of decline. As noted, the primary debate around closing schools often concentrates on academic achievement, however, public discourse tends to involve other factors, such as institutional mourning.

A Community Counter-Narrative

Eve Ewing (2018), in her book *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and Closings on Chicago's South Side*, defines institutional mourning as a very emotional loss and detachment as a person would mourn the loss of a loved one. Ewing (2018) pointed out that neighborhood schools are often the galvanizing pillar within a community filled with memories, activities and future dreams. Ewing (2018) points out that once a school closure has been announced and voted to close; students, parents, and teachers often view the message as an inalterable forfeiture in so much that the lives, legacies and community identity dies when the school closes.

In addition, when a school is being closed, during the time of phasing out, students and families are burdened with the questions of where will they be enrolled next school tern, how far will it be to their home, will the school be as accepting as my previous one, who in the new school can I trust. The loss of a neighborhood school forces students and families to prepare for the unknown that generates often creates less focus on academics and more on spatial boundaries (Hilty, 2018). Even though a new school may be a short distance away, the school culture and connections may be miles apart (Tieken & Auldridge-Reveles, 2019). Ewing (2018), Hilty (2018) and CREDO's report gives significant insight around school closure.

CREDO illustrates school closures do not support student achievement, but it profoundly and negatively affects communities. Ewing and Hilty illustrates other mitigating factors that questions the validity of the process and the uncertainty of the transition process. Based upon CREDO, Hilty (2018), and Ewing's (2018) findings, Grant (2015) suggests a major disconnect between policy and decision makers and the school community.

Neoliberal governance focuses heavily on numbers to establish policy (Rose, 1991). Lingard (2013) explains this type of governance is often used as ammunition to legitimize a policy for political means that seeks to serve an explicit objective. To create an unbalanced approach, Lingard (2013) suggests utilizing a data partnership. Lingard (2013) asserts to expose the unforeseen function of power and interests, research should be conducted in a manner that combines empirical based research with interpretive research, framed by some version of critical theory. Lingard (2013) and Ravitch (2015) both agree there is more to student

achievement than standardize tests. Therefore, the question remains why school closures are still occurring so frequently.

Ewing (2018) outlined that closing of schools is often out of sight and ear shot of the people within the neighborhood. Furthermore, according to Linda McNeil, school closing shutters a neighborhood, and shuttered neighborhoods open the doors for business ventures in an educational market (Hilty, 2018). McNeil suggests the closing of a school allows venture capitalist, real estate developers, and corporate charter chains an opportunity to seize property at a lower cost to open and education market and gentrify neighborhoods (Hilty, 2018). McNeil suggest many school closures are steeped in politics with an end game of making more money for the privileged (Hilty, 2018).

Because state's have independent authority of setting up and executing education policies and procedures, there is no universal method that addresses these concerns. Even if a universal playbook was available, Ewing (2018) believes school reform would still be severely flaws due to the process being saturated in racism. Invoking test scores, facilities issues and underutilized building space is a smoke screen of school reform. Ewing (2018) asserts this ideology on the premise local educational agencies that invoke the necessary issues to close a school are the same individuals with the power to solve the problem.

We know from the reporting of CREDO and other diverse studies, that standardized testing does not improve because of school closure. We also know school closure poses significantly negative impact on a community (McNeil, 2018). Additionally, the history of educational reform in the wake of Brown, ESEA, NCLB,

and ARRA illustrates policies are established in a voice to support minoritized communities, but often void of the realization that raced, classed, and gendered experiences are predictors of academic struggle and obstacles (Noguera, 2008). No matter the struggle, limited research exists on how or when the voice and needs of the community converge with the plans of the privileged.

Chapter Summary

For nearly twenty years, an increasing amount of focus regarding school success has been viewed in a singular, neoliberal point of view (Ravitch, 2016). Individuals who support neoliberalism and the market model envision schools as archaic bureaucratic institutions, rooted in times of old that are destined for continued failure. From this belief, neoliberalism was birthed to improve the American educational structure by means of freedom of choice and decentralized oversite. Reckhow (2013) pointed out that market-based accountability systems yield exciting potential because it provides tangible accountability systems that are measurable for student success and teacher accountability. Schools are given more tools and resources to drive success by specific benchmark projections and palpable numbers that come with them. Market-based practices provide parents and local communities, particularly communities of color, speeches and reports to illustrate how beneficial school turnaround is good for their child and community. Further, researchers like Dewitt and Moccia (2011) and Superville (2017) assert that students displaced from closure more often than not fare no better academically than before the school closed. Some reports include advanced student achievement, improved graduation rates, safer schools, and better teachers (Repercussions, 2010).

Opponents of school closures as a reform strategy argue that present day education policy heavily focused on neoliberalism and meritocratic practices do not take into account the systemic marginalization of the less fortunate in the United States. Opponents of school closures as a reform model like Diane Ravitch (2015) have argued that school closures are not focused on the success of the overall child but on the progress of standardized testing in specific subject areas. To further support this argument, in a paper by Lieberth (2016), Diane Ravitch is quoted as saying "Sometimes, the most brilliant and intelligent minds do not shine in standardized tests because they do not have standardized minds." Nevertheless, policy makers continually emphasize the importance of standardized tests as the primary source of measurement for future success. Further, market-based policies unapologetically label schools as either "winners" or "losers," where the latter is presented with major changes that immediately upset the culture and climate of a school and its community (Minow, 2010). This is exacerbated when the changes come in the form of questionable government intercessions and market-logistics that disproportionately harm disadvantaged students and communities. Many communities have demonstrated and articulated outrage and confusion around school closures.

One pronounced reason is the disproportionate rate and effect of the closures on certain communities. According to research conducted by Ewing (2013), approximately 80% of school closure affect students of color. Ewing (2013) further suggested that school administration often states school closures are not based on race but because of academic failure or that schools are often underutilized and

insufficiently resourced. However, the lack of communication, misinformation, and broken promises surrounding school closures often cause community skirmishes that tear apart a previously connected community. Ultimately, the disagreement between proponents and opponents of school closures as a reform strategy is the characterization of what is an effective school and the role the United States government has played in the systematic marginalization of communities of color (Jargowsky, 2013). The two sides share one common theme: wanting better schools. However, how to achieve this remains an ardent debate of two vastly different visions.

Regardless of one's stance on school closures as a turnaround strategy, no argument or decision should be made without including community voice. Among all the robust conversation about various reform strategies, what is missing from the extant literature is the centering voice of the communities. There is a need for more research that will provide a deeper understanding of how school closures affect the community. The consequential impact of school closures on students and communities is too great an issue for decisions to be made without their voice. All factors, tangible and intangible, must be evaluated and considered in collaboration with the community prior to a final decision is made on school turnaround efforts. The people of the community should have a voice in deciding the future of the area in which they reside.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Yin (2011) described case study research as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (p. 23). The purpose of this doctoral research project is to explore how communities are affected by school closure. I examined data involving concerns about Rocky Mountain High School and the process that lead to the decision to close the school in 2008 through the phasing out of the school in 2014. Beginning in 2015, Rocky Mountain High School community members have been very vocal about the process and the affect it has taken on the overall community. The aftermath of the decision to close Rocky Mountain High School frames this case study. I hope to identify the perspectives of community members associated with school closures and their beliefs of how their community has been affected socially, emotionally, and financially. I begin this chapter by explaining why case study was used to explore these research questions. I will further explain the process of how and why participants were selected. To conclude this chapter, I will explain the data collection process, data analysis, trustworthiness, and limitations of the study. This process is structured to ascertain the most accurate depiction of events and perceptions while providing participants a platform to freely express their perceptions and

experiences. This dissertation research project was guided by the following question: *How do school closings affect lower socioeconomic urban communities in which they serve?* I close the chapter outlining the trustworthiness of the study, while illustrating limitations, ethical concerns and the significance of the study.

Case Study Design

A general definition of case study accepted by many researchers includes, but is not limited to, an analysis of how a person reflects on a lived experience and how that lived experience connects to real life events. Merriam (2009) described a case study as an in-depth and intensive analysis of an occurrence experienced by an individual or group. Hatch (2002) believed case studies are demarcated as a methodological approach that is best suited to analyze a lived experience of an individual, group, or community. Yin (2003) suggested case studies are inherently important to utilize in research when the boundaries between wonderings and real-life events are not evident or readily witnessed. I provide these definitions as a means highlighting three main components of case study: (a) identifying a case with boundaries that can illuminate a previously hidden problem under real world conditions; (b) the researcher draws on multiple sources of information to capture the views and perspectives of the participants in the study; and (c) there is a holistic analysis of the entire case to share lessons learned about the case (Yin, 2011).

Strengths of case study

There are various reasons to use a case study. One primary reason is that it offers researchers an opportunity to investigate and explore complex variables associated with understanding a problem from an up close and personal perspective.

The data collected via case studies are more often richer in text and depth (Creswell, 2013). A second reason to utilize case study methods includes expansion of later research. Yin (2013) suggests other research methods often do not tell the complete story, thus creating a gap in literary findings. A third reason to utilize case study methodology centers upon researching cases where large samples associated with a particular topic may not be available. As an example, in this research project, I am seeking information about a particular case in a particular area from the perspective of specific community members. In this project, I intentionally center the voices of the community, so that their voices serve as the foundation to policies and practice and conscious to decision makers in a way that will promote the greater good for all. The personal experiences can provide information and context to individuals who may seldom, if ever, be exposed to their story.

An example of this is the *Brown v. Board of Education* case. The personal narratives associated with *Brown v. Board* allowed citizens across the nation to peek into the lives of individuals that were far away from their personal story and gave insight on what needed to be changed. Merriam (2009) believed that the personalized narrative allowed researchers to learn not only the what, but the how and why, thus creating a powerful dialogue of the true meaning behind the numbers. This study may not yield the attention or results associated with *Brown*; however, the underlying context of providing a voice from the limited few to the larger audience resound. Neighborhood schools are being closed annually for distinct reasons. The strength of using case study methods in this research will allow the community to voice their perceptions and reactions to the school closing. Case studies may yield a more robust

design than other forms of methodological designs that tells a more complete and comprehension version of the story being explored (Yin, 2013).

Limitations of case study

As indicated, there are limitations of using the case study method. One reason is the replication of the study may not be generalized as true for the greater population. This type of study is specifically focused on a targeted group in a specific region that may or may not have similar variables in other venues. That reason brings about a second limitation of using case study methods. Because of the limited scope of case study, some researchers do not believe case studies are scientific in nature; therefore, it may be difficult to trust the results of a case study or to delineate a true cause and effect based upon the findings. Nonetheless, the results of this study may yield information that illustrates inequities associated with systemic racial and social biases in education.

The Closing of Rocky Mountain High School

Pebbles community. The community explored in the study, is located in the northeastern quadrant of the metro area. This community would be considered one of the younger neighborhoods as it began its development around the early 1960's. "Pebbles" (neighborhood pseudonym) was established to serve as a reasonably priced community where middle-class and military families could own their own home. By 1970, Pebbles had nearly 5,000 residents; over 80 percent of that populace was under the age of 34 and married. At present, the community houses roughly 31,599 residents. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, data recorded about Pebbles illustrates 62 percent of residents identify as Latinx, 24 percent identify as Black, 11 percent identify

as White, and 2 percent identify as Asian. Nearly 25 percent of the community is categorized as living at or below the poverty line. This statistic is considered high in relationship to the metro area in which the overall poverty rate is approximately 12 percent.

There has been great disinvestment in the community that contradicts the goal of having a community that was intended to provide affordable housing, high performing schools, and opportunities that equally serve people of color. Pebbles was originally designed to be a community of growth and opportunity. However, Pebbles has experienced many challenges as it relates to opportunities and growth. The most cited challenge involves that lack of supermarkets or venues for families to eat healthy. Because of these limitations, Pebbles is categorized as a food desert. In addition, the community has been identified as having major infrastructure and transportation issues. The city does provide public minimal public transportation opportunities for Pebbles, but in many cases, locations to take advantage of public transportation are in areas that are difficult for community members to walk to. The lack of accessible public transportation ultimately creates a pedestrian infrastructure that is challenging to navigate, particularly during in climate weather situations.

Silver Oaks School District. Participants involved in this study are affiliated with a large urban school district located in the central western part of the United States. This urban school district has nearly 5,000 classroom teachers that educate more than 90,000 students that are enrolled in over 200 schools. The schools are broken down into 95 elementary schools, 31 middle schools, 43 high schools and 38 other combination of schools. According to the United States Department of Education

(2015), the demographic make-up of this district is 0.7% American Indian, 3.2% Asian, 13.2% African American, 53.8% Latinx, 24.7% White, 4.1% Two or More Races, and 0.4% Other. This district has more than 65% of its students eligible to receive Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), 36.3% of its population identified as English Language Learners, approximately 11% of its students has an Individualize Education Program (IEP), and 14% of students identified as Gifted and Talented (GT). Further statistics indicate the four year on-time graduation rate exceeds 70% with a dropout rate between grades 7 to 12 of hovering around 4%.

Description of the Case of Rocky Mountain School Closure. Although the Pebbles community emerged in the mid 1960's, the one and only local high school did not open until 1980. The high school was often described as the cornerstone of the community until it was voted to be closed in 2010. Many regarded the disassembling of Rocky Mountain High School as the obliteration of one of the most amalgamating institutions in the community that further limits a venue for arts and culture and community building. Throughout the closure process and to present day, community members have expressed a desire to have a larger voice in the outcomes experienced by the community and wish for current and future residents not to be displaced as a result of community challenges that are largely associated with the closing of Rocky Mountain High School.

Rocky Mountain High School. Before the closing of this school, 1700 students were enrolled. Among those enrolled, nearly 95% were students of color (6% White, 31% Black, 61% Latinx, and 2% Other). Approximately, 84.46% of enrolled students qualified for free and reduced priced lunch. It should be noted that the average

students of color enrollment for schools in the state at the time of this school's closure was 47%. The State Department of Education Annual Reports indicated the school was performing significantly below state levels on state standardized tests as well as national standardized test such as the SAT and ACT test, but data is limited as to what interventions were being utilized to support the school prior to closing down.

In 2008, the Pebbles community, in which Rocky Mountain High School was located, was informed that Silver Oaks School District was concerned about the lack of improvement in the academic performance of Rocky Mountain High School students. Pebbles community members were presented data about disciplinary concerns, low student enrollment, and minimal students attending higher education after graduation. Silver Oaks School District personnel invited Pebbles community members to numerous forums to discuss measures to improve in the areas of concerns.

After several meeting with the Pebbles community, Silver Oaks School District proposed to the Pebbles community, along with the greater city community, a bond option, to be placed on the 2008 election ballot, that would be used in part toward improving failing schools like Rocky Mountain High School. Initially Pebbles community members voiced opposition to the proposed measures because similar previous efforts were perceived to have failed. However, the Pebbles community later decided to support the measure due to the belief that educational efforts would be very different and beneficial to the Rocky Mountain High School, if structured under the potential election of the first African American President, Barack Obama.

Choosing a provision to reform Rocky Mountain High School. In 2008, the bond measure passed and Barack Obama was elected the first African American President of the United States. In 2009, shortly after the election of President Barack Obama, Arne Duncan, then secretary of Education, under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided options that included four provision for failing school to receive support from the federal support. These reform options were presented in the form of School Improvement Grants allocated under the reauthorization of ESEA. Armed with this resource, Silver Oaks School officials approached Pebbles community members about choosing one of the four options of reform for struggling high schools. The options ranged from adjusting staff, or transforming the school community, to the ultimate measure of closing the school.

After reviewing the options, Pebbles community members decided to adopt the "transformation" model. Pebbles community members obtained more 300 signatures in support of this option because they believe it was the least disruptive to the school and community.

Silver Oaks District personnel brought back a different option for parents. Silver Oaks opted to embrace the turnaround model, which is generally perceived to be a more disruptive process. Disappointed with the decision to disregard the community voice, Pebbles community members were willing to adhere to Silver Oaks School District's decision. However, in 2010 the Pebbles community learned that Silver Oaks School District had decided on another option that was the most disruptive of all. Silver Oaks School District decided to phase out Rocky Mountain High School by way

of closing it permanently by the year 2014. Silver Oaks School District announced a vote would be held at the next board meeting to decide the fate of Rocky Mountain High School.

The Decision to Close Rocky Mountain High School. Rocky Mountain High School was opened in 1980 and a little over thirty years later was slated to be closed. On the evening of the vote to close the Rocky Mountain High School, teachers, students, and community members voiced their opinion against the school board's vote for the largest and most disruptive school turnaround plan in the history of the district for one of the youngest schools in the district. The group of protesters cited that closing down the school was a fabricated disaster that compared to Hurricane Katrina. Protesters against the school closure vote, further used district data to articulate that the school's score had improved more than 15% over the previous year and by ignoring that fact, the district was signaling a lack of belief in the students, school personnel, and community.

In contrast to the protestors, district officials again cited low academic success, school enrollment, and disciplinary for the reason for deciding to close Rocky Mountain High School. One particular board member spoke to the data collected from the Colorado State Department of Education, reveling that for decades, less than 6% of the school's students graduated from high school and entered an institution of higher education. More evidence from board members were presented to suggest disciplinary matters were substantially higher and attendance was substantially lower when compared to similar schools. In conjunction with the information presented by the school board and the data shared from the Colorado State Department of Education

regarding higher education attendance rates of graduates, a divided school board voted to close down Rocky Mountain High School in spite of recent demonstrated growth and strong opposition from teachers, parents, and community members. Several school board members articulated the closing as unfortunate, but necessary and vital toward improving student achievement.

The community voice indicted their fight was not for occupational reasons but for the welfare of the students and the greater community. In their oppositional argument, community voice reminded the school board of previous school closures and a perceived failure to achieve the goals set forth from those efforts. Additionally, the overall community advocacy group questioned the reasons for the vote to shut down the school when so much opposition was being voiced. Furthermore, community members questioned who was behind the decision and who benefitted from the decision to close down Rocky Mountain High School. Several community members voiced a concern that White board members were making life decision for Black and Latinx community members without the consideration of what it would do to the community and the people who lived there. Moreover, the greatest concern voice was whether the closing of Rocky Mountain High School left students in better vantage point or only a few students if any. Regardless of the questions, community members voiced their disappointment and frustration that a final decision was executed against the voice of the people in which the school served with little to no justification of why.

School Closure. Since 2000 "Silver Oaks School District" (school district pseudonym) has experienced approximately 17 school closures. Eleven of the schools closed (58%) were charters who made a decision to surrender their charter. Six schools

were closed (32%) because of a School Board vote. Nearly 80% of these schools are located in areas that are predominantly occupied by communities of color that serve 62 percent of residents that identify as Latinx, 24 percent that identify as Black, 11 percent that identify as White, and 2 percent that identify as Asian.

Interestingly, there is discrepancy between Pebbles community and the Silver Oaks School District about the Turnaround strategy used for Rocky Mountain High School. Whereas the District's records have identified Rocky Mountain High School as a restart, the community perception believed their school was permanently closed. As a reminder, a restart is turnaround option where districts can close a school and reopen that same school under new administration, with new personnel, and even with a new name. Subsequently, Rocky Mountain High School underwent this process whereas the name of the school has changed, the personnel has 93% turn over, and the structure of programs are vastly different. Yet, the empirical data has not demonstrated more than 5% positive growth since the change has taken place.

To understand the impact of school closure on the community beyond test data, several different participants were invited to participate in this study. In alignment with case studies, I gathered data from multiple sources to provide a more holistic picture and deeper understanding of this school closure. As such, I gathered data from both community members and district personnel who were involved in the decision to close the school. However, the primary participants include residents who lived in the community from 1990 to 2019. The primary participants were categorized in three different groups. The first group consists of parents and guardians of students who the school closure affected. The second group includes members of the

community who either had students attend prior to the school closure or parents who had students looking to attend the school prior to the school closure. The third group includes educators who live in the community associated with school closure. For clarity, the chosen educators may or may not work for the immediate district who closed the school. Other participants include school personnel involved in the decision-making process of closing the school.

Participants

The study will consist of 9 people associated with the closing of Rocky Mountain High School within the Denver metropolitan area. I will utilize a snowball sample effort to ascertain participants who meet the criteria. The reason for this strategy is to generate a sample that represents a wide variety of participants from various different perspectives who arguable viewed the school closure from diverse tenures, experiences, and backgrounds.

Participants will include two school administrators, two district personnel, and five community members at large. Three participants identify as men and six identify as women. Two participants are Latinx, two participants are White, one participant chose not to disclose, and five participants are Black. The chosen participants have variable age differences and experiences. The age ranges from 27 to 72 and experience levels range from one to 43 years. Community members must have lived in the community between the years of 1990 and 2019 and who were directly or indirectly affected by the school closure.

For this study school administrators will be defined as leaders who worked in the school and was a part of the decision-making process and or delivering information about the school closure. District Leaders are individuals in district leadership roles who work and/ or live in the community and was a part of the decision-making process related to the school closure. Community members will consist of individuals above the age of 21 who have lived in the community between the years of 1990 and 2019 who was either a parent or guardian of a student affected by the school closure, an employee of the district, a student of the district at the time of the school closing, or a community members who lives in the neighborhood but have no affiliation with the school. .

This project will concentrate on the school closure experience through the lens of various school and community stakeholders. The following pseudonyms are used for the participants in this project: Allegra, Brad, Carol, Donna, Evelyn, Frank, George, Laura, and Margerie.

Community Members

Brad. Brad is a current resident of Neighborhood community and has extensive ties to the community. Not only has Brad lived in the community for more than 40 years. Brad is both a former student in Silver Oaks and attended a rival high school of Rocky Mountain High School, has children that attended the school, and was working in an adjacent school within the district during the process of the school closure.

Brad and I were colleagues when I began this project. After settling in on a topic, and largely due to Brad's background and relationship with the community and district, I asked him to be a part of the study and give suggestions of a variety of

persons who could provide invaluable life experiences for the study. Although Brad no longer works with the district that closed the school, Brad still communicates with district personnel and members of the community in hopes of working to ensure equity for all students, particularly students that resemble his childhood neighborhood.

Brad openly expressed his bias toward the school closing but tried to remain optimistic about the information presented. Brad stated that he listened and reviewed the data that was presented by the district as to why the school should be closed. As an educator, Brad agreed the data was compelling enough to explore reasons why closing the school could be considered reasonable options. However, Brad believed that data was only one side of the story.

As noted, Brad indicated that he indeed was biased against closing the school, because, in his opinion, scores and enrollment were far from the whole story. Brad related how his childhood experience and how the school along with the community, in his opinion, changed his life for the better. Brad believed that if a truly collaborative process would have taken place, there may have been a better solution to resolve the matter short of closing the school.

Carol. Allegra referred Carol to this study. Carol and Allegra were neighbors at the time of the school closing. Carol shared similar concerns to Allegra around the school closing. Her children attended the closed school like Allegra's. However, Carol's believed Rocky Mountain High School would be a more accepting environment for her children. Carol expressed her thoughts of wanting her children to attend a school where they would not be judged on race or bullied because of financial means or lack thereof. Carol asserted that her experiences with previous schools only

saw her children in a negative manner. She stated she needed a school where the adults not only got to know her children but also wanted to know them and push them to be successful. From the conversation she had with members around the city, Carol believed Neighborhood School was the place for her children. As a parent, Carol did acknowledge the data presented as to why the school should be closed was alarming, she questioned more the motive of the closing as well as her believed lack of parent and community consideration. As noted, whereas Carol voices an understanding of data induced decisions, Carol expressed a concern of the decision-making process and her perceived lack of concern for parental input.

Donna. Donna is a single parent that works in the central part of the metro area and resides in the school closure community. Donna moved to the area during the school shutdown. Donna expressed moving to the area, as a means of affordability. Donna believed that her child's school needed to improve in areas but was enough to provide her child with an adequate educational experience. Donna had one child that attended the school up to closure but has since moved the student to a neighboring charter school since the closure. Donna's recollection of how the process unfolded did not bother her. Donna relayed that she understood the district's reasons and felt it was for the better. She further believed the district would provide better opportunities for the families and as a result she moved her child to a neighboring charter school. Donna indicated that her child is actually doing better academically as a result of the move but has concerns around her child's emotional state. Donna was recommended to this study by George. As you will note later, George is a district administrator who believes the move was justified but has a few areas in the process to be improved. As a result,

George believed Donna could provide information that speaks toward how the school closing helped more than hurt the community.

Margerie. Margerie is a long-time resident of the community like Brad, who came back to the community to educate the next generation of neighborhood children. Brad recommended Margerie for this study because of her long-standing involvement in the community and for her passion around this subject recommended her for this study. Margerie is a current resident of the community. She has lived in the neighborhood for more than 40 years. In anticipation of closing the school, Margerie began listening tours with community members and fellow educators to gather information as to the pulse of the community as it related to this topic. Margerie acknowledged her bias, in that she did not want to see the school closed down, and she wanted to know if her thinking was in line with the majority of the community. As she gathered her information, Margerie believed her reasoning for keeping the school open was shared by more than 75 percent of the community.

When the time came for community forums to take place, Margerie was an outspoken community member at the meetings. She provided speeches involving how communities of color have systemically been underserved and underrepresented throughout the history of the nation. Margerie also used data around civil rights cases, desegregation events, and school busing to serve as a platform around forced district mandates. Margerie asserts that all decisions made in the name of school reform may not be best for the community in which it affects. Furthermore, she believes communities of color voices are often limited or non- existent in these types

of conversations. Margerie's long history in the community and education field provides a different voice to the process, and how systemic patterns affect outcomes, that singular data collection methods, may not provide.

High School Teacher

Allegra. Donna recommend a participant who was unable to participate in the study. That participant then recommended Allegra. Allegra was a teacher at Rocky Mountain High School at time of the school closing. Allegra did not reside in the community but was very close to her students and community members. Allegra was referred for this project due her perspective of student concerns and community concerns that were presented to her daily. Because of the concerns, Allegra spoke with families and colleagues in depth about their concerns and possible solutions. Allegra also participated in the meetings to find the best solution moving forward and the board meetings the ended in a vote to "phase out the school".

Allegra did acknowledge there were some minor issues of concern but nothing out of the ordinary associated with teenagers and attending school. In addition, she believed her proximity to the school was an attribute of her supporting her students and their families and their overall success.

Since the school closed, Allegra expressed a concern that family are now in a position where the students will have to choose a school that is more than 4 miles away. In addition, Allegra feared for the well-being of her students because of transportation, entering new surroundings that might not be as welcoming, but most of the well-being of being told "they were not good enough".

Allegra has kept in touch with some of her students since the phasing out of Rocky Mountain High School and has noticed some are doing okay and others are not. Allegra believes this is largely in part that each school is different in their approach to staffing, course offerings, and overall culture and climate and some students adapt better to change than others. What Allegra noticed most was the camaraderie and togetherness that once existed between her students has diminished greatly. Allegra points out her former students are still neighbors, living down the street from each other, but not they appear to be strangers that rarely speak to each other. Allegra's perception is believed to add value as it illustrates real tangibles problems associated with school closings that may not have been readily apparent in data collection nor considered in the decision to close the school.

Public School Administrators

Evelyn. Evelyn is a public-school educator that resides in the school closure community. Evelyn grew up in a large Midwestern community similar to the community is which she currently resides. In her youth, Evelyn lived in a community where school restarts and school closures were expected each year. Evelyn indicated her home school was not closed, but she did witness many of her neighborhood friends and family members' school being restructured or closed, year after year. As a result of her childhood experience, Evelyn believed there may have been better ways to address school reform. She conveyed, she believed there might have been many problems associated with public schools who enrolled a large percentage of students of

color, but abandoning those schools and communities color was not the answer. Furthermore, Evelyn does not believe that failing schools are the sole fault of students and communities in which they serve.

Evelyn believes many of the problems associated with public schools are historically systemic and perpetuated to serve a greater purpose. Evelyn paraphrased an idea from the chronicles of the Tuskegee Airmen. She articulated that historically, people of color have been believe to be inferior to Whites, yet people of color are often placed in untenable situations with minimal resources and subsequently questioned why they failed. Evelyn believes this fear stems from the idea of Whites not wanting to lose hold of being the ruling and dominant class in America. Evelyn suggests the long fear associated with collaboration of the races is at the core of school reform decisions and that white flight, political measures, and minimal allowance of community input will perpetuate a continuing demise of students of color and neighborhood communities in which they serve. Evelyn was recommended for this study by George because of her current and previous experiences associated with school reform efforts.

Frank. Frank was intimately involved with the closing of this school. Frank was the current school administrator of the school during the reform process. Frank was not directly involved in efforts around the decisions associated with the school closure. However, Frank was assigned to the administrative team that oversaw delivering the message to the community about the school closure and how it would be facilitated.

Frank did acknowledge the data obtained by the district, indicating low-test scores, and diminishing enrollment, served as a guiding factor the overall decision to close the school, but those reasons alone should not have been the deciding factors. Based upon his research at the time of the school closing and at present, Frank agrees the school needed improvements and some restructuring, but not closed. He asserts that some of the improvements were out of the control of the school administration, faculty, students, or parents.

Frank indicates he is of the firm belief that all students must have a quality school in their neighborhood, but a firm advocate against the one size fits all model. He believes all students can be successful, but most of that success stems not just from academic success, but in partnership with the school environment, climate, and culture.

Frank still works in the district as an administrator and currently believes the school should not have been closed. In addition, Frank believes the closing of this particular school did not provided greater opportunities nor positive outcomes for students. George and Brad recommended Frank for this study to allow this study to have a perspective from a school leader that was heavily involved with the community through this process.

District Administrators

This study is primarily focused on the community's perception of school closing. Based upon my conversation with various participants, it was suggested that I might want to interview district personnel involved in the school closing, to ascertain why they voted to close the school despite the opposition being expressed the

community. Two participants, George and Laura, we chosen by participants because, even though they voted for the school closing, they appeared to want the best for the school and community. The participants, who suggested for me to interview George and Laura, believed George and Laura truly listened to them, but differed in belief. Furthermore, the participants believed their input would generate a more robust discussion around this topic.

George. George is a current district administrator that began working in district 7 years prior to the school closing. Over that period George reported noticing a constant diminish in standardized test scores and enrollment. George also indicated he noticed a lack of urgency on the part of the students and families to correct this trend. George indicated he was selected to be a part of the team to investigate and make suggesting of what needed to happen regarding improving the school's performance and enrollment.

As a result, George was one of the administrators who heavily involved the decision- making process associated with closing the school. One the district decided to close the school, George, like Frank, was assigned to the administrative team that oversaw delivering the message to the community about the school closure and how it would be facilitated. George did state his in not particularly in favor of school closings, however closing a school in some cases, like this one, it is a necessary measure. Allegra, Carol, Brad, and Harold recommended George for this study, based upon their conversation with him indicating the school closure would be good for the

students and the community. Several reasons were given as to why to include George. The one reason that resonated with all who recommended him centered upon the belief that George appeared genuine in his belief toward securing a better school for the students.

Laura. Donna referred Laura to this study. Laura is a current district administrator that has lived in the community for more than 40 years, attended Rocky Mountain High, and now works for Silver Oaks School District. Laura witnessed the community grow and was a part of the process when Rocky Mountain High was being built. Based on the history of the neighborhood, the stereotypical remarks the community has received over the years, she expressed a concern for the future of the students, families, and overall community concerning the school closure. Laura shared her thoughts and how others community members expressed adamant opposition and their concerns, on a daily basis, about the idea of the school being closed. Whereas Laura realized the school was in need of some changes, she believed there were better options to pursue besides closing it down. Information collected through the interview process from the listed participants will be the primary source for data collection of this study.

Data Collection

Interview. The data collection process was conducted over an 8-week period. Interviews for this study will be conducted via in person or by zoom, depending on the preference of the participant. Each participate will be expected to participate in one individual interview that is conducted in a semi-structured format. The interview will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes long. I will be the primary interviewer for this

project. My interview protocol includes eleven questions, which were informed by my literature review. Every question was intentionally designed to invite candidates to share candidly their lived experience of the school closure process. Each interview will be digitally recorded. This digital recording will be used to transcribe the participants' data. I will use *nVivo* to transcribe participants' data. If necessary, I will take notes during the interview process for the purpose of possible follow up questions or clarification of thoughts. However, this will be conducted on a minimal basis as to keep the flow of thought consistent and uninterrupted in hopes to aid with data analysis. *(See Appendix B and Appendix C)*

Survey. Each participant will be given the opportunity to complete an exit survey at the conclusion of the initial interview process. This survey (*see Appendix D*) will be used to collect basic demographic information about each participant, along with the participant's additional personal reflections and observations associated with the closing of Rocky Mountain High School. The supplemental information is sought to grant the reader a more in-depth understanding the participants in the study and provide additional information that may not have been expressed during the interview process.

Documents. The collection and analysis of documents is often an important source of data in qualitative research. These documents will be used to link or support the interviews and participant observations and to provide a thick description of the case. Additional data sources used for this study will include my journal reflections, the participants reflections, official district documents used in the decision to close Neighborhood School X, newspaper articles, social media posts, and community

surveys. The researcher's field notes, community surveys, and official district documents will be particularly utilized to supplement and support the participant interviews.

Data Analysis and Procedures

Merriam (2009) suggests the foremost conclusion of data analysis is to answer the essential research question of the study. This study focuses on the personal narrative perspectives of multiple participants around school closures. To answer that question, I will begin to analyze data of each participant, become very familiar with the data, and open-code the data in hopes of identifying patterns and themes. (See Figure 4) I will also code through the lens of Critical Race by utilizing deductive codes that include but are not limited to components of the endemic nature of racism: i.e. systems of power, subtleness of racism, embracement of diversity through colorblindness. I will further use deductive theoretical codes grounded in critical race theory's interest-convergence. It is the hope that data collection will uncover or reveal a deeper meaning and understanding around the experiences of community members associated with the closing of Rocky Mountain High School.

This process will commence with the analyzation of data collected from each participant. After collecting data from the interview, I will review and become familiar with the information collected. The review of information will also include data obtained from the researcher's field notes and personal observations. As noted, the data will be subject to member checking during and immediately after collection of information to ensure clarity and accuracy. Once I have become familiar with the

data and have determined the information obtained is accurate, the data will be coded, analyzed, and categorized to uncover and reveal potential themes and patterns.

To achieve this goal, I followed Creswell's (2009) six steps of data analysis. Creswell (2009) suggests beginning the data analysis process, information must be systemically organized and prepared for analysis. Once the data has been properly organized, the researchers must give due diligence to understand the data. This bring me to Creswell's second step. The second step will be to thoroughly examine the data by reading or listening for a clear understanding of what was provided by the participant. Through intensive and consistent review, this step will allow me to become very familiar and intimate with the data collected. Once I have become intimate with the collected data coding Creswell's third step will begin. The third step will center upon coding the data to seek themes and patterns that will allow me to decipher if themes or patterns emerge.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), it is important to collect, thoroughly review, and code data daily and in a consistent manner. The procedures executed in this study will illustrate a step by step timeline of what is recorded, and at what intervals the recordings are occurring. *(See Appendix C).* Within two hours of completion of the participant's interview, I will conduct and review memos to ensure accuracy of the participants' data. After the transcription of data has been complete, I will use member checking to validate all information is true and accurate of the community's perceptions and free from bias or misconceptions. I will request the

participant to review and check information for accuracy throughout the interview process and at the conclusion of the interview. Additionally, after the first round of analysis, participants will be provided a copy of their transcript for further review for clarity and accuracy.

Upon receiving conformation that all information is true and accurate, I will immerse myself in the data to become intimately familiar with the participants' responses. This will be conducted daily for a minimum period of 14 days, in part to develop the purest focus of reporting what the participant intended, as well as, delving deep into the materials for common themes. It is my hope that daily review will help me decide if there are emerging themes that reveal or uncover a convincing or compelling story.

Within 24 hours of a participant's interview and completion of the participant's data transcription, I will record field notes and review them a minimum of three times. This will be conducted to promote consistency of content and interpretation. After reviewing my field notes for the third time within a 24-hour period, I will journal my personal observation of my interaction with participants, my reactions to responses, and my reflection of recorded responses. This process will also help me identify themes and how to code themes as they emerge. Once this step has been examined in depth, I will determine how the information will be disseminated and represented in the narrative. This overall process should take no less than 14 days and nor more than 30 days to complete. Within this period, the final step will be to interpret the meaning of the data. This process is conducted to ensure trustworthiness and an awareness of ethical considerations while holding true to a theoretical lens.

In reviewing the history of the process of Rocky Mountain High School closure, there appears to be an overwhelming difference of opinion between the majority White leadership of the Silver Oaks School District who voted to close the school and the majority Black and Latinx Pebbles community members who adamantly opposed the closing of Rocky Mountain High School. This difference led me to explore the process through the lens of Critical Race. The underlying measure is to explore whether or not the final solutions was a result of it being in the best self-interest of the party perpetuating the condition and has the power to resolve it or because of a moral or ethical desire on the part of all parties to resolve the issue.

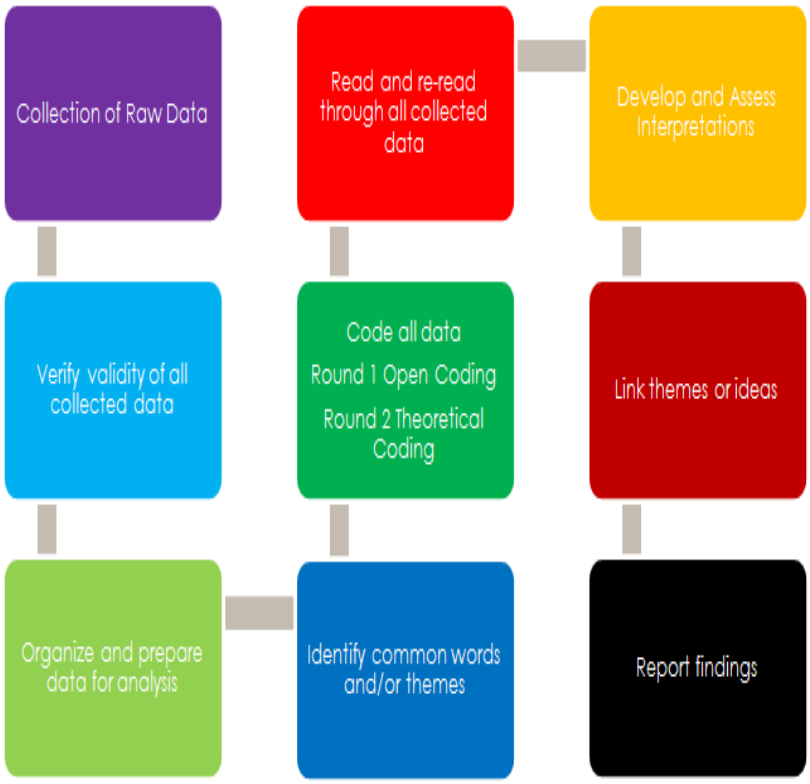

Figure 4. Data Analysis Mode

Trustworthiness and Ethical Consideration

Trustworthiness and Ethics may be defined as guiding principles that governs one's behavior (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Yin 2011).

According to Bryman and Bell (2007) participants in research should not be subject to any harm. It is the researcher's responsibility to protect and maintain the anonymity of all participants while eliminating any type of confusion for the participant or bias by the researcher. Bryman and Bell (2007) suggests the researcher strictly adhere to the University's Code of Ethical Practice in every aspect of research. Bryman and Bell (2007) additionally informs that it is the researchers' responsibility to examine and reflect on one's own personal bias and provide in writing, the researchers' bias and stated values. It is further recommended that data collection is authentic and an accurate depiction of what the participants intended. The next two sections inform how I plan to execute these measures.

Trustworthiness. When it comes to considerations as to whether or not a study can be considered trustworthy, Merriam (2009) suggest researchers asks two questions:

1) Is the study credible, and what assurances are provided so that the participants know the information is honored and protected from disclosure? When judging trustworthiness of a project the researcher must take into consideration these two questions. As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is imperious to qualitative research. Trustworthiness of a study must provide safeguards to participant representation, while accurately identifying and depicting the intended message

(Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Because inconsistency and various procedures can lead to ineffective validation, Creswell (2009) suggests researchers explore all biases and methods while intertwining parallel approaches to ensure credibility. To increase the trustworthiness of the research, I will employ strategies as prescribed by researchers in the field. These strategies suggest I utilize multiple data sources from my interview and review process to execute a method for triangulation.

Triangulation. According to Yin (2011) triangulation is the process of increasing the credibility of research findings through the process of utilizing multiple sources. My triangulation process will be supported by the data collected in the interview process, my recorded field notes, my journal entries, and my personal observations. (see Figure 5) Triangulation design for data collection.) Contrasting the data points will help me ascertain if the information obtained is not only consistent to what was recorded, but what is pertinent and credible to my overall research question.

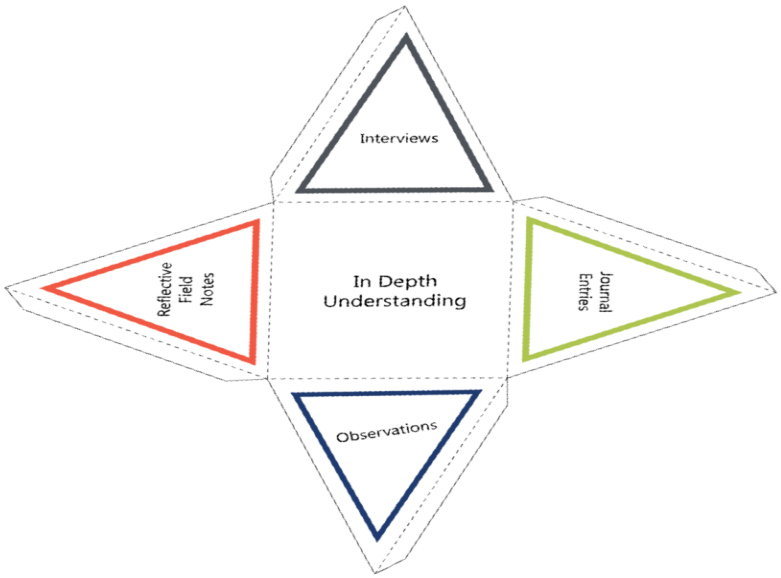

Figure 5. *Triangulation design for data collection.*

As indicated, the first area to explore is based on Yin's (2011) suggestion of triangulating the data or using multiple sources to date to confirm findings for the data collection process. As stated, I will use written notes taken from the interview session, digital recordings from the interview session, and personal journal notes as a means of capturing multiple data points to authenticate data findings. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), this further supports the ethical portion of researcher by enhancing the privacy of the data collected.

Member checking. My next step will be to utilize Merriam's (2009) suggesting of member checking. Member checking is explained by allowing the participant to review the captured data to ensure accuracy. This will be executed during and immediately after conducting the initial interview. In addition, during the first round of analysis, a copy of the participant's interview transcript will be provided to the participant to verify and confirm the accuracy of the information collected and reported. This will give the participant the participant time to read over the material collected and confirm, deny, or clarify all information that will be reported in the study. Once the participant has authenticated the information, I will seek other peers to review the material as well.

To further ensure the information is clear, I will utilize Lincoln and Guba's (1985) idea of providing a copy that thoroughly explains how decisions were conducted by providing a detailed written document that outlines the process to the participant about the data and analysis collection method. It is my hope this document can and will be utilized by the participants to assist in granting a clear and precise observable method to the participants through rich thick descriptions as Merriam (2009) suggests. These are

three areas that will be executed to ensure trustworthiness in the information being presented. However, consideration must be considered on the ethical nature of reporting. To ensure ethics are considered, I will follow Merriam's (2009) suggestions of ethical guidelines. Furthermore, frequent and collaborative discussions with my advisor, dissertation committee members, and various educational expert scholars related to my study will grant me honest reflection to ensure trustworthiness and further scrutinize ethical considerations.

Ethical Considerations

Merriam (2009) believes each researcher must address their own bias and take every measure to ensure their bias in not reflecting in the reporting of data. The first step Merriam (2009) suggests is the researcher critically reflects on their personal biases, assumptions and personal narratives. To authentically report an accurate account of the participant, Merriam (2009) asserts a researcher must be diligently and intently focused on critically evaluating their relationship to the story being told to, as to avoid affecting the participants' recollection and meaning of their lived experience.

In addition to observing protocols set forth by Merriam (2009) for this study, to further safeguard ethical considerations, I will provide participants with information regarding who is involved in the study, the time frame associated with the study, the risk associated with the study, and their right to participate, refusal, or withdrawal from the study. (Informed consent). Next participants will be provided information as to how information will be collected. Because I seek to audio record

participants, I will request approval from each participant to do so prior to beginning the study. Participants will be informed as to my reasoning to audio record, who will have access to the information, and how long the information will be stored after the student has been completed (introductory protocols). Participants will further be informed of their right to participate, refuse to participate, or their ability to withdraw from the study at any stage of the study. Regardless of whether a participant completes, withdraws, or refuses to participant in the study, they will be informed they and their identity will be protected at all time. Finally, participants will be provided a thorough description of the study and allowed to ask any clarifying questions prior to the study beginning. (Introduction to the research project). These guiding principles will be adhered to and administered before, during, and after completion of this project. *(See Appendix C)*

Researcher's Positionality

This case study seeks to engage community members associated with school closure in hopes of reporting their unique perspective narrative. The snowball selection consisting of district personnel and community members was deliberate. The selection of participants was chosen to deliver a balanced and accurate perspective of the case.

The data collection will engage participants via online interviews with the researcher. The process is structured to tell their story from a process that bolsters an open and sincere dialogue about their perceptions regarding the school closure

process. To minimize any form of bias, strict adherence of the informed consent decree will be executed. In efforts of ensuring reliability and validity, I will diligently and intently focus on critically evaluating and reporting their relationship to the story being told as an outside observer, careful not to forge my perceptions into their narrative. Additionally, member checking, analytical memos, and peer debriefing will be conducted periodically.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided the reader a rational of why the type of why case study was the most appropriate qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the closing of Neighborhood School. I shared my process for how data will be collected and strategies that will be used to safeguard trustworthiness and ethical considerations of data collection and reporting. From a holistic review of the literature, it is my desire to uncover and report factors that affect community members associated with school closings. I further hope to explore if perceptions around school closure are rooted in beliefs that interest convergence may be a factor. The next chapter will present findings from the data analysis of community members associated with closing a neighborhood school.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this case study was to examine a school closure in an urban metropolitan school district and the effect that school closure had on the neighborhood community. In chapter one, I discussed a history of educational reform measures that led to the school closures while illustrating the history of inequality associated with those reforms. In chapter two, I provided an in-depth review of the literature on school closures and identified a gap in the research regarding community voice and their perceptions of the school closure process. As stated in my introduction, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the decision-making process for the school closure of Rocky Mountain High School, a neighborhood school in an Urban School District in the Rocky Mountain West and the impact it had on the community. My purpose is also to understand how communities can be authentically and systematically engaged in school improvement plans. There is limited research that speaks to community input and how decisions are infused in turnaround efforts or how their voices are considered in the process. In chapter three, I provided the reader a rational of why case study was the most appropriate qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the closing of Neighborhood School. I shared my process for how data will be collected and strategies that will be used to safeguard trustworthiness and ethical considerations of data collection and reporting. In chapter four, I will present

the findings to the central research question for this study: *How do school closings affect lower socioeconomic urban communities in which they serve?* The five themes were: (a) The Community believed a singular focus on data (standardized test scores) was used to justify the school closure; (b) The Community believed historical racialized methods were used to establish the Pebbles community and ultimately used to close Rocky Mountain High School; (c) The Community believed money, power, and influence dictated the outcome; (d) The Community believed the process was manufactured; and (e) The Community did not believe their voice mattered in the process. Each of these themes came from an in-depth analysis of interview transcripts, survey, and document analysis. Together, these findings indicate that community voice was requested but not an integral part of the decision-making process nor the voting process. In addition, the collective consensus suggest systems should be established to ensure authentic engagement with the community. I discuss each of these themes through a narrative structure that begins with the development of the Pebbles community and ends with a discussion of the aftermath of the closing of Rocky Mountain High School.

The Development of the Pebbles Community converged with the Civil Rights Movement Racial Segregation and Homeownership Opportunities.

In 1965, the Pebbles community was established and annexed as a suburban community located in the northeastern quadrant of the Silver Oaks School District. The Silver Oaks city promoted a plan to establish a community of the future with affordable housing from hundreds of acres of vacant land just east of the Silver Oaks city limits at that time. Historical records indicate between 1965 until the early 1990s, Pebbles grew

exponentially from vacant land to having approximately 30,000 residents. According to Brad, many Silver Oaks residents believed Pebbles would be a community structured in vibrancy with an extreme amount of potential for all residents, particularly for people of color. Community member participant, "Carol," a mother of two children that attended Neighborhood School said, "I can remember the announcement and when the decision came down. I immediately thought about how the idea of living there would be a dream. So, I, along with many of my friends, moved out here." According to Carol, she and many of her neighbors felt a sense of pride moving into a neighborhood where they felt they belonged and did not have to face the judgement or ridicule of others due to race or wealth.

Race is mentioned frequently throughout my data collection as a point of pride and in moments of despair. To understand the reason more clearly, it must be noted that the Pebbles community was being annexed during a time of racial unrest in America. Participant, "Frank," a school administrator of Neighborhood school during the reform process, shared,

> the inception of the Pebbles community was happening during the throws of the Civil Rights movement. Segregated practices and treatment of Blacks and other racially minoritized groups as inferior was the pulse of the land. So, for African American families to have the potential to own their home was enormous, whether it was in a segregated neighborhood or not.

What several participants questioned and grappled with during reflections was the actual reason for the decision to create a "new" community during that time. Some participants' comments alluded to their perception that the birth of Pebbles may not

have been a noble act but more of a potential means to discontinue busing and further segregate the city. No matter the reason, Pebbles was scheduled to have its first homes by 1967.

A place to call home. As Frank pointed out, the establishment of the Pebbles community was huge for Black residents in the Silver Oaks metropolitan area. During this time, redlining (loan restrictions for minority citizens), a practice started around 1933, was still an issue throughout the United States. No matter how financially "sound" the buyer would be, Blacks and other minoritized citizens were often denied loans to purchase homes in neighborhoods that were predominantly White, affluent or not (Rothstein, 2019). Blacks and many racially minoritized citizens were seeking equality in moral and civil rights. Frank believed flocking to this new community was associated with those rights, including homeownership, while attempting to escape the systemic racial practices that Blacks experienced during this time.

What Silver Oaks proposed was believed to be a bold and progressive gesture that appeared to move away from systemic and cultural discriminatory practices. Silver Oaks was addressing a nationwide systemic practice in 1965 three years prior to the passing of the Fair Housing Act on April 11, 1968. Whether believed to be a small step in the right direction or not, one thing was certain, creating opportunities for people of color to acquire homeownership during this time was an opportunity many Silver Oaks racially minoritized residents wanted to leverage. Margerie, a Pebbles community member of more than 60 years, stated, "with the discrimination Black people faced day to day, to be able to own a home in a neighborhood, full of homes with grass and backyards, with people that look like me, seemed surreal." She elaborated further,

> when Pebbles community began building the first home, many people believed it would be everything the city promised: affordable housing, supermarkets, schools, community gatherings, and events for neighborhood people. You must remember this was presented around the time busing was an issue and many people were not comfortable with the idea, Black or White. The Whites had their neighborhoods, and the more affluent Blacks lived in the city where home prices were a bit expensive. People whose means were not as much were often at a disadvantage, seeing they could not get any loans to live in a more affluent neighborhood, or white neighborhood, not that they would accept you there anyway. So, people who wanted and could afford to take advantage of this new opportunity appeared to jump at the chance. Once they started building, family after family of people began moving in. What surprised a lot of people was the amount of homeowners moving in, were predominately African American. Yes, Black people showed up. Like everybody else, Blacks wanted to experience the American dream. Blacks also wanted to live in places where they felt they belonged. Based on the presentation given at time, what better place to live than Pebbles.

The optimism shared by Margerie was affirmed when Carol recalled her thoughts about the first moments of moving into the neighborhood years ago. Carol shared,

> I moved out here over 30 years ago. I was so excited to move out here. It was beautiful. The landscaping was nice. We had parks we could visit. I knew all my neighbors, and they were all so nice. It was easy getting to know

> people. We talked about worldly matters and did things together. We would walk around the neighborhood or to the parks, gather socially during the different holidays or sporting events. You know, it just felt like a family.

Donna, a single parent that works in the central part of the metro area and resides in the school closure community, echoed Carol's comments,

> when I got to that area, I was very surprised actually, at the sense of community, where neighbors knew each other. You know, everybody rallied round each other to attend different events like picnics or social gatherings. We went to the park. We did walks. I mean, it was really a big community focus. And so, I think that was a major thing that I hadn't seen in other communities that I enjoyed. And I thought it was an integral part of Pebbles.

What Donna, Margerie and Carol proclaimed has been the story of many Blacks throughout history. The comments about being given an equal opportunity or "fair shake" illuminated the thoughts of Pebbles community members and the future it may bring. The comments from the community members indicate that since regulatory discrimination in opportunities to become homeowners for racially minoritized communities was a normed and protected practice, the development of the Pebbles community was an opportunity aspiring Black homeowners had been waiting for, and Silver Oaks was a place to call home.

Community Values. With a place to call home came a close-knit community with strong community values. Evelyn, a public-school educator that resides in the school closure community, expressed that she and many members in her community

were taught to believe about the community and education by alluding to Dr. Carter G. Woodson's quote in the *MisEducation of the Negro*. She said, "…real education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better…" The members of the Pebbles community were seeking their moment to improve their lives, not only through homeownership, but in all aspects, especially through education. Laura, a resident of Pebbles for more than 40 years, stated the excitement and pride associated with moving into the community revolved around her fondest memories beginning with her experience in the neighborhood school. When her family moved to Pebbles, she indicated that her parents believed that finally, "...they would have an opportunity to provide for their children what America has always indicated for some, a chance at providing their children with a solid education so their future would be better." The community outlook and possibilities appeared to be just what Laura and other Black residents were looking for, an equal and fair opportunity of bettering their situation.

> Regardless of race or gender, each participant indicated the importance of the community and neighborhood school, and how both shaped their lives. Brad shared, not only was homeownership a possibility, this community established a reputation of closeness and traditions and I wanted to raise my children in. This was a community where I believe my family, particularly my children, would feel like they mattered and have a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves, whether in the neighborhood or at school.

Although each participant stated distinct reasons for the significance of the community to them, all indicated the sense of belonging and camaraderie were fundamental elements that cemented their decision to be associated with this community. To the residents, Pebbles was the most vibrant part of the city at the time, because it was new and accepting. Carol believes this reputation of acceptance, along with being able to secure affordable housing due to better loan accessibility from the FHA, VA, and local banks, prompted more residents to move into the neighborhood. Laura also held these sentiments when she shared,

> many people began to move into the neighborhood, and in a short amount of time, this area went from being vacant land to a rising community. I still believe it was due to being able to live somewhere without judgment, being a part of a community that accepted you, no matter what.

Evelyn also shared why the establishment of Pebbles was so important for so many when she shared,

> many Blacks took advantage of this opportunity because homeownership was a symbol of achievement for the family and extended. This area was considered good for Blacks;…people living in a close-knit community, a family, that was filled with spirit of ownership, pride, a true spirit of accountability for themselves and others.

As a result, of the annexation, homeownership for families of color was the highest it had ever been. The United States Census revealed that between 1950 and 1970, Black homeownership across America rose approximately 20%, and during this time Silver Oaks grew approximately 35% largely in part to the rise of the Pebbles community.

Silver Oaks city officials and various community members were proud that Pebbles community achieved this milestone despite national discriminatory practices prior to the passing of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. Community members were also aware this this newly formed community would provide a solid foundation for the neighborhood schools.

A solid foundation for the neighborhood school. Many members of the community wanted schools that would provide opportunities for their students and for community members as well. Margerie, a long-time resident of the community, recalled,

> in the beginning, when families moved into the Pebbles community, there were no schools close. The parents knew schools would eventually be built. However, the parents I spoke with, wanted schools that were welcoming for all families and provided a curriculum that would set their children up for success. We just wanted what the White schools already had.

Eventually the Silver Oaks School District prepared plans to build the first schools in the community. Around 1970, Silver Oaks School District built the first neighborhood school. Over a period of ten years, the Pebbles community grew to have seven neighborhood schools. The first schools in the neighborhood were schools for students between primary age and junior high school age. High school age students in the Pebbles neighborhood were still being bused to high schools around the metro area. Nonetheless, children in primary and early secondary grades were extremely excited about their neighborhood schools. Laura, a resident of more than 40 years, reflected on her feelings of living in the neighborhood as a child and

her pride in her schools. She shared, "It was an exciting time growing up out here. The community was mostly Black and what was special about this time was that we had teachers that looked like us, cared about us, but mostly, loved us." Like Laura, this was another feeling of pride for most of the residents of the Pebbles community.

Evelyn points out the importance of neighborhood schools understanding the culture of students as a main component in teaching and representing the families that lived there. Evelyn stated,

> you can go back to segregated times and notice the difference in care for students. Before integration, my parents told me schools were thought of very highly. You did not disrespect your teachers. They were there to help you, and you were there to learn. It was like a partnership that everyone silently agreed was best for everybody. Then integration came along. You know, integration placed students in areas where they were almost always stereotyped, not respected, and in the case of African American students, their educational experience did not involve learning their culture nor pushing them (African American students) to be better, and that is something that is lost on schools that do not have a vested interest in the kids or families in the neighborhood.

Brad, a Silver Springs native and Pebbles' resident of more than fifty years and Neighborhood school alumni, believed that in the beginning, Pebbles neighborhood schools did cater to the needs of the students and neighborhood and "cared about the well-being of families in an out of the school." Like Brad, Laura also recalled,

> the schools were a reflection of the diverse identity of the greater community; families, students, parents, teachers, and hope was at the center of this

> identity… When my family moved out here more than 40 years ago, I would say it was approximately 90% to 95% Black. There were some Whites out here too. But no matter who you were, everybody looked out for everybody, even the school people. For instance, one of my principals, who was White, and several of my teachers who were White, lived down the street or around the corner from me and knew if I needed anything they would be there to help. I hope they knew that my family and others would be there for them too. All in all, the community just felt close, no matter who you were.

Most participants in this study agreed race played an integral part in their decision to be a part of the community. All participants also suggested the Pebbles community was successful despite racial differences, because of the Pebbles community willingness to accept all people.

The success of the Pebbles community was shared widely by the city government. In 1975, a metro wide account reported in the local newspaper that the new annex and the Pebbles community was a success. The media report spoke of the community spirit, the housing boom, job growth, and the cohesiveness of the community members. As a result of this report and the need to expand further, Silver Oaks School District began to process a bid to open the first comprehensive high school in the area. This was pleasing to most residents in Pebbles because as Carol shared,

> for me and for other parents, as working parents, you want your kids in a neighborhood where they're close to school, close to home. They can walk,

> you know, they can walk to school, they can walk back. We had that in the lower grades, now we would have that in all grade levels.

Immediately upon establishment, the Pebbles community population grew and was thriving. Due to this momentum, in less than fifteen years, since the first homes were built in 1967, the Pebbles community witnessed the opening of Rocky Mountain High School in the fall semester of 1980.

The Opening of Rocky Mountain High School

At the time Rocky Mountain High School opened, the Pebbles community had established a small community that consisted of a fire station, a bank, recreational parks, and more than 10,000 residents in which 80% or greater were married and under 35. With the opening of Rocky Mountain High School, community members expressed appreciation and enthusiasm around having a high school within walking distance of their home. However, the enthusiasm began long before the school opened. Residents expressed their pride due to having being a part of the process to select details about the school down to its colors. Laura recalls,

> It was great to see our new school. I could not wait to enter the building on the first day it opened. I can remember being told in junior high school that Silver Oaks School District was opening a High School in the neighborhood. Everybody was excited. That was all we could talk about. You know, we (students, parents, and community members) were allowed to participate in the building structure, picking of the colors, selecting the mascots; everything. It

> was so cool that we were included in the process. That gave all of us a quick sense of pride about this school and what it could be. We couldn't wait for it to open. So, when it finally opened, my friends and I were totally excited.

As schools and communities across the nation were easing into the new conditions of integration "with all deliberate speed", the opening of Rocky Mountain High School was ahead of the curve and a sign to Pebbles community members that times were changing for the better. Carol commented,

> not only did I own my home and living in a neighborhood of friends, our neighborhood finally had a high school that would be reflective of us and our history. We would now have a high school for the students of this community, a school where Black students could call home and thrive. It was exciting to see this development.

Pebbles community members were witnessing firsthand the promises made by the city and school district come true. However, in less than 20 years, the Pebbles community would find itself amid unanticipated circumstances and at the center of controversy.

Internal Conflict and External Accountability

In 1980, Rocky Mountain High School witnessed the opening of its first comprehensive high school. Students that once traveled across the metro area for high school were able to attend a high school in their neighborhood. In the initial years of Rocky Mountain High School's existence, daily operations moved along smoothly. However, as time passed, and in less than 15 years, Rocky Mountain High School

found itself answering questions as to why academic performance was consistently low, why enrollment was diminishing, and why disciplinary incidents were on the rise. These questions were being raised due to the increased scrutiny in the mid 1990's around school accountability.

Around the mid 1990's, the federal government's accountability structures required the documentation and reporting of public school performance and across the nation. This accountability structure focused on graduation rates with emphasis on standardized test scores and academic success. At the time, Silver Oaks School District reported less than 45% of their schools were performing at the state satisfactory level. In addition, while the federal government called for local education agencies to improve academic performance, during this same time, Silver Oaks School District was experiencing extensive changes across the district.

Teacher Contract Dispute. In 1994 Silver Oaks School District was in the middle of teacher contract dispute. The dispute was largely associated with a raise in pay, but one component involved having more voice at the district level. The dispute coupled with Federal pressures around accountability and state pressures with school choice caused a great deal of anxiety around the city, particularly in the Pebbles Community. According to Carol,

> Those were tough times. We were experiencing possible changes on the national level and then state changes, all the while trying to negotiate a teacher contract dispute. That was a lot to handle. But the biggest drawback was not many people saw all of this coming, nor understood why it was happening.

Nonetheless, facing several layers of change at once, Pebbles community members still believed their community was sheltered from the conflict. Carol stated,

> There was a lot going on back then…but, from the time Rocky Mountain High School opened, I was not aware of any complaints about the school in our community. We felt it was a great school. People felt welcomed, informed and involved.

Participant, Frank, a current Silver Oaks district administrator, wrangled with this belief. Frank stated, "I saw a change coming. The teacher strike hurt the district, but the thing I believe hurt the most, were the programs that were put into place as a part of the agreement." As a part of resolving this dispute, every school in the Silver Oaks School District was given a mandate to adopt Collaborative Decision Making (CDM) teams. These forums were established to grant more transparency and collaboration between school leadership, teachers, and parents to improve student achievement. Frank was not confident this was a positive move on the district's part. He said,

> All this talk about accountability felt like it was a move to improve the school in order to build houses or further develop the community and improve the city's tax base. As a result, I believe the programs that were instituted aligned with the inner structure of a business model. That model allowed outside voices to have more of a control about school matters. In many cases, it opened the door for political scrutiny that always has a bias, and certainly in my opinion, that scrutiny almost always targeted, negatively, the rights and beliefs of minorities.

The establishment of these forums were a part of resolving the teacher contract dispute. A component of these forums included specific guidelines to enhance the collaboration between leadership, teachers, and parents under the auspices that it would provide more autonomy to school leaders. These guidelines presumptively allowed more control to school leaders around time, resources, and the school's curriculum. However, schools and the community lost a lot of autonomy. Decisions such as overall accountability measures, school funding, human resources, and policy around discipline, were controlled at the central level. The increased centralization resulted in a disconnect with the community and a new narrative. Around 2005, Silver Oaks School District commissioned a report to conduct a deep data dive on the root cause of chronic low academic performance and declining enrollment. What emerged were reports that highlighted alleged irregularities and deficiencies in the daily operations of the school. Findings from this report indicated the current academic structures, such as, inconsistency in curriculum, course offerings, rigor in teaching, and support systems for academically struggling students, were the primary reasons as to why a number of Silver Oaks' schools were experiencing chronic low academic results and diminishing graduation rates. George, a current district administrator that began working in district 7 years prior to the school closing, stated,

> School grades looked okay from a local stand point, but test scores were chronically very low. So, after reviewing the data, it was the belief that the district had to do something. A decision needed to be made to accelerate the opportunities for kids. We could not have kids habitually failing and losing a genuine opportunity for college and career opportunities.

Frank, the school administrator during the reform process, believed these reports aided and ramped up discussion around school choice. Frank commented,

> I felt like the reasons given did have some truth in them, however, decisions during this period did not appear to be based upon improving schools, but more toward establishing reasons for school choice and bringing in charter schools.

Legislation that addressed and adopted school choice began long before Silver Oaks School District began looking meticulously at school accountability and the teacher conflict.

State-wide school choice. In 1980, the same year Rocky Mountain High School opened, the state legislative branch established and adopted policies that granted every student in the state the right to choose which school they wanted to attend. When Rocky Mountain High School opened this was not much of an issue. Brad, a fifty-year resident of Neighborhood community, explained,

> I was not really paying attention to politics and policies as much back then. I was not really paying attention to school choice. Back then, people around the city demonstrated pride in their schools. You knew where you were going to high school and you were most likely going to be there four years or until you graduated. There was no difference about Rocky Mountain High School. When Rocky Mountain High School opened, everybody in that region wanted to attend the school. It was the ultimate center of pride for the community.

However, as time elapsed, and in conjunction with the stipulations associated with the teacher contract dispute, school accountability, enrollment, and graduation rates, school choice became the focus of local education agencies, politicians, and local developers. This intersection brought about decisions of whether to invest in improving schools, closing schools, exercising school choice options, or a combination of them all.

The Turning Tide. According to several participants, by 2004, Silver Oaks School district faced public security around low performing schools and had already closed several schools. Initially, charter schools, and school choice options did not appear to be major a concern in the Pebbles community until talk of chronic low academic performance, declining enrollment, and violence was being spoken of more and more around the Silver Oaks School District. Evelyn stated, "When the district first began discussion in Pebbles about student successes and failures, I thought it was just to talk about how to improve the school. I didn't think the talk would amount to anything other than changing leadership again, or teachers…you know what they were already doing." However, after several weeks of discussion and more talk about charter schools, Evelyn realized this was like a previous process. As a result, she began to fear the worse. Evelyn recalled, "As the talks continued, I started to reflect, and I can remember thinking, Silver Oaks had already closed several schools and had recently attempted to close another school very similar to Rocky Mountain High School. It's almost the same reasons and language used in that situation." Upon

further reflection, Evelyn suggested this was the beginning of the end of Rocky Mountain high school and the beginning of charter schools. Once the talk of charter schools began, Margerie, a long- time resident of the community, remembers the process and commented,

> In the early 2000's Silver Oaks city government of was looking to expand the Pebbles areas. I can remember seeing in the news how local government officials, developers, along with district personnel spoke about possibilities to expand Silver Oaks' tax base. To take advantage of the land around the Pebbles community, it was assumed a positive outlook on schools would be a major factor, and it appeared this was the optimal platform to introduce charter schools.

As the conversation lingered, information about charters schools were being introduced to the Pebbles community, followed by questions and surveys about the community's perception about charter schools. Evelyn, a public-school educator that resides in the school closure community, stated, "I remember when they (Silver Oaks School District) began to send out surveys and asks questions about charter schools. I thought to myself, 'that is strange'. Why are they sending out these surveys when we already have schools in the area?" Around the time surveys were being conducted, Silver Oaks Schools District had recently received the results of a commissioned study that suggested large urban districts, like Silver Oaks School District would be best served in improving schools, by executing a "laser-like" focus, on student achievement.

Margerie remembers this "laser-like" focus was also a part of a dialogue obtained from a commissioned report. According to Margerie, a long-time resident of the community,

> The report talked about growth data and how under the current structure, Black student performance would not likely catch up with White student performance. But it also spoke about dismissing data points that showed growth in "some" students because it was unreliable or something to that effect. What I remember most is that charter schools were going to be a major part of Silver Oaks moving forward, because a heavy emphasis presented from this report was about how establishing charter schools would help boost enrollment and academic performance. It was my opinion, that no matter what data was being presented, it was done in the name of primarily bring in charter schools.

Allegra, a school teacher at Rocky Mountain High School, pointed out,

> I know White flight was a concern around the city, and in just a short period of time I noticed that the success talk had turned, and Pebbles was no longer considered a positive area around the city. The city was looking to expand and the ideal area was in or near the Pebbles community. With the negative publicity surrounding Pebbles, many White residents were not likely to move out to Pebbles nor enroll their children in Rocky Mountain High School.

Based on the information presented, Brad believed the measures being taken were about having "better schools" in the Pebbles areas, and the quickest way to that was through the establishment of charters schools. Allegra feared the data points that were

being presented, coupled with the rising conversation about school choice, were extremely political in nature. Evelyn believed school choice would become a major factor in Silver Oaks because of political pressure, and those pressures began with touting low academic performance, particularly scores on standardized tests. What was known around the community was something would take place to increase efforts to improve academic success. However, many did not know what lied ahead.

Singular focus on standardized testing. Several members of the Pebbles community believed the new accountability structure, which emphasized standardized testing, was flawed and would overtime, negatively affect students of color. Frank, the current school administrator of the school during the reform process, recalled his worry about the accountability system when it was first presented. Frank asserted,

> You could see the tide turn for Rocky Mountain High School when the talk of *Goals 2000* and *No Child Left Behind Act* was introduced. Those two programs emphasized school accountability through testing. The school and community were predominantly African American and research indicates African American and Latinx students consistently scored lower on standardized tests than their White counterparts. To me, the notion that student assessments would be the primary measure of school's success was the signal that problems were heading that way.

Margerie, a resident of more than fifty years, further commented,

> I have been through a school closing and what I know is, when someone mentions test scores. Schools that enroll mostly students of color should worry, because the only thing that matters are student test scores, nothing

else. Historically students of color often do not collectively score as high on those tests as White students. What that means to me is something negative may be coming, solely because of test scores, and that is a shame.

However, several participants opposed the idea of major reform by singularly focusing on test results. Furthermore, if test scores were the central argument, some members did not feel the suggestions of reform were equally balanced based on Silver Oaks data illustrating data like high schools in other areas. Frank pointed out,

> I understand concerns of low academic performance, but I know for a fact that in comparison to minority students around the district, the students at Rocky Mountain High School were performing on average, 10 points better than minority students at other schools around the district. I am not saying that, Rocky Mountain High School overall student scores were better. I am saying if academic performance, test scores, was the single focus, then other schools should have been considered for an all on assault before Rocky Mountain High School.

Brad, a former student of the school that was closed who had children that attended the school, echoed these findings,

> If you looked at the data for all the other area comprehensive high schools, in comparison, Rocky Mountain High School students were doing as well as other schools. So, I was thinking, why the heavy talk about test scores and changes needing to be made. Were they making changes everywhere else? If

so, were other schools being considered for closing, and if not, what were those schools doing to improve the academic performance of their minority students?

Evelyn, a public-school educator that resides in the school closure community, believed test scores were the scapegoat of educational reform, when she said,

> History tells us that systemic racism exists, but you always have people to make excuses to keep perpetuating the process. I don't how many research projects tells people that standardized tests are historically biased, but I am confused as to why that information is consistently ignored. It's like the people making the decision knows it is a game changer toward illustrating a point for the masses, but a point that always hurt Black and Brown kids and they seem to don't care. It's ridiculous.

Carol, a Pebbles community resident and neighbor to Allegra, remembers a time when standardized testing was not a factor in graduating high school. She reflected,

> I remember when I was in school, a long time ago, you were tested on what the teacher taught you in class. You were not measured against students. You were graded on what you learned. I came from an entire generation of people that turned out okay from that structure. I am not sure what happened, but I don't believe today's methods are better. I actually believe they are worse.

However, not all community members shared the belief of Carol. Donna, a single parent that works in the central part of the metro area and resides in the school closure

community, explained, that for her, academics is the most influential factor. She expressed, “When considering a school for my child to attend, I look at the academic rankings. I want my child to attend a school that is high performing so my child has an opportunity at success at the next level.” What Donna described can be associated with neoliberal reasoning and meritocracy.

However, when asked what she thought about standardized testing, Donna acknowledged, “I do believe there is bias, but it is the system we live in, and I need my child to be able to navigate whatever comes at him.” Most participants eluded to the fact that of course, they want their child to work hard and succeed, however, seven of nine believed, whereas meritocracy is a driving force to support the argument of success, meritocracy is a false narrative in regard to the success of people of color, and that standardized testing is the tip of the sword. Evelyn, who witnessed many of her neighborhood friends and family members’ school being restructured or closed year after year, stated,

> I hear the argument all the time, if you work hard, get good grades and score high enough on some test, you will get where you need to be (meritocracy). I think that is nonsense. I know plenty of people that did not make the highest grade or met a testing threshold that turned out to be exceptional at what they do and vice versa. In my opinion, standardize testing is just like other things in the life of Black and Brown people, a scapegoat to keep people down or in their place. That’s why I believe to give a blanket statement, that testing is an equal measure or that hard work is the only factor that matters, is delusional.

> Of course, those are factors that may or may not be considered, but based on history, we all know, whether it is spoken or not, race, gender, and sexual orientation play a factor in everything. Everything includes bias, and who in history has been biased against the most, people of color, our Black and Brown people.

Some participants suggested systemic racism has been a long-standing problem in America, and standardized testing is a major factor. However, six of nine participants are baffled as to why standardize testing is still being used as the "be all end all" in a system that has documented knowledge that this form of measurement is inherently biased against people of color. Nonetheless, when it comes down to standardized testing and school accountability, Brad summed up what most participants believed. "I do believe academics should be a factor when determining a student's and probably a school's success. However, it should not be the major reason, and it definitely should not be the only reason. I think other matters should be considered in the whole picture to determine success." Nonetheless, educational reform is largely based on standardized testing results and districts with low performing schools consistently seek ways to improve test scores. Many of their efforts begin with school improvement grants.

The Beginning of the End of Rocky Mountain High School

In 2009, under the Obama Administration, schools across the nation were presented opportunities to received additional funding through School Improvement Grants (SIG) to help turnaround failing schools. To receive this funding local education agencies had to complete the application process informing the federal government how funds would be utilized, and which model would be used in the

turnaround process. The four models include (1) restarts, (2) transformations, (3) turnarounds, and (4) closures. That same year, the Silver Oaks School Board opted to utilize one of the four turnaround options under the *Race to the Top* initiatives by the Obama Administration to improve Rocky Mountain High School's situation.

Silver Oaks School District decided to take this opportunity and informed Pebbles community members that meetings would take place to discuss matters associated with Rocky Mountain High School. District leadership informed the Pebbles community that each meeting would involve discussion around the possible steps that needed to be taken to "turnaround" Rocky Mountain High School. Silver Oaks district leadership meeting agendas led first, by discussing the worries about low academic performance and enrollment concerns and concluded by presenting several choices to the Pebbles community as viable improvement options. The choices ultimately landed on choosing one of the four turnaround options, that included changing leadership, staff members, a restart, or simply closing the school and starting over.

Community Engagement. Realizing that change would come regardless, the Pebbles community committed to listen and be a proactive part of the process. Silver Oaks district leadership informed the community that moving forward there would be in-depth discussion and collaboration about next steps, but the community would be the deciding factor in the direction of the school. In addition, the community was informed that these were preliminary discussion that would not come to fruition for at least three years. Allegra, the mother of four students who were directly affected by the school closure, commented,

> In the initial meetings, during each discussion, people were worried about the process and when would it take place. Those questions were constantly being asked during meetings. I can remember it like it was yesterday. We were told on several occasion in those meetings that we would have three years to transition into whatever change we decided.

Whereas members of the community did not appear to like the idea of change, many appeared to leave the meetings with the idea that their voices were being heard and that the timeline was not instantaneous. Laura indicated, "…the proposed changes were hard for people to accept, but they at least felt that they were involved and had a say in what happened. You know, why wouldn't they? Just a few years ago, we were totally involved in the creation of the school, so let's just come together again and find a way to make this better." Reflecting on the process, Margerie recalls, "I remember thinking, I don't like this, but at least it will not take place for a few years, and the people will have a say in the final outcome." Evelyn added, "I didn't like it, but I did feel like people could make the best of it. When I heard in those meetings that they, (Pebbles community members), would be the deciding factor and that whatever decision they came up with would be the decision to go with, I was skeptical, but impressed."

Like Margerie and Evelyn, many community members were uncomfortable with the discussions and had difficulty accepting the suggested proposals. Nevertheless, members of the Pebbles community were committed to be a part of a discussion and hopefully come up with a solution that was suitable for all. Based upon the information shared, members of the Pebbles community believed the process

would be a collaboration in good faith. Allegra stated, "…the initial meetings left people wondering what would the future look like…so many questions. But they left willing to work on it. Some were excited and began meeting right away to come up with solutions."

The members of the Pebbles community held several meetings to decide which turnaround option would be best for Rocky Mountain High School moving forward. Allegra, a current resident, stated, "…those meetings were intense. People were not agreeing on much, but you could tell they were invested in coming up with the best decision, no matter how hard or how long it took. They were committed." Margerie, also a long time resident, commented, "the community spokespersons wanted to be ready the next time we met with the school board. They wanted a united front, a stand of solidarity, about what they would like for the school." Laura, district administrator that has lived in the community for more than 12 years, remembered, "...I was not a part of all the meetings, but I do know that people worked hard to come up with a decision that met what the district requested and that the community wanted." At the conclusion of Pebbles community meetings, most participants felt prepared and confident in their agreed upon selection and was ready to share this information with the Silver Oaks school board.

After many hours of collaboration and compromise, the Pebbles community believed their agreed upon option was the best choice moving forward for Rocky Mountain High School. When the time arrived at the next meeting with the school board, Pebbles community spokespersons presented their choice from the turnaround options. The Pebbles community members chose the "transformation"

model largely in part because this model was universally accepted as being the least disruptive to a school. However, after the conclusion of their presentation, Silver Oaks school board informed the Pebbles community that that their option would not be chosen, but a secondary option, the "turnaround" model, would be selected because the board felt it was the better option. Margerie recalls, "…I needed to take a minute, I, like many others, was upset, ...we were livid. Many called out the notion this always happens, and that Black and Brown voices didn't matter. It was not a good scene."

According to Laura, the board's decision was shocking to the community. She said, "We felt like we were blindsided when the board rejected our idea. I don't think many people saw this coming. They actually believed the board, when they told them their voice would be the deciding factor." Allegra recalls, "This was totally shocking to me and many people around me were outraged. We were told over and over again that our decision would be the consideration. Only to be informed that it was not. I could not believe it." Community members who did not support the turnaround option were speaking out about the process and how the board never intended to give the community a say. Brad believed, "…several people in the audience voiced their disappointment and from that point on, one might assume that the community lost all trust in Silver Oaks District leadership." Pebbles community members realized at this moment their voice may not matter as much as they believed. According to Margerie,

> You could feel the tension between the community and the district leaders in that meeting. The district began talking about how bad the tests scores were, low academic performance, etc., and that a change needed to happened, and

> their decision was the best to address the matter. Oh my…. It made me feel like we didn't matter. We were being told things that did not seem real. They were labeling this school a bad place; that the people here were no good as if test scores were the only things that mattered.

Allegra indicated, "Of course you know the news was present, and during this discussion, there was a heavy focus on test scores and based on that, it seemed like they, (the school board), were looking for a reason to change something instead of improving what we had. Yea, that entire process made a lot of us feel like we were not good enough, you know, just absolute horrible people." Frank commented, "It felt manufactured." What the community did not see coming was the deal would be altered one more time, and this time, it spoke of closing the school.

The Vote to Close Down Rocky Mountain High School

Pebbles community members were in disbelief about the recent turn of events around the choice selected for Rocky Mountain High School. Community members, teachers, students, and community activists voiced their concern about the alleged "good faith" agreement between the community and district leadership, where many believed this would be a good faith collaborative effort on all sides. This would be tested yet again months later. After community members began to settle on the idea that the "turnaround" option would be exercised moving forward, a few short months later, the community was yet again informed that the school would be phased out and closed forever. This revelation sparked more outcry from community members, teachers, students, and activists. Nonetheless, Silver Oaks school board explained that

the best course of action would be to close down the school and start over with different options. However, the vote on the matter would be taken at the next board meeting and the members of the Pebbles community would be presented one last opportunity to discuss and pled with the board to reconsider their proposed decision.

When the time arrived, prior to the vote to close down Rocky Mountain High School, Silver Oaks district leadership allowed the community an opportunity to speak on the matter one last time during an open session at the board meeting. The meeting began around seven o'clock in the evening and lasted just after one o'clock the following morning. The meeting was filled with anxious teachers, students, parents, community members and activists, mostly protesting the potential vote to close Rocky Mountain High School. After hours of passionate commentary and reasons to give this school and community another chance, Silver Oaks school board voted 4 to 3 (split vote) to close down the youngest comprehensive high school in the district. Allegra recalled,

> At the school board meetings, our students spoke. They gave some of the most beautiful speeches I've ever heard about why their school should stay open. Why they love their community, why they love their teachers, why they needed Rocky Mountain High School to be given another chance. Those speeches went on for a really long time. Many community members, students, teachers spoke passionately for keeping the school open, but ultimately, I think the decision was made months ago and this was just a formality.

As far as Allegra was concerned, where the outcome was not expected or anticipated, the process left a negative impression for many people involved. Allegra indicated a disdain for what she believed was a faux collaboration process. She also believed it was conducted in the most unprofessional manner possible. Allegra reflected on the process and the final outcome and stated,

> It was all a lie. The community was first led to believe that their voice would matter, only to find out that after many hours of community discussion and collaboration, the board made another choice without the community's consideration. Furthermore, after the community met with the district and told that their choice would not be honored, just a few months later the community was informed that the school would be phased out, closed down. How do you go from being involved in a decision that would not take place for three years, to being told the school would be voted to be phased out in four years? You know the more I think about it, this was a forgone conclusion. Insane!

Based upon documentaries found in district records, local newspapers, and YouTube videos, the process was reported to unfolded very closely to what participants recalled, and for that reason Frank remarked, "the process was orchestrated with a preconceived outcome. There was never going to be any collaboration about this. To be honest, I still believe the vote was a formality, designed to achieve the outcome that was decided upon years ago. What a shame!"

Forgone Conclusion. Based upon the belief that the decision to close down Rocky Mountain High School was a forgone conclusion, Frank, an administrator

assigned to the administrative team that was in charge of delivering the message to the community about the school closure and how it would be facilitated, commented,

> After the meeting with the board to announce the decision to close the school, all I could think was. Oh wow! I can't believe this! Then I thought, yes, I can. As I reflected in the moment, I realized, the majority of people who attended these meetings were Silver Oaks employees, community activist, private investors, or government employees. They were a fixed group that were extremely biased towards what was
> going to happen and had a lot to gain should it happen.

Evelyn was not as shocked by the decision as others, but had hoped for a different outcome. Evelyn stated, "What I hoped would not happen, happened. Big money and politics won again!" Evelyn and others commented on having some faith in the process at the very beginning but along the way the process somehow changed in a direction many were not comfortable with. Margerie accounts, "When the process first began, I had some hope that things would be different this time and that the district would honor their word. I was wrong. I guess this community didn't have enough political clout or money to buy the process."

The Aftermath

After the process was concluded, all participants commented on their disappointment in the Silver Oaks school district leadership and board. Nonetheless, after the 4-3 board vote, the district leadership decided to move forward on phasing out the youngest high school in the district without consideration of the future

ramifications. Laura believed that a bad decision was made, "…now we are stuck with the dealing with the impact of a poor decision that could have been avoided had the district engaged the community voice in an honest and transparent manner. Nonetheless, without considering most of the community voice, the question should be asked what they did (district leadership) do to invest in making the school better before deciding to shut it down?" George, one of the administrators who heavily involved the decision-making process associated with closing the school, commented,

> In hindsight, I don't believe community engagement was a primary focus. I believe the decision to close down Rocky Mountain High School was done at the whim of gentrification and assimilation. It was a part of a systemic process, that again, in public schools, has not taken seriously the conversation of community voice and equity. It was a narrow and short-sighted view of equity.

Upon reflection, most participants want to know if any person on that board realized the future ramifications that single vote would take on the Pebbles community.

Destroying a Community. The participants shared a common theme that the investment in Pebbles community, a once believed vibrant and upcoming community, had seen the rise and fall of their local neighborhood high school. Consequently, there was a severe and diminished belief and respect for the people of the Pebbles community. Frank indicated,

> Silver Oaks municipality saw something in this area years ago that led community members to believe that an ensuing partnership would be forged into a legacy of good will, good fortune, and prosperity for all. However, as circumstances unfolded, in a short amount of time, the city and school district

leadership, that promoted so much potential and promise for the area, now tolerate a belief about this area that speaks to fear, violence, and despair.

By in large, because the majority of the Pebbles community residents were Black, the participants of this study believed the underlying vote to close Rocky Mountain High School and the message sent by the vote is associated with racial undertones that speaks to stereotyping and negative bias. The negative bias and belief about people of color in the Pebbles community promoted Margerie to say, "… if this were a White neighborhood, or a neighborhood that consisted of people with a lot of money, I believe the outcome would have been different. Or maybe, it would have never been brought up to begin with." In addition, Laura commented, "…this process destroyed a community. It damaged a legacy of history and tradition created by the people of this community; that can never be restored."

Leaving Behind a Legacy. When this study began, participants were asked to define the importance of the community and why they chose to be a part of this community. This question is paramount to set the stage of understanding perceptions and attitudes regarding the decision to what they believe about their community and the decision to close Rocky Mountain High School. Each participant indicated the importance of the community and how the school and community shaped their lives. Participants suggested the sense of belonging and camaraderie were essential elements when it came to their decision to be associated with this community. Their passionate commentary spoke to the pride and joy of living in a community of friends. Yet, when Rocky Mountain High School was closed, many believed the legacy of these traditions and practices, what the community was built upon beginning in 1967, is now left

behind and lost forever. Donna asserted, "…community engagement between families truly mattered. When I first moved into this neighborhood, it was really beautiful seeing how the community came together to support the events that we had, whether those be sporting events, festivals, fund raisers, etc." In addition, Donna, along with Laura, believed the traditions and culture began with the neighborhood school. Laura, district administrator that has lived in the community for more than 12 years, commented,

> Communities and neighborhood schools are an important part to the connectedness between families. You know kids learn all their values from their parents, in schools, and from the community in which they live. There is a closeness between neighbors. Togetherness creates a close-knit community, if that's a word. Togetherness and support are what happens when you keep people together… they shop together, they live together, they play together, they learn together. When you know somebody, you care about them and you're probably going to be less apt to have conflict with them. So,
>
> a sense of community creates a different set of values and beliefs that generate long term friendships and camaraderie with people in their lives.

Carol's comments aligned with Laura's as she expressed,

> You know, I am a native of this city and community. I have been here a very long time and the values of the community have been established by the friendships and camaraderie between neighbors and passed along from generation to generation. Living in this community created a great deal of pride for people. In many cases these values have historical and intrinsic principles

that are passed along each generation.

Margerie emphasized the pride in community by stating,

> Communities are historical landmarks for all the people who have lived there, if a community has existed 50 years, for example, think how many children, parents, and grandparents have lived there, grown up there, and played there. The memories and stories have a historical significance that cannot be measured or forgotten.
>
> Communities are an invaluable part of living.

After hearing these passionate tales of an era now past, the focus turned to the age-old question of what happened. Evelyn captured the thoughts of most participant in the following statement. She exclaimed,

> You know, this was a beautiful community and still is, in a lot of respects. But not all people see it that way. This was largely an African American community of regular people just trying to make it. In the eyes of some, during this process, people in this community and their voice just didn't seem to matter to the decision-makers. I could probably guess why, but I will not speculate. Nonetheless, you know, it is hard to get people to look beyond their core beliefs, it takes something big to open people's eyes. I wish people would look at Black communities like they view their own. In most cases they don't and in a situation like this one, you have outsiders making decision about what is best for the people living somewhere they know little to nothing about, without trying to understand the big picture.

> When that happens, something is lost, the heart of the community is stolen and is no longer there. The history, the traditions, the closeness; dies. And the vote to close down Rocky Mountain High School was the weapon of choice.

However, Brad and Carol believed that weapon of choice would not have been as effective if the preconceived thoughts did not surround the Pebbles community. Donna stated, "… after a few years, to be honest, this community had a bad rap around the city as being unsafe and not a place to bring up children." Brad believed those negative stereotypes and perceptions were mainly from outsiders of the community and the beliefs were rooted in race. Brad commented, "The community was black and like everything associate with blackness, they were stereotyped by individuals who did not live out there or by individuals who did not know anyone who did live out there. It was like, all the "Blacks" live out there, it must be bad." Carol stated,

> Yes, I felt like this area got a bad rap. I know things happen, but they happen all over the city. To me it is unbelievable how people still stereotype us (Blacks). What about the positive images and stories that come from the Pebbles community. We have had mayors to live in this community. We have doctors, lawyers, professional athletes, teachers to graduate from this community, as well as many others that are very proud of where they came from, but for some reason when people think of Pebbles they only see Black people and I guess that just means trash to them.

George, an administrator involved in the school closure decision making, understands Brad's sentiments and asserted, that whereas, he cannot subscribe to that way of thinking, he knows all too well it happens. George commented, "...situations like the stereotyping of this community is unfortunate. Communities are supposed to bring people together, and this community had a powerful connection. There were a lot of hopes and dreams within this community, so it is unfortunate that outside forces chose not to see beyond the obvious."

Donna suggested people generally will see the worse before the best, especially in the media. "You know, in the media, they're going to always project that only negative thing happens in Black communities. Any little thing and it gets blown out of proportion. Don't get me wrong, some things are major, but it is not always the case. But I think stereotyping and perception of people from outside the community was a major thing that obviously played into closing down the school." Laura gave an example of Donna's proclamation, "…I know it was incident at the school and a student died, and that was one of the reasons, stated, you know, "violence", as why a new school needed to be considered. However, let's not forget there were mass school shootings around the nation in schools that were mostly populated by White students, until this day, I still have not heard about anyone saying the neighborhood is bad or looking to close down any of those schools due to violence."

Evelyn indicated that "It is hard to get people to look beyond their core beliefs. Most people hear something and immediately think or ask if it was associated with a Black person. If it is, then you can guess the rest of the story." Evelyn's commentary resonates in stories of the participants of this study. Whereas, many see the closing of

Rocky Mountain High School a travesty of justice, 8 of 10 voiced that travesty included a decision based largely on stereotyping and bigotry. Margerie wishes a change would come sooner than later and shared,

> I learned a lot in this process. I listen to an activist and understood the larger picture of why some decision were made. However, in doing so, I still wished people would look at Black communities like they view their own. In most cases they don't, and in a situation like this one, you have outsiders making decision about what is best for the people there without trying to try to understand the local history, hopes, and desires associated with stories of the people living there.

Frank suggested, "…this happens because the power structures often do not value nor recognize the views and beliefs of people of color. They say they do, but their actions speak volumes that they don't." According to Frank, "One thing I know, ultimately race, in some way or other, closes schools, and it was readily apparent in the closing down of Rocky Mountain High School."

Participants in this study collectively believed stereotyping led the powerful and influential members of Silver Oaks to not view Pebbles as successful as it once was. Participants also agreed upon how the media constantly presented the community as a place of violence, filled with students who were academically failing and had little chance of becoming better without outside intervention. Allegra believes the constant negative attention in the media led to more despairing remarks and perceived degradation through statements made at select board meetings. During these meetings Allegra

recalled consistently hearing statements suggesting the neighborhood school and community as failing and "not good enough" by individuals she did not believe were familiar with the community. George suggested, "… stereotyping led to thinking that outside voices were more significant than the voices within the community. This singular thinking led to a lot of things being missed, particularly the community voice." George's recollection illustrates a larger belief from all participants. At varies stages in each participant's recollection of events, comments were produced to illustrate specific scenarios of perceived manipulation by way of conversations, reports, and actual occurrences of compromises and brokered deals in the name of equity and improvement. These reflections also produced stories revealing the underlying motive of deals with land developers, charter associations, increasing the tax base, and reducing "White flight" from the district.

As suggested by all participants, the process was presented as a measure that was necessary and warranted for students to be successful. From the establishment of Pebbles community to the process to discuss the future of Rocky Mountain High School, participants believed the presented proposals were tactics to suggest the action was beneficial for the community. However, as each process continued, participants submitted beliefs the process, specifically the school closure process, was not transparent nor fair. The process ultimately appeared manufactured so much so that the proposal that was presented as the best option for the community, garnered little, if any, respect for the voice and input from the community in which it served.

Chapter Summary

This study's research question— *How does school closings affect lower socioeconomic urban communities in which they serve,* was the focal point of examining participants' lived experience as it relates to a school closing. The stories in the project unveiled an assorted combination of experiences and emotions associated with the perceptions of partnerships, camaraderie, and trust, which were pertinent aspect for all participants in this study. The investigation of this study derived five central themes about the closing of Rocky Mountain High School: (a) The Community believed a singular focus on data (standardized test scores) was used to justify the school closure; (b) The Community believed historical racialized methods were used to establish the Pebbles community and ultimately used to close Rocky Mountain High School; (c) The Community believed money, power, and influence dictated the outcome; (d) The Community believed the process was manufactured; and (e) The Community did not believe their voice mattered in the process. In this sequence of events, I uncovered several episodes of behavior that some participants believed held racist undertones. The most consistent message interwoven throughout each theme was a lack of respect for the voices of the members of Pebbles community. Each participant articulated how the perceived dismissive behavior was to them personally, but shared sentiments of real accounts that were echoed by their friends and collogues. At various stages in each participant's story, revelations arose indicating some level of the partnership was damaged or broken due to perceived intentions around transparency, stereotyping, deception, racial bias, and respect. George tersely summarized the entire experience from his vantage point, that in many ways capture the voice of all participants:

I would say that we need to take longer before we decide to close a school and that we need to be certain that there were no other avenues we could have taken to get to the results that we wanted. We know any decision to close a school is always going to be about student performance. It's always going to have a data component that's compelling, whether people agree on that or not, it is a fact. However, I would say that before any action taken we should, in the words of carpentry, measure twice and cut once. Let's make sure that the results that we're seeing, even chronic results, are being viewed over multiple years, and that we've explored every approach on how to change those opportunities over the years before closing.

You know, when you close a school, you've closed the school. And for really almost a generation of folks, particularly in this case, you have lost a level of trust for many and you have disenfranchised others in some ways. You send a message that, and a personal one for the community, your school wasn't good enough; the people were not good enough, which has a reflection that goes larger to a community. Every one of us basically love our neighborhood schools and in some way is very protective of it.

Just based on those thoughts, I would say again, before we close the school, we need to be certain we're hearing from everybody, including the voices that aren't ordinarily being heard or lost in translation and that we must explore

> every other way to improve the school before we take the drastic approach of closing it. Because, again, once it's done, you can't unclose a school. Once it's done, so dies the unity, the partnership.

George's synopsis summarized the core of the participants, that collaboration and compromise are not a bad thing, but evasiveness and deception are never a great way to proceed, not if trust and unity are expected. In addition to George's summation, numerous chronicles of the contributors emphasized how race is never far from any process and the significance of rooting out systemic practices is sorely needed, so that all people, community members, educational leaders, activist, business leaders, and government personnel may form true partnerships, as a community, to solve any situation and live amongst each other peacefully.

This study is significant because I examined educational reform efforts, specifically school closures. I highlighted the viewpoints of select minoritized community members around how a significant decision was made involving their community, while revealing the level in which their voices were considered or acted upon. Furthermore, findings from this study illustrate systemic practices, marred in racial bias and stereotyping, continue to affect relationships, trust, culture and climate, and camaraderie. The participants in this study avowed the significance of race through narratives confirming that all processes have consequences, and those consequences have winners and losers, which in most cases negatively affect people of color in minoritized neighborhoods. These conclusions, their effects, and suggested future recommendations will be discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this case study was to examine a school closure in an urban metropolitan school district and the effect that school closure had on the neighborhood community. Through the course of this process, I examined the history of the neighborhood, a neighborhood high school, and the journey to closing a school. To capture and evaluate the perceptions, I centered my questions around the central research question: *How do school closings affect lower socioeconomic urban communities in which they serve*? Based on nine individual interviews, transcriptions, my journal notes, newspaper articles, school district reports, and state data, I obtained authentic and detailed data from everyone and everything associated with a specific school closing in a minoritized community. In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings through a critical race theoretical lens and conclude with study implications and recommendations for research, policy, and practice around turnaround efforts in minoritized urban communities, particularly involving school closures.

Critical Race Theory and Rocky Mountain High School

I utilized Critical Race Theory has a theoretical lens to understand the role race and racism played in the decision to close Rocky Mountain High School. Using case study as method, I organized data from interviews, document analysis, and

participant surveys to bring individual stories together to form a collective counter-narrative about the process of the closing of the Neighborhood school from the perspectives of residents and educators in the Pebbles community. Findings from this study indicate that the Pebbles community strongly believed that race and racism were central in the decision to close the Neighborhood School. As the story began, an examination of the origins of the Pebbles community revealed that racism was the norm and providing opportunities for homeownership to Black families was aberrant to the racially discriminatory lending practices that were protected by law in the housing industry (Rothstein, 2017). This aberrant opportunity for Black families, that occurred amid the Civil Rights Movement, is what brought about the establishment of Pebbles and it being a majority Black community.

The Interest Convergence of the Pebbles Community. For example, the incident on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on the outskirts of Selma, Alabama (the protest march from Selma to Montgomery, otherwise referred to as *Bloody Sunday)*, resulted in national coverage and citizens around America witnessing the brutal mistreatment of citizens conducting a peaceful march. The videos, pictures, and narratives from this event appeared to be too much for the country to stomach. Shortly thereafter, President Lyndon. B. Johnson disavowed the actions taken by the Alabama police on that day and immediately acted to propose national legislation to address racial injustice. Participants who lived in Silver Oaks municipality at the time felt that national recognition prompted the decision to create the Pebbles community.

A Moral Imperative. Participants recalled the establishment to create Pebbles happened in late spring of 1965, shortly after the attempted "March to Montgomery" and because racial injustice dominated the national narrative. The underlying motive of establishing Pebbles community may have been a reaction to *Bloody Sunday*. In that reaction, some participants viewed that as an opportunity to financially and politically seize the moment. Frank's earlier summation, associated with the recollections of other participants, demonstrated how a fixed process, beholding to power and influence, highlighted what Bell believed true. The establishment of Pebbles was presented in part to help a certain group of people intersected with an agenda that may have benefitted others.

A political and financial opportunity. As I delved deeper in the narrative, I uncovered that six of the nine participants, believed the establishment of Pebbles was primarily based on money and politics. They did not believe Pebbles was established due a moral imperative but developed to advance a hidden political agenda that benefitted the political elite and their wealthy friends. Some participants believed to advance the idea of support and aligning with the growing national narrative around racial justice was a perfect way to cloak a political and economic agenda. Two participants shared that the dominant message behind the development of Pebbles was that it was as a new opportunity for homeownership. However, offering opportunities for homeownership for Black families converged with the interest of an increased tax base for Silver Oaks, monetary windfalls for land developers, and political capital for elected officials. Thus, the intersection was presented as prosperous for both parties, the Pebbles community homeowners and the Silver Oaks municipality. Therefore, it

was able to move forward with little objection on both sides. However, over the next twenty years many external and internal factors led to negative implications for the Neighborhood school. Factors that affected the success of the Neighborhood school included leadership turnover, teacher turnover and strike, ever-changing reform policies, and considerable divestment from the Pebbles community which led to it being a food desert.

Leadership Turnover

Kearney, Valadez and Garcia (2012) presented evidence that having a consistent leadership on campus improves and stabilizes school culture that is conducive to improving student achievement. However, according to participants in this study, it was widely known and acknowledged that Rocky Mountain High School experienced several changes in leadership in a short amount of time. Frequent and rapid turnover in school leadership has a profound negative effect on school culture, which ultimately has an indirect negative effect on student achievement (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Yet, prior to exercising a vote to close Rocky Mountain High School, district leadership failed to reveal in their school closure discussions that over a seven-year span, the school experienced four different leaders and leadership teams and this mitigating factor could possibly be a root cause of diminishing results. In the case of the closing of Rocky Mountain high school, district leadership inferred that the low tests scores were a result of poor teacher and student performance. Another significant event that often results from leadership turnover is teacher turnover.

Teacher Turnover

According to Holmes, Parker, and Gibson (2019) to advance a school, principals must retain highly effective teachers, which helps to safeguard constancy in the classroom. The constancy teachers provide can elevate standardized test results as much as 10 percent in one year or less, according to Clark, Martorell, and Rockoff (2009). During the time Silver Oaks leadership contemplated executing reform efforts to improve Rocky Mountain High School, attracting and retaining teachers was a concern. Data taken from the Silver Oaks archives suggested Rocky Mountain High School was having trouble recruiting teachers as well as retaining teachers once hired. As a result, Rocky Mountain High School was a "hard to staff" school. According to Jacob (2007), "hard to staff" schools are often equated with schools that are low performing and have a high population of free and reduced lunch students and whose student population are mostly Black or Latinx. To secure teachers for "hard to staff" schools, districts resorted to seeking instructors through alternate measures. In many cases, the teachers that were being recruited were often coming from alternate certificate programs that required them to participate in a summer crash course in preparation for the course they would be teaching and to stay two years in their position in order to fulfill the obligation of their contract. These individuals were often not considered highly qualified educators or experts in their subject matter but qualified enough to instruct the students in schools like Rocky Mountain High School. However, no matter how effective the teacher may have been, constancy and stability were still an issue at Rocky Mountain High School. This problem was further exacerbated due to an unforeseen teacher strike.

Teacher Strike

If circumstances to motivate and inspire students to focus on testing were not strained enough, in October of 1994 as the narrative began to turn negative for the Pebbles community and Rocky Mountain High School, Silver Oaks metropolitan area was experiencing a teacher strike. The teacher strike of 1994 began due to a dispute over work conditions (i.e., the length of the workweek, planning time, and pay). The strike lasted for just over one week. In that time, more than 18,000 students (1/3 of the district's student population) stayed home and were left without daily classroom instruction. To keep schools open, the remaining students who attended classes were being taught by substitute teachers. This strike divided Silver Oaks greater school community and further distracted an already stressed population of students even more.

Food Desert

Amid discussing how leadership and teacher turnover along with the strike disrupted the daily lives of students, one participant brought up the point of student health and well- being. This participant eluded to the social and emotional trauma students around the metropolitan area may have experienced, but a significant point highlighted was nutrition.

During the strike, it was noted that approximately one third of Silver Oaks students stayed home during the strike. However, two-thirds attended school. One participant highlighted that students did not come to school to further their learning. Many came for the meals. At the time of the teacher strike Pebbles neighborhood was filled with quick stop stores and junior food marts, however, the community that was

touted to be futurist, was void a grocery store for families to shop. This was just another area in which students and families in the Pebbles community and Rocky Mountain High School had to navigate while expected to focus on performing well on standardized test. In chapter two, I highlighted president Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" stance in which he touted education as the "Great Equalizer".

President Johnson believed education was the premise to lift individuals from poverty. However, in the case of Rocky Mountain High School, educational practices and outside circumstances were embedding families deeper in poverty and doing so with inconsistent practices and revolving policies.

Revolving Policies

As most participants indicated, academics are important, and students should be held accountable. However, a concern raised was the frequency in which Silver Oaks presented new methods and pedagogical approaches to raise the test scores of students. Silver Oaks schools district is not solely to blame for some quick turnarounds or abrupt changes. Rooted since the inception of the Elementary and Secondary School Act, (ESEA), education reform policies have been known to change every six years, depending on which political party is in charge and the priority of each administration. This may not seem detrimental at the national level, but it can be devastating at the local level. In the case of Rocky Mountain High School, it was observed that with each change in leadership, a method would be rolled out with the new administration team, thus forcing teachers and students to abandon one method and trade it in for another new method. Sometimes this change would happen within a six-month period. According to Meyers and Smylie (2017)

quick and abrupt turnarounds are not effective regarding student achievement and turning around low performing schools. Meyers and Smylie (2017) suggest this in part because specific turnaround efforts disrupts schools more than others. Case in point, the restart model provides a cart blanch approach to dismissing school leadership and teachers because the model dictates this must happen, not taking into account school failure may not be a result of their performance. This is just one example that continually perpetuates practices in neoliberalism and the myth of meritocracy.

The Myth of Meritocracy

Researchers like Diane Ravitch (2016) have consistently argued that standardized tests are historically biased against minoritized students and should not be used to measure a school's success or failure, yet somehow the practice continues. Using standardized test scores as the primary driver in the decision to close the Neighborhood school is rooted in the notion of meritocracy. The assumption of meritocracy is that hard work and dedication determines one's success or failure. Since the Pebbles community was created to establish affordable housing and new employment opportunities, the assumption was that community members and by extension the students of the Neighborhood school were now on a level playing field. Based on this faulty ideology, consistently low-test scores were attributed to the students and their families rather than a collection of policies, practices, and divestment from the Pebbles community that all had a role in the school's academic performance.

Meritocratic practices fail to take into account historical and systemic situations that hinder certain populations of students from gaining knowledge and wealth (Cobb & Russell, 2015). Some of these situations include scenarios where students have a lack of food at home or limited areas in the neighborhood to shop for food. Additionally, families may often find themselves in situations where they have limited or no private or public transportation to freely move about which sometimes limit employment opportunities. If this were not enough, students in "hard to serve" schools often experience frequent teacher and principal turnover in schools that inconsistency administer policies to promote equity for all students. Scenarios as such are very real in urban communities and often play a significant role in detracting students from authentically delving into content. Whereas Walter, Spencer, and Erman (2013) proclaimed test bias may be rooted in context, Cobb and Russell (2015) asserted that policymakers have a unique opportunity to improve student performance by examining their surroundings and taking the necessary steps to provide a psychologically safe environment.

Ignoring divestment from the Pebbles community is rooted in the notion of meritocracy, suggesting the establishment of a community filled with affordable housing and new opportunities, community members would have a level playing field toward upward mobility in society. However, these internal and external factors had compounding effects on the community and students within the Neighborhood School. Students within the Pebbles community were not starting from an established well-resourced community but from a place created to address years of racial oppression by means of providing affordable housing and opportunity for historically marginalized

citizens. Whereas affordable housing may have been realized for many, true equal opportunity through the spirit of meritocracy eluded the members of the Pebbles community. Meritocracy for the Pebbles community yielded unintended consequences rooted in historical racial practices that ultimately perpetuated biases and stereotypes. In doing so, systemic racial disparities continued the cycle that disproportionally marginalized and exploited the community and neighborhood school. However, even where marginalized, Pebbles community members wanted nothing more or less than any other neighborhood wanted, a good school.

What is considered a good school?

The question can be explored as to what is a good school. In the case of Silver Oaks School District, Pebbles community and Rocky Mountain High School, all agreed that academic, good teachers, a robust curriculum, and collaboration were essential to the notion of a school being considered good. However, one stark difference emerged between the groups. Silver Oaks indicated from their reason to close down a school that test scores were the determining factor as to whether a school was successful or not. In contrast, where the members of the Pebbles community and Rocky Mountain High School believed academics were also important, the general consensus was standardized test results should not be the most important factor when deciding if a school is good or not. Pebbles community and Rocky Mountain High School focused more on relationships, camaraderie, and historical legacies as a way of determining if the school was good or not. These diverging perspectives ultimately resulted in different recommendations and responses.

Community and School Reputation. The reputation of the community and school was important to both the community members and the districts. However, my findings indicate that while the district believed the area was increasing growing to be unsafe and the school was a failure because of consistent low scores on standardized tests the community members believed the school was successful because of the relationships established between the school, students, and their families.

District Perspective. Participants in this study articulated on numerous occasions how the city once touted the community as a place of promise to attract them and others as potential homebuyers. However, over a short period, all participants noticed a change in view. The once promising Pebbles community was now being labeled as one of the most dangerous parts of the city to advance the need for charter schools and justify the closing on the Neighborhood school.

Community Perspective. However, several narratives of long-time community members suggested that the decision makers were far removed from the school and community, and most of their beliefs and decisions where based on numbers and not from "boots on the ground". Community members articulated some problems in the area and at the school, but were adamant those problems were no different than other parts of the city.

Additionally, participants believed there was little time invested in building relationships with the community and understanding its values. Participants, comprised of both Pebble residents and school and district administrators, believed that had Silver Oaks school district taken more time and energy to visit the school and assess other factors, beside test scores, the district would have noticed problems that

were not a result of the community but by district design. They spoke of poor district leadership which did a poor job of investing in consistent school leadership and addressing high teacher turnover that affected students' academic performance.

School Ratings. Although participants believe successfully navigating pedagogy is important, all agreed the Silver Oaks accountability structure was flawed and did not support the true measures of success.

Community Perspective. Pebbles community members believed that the accountability system that labeled schools quality and effectiveness missed the mark and did not capture what the community valued. Some participants, like Allegra, believed that the school rating system tracks schools as you would track students. Once a label has been attached, it is exceedingly difficult to change the narrative, particularly when it involves school that enroll mostly students of color. Pebbles' administrators, like Frank, believed that ratings are based on inaccurate data points and "is a sham that only represents about one eighth of the information to determine the overall success of a student." Nonetheless local educational agencies around the nation, particularly Silver Oaks, places a heavy emphasis on a number, without seemingly considering other factors. Due to the heavy emphasis placed on standardized testing, and considering the historic nature of standardized testing, five of the nine participants assert this is a point of equity that is largely ignored by Silver Oaks School District. Instead of placing a heavy emphasis on testing, all participants suggested investing more time in building solid and trusting relationships with the community.

District Perspective. From the district's perspective, the state school accountability system was a suitable measurement to indicate school performance. The indicators provided by the state instrument allowed Silver Oak to evaluate school and district level performance against other schools and district in state, as well as across the nation. Silver Oaks believed the data yielded from these annual reports would allow for strategic and purposeful planning to address deficiencies as well as celebrate growth and accomplishments. These data points would further continue improve on what Pebbles Community believed was already a good school.

Pebbles Community Definition of a Good School

Relationships. The Pebbles community deeply valued education, and they believed test scores were important. However, more than test scores, the community valued relationships.

Relationships mean to take care of one another and invest in the success of people. It means ensuring students have adequate and equitable programming to meet all students' needs, ensuring a curriculum that is reflective of who they are and what they experience. It also means forging a positive and caring relationship with the people they are entrusted to.

Safety. Collectively, the participants stated children should be afforded the opportunity to be in safe schools in which they have educators who look like them, care about them, educate them, but above all, love them, and that begins with knowing the child and their situation. Only then can a true measure of success be measured. Although participants heavily narrated matters from the child to school, seven of nine indicated positive relationships should be more prevalent from the district level to the

community. Yet, this was not in the interest of the decision-makers who ultimately decided that closing the school was in the best interest of the community.

Overall, to the community, a good school is a place the provides a strong curriculum consisting of historical information relevant to their culture. In addition, the belief is the school is built on trust and collaboration with a common goal of investing in students for the benefit of supporting their future needs. Moreover, a good school to the community members is built on relationships rooted in camaraderie that is a haven for families to congregate and build legacies. However, during the closure process, families were being informed of an old idea being repackaged as a viable option for reform.

Silver Oaks District Definition of a Good School

Silver Oaks district subscribed to the idea that good schools are based on the school choice of families. School choice is rooted in neoliberal policies cloaked with his disdain for the federal government interference in states' rights (Strauss, 2018). Friedman and neoliberal advocates believe that better schools are promoted through market competition and anything that forces parents to send their children to low performing schools ultimately diminishes the character of American education. School choice is thought to send a powerful message of market responsiveness to families that would not only improve student scores because students would attend schools that best meet their needs. School choice also provided an opportunity to rebrand the neighborhood to attract more or a different types of student enrollment.

Clearly, there were not shared definitions of understandings between the community and district about what constitutes a good school and how should quality be measured. The district defined schools narrowly by test scores (likely due in part to federal accountability and incentives) and school choice. A reason given for closing the school centered upon the idea of opening charter and specialized schools (international studies schools) in the neighborhood. Statements made in support of opening charters schools suggested charter and specialized schools would offer more choice and would also be better at supporting students while increasing student enrollment and community interest. On the other hand, the Pebbles community defined good schools based on how they strengthened relationships between the school and community, the safety provided by the school for their children, and cultural and historical legacy preservation. The narratives of the study emphasized the importance of authentic engagement with communities, especially communities that have historically been marginalized. The community narratives indicate that they believed their voices were considered insignificant and race and racism played a vital role in the decision-making process. The stories of the community members uplifted in this project have important implications for practitioners and scholar-practitioners.

Recommendations for Practitioners

In 2014, a national report by the Reform Network Support Team provided an outline of strategies to help local education agencies navigate school turnaround. However, these were just suggested strategies and not mandated policies. As revealed in my literature review, Ewing (2018), pointed out that states inherently have self-governing authority of setting up and executing education policies and procedures and

there is no universal method that addresses these concerns. Ewing's statement highlights a need for oversite along with checks and balances to ensure basic fairness and accountability.

Required Community Membership on School Improvement Teams. Because educational reform promotes high emotions, one area I would focus on is empowering stakeholders to be active participants in the process. Too many times, individuals hear the words but do not subscribe to the idea that their voice matters. In a process that affects so many individuals and such a long-lasting effect, it is imperative that all voices come to the table in a collaborative forum to make the best-informed decision possible. The root of solving any problem begins with first understanding the situation. That means probing to understand all factors that may support a root cause while working collaborative with a team to solve for the problem. The second recommendation would be to solicit community members to be an active part of finding root causes of the problem. As noted previously, standardized test may have been stated as the root cause to close Rocky Mountain High School, but after careful review and exploration, several outside mitigating factors where present that may have contributed to diminished scores. I recommend that district leaders and local school boards consider not only seeking community input in open forums, surveys, or town halls, but allow those voices to be active participants. Individuals in this study revealed a process they believed was manufactured. A large part of this belief was based on the information initially presented around how involved the leaders wanted the community to be a part of the decision-making process. Participants suggested trust and hope were

lost when the community was later informed that leadership made changes in direct opposition of the communities' suggestions, and community voice would no longer be considered, despite facing large protest from the people of the community.

Weighted Community Vote. It is not enough to have the information. A leader's responsibility is to find a way to maximize the strengths of the team in completing the task at hand. In the case of Rocky Mountain High School, leadership had the prime opportunity to secure allies in this process. The community was engaged, willing, and supportive of finding a way to improve their neighborhood school. In addition, the community began this process as a vested and strong ally to the district. Community members did not like the idea of changing their school, however, they were vested in working with district leadership in coming up with the best solution as partners to better Rocky Mountain High School. As the process continued, a missed opportunity arose. Instead of acknowledging and embracing the work and support of the community, district leadership alienated community members and broke a trust that may never fully recover. It would be my recommendation to establish a panel that guarantees two community members that are selected by the community to be a part of the fact-finding, discussion and voting process. As a part of the by-laws provision should be provisions should be explicit in the weight of each vote, how to proceed if the vote does not carry a majority of community support, and protocols that support overturning a vote is the community does not support the overall recommendation of leadership. Specific parameters and guidelines would ensure more objectivity and authentic engagement between stakeholders. It would also promote a greater spirit of community, particularly in areas that have historically

been silenced. There are not simple answers to educational reform. However, there are simple procedures that may be exercised to work toward the end goal. This means providing information that is accurate and available for all to see while securing a transparent system of checks and balances when voting on a resolution for change.

Provide Community-Centric Metrics to Evaluate School Success. Based upon the perceived experiences of community members associated with Rocky Mountain High School, I suggest district leaders and school boards incorporate weighted metrics to evaluate schools in turnaround that are led by the community. This metric should provide measurements that are not based primarily on standardized testing, attendance, behavior, or underutilization of a building but include measurements to demonstrate progress in areas that are important to parents and individual students.

Required Notification of Meetings and Locations. Themes that emerged from the collected data suggested some community members were unaware of when meeting were taking place. In other instances, meetings were being conducted during hours many community members could not attend. In the case of executing turnaround meeting with the community, information about time, place, and agenda items should be sent out to community members no later than two weeks (14 days) prior to the meeting date. A second reminder should be sent out no later than 1 week (seven days) prior to the meeting time. Within three days of the meeting date, a final notice should be sent to families as a reminder of the time, place, and agenda items. These periodic yet purposeful reminders would allow families enough times to plan around attending

as well be active engaged participants in the discussion. Based on participants in this study, the consistent and targeted reminders would have been appreciated. This would create consistency and promote participation.

Appeals Process for the Community. A further suggestion would be to create a system that allows more community input around voting on the decision. Currently the decision to close is largely in the hands of school board members with no community input other than protesting the vote. In the decision to close Rocky Mountain High School, one board member who represented the school zone voted for closing the school, when most constituents wanted the opposite. Because of these findings, I suggest school boards and district leaders impose a system that mirrors the checks and balances established between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, whereas a vote can be overturned if a specific threshold of members vote in opposition.

Recommendation for Scholar-Practitioners

Critical Policy Analysis. To begin, I would first recommend studies that conduct a critical policy analysis of district procedures and school board procedures for educational reform efforts. I begin there because, the findings of this study as counternarrative to the closing of Neighborhood school indicate that race and racism are integral parts of why schools close in minoritized areas. While the four most common reasons include low academic performances, low student enrollment, high disciplinary problems, and underutilization of the facility (Dutton, 2015; Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2015; Medina, 2015; & Weber, Farmer, & Donoghue, 2020), Critical

Race has several tenants that researchers can use to explore the role of race and racism in the closing of a school in different contexts. From a critical race theoretical lens, it is not a matter of if but how racism plays a role in school reform efforts. It also primes researchers to explore questions like:

1) What's the counternarrative?
2) Who and what (i.e. money, political agenda) is behind this process?
3) Who initiated the process?
4) Who are the power players (inside and outside)?
5) Who are the peacemakers?
6) Who are the winners and losers?
7) What is gained and what is loss?

Counternarratives are important, because in this story it revealed that the community had different values than school leaders. Their values were grounded in history, community, and education that is culturally affirming. Alternatively, they perceived school leaders' values to be grounded singularly in test scores and unspoken political agenda and economic opportunities.

School closure and school turnaround is cloaked in reasons to help the students who have been marginalized realize greater success. However, after more than a decade, minimal success has been realized (Logan et al., 2012). What is often left out of the narrative when promoting how successful outcomes may be is the narrative associating the process with large monetary resources (Orr & Rogers, 2011). One participant stated, the money from the closed school budget was enough to allot more than one million dollars per school of seed money for five new schools over a

three-year period and allotted additional monies to support several charter schools in the same area. Because districts often rely on subsidies to meet financial needs and schools rely on enrollment as a part of funding (Baroody, 2011; Medina, 2015), I recommend looking how marketing and branding may be potentially be interwoven into education reform as a mean of increasing a tax base and increasing enrollment. The implications taken from the data suggest education reform should be explored not from an educational standpoint, but from an economical one.

Explore Community Voting Metrics. In addition, and to broaden the circle of influence and improve transparency, a suggested approach for turnaround research would be to explore community voting metrics for school turnaround. Among the research materials I explored, I was unable to uncover a voting metric that gives equal weight to community voice. It would be my recommendation to research school districts who have reported success in turnaround efforts against failed turnaround efforts and explore if community voice was a part of the final vote, if so, what weight was given to community voice and what percentages of their voice mattered in the final decision. I bring this suggestion because of perception uncovered in this research project. In the case of Rocky Mountain High School, it was uncovered that the community members were tasked to collaborate and decide the future of the school. The community exercised their duty and executed a process, but were denied a voice, because the decision makers believed their idea was better. In this denial, community members were left with no recourse to adjust or overturn a decision that would affect the area in which they live, thus being left at the mercy of individuals, in most cases,

that do not live or are reflective of the community the decision is being made for. This example goes to the heart of this study around transparency, collaboration, and communication.

Chapter Summary

In this case study, I surveyed the engagement process associated with school closures and how it affected the community in which it served. The commitment of this exploration was to understand how the process unfolded, the community members perceptions of the process, and suggestions to improve future processes. This study revealed five counter narratives to the dominant narrative (1) standardized testing was a singular focus, (2) race was a significant factor in the decision to close the school (3) outside influences dictated the outcome, (4) the process was manufactured, and (5) community engagement was in voice only. The narratives as told by the participants conceded information that suggested an unfair, non-transparent, manufactured process that ultimately destroyed a community. Community members' voices are significant in the establishment, growth, and sustainability of their neighborhood but were silenced in the process. The narratives also suggested racism as an integral measure of the process. Participants indicated that racially minoritized community members voice were not significant in the process and others outside of the community held a belief that their decision was best regardless of what community members wanted or believed.

Subsequently, the analyzation of the collected data has generated three specific recommendations relevant to educational reform and school closures. Throughout this study, I illustrated how the formal decision-making process, with checks and balances,

is needed during a school closure process. The current process demonstrates methods and procedures that can be of a singular view. Once that view has been achieved there is little to no room for voices to be heard in opposition.

Additionally, historical racism should be part of the conversation with racially minoritized communities before considering closing the neighborhood school. The participants in this study outlined how preconceived beliefs and racial stereotypes from district leadership and city government, labeled, coerced, and destroyed a community. The voices of the participants highlighted a need for outside members to interact and dialogue with the community to understand the history, the traditions, and legacy to be achieved. Based upon the aftermath and reflection, expected results were not realized and a community that was once touted as a success has been left in shambles with no sign of positive recovery.

It is imperative that processes allow for transparent and inclusive community voice within school closures decisions. Their voices matter and should be an integral part of decisions. Community cannot be dehumanized as a place but should be humanized as a communal relationship. Otherwise there will be no unity between the school district and the community in which it serves. To ensure engagement is authentic and viable, I would suggest practitioners to take the time to delve into root causes, understand the entirety of circumstances, formulate a plan in collaboration with all stakeholders, and execute the agreed upon plan. Prior to making an abrupt decision to decide to close a school, it is prudent to, in the words of carpentry, “measure twice, to cut once”.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Recruitment Letter

Dear (Participant's name)

My name is Anthony McWright and I am a student from the Education Department at the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about how communities are affected by school closure. You are eligible to be in this study because you have lived in the community between the years of 1990 and 2019 and were directly or indirectly affected by the school closure. I obtained your contact information from a fellow friend who lives in the community and suggested you would be a good person to interview for my study.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will take between 45 and 60 minutes. Prior to interviewing, you will be provided a written consent form and asked to explain in your own words your interpretation of what it means to participate in this study. Additionally, I would like to audio/video record your interview and then we will use this information to reveal your experience in the decision making process associated with school closure and your perception of the process.

Remember, participation in this study is completely voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal however, you can choose to be in this study or not. Furthermore, I can reasonably assure your confidentiality and the information revealed in the interview process. If, however, you experience discomfort or may want to discontinue the interview at any time you will be allowed to do so. I respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that
may make you feel uncomfortable or continue participation in this study. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you would like to participate or have any questions about this study, please email me at Anthony.McWright@du.edu or contact me at xxx-xx-xxxx.

Thank you very much for considering to participate in

this study.

Sincerely,

Anthony

Appendix B
University of
Denver
Consent Form for Participation in Research

Title of Research Study: Where is the CommUNITY? A Qualitative Case Study of a School Closure in an Urban School District

Principal Investigator: Anthony McWright
Doctoral Student
University of
Denver

Lolita A. Tabron, PhD (Faculty
Advisor) Assistant Professor
Morgridge College of
Education University of
Denver

IRBNet Protocol #:

Invitation to participate in research

You are being asked to participate in a research study about school closures in urban neighborhoods. This study is being conducted because while school reforms suggests turnaround methods are effective, recent research reveals otherwise. Furthermore, research illustrates school closure disproportionally affect minoritized communities with these communities have little to no say in the process. In response to these findings, supplemental research is warranted on strategies to improve community engagement in the turnaround process. While there are various studies that speak to the reasons to exercise turnaround methods, (particular school closures), there are limited studies that provide the voice of the community in the process. This study is intended to provide an overview of the process will granting a platform for community members to express perceptions and suggestions to improve the process.

You have been invited to participate in this research study because you are have either lived or worked in the community during the school closure. The purpose of this research is to understand the essence of the lived racialized experiences of community members during school closure that will contribute to the omitted dialogue about the significance of community voice and engagement in the turnaround process. Moreover, this study will provide clear understanding of the perceptions associated with school closures, as well as methods to better the process. By sharing your story and experience, I hope to continue to shine a spotlight on the historical inequitable processes rooted in meritocracy, neoliberalism, and the law that on the surface is indicated to help and support, but all too often, perpetuates historical practices and continues to exploit minoritized communities.

Voluntary Participation

Participating in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose to end your involvement in this process for any reason without penalty. Even if you decided to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide to withdraw early from this study and the information or data you provided will be destroyed upon your request for terminating your part in this study.

Possible Risks and Discomforts

There are minimal potential risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study. All information provided in this study, recordings or notes that provide answers to interview questions, will be kept confidential. Additionally, any information obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission.

Confidentiality

The researcher will make every efforts to ensure your information remains confidential. All identifiers linking you to this study will be excluded in any report that might be published. The name of your school community, the local high school, and school district will also be kept confidential. A pseudonym for you, the high school and the school community has been chosen for you. You will be allowed to change your personal pseudonym if you wish. Once all data has been collected, transcribed, coded, and reported, the researcher will destroy the original data. Againall information about you will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

There are two exception to the promise of confidentiality. Any information you reveal concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect is required by law to be reported to proper authorities. Research records will be stored securely on a password protected software program on a password protected computer login, and only the primary researcher, Anthony McWright and faculty advisor, Lolita Tabron, PhD, will have access to records affiliated with this study.

Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the University of Denver Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being executed according to expectations and that information is collected properly. Moreover, should any information contained in this study be subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. The research information may be shared with federal agencies or local committees who are responsible for protecting research participants.

Study Benefits
This research has the potential to expand the narratives of school closures and community engagement. Research conducted via this project will add to the body of knowledge regarding the practices and experiences of communities involved in the school closure process. This study will provide insight for policy makers, district personnel, and community members an opportunity to evaluate and investigate the intersecting roles of this process while providing narratives that emphasize historically racialized perspective in the decision making process of school reform.

Incentive to Participate
You will not receive any payment for participating in this research project.

Study Expenses
You are not expected to pay for any costs associated with this research project.

Procedures Study Purpose:
If you choose to join this research study, you will be invited to participate in one 45- 60 minute interview in May 2020 in which you will be asked about your experiences associated with school closure. The interviews will take place via online.

All interviews will be video and audio-recorded using the recording platform from the internet interview. As this is case study, the identifiers are necessary to provide the rich description of each of the participant's individual, school, and community context. Pseudonyms will be chosen by and used for each of the participants and their schools. These pseudonyms will be used in order to ensure each participants privacy. Again the only individuals who will be privy to the recordings and the interview transcripts will be the primary researcher, Anthony McWright and my faculty advisor, Lolita A.Tabron, PhD. However, I will share my findings with the University of Denver and others as part of my dissertation oral defense. Your name or any identifiable information will not be in the report. This further allows you the opportunity to speak freely and reveal the most accurate memorable recollection of this process. The recording device will be kept in the personal office of Anthony McWright. Recordings will be deleted once notes are transcribed.

At the conclusion of your interview, I will summarized what we discussed to ensure that I accurately captured what you shared. Furthermore, at any time your desire, you will have an opportunity to review the transcript of your individual interview to further inspect accuracy of reporting.

Audio/Video recording:
As noted, you will be audio/video recorded during the 45 to 60 minute interview process. If you do not want to be audio/video recorded, please inform the researcher
Questions:
If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact Anthony McWright at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or Anthony.McWright@du.edu, or his faculty advisor, Lolita A.Tabron, PhD, Assistant

Professor in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department in the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver at (303) 871-2121 with any questions or concerns about your participation in this study.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Denver's Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

Options for Participation

Please initial your choice for the options below:

_____ The researcher may audio record me during this study.

_____ The researcher may video record me during this study.

_____ The researcher may audio and video record me during this study.

_____ The researcher may NOT audio and video record me during this study

Options for Data Review

Please initial your choice for the options below:

_____ I request a copy of the transcript from my interview when transcription is complete

_____ I do NOT request a copy of my one-on-one interview transcript.

_____ I request a copy of the synthesized findings when analysis is complete.

_____ I do NOT request a copy of the synthesized findings when analysis is complete.

_____ I request a copy of my interview transcript AND synthesized findings when analysis is complete

_____ I do NOT request a copy of my interview transcript or synthesized findings when analysis is complete.

Signature of Consent

Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study. By participating in the interview, you are giving permission for the investigator to use your information for research purposes including conference presentations and publication. If you agree to participate in this research study, please sign below. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_____ _____

Participant **Date**

Appendix C

Interview Protocol – Community Voice

Central Research Question:

How do school closings affect minoritized communities in which they serve?

Opening Protocol

Provide the Informed consent form to the participant and ask that the form be read. After the participant has read the form, ask the participant if he/ she has any questions about his/ her consent, the research, or the process. Answer any questions the participant may have, and ask the participant if he/ she is willing to participate in the study and to sign the two copies of the Informed

Consent Form.

If willing to participate, give the participant one copy of the informed consent form and retain a signed copy for yourself.

Give the participant a face sheet for them to fill out while checking devices.

Read Preamble

Preamble

Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. The reason why I asked you to participate in this interview is to hear about your experiences and perceptions about school closure. Today is ____ and we are online via____. I'm interviewing_____today.

Your opinions, experiences, ideas, and participation are very important in this study and may lead to deeper understanding of the experiences of minoritized communities and school closure. Please know that I am not here to promote a particular way of thinking about school closures. I want you to feel comfortable to share good things as well as critical things about this topic. There are no right or wrong answers.

We are going to spend the next 45-60 minutes having this conversation. I am going to be asking you some questions about your experiences surrounding the school closure process. I would like to audio and video record our discussion today so that so that I can listen to it later and use it to write a report. It will also enable me to review recorded information to ensure maximum accuracy in note taking for this study. For your information, please know that my faculty advisor, Dr. Lolita Tabron and I will be the only individuals who will have access to the information from today's conversation, including the recordings and the notes I will be taking.

I will share my findings with the University of Denver and others as part of my dissertation oral defense. Just as reassurance, please understand all information obtained and/or shared during our conversation will be kept confidential. Your name or any identifying information will not be submitted in the report. This is to provide you an opportunity to freely share your experience and to honestly reveal what's on your mind.

I do intend to share general themes from our and other conversations with select district personnel, select community members, my faculty advisor, and with my dissertation committee as part of my dissertation data analysis and findings. Nevertheless, I will not put your name or any other identifiable information that be traced back to you in the final report. Again, all information will be kept confidential.

During this time, I have several questions that I would like to ask you. To respect our time together, I may need to interrupt our conversation if we are running short on time. As a follow-up to this conversation, I may request additional comments and feedback during the writing of the data analysis of my dissertation to ensure that your opinion, experiences and ideas are accurately reflected.

Now I will ask some questions regarding your perception of the school closure process. You may ask me questions at any time during this process. If you would like to follow along, here is a copy of the questions I plan to ask.

Before we continue, do you have any questions? Great! Let's get on with the interview.

Perceptions of the Neighborhood and Neighborhood School

First, I would like to hear about the neighborhood and the role of the neighborhood school

[Question 1] What role do you think schools play in the community?

- *What role did education play in your life?*
- *Why did you choose to live in this neighborhood?*
- *What influenced you to enroll your child in this particular school?*

Listen for:

- Commitment to purpose connected to like-minded persons, Black and Latinx
- Sense of belonging
- Historical connection with the school
- Historical struggles in education is connected to something greater (a collective)

[Question 2] Why is the neighborhood school important to you?

- *Did you attend a neighborhood school? If so, what was your experience?*
- *How do you envision the neighborhood school enhancing your child's education?*

Listen for:

- Education is fundamental to success
- Education is a way out their past and current situation
- Education is essential to a prosperous future

<u>Overall Themes to Listen for</u>:

- Connection to the school and community
- Education is important throughout time (historically, present, future)
- Education is significant for life trajectory

School Community's Perception about School Closure

Now I would like to hear about your experiences in the decision making process.

[Question 3] What factors do you believe played a role in the decision to close the school? *Academic factors*

- *Test Scores?*
- *Attendance?*

Behavior? Political factors

Listen for:

- Lack of respect for community voice
- Lack of representation on the school board

- Too much focus on standardized testing and behavior
    - Negative interactions with school district and school board
    - Differences in majority (_____) school communities
    - Deliberate misleading information regarding collaboration and expectations.

[Question 4] What are your thoughts about the decision to close the school?

- *What or whose input do you think was used to make the decision to close the school?*
- *Whose voices you do think should be included in this decision and why?*
- *How should these voices be included in the process?*

Listen for:

- Student success and community need is greater than a standardized test score
- School closure overwhelming affect minoritized communities
- The decision making process was flawed
- Collaboration and choice was misrepresented
- Race is an important factor in the decision making process
- Targeted characteristics used for determining school closure

[Question 5] If you were granted the opportunity to give your thoughts to the school board about this particular process, what would you say?

Listen for:

- Historical decisions that negatively affected minoritized communities
- Challenges with establishing trust (with who)
- Benefits with establishing trust (with who)
- Absence of community voice (where is the voice of students, teachers, and parents)
    - Mind made up before the process began
    - Preconceived idea of how to approach situations
    - Community knows what is best for the neighborhood school and students

<u>Overall Themes to Listen for</u>:

- Historical racialized methods used to illicit a specific response and action
- Data used to overpower human voice
- Money, Power, and Influence determines outcomes
- Community voice does not matter
- Absence of respect for the school's history and contribution to the community

Racialized Methods Associated with Decision Making

Now I would like to hear about the affect the closing the school had on you and the community.

[Question 6] How has the closing of the neighborhood school affected you perso

- *How has the school closure affected your family?*
- *How has the school closure affected your ability to attend school even*
  - *Back to school nights, Open House, Student Teacher Conferences § F Association Meetings?*

Listen for:

- Morning and afternoon commute (transportation concerns)
- Adjustments to afterschool activities and student pickup
- School Drop off (students are being dropped off at a different school and not t
- Students attending different schools
- Varying expectations and routines at different schools
- Academic, Social, and Emotional challenges for students and families.

[Question 7] What are your perceptions on how the closing of the Neighborhood community at large?

Listen for:

- Spatial loss
- Loss of community
- Loss of relationship with teachers / school personnel
- Transportation problems
- Uneasiness about new school situations
- Where do their students fit in

Overall Themes to Listen for:

- Lack of consideration for mitigating and important factors for families
- Different views about what school success is (perceptions are racially estrange

Now I would like to wrap up the interview by making sure I did not miss anything.

At the beginning of the interview I asked what you about____. Some of the things I h _____. And I asked you about_____. Some of the things I heard include _____.

Has our discussion brought up any other issues about your experiences in the school c process that you'd like to bring up?

You may be wondering about what I'll do with all the information you've shared toda be transcribing this interview in the next few days. Out of all the things we've talked a of maybe some topics we've missed -- what should I pay most attention to? What shou about when I read your interview?

Would you be interested in receiving a copy of the transcript?

You can contact me via e-mail or phone if you think of anything else that you'd like to tell me about what we've talked about today.

Thanks. I really appreciate your help with this research!

Interview Questions-Follow Along Copy for Participants

1. What role do you think schools play in the community?
2. What influenced you to enroll your child in this particular school?
3. Why is the neighborhood school important to you?
4. How do you envision the neighborhood school enhancing your child's education?
5. What factors do you believe played a role in the decision to close the school?
6. What are your thoughts about the decision to close the school?
7. Whose voices you do think should be included in this decision and why?
8. How should these voices be included in the process?
9. If you were granted the opportunity to give your thoughts to the school board about this particular process, what would you say?
10. How has the closing of the neighborhood school affected you personally?
11. What are your perceptions on how the closing of the neighborhood school has affected the community at large?

Appendix D
Exit Survey

Age

18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	65+

Connection to the Community

Community Member	Community Member/ Parent	School Personnel	School Personnel / Parent	District Personnel	District Personnel / Parent

Years living or working the community:

1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	30-35	35+

Why did you choose to live in this community?

Would you like a comprehensive high school to reopen in the community?

Why / Why not?

Additional comments you would like to share about the process that was not captured in the interview.