

PRAGMATIC CITIZENSHIP: HOW SCHOOL COMMUNITY  
COUNCILS MAKE BETTER CITIZENS

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the relationship between civic participation and individual civic capacity development. It explores this relationship empirically, by examining citizens' experiences in a specific shared governance institution, School Community Councils (SCCs), in the state of Utah. The project pursues three main questions. The questions are designed to assess and potentially revise reigning theories about the benefits of citizen participation according to findings of a rigorous ethnographic study of SCCs. First, what do the experiences of citizens participating in SCCs suggest about the institutional conditions that are most likely to facilitate individuals' civic capacities? Second, if citizens develop civic capacities through their participation in SCCs, how should such development be understood and explained? Third, in what sense are the civic capacities developed in the SCC setting beneficial for democratic citizenship as such?

In order to investigate these questions, I engaged in an 18-month immersive study of School Community Councils in primary and secondary schools in Utah, in which I conducted ethnographic participant observations as well as narrative interviews with parent members of the councils. School Community Councils are shared governance institutions at all public and charter schools in the state of Utah, made up of parents, teachers, and the school's principal. Through careful observation of four high school SCCs, I was able to develop a pragmatic theory of civic development: improved

citizenship born of participatory experiences. I argue that the institutions best designed for civic capacity building are those with distributed authority structures that enhance citizen participation by bestowing responsibility upon citizens and giving citizens decision-making power. As public institutions distribute authority via responsibility and power, citizens experience the developmental process of cognitive dissonance resolution which motivates citizens to continually readjust their behavior to solve public problems.

This pragmatic theory of development stands in contrast to alternative citizenship development theories based on knowledge acquisition and rationality. Whereas the most influential development theories are primarily cognitive in scope, I offer a pragmatist civic development theory based on shared public problems, where development of individual civic capacities is assessed in terms of broadening recognition of difference and the coordination of interests toward desired public outcomes.

To Jessica. Always the best example of a good citizen and the dearest partner  
one could spend their life with.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	ix
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
CHAPTERS	
1. PRAGMATIC CIVIC DEVELOPMENT: DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND CITIZEN READJUSTMENT.....	1
Proximate Governance.....	5
Civic Capacity Development: What Does “Better” Mean?.....	11
Pragmatic Citizenship: Proximate Governance and Citizen Readjustment.....	25
2. PARENT-STRONG VERSUS PRINCIPAL-STRONG SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCILS.....	36
Why School Community Councils?.....	37
Observing, Interviewing, and Mining SCC Archives.....	46
Parent-Strong Versus Principal-Strong Councils.....	55
3. THE DEVELOPMENTAL DISSONANCE CYCLE.....	68
“Real” Decisions.....	69
The Developmental Dissonance Cycle.....	72
Public Decisions and Personal Dissonance.....	76
Motivation and Behavioral Adjustments.....	85
Pragmatic Civic Development.....	92
4. CASE STUDIES: INTRODUCTION.....	96
Biographical Sketch.....	97
Power and Responsibility.....	97
Decision Synopsis.....	97
Decision Processes.....	98
Conclusion Section.....	99

5. CRESCENT HIGH SCHOOL SCC.....	100
Beth.....	102
Marilyn.....	111
Nancy.....	117
Melodie.....	127
Sara.....	134
Laurie.....	142
Deana.....	150
Conclusion: Pragmatic Citizenship at the Crescent High SCC.....	156
6. RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL SCC.....	162
Wendy.....	164
Ellen.....	170
Rick.....	176
Allison.....	183
Paula.....	190
Natalie.....	197
Jenny.....	203
Conclusion: Pragmatic Citizenship at the Riverside High SCC.....	210
7. LAKEVIEW HIGH SCHOOL SCC.....	215
Linda.....	217
Heidi.....	224
Denise.....	231
Conclusion: Pragmatic Citizenship at the Lakeview High SCC.....	237
8. OAKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL SCC.....	241
Janet.....	243
Emily.....	248
Lynn.....	255
Kelly.....	261
Lisa.....	267
Conclusion: Pragmatic Citizenship at the Oakwood High SCC.....	272
9. CASE COMPARISON.....	276
Invested Decisions and Advisory Decisions.....	277
Disagreement and Importance.....	281
Motivation and Prolongation.....	286
Taking Action.....	290
Conclusion.....	299



10. CREATING PRAGMATIC CITIZENS.....	301
Institutional Characteristics.....	304
Individual Characteristics.....	311
Conclusion.....	320
Appendices	
A: INTERVIEW GUIDE.....	322
B: INTERVIEW CODING INSTRUCTIONS AND CODING SCHEME .....	325
C: INDIVIDUAL LEVEL DATA.....	331
D: INTERVIEW LIST.....	340
REFERENCES.....	343

## LIST OF FIGURES

### Figures

1: Attendance at SCC Meetings.....	60
2: Agenda Items Directed by School Administrators.....	60
3: Agenda Items Addressed per SCC Meeting.....	61
4: Average Meeting Length.....	62
5: Decisions Made per Meeting.....	63
6: Meeting Arrangement in Parent-Strong Councils.....	65
7: Meeting Arrangement in Principal-Strong Councils.....	65
8: Developmental Dissonance Cycle.....	74
9: Pragmatic Civic Development.....	94
10: Average Decisions Reported by Decision Type.....	280
11: Average Disagreement Rate by SCC.....	282
12: Average Importance Rate by SCC.....	285
13: Average Motivation Rate by SCC.....	287
14: Actions Reported per Member.....	292
15: Actions Reported per Decision.....	292
16: Independent Actions Reported per Member.....	294
17: Dependent Actions Reported per Member.....	297

## LIST OF TABLES

### Tables

1: SCC Meetings and Note Record.....	51
2: SCC Interview Record.....	52
3: Name Tags, Introductions, and Food at SCC Meetings.....	66
4: Abbreviated Decision Coding Scheme.....	98
5: Beth.....	332
6: Marilyn.....	332
7: Nancy.....	332
8: Melodie.....	333
9: Sara.....	333
10: Laurie.....	333
11: Deana.....	334
12: Wendy.....	334
13: Ellen.....	334
14: Rick.....	335
15: Allison.....	335
16: Paula.....	335
17: Natalie.....	336
18: Jenny.....	336

19: Linda.....	336
20: Heidi.....	337
21: Denise.....	337
22: Janet.....	337
23: Emily.....	338
24: Lynn.....	338
25: Kelly.....	338
26: Lisa.....	339

## CHAPTER 1

### PRAGMATIC CIVIC DEVELOPMENT: DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AND CITIZEN READJUSTMENT

On February 9, 2017 Congressman Jason Chaffetz entered the Brighton High School auditorium in Sandy, Utah to an eruption of jeers. Looking down, he stood briefly behind the podium in his pressed navy suit and tapped the microphone to assure it was working. Meanwhile the crowd booed, heckled, and yelled. A cadre of local and national press photographers stood anxiously facing the crowd and upon his entry, scampered quickly to capture the scene. Outside, over 1,000 disgruntled would-be attendees coordinated chants, displaying their disapproval in concert. After a repeatedly interrupted pledge of allegiance, Chaffetz proclaimed, “I do believe, as a representative, a part of my role and responsibility is to stand, and to listen, and to hear, and to have a public dialogue and that’s what this is about” (The Salt Lake Tribune, 2017). He continued a fitful introduction, and after a failed attempt to explain an idea about a recent Supreme Court nominee, he moved to the first question. A middle aged man in a baseball cap read his question aloud about the limited public input regarding the decisions on public land use in Utah. Chaffetz responded that he appreciates and wants public input and then hastily moved to the next question. At this point the volume overwhelmed Chaffetz as the crowd protested his incomplete answer. The baseball-capped questioner marched down the aisle,

and with his hand raised, attempted to ascend the stairs to the stage, yelling at Chaffetz as Chaffetz repeatedly said that his question had been answered. At Chaffetz's insistence the man turned and started back down the aisle only to be replaced by a woman who marched to the stage, pointing to the man and repeatedly yelling, "answer his question!" The pandemonium continued until a loud, exasperated male voice shouted above the din: "Shut the hell up! Shut the hell up!" (The Salt Lake Tribune, 2017) After only a brief reprieve, the town hall proceeded tenuously until Chaffetz exited an hour later to boos from the crowd.

Reminiscent of the beginnings of the Tea Party movement, this vitriolic scene has been reproduced in many town halls throughout the country, images of which have been widely disseminated through media outlets over the last decade (Istenstadt, 2019).

Throughout this period, citizens have been characterized by politicians as unruly bullies, paid intimidators, and mobs (Evanson, 2019). As citizens repeatedly get caricatured in such a way and as this narrative gets widely distributed by news outlets, the question arises: Is this an accurate portrayal of citizen participation in the United States?

Furthermore, if the modern town hall is not conducive to productive civic dialogue as some politicians claim, what accounts for this breakdown? Is it possible to create conditions that facilitate better citizenship behaviors and will that create better citizens?

These questions regarding whether and which type of democratic participation makes "better citizens" were alive in the scholarly debate long before the shocking display of contemporary town hall meetings. In fact, Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) and John Stuart Mill (2008) strongly asserted in the 19th century that participation does make better citizens and that the improvement accrued to citizens is a justification for

democracy itself. This normative thrust of the classical literature influenced later scholars and resulted in a situation where much of the theoretical literature on democratic citizenship claimed the educative effects from civic participation with little corroborating empirical evidence. After a comprehensive review of this literature, Jane Mansbridge (1999) summarized the problem:

Participation in democratic decisions makes many participants better citizens. I believe this claim because it fits my experience. But I cannot prove it. Neither, at this point, can anyone else. The kinds of subtle changes in character that come about, slowly, from active participation in democratic decisions cannot easily be measured with the blunt instruments of social science. Nevertheless, those who have participated actively in democratic governance often feel quite strongly that the experience has changed them. (p. 291)

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the relationship between civic participation and individual civic capacity development. It explores this relationship empirically, by examining citizens' experiences in a specific shared governance institution, School Community Councils ("SCCs," "councils," and "community councils" also utilized throughout) in the state of Utah. The project pursues three main questions. The questions are designed to assess and potentially revise reigning theories about the benefits of citizen participation according to findings of a rigorous ethnographic study of SCCs. First, what do the experiences of citizens participating in SCCs suggest about the institutional conditions that are most likely to facilitate the development of individuals' civic capacities? Second, if citizens develop civic capacities through their participation in SCCs, how should such development be understood and explained? Third, in what sense are the civic capacities developed in the SCC setting beneficial for democratic citizenship as such?

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of School Community Councils in primary and secondary schools in Utah, in which I conducted ethnographic participant observations as well as narrative interviews with parent members of the councils. School Community Councils are shared governance institutions at all public and charter schools in the state of Utah, made up of parents, teachers, and the school's principal (Utah Administrative Code, R277-477, R277-477-1). Through careful observation of four high school SCCs, I was able to develop a pragmatic theory of civic development: improved citizenship born of participatory experiences. I argue that the institutions best designed for civic capacity building are those with distributed authority structures that enhance citizen participation by bestowing responsibility upon citizens and giving citizens decision-making power. As public institutions distribute authority via responsibility and power, citizens experience the developmental process of cognitive dissonance resolution which motivates citizens to continually readjust their behavior to solve public problems.

This pragmatic theory of development stands in contrast to alternative citizenship development theories based on knowledge acquisition and rationality. Whereas the most influential development theories are primarily cognitive in scope, I offer a pragmatist civic development theory based on shared public problems, where development of individual civic capacities is assessed in terms of broadening recognition of difference and the coordination of interests toward desired public outcomes (Dewey, 1954, 2008). The utilization of data gathered through ethnographic and narrative interview methods provides a view of real-time participation as well as citizens' subsequent recollection of that participation through narrative recall and elaborated individual meaning. These combined methods ultimately illuminate the actual civic experience of members of the



SCCs, rather than merely their reasoning processes or information acquisition as it relates to their experience.

Prior to advancing to the empirical method and data for the project in Chapters 2-9, this chapter establishes the basic theoretical concepts of the study: democratic participation and civic capacity development. There remains significant confusion in the literature around which types of democratic participation lead to civic capacity development and more importantly which characteristics are desirable for democratic citizens. After discussing the particular institutional conditions that are most likely to result in civic capacity development in the first section, I offer a theory of pragmatic citizenship in second section, where I argue that citizens who regularly exercise public decision-making power and feel responsible for those decisions are more likely develop skills and dispositions that increase their ability to solve public problems. Finally, in third section I detail the continual readjustment process—dissonance resolution—that takes place for active democratic citizens.

### **Proximate Governance**

For nearly 2 centuries democratic theorists have made claims that participation makes better citizens. This argument was originally advanced by Alexis de Tocqueville (2000), who suggested that those who participate democratically do so first out of self-interest, which progresses over time to a more civically-inclined “self-interest well understood” (p. 502). Additionally, while holding public positions, the citizen is challenged so much by his fellow citizens he ends up being educated by them and by this means gains the skills and dispositions to administer in further public service. Ultimately,

Tocqueville claims that these participatory processes attach the citizen deeply to the polity. So much so, he found, that the 18<sup>th</sup> century Americans he studied would rather die than cease to partake in public life (p. 233). Tocqueville's nuanced quasiethnographic account of democratic civic development was followed by a formal theory of developmental democracy, advanced by John Stuart Mill (2008). The democratic system of governance, according to Mill, is justified by the educative effects that accrue to its citizens. Those who participate actively in democratic politics experience salutary effects from their participation. Among these effects are practical skill, political knowledge, and moral improvement. These specific skills and dispositions are enhanced by the energy one feels when participating actively in democratic politics, Mill argues (pp. 253-256).

While Tocqueville and Mill expressly state that democratic participation is necessary for such individual civic improvement, neither details precisely what "participation" amounts to. Said another way, one might ask: What are the particular democratic institutions that foster this type of civic development? Given the context of their writing, we assume from Tocqueville that the New England township, with its particular institutional setup, is the ideal site for such participatory benefits. Likewise, Mill begins to address representative institutions only after his defense of educative effects of democracy. We therefore are left to surmise that he intended his defense for more direct forms of democratic participation. Yet, theories about the particular institutional conditions that foster personal civic development would be left for later scholars to develop.

Heavily influenced by the legacy of Tocqueville, Jane Mansbridge fully investigates the institutional structure of township democracy in her hallmark work,

*Beyond Adversary Democracy* (1980). There she details the particular institutional conditions of township democracy, but limits her analysis of the educative effects of such participation. It is in her later work (1999)—where she turns to the better citizens question specifically—that she begins to identify the particular institutional conditions for civic development. She identifies two institutional conditions that begin to define the optimal outlets for democratic participation that induce civic education. Rather than address all forms of democratic participation, she specifies that those who participate in “democratic decisions” feel the educative effects of their participation. She further clarifies that a citizen not only must participate in making decisions, but must do so actively. It is “the active participation in democratic decisions” that qualifies the type of democratic participation responsible for civic character change (p. 291).

Participatory democrats such as Carole Pateman (1970) further articulate the relationship between participation and personal civic development. She corroborates and strengthens Mansbridge’s position by claiming that “in the participatory theory ‘participation’ refers to (equal) participation in the making of decisions, and ‘political equality’ refers to equality of power in determining the outcome of decisions” (p. 43). When these conditions are met, she argues, so are the objectives of participatory theory and its promise to “develop and foster the ‘democratic’ personality, i.e. qualities needed for the successful operation of the democratic system” (p. 64). Yet Pateman’s theory does not distinguish between the types of power held by citizens. In her work she advocates for workplace democracy and sees the democratization of private institutions as equivalent in value to public institutions.

Later participatory theorists would emphasize the importance of decision-making

power in public institutions. Benjamin Barber and Nancy Fraser distinguish between “strong” and “weak” forms of democracy based upon the degree of decision-making power citizens have. Barber (1984) emphasizes the need to encounter others in the “political arena” and that a public sense of “we” is created only when individuals deliberate, determine, and decide together about public goods (pp. 123-126). Similarly, Fraser (1990) suggests that strong publics are those “whose discourse encompasses both opinion-formation and decision-making. As a locus of public deliberation culminating in legally binding decisions (or laws)” (p. 75).

Although educative claims about participation have been used widely in democratic theory, the literature makes clear that “participation” refers to a very particular type of civic activity in the form of *active decision-making in public institutions*. As such, we are most likely to find the educative effects of democratic participation in institutions where decision-making authority is distributed to the participants themselves. This refined idea of participation has been further classified and clarified by Archon Fung and Heather Pincock.

Along with the expanding theories of participatory and deliberative democracy has come a proliferation of actual institutional forms meant to improve the quality of the public sphere. In his thoroughgoing work on minipublics, Archon Fung (2007) designates various institutional design choices and categorizes each design based on its internal features and its consequences. While Fung seeks to categorize a broad array of minipublic institutions, a significant part of his work focuses on participatory institutions that are akin to the “small group democracy” institutions designated by John Gastil (2014). Following the same line of demarcation, Fung (2007) distinguishes the

minipublic of ‘participatory democratic governance’ from three other types of minipublics without decision-making power. He then outlines the particular features of participatory minipublics that will increase the engagement, incentives, and investment of citizens in the public sphere and thereby be more likely to develop “democratic skills and dispositions” (p. 169). The extent of his insight is worth quoting at length:

First, citizens are more likely to gain democratic skills and dispositions where deliberations have tangible consequences for them. In empowered minipublics where citizens have high stakes, they also have incentives to conduct structured and purposeful deliberations. They will, furthermore, be inclined to engage in the give-and-take process of reason giving and settlement that requires, and so fosters, the skills of proposal formulation, justification, listening, cooperation, and compromise. Minipublics with recurring deliberation are more likely to contribute to the development of democratic skills and dispositions than those that convene once or only infrequently. Iterated interaction increases both incentives and opportunities for cooperation. (p. 169)

Following this detailed elaboration of the optimal conditions for the educative effects of democratic participation, Fung summarizes his thoughts by asserting that for the most likely results of citizen education, the institution should be empowered to make decisions, should be high stakes for the participants, and recur frequently. He calls these types of institutions “hot deliberations” and suggests that in these conditions “participants will invest more of their psychic energy” and that citizens will take these deliberations more seriously than other forms of public engagement (p. 171).

Further articulating Fung’s analysis, Heather Pincock (2011) maps out on a series of graduating scales that demonstrate which institutional conditions will have the “highest educative potential” (p. 53). She argues that in regard to collective decisions, those institutions that are empowered to make fully binding decisions and do so in a face-to-face setting will have the highest educative potential. She compares this to less educative institutions that are either provisionally binding, advisory, or are limited to

advocacy. Furthermore, she argues that institutions with the highest educative potential are those that are “closest to home” and that the more local and personal the issues under consideration, the more likely they are to “prompt the high level of psychic engagement needed to generate educative effects” (p. 55). Lastly, she argues that the intensity of the deliberation matters for its ability to cultivate civic capacity development. Thus, the longer citizens’ engagements last and the smaller the number of participants in a particular institution, the more likely the institution is to have educative effects.

In sum, when suggesting that democratic participation leads to civic capacity development, participatory democracy scholars previous to Fung and Pincock advanced the idea that democratic participation should take the form of active decision-making in public institutions. Fung and Pincock further distinguished this type of participation by arguing that these active decision-making public institutions will most likely produce educative effects for citizens when also structured with the following features: 1) immediacy or closeness to home; 2) fully binding decision-making authority; 3) recurrent or long lasting participation; and 4) in a minipublic or small group of citizens. For purposes of clarity, those institutions that meet these criteria I will call *proximate governance* institutions. Proximate governance institutions are public institutions that are close to home, which give fully binding decision-making authority to citizens, and which recurrently meet in small groups over long periods of time. Proximate governance institutions most often include decision-making bodies connected to schools, police stations, libraries, municipalities, parks, and other public neighborhood resources.

Although the strongest claims regarding individual civic capacity development have been made in connection with proximate governance institutions, very little research

has been done to illuminate this connection. Pincock and Fung, for example, have repeatedly argued that these institutional conditions will have the greatest impact on the character of citizens, yet neither fully addresses certain questions. First, if these empowered and intimate democratic institutions lead to individual civic capacity development through ‘psychic processes,’ what are the particular developmental processes that occur for citizens? Second, among the many different modes of political participation, what is unique to the experience of proximate governance that gives it the highest potential to foster individual civic capacity development? The following two sections seek to answer these questions.

### **Civic Capacity Development: What Does “Better” Mean?**

After the exasperated citizen had yelled “shut the hell up” two times to quiet the crowd at Brighton High School, Jason Chaffetz immediately responded while motioning with his left hand. “Easy, easy, please. Please, come on. Come on, we’re better than this” (The Salt Lake Tribune, 2017). In this suggestion to be “better” Chaffetz evoked some ideal character of citizenship, highlighting a fundamental question in a liberal democracy: What does it mean to be a “better” citizen? Throughout the years, political scientists and educational theorists have used models from moral philosophers and developmental psychologists in order to answer this question and thereby define what it means to be a “better” citizen and provide criteria by which one can assess development. Within the United States, two predominant models of cognitive development, one based on knowledge and one based on reasoning, have emerged that have greatly influenced our collective understanding of what it means to be a better citizen. While these models

provide clear measures for personal development, I argue that their limited cognitive scope does not fully capture what it means to be a democratic citizen. In contrast, I offer a pragmatic model of citizenship development where the political capacities developed through participation are oriented to solving public problems rather than improving political cognition.

### **Knowledgeable Citizens**

The first cognitive model for civic development originated in British empiricism and sees the acquisition of knowledge as the primary indicator of growth. In this process of development, sensory organs process external stimuli. Development is understood as the ability to accumulate, discriminate, correlate, and access knowledge (Case, 1992). This idea when applied to the context of civic development is primarily represented by the approach to civic education advocated in public schools and is the idea that the more that an individual knows about the political system, the better they are as a citizen. In other words, to gain more political knowledge is to be a better citizen.

This way of understanding civic development has been operative in the United States since the emergence of the public educational system itself. Thomas Jefferson famously asserted, “I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education” (Lee, 1957, p. 17). While Jefferson offered other proposals for developing civic capacities, his most lasting contributions are the formal educational institutions he helped found, such as the University of Virginia. Noah Webster and



Horace Mann also saw the public school system as integral to developing citizens in the new republic. Similar to Jefferson, they advocated for the general diffusion of knowledge as the primary method for cultivating citizenship. Webster worked to standardize language throughout the United States and promoted knowledge acquisition as a means of building civic identity. Mann, who is widely acknowledged as the “father of the American common school,” believed that, “the training of the schoolroom would eventually ripen into the ‘institutions and fortunes’ of the state.” He, like Jefferson and Webster, spent a long career promoting the idea that “popular education was integrally connected to freedom and democratic government” (Ravitch, 2001, p. 16).

While it is true that the public school system in the United States originated with the explicit objective of cultivating citizens through the dissemination of knowledge, the complex system has evolved throughout the years to accommodate for the changing needs of society. Changes during the Progressive Era, which came on the heels of the Industrial Revolution, involved more accommodation for industrial, workplace and domestic education. The expansion and consolidation of the public school system in the post WWII years brought with it mass enrollments and new ideas on the intent of the system itself (Reese, 2011; Rury, 2005; Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Educational reformers in the postwar era have largely overlooked civic education in an effort to advance more economic skills of engineering and math (Galston, 2007). These trends have prompted a new generation of political scientists and educational theorists to reassert arguments about the importance of political knowledge for democratic citizenship. William Galston (2007), for example, argues that “civic knowledge directly affects civic competence, character, and conduct” and, through the demonstration of empirical data, suggests that

“formal education may well hold the key to the erosion of civic life that troubles so many thoughtful people” (p. 624). In agreement with Galston, Diane Ravitch (2001) concludes in the first chapter of her edited book, *Making Good Citizens*, “that schools must teach youngsters about our history, our civic institutions, and our Constitution” and that “the best protection for a democratic society is well-educated citizens” (p. 28; See also: Delli Carpini & Ketter, 1996).

In addition to the focus on political knowledge acquisition in a formal public school environment, political scientists have also directly researched the more pertinent connection between political participation and knowledge acquisition in small scale deliberative environments. For example, Mark Button and Kevin Mattson (1999) performed exit interviews with citizens across the country who participated in deliberative forums that were advisory in nature, asking participants about their experience. They found that, even when citizens did not have decision-making power or the ability to exert meaningful influence on their representatives, they “saw deliberation as educational” and felt that their participation had “improved understanding of complex issues” (p. 631). James Fishkin and Robert Luskin (2005) have conducted similar studies on “deliberative polls,” advisory deliberative forums meant to refine public opinion on an issue. They have repeatedly found that participating in deliberative polls increases political knowledge of participants. Their studies attempt to gauge the “information gains” by conducting pre- and post participation surveys about the political topics under discussion, as well as general political knowledge. They assert that, “the results show impressive information gains. Not everybody masters every fact, to be sure, but it is a rare topic specific information item that does not show a statistically significant average

gain” (p. 291).

While the founders of the public school system, educational theorists, and political scientists view the problem of citizenship from different perspectives and historical contexts, all converge on the idea that to be a good citizen, an individual needs to gain information about the political institutions, political issues, and political history of the United States. The acquisition and discrimination of political knowledge is the path to becoming a better citizen.

### **Reasonable Citizens**

Alternatively, the second notion of civic development descends from the rationalist theory of Immanuel Kant and was originally elaborated by the moral psychologist Jean Piaget. According to these theorists, it is not simply the acquisition of knowledge that results in citizen development, but the use of reason to assemble knowledge into justifications or theories. They argue that development occurs in stages, during which individuals utilize increasingly universalizable principles to justify their own moral positions—ultimately developing into morally autonomous individuals. This idea of moral development is directly taken up and elaborated in the work of liberal political theorists such as John Rawls, Amy Gutmann, Stephen Macedo, and Eomann Callan and suggests that civic education is the development of autonomy that enables, although may not necessarily entail, reasonable exchange with other differentially situated citizens. In other words, as one develops more universally justifiable principles for their public opinions and actions, one develops as a citizen.

In his foundational work, *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, Jean Piaget (1997)

originated this reason-based framework by analyzing the relationship of children with rules. For Piaget, “all morality consists in a system of rules and the essence of all morality is to be sought for in the respect which the individual acquires for these rules” (p. 13). Based on an extensive observational and interview-based study of children playing marble games, Piaget concluded that children develop from a state of moral heteronomy to a state of moral autonomy. In a heteronomous state, children reason that rules are “external laws which are sacred because they have been laid down by adults” (Duska, 1975, p. 8). Heteronomous morality is a morality of obedience that requires strict adherence to rules laid down by an external authority. But as children grow in age and continue to play with peers, Piaget argues, they begin to “see rules as a product of mutual consent, rather than as a code of laws handed down by authorities” (Duska, 1975, p. 11). In this period of transition from heteronomous to what Piaget terms “autonomous” morality, the child develops the ability for abstract reasoning and begins to develop a sense of justice through cooperative play and peer solidarity. As Piaget (1997) explains, “the rule of justice is a sort of immanent condition of social relationships or a law governing their equilibrium. And as the solidarity between children grows we shall find this notion of justice gradually emerging in almost complete autonomy” (p. 198).

While Piaget’s theory posited that a child advances morally by developing moral autonomy, Lawrence Kohlberg elaborated upon it and crystalized the idea into a stage-based theory of moral reasoning and judgment. Kohlberg created a developmental framework consisting of three levels and six stages of moral judgment. Similar to Piaget, the first level of moral development, called the “preconventional” level, is characterized by obedience to rules that are pronounced by an external authority and adhered to out of

fear of retribution. At the second stage, or “conventional” level, the individual justifies rules out of respect for, and a desire to maintain, the social order—particularly that of their own social groups and relationships. To be morally good at this level is to show loyalty to and live up to what is expected of you by others. The final level of moral development in Kohlberg’s schema is the “postconventional” or “principled” level. Here a person is aware of a diversity of values in society and acts as an autonomous moral person by following self-chosen ethical principles, regardless of immediate consequences or societal expectations (Kohlberg, 1984; Power et al., 1989). Throughout Kohlberg’s work, he assesses each of these stages of moral development through the lens of degrees of moral judgment. An individual progressing through these developmental stages provides reasons and justifications for their ideas and actions, often in hypothetical moral situations. Kohlberg argues this development of moral judgment is synonymous with moral development itself.

The work of these foundational moral psychologists was important (and controversial) in its own right, but it took on increasing significance as these ideas became the undergirding justifications for liberal theories of citizenship. In a less frequently cited, but no less important, section of *A Theory of Justice*, for example, Rawls (1971) draws directly on Piaget and Kohlberg to establish his own idea of civic development in his “well-ordered society.” He states, “My aim is to indicate the major steps whereby a person would acquire an understanding of and an attachment to the principles of justice as he grows up in this particular form of well-ordered society” (p. 461). Rawls explains that a person or citizen would go through a “sequence of moral development,” which occurs in three stages that align with Piaget and Kohlberg—

“morality of authority,” “morality of association,” and “morality of principles.” Similar to Piaget and Kohlberg, Rawls (1971) describes the stages as moving from a position of moral obedience to moral autonomy and describes the end point as a rational citizen: “As the situation dictates, we take up the perspective of a constitutional convention, or of a legislature, or whatever. Eventually one achieves a mastery of these principles and understands the values they secure and the way in which they are to everyone’s advantage” (p. 473). To become a better citizen for Rawls is to continuously work out the rational basis for living in a pluralistic society. He concludes his discussion by stating, “Being governed by these principles means that we want to live with others on terms that everyone would recognize as fair from a perspective that all would accept as reasonable” (p. 478). Thus, directly aligning with Kohlberg, Rawls asserts that the process of learning to reason upon ever higher or more just principles constitutes the process of civic development itself. The ultimate manifestation of the ideal citizen is one who has worked out the various principles of justice from the impartial standpoint of a citizen legislator.

It is difficult to overstate the influence of Rawls’s theory on the contemporary ideas of civic education and development, but, in the remainder of this section, I will detail three additional theorists who have come to largely circumscribe the ideas about the development of better citizenship in liberal democratic theory. It is important to note that the sources outlined here deal directly with the question of civic education and creating better citizens, but there is also an extensive body of research in deliberative democracy theory that is also heavily influenced by Rawls’ approach to civic development. Whereas all three of the following scholars are heavily influenced by

Rawls, Amy Gutmann advances the idea of a deliberative citizen whereas Eamonn Callan and Stephen Macedo advance the idea of the reasonable citizen.

In her influential book, *Democratic Education*, Amy Gutmann (1984) also builds upon the three levels of moral development elaborated by Rawls, Kohlberg, and Piaget to guide her prescription of the ideal democratic citizen. She suggests that rather than extolling autonomy as the ideal endpoint of democratic citizenship, “teaching the morality of association marks great progress over the morality of authority” (p. 61). In this difference from Rawls, she asserts that schools interested in building democratic character should “help develop the cooperative moral sentiments—empathy, trust, benevolence, and fairness” (p. 61). She goes to great lengths to demarcate her position from that of Kohlberg and Rawls and allows that, even though the morality of association may be “a subordinate philosophical ideal, it still may be the primary political ideal for democratic education within primary schools” (p. 62). Yet, although Gutmann seeks to differentiate her theory by advocating for an alternative endpoint, her concept of development aligns with Rawls and Kohlberg because she utilizes their reason-based framework as her starting point. Elevating the importance of one particular stage still subscribes to the general schema that to develop moral rationality is to develop as a citizen. Though Gutmann argues that empathy and trust are important virtues, she argues that the core purpose of democratic education is to develop deliberative character, which she defines as the ability to conduct “careful consideration with a view to decision” on an individual level and “consideration and discussion of the reasons for and against a measure by a number of councilors (e.g. in a legislative assembly)” on the institutional level (p. 52). In other words, although Gutmann seeks to give importance to a broader set

of democratic virtues, in the end to be a better citizen for Gutmann looks very similar to Rawls's impartial citizen legislator.

Following in this tradition, Eamonn Callan (1997) suggests that the "cardinal personal virtue of liberal democratic politics" is what he refers to as "justice as reasonableness" (p. 8). Callan's account moves from advocating a general or impartial view to a more personal sympathetic reasonableness. In a liberal democratic order, citizens need to "develop some imaginative sympathy for compatriots whose experience and identity incline them to see political questions in ways that differ systematically from their own" (p. 8). This type of civic development would engender respect for the rights of other citizens and oneself. The idea is to develop characteristics in citizens on an individual level that make them aware of the deep diversity in society and to cultivate respect for and the ability to moderate amongst those differences through imaginative sympathy. In other words, to be a good citizen, one does not contemplate first principles, as Rawls posits, but rather develops the capacity for reasoning by different means.

Finally, building on the work of Rawls, Gutmann, and Callan, Stephen Macedo (2000) develops a broader civic ideal he calls "civic liberalism." With this concept, Macedo distills the related strands of thought and portrays the ideal of the reasonable citizen. This theory "advances an ideal of citizenship according to which we formulate and defend basic principles of justice by relying on public reasons that we can share while disagreeing about our ultimate commitments" (p. 180). The ultimate political obligation in a civically liberal society is that, when we act as citizens "we owe our fellow citizens reasons that they can share with us" (p. 187). It is upon these reasons that we develop shared standards for our public life together.



In sum, moral psychologists and liberal political theorists originally converged on the idea that to be a better citizen was to develop the capacity for impartial reasoning. As one developed civically, she or he moved from justifications based on obedience to authority to justifications based on community expectations to justifications based on universally applied moral principles. Many influential civic education theorists took up this model and provided it as the central justifying structure of civic education in liberal democratic societies. To be a good “reasonable citizen” according to this model is to be increasingly capable of giving reasons for public decisions based on principled justifications that differentiated others would accept.

### **Pragmatic Citizens**

While these models of citizenship development have been highly influential in both theory and practice, through my observations it has become clear that the “knowledgeable citizen” theory and the “reasonable citizen” theory fail to capture the more interdependent cognitive *and* behavioral processes inherent in active democratic citizenship. Failing to capture the interconnection between civic cognition and civic action leaves the educational prescriptions of knowledge citizenship and reasonable citizenship with limited educational aims and “fully developed” citizens with truncated capabilities. In contrast, I advance a pragmatic theory of citizenship development inseparable from the lived experience of empowered democratic engagement, in which to become a “better” citizen is not merely to know more or to be better able to provide reasonable justification for your position, but to expand your cognitive awareness of actual shared problems through immediate and repeated contact with difference and

through that experience become more adaptable and adept at resolving those shared problems. In the end, the pragmatic theory of civic capacity development is an experiential theory of civic capacity development measured by one's increasing ability to achieve common aims and interests by exerting social control in concert with other citizens.

The theory of pragmatic civic capacity development descends from the pragmatist tradition—especially the thinking of John Dewey. Because it is a theory that makes public action primary, Dewey (1927) provides an important starting point for defining what can be understood as public. In defining public or political actions he demonstrates the simple fact that “human acts have consequences upon others” (p. 12). When those consequences are perceived, it is often the case that it leads to the “subsequent effort to control action so as to secure some consequences and avoid others” (p. 12). An act becomes public or political when the efforts to control actions deal with consequences that affect a large number of people or when the consequences extend beyond the institution from which the action originates. It follows that to practice pragmatic citizenship is to exert effort to control public actions in order to secure desired consequences. As such, the increased ability to direct certain outcomes and avoid others in public decision-making marks the process of pragmatic civic capacity development. It is possible to imagine a citizen with a significant amount of knowledge regarding the political institutions and political issues of a society without having the ability to exert control on the direction of those issues. Likewise, one can imagine an individual who is able to argue and deduce which laws are just based on moral principles of fairness and reciprocity, but who is not capable of exercising conjoint power with fellow citizens to

realize those just laws. A pragmatic theory of civic development then is inextricable from the experience of acting as a citizen. The development of capabilities directly related to public action must thus take precedence over knowledge or rational capacity—whether related to that action or the political system generally.

More accurately speaking, the model of the pragmatic citizen does not seek to discount models of citizenship development based on knowledge and reason, it simply suggests that those models are less suited for democratic political conditions. Whether direct or representative, elite or populist, consensual or adversarial, democracy links civic life to political action of some sort and citizenship improvement must at a minimum develop the capacities and dispositions to act politically. At a maximum it is as Dewey (1916) suggests:

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own. (p. 58)

I am not suggesting that we fully reconceive democracy as a comprehensive societal mode of interaction, but that a conception of democratic citizenship—when individuals act in their capacity as citizens, whether minimal or maximal—must be oriented to political action first. The theories of knowledge-based citizenship and reason-based citizenship elevate cognition above action as the primary indicator of civic development. Pragmatic citizenship reverses this order and places political action as the central focal point and other dispositions and capacities become secondary to those that increase ability to act politically.

What does it mean to act politically in a democracy? According to Dewey, a

democratic citizen acts publicly (or politically) when she or he directs the consequences of public decisions. As mentioned earlier, what distinguishes public decisions from private or individual decisions is the plurality of the people impacted. What Dewey (1916) argued at the beginning of the 20th century was true about political society for Aristotle and is undoubtedly even more descriptive of political conditions in the twenty-first century:

Society is one word, but many things...within every larger social organization there are numerous minor groups: not only political subdivisions, but industrial, scientific, religious, associations. There are political parties with differing aims, social sets, cliques, gangs, corporations, partnerships, groups bound closely together by the ties of blood, and so on in endless variety. (p. 55)

Due to this variety in political societies, I argue that democratic civic action is that which recognizes the plurality of society and also the power of each individual to equally direct public decisions. Democratic action then interpenetrates and coordinates different empowered citizen actors and groups extant in the population through interplay between them and common interest among them. The degree to which an individual recognizes that the direction of her/his public actions is dependent upon coordinating common interests with diverse and empowered others is the degree to which she/he develops democratically. Likewise, the degree to which an individual develops the ability to adjust their actions in consideration of empowered others who are different from them is the degree to which they develop democratic civic capacity (Dewey, 1916, p. 58).

This does not mean that all political participation will lead to this type of democratic development. Surely there are conditions where individuals seek to coordinate common interests through fiat or deny the interests of diverse others in bringing about political decisions. A citizen might become more adept at this strategic

capability over time, but she will not be developing democratically. Similarly, there are repeated times when citizens adjust their actions in ways that utilize their relative power and perhaps are successful at controlling public decisions. Again, what I seek to argue is that this type of political disposition and capability is not a democratic capability.

Because of the plurality of political society and the sovereignty of democratic citizens, democratic civic capacity is defined by its ability to recognize, adjust, and work with differently situated and empowered others to direct the outcome of public decisions. The full implications of this definition will be explored in the empirical chapters of this study.

### **Pragmatic Citizenship: Proximate Governance** **and Citizen Readjustment**

It remains to explore why democratic participation in proximate governance organizations leads to pragmatic citizenship development. In other words, why do public decision-making organizations in recurrent face-to-face settings lead to the greater recognition of diverse interests and cultivate individual capacities to adjust to and direct common decisions?

In one memorable exchange at the Brighton High School townhall, Congressman Chaffetz sought to explain his position opposing the release of President Trump's tax returns. He said he believed that every president should release their tax returns and, in an effort to relate to the audience, added, "My guess is that everybody in here shares that same opinion." Before he could finish, one audience member yelled, "You're the only one with the power. I don't have that power, you do!" After being forced to pause for cheers, Chaffetz replied over the audience, "It's not...It's not...It's not required by law! It

is not required by law” (The Salt Lake Tribune, 2017). This exchange brought out in high relief the discrepancy in political authority between the audience members and Congressman Chaffetz. Exasperated citizens were being affected by decisions that Congressman Chaffetz had direct authority over and expressed frustration at their own inability to influence the trajectory of those decisions. In this section, I will argue that the authority structure of democratic institutions plays the catalyzing role in pragmatic civic development.

In the first and second sections of this chapter, I have sought to answer two simple questions: Which type of democratic participation has the highest potential to lead to civic capacity development? And what type of civic capacity development should be expected and desired for citizens in democratic societies? Here, I argue that what makes proximate governance institutions unique is that these institutions bestow responsibility on citizens and equalize decision-making power among citizens. The immediacy, the bindingness, the recurrence, and the scale of the institution all increase the likelihood that citizens feel more responsible for the decisions made by the body and more equal in their share of power. In this final section, I argue that when citizens feel responsible for and empowered to make public decisions, they will regularly take part in decisions and encounter arguments that conflict with their personal beliefs. Due to the unabating need to make decisions in proximate governance institutions, they regularly experience the discomfort of cognitive dissonance as decisions are proposed, deliberated, and taken, and citizens are subsequently motivated to seek dissonance resolution through taking personal actions. This continual process mediates and advances the development of civic

capacities by prompting constant experiential learning, experimentation, and adjustment from the individual citizen toward the political community.

### **Dissonance Resolution: A Psychobehavioral Process**

Due to the well-documented psychological drive for internal personal consistency, cognitive dissonance is a motivational state of mental tension that arises from inconsistent or conflicting knowledge (Festinger, 1957; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976). In simpler terms, when an individual has two thoughts that are not in agreement, she will experience a sense of discomfort that will motivate her to resolve the internal disagreement. While this state of “cognitive dissonance” can be aroused by two conflicting or inconsistent thoughts, researchers have repeatedly shown that cognitive dissonance arousal most frequently occurs when there is inconsistency between behavior and cognition (Wicklund & Brehm, 1962; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976, p. 6). When, for example, an individual acts in a way that diverges from their own beliefs or values, dissonance arises. As the originator of the cognitive dissonance theory, Leon Festinger (1957), explains, “Where an opinion must be formed or a decision taken, some dissonance is almost unavoidably created between the cognition of the action taken and those opinions or knowledges which tend to point in a different direction” (p. 5). Take, for example, a member of a School Community Council who believes that the school would benefit from devoting a portion of this year’s funds to Advanced Placement English courses. In the course of deliberations, however, the council moves to allocate the funds to an English Language Learning program for students who recently immigrated instead, and the full council votes to approve. The divergence between the

decision taken and the belief or desire held by the individual who initially advocated for a different course of action creates dissonance or inconsistency within that individual.

This does not mean that all decisions taken by the SCC will create dissonance. It has been shown that “the amount of dissonance [a person] experiences is a direct function of how important those cognitions are to him” (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976, p. 2). Of course there are many cognitions that are simply not important enough to provoke dissonance when contradicted. If the council member held the opinion supporting Advanced Placement English courses simply because a distant friend had had a good experience in those courses, she may not experience much dissonance in allocating funds to a different program. However, if her own children had benefitted from Advanced Placement courses and she therefore believed that the school as a whole had significantly improved due to the introduction of those courses, she would be much more likely to feel dissonance with a decision not to fund them.

Additionally, what cognitive dissonance theory argues is that once cognitive tension arises, the individual will experience a “motivational state” to resolve the dissonance in order to regain internal cognitive consistency. The experience of dissonance causes psychological discomfort and the SCC member in the above example will, as a result of feeling that dissonance, feel motivated to alter her cognitions or behavior in some way to regain internal consistency. In other words, as a motivational state, cognitive dissonance drives an individual to adjust and change in a way that will accommodate for and justify the conflicting behavior. In the process of dissonance reduction, “dissonant cognitions can be eliminated, or their importance reduced. Consonant cognitions can be added, or the importance of preexistent consonant



cognitions can be increased” (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976, p. 5). As with the creation of dissonance, acting anew is often the most potent way to reduce dissonance (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2007, p. 11). For example, the SCC member might lessen the importance of Advanced Placement courses by gathering information about other schools where the courses did not improve the college placement at the school. She might also seek out conversations with SCC members or other parents whose children excelled in ordinary English classes or she might speak out in a meeting about how her child took ordinary English classes during the first 2 years in high school and had a positive experience. Additionally, she is likely to refrain from speaking about her child’s experience in Advanced Placement courses at SCC meetings. In this way, cognitive dissonance resolution is a psychobehavioral process in which cognitions and actions are repeatedly prompted by one another and adjusted in order to regain consistency.

Lastly, in addition to being motivated to resolve dissonance, the evidence suggests that newly formed cognitions regarding actual behavior are less likely to change than cognitions not tied to behaviors, or to behaviors that are in the more distant past. In other words, the more recent the decision is, the more likely the dissonance will resolve to justify that decision (Wicklund & Brehm, 1962; Wicklund & Brehm, 1976, p. 6). Thus, for the SCC member, she is more likely to make right the recent decision to allocate funds to the English Language Learning (ELL) program because it is a decision/behavior rather than merely a belief *and* because it is recent. As Wicklund and Brehm (1976) explain, “The cognition of a recent behavior or behavioral commitment, such as a decision, is usually assumed to be the element most resistant to change” (p. 5). In sum, this means that the SCC member would be motivated to justify the ELL decision, often

through further behavioral actions, even though it advances the interest of other SCC members over her own personal interests.

### **Public Responsibility, Power, and Dissonance Resolution**

When public responsibility and power are distributed it means that ordinary citizens take part in shaping the decisions of the public institution, they actively contribute to the discussion and negotiation of the decisions as they are considered, and that they are accountable to members of the public for the actions that they take. What I argue here is that, as these conditions are more fully met, citizen members of proximate governance institutions more regularly experience cognitive dissonance and the process of resolving that dissonance, thereby being motivated to act in ways that address public problems and in doing so learn new skills and capacities.

The first point to consider is that proximate governance institutions where citizens participate are public, and it is in public institutions that one is most likely to encounter conflicting views. As discussed in the pragmatic citizen section, among possible institutional forms, public institutions encompass the broadest cross section of the population. In other words, because schools, parks, and libraries are public, you will encounter in these institutions more people, on average, who hold differing values than you will in private institutions such as families, churches, businesses, and voluntary or affinity organizations. This does not mean all schools are highly diverse, it simply means that, relative to private institutions, they will be on average more diverse. Given this diversity condition, it follows that the viewpoints and interests represented in public institutions will more often diverge than in other institutions. In this situation, the

likelihood that an individual will encounter perspectives that are different from their own is greater than in other institutions. In this way, the publicness of the institution increases the likelihood for creating dissonant viewpoints, needs, and interests within the decision-making institution. This in turn increases the likelihood that members of public decision-making bodies will experience personal moments of cognitive dissonance.

Furthermore, as was briefly explained, cognitive dissonance is intensified when behaviors are inconsistent with cognitions. In a public *decision-making* body, it is incumbent on members of that body to make continual decisions about the resources under their jurisdiction. In other words, decisions must take place on a continual and repeated basis. In most public decision-making bodies, especially those proximate governance institutions designated here, there is no available option to not make decisions without losing significant resources. This condition of inevitable decision-making and repeated enacted behavior, together with the diversity of perspectives weighing on the decision, makes public decision-making institutions places where not only are there differing perspectives with which one must engage, but actions representing those differences must repeatedly be taken. Members of SCCs, for example, are continually compelled to make decisions with dissimilar others, and that process leads to the continual internal weighing of tradeoffs and values for the individual involved. Incumbent decision-making puts members in a position to not only participate in decisions, but to continuously grapple with the consequences of those decisions after they are made.

It could be said that a member of an SCC could avoid dissonance by simply disagreeing and not going along with decisions that they disagree with. That would

certainly help an individual avoid decision-initiated dissonance, yet the conditions of proximate governance often build an “only consensus” orientation to decision-making. This does not mean there is consensus on every decision, but that those decisions that do not have consensus usually get postponed, dropped, or continuously discussed and modulated until most everyone is in support. This consensus pressure works against or in tandem with the timing pressure to make decisions. The result, as I have observed, is a condition where citizens continually weigh their support or opposition to a decision and will regularly go along with decisions of which they are not fully in support. As A.R. Cohen (1964) explains, “dissonance theory is especially appropriate for the study of the sorts of situation...where persons are “forced” to comply with a request that they behave in a way that does not follow from their cognitions” (p. 82). Such is the case for many SCC members: They will regularly vote to pass decisions that do not follow from their cognitions.

While it is true that public decision-making creates conditions ripe for cognitive dissonance, it is not always true that citizens feel responsibility and power in proximate governance bodies. What I am arguing here is that the more responsibility one feels for the decisions at hand, the more cognitive dissonance she will experience. It is a well-researched finding in social psychology that “without personal responsibility the dissonant elements are psychologically irrelevant for the individual” (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976, p. 7; See also Cooper, 1971). Thus, if the SCC member in the above example is essentially forced into a decision either because there are no opportunities to offer her idea about the Advanced Placement courses, little time is allocated in meetings for deliberation about the English Language Learning courses, or no parents approach her

afterward to ask about the decision, she is likely to feel very little dissonance, even though the money is being allocated in a way that is different from what she believed was best for the school. On the other hand, if she formally puts the idea to fund Advanced Placement courses on the agenda, the SCC weighs and discusses the ideas in multiple meetings. And if parents ask her about the decision immediately after it is made, she is likely to feel significant amounts of cognitive dissonance if the decision does not go as she hoped. Thus, even though the timing and consensus pressures may be keenly felt, the degree of dissonance felt by a citizen also corresponds to the degree of personal responsibility that she feels for the public decisions made. As outlined previously, I argue that public responsibility is increased in three ways in proximate governance structures: agenda setting, deliberation, and accountability—the origination of the idea or decision to the body, the time and effort devoted to discussing the idea or decision, and the way in which the ideas and decisions are communicated to other affected parties who hold the decision makers to account.

In sum, citizens who actively contribute to public decisions in proximate governance institutions are likely to experience repeated instances of cognitive dissonance. Dissonance emerges as ideas considered and decisions taken by the body conflict with personal beliefs and values. Due to the relatively high diversity encountered in public institutions, there is a greater chance that the ideas considered will differ from the personal values of the citizen. Furthermore, because there is a continuous demand to make decisions in this type of institution, decisions are frequently made that do not conform to the cognitions of the citizens, yet in pragmatic consideration of maintaining consensus, they often publicly support those decisions. Having given their public support,

citizens are left to work out the dissonance created by the conflicting internal belief and external behavior. The degree of personal responsibility that they feel for the public decision will be a result of the contribution they made to originating the decision under consideration, the time and effort given to deliberating the decision with other citizens, and how accountable they feel to other citizens. As the personal responsibility is increased along these measures, citizens are more and more likely to feel dissonance for decisions that are made. The subsequent dissonance resolution strategies created—in the form of active personal adjustments to the needs of community—thus comprise an important process of pragmatic civic capacity development.

### **Dissertation Outline**

In the following chapters, I will elaborate on the concepts and theories presented above through an empirical investigation of four School Community Councils. In Chapter 2, I explain my research methodology and highlight what emerged as the most important distinction in the data: differences in the level of decision-making authority held by parents on ‘parent-strong’ councils versus ‘principal-strong’ councils. In Chapter 3, I introduce the process of developmental dissonance, which is a fully elaborated process of individual dissonance resolution for acting parent SCC members. This developmental dissonance process is the primary theoretical contribution of the dissertation and lays out the process whereby parent members in dissonant conditions are motivated to act in procivic ways to resolve dissonance. In Chapters 4 through 9, I present case studies of the parent members of each high school SCC and include a case summary chapter. In the final chapter, I reflect on the implications of the study for proximate governance

institutions and individual citizens. I argue that we must be attentive to power, responsibility, and scale in proximate governance institutions and foster dispositions in citizens that enable difference recognition and interest coordination.

## CHAPTER 2

### PARENT-STRONG VERSUS PRINCIPAL-STRONG

### SCHOOL COMMUNITY COUNCILS

In this chapter, I outline the case selection, research methods, and primary analytical distinctions that emerged during the project. The cases selected for this study are shared governance institutions—School Community Councils—in public high schools in Utah that meet the criteria of proximate governance institutions as discussed in Chapter 1. I deliberately selected this institutional type because it is the most likely site where better citizen effects could be observed and analyzed (Fung, 2001; Pincock, 2011). Moreover, due to the subtle nature of civic capacity development (Mansbridge, 1999), I utilized a grounded theory methodological approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) with three distinct data collection and analysis activities: participant observation, archival research, and semistructured interviews. This approach allowed me to observe first-hand the actions of the participants in monthly SCC meetings, to understand formal interpretations of those actions as reflected in meeting minutes, and then to elicit the perspective of participants through elaborated narrative accounts of meetings and other personal experiences of serving on School Community Councils. The combination of these research methods resulted in multidimensional portraits of SCC activities, which became my dataset.



Originally, I selected four elementary school cases and four high school cases with the intent to understand the distinct experience of what I thought would be the two most important populations: “new members” (members with under 2 years’ experience on the council) versus “experienced members” (members with over 6 years’ experience on the council). However, as the research progressed, it became clear that a deeper analysis of the four high school councils only would prove more effective because of the superior record keeping, regularity of meetings, and divergent institutional practices. I therefore dropped the elementary cases in an effort to focus on four primary high school cases. As I learned, the most relevant distinction was not between new and experienced members, but between members of high school councils where the principal primarily held decision-making authority (principal-strong) and members of high school councils where the parents primarily held decision-making authority (parent-strong). Based on their majority status, the formal decision-making authority of an SCC is ultimately held by the parent members. Yet, in actual meetings, each SCC had very different informal practices that shaped the power structures of decision-making within the SCC—weighted either toward the principal or toward the parents. It is for this reason that the last section of this chapter is dedicated to drawing out this important distinction, which will then be utilized as a comparison framework throughout the remainder of the dissertation.

### **Why School Community Councils?**

As described in Chapter 1, it was imperative to select case institutions for this project where citizens regularly participated in the active decision-making of public institutions. As such, the selection criteria for the cases were that they be proximate

governance institutions. The opportunity to observe over a year-long period four case institutions that met this exacting criteria is extremely rare in the study of citizenship. While there are many studies that seek to answer questions about civic capacity development, most do not examine institutional sites that meet “optimal” conditions for civic capacity development. This is in no small part due to the fact that such sites (proximate governance institutions) are very rare in the United States. As Fung observes, there have only been a select few proximate governance institutions created nationwide. Examples include those created by the Chicago Police Department and a few other school districts scattered around the country (Fung, 2001). As a result of this scarcity, one primary contribution of this dissertation is to provide original data on institutions where citizens regularly meet in a small, face-to-face environment close to home, and have legally codified authority to make decisions over public resources (Fung, 2001; Pincock, 2011).

### **History and Legal Structure of School Community Councils**

School Community Councils were officially created by the Utah State Legislature in 1992. Originally, the councils were established to bring together a decision-making body of parents, teachers, and the school principal to address the academic needs of students in public and charter schools throughout the state. During the initial years, many of the elementary, junior high, and high schools around the state created SCCs and these school-based committees were tasked with creating a School Improvement Plan (SIP). Although originally successful in bringing together parents and school employees to advise on academic needs, it was in 1999 that the School LAND Trust Program was

created, through which SCCs gained decision-making authority over annual budgets provided by the State of Utah. The original purpose of creating the School LAND Trust, as outlined in the legal code, was to “provide financial resources to a public school to implement a component of a school’s improvement plan or charter document in order to enhance and improve student academic achievement” (Utah Administrative Code R277-477-1). The second purpose listed in the law was to “provide a means to involve a parent of a school’s student in decision-making regarding the expenditure of School LAND Trust Program funds allocated to the school” (Utah Administrative Code R277-477-1). Together, these legislative acts formally created committees made up of parents of children attending the school, teachers employed by the school, and the principal of the school. Although the council was composed of these three parties, it also included a “parent majority requirement.” Thus, the total number of parents on a School Community Council must exceed the number of school employees on the council, including the principal (Utah Administrative Code 53A).

With the establishment of LAND Trust Program in 1999, every public school and charter school in the state received an annual budget to be allocated each year by the SCC. In the school year this study was conducted (2018-2019) the average elementary school SCC oversaw \$62,000, the average junior high school oversaw \$97,000, and the average high school oversaw \$126,000. While the state’s annual budget for SCCs was relatively small during the beginning years, in the past decade it has increased dramatically—from just over \$20 million in 2011 to over \$70 million in 2019. The funding is designated on a per-pupil basis. Though the average high school received approximately \$126,000 in 2018-19, there are many high schools, including two in my

sample, that received over \$270,000 that year because of the relative size of the student body.

### **Responsibilities of School Community Councils**

Each year the SCC is legally required to submit a School LAND Trust Plan to the state. The School LAND Trust Plan identifies academic goals for the upcoming school year, specific steps to meet those goals, measurements to assess improvement, and specific expenditures focused on academic improvement (Utah Administrative Code R277-477-1). After the plan is submitted by the SCC chair with the signatures of all members, a state committee reviews and approves the plan. This codified structure focuses the allocation of money on the academic needs of the students of the school but has some small exceptions written into the code, such as: “A council may budget and spend no more than \$7,000 for in-school civic and character education” (Utah Administrative Code R277-477-1). But by and large, the budget is designated for academic spending as determined by the council.

In addition to creating and administering the School LAND Trust Plan and budget, SCCs have gained other direct responsibilities with subsequent legislation including the development of a reading achievement plan for elementary students and the development of a safe walking plan for junior high, middle school, and elementary students. Furthermore, the SCCs have advisory responsibilities with fairly wide scope: “Advise and make recommendations to school and school district administrators and the local school board regarding the school and its programs, school district programs, and other issues relating to the community environment for students” (Utah Administrative

Code 53A). As I attended meetings at over 20 different schools throughout the pilot and case phases of this research project, I regularly observed the councils advising on both the school and district levels for many issues outside the immediate LAND Trust scope of the SCCs, including security equipment and camera placement, cell phone policies, grading policies, building construction plans, academic scheduling, mental health issues, extracurricular programs, and moving sixth graders to middle school and ninth graders to high school, among many others.

### **Elections and Meeting Formats**

The parent members of the SCC are elected by the parents of students at the school for 2-year terms. Likewise, the faculty council members are elected by the fellow teachers in the school for 2-year terms. The principal is always a member of the SCC, but cannot serve as chair or vice chair. The chair position must always be filled by a parent and the vice chair position can be filled by a parent or a teacher. As a basic qualification, the parent members are required to have at least one child at the school where they serve. The parents are typically elected through online voting run on the school's social media page or school website (Salt Lake City School District, 2014). Although I did not observe the election process directly for this study, the parent interviews demonstrated that elections were sometimes seen as a formality procedure and at other times were competitive. Parents in competitive elections reported that they would often write their friends and other associates and campaign for the position.

The standard practice for the SCCs was to hold monthly meetings on the same day and time of every month, for example, 7:00 AM on the third Thursday of each

month. Of the four cases observed in this study, two met before school hours and two met directly after school hours or in the evening. All four SCCs in the full study had regularly scheduled monthly meetings. The length of the meetings was typically scheduled to be either 1 hour or 2 hours and most meetings lasted between 60-120 minutes, but occasional meetings in the four cases completed in 30 minutes or continued for more than 2 hours. By law all meetings are public and meeting times, meeting agendas, meeting minutes, member names and contact information are required to be posted on school websites. All four case high school SCCs regularly posted meeting agendas and meeting minutes to their respective school websites.

### **Parent Members**

The focus of this study is on the parent members of SCCs. The primary reason for this is that the parent members are unpaid volunteers, and therefore are acting in a purely civic capacity, as opposed to the principal and the teachers on the committee, who participate because it is part of the duties of their employment. Furthermore, it is important to reemphasize that parents held a majority on the councils by law and thus ultimately held the formal decision-making authority of the council. Additionally, the councils are also legally required to run under the direction of a council chair, who is mandated to be a parent. However, as empowered actors on the SCC, I observed that the school employees and especially the principal often significantly influenced the meeting format and even the decision outcomes of SCCs. Thus, in the observations, I carefully noted the interactions of all of the members but then subsequently interpreted the interactions through the lens of the parent interviews.

In sum, while there are significant differences in the informal implementation of SCCs, the unique institutional structure gives parent citizens legal decision-making authority over an annual public school budget, as allocated by the state of Utah. Parents of students at the school meet monthly in face-to-face meetings with fellow parent citizens, teachers, and the principal to administer public funds and weigh in on major decisions made at the school and school district. As a proximate governance institution, a School Community Council represents a particularly strong manifestation of the participatory conditions that scholars have repeatedly argued are most likely to facilitate civic capacity development.

### **Case Selection**

The case selection for this project was altered significantly as a result of the pilot study. During the pilot study, performed in the spring of 2018, I observed meetings of nine elementary school SCCs from three different school districts in the greater Salt Lake City metropolitan area. In order to maximize the SES variation between the cases, I randomly selected elementary schools from within three geographic subzones of each district, which were divided evenly east to west in the greater Salt Lake area.

During the observations of these meetings, I was repeatedly asked by participants whether I was also observing meetings at junior high schools and high schools. After inquiring, the various parent members then suggested that I should specifically attend high school SCC meetings because that is “where the action is.” As explained previously, in an effort to focus my efforts, I altered my sample completely and did not return to any of the elementary schools. The final sample of SCCs was made up of four high schools.

The high school cases were selected prior to having attended any SCC meetings at the schools.

As before, I sought to create a wide variation within the sample of cases. The original point of difference between cases was the geographic setting because of the additional layers of SES variation encompassed within geographic location in educational institutions. Thus, I selected one high school from the more densely populated urban area of Salt Lake City, one from the outlying suburban district around Salt Lake City, one from a rapidly growing ex-urban area, and one from a predominantly rural area of Utah. Another primary distinction between the high school SCCs was that they were administered in separate school districts. As the study progressed, it became clear that this point of difference mattered significantly as each district administered SCCs in unique ways that affected communications, training practices, audit procedures, attendance of board members at SCC meetings, and advisory roles. Often the SCC members had participated on SCCs at different schools within the district, and practices were often shared and reproduced throughout the district.

As intended, the original selection criteria based on geographic setting resulted in a wide range of racial diversity levels among the schools. According to Public School Review (Public School Review), the two high schools in urban and suburban settings had a majority non-White student population with the White population ranging from 30-40% in each school. The rural and ex-urban high schools had white populations closer to 90%. While a school's racial diversity was reflected to a certain degree in the School Community Council makeup, across the case schools the parent members of SCCs were predominantly White and female. Where the racial diversity consideration impacted the



councils most was on the funding allocations and decisions made by councils on behalf of the student populations. Proposals that addressed the needs of minority populations were regularly taken up in the councils from racially diverse schools and such proposals were considered far less frequently in the other schools.

An additional feature of the sample was the wide range of socioeconomic statuses represented. Given that SES is the most durable indicator for civic participation, it was important to include schools and council populations that represented all ranges of socioeconomic status. Census data from each city demonstrate this fact. For example, while 48% of the feeder population for one case school held a bachelor's degree or higher, this figure was only 13% for another case school. The other two cases ranged between 32% and 45%. Additionally, per-household income from the highest-SES case school measured above \$95,000 annually where that of the lowest case school was just above \$50,000. The other two high schools took in residents with median household incomes—between \$55,000-\$61,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). These general characteristics were confirmed by exit surveys of actual participants, and in fact revealed that the sample included an even more significant range of socioeconomic statuses among participants than census data would indicate.

The final major point of difference between the case schools was the age of the school itself. Ranging from one of the oldest schools in the state with over 100 years of institutional history to one of the newest schools in the state, constructed in 2018, the sample also accounted for wide variation in institutional memory. As with the other differences between cases, institutional memory influenced the workings of SCCs in terms of organizational strength, the longevity of student and parent relationships with

the schools, and the schools' influence and attention received within the district. While there are certainly additional dimensions of difference that could be considered, these diversity markers in the selection criteria created a sample of high school SCCs that reflected a wide variation between the four schools.

As will be discussed further in the last section of this chapter, each SCC had its own informal modes of operating that greatly influenced how decisions were made and how influence was wielded. In other words, even though the formal codified authority structure of every SCC was the same, the informal authority structure differed significantly between the case schools. That point of difference, rather than the difference between new and experienced members, which was my original focus, became the primary point of comparison for the project.

### **Observing, Interviewing, and Mining SCC Archives**

This project originated not only from my interest in the relationship between political participation and civic capacity development, but from a desire to augment the very limited scholarly resources related to this topic. As noted in the introduction, many scholars have suggested that a relationship between these phenomena exists, but only marginal gains have been made in investigating the institutional contexts of political participation that relate most directly to processes of civic capacity development. As Jane Mansbridge noted, the subtlety of civic capacity development does not lend itself well to statistically based empirical studies (Mansbridge, 1999). Rather, citizens participate in complex institutions and experience development through various processes that need to be closely observed and mapped out in their immediate relational contexts. In response to

this challenge, I spent hundreds of hours observing, interviewing, note taking, and analyzing, thereby building a grounded theory framework with the data from the field.

Although I began the project assuming I could simply assess individual citizens with less attention paid to the institutional context, it became evident that both the institutional and social-psychological processes needed careful attention. Rather than follow other more typical studies that measure political knowledge through surveys before and after participation, it was important to closely investigate the distinct processes of political participation itself. Over the course of the study, it became increasingly clear that even though two institutions have an identical legal structure, they are often expressed in markedly different ways in different contexts. As a result, there are divergent developmental responses that emerge based on the distinct types of participation—a reality that can only be captured through close observation and in-depth interviews.

As the project required active theory building throughout the research process, grounded theory provided the methodological framework for the project. As Strauss and Corbin (1994) explain, “grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and organized. Theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (p. 273). This continuous interplay between theoretical analysis and data collection was necessary to make sense of the complex relationship between participation and civic development. While grounded theory provided the overarching methodological framework, I utilized three particular methods for data gathering and analysis: participant observation, semistructured narrative interviews, and archival research.

## **Participant Observation**

As detailed in Section 1, this project encompassed a pilot study and a full-length case study. Over the course of 14 months from 2018 to 2019, I observed 56 SCC meetings at 18 different schools. After the initial pilot period of observations in which I learned about the general workings of SCCs, I selected four councils to observe at repeated meetings throughout the school year. The meeting observations served as the initial access point for the study and, in all four cases, I observed multiple meetings prior to pursuing interviews with parent members or conducting archival research.

The accessibility and regularity of the SCC meetings made them prime sites for participant observation. During the study, I was regularly welcomed to the meetings and added to the minutes as a guest from the University of Utah. Prior to the meeting, I often emailed the chair of the committee to ask for permission to attend. For those committees from which I did not get a response, I arrived at the meeting without prior contact and was always able to attend the meeting. In the over 50 meetings that I attempted to attend, I was not once turned away. Yet, while the principal and SCC members were generally receptive to my presence, there were often difficulties in scheduling for the SCC meetings. Meetings were moved to different times or cancelled, and as an outsider, I was not informed about these changes to the scheduling. This was most often the case with elementary schools during the pilot study.

One challenging dynamic of the observation process was how much I was noticed by other members attending the meeting. Due to the wide variation in the number of attendees, I was more or less noticeable during the meeting based on how many attendees were at the meeting. My general experience was that after the first or second meeting, I

typically became an expected attendee and began to be less noticed over time. I sought to minimize the impact of my presence through attentive listening and unobtrusive small talk.

In the early meetings, I observed that note taking by members was a common practice and that most members took notes directly on the agenda. In an effort to fit in with the members, I took up the same practice and used the agenda for my jottings. On average, I wrote much more than other members and I was always conscious of how my note taking was perceived. I occasionally adjusted the quantity of notes based on the attention from others during the meeting. At most meetings, I was able to take notes freely and continuously throughout the meeting. At various times during the observations, references to my notes were explicitly made by the attendees. Many of these references were made in a joking manner and I would smile and laugh along with the individual who referenced my notes, while assuring them that the notes were only for my research and would be anonymized. These types of references were most common in the beginning of the study and, after I had attended numerous meetings, the attendees referenced my notes only seldom. In general, this was also true of my attendance. The more meetings that I attended, the less noticeable I became. Given this trend, I was able to make a more extensive record of the later meetings in the study, and I was able to attend more to specific language used between the members as discussions unfolded. These jottings then became the primary source for field notes.

After attending the meetings, I regularly created extended field notes in the most timely manner possible. In this effort, I often recorded my immediate thoughts by audio recording while traveling back from the meeting. The jottings and the audio recording

became the primary sources for my field notes. While my initial jottings were less developed, I always divided my field notes into subcategories so as to make some initial sense of the content of the meeting. In many early field notes, I recorded detailed information about the environmental setting of the meetings including the shape of the room, the location of the tables, the colors, decorations, orientation, etc... This environmental observation was initially accompanied by an analysis of the levels of participation by particular members of the SCC. Afterwards, I recorded the content of the meeting and described the meeting items that were taken up by the members with my own reflexive comments and analysis.

Because the environment and the participation levels stayed fairly consistent for each SCC meeting over the year, my initial field notes evolved into more detailed accounts of the particular dialogic exchanges between members in the meeting. I sought to capture their precise words in my jottings and then recreate the exchanges in my field notes as accurately as possible. Thus, rather than simply take note of the issues that were raised in the meetings as I did at first, I began to take note of what particular statements were made by whom about the issue at hand and record the order in which the comments were made. It was impossible to capture everything that was said, especially because very often multiple people spoke at the same time. In this situation, I noted as many of the precise words of the key interlocutors as possible and then recreated the general arc of the discussion in my field notes using verbatim statements. These “interaction sequences” became the predominant focus of my field notes during the second half of the study.

After recreating the interaction sequences as accurately as possible, I then took two additional steps to complete my field notes. In the first step, I added my own

reflections about the interaction sequences. My reflections included the feelings and thoughts about the interaction sequence that I recalled having personally experienced during the meeting as well as any additional related thoughts after the meeting that were particular to my own mental state, immediate reactions to the content of the meetings, and my perceived influence on others as a researcher. Next, I added a third section of notes entitled “analysis” where I attempted to identify and describe recurring patterns of phenomena and compare those to previous observations as well as situate them within my conceptual framework. The analysis section of the field notes was the primary vehicle through which the theoretical categories of analysis emerged and evolved throughout the project.

In sum, the final process of participant observation was to attend an SCC meeting at a case school, recording jottings in real time during the meeting, and soon thereafter create an elaborated set of field notes and supplementary audio notes. Table 1 is a record of these activities:

Table 1: SCC Meetings and Note Record

<b>High Schools</b>	<b>Attended</b>	<b>Jottings</b>	<b>Field Notes</b>	<b>Audio Notes</b>
Crescent	9	9	7	1
Riverside	8	8	8	1
Lakeview	4	4	2	1
Oakwood	7	6	6	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>6</b>

### Semistructured Narrative Interviews

After attending the meetings throughout the school year, I developed a congenial rapport with many of the SCC members and I had the opportunity to interview over half of all the parent members. The receptivity to the interview invitation seemed partially due to the social environment of the SCC meetings. Where I was able to interact with members before and after the meetings, I received a more positive response to the invitations. While I would have liked to interview all parent members, extended semistructured interviews with over 50% of participants gave me confidence in the data patterns. Table 2 shows the number of interviews performed versus the total number of parent SCC members.

The interviews were conducted between April and June 2019 toward the end of the participant observation period. The timing for the interviews was selected based on the need to develop rapport and also the mutually experienced meetings between myself and the parent members of the SCCs. There were often specific meeting events that both myself and the interviewee had experienced in the meetings, on which the parent member

Table 2: SCC Interview Record

<b>High Schools</b>	<b>Parent Members</b>	<b>Parent Members Interviewed</b>
Crescent	10	7
Riverside	11	7
Lakeview	7	3
Oakwood	14	5
<b>HS Totals</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>22</b>



further elaborated in the interview. With a shared meeting experience, these moments of reflection in the interviews became especially rich because there was clarity around the fact that although I observed the event, I did not understand the internal experience of the interviewee. This positional understanding opened up space for the interviewee to articulate their internal experience often with great clarity. Over the total course of the study, I interviewed 22 parent members from the case schools and an additional 33 parent members from outside SCCs. While the 33 outside interviews were extremely helpful during the pilot period and provided additional context during the case studies, they will not be directly utilized in the subsequent chapters. Although all of the parent SCC members held elected public positions, the names of all interview and meeting participants have been anonymized. Prior to the interview, each parent member voluntarily signed a confidentiality form which read that, “in publications, your name will be removed and a pseudonym will be used in its place.”

The interviews averaged approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes and were conducted primarily in the homes of the parent members or a nearby public library or coffee shop. Four of the interviews were conducted over the phone. As the study progressed, I developed categories of inquiry which became the basis of a standardized interview guide (See Appendix A: Interview Guide). The interview guide included eight questions and was organized in a semistructured format. The vast majority of interviewees were asked the full set of questions and the interviews were only truncated where time did not permit. The questions were written explicitly to evoke memories and experiences of decisions on the SCCs where the parent member had served. The initial experience solicitation question on the interview guide pertained to a category of inquiry

and then additional follow up explorations were made regarding the experience as told by the interviewee. The follow up questions were typically structured by repeating statements made by the interviewee and then a petition to explain more about the statement. On occasion, I also inquired about a particular meeting event I had observed which involved the individual being interviewed.

The semistructured narrative format of the interviews allowed many unforeseen ideas and themes to emerge. More often than not, the exploration of one question would last over 20 minutes and would cover many of the topics in the subsequent questions. In each case, I still asked the full set of questions and the interviewees would very often elaborate more on the initial topic. In this way, experiences on the SCC were often revealed in waves during the interview. The topic would drop and then be revisited later in order to further clarify or describe a portion of the experience that had been passed over. The openness of the interview format and the layers of meaning uncovered was in keeping with the overarching grounded theory methodology. The topics of the interview were garnered from the meeting observations, and then the semistructured interviews enabled additional learning and theorizing from the interviewees directly.

### **Archival Research**

In addition to the observation and interview data, I also systematically analyzed the meeting agendas and meeting minutes produced by the SCC members for all of the meetings held in the 2018-2019 school year for all four case schools. As required by law, each School Community Council must record minutes to meetings and make them publicly available. All of the SCCs in the study made their records available via the

official school website. This important source of data provided a primary source record of the same meetings for which I collected jottings and field notes. This source was an important check on my own data as well as a means of triangulating the theoretical concepts that emerged from the field study and interviews.

Given that this is not a large-*n* statistical study, the agendas and minutes were also utilized for descriptive data measures. These measures are explained in the following section and include metrics such as attendance, meeting length, and number of decisions made. What I observed as a researcher regarding the structure of the SCC meetings in each school was largely corroborated by the data gathered from the minutes and agendas. In the final section of this chapter, I now turn to these data directly to demonstrate the primary analytical distinction of the project.

### **Parent-Strong Versus Principal-Strong Councils**

In Chapter 1 and the preceding sections, I discussed the theoretical and strategic basis for selecting School Community Councils as a site for the study of civic capacity development. It has been repeatedly asserted by various political scientists and political theorists that proximate governance institutions like SCCs are ideal for the development of civic capacities. What is less understood in the literature is that although these institutions might be formally codified with the exact same structure, the lived implementation, or informal practices, of these institutions differs significantly. Added to the formal authority given to citizens are the informal practices by which citizens gain or lose the lived authority over the decisions made in the institution. As citizens gain authority through these practices, they take on a greater share of power and responsibility

for the decisions made and are thereby more likely to experience civic development processes.

It became clear from the very first observations of the pilot study that both school principals and parents cared a great deal about who was “running the council.” I became increasingly aware over the course of the study that principals and parents were the primary parties to the School Community Councils and the relative degree of influence that each party wielded was what made up the informal structure of authority. For example, after sending a request to attend a meeting at an elementary school in the suburbs of Salt Lake City, the principal promptly emailed me back and asked if we could “talk prior to you coming.” We arranged for a call during which she undertook to “explain” the council. She said that in recent years there was an issue about exiting the school that caused prominent community members to “stack” the SCC. According to her, these prominent members had been “running the school” for years and she was the first administrator to stand up to them. She wanted me to be aware of this dynamic because she felt it might cause me to reconsider the school as a site for study. I ultimately did not select the school for unrelated reasons, but through exchanges such as this I came to understand that power struggles between parents and principals were common on SCCs, and created informal norms that greatly influenced decision-making processes.

Two primary ways in which SCCs differed was in meeting structure and meeting environment—factors which will be discussed in detail below. Where these factors led to the principal and administrative staff having more authority in the meetings, I came to consider the council to be “principal-strong.” Where these factors led to the parents having more authority in the meetings, I came to consider the council to be “parent-

strong.” Categorizing councils in this way helps illuminate the different ways authority is informally appropriated in proximate governance institutions. This distinction demonstrates that parent-strong councils endow parents with decision-making power and responsibility, while principal-strong councils limit both the power and the responsibility of parent members.

In an effort to maintain the anonymity of the schools in the study, I have utilized pseudonyms for each school. The high school from the suburban area will be referred to as “Crescent High School” or “Crescent High.” The high school from the urban area will be referred to as “Riverside High School” or “Riverside High.” The exurban high school will be labeled “Lakeview High School” or “Lakeview High.” And the rural high school I have termed, “Oakwood High School,” or “Oakwood High.”

### **Meeting Structure**

The meeting structure is measured in terms of who attends the meeting, who directs the meeting, the number of agenda items considered, the number of decisions made, and the length of the meeting. Each of the measures indicated in this section is taken from the agendas and meeting minutes created by the members of the SCC and not from my own record keeping. Where there is overlap on data points, my own observations, my jottings, and field notes strongly corroborate the data in the agendas and minutes.

The first consideration regarding the shape of authority for an SCC meeting is simply who attends the meeting. On average, 15 individuals attended high school SCC meetings made up of three populations: 1) parents of students who attend the high school

(parents); 2) the administrative staff including the principal, assistant principals, secretaries, and school board members (admin); and 3) teachers, counselors, and librarians currently employed at the school (teachers). The absolute number of council members drawn from each population and the percentage of the total membership each group represented differed significantly across the four sample schools.

While there are many differences between the councils, the most significant impact on whether it was a parent-strong or principal-strong council was the absolute number of school administrators who attended council meetings and what percentage of the total attendees they represented. Due to the built-in knowledge and experience asymmetry between an administrator of the school and a parent, one additional administrator in a meeting always made a significant difference in how the meeting was run and the ability of the parents to influence the direction of the meeting. Thus, where an average of 1.2 administrators attended the SCC meetings at Crescent High, 4 and 4.1 administrators attended meetings on average at Lakeview and Oakwood High, respectively. This almost four-fold difference in the absolute number of administrators meant that one in four attendees at Lakeview and Oakwood High were school administrators, giving that group a significantly larger voice on those councils. It is worth noting that school administrators other than the principal (assistant principal, secretary, school board member) are not legally members of the council, but at least three of these individuals attended the meetings at Lakeview and Oakwood High at each meeting during the year, which significantly increased the ratio of administrators to parents in each case. Riverside High had an average of 1.6 additional administrators in SCC meetings besides the principal, but that number was somewhat offset by the much higher

number of parents who attended those meetings. In Figure 1, the absolute numbers of attendance are averaged across meetings and noted within the pie and the percentages are noted below the group labels.

While the people in the room significantly impact the way a meeting is executed, it does not guarantee that more administrators will automatically yield a principal-strong council. Thus, it is important to include additional measures to determine whether the principal or the parents held the ultimate decision-making authority on the council. In order to see how much the principal and other administrators participated in the meetings, I created a composite measure of who directs the meeting agenda items by summing the number of times an administrator was explicitly named in connection with an agenda item on the meeting agenda and minutes for each meeting throughout the school year for each SCC. Although the meeting agenda sometimes obscured the amount of participation in the meeting by particular individuals because it is an advance record, when combined with the retrospective meeting minutes, the measure becomes more accurate in assessing the overall participation of the particular individuals. On both agendas and minutes, the individual administrators were often named when they were slated to direct a topic or when they ended up contributing significantly to an agenda item. Thus, when administrators were named in the agenda or minutes related to a particular topic, their participation was recorded. Figure 2 demonstrates the average percentage of agenda items directed by the school administrators for the year.

The attendance and participation of administrators versus that of parents is also reflected in other structural components of the SCC meetings. As I observed the meetings over the school year, it became clear that the more that administrators attended and

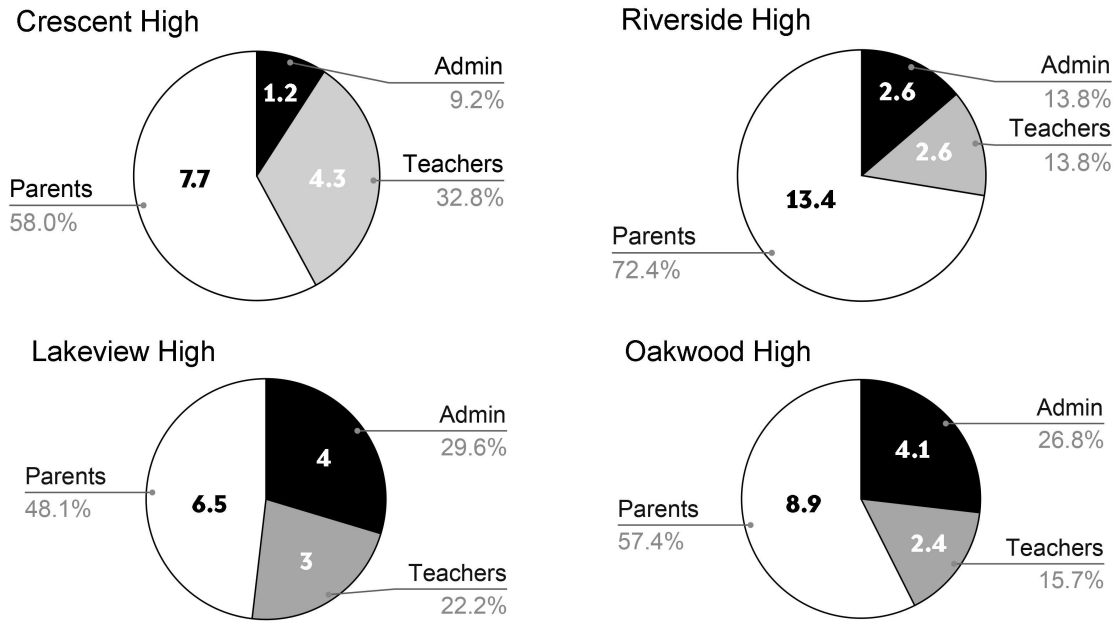


Figure 1: Attendance at SCC Meetings

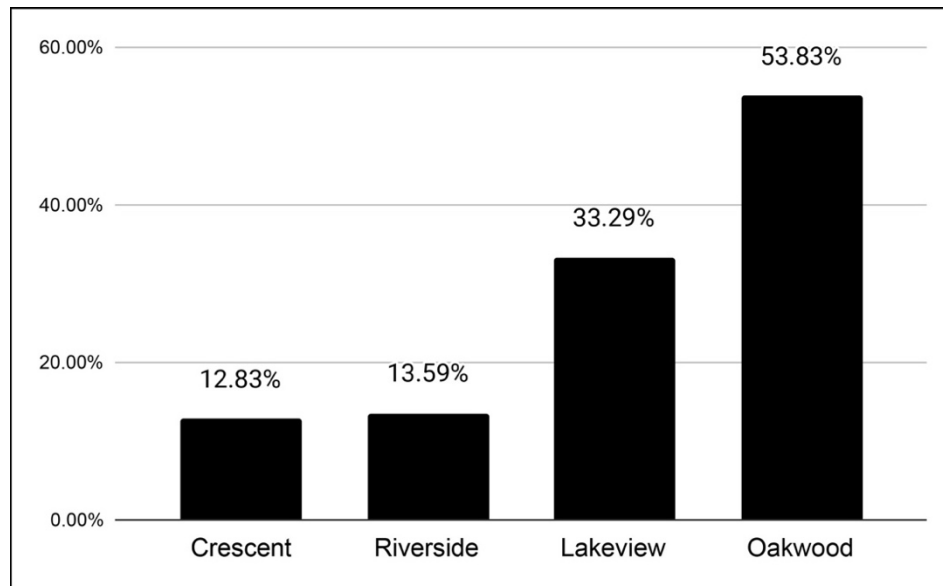


Figure 2: Agenda Items Directed by School Administrators



directed the meetings, the fewer agenda items were raised in the meetings overall. In meetings where administrators were heavily involved, there was far less discussion than in meetings where parents directed the agenda. This, as might be expected, translated into shorter meetings and fewer decisions being made in those SCCs where the administrators were noticeably involved in the direction of the meetings. As demonstrated in Figure 3, at Crescent and Riverside High, the councils addressed over 17 items per meeting, whereas Lakeview High and Oakwood High addressed on average 5.94 and 9.43 items respectively. Thus, the parent-strong councils at Crescent and Riverside High addressed, on average, more than twice as many agenda items per meeting as the principal-strong councils. As seen in Figure 4, this difference was also reflected in the length of meetings—parent-strong council meetings often lasted 2 hours, where the principal-strong council meetings would frequently end after less than an hour.

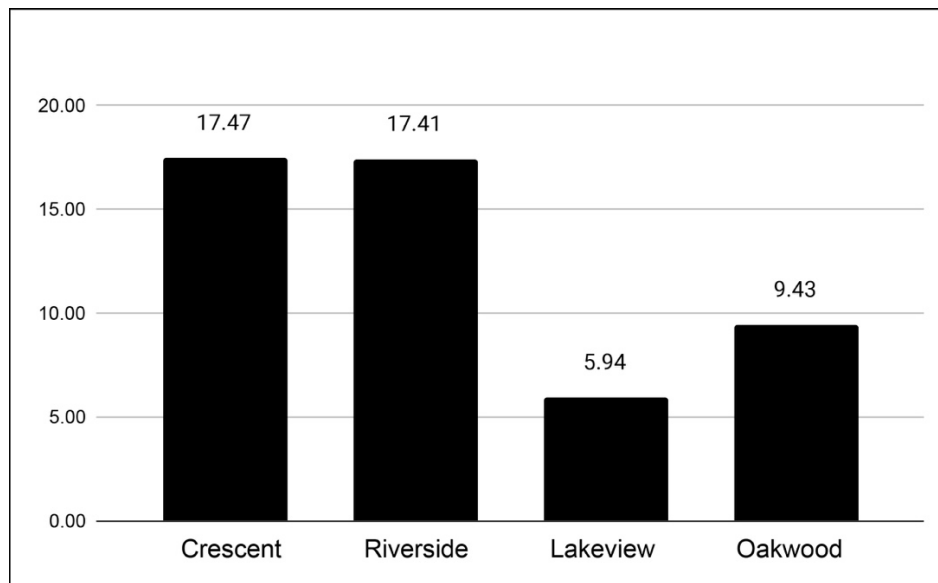


Figure 3: Agenda Items Addressed per SCC Meeting

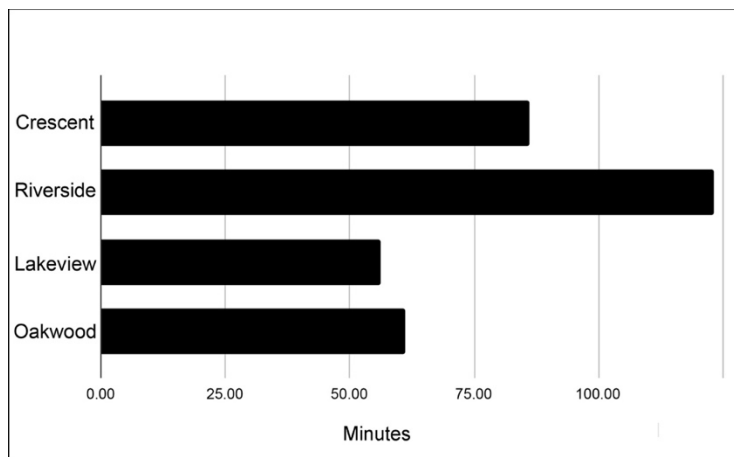


Figure 4: Average Meeting Length

Most interestingly, measures regarding who attends and directs the meetings correlate strongly with what is the most important measure for this study—the number of decisions made by each council, per meeting. In my observations, one of the strongest differentiators between parent-strong and principal-strong councils is that parent-strong councils operate as decision-making bodies complete with norms, rules, and procedures to regularly deliberate, assess consensus, and vote on measures before the body. Principal-strong councils lack this decision orientation and would come together to vote on decisions roughly one time per meeting outside of approving the previous meeting minutes. This decision-making orientation of the parent-strong SCCs is reflected in the recorded number of decisions taken in the SCC meetings. As seen in Figure 5, the most parent-strong council, at Crescent High, made nearly 10 decisions per meeting on average; Riverside High, with a slightly less parent-strong council, registered five decisions per meeting on average. However, the Lakeview High and Oakwood High councils—both principal-strong—made on average only 1.38 and 2.14 decisions, respectively, per meeting.

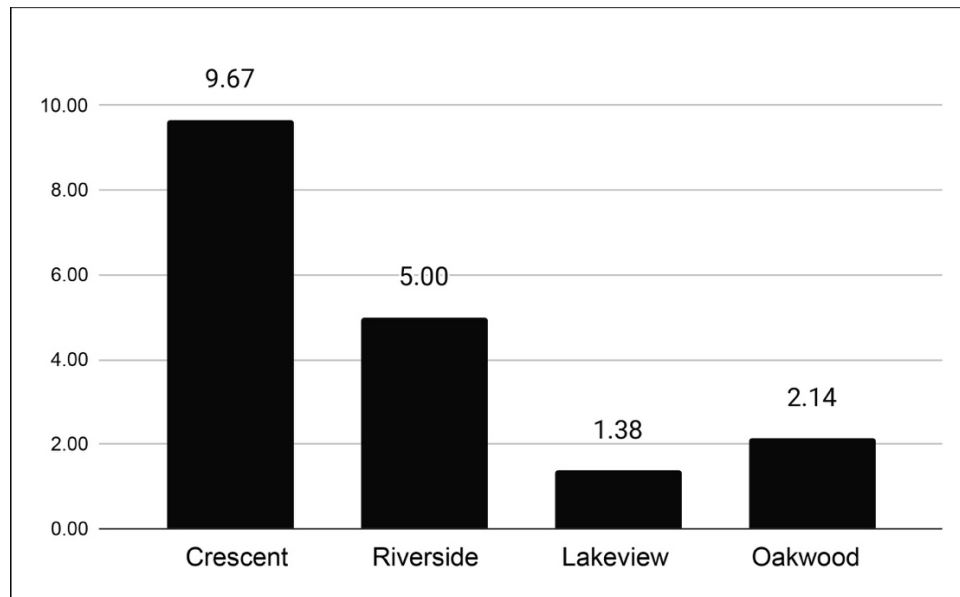


Figure 5: Decisions Made per Meeting

### Meeting Environment

In addition to being influenced by the meeting structure, decision-making authority is also shaped through the environmental context. In other words, the physical and social settings of the meetings played a role in how authority was appropriated on the sample SCCs. Understanding that environmental context shapes power (Sudjic, 2005; Yanow, 2014), I first noted significant distinctions in the physical surroundings of principal-strong and parent-strong SCC meetings.

Among the most important of these environmental conditions was the location of the meeting. While all meetings were held at the school to which the SCC pertained, the two parent-strong SCCs met in the library of the school whereas the two principal-strong SCCs met in a conference room adjacent to the school's administrative offices. The library of a school is a place where parents would be much more familiar with the norms and perhaps the actual space of the school. Libraries in the United States are typically

open to the public and are a common place for ordinary citizens to frequent. Conference rooms, on the other hand, are places where parents would enter much less frequently when acting as citizens and are immediately associated with hierarchical authority structures. Thus, the location chosen for the SCCs either served to underscore administrative authority structures, or to signal a more citizen-friendly dynamic.

Additionally, libraries do not have a definite architectural shape. Thus, all the meetings held in libraries required the participants to move tables into a formation that suited them. However, conference rooms generally had a standard shape with fixed seating, thereby eliciting no input from the participants in shaping the space in which they met. As can be seen from the birds-eye view in Figures 6 and 7, the shape of the meeting environments among the parent-strong councils and the principal-strong councils differed significantly. From my observations, the seating arrangement at each particular SCC stayed fairly consistent throughout the year. I have designated the most regular places where the SCC chairs sat (black circles), the principals and assistant principals (gray hexagons and squares), and the parent and teacher members (gray circles). The entrance to the room is also noted with an arrow.

In addition to the physical setting, the social meeting environment also played a role in shaping the council authority structure. As members became more familiar with each other, they often expressed that they felt more comfortable contributing in the meetings. The social connection between parent members was often actively facilitated by practices such as distributing name tags, making introductions, and serving food at the meetings. In Table 3, I list whether the SCC participated in one of these social connecting activities during one or more of the meetings that I attended throughout the year.

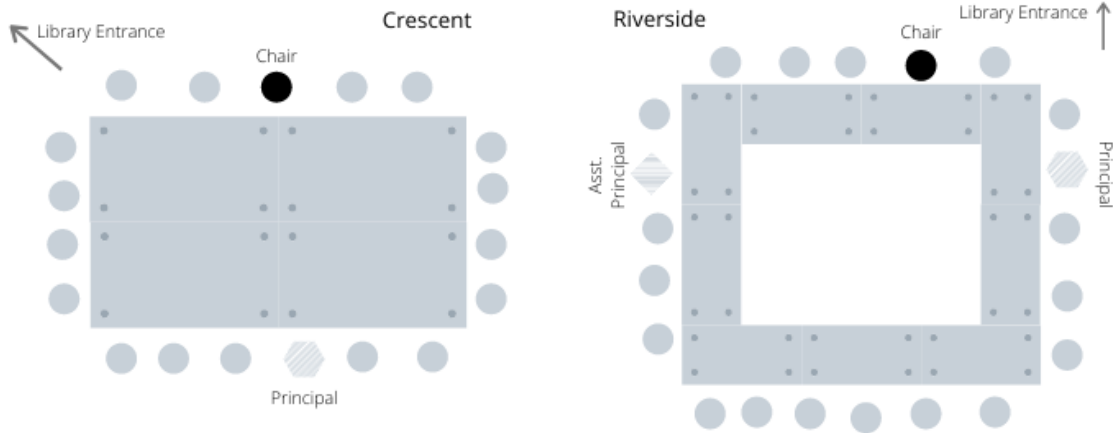


Figure 6: Meeting Arrangement in Parent-Strong Councils

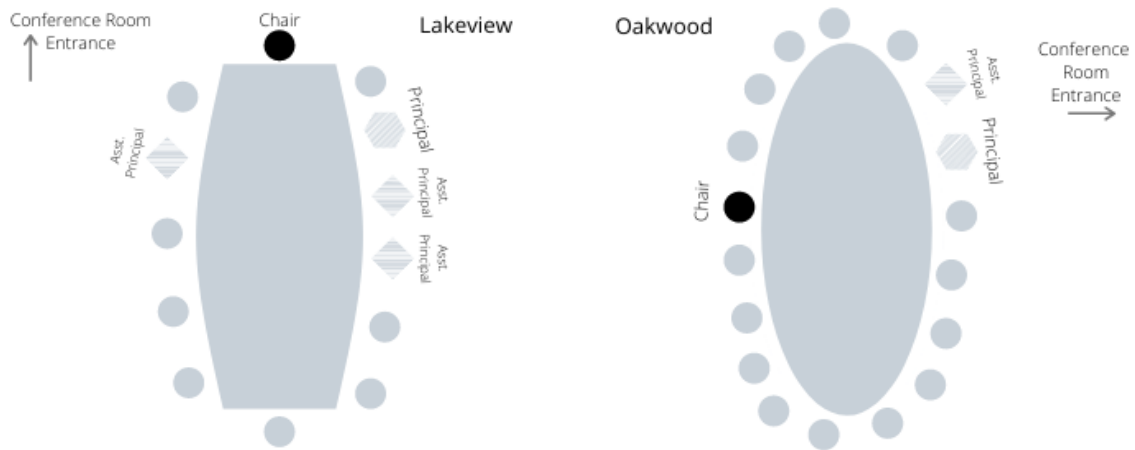


Figure 7: Meeting Arrangement in Principal-Strong Councils

Table 3: Name Tags, Introductions, and Food at SCC Meetings

	<b>Name Tags</b>	<b>Introductions</b>	<b>Food</b>
<b>Crescent High</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Riverside High</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Lakeview High</b>	No	No	No
<b>Oakwood High</b>	No	No	No

Neither of the two principal-strong community councils distributed name tags, made introductions of the members, or served food at the meetings. These social connecting activities were regular practices at the parent-strong council meetings. In fact, both the Crescent and Riverside High SCCs served food at nearly every meeting during the year and at the end of the year, Crescent High had a specially catered meal that all the members ate together for nearly 30 minutes before the meeting started.

In sum, it is clear that the informal practices of SCCs differ significantly when comparing principal-strong and parent-strong councils. I have argued here that these practices significantly shape the decision-making authority of the community councils. When fewer school administrators attend SCC meetings and direct the agenda of those meetings, the parents will likely gain greater decision-making authority on the council through increasing the number of items addressed in the meetings and making more decisions. Furthermore, as SCCs consciously shape the environment to be more familiar to parent members of the SCCs and put in place regular practices to enable them to meet and connect with fellow members, it is likely that parents will feel more comfortable participating in the meetings. Together the meeting structure and the environmental

structure work together to either concentrate decision-making authority in the hands of the principal or disperse the decision-making power and responsibility to the parent members of the council. As the authority structure becomes dispersed and SCCs become parent-strong, there is a greater likelihood that members will experience conditions that prompt them to develop their civic capacities.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE DEVELOPMENTAL DISSONANCE CYCLE

Having demonstrated in the previous chapter that SCCs have divergent institutional practices in the way they distribute power and responsibility to parent members (parent-strong vs. principal-strong), I now turn to the specific processes by which parent citizens are impacted by these differences. The objective of this chapter is to answer two questions: First, why can we expect that parent-strong councils, where parents hold greater power and responsibility, will more often lead to individual civic capacity development? Second, what are the particular processes that unfold on parent-strong councils by which parent members are encouraged, provoked, or in some cases forced to develop as citizens? In order to address these questions, I focus on the parent members of the Crescent High School SCC. As detailed in Chapter 2, the Crescent High School SCC is the most parent-strong of all the SCCs in the study. As such, the parent members of the Crescent SCC hold the most responsibility and power of all participants interviewed for this study. I therefore focus on their experiences in order to illuminate a process of civic development, aspects of which were apparent in all parent-strong School Community Councils that I observed.



### “Real” Decisions

As parents reflect on their experience participating in School Community Councils, they repeatedly express that the SCC is where they take part in significant decisions for the school. This is particularly the case at parent-strong councils, where the chair of the council (legally mandated to be a parent on all SCCs) sets the agenda, runs the meetings, and parents regularly deliberate about the consequential issues at the school. Often, members of these councils describe the nature of their decision-making power and responsibility by contrasting their experience on the SCC with their experience on the PTA (Parent Teacher Association). Beth, a parent who has also served on the PTA, describes the difference this way:

**Beth:** So, the PTA, they do do a lot of advocating and stuff. They do do a lot of, they do a lot more of the activities and the like getting parents involved in just the little things in the classroom and stuff. Whereas, I think community council is more like the big decisions. Like the PTA plans things and does activities and, you know, talks to parents and gets opinions. But the community council is where the actual opinions and the procedures of the actual school happen. (Interview 2)

In this interview, Beth repeatedly invoked the PTA in order to contrast the SCC as a place where “the real information and change is happening.” Beth’s sentiment is mirrored by those of other members of parent-strong councils, and my observations confirmed the fact that members of parent-strong councils often take up far-reaching decisions. These “real” decisions required a significant portion of the council’s time and often led to extensive decision-making processes that lasted many months.

As parent members become involved in these decision-making processes, many reported that they felt the experience changed the way they acted on the council and thought about their council activity. Take, for example, a significant decision that Beth faced as the chair of her junior high school community council. The school district

initiated a process known as reconfiguration, where ninth graders are reassigned to high school from junior high and sixth graders are reassigned to junior high from elementary school. The district gave full decision-making authority to the SCCs to decide whether they ultimately wanted to make the change. As the chair of the council, Beth felt pressure to bring up the issue, but strongly disagreed with its implementation. In the following interview excerpt she details the personal process she went through as the decision unfolded:

**Beth:** That's one where I was totally against. Having six grade moved up to the junior high.

**Interviewer:** Oh, you were?

**Beth:** I did not want that to happen at all. And it was something that I was told we needed to bring up because they just wanted to know where we're at. And I didn't even want to bring it up [laugh]. I was like no, we are not moving six grade.

**Interviewer:** You were the chair?

**Beth:** Yeah. But we did. And I'm like you know what, it doesn't hurt to just... As community council we're representing other people too. You know, I need to know what other people are seeing. And we walked into the meeting and, you know, we brought it up and just said, you know, what are you guys thoughts about this? What are concerns? What are... And my thought, my biggest concern was the kids aren't quite ready for it. Junior high is junior high. Like everyone, not many people enjoyed their junior high days. And the least number of years I can have 'em in there, that's what I prefer to have. You know? There's all of the hormones and all of the changes and all of the trying to find your identity and, you know? If you can keep it in a controlled environment in elementary, and you send them off to high school where...

**Interviewer:** Zip through that part. [laugh].

**Beth:** Yeah, let's just zip through this part. You know, and that was my biggest concern. And then I went into the meeting and I think, if I remember right, the district was there and they shared with us about that as far as education wise, it actually aligns better with the junior high or something. Sixth, seventh, eighth actually goes well together as far as the curriculum and all that kind of stuff [...] And as we got in there, there was some other parents that were there and expressed their, their situations as that their kids had a terrible sixth grade teacher or their kid was ready to be more advanced, but because of the classroom they

were in, the teacher had to focus on the lower kids. And so they didn't get that extra push so they became lazy. And then they got into junior high and they continued that lazy schedule, you know? So it kind of, it hurt them not to be able to move on and be able to be pushed, you know? And I was like, okay, but they're still in Junior High [laugh]. Still Junior High, you know? And just, um, as I talked to, just sometimes there was that kid who didn't get along with their sixth grade teacher and they just... They just stopped. And trying to get them going again was hard. Whereas if you had multiple teachers, they could attach to one or two that could help them excel in those areas and maybe they'd slip a little in some others, but it wasn't a whole year lost. It was just maybe a partial. And as I started hearing some of those from other parents and heard some of the information from the district, I was like, okay. I mean, I went in pretty decided, but still willing to listen. And as I left I went, this might not be necessarily the best situation for my kids because my kids had this magnet program where they were being pushed and it could actually be harder for them because they're taken out of that high level class and put into, I don't want to say lower, but not as intensely high. And so, but there was other kids who could be at that level with my kids, but weren't having the opportunity. Because my kids were high enough, they could be in that special program. But these kids, either their parents couldn't help them get to and from the school or they weren't at quite that level, but they could if they got the right pushing. And so that was, I was like, you know, to help some of these other kids be able to have some of these opportunities, too. This could be a good situation for them. And so now I've, I've changed [laugh]. After listening. But because of community council, I've been given that information. (Interview 2)

In SCC decisions such as reconfiguration, parent members like Beth are often confronted in real time with disagreement, novelty, and a range of pressures from other parents, parent members, teachers, and school administrators. This dynamic and recurrent decision-making experience initiates psychobehavioral processes for parent members of SCCs as they psychologically calibrate to the present decision at hand and readjust behaviors during the decision execution and aftermath.

In the remainder of this chapter, I outline one psychobehavioral process prominent in parent-strong councils. I call this the “developmental dissonance cycle.” I suggest that the developmental dissonance cycle is one way we can understand the counterintuitive procivic behavior that emerges in pragmatic decision-making situations. Parents who would otherwise think and act in familiar patterns get caught up in decisions

that shift their thinking and behavior in ways that are unforeseeable even to them. In Beth's case, she ended up spearheading a major initiative that went against the best interests of her own children. Although not all decisions cause shifts in thought and behavior this dramatic, citizen parents on SCCs are constantly modulating their behaviors in unexpected ways as they seek to address issues at the school with their fellow SCC members.

To begin to explain this procivic behavior exhibited by members of parent-strong councils, I provide a condensed overview of the developmental dissonance cycle in the following section with a basic visual diagram. I then expand upon each step of the process in the remaining sections of this chapter and introduce further process elements. In order to fully elucidate the developmental dissonance cycle, I include detailed explanations with examples from parent members of the Crescent High SCC.

### **The Developmental Dissonance Cycle**

As councils weigh, debate, and work through "real" decisions, individual parent members often become deeply involved in the issues at stake. Given the diverse range of ideas and interests that emerge among the decision makers, parent members frequently disagree with other parent members, teachers, or administrators who are party to the decision and also sense pressure to ultimately make decisions.

As the personal importance of the decision and disagreement with others increases amidst this pressure to decide, the individual member is more and more likely to experience a state of dissonant tension within themselves (internal dissonance) or between other decision stakeholders (mediating dissonance). The individual member

feels internal dissonance when she goes along with council opinions and decisions that she did not originate or support. Alternatively, the individual member feels mediating dissonance when she is advising school (or district) administrators on decisions of import and finds herself in a representative position between discordant decision stakeholders. As a representative, the parent member often becomes the accountable party between misaligned parent constituents and school administrators.

According to psychological theory, it is expected that parent members who experience cognitive dissonance will also feel psychological discomfort and the motivation to resolve their dissonant state (Festinger, 1957). In other words, because parents often go along with decisions that they disagree with (internal dissonance) or are seen as the accountable party between disagreeing administrators and parents (mediating dissonance), they are propelled to make behavioral modifications to regain internal consonance or demonstrate consistency to those they are accountable to. In my observations, the actions that parent members take in order to resolve dissonance are varied, but take on certain recognizable and repeated patterns. For example, parent members in these conditions regularly look for more information about the issue on the internet, in books, from research studies, and from other members. While the specific activities they undertake are varied, information gathering in some form is a common response to the experience of dissonance. Members report engaging in three additional actions (elaborated in full later in this chapter) regularly as they address dissonant decision conditions: strategic talking, meeting actions, and speech withholding. In a decision, an individual member might engage in all of these actions or simply withhold something they were going to say at a key moment in an SCC meeting. What is important

is that the decision conditions parents encounter in SCCs lead to internal and mediating dissonance that prompts individual pro-civic actions that otherwise the parent would not be motivated to take.

This individual process touched off by council decision-making is what I term the developmental dissonance cycle. The full process that an individual experiences during the developmental dissonance cycle is demonstrated in Figure 8. As a parent member participates in an invested decision for which the council has full authority *or* an advisory decision for which the members advise school and district administrators, it often leads to a particular form of dissonance: internal dissonance for invested decisions or mediating dissonance for advisory decisions. Regardless of the type of dissonance felt, parent members then experience an emotive motivational state to resolve the dissonance and engage in one or many activities in order to address the tension.

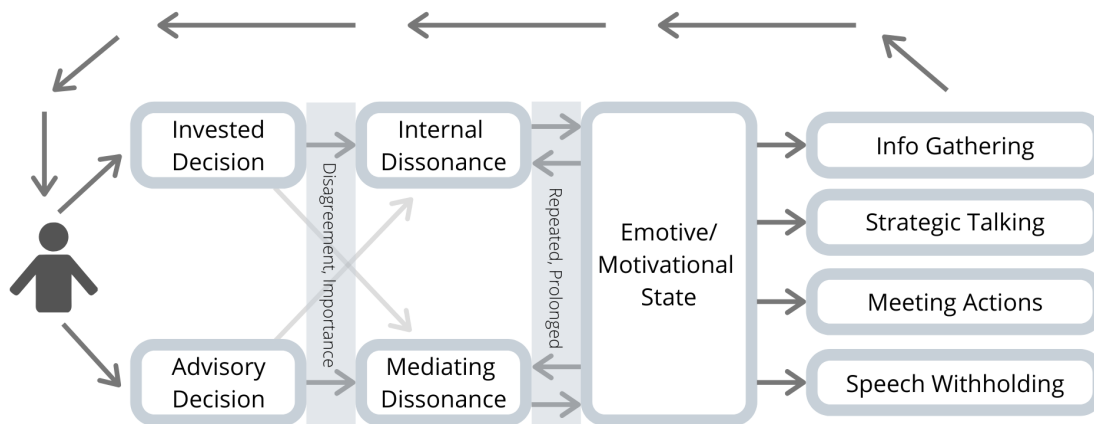


Figure 8: Developmental Dissonance Cycle

As noted in Figure 8, developmental dissonance is an individual psychobehavioral process recurring on a cyclical basis and is initiated with a council decision. Because councils often consider multiple decisions at a time, one individual member might experience the developmental dissonance process for multiple decisions simultaneously, although personally salient issues in a given period are typically few. Thus, not every decision the council makes will prompt this process for every member. In fact, particular issues often register strongly for some members and not for other members of the same council experiencing the same meetings and decisions. Thus, while one member might experience strong dissonance and emotive response to an issue, other members will see that very issue as less salient, and not go through all of the steps of dissonance resolution. But, another member may go through the full the cycle on a different issue that the council takes up. These differences in individual experience are anticipated in dissonance theory and will be further explained through examples in the following sections. The remainder of the chapter will be dedicated to the full exposition and finetuning of the developmental dissonance process utilizing interview and observation evidence and the cognitive dissonance theoretical framework.

Prior to the elaboration of the developmental dissonance process, it is important to note that the retelling of SCC decisions by parent members in interviews is often portrayed with more continuity than experienced by the member while participating on the SCC. Often parent members recalled SCC decisions in chronological and linear fashion, with themselves as central characters in a coherent narrative arch. While it has been well established that the act of narrative recall is dependent on memory and involves active meaning construction for the self, I understand that the actual lived process of

developmental dissonance is likely not as linear or chronologically coherent as the interview narratives presented by participants (Pasupathi et al., 2007). Yet, with this understanding, the developmental dissonance cycle adheres as closely as possible to the *narrative reconstruction* by participants as they recall particular decisions on the SCC. This is an attempt to stay true to the interview data, while also acknowledging that the model is divided into discrete stages and steps that are often experienced in a nonlinear fashion.

### **Public Decisions and Personal Dissonance**

#### **Invested Decisions and Internal Dissonance**

As explained in Chapter 2, School Community Councils have two distinct types of decision-making powers and responsibilities: invested decisions and advisory decisions. Invested decisions are those decisions for which the council is invested with full decision-making authority. Included in this category are all decisions regarding the allocation of the Land Trust budget for the council each year. As the council is made up of a parent majority, these decisions are those over which the parent members have the most responsibility and power to shape and direct. Examples of invested decisions from the study include making decisions about the following issues, as well as many others: purchasing math software programs, providing literacy aids for English language learners, acquiring technology hardware of various kinds, administering college entrance exams, implementing school wide programs of inclusion, creating targeted high school readiness programs for incoming freshman, and implementing teacher training workshops.



While many invested decisions are noncontroversial and pass unanimously without elaborate discussion, others prompt disagreement among the members and fuel a debate regarding the appropriate action to take. In order for the developmental dissonance process to be initiated for the parent member, she must hold an opinion regarding the decision that differs from other members and come to understand that divergence as the interaction unfolds. According to dissonance theory in order for an individual to experience cognitive dissonance, she must simultaneously hold two cognitions that are “relevant to each other but inconsistent with one another” (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones, 2007, p. 7). In an SCC setting, this inconsistency in cognitions is introduced when the individual parent member’s opinion about an issue is introduced verbally or held cognitively at the same time that differing opinions are also offered regarding the same issue.

Because the opinions offered will likely end with a decision, the views shared by the other members are consequential to the outcome and cannot be easily sidestepped by the disagreeing parent member. The decision objective therefore increases the pressure on the member to reckon with the alternative perspectives on the issue because of its important bearing on the outcome of the decision. And yet, even if a member disagrees with the alternative views, if the issue is unimportant to her, she is not likely to give much weight to her own or another member’s viewpoint and can thereby minimize or evade dissonance. As explained previously, the dissonance between the originally held view of the member and the newly introduced view increases or decreases based on how important that particular issue is to the member (Wicklund & Brehm, 1976, p. 2). Thus, taken together, there is a filter based on the degree of importance the individual places on

a particular issue as well as the individual's level of disagreement with expressed views and that determines whether they move from the decision stage to the dissonance stage.

Although these elements differ significantly per issue and per individual, when both disagreement and importance converge for one person, parent members frequently recall a sense of conflict regarding the decision. Take, for example, the reflections of Beth, of the Crescent High SCC, on the council's deliberations about whether to provide funds for low-performing students at the school to take the ACT college entrance exam free of charge:

**Beth:** We were deciding about doing some money for paying for ACT tests for the kids who were taking the ACT prep.

**Interviewer:** Oh, yes.

**Beth:** And when we voted on it, it was kind of in my mind, I was kind of, I'm not quite sure yes or no. Should I say yes or no? And we voted on it. And I was kind of iffy. And I went ahead and said yes. And then right afterwards, somebody said something that I was like, that makes a lot of sense. I wish I would've said no. But, it wouldn't have changed the overall outcome of the whole vote. But on the notes and stuff like that it only said there was one dissenting member and I was like, I kinda wish I would have been that second one, even though it still would have passed and it ended up not making an effect in the end. But just wishing that I had more information before I voted. (Interview 2)

Remembering the same decision, and reflecting upon how her opinions differed from the majority—with whom she nonetheless voted to approve—Sara, another parent member of the Crescent High SCC, stated,

**Sara:** Because what I have been figured out is when you give the students a portion or full amount for something, they don't value that. And those kids that really, really, really want to do more [than] one ACT, and they will have the chance, they need to pay something. They need to value what it cost. And I am minority, okay? I am a low income. So I really understand that if you don't pay for something, you no value. So that's why I was in a conflict with them that day. (Interview 6)

As both Beth and Sara's comments show, each disagreed with the decision as it was

originally presented and ultimately decided upon. During the process both felt at odds with the other members of the council and yet both ultimately voted in favor of the decision. This process of reckoning with other opinions and ultimately approving a decision that you disagree with happens regularly on parent-strong SCCs. It is this particular institutional dynamic that leads to the situation of internal dissonance for the individual members as their own cognition conflicts with the decision that they are party to and accountable for.

What cognitive theory explains is that, in order to resolve the dissonance that they feel, Beth and Sara will likely increase consonant cognitions and actions and/or decrease dissonant cognitions and actions. In other words, they will seek to justify their decision to approve funding for the ACT with affirming thoughts and behaviors and/or they would seek to discredit their previous ideas that were against the decision. In this process of dissonance reduction there is wide agreement among scholars that the attitudinal change will likely be “in the direction of the cognition that is most resistant to change” and that “knowledge about recent behavior is usually most resistant to change, because if a person behaved in a certain way, it is often very difficult to change that behavior” (Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones” 2007, p. 8). In the case of Beth and Sara, this would mean that they are most likely to resolve their dissonance by justifying and affirming their decision to approve the funding for the ACT because that is how they ultimately behaved and they cannot change their vote. Yet, as is clear from the quotes above, both members questioned the decision or reaffirmed their original opposition to the decision. This means that their cognitions against the decision are actually more resistant to change than their actual voting behavior. In this very common situation, the efforts of the parent

member to fully resolve their dissonance toward their own cognitions are hindered because they cannot change their voting behavior.

Due to these decision dynamics in which parent members vote publicly to approve decisions that they internally question, I observed that the dissonance created was difficult to promptly resolve. The voting actions taken by the members were recorded in the minutes, the council budget allocations, and in the memory of the other council members. As a result, when an individual would later attempt to diminish the importance of their dissonant decision, those decisions and their consequences would continue to resurface throughout their time on the council. This more prolonged and revisited state of dissonance leads them to continue to readjust their cognitions and actions relative to that decision far into the future.

One significant limitation in the comparable psychological studies performed is the experimental setting, which only demonstrates cognition and behavior relative to a single isolated intervention. Contrastingly, in the SCC setting, parents in a state of dissonance are repeatedly confronted with past decisions as they are reintroduced, revised, or reported on in subsequent meetings. As parents continue their service over months and years, they remember these instances, learn, and make behavioral adjustments. The model of developmental dissonance must therefore include a second filter, which accounts for the repetition and prolongation of dissonance as individuals move back and forth between the dissonant and motivational stages.

### **Advisory Decisions and Mediating Dissonance**

In contrast to invested decisions, advisory decisions are those decisions for which the council has only advisory authority. These are decisions taken by the school district or the school administration that are brought before the school community council for discussion during the decision-making process. Not all decisions from the administration or the district are brought before the SCC, but there are many in which the district and school administrators seek parent input and buy-in. Given the nature of these decisions, the timing and relative influence over these decisions vary greatly. Also, while invested decisions are backed by a legal mandate granting budgetary authority to every SCC in the state, advisory decisions are typically introduced at the discretion of the district and school administrators. Yet even with these conditions present, the majority of the councils in the study spent considerable time discussing advisory decisions and all councils weighed advisory decisions at some point during the year. Examples of advisory decisions from this study include new school building construction, district-wide grading policies, school security procedures and infrastructure, district-wide scheduling, behavioral codes for extracurricular activities, school dress codes, transportation routes, city coordinated infrastructure projects, and school boundary changes among many others.

Advisory decisions differ from invested decisions in the sense that they form part of a larger decision-making process, where ultimate authority resides outside the council, as opposed to a decision fully within the jurisdiction of the council. While members do not have direct decision-making authority, these decisions tend to regard issues that are widely known by the broader population of parents at the school and are often

controversial. These decision attributes often make advisory decisions particularly salient to individual parent members.

While invested decisions lead to internal psychological dissonance as described in the previous section, I observed that advisory decisions led to a form of mediating dissonance that a parent member experiences when inhabiting the in-between space of discordant and interconnected decision stakeholders. Mediating dissonance is the discomfort that a member feels when she is accountable to two distinct parties to a decision who disagree with each other about the appropriate action to take. In my observations, this occurred most often when a parent SCC member, representing the larger parent population at the school, sustained a position between her parent constituents and the school administrators regarding a decision. It can also be the case that the parent member represents the members of the SCC to the district school board.

The idea of mediating dissonance is a new iteration of cognitive dissonance theory as it proposes intermediating two discordant parties to a decision rather than dissonant thoughts provoked by a decision. Yet, it builds on robust research in cognitive dissonance theory about the self-concept (Tavris & Aronson, 2007). In this formulation of dissonance theory, Thibodeau and Aronson (1992) argue that “dissonance will be aroused because a given behavior reflects negatively on the integrity and self-worth of the person who performed it” (p. 592). As a parent member mediates between disagreeing parties, it is often the case that their behavior is at risk of appearing inconsistent. In this case dissonance will be aroused when the perception of one of the represented parties reflects negatively on the SCC member. Thus, in order to maintain consistency between their own self-concept and the perception of others whom they

represent, the individual is driven to adjust behaviors to maintain consonance—even preemptively.

As I repeatedly observed, this “in-between” space inhabited by parent members during advisory decisions is consciously understood by them. Take, for example, the district-wide decision to fully change the grading scheme from letter grades to proficiency-based grading using a number system from 1 to 10. This was a multiyear decision involving vast amounts of training, instructional time, and resources from the district. In the following excerpts, Laurie, a parent member of the Crescent High SCC, describes her in-between or mediating role:

**Laurie:** So the thing is with the community councils, is on the school website it says that parents are welcome to come to the meetings and express concerns that they have for their children because the community council is supposed to be an in-between. We are supposed to be able to be a voice to the district about community concerns. So the purpose is not just only to look at these proposals and pass them on and to disperse that the land trust fund moneys. It's also to act as advocates for the parents who have concerns.

As Laurie’s comments demonstrate, she understands herself to be between decision stakeholders. She confirms this later in the interview as she explains,

**Laurie:** But because I want parents to know that you can come here and express your concerns and I want to be a voice for it, like when I speak, it's like 5 percent my frustrations. The other 95 percent is the other 50 people that I've talked to but don't know how to express their voice. (Interview 5)

Here Laurie captures the mediating space that she actively inhabits during advisory decisions. As with internal dissonance for invested decisions, mediating dissonance is provoked by disagreement and the importance of the decision to the individual member. It is also repeated and prolonged, but for different reasons. With mediating decisions, the decision process itself is often what is prolonged and repeated as the decisions often take

years to implement. Thus, parent members of SCCs often inhabit their mediating positions for extended periods of time.

For example, the proficiency-based grading issue was brought up in six of the nine meetings I attended over the year of this study and Laurie was regularly a key interlocutor in the discussions with the principal and district representatives. In three of these instances, the issue was noted on the agenda and in three others the issue reemerged during comment time because it continued to be top of mind for many of the parent members of the committee. My field notes indicate three different meeting discussions in which the issue was reviewed, discussed, and debated at length including an exchange with the School Board President who visited the SCC meeting for a hearing from the parent members about this issue exclusively. In two other discussions, the principal presented prepared remarks about the topic and sought to assuage the concerns of the parent members while confirming that the policy change would still proceed.

These discussions at the SCC meetings were happening simultaneously with outside discussions that Laurie was having with parents who disagreed with administrators about the problem. In her interview, she recalls a time that she had spoken with several parents at parent teacher conferences who were upset about how the program was impacting their children's science grades. Additionally, she cites another four conversations with parents whose "students missed out on a scholarship because their GPA dropped because of the PBG class." Added to these conversations were many others with parents of her children's friends with whom she was also connected, and felt a responsibility to represent.

In sum, as Laurie repeatedly expressed in the interview, the proficiency-based



grading issue was very important to her and it also significantly impacted her own children. As she became more involved in the decision, she increasingly understood that the district administration and the parents (and teachers) of students at the school disagreed about the appropriate means to implement the policy. As a parent member of the SCC representing parents to administrators, this position of in-between accountability puts Laurie in a state of mediating dissonance. This state is prolonged for Laurie because the change to proficiency-based grading takes years to implement. Thus, Laurie inhabits this position for a prolonged period of time and, depending on the decision dynamic, often revisits the state of dissonance because of new encounters with parents or administrators.

### **Motivation and Behavioral Adjustments**

There are two components of cognitive dissonance theory that explain the transition from cognitive dissonance to behavioral modification. First, according to Festinger (1957), due to the strong drive to maintain personal consistency, cognitive dissonance is a state of discomfort that the individual will seek to eliminate. This component of dissonance theory is outlined in the original theoretical statement by Festinger: “the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, will motivate a person to try to reduce the dissonance and achieve consonance” (p. 3). Second, an individual's actions are often the primary catalyst and mitigator of dissonance. Again, from the original theory: “Where an opinion must be formed or a decision taken, some dissonance is almost unavoidably created between the cognition of the action taken and those opinions or knowledges which tend to point in a different direction” (Festinger,

1957, 5). Scholars widely agree that behavior regularly activates cognitive dissonance processes (Acharya et al., 2018; Festinger et al., 2008; Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). Additionally, studies have demonstrated that behavioral commitments made and actions taken play a primary role in dissonance reduction. Harmon-Jones and Harmon-Jones (2007) explain, “dissonance evokes a negative affective state that signals the organism that something is wrong and motivates the organism to engage in behavior to correct the problem” (p. 11). Thus, not only is dissonance often initiated by behaviors, but also it encourages future behavioral modifications of the individual. In the case of SCCs, a parent member of an SCC who acts in a way that causes dissonance will be motivated to take further actions to reduce dissonance. These foundational aspects of dissonance theory were confirmed by my own research. Thus, the developmental dissonance cycle experienced by SCC members represents a *psychobehavioral* process.

### **Emotive/Motivational State**

In this subsection, I recount a short meeting vignette that occurred at a February 2019 meeting of the Crescent High SCC, along with the personal recounting of the same meeting moments by Laurie. Although there are multiple SCC members named in the vignette and the subsequent interview segment, the intent is to demonstrate the last two steps of the developmental dissonance cycle: Laurie’s emotive/motivational response to the situation and her commitment to take further actions.

Following months of discussions, contentious school district board meetings, and an attempt by Laurie earlier in the week to pass out informational flyers at parent teacher conferences, Principal Holman of Crescent High School came to the February SCC meeting prepared. Now months into the proficiency-based grading rollout, he prepared comments for the meeting that sought to address steadily mounting concerns of the parents and teachers.

As an observer, I was unaware of the happenings outside the meeting, but later learned through interview accounts that a teacher on the council had been told by the district that if she continued to raise concerns about proficiency-based grading, she would lose her job. Similarly, while attempting to pass out informational flyers to parents earlier in the week, Laurie was halted by Principal Holman and told she could not do so. In this pregnant context, the meeting started as usual, with a call to order and the unanimous vote to pass the previous meeting's minutes. After some initial business, the agenda turned to Principal Holman for New Business:

Emilia, teacher and vice chair, gave the floor to Principal Holman for the New Business agenda item. He started by giving a brief update on the construction of the new school and talked about a water issue they are having and the difficulty with the weather.

He then passed out a sheet to each of the members on proficiency-based grading. He explained the topic for five minutes or so and started by saying, "Proficiency-based grading has been going on for a long time." As he explained, he spoke as if from the position of a parent and apologized to the teachers. He said that the problem with the current grading is that teachers have "vastly different grading scales." He then asked, "Does anyone have twins?" Katie, a math teacher, raised her hand and pointed behind her where her twins were playing. Principal Holman then explained that two twins could "have two different teachers and that they will not be given the same materials nor will they be assessed the same." Due to this problem, he explained, "we are taking the standards from the state, teachers are getting together and talking about how to assess the same topic so that there is standardization."

The second problem, he explained, is that all assignments in the traditional grading system are weighted the same and, with proficiency-based grading, "the last assignment will be weighted more" to track improvement. As he explained the system, he again spoke from a parent's point of view. When he came out of that perspective, he said, "We are new at this and we have a lot to work on." He continued to explain that the district trained some teachers one way and then they wanted to implement it a different way, so the district is taking a "step back so that everyone can get on the same page and ensure we're on the side of the kids." He explained that there is a 5-year plan to implement this so that "we're not shoving down teachers and students' throat." After the uncharacteristically long five to seven minute explanation, he then said, "I know Laurie's not satisfied."

Deana, sitting next to Laurie, started in directly about what really constitutes the equivalent of an A grade: "It's just confusing, is it highly proficient, or above average? It should be one or the other," she said, gesturing with her hands. Principal Holman replied by explaining the segments of the grading scale. As Deana and Principal Holman exchanged comments, Laurie's face became flushed

and then in the first small gap she interjected loudly and emphatically looking at Principal Holman, “Proficient should be an A, not above proficient!” She shook her head in desperation as her voice reached a crescendo, “I’ll stop...I’ll go off!”

### **Behavioral Adjustments**

Although the potency of this tense moment is not well captured in writing, the emotional salience of this meeting interaction was further elaborated in Laurie’s personal account. What became clear during the interview was that the strong emotions Laurie experienced led her to take a variety of actions to address the increasing tension between parents and administrators. In the following interview segment, Laurie recounts the meeting with the principal above and details a variety of actions she took to address the issue at both the district and the school level. Finally, toward the end of the excerpt, Laurie directly connects the last two stages of the developmental dissonance cycle as she expresses how the events fueled her desire for further action:

**Laurie:** So at that meeting where I was talking to the principal, the reason why I was so frustrated and so animated is because of two things. I had just gone to the district meeting and it was frustrating because parents aren't allowed to just come and speak for two minutes and like is there any more public comment?

**Interviewer:** They're not allowed to do that?

**Laurie:** You are not allowed to do that. You have to get a hold of a person at the district, whoever this person is, at least 24 hours in advance, sign up to speak and then they let you know if you're approved to speak. So as a parent, I'm not even allowed to just come. I have to be approved and they have to know the topic I'm going to speak about and so I went and I spoke and then there was another mother whose children are in the school district, but she also teaches for the school district. She got up and spoke too and said like everything that I didn't have time to say, but spoke very eloquently and we both were just very frustrated about it. And I'll explain what my problems with it are. From there, I came back and was talking actually to the librarian and one of the counselors about, I think the parents need to know that the only way we're going to be heard about proficiency-based grading is that they need to be on the school district board, their tail. They need to bombard them with public comment. They need to email them. And so I had written up little flyers with all of their email addresses. And then two days

later, it was this community council meeting and I was like, come to our community council meeting, express your concerns and we will. Or, you know, if you don't want to type in this email address, come, we'll pass on your concerns. And then I went to parent teacher conferences the next day. And the librarian was like, yeah that would be fine. You know, just trying to ask a veteran teacher and community council person. So I was passing them around at parent teacher conferences and just saying, you know, have you been, has your student been affected by proficiency-based grading and do you have concerns or questions? Come to the community council meeting or reach out to the school district board members and here's their email addresses. That's all it said, a little flyer was passing them around. Well, Mr. Holman stopped me and told me that I was not allowed to pass those out and he said that at the parent teacher conference. And I was like, but parents don't know what avenues of communication they have to express their concerns. They can go and complain to the teachers, but the teachers feel like their hands are tied. And I'm like, they need to know that they have an advocacy group for parents. And the community council is that avenue. And they need to know they can come and that they don't need to type up an email. They can just come tell us; we'll pass on their concerns. And if we can collect enough concerns, maybe it'll make a dent. And so he told me I wasn't allowed to do that. And he also said that the representative from the district got a hold of him after I spoke at the district meeting and pretty much was told that they needed to rein me in. And I was furious. I was like, no, you don't get to rein me in. I can say what I want about this. And I can gather support from other parents who have similar concerns because you will hear us. (Interview 5)

As can be seen from this one example, the actions stemming from dissonant conditions can be quite varied. Laurie personally gathered information from the district website, created informational flyers for parents, distributed those flyers at parent teacher conferences, and interacted with many parents about proficiency-based grading before being asked to stop. Additionally, she reports multiple conversations with other parent members of the School Community Council, teachers at Crescent High and other schools in the area, parents of children who attend the school, and extended personal conversations with members of the district school board and school administration. This was all in addition to the six meeting discussions at the Crescent High SCC meetings throughout the year, during which Laurie regularly played a significant role.

Although the actions stemming from dissonant conditions are varied, they tend to

group into four categories. The four recurring and identifiable actions performed by parent SCC members are information gathering, strategic talking, meeting actions, and speech withholding. In the remainder of this section, I define each activity that emerges during the developmental dissonance cycle and then in the final section provide criteria for assessing whether the actions taken build pragmatic civic capacities.

*Information Gathering* happens when parent members personally seek out information related to a specific issue topic related to the SCC. Many parent members report seeking information from the Land Trust website in an effort to learn more about their role on the SCC and the purpose of School Community Councils. Additionally, parents utilize internet resources to learn more about procedures, meetings, and contact information at the school district. Some members report following sources related to the state legislature, especially its actions pertaining to education policy. What is more, some parents report seeking out knowledgeable individuals, books, and scholarly research in order to understand educational issues better, such as recommended technology resources or cell phone policies for schools in other countries. This activity of personally searching out information related to the SCC is widely reported by members of parent-strong SCCs.

*Strategic Talking* occurs when parent SCC members seek out one-on-one conversations with other stakeholders regarding an issue on the SCC. These conversations often occur before, during, and after SCC meetings, and involve other parent members of the SCC, teachers, and the school administration. Many parents also report contacting school and district administrators outside of SCC meetings to either meet in person or discuss by phone SCC issues on a one-to-one basis. Lastly, parent

members regularly seek out other parents to discuss SCC issues. Similar to information gathering, this activity is widely reported by parent members of parent-strong councils.

*Meeting Actions* are direct actions that parent members take in meetings that shape the outcome of a discussion or decision. Meeting actions typically take the form of comments made in SCC meetings, as issues are being deliberated upon. In an SCC meeting, a meeting action is a particular moment recalled by a member when they personally spoke in the meeting about the issue. Additionally, a meeting action can also take place outside of an SCC meeting. This includes speaking at a townhall or school district meeting regarding issues on the SCC. Meeting actions are always public speech acts done in a face-to-face meeting setting.

*Speech Withholding* is the conscious decision to not speak at a particular point in an SCC meeting. Members often report a conscious calibration of their participation regarding particular issues. In addition to speaking out, as in a meeting action, this means holding back when a decision is being deliberated.

The actions that members take form the final step of the developmental dissonance cycle and in themselves produce experiential civic learning. The ongoing behavioral modifications that SCC members make in response to the internal or mediating dissonance feed back to them and inform future decision-making experience. Also, because of the dynamic and interconnected nature of decision-making, the actions often influence the process itself. As such, it is not always the case that invested decisions lead only to internal dissonance, nor that advisory decisions always lead only to mediating dissonance. As some decisions modulate into different shapes and interests become clearer or spawn additional decisions, the individual can encounter both forms of

dissonance simultaneously or experience mediating dissonance for an invested decision. The process of developmental dissonance, then, is ultimately a cyclical and uniquely individual process based on the decisions at hand, and the member's personal reactions to them form the feedback loop of experiential education and civic development.

### **Pragmatic Civic Development**

Throughout this chapter, I have asserted that the developmental dissonance cycle leads citizens to take procivic actions that are in themselves educational experiences. Rather than increase civic knowledge through classroom study or civic reasoning through argumentation, pragmatic citizens learn through doing. As citizens move through decision-making processes, they are continually motivated to act anew. Those motivations propel them into new circumstances with new interests to respond to and new problems to address.

While the developmental dissonance cycle demonstrates that citizens are motivated to take actions, it does not, in itself, provide criteria for understanding whether the actions taken are educative experiences in building an individual's ability to solve public problems. Surely there are instances when citizens act in ways that are miseducative or do not lead to enhanced civic capabilities in this regard. As Dewey (1938) explains, "Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other...Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (p. 25). In the case of pragmatic civic education, this would mean that any experience that arrests or distorts one's ability to solve public problems is miseducative. On the other hand, those experiences that enhance one's ability to solve



public problems educate an individual.

With this framework for development in mind, I provide criteria for understanding whether the actions taken by SCC members are educative of pragmatic civic capacities or not. Given that public decisions involve multiple and varied interests and involve efforts to “secure some consequences and avoid others” (Dewey, 1927, p. 12), those actions that teach individuals to recognize difference and increase the points of interest to a decision are educative. Additionally, those actions that teach individuals how to coordinate interests between various parties toward a desired outcome are educative (Dewey, 1916). Said inversely, those actions that teach individuals to promote single or narrow agendas and decrease the points of interest to a decision are miseducative. Likewise, those actions that teach individuals to fragment interests between various parties and thereby inhibit movement toward an outcome are miseducative. In the specific case of SCC participation in this study, the developmental dissonance cycle demonstrates that parent members are motivated to regularly gather information, seek one-on-one conversations, and speak (and withhold speech) in meetings. Each of these actions can theoretically be performed without the recognition of different interests. Furthermore, these actions could be taken not to coordinate interests, but to fracture interests among the various SCC members or secure self-interested aims. In this case these actions would be miseducative. Alternatively, when the actions taken on SCCs are oriented toward a recognition of differences such as race, class, opinion etc. and/or in an effort to coordinate interests among parents, teachers, or administrators, the actions are educative of pragmatic civic capacities as seen in Figure 9. What I found is that the greater the power and responsibility given to parent members, the more numerous the

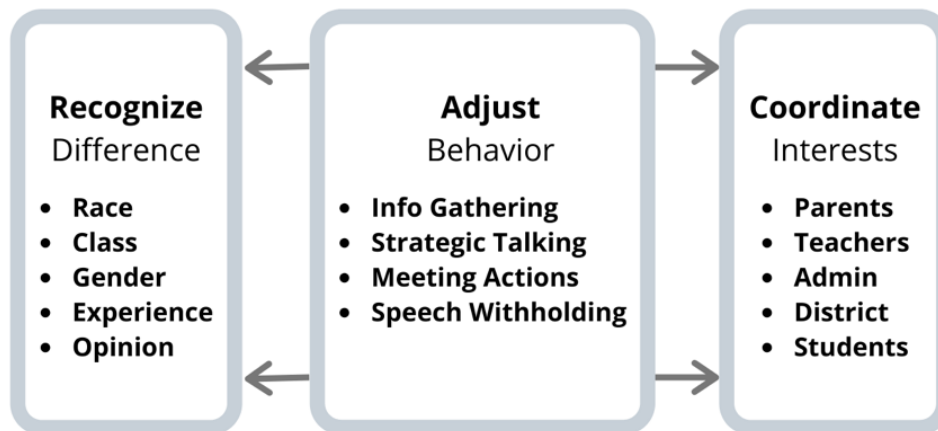


Figure 9: Pragmatic Civic Development

instances when actions educated parent members toward wider recognition of difference and toward capabilities that allowed them to better coordinate interests of stakeholders.

### Conclusion

What is initially demonstrated by the developmental dissonance cycle and will be fully elaborated in the four case study chapters that follow is that members of parent-strong SCCs regularly make procivic behavioral modifications in response to the dissonant conditions of proximate governance. By acting in new ways, citizens encounter novel and distinct circumstances that require further recognition of difference and coordination of interests and thus new ways to practice citizenship. What is important to reiterate in conclusion is that the developmental dissonance cycle is an individual psychobehavioral process prompted by decisions made in proximate governance institutions. As citizens who hold power and responsibility become involved in the decisions that they care about, and are forced to deliberate those decisions in face-to-face

settings, disagreements inevitably arise that persist through the decision-making process and often lead the individual to support or represent decisions she otherwise would not have. This position of acting contrary to one's opinions and being accountable for those positions causes psychological discomfort. In a state of discomfort, citizens are motivated to gather information, talk one-on-one with stakeholders, intervene in meetings, and withhold speech in order to resolve the dissonance and thereby often learn to more adequately address the issue at hand.

## CHAPTER 4

### CASE STUDIES: INTRODUCTION

Each of the following four chapters will represent one School Community Council from the study in this order: Crescent High School, Riverside High School, Laketown High School, and Oakwood High School. As noted in Chapter 2, Crescent and Riverside High are parent-strong councils and Laketown and Oakwood are principal-strong councils. This order is intended to allow for comparisons across chapters. Each chapter will be organized in the same format and provides a detailed “decision case study” for each parent member who participated in the interview portion of the study and then a chapter conclusion. The evidence provided for each individual parent member is fourfold: First, I provide a *Biographical Sketch* of the individual member; second, I provide interview quotations that indicate the parent members’ sense of *Power and Responsibility* on the council; third, I provide a *Decision Synopsis* of all of the decisions reported in the interview; and, fourth, I detail the *Decision Processes* for the two most important decisions recounted in the interview. Each of these sections will be briefly explained below to give the reader a sense of the organization and purpose of the decision case studies and the chapter conclusions in Chapters 4-7. The final chapter of this section, Chapter 8, provides a case study comparison at the SCC level based on the individual data presented in Chapters 4-7.

### **Biographical Sketch**

In the *Biographical Sketch* sections of the subsequent chapters I utilize data collected from the interview, interview exit survey, and meeting observations to give the reader an overall sense of the parent member. The details for each member include demographic information, historical participation on School Community Councils and other voluntary organizations, income and education levels, and unique attributes or memorable actions that the member portrayed in the interview or SCC meetings.

### **Power and Responsibility**

In the *Power and Responsibility* sections of the following chapters, I provide an overview of the parent members' personal sense of power and responsibility along with directly applicable interview quotes from the member. As the theory of developmental dissonance indicates, the more that a citizen feels that they have decision-making power and responsibility, the greater likelihood there is that they will move through the developmental dissonance cycle and exhibit procivic behaviors.

### **Decision Synopsis**

The *Decision Synopsis* sections of the upcoming chapters are summaries of all of the SCC decisions each parent member reported in their interview. The decision synopsis gives a detailed numerical breakdown of the observable aspects in the developmental dissonance cycle in each of the reported decisions. In order to create the coding scheme for the summary, the developmental dissonance cycle was broken down into six distinct stages: Decision, Disagreement, Importance, Motivation, Prolong, and Actions. It is

assumed that each member who experiences the developmental dissonance cycle will move through these stages as explained in the previous chapter. The stages are further broken down into types that are identified for each decision. For example, each decision reported by a member was coded for whether it was an invested decision (IN) where the SCC has full decision-making authority or an advisory decision (AD) where the SCC has advisory authority. The total number of invested decisions and the total number of advisory decisions are then reported in a brief one-paragraph summary. Table 4 represents an abbreviated version of the study's full coding scheme, which can be found in Appendix B.

### Decision Processes

The *Decision Processes* sections in Chapters 4-7 include interview excerpts from two decisions recounted by the parent member in their interview that demonstrate the highest measures of disagreement and importance. It is on decisions with high levels of disagreement and importance that members are most likely to experience the developmental dissonance cycle (see Chapter 3). Each decision is accompanied by an

Table 4: Abbreviated Decision Coding Scheme

DECISION	DISAGREEMENT	IMPORTANCE	MOTIVATION	PROLONG	ACTIONS
<b>IN:</b> SCC has full decision making authority. i.e. trust land fund allocation, safe walking plan	<b>SS/SR:</b> Member states in meeting (SS) or reports in interview (SR) disagreement with substance of decision	<b>CH:</b> Decision impacts member's child(ren)	<b>DES:</b> Member expresses desire for different decision outcome	<b>REP:</b> Decision repeated in at least two meetings	<b>IG:</b> Member gathers information from websites, books, scholarly articles, or knowledgeable individuals
<b>AD:</b> SCC has advisory decision making authority. i.e. all decisions made by district or school admin	<b>FS/FR:</b> Member states in meeting (FS) or reports in interview (FR) disagreement with form of decision	<b>AC:</b> Member takes action in relation to issue	<b>NEG:</b> Member uses negative adjectives to describe decision		<b>ST:</b> Member talks with other decision stakeholders one-on-one
					<b>MA:</b> Member speaks to or motions for decision in a meeting
					<b>SW:</b> Member intentionally withholds speech in meeting

analytical synopsis in which I highlight the particular aspects of the decision as they relate to the developmental dissonance cycle. The analytical synopsis is broken up into three paragraphs. The first paragraph describes the developmental dissonance *process*. The second paragraph describes the *actions* taken by the member in response to their dissonant condition. Lastly, the final paragraph details the unique particularities or anomalous aspects of the decision process for the individual member.

### **Conclusion Section**

Following the decision case studies for each individual member, I provide a conclusion section in each of the Chapters 4-7 that draws on the two criteria of pragmatic civic education: recognition of difference and coordination of interests. I evaluate the “real” decisions that are provided in the *Decision Processes* sections according to these criteria and make general observations about how the council promotes (or hinders) pragmatic civic development.

## CHAPTER 5

### CRESCENT HIGH SCHOOL SCC

In the previous chapter, I introduced parent members of the Crescent High SCC in the various stages of the developmental dissonance cycle. The objective of this chapter and the following three chapters is to thoroughly investigate and uncover the particular paths of civic development within the developmental dissonance cycle by analyzing the decision-making experience for individual parent citizens within the institutional context of an SCC. Here I begin with the Crescent High School SCC, which is the most parent-strong council among the cases. In the next three chapters, I will take the other three SCCs in turn, from most parent-strong to most principal-strong.

In what follows, I detail the developmental dissonance cycle with seven individual parent members of the Crescent High SCC: Beth, Marilyn, Nancy, Melodie, Sara, Laurie, and Deana. Only two parent members of the SCC are omitted because they did not respond to my request for an interview and I therefore lack sufficient data. For the seven members listed above, I utilized a combination of interviews, memos, observations, exit surveys, and meeting minutes to provide a textured portrait of each individual as they moved through the decision process. Prior to detailing the personal experience of each member, I provide a brief overview of the Crescent High SCC.

The Crescent High SCC is made up of nine parent members, five teachers, and the



school principal. Of the nine parent members, eight regularly attended SCC meetings and I interviewed seven of these eight members. Eight of the nine parent members were women. Seven of the nine members were born in the United States and White, one member who had immigrated from Canada was White, and one member had immigrated in early adulthood from Latin America (she did not specify the country) and was Latino. There was a range of experience on the council with the longest-serving member having served for 20 years on SCCs as her children progressed from elementary to junior high and high school. The newest member was serving in her 1<sup>st</sup> year. Five of the seven parent members had served on community councils for 6 years or more and all but one had served or were currently serving on additional SCCs or PTAs at the elementary and junior high schools where their other children attended school. Four of the seven members had average annual household incomes of between \$50,000 - \$100,000. The three others had household incomes exceeding \$100,000, but none beyond \$200,000. Additionally, the highest degree obtained by three of the members, including the chair, was a high school diploma. One member completed 1 year of college, while another completed an associate's degree. Two had received bachelor's degrees and one had graduated with a doctorate in medicine. The oldest parent member was 58 years old and was on the council for her very last term, while her last child was in school. The youngest was 40 years old and at the time of the study had three children in elementary school, one in junior high, and two in high school.

## Beth

### **Biographical Sketch**

Beth is 40 years old and has five school-aged children. She has lived in her home for 7 ½ years and lived in her community for 14 years. In total, she has served on School Community Councils for 12 years: 6 for elementary school, 4 for junior high, and 2 for high school. She has served in a variety of positions on the SCC and currently serves as chair of the junior high SCC, secretary of the elementary school SCC, and member of the Crescent High School SCC. She has also served on the PTA for 10 years and plans to continue to serve on the SCC “until my kids are out of school.” Beth is White, lower-middle income,<sup>1</sup> and completed a bachelor’s degree. She carries herself with a constant energy and is always in motion as she speaks. Her hands accentuate her thoughts and her tone conveys emotion. She dresses very simply and regularly draws you in with nods, laughs, and ends phrases with: “you know?” At one point during the interview, she raised both fists high above her head and exclaimed “YES!” when describing the participation of new parents on the SCC.

### **Power and Responsibility**

As seen from the excerpts below, Beth views herself as an empowered actor in an empowered decision-making body. She also regularly expresses a sense of responsibility to her neighborhood as their representative on the SCC and exemplifies pragmatic

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<sup>1</sup> For household income designations, the following designations are utilized throughout: Lower Income: < \$50,000; Lower-Middle Income: \$50,000 - \$99,000; Upper-Middle Income \$100,000 - \$200,000; Upper Income: > \$200,000 These numbers resemble Pew Research Center annual household income guidelines. Lower Income: < \$45,200; Middle Income: \$45,200 - \$135,600; Upper Income: > \$135,600 (Fry & Kochnar, 2018).

citizenship.

**Beth:** You know, all those decisions and anything that's changing in the district or school levels, community council finds out first. A lot of parents I keep telling, even my sisters who are in other parts of Utah: You want to be on community council. Like, if you want to know what's going to be happening at your school. If you want to know, if you want to have a voice to be able to say what's happening, community council is the place to be. And I've helped with PTA stuff, too, but I'm like PTA is great[laugh], but the voice is in the community council. (Interview 2)

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**Beth:** I'm supposed to represent my neighborhood. And I realized actually at the Crescent Community Council, I'm the only one I think from the east side, I guess from Monroe's boundaries. Cause I'm the only parent that came from Monroe.

**Interviewer:** Oh, all of the rest are from Crescent Junior?

**Beth:** Crescent Junior. From what I can, from what I can tell. From what I've been able to... I think there's one that actually lives in the Oquirrh area, but she has her kids there. But when I realized that, I was like, wow, I like represent everybody over here when I'm making decisions. You know, that's my, I'm representing everyone. And I really need to talk to other parents and see what their opinions are on some of this and make sure I'm really representing them and not just my own crazy brain that you know sees these things my own way. (Interview 2)

## Decision Synopsis

In her interview, Beth described five invested decisions, three advisory decisions, and one decision where the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. Of the nine total decisions she described in her interview, she reported personal disagreement with six of them. She substantively disagreed with three of the decisions and stated her disagreement in SCC meetings for two of the decisions, while reporting the disagreement for one decision. Additionally, she disagreed with the form of three decisions which she regularly described as “rushed” or “last-minute.” In these cases, she did not necessarily disagree with the decision itself, but would have liked more time or to gather information

before making the decision. In terms of importance, for two of the decisions she reported that her own children would be impacted, and she took personal action on seven of the decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for six decisions and characterized three decisions negatively. As she recounted the decisions, she reported that five of the decisions were brought up in more than one meeting. Lastly, she reported taking personal action in the following forms: gathering information for four decisions, one-on-one discussions with stakeholders for two decisions, taking action in meetings for five decisions, and withholding speech for one decision.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Chromebook Cart

In this sequence, Beth describes a situation in which the principal rushes a decision at the last minute, and the SCC members feel pressure to vote in favor of the decision. In the aftermath of the decision, Beth reports that she personally sought out the teachers in the school who are impacted negatively. She describes one particular conversation with the music teacher. In the conversation, she proposes that the SCC take up an invested decision to purchase a Chromebook cart—a classroom set of laptop computers—for the music class.

**Beth:** The principal has kind of and it's her first year working with community councils and other things like that. But we've gone through a meeting and then all of a sudden at the end, she would say, "Oh, we need to vote on this," and she presents something. And we'd talk about it, but she gives us information she had, which obviously she wants us to vote for it. You ask her, you know, I mean, that's why she's presenting it. And we'd be going through it and we'd go okay, but... And people had to start leaving. So we had to do a vote, you know? And it was kind of like, okay, well, is that really what she said it was? Is that really beneficial? And there was a couple of times that I'd go talk to teachers afterwards about, okay, she said this... Is this really what's going on? I had one teacher who

came up to me at the junior high who said that um... I just asked her. Because she had been kind of getting the brunt end of some of the changes. She's the music teacher and so obviously when you're talking about having to raise grades in the core classes, as the principal said at one point, some of the non-essentials have to sacrifice to help us get out of turn around, you know? And so they kept cutting back on some of the, she was doing like jazz band and other things that kept getting changed and adjusted. She was like what's going on? And, you know, I asked her, I said, you know, what is something we could do to help you? And she made a comment about, she needed, she could really use a Chromebook cart. All of the other teachers get Chromebooks. And she was told that she needed to go to the computer lab and like the principal said that everyone had access to computers. Every classroom. And I said, what about music? Oh, they have a computer lab just around the corner. Well, the teacher only needed a five minute little thing on... they could do it quickly on the Chromebooks, get it turned in and save her hours of correcting and doing paperwork because it all comes through a spreadsheet. If she could use that instead, but she would have to take her entire class out to the computer lab, get them all locked, bring them back. No, she really needed a Chromebook cart and they said that they had an extra one. And I'm going... you know?

You know, and so, you know, there's been times that afterwards I'll go talk with the teacher and I'll say, okay this is what we were told. Like the sixth grade thing, I went directly to teachers and I said, as the chair, I get more information beforehand. So sometimes I can do some of this before the meeting. Sometimes I don't have time or sometimes I don't get it all beforehand, but going and talking to teachers and saying, okay, what's your view of this? Because you see things differently than I see them and than the principal might see them. And so, you know, there's been a few things that I've gone and talked to teachers and then I go back to the principal. I'm like, okay, without getting anyone in trouble. How do I tell you that? [laugh] You know?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that's an interesting...

**Beth:** You know, it's like but especially this year, we've had a couple of times in junior high that we've had to go back and talk to a couple of things or whatever. But it's hard when it's kind of thrown at you. You have to vote quickly and you're not quite sure that you have all the information. But, and it depends a lot on how critical it is or important it is, whether I actually study it out or if it's not like that much money. And sometimes it's just a matter of trying something new because the teachers are, that's something, we've done that before. And sometimes just giving it a few weeks takes care of the problem. Otherwise, I take it to the next meeting and I say, okay, you know?

In addition to gathering information, strategic talks with teachers, and deliberate actions in subsequent meetings, Beth also described individual conversations with the principal:

**Beth:** There's been several times that I can just go right up to the principal and say okay, I'm concerned about this little thing. And it wasn't necessarily the whole committee needed to be there. But I had his voice. I had, you know, time and he'd talk directly to me and I don't have to make an appointment. And, you know. So, I mean, you get that one-on-one time with the principal, you know what's happening. You can voice your concerns and it's a very casual environment. It's not a you go into their office and you're complaining. You know, you say I'm giving you something, I'm helping out in this committee. I have a concern, what can you tell me about it? (Interview 2)

In this example, Beth describes an invested decision that was rushed during the final moments of an SCC meeting: “All of the sudden at the end, she would say, oh, we need to vote on this [...] And people had to start leaving. So we had to do a vote, you know?” Feeling pressure to make the decision in a constrained time, Beth votes to approve the decision with the other SCC members. Upon reflection, she doesn't necessarily disagree with the decision itself (substance), but how the principal went about it (form): “And I never felt like it was like a bad decision that was made. I just think there could have been more information pretty much every time that it's happened.” Having felt the internal tension between the decision and her thoughts, Beth reported that she immediately questioned the decision: “it was kind of like, okay, well, is that really what she said it was? Is that really beneficial?” Beth did not directly describe how important these issues are to her, but she did provide a clue as to how she thinks about the issues: “it depends a lot on how critical it is or important it is, whether I actually study it out.” This indicates that her level of activity outside of the meeting was tied to the importance of the issue at hand.

Beth connected the rushed decision directly to her strategic talks with teachers impacted by the decision, as well as to her efforts to gather information, her speech withholding as the decision was being made, and her seeking out one-on-one conversations with the principal. As she attempted to make sense of the decision

situation, she described her information gathering as though it was a learned behavior from a repeated condition: “If we make a decision and I go get more information, then I can come back and say, ‘we talked about this last month, but I got more information.’” Although there are many actions she took, the particular actions that stand out in this example are strategic talking and information gathering. Beth related the conversation between teachers and principal in a way that shows her as a liaison and someone who is conscious of her position: “I’ve gone and talked to teachers and then I go back to the principal. I’m like, okay, without getting anyone in trouble. How do I tell you that...[laugh] You know?”

In this case, we learn that internal dissonance can arise under conditions of insufficient information as well as disagreement, so long as there is pressure to act. In other words, Beth disagrees with the form of the decision, but not necessarily the substance of the decision. Of additional note is the fact that Beth can be understood to be experiencing both internal dissonance and mediating dissonance. Both paths in the cycle apply as she personally describes her own questioning of the particular invested decisions and also acting in between stakeholders: the principal and the teachers.

## Decision 2: Reconfiguration

The reconfiguration decision was already introduced in the previous chapter. This decision came up while Beth was acting as chair of the SCC at the junior high. She was strongly against the decision to move sixth graders to the junior high and yet, feeling pressure from district administrators, decided to open up discussion on the topic. Here she tells of her decision to bring up the issue and hear from parents who had opposing

opinions:

**Beth:** That's one where I was totally against having six grade moved up to the junior high.

**Interviewer:** Oh, you were?

**Beth:** I did not want that to happen at all. And it was something that I was told we needed to bring up because they just wanted to know where we're at. And I didn't even want to bring it up. [laugh] I was like no, we are not moving six grade.

**Interviewer:** You were the chair?

**Beth:** Yeah. But we did. And I'm like you know what, it doesn't hurt to just... As community council we're representing other people too. You know, I need to know what people are seeing. And we walked into the meeting and, you know, we brought it up and just said, you know, what are you guys thoughts about this? What are concerns, what are... And my thought, my biggest concern was the kids aren't quite ready for it. Junior high is junior high. Like everyone, not many people enjoyed their junior high days. And the least number of years I can have them in there, that's where I prefer to have, you know? There's all of the hormones and all of the changes and all of the trying to find your identity and, you know? If you can keep it in a controlled environment in elementary. And you send them off to high school where...

**Interviewer:** Zip through that part. [laugh].

**Beth:** Yeah, let's just zip through this part. You know, and that was my biggest concern. And then I went into the meeting and I think, if I remember right, the district was there and they shared with us about that as far as education wise, it actually aligns better with the junior high or something. Sixth, seventh, eighth actually goes well together as far as the curriculum and all that kind of stuff. Because I had been, I'd understood that basically they have to have a sixth grade... I had talked to some teachers. I had talked to a couple other people just trying to find out what was going on and, um, the sixth grade ended up being kind of their own little classrooms and doing their own little thing anyway. And I'm like, okay, does that help us to move them from having our own little classrooms to having their own little classrooms? Like, is it worth the effort to change everything? And I just, I didn't feel like it was worth the effort if it was just going to be the same thing. And as we got in there, there was some other parents that were there and expressed their, their situations as that their kids had a terrible sixth grade teacher or their kid was ready to be more advanced, but because of the classroom they were in, the teacher had to focus on the lower kids. And so they didn't get that extra push so they became lazy. And then they got into junior high and they continued that lazy schedule. You know, so it kind of, it hurt them not to be able to move on and be able to be pushed, you know? And I was like, okay, but they're still in junior high, you know? And just, um, as I talked to, just sometimes there



was that kid who didn't get along with his sixth grade teacher and they just... They just stopped. And trying to get them going again was hard. Whereas if you had multiple teachers, they could attach to one or two that could help them excel in those areas and maybe they'd slip a little in some others. But it wasn't a whole year lost. It was just maybe a partial.

And as I started hearing some of those from other parents and heard some of the information district, I was like, okay. I mean, I went in pretty decided, but still willing to listen. And as I left I went, this might not be necessarily the best situation for my kids because my kids had this magnet program where they were being pushed and it could actually be harder for them because they're taken out of that high level class and put into, I don't want to say lower, but not as intensely high. And so, but there was other kids who could be at that level with my kids, but weren't having the opportunity. Because my kids were high enough, they could be in that special program. But these kids, either their parents couldn't help them get to and from the school or they weren't at quite that level, but they could if they got the right pushing. And so that was, I was like, you know, to help some of these other kids be able to have some of these opportunities, too. This could be a good situation for them. And so now I've changed [laugh]. After listening, but because of community council I've been given that information. And that's, that's one thing that as a community council member, especially when I've been the chair, that just felt a big need to let other parents know that information too. (Interview 2)

The reconfiguration decision has unique characteristics. Although the SCC was given full decision-making authority over the matter, it can be considered both invested and advisory because it was administered and organized at the district level. All of the elementary schools feeding into a junior high had to approve the decision by SCC vote in order for reconfiguration to move forward. As Beth's recounting makes clear, she experienced both internal dissonance and mediating dissonance. Initially, she describes the pressure she felt to bring up the topic even though it was a decision she "was totally against." Despite her own personal disagreement, she ended up moving forward with the meeting recounted here and spearheading subsequent meetings to advance the decision. In addition to these conditions for internal dissonance, she describes herself representing other parents: "As community council we're representing other people too. You know, I need to know people are seeing." Thus, as the decision unfolds, she simultaneously works

to resolve the disagreement between her own thoughts and actions and also mediates between the district administration and parents. The decision is also clearly very important to Beth. If the decision moves forward, her own children will miss out on 1 full year of the “magnet program,” which is an advanced learning program run by the district. The negatively valenced language she used such as “totally” and “my biggest concern” and “I did not want it to happen all” make it clear that she was motivated to resolve her dissonant state. As she described her conflicted emotions, she moved back and forth between her own position and that of the parents. Moving between these perspectives multiple times laid bare her internal unease and her mediating position as she worked out of the decision over many months.

The actions stemming from her dissonant state were information gathering, strategic talking, and meeting actions. These actions were primarily in the service of holding additional meetings and implementing each step of the decision. Later in the interview she explained her efforts to “get all the other schools out, also get to go and have meetings and write letters. So at the junior high, the principal is totally on board, really wants it to happen and we invited all the community councils. I emailed all the council chairs and said and I think she emailed all the principals and said, we're having this meeting with the district.”

Similarly as for the first decision, Beth experienced both internal and mediating dissonance in this example. Because Beth acted resolutely to implement the decision, the internal dissonance she felt was likely not prolonged. Although her actions clearly betrayed her opinions in the beginning, her subsequent actions confirmed her new position and we can expect that she is achieving internal consonance now that she's

“changed.” That said, she described a protracted effort with parents to convince them of the merits of the decision and thus her mediating dissonance continued for many months. Interestingly, as she was about to go into the initial meeting, she described herself as “pretty decided, but still willing to listen.” As she did listen and began to take actions that conflicted with her own opinions, she rationalized this new position and immediately began to resolve her dissonance by emphasizing the needs of the other kids: “I was like, you know, to help some of these other kids be able to have some of these opportunities, too. This could be a good situation for them.”

### Marilyn

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Marilyn is 58 years old and her youngest of 10 children graduated from high school in 2019. She moved from Canada to Utah 14 years ago and has lived in the same home since. In total, she has served on School Community Councils for 10 years and is currently in her last year of service because she will no longer have children who attend the school. She has also been active in the PTA for 12 years and served on a school council in Canada prior to moving. Marilyn is White, lower-middle income, and completed 1 year of university education. As she spoke in the interview and in SCC meetings, she often leaned back in her chair and looked down to process her thoughts. She expressed herself in a measured way by moving between perspectives to gain clarity on a topic. In SCC meetings, she typically did not play a prominent role in discussions, although she was always ready to remind the members that their decisions must advance the “highest academic need.”

### **Power and Responsibility**

Marilyn describes her own power on the SCC in terms of being able to speak up and play a part in the organization and observes that the SCC has become a place where parents have a voice over decisions at the school. She describes her responsibility on the SCC in terms of serving “all students” and wonders aloud about how to meet their needs when specific demographics have been the primary recipients of SCC resources in the past. As with Beth, Marilyn sees power in terms of decision-making and responsibility in terms of the entire school community.

**Marilyn:** I think just general ideas of come be involved in community council, we have a lot of money that you can help determine with. Or come be involved in a parent teacher, PTA and let's do things for our teachers or for the school and then they usually will become part of the school community council after that because they find they have more of a voice over of what's going on in the school through the community council rather than through PTA. (Interview 3)

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**Marilyn:** We need to focus for all students to be able to have that opportunity and not just the few that used to need it. We have so many more. It's becoming such a diverse society. And when Mr. Holman talked about, the amount of students that have different languages, it's just been weighing on me to say, OK, are we focusing on all of them as well? You know, we don't have the translators, we don't have the other things for them. But what can we do in the schools for them? Are we letting them down or are we? You know, and so that's a new concept that I've been thinking about, thinking that needs to come, to come forth. (Interview 3)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Marilyn described seven invested decisions and one advisory decision. Of the eight total decisions she described in her interview, she reported personal disagreement with six of them. She substantively disagreed with four of the decisions, but

did not state her disagreement in SCC meetings. Additionally, she disagreed with the form of two decisions and spoke against one in a meeting where she suggested that fund recipients provide reports of their spending and activities. In terms of importance, for five of the decisions she reported that her own children would be impacted and she took personal action on five of the decisions. She expressed a desire to change the direction or outcome of three decisions and characterized five decisions negatively. As she recounted the decisions, she reported that three of the decisions were brought up in more than one meeting. She took personal action in the following forms: information gathering for one decision, seeking one-on-one discussions with stakeholders for three decisions, speaking in meetings to advance or alter two decisions, and withholding speech for one decision.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: The Literary Magazine

In the following sequence, Marilyn makes reference to a decision to allocate \$10,000 to a literary magazine that publishes the work of Crescent High students.

Marilyn recounts a situation in which she disagrees with the decision, but refrains from speaking in the meeting. She begins by wondering aloud about whether the money is spent properly and whether the magazine is useful to students:

**Marilyn:** I just wondered if the amount of money, if they were being taken care of. If they were, you know, what's really happening with those? Or the literary magazine thinking we have put so much money into this literary magazine, but are kids really even? Is it just going straight into the garbage? You know? All these books that the counselors get and we buy those things. Not that they're not good materials, but from my perspective with my students and some of the other parents I've talked to, it's going straight into the garbage. And so, I guess it's one of those things that I wonder. I haven't dared bring it up because some of the teachers are the ones that are doing the literary magazine that are there. And I'm thinking, I don't know this is a good idea. But yet, they're so favorable of it and

they say it is such a good thing. So somehow I don't know if it's just for them or if it really is the students. But from my perspective, I'm thinking it's going into the garbage [whispers]. It's being filed. You know, I mean, it's just they're not, they're not using it. And it is good material, I'm sure. But it's not being used properly and the literary magazine is just basically, I don't know if you've seen one of those. It's kids work and they print it like, they put it into a magazine. So the kids can actually see that they, one of their poems or their essays is printed into the magazine. But, a lot of them don't even care from my perspective. So there's a few that probably do and maybe that's what we're doing is we're hitting those few, but the teachers think it's great. Those kinds of things and I'm thinkin, I'm, I'm being quiet over here. [laugh] We're just going, it's going in the garbage. You know? There's little comments that are going on over here, but none of us are quite brave enough to bring it up and say it, you know? But that's one of those things that you think about it afterwards and think, well, should I have brought it up or should I not? You know, you know, is that for the good because the teacher is on council that likes, that is doing that. And they're really for it and they think it's a great thing. Maybe it is because they enjoy it and it's their students that are getting published in there. But is it, do they really understand that it's just goin? And is that money really being... But maybe for a few it is. Maybe they prize that their work is in... You know, sometimes you pay money out there for the one or two that it really helps and maybe it's that. But, there is those moments that I wonder, aaah maybe I should've said something. Maybe, for the ten thousand, maybe it's OK. I don't know, for the amount of money we use, but it's a lot of money! You know? (Interview 3)

In this segment, Marilyn recounted an invested decision to fund a literary magazine for Crescent High students. She repeatedly expressed her substantive disagreement with the decision, which she voiced by asking inferential questions (“Is it just going straight into the garbage?”) and through reference to experience from her own children and other parents. Nonetheless, she went on to vote in favor of the decision. She explained that the teachers on the council are “so favorable of it” and despite her disagreement she hasn’t “dared bring it up.” She expressed her desire for a different outcome by repeatedly questioning the value of the decision and the perspective of the teachers. She also became animated in describing the decision and even after partially defending it, states, “but it’s a lot of money!”

While Marilyn recounted conversations with other parents, her predominant

action regarding this decision was withholding speech in the meeting. She explained that her decision to withhold in the meeting was made because the teachers are “really for it and they think it's a great thing.” And yet her very decision to withhold speech leads to her internal conflict after leaving the meeting: “But that's one of those things that you think about it afterwards and think, ‘well, should I have brought it up or should I not [have]?’”

The way that this decision unfolds is typical of the developmental dissonance process. Marilyn acts in a way that betrays her own opinions and then wrestles with the decision afterwards. Yet, what is noteworthy here is that Marilyn withholds speech in the meeting as her primary action. The decision to withhold is important because it demonstrates the complex and open-ended nature of dissonance conditions. By withholding, Marilyn maintains workable relations with the teachers on the committee, but prolongs her own internal dissonance regarding the decision. In speaking, she might resolve her own internal tension, but do so at the risk of future discord with the teachers on the committee.

#### Decision 2: Proficiency-Based Grading

In the following sequence Marilyn describes a district-wide decision to change from standard grading to proficiency-based grading. Here she expresses that she is largely unaffected by the change because of her children's age. Yet, as the decision takes on greater significance over the year, she becomes increasingly perplexed and motivated to understand more.

**Marilyn:** So, it wasn't affecting me the same way. And so it was like, I don't see the problem with it. But I guess when I really think about it, if I did have younger

ones, maybe I would see it differently. Maybe it's in the junior highs, maybe it's in the elementary schools that's affecting the students more. And so I guess from my perspective, I was like, what's the problem with this? [laugh] And, and me kind of blowing it off like I don't see your problem. And, but listening to them, then it made me rethink the fact that maybe I had to go in and go to the district website and find out more about performance grade based grading and the trainings that were on there, because I didn't understand it from what they were saying. I didn't understand. What is the problem? I don't understand it, I'm not having the same issue with my student with only one class. One student you know. And I just didn't understand it. And it's like come on people. So I don't know if that answers that question.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, it does.

**Marilyn:** But it was like I don't see the problem. But then the more I studied it and then I could sympathize with them as far as okay, maybe it's because of their looking down the road from their younger ones, that pretty soon it's going to be in every grade. (Interview 3)

In the beginning of this district-wide decision process the primary drivers of dissonance—importance and disagreement—are missing for Marilyn. Yet over time, she begins to notice that her own thinking is at odds with the majority of the parent and teacher members on the SCC. She wondered aloud about this in her interview: “I was like, what’s the problem with this?” At first, she was able to “blow off” the problem, but with time her discordant position and the increased salience of the decision began to weigh more heavily on her: “but listening to them, then it made me rethink the fact.” Marilyn repeated her rhetorical questions about proficiency-based grading many times in her interview, which gives the sense that she continues to feel conflict about the issue. Indeed, the issue was raised repeatedly over the year in SCC meetings and continues to be implemented over many months, even years, in the district.

As she recounted the decision, Marilyn reported that after listening to the others, “I had to go in and go to the district website and find out more about performance-based grading and the trainings that were on there, because I didn’t understand it from what



they were saying.” Thus, her primary action was to gather information about the issue in order to understand it better. She then reported that, “the more I studied it and then I could sympathize with them.”

This decision process is unique because it was originally unimportant for Marilyn. Her own child was doing fine and she didn’t understand why it was a big deal. Additionally, her original disagreement was with the other parents on council and she had not acted in a way that ran against her own opinions. Yet, as the decision took on outsized importance and became increasingly conflictual over the year, it was difficult for Marilyn to dismiss. Her experience suggests that internal dissonance can be initiated by external pressures during decision-making and does not always originate from one’s own inconsistency between thoughts and/or actions.

## Nancy

### **Biographical Sketch**

Nancy is 54 years old and one of her six children attends Crescent High. She moved to the area 33 years ago and has lived in the same home nearly her entire adult life. She has served on the School Community Council for 20 years and currently serves as the chair of the Crescent High SCC. She has also served on the PTA for 15 years and plans to participate on the community council for “as long as I am re-elected.” Nancy is White, upper-middle income, and never attended college. While directing meetings as the chair, Nancy is the clear focal point of the meeting. She opens the meeting, comments regularly, decides when the next agenda item will be taken up, and invites or limits the speaking of others. During meetings she repeatedly hushes or tells others to wait while

she calculates the new budget following a decision. When recalling her actions in meetings and interactions with other parents, it is clear that she understands herself to be an authority about SCC matters and a prime mover on the issues of the school district. When recounting an SCC meeting with the school board president, she eagerly started in: “let me tell you what happened...” She also makes clear that the SCC is supposed to be a “parent-run” organization and, according to the legal code, parents are supposed to hold the power. She is well known among friends and neighbors for being involved and she is often contacted by parents as a source of information: “I’ll get a phone call and say somebody from the junior high asked me to find out...[it happens] all the time.”

### **Power and Responsibility**

Nancy described her sense of decision-making power by outlining her role as the chairperson on the school community council. She mentioned a specific example from early in her time on SCCs—before she had learned to take charge. Additionally, Nancy indicated that she sees herself as a consistent liaison between the school and the parents of her community. More than most members, she is continually communicating, updating, and relaying interests from other parents regarding issues on the SCC.

**Nancy:** So at the elementary, at the very first with the principal, it's really supposed to be parent-run, but it wasn't at first. It was a principal-run and I wasn't educated enough at first to know that I was the one that should be in charge. So the principal got her way and it was what the principal wanted. And so looking back now it was really, I really liked the principal, but it was really a manipulation, you know, because I didn't know what I was doing but she did what she wanted to do, you know[...]

**Interviewer:** And now you say it's a parent run organization. What do you mean by that?

**Nancy:** That's how they frame it now. That's what they call the community

council, a parent run organization. That, I mean, that's how they word it now and that's how it's supposed to be run. That's who's in charge. That's who your chair is supposed to be is a parent, not a faculty member, not the principal. And if you feel like they're taking advantage of the situation or they're overstepping, you're supposed to let them know. (Interview 4)

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**Nancy:** I have people come up all the time say I've heard this is going on, this is going on. Can you bring this up in the meeting? Do you know what I mean? All the time.

**Interviewer:** Huh. People coming up to you?

**Nancy:** Yes. Because they know I'm on the council.

**Interviewer:** Because it's you. Yeah.

**Nancy:** Yeah. Because they know I'm involved. Yeah. Do you know what I mean? And they asked me to find out what's going on. All the time.

**Interviewer:** All the time. Friends? Not friends?

**Nancy:** Yeah. Friends or they'll say so-and-so wanted me to find out, you know? A friend of a friend asked. Yeah. All the time, all the time. Yeah. (Interview 4)

## **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Nancy described two invested decisions, two advisory decisions, and one decision on which the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. While it became clear throughout the study that Nancy is heavily involved in nearly every decision taken up by the SCC, much of the interview was spent on the two major decisions that took an outsized role in the Crescent High SCC: reconfiguration and proficiency-based grading. In an example of how certain decisions take on immense importance for the committee members, Nancy spent 20 minutes describing the details of the reconfiguration decision and over 37 minutes on proficiency-based grading. Of the

five decisions she recounted in her interview, she reported substantive disagreement with four of the decisions and stated her disagreement in SCC meetings during three decision deliberations. Noteworthy in her accounts of disagreement is that she was directing decisions as chair and thus would not be expected to disagree with the form of the decision. Among the members, she is also one who spoke out often when she disagreed with a decision. In emphasizing the importance of the decisions, she explained that her children were impacted by three of the decisions and she personally took actions on all four of the decisions that she disagreed with. She expressed a desire to change the outcome of four decisions and described two decisions negatively. As she recounted the decisions, she reported that three had been brought up repeatedly on the council. She took personal action in the following forms: strategic talking for two decisions and speaking in an SCC meeting or district wide meeting for four decisions. She also reported holding back in one critical SCC meeting about proficiency-based grading.

### **Decision Processes**

#### **Decision 1: Reconfiguration**

In the following excerpt, Nancy reveals that she and a small group of parents originated the district-wide decision to reassign ninth graders to high school (commonly known as reconfiguration). Of all the decisions I observed in the district during the pilot and full study, reconfiguration had the most far-reaching impact. Here Nancy suggests that she took part in initiating the entire district-wide process. Toward the end of the sequence she also discusses particular disagreements that she voiced with the district superintendent about sixth graders.

**Nancy:** Well, the time that I made a difference, and I don't know if people are happy with it or not, was I was one of the people that changed the ninth graders in the high school.

**Interviewer:** Oh, you did?

**Nancy:** Yes. I don't know how happy people are about that, but I was on the community council at the junior high that kind of set forth that in motion. We brought that to our community council as parents. We started talking about it, we brought it to the community council. They were happy about it, you know, they wanted to go forth. We brought it to the school board and it went forth from there and I don't think a lot of people know that. And it's fine. I remember sitting in the meeting. They had the, at the time they're calling it an open house with Superintendent Gardner and parents were a lot, you know, upset. A lot of them were upset. They didn't want the ninth grade going to the high school.

Nancy continued to explain her reasoning for pushing the ninth-grade transition and then clarified her role in the decision:

**Interviewer:** Oh so you're saying... So, I just want to make sure I'm clear. You're saying that what you did originated the whole district thing?

**Nancy:** I really feel like that. Yes.

**Interviewer:** Wow. Okay, okay [...]

**Nancy:** So anyway, but there's a lot of parents who don't like it. And we're not happy about it now because one of the questions that we asked at the time was would they move sixth grade to the junior high school. Now, that's something that we didn't agree with because I personally don't feel like sixth graders are mature enough to go into junior high and that's that something. I said this is a concern parents have, would this ever happen, directly to Superintendent Gardner, this close. He said that will never happen - I promise you directly. And he said it would never happen. Well, it's happening. It's already happened. It happened up at Cove. You know, in their, their district with, I think it's Burton, that's already happened. They say it's a special circumstance because there's fear of closing a school. And it's being talked about out here but we shot it back down. But other schools keep wanting it, so it keeps being brought up.

After describing her role in the decision and her ongoing disagreement with

Superintendent Gardner, she finally related a face to face encounter with him at an open house meeting:

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me a little bit about that meeting? So, like, you know, when you originated the idea here with the three people and you say you're having face to face meetings with Superintendent Gardner.

**Nancy:** And that was an open house that we had and the questions were being asked and he finally said, could someone from the Crescent Junior High Community Council please stand up and answer their questions? And so that had to be me because I was the chair.

**Interviewer:** Was this a district board meeting?

**Nancy:** It wasn't a board meeting. It was just an open house they had, answering the people's questions about why. Because before they, you know, before they do any of the change, there's an open house to answer questions and...you know? And so that was something he was doing. Only he wasn't really, people weren't happy, you know? And so they wanted to know why it was ever brought up and so I was the lucky one. And so he said, will someone stand up from...and so it was me that from Crescent Junior. And so they're like, why? And we're like, because these you know, this goes on student's transcripts. It's so important. They're going to have more choice. They're going to be able to go to DTI [District Technical Institute], you know? And then we thought it was important to give them this chance if the school board chooses to make this choice. I mean, I don't get to make the choice whether it's going to be changed or not. The school board will vote on that and make that choice. (Interview 4)

In this truncated selection, Nancy describes the district-wide decision to reassign ninth graders to high school and sixth graders to junior high. It is clear that the decision is important to Nancy as she talks of the decision's impact on her own children and the repeated actions she takes in reference to the decision. Nancy ends the sequence demonstrating that she originally had only advisory powers: "I don't get to make the choice." Yet, as the decision played out in the district each school gained invested decision-making power over the decision in regard to their own school. While she originally played a central role in initiating the district-wide decision, she expressed substantive disagreement with the connected decision to move sixth graders to junior high: "I personally don't feel like sixth graders are mature enough to go into junior high." In this way, Nancy expresses her ongoing conflict regarding her original responsibility

for the decision and its associated consequences. In response to this dilemma, she describes her mediating dissonance when parents began to seek her out and ask her to account for the decision: “So now people are like, ‘you said that wasn’t gonna happen.’ And I’m like, ‘hey, you go talk to Superintendent Gardner because you were there. He said that wasn’t gonna happen.’”

The predominant actions taken by Nancy regarding the decision were strategic talks with stakeholders and meeting actions at the school and district level. In recounting her exchanges with Superintendent Gardner, she repeatedly attempted to justify her original actions to other parents who are displeased with the associated decision to move sixth graders. Seeing herself as the responsible party, she connected her actions at the open house with her role as chair on the SCC—as if there were no other option but to speak at the open house.

One important aspect of Nancy’s explanation that is not included above is the immediate impact on her children. As Nancy recounted the decision, she explained that it would positively impact her son, who participated in sports in ninth grade, but she also said that her daughter spoke out against the decision in their personal conversations. Thus, as Nancy moved the decision forward, she dealt with disagreement and misalignment both among parents at the school and her own children. This example demonstrates the multidimensional character that SCC decisions can take on. It also demonstrates that some decisions have unanticipated second-order consequences that initiate mediating dissonance conditions for the parent member—even when the member is not conflicted or experiencing any form of internal dissonance about the original decision.

## Decision 2: Proficiency-Based Grading

**Nancy:** The proficiency-based grading, I'm really upset with that. Were you there the day that the president came from the school board and talked about the proficiency-based grading?

**Interviewer:** I was there when a school board member came. I didn't know he was the president of the school board. But yes, I was. He sat in the corner and was there for, yeah.

**Nancy:** And let me tell you what happened because of that.

**Interviewer:** Please. Yeah.

**Nancy:** So because of that meeting, a group was sent out [from the school district] to talk to the teachers and said that they were not to bring up proficiency-based grading. If they were not doing proficiency-based grading for the district, they didn't have any form of input that the district needed. So, if they were like, Emilia [a science teacher on the Crescent High SCC] said I've been teaching for 20 years, I can see the issues you're going to have. They said you couldn't possibly know the problems that we're going to have. We don't want to hear from you.

After explaining Emilia's conflict with the district administrators, she went on to relate how the district board president asked Principal Holman to write up Emilia for insubordination:

**Nancy:** [The president] asked him to write her up for insubordination for what she said at the meeting...and in the next meeting said I cannot bring up anything about proficiency-based grading, I can't talk about it, I can't anything because they are really trying to get me in trouble. It's going to jeopardize my retirement. So the teachers are all in fear of what's going to happen. So Emilia went to a training right after that and was asking questions and they said, why are you asking that question? She said, because these are things that I know are going to come up. And they said, how would you know that? She said, because I've taught for 20 years, these are things that are going to happen. They said you couldn't possibly know that. And she was going to next year take on two classes with proficiency-based grading. And she told Jim after she went to the training, she said, I won't do it. I'm not going to jeopardize my retirement because depending on how you do in the grading, it affects your raises and things and so she said I won't do it. So she declined the proficiency-based grading for next year anyway. Anyway, so she declined it for next year. So those kind of things are just, I mean, silly anyway. And the teachers at the elementary that have done it for their entire year had to do everything proficiency-based grading have just struggled with it. It's so much



more work for them, you know, and don't see a real benefit. If it was done in a way that was the same across the board, but it just isn't being done the same way. You know, it's supposed to be done on the test on what you know. But like Tessa's teacher ended up giving them packets to bring home. So it's not done on test merit, you know? So it's really not being done the way it's supposed to be done.

After explaining Emilia's situation with the district, Nancy recounted her own direct confrontation with the school district superintendent at a townhall about the discrepancy between what was being explained and her own daughter's experience.

**Nancy:** And so I raised my hand and I said, you know, that's not what my daughter's experiencing right now at all. She is having to, in order to take an assessment again, her teacher has her just to redo, assess you know, she has to kind of jump through hoops and just redo, redo, redo assignments on the computer before she can retake an assessment. And he said, oh no, that's not how it is. Excuse me? My daughter is doing that right now. Well, no, that's not how it is. Excuse me! Yes. That's how it is.

Finally, she recounted a one-on-one conversation with a school board member immediately following the townhall meeting:

**Nancy:** And after the meeting, the fourth member came up and was just very conscientious. If you have an issue, I really think you need to go to Mr. Holman. I said I've already talked to him and he told me to get her out of that class. I said I've already talked to him and Jim told me to pull her, you know? I said that I'm not sure if you're aware, but I am the chair of the community council. And her face just she's like, oh [...] She's like, oh, like, oh, so you're involved. You do know what's going on. You know what I mean? And so then I sat and talked to her for about 20 minutes. Like, oh, maybe you should, you know, I'm like yeah, see, I do know what's going on. And there are issues with proficiency-based grading that, you know, they're not following the rules. They're not following the standards there. There's an issue here.

After her full explanation of the issue and the various events surrounding the decision, I asked if she plans to continue raising the issue at SCC meetings:

**Nancy:** You know, I do, because they've got to see that this is something parents that are upset about. They've got to know that. And actually, this was brought up in our community council meeting at the elementary school. And I said, I think you really need to go to a school board meeting - scheduled to be put on the agenda. You need to call in and be put on the agenda and let them know your

issues with it and talk about it at one of the school board meetings. And they said, well, can't you go talk about? I said, no. I said, they don't want to hear from me anymore. They need to hear from someone else, not Nancy anymore. So they need to hear from somebody else. I'll be happy to help you draft your speech, whatever you want to talk about. You need to have, you know, have a speech out, you know, whatever you want to say. I'll be happy to help you phrase it out, whatever you want to. I said, somebody else needs to go talk to them. So, and they said OK. (Interview 4)

In this multiepisodic and lengthy process, Nancy described the decision to change the grading scheme for all schools in the district from traditional letter grades to proficiency-based grading. She expressed her disagreement with the decision as soon as the topic came up, stating, "I'm really upset with that." The importance of the issue to her was demonstrated by the extensive length of time she devoted to the topic in the interview and in the multiple SCC meetings throughout the year. She also repeatedly cited the impact of the decision on her children and took numerous actions in reference to the decision. Together, the disagreement and importance led Nancy into a place of mediating dissonance rather than internal dissonance. As an SCC chair who "knows what's going on" she specifically addressed her role as a parent in between teachers/parents and district administrators. At one point she reported that Emilia, the science teacher on the SCC, texted her immediately and "kept me in the loop" regarding the decision to hire a new principal. Principal Holman had been supportive of teachers' plight with the new grading system, but now he was leaving and Nancy expressed concern over how this would impact teachers. As demonstrated by the interview, the issue was prolonged over years and repeatedly addressed in meetings.

Nancy took various actions in relation to the issue, including strategic talks with district board members, teachers, and parents. In one interaction with parent members of the elementary school SCC, she advocated for their participation at district board

meetings: “You need to call in and be put on the agenda and let them know your issues with it and talk about it at one of the school board meetings,” she told them. She also recited at least two public confrontations with district administrators in townhall meetings and SCC meetings. Lastly, she recounted withholding speech at the SCC meeting with the school board president: “I chose what I said carefully. You know, so I wasn't [...] Maybe I wasn't truly honest with what I said maybe, you know what I mean?”

As a parent member, Nancy is caught between parents/teachers and district administrators. Her position regarding the issue stayed relatively consistent and thus the dissonance she felt as that of mediating between discordant parents/teachers and district administrators. Yet, while mediating dissonance does not include conflict between personal opinions and actions, it similarly prompted Nancy to act in many ways to resolve the tension between the district administrators and the parents/teachers of the school. Nancy, especially as chair, sits at the nexus between these two parties and repeatedly moved to manage the conflict between them.

## **Melodie**

### **Biographical Sketch**

Melodie is 50 years old and her last child of three graduated from high school the year previous to the study. According to the state law, parents like Melodie can stay on the council 1 year after their child has graduated in order to accommodate for 2-year terms on the SCC that do not align with their child’s school completion. Melodie has lived in her home for 12 years and has lived in the community for 19 years. Prior to moving to Utah, she lived in many locations around the United States. She has served on

community council for a total of 12 years, including councils at the elementary and junior high while her children attended. She serves as the secretary of the Crescent High SCC, and was usually hurriedly taking notes on a laptop at meetings throughout the year. Because she does not have any more children attending school, she does not plan to continue on the SCC, but is seriously considering a run for the district school board. Melodie is White, upper-middle income, and completed an associate's degree. She speaks in measured phrases, with intermittent pauses and a catchy laugh to accent important flourishes. She is very attuned to the procedures and rules of SCC governance and sees herself as a strong advocate for participation on the council. When I asked about a time when she was able to make a difference she said, "when I get to talk with parents who want to be involved or if I'm talking with parents who their first child is starting school, you know, you've had all of your kids go through school now. Can you give me any advice? My first thing is go and get involved in community council."

### **Power and Responsibility**

Melodie repeatedly expressed frustration that parents do not understand the power that School Community Councils have. When first participating, she was amazed that as a parent she could be part of a body that decided the academic goals for the school and had its own budget. Similar to Beth, Marilyn, and Nancy, she also saw her role as representing the community at large. She spoke about various minority populations that are underrepresented on the SCC and the need to welcome disagreement on the SCC so that "people feel safe enough to oppose something."

**Melodie:** I still feel like in general, parents have no idea what community councils do or the power that they have and the decisions that they make that

affect everybody's kids. And the fact that it is a parent majority, that the principal doesn't even get to, that the faculty gets a vote, but the core is made up of a parent majority. (Interview 7)

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**Melodie:** And so I feel like, you know, I'm not the only person who voted for me. So there's people out there who voted for me to be on this council to represent them, whose children may have different needs than my children. And so I really felt like it was important to talk to parents at every opportunity, whether it was at a school play or concert or a church or on the street, just to find out how is your kid doing in school? Do you feel like they're getting what they need from the system? (Interview 7)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Melodie described four invested decisions, one advisory decision, and one decision on which the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. As with other members, Melodie's interview was predominantly focused on reconfiguration and proficiency-based grading. In a total interview of 2 ½ hours, 45 minutes were spent explaining reconfiguration. Of the six decisions reported in her interview, she remembered disagreeing on three of the decisions and only once stated that disagreement publicly in a meeting. On many decisions she recounted, Melodie found herself in the minority among the group and the disagreement was with other members, rather than the decision itself. She related that her children were directly impacted by two of the decisions and she took personal action on five of the six decisions. While recalling the motivational/emotive experience of the decisions, she reported desiring to change the outcome of one decision and spoke in negative terms about two of the decisions. As might be expected, the two predominant decisions were prolonged for many months and she took personal actions on five of the six decisions, including information gathering

for one decision, strategic talking for four decisions, and meeting actions for four decisions.

## **Decision Processes**

### **Decision 1: Proficiency-Based Grading**

As can now be understood, of all the advisory decisions taken up by the Crescent High SCC during the study, proficiency-based grading was the most salient and controversial. Yet, as might be expected, different members experienced the decision in sharply contrasting ways. Even before the decision came up, Melodie had been a “believer in proficiency-based grading for a long time and wished it for my kids.” However, as the decision rolled out, and as she heard the concerns of parent members of the SCC, she began to question the implementation. As she recalled the SCC meeting with the school board president she related the following:

**Melodie:** So when Kim came and was presenting things, the problems of implementation became very evident. And the concerns that the other parents at our community council meeting were expressing were all implementation problems, concerns. This isn't working because the teacher doesn't know how to do it. This isn't working because they're getting this kind of grades in this class but now this teacher is doing this system. And how is this affecting their transcript? And of course, at the high school, that's always the big question. How is this affecting their transcripts? And so while personally I am hugely in favor of proficiency-based grading...

Realizing that the implementation was going poorly, Melodie began to monitor the communication from the district and personally respond:

**Melodie:** After the district announced that they had put a new explanation for parents on their district website, I did get on and look at that to see if it was any more clear than their first one. Because the first one I had even, you know, sent a comment back in that if you're not a teacher, this makes no sense. Can we dumb this down some more? Not that all of us as parents are stupid, but can we put this into terms for real people? And so I did get on to see if it was a little more

understandable. And it is, but it's still more about the concepts than about how it's actually working. (Interview 7)

In this example, Melodie describes an advisory decision that she initially supported. She was originally made aware of the decision at a prior district level SCC meeting and, in the beginning, felt somewhat isolated at the Crescent SCC meetings: “I did say that I was in favor of it and I think I was the only parent who was in favor of it and at that point.” Yet, while she initially supported the idea, other parent members voiced repeated complaints about the implementation. Similar to Marilyn, the disagreement regarding the decision was thus introduced by other parent members of the SCC. The level of discomfort Melodie felt from these inconsistent positions is not reported in her interview. What she did clarify was her relief that “it’s not affecting any of my kids at this point, because I firmly have been a believer in proficiency-based grading for a long time and wished it for my kids but I have not been impressed with the implementation of the idea.” Having her own children not impacted by the decision made it relatively less important to Melodie, but in the council she faced a significant amount of disagreement. In dealing with this disagreement, she expressed her own conflict in questioning the policy she once gladly supported: “How is this affecting their transcripts?” and “Is it just a test? What if you have kids who don't test well? They know this stuff, but they don't test well. Is there another way that they can express that?”

In response to the decision process, Melodie began to see herself in a mediating position between parents and the district. She then began to gather information on the district website and reported looking into the issue two separate times. One of those times, she “sent a comment” to tell the district how to change the language of the explanation of proficiency-based grading in order to make it more understandable for

parents.

Melodie's decision case about proficiency-based grading mirrors Marilyn's case very closely. In the beginning, the decision for Melodie was only moderately important with almost no disagreement. As the decision progressed, the position of other parents pushed Melodie to reconsider her previous position and she began to question the implementation of the policy. She then took actions to gather information and message the district as the issue became more important and she sought to mediate between the district and parents.

#### Decision 2: Reconfiguration

Melodie experienced reconfiguration—the decision to move ninth graders to high school—on a different council than Beth and Nancy. As she mediated the disparate positions between administrators and parents on the issue of reconfiguration, she described conversations like the following where she sought to educate parents as a trusted source of information:

**Melodie:** Well, and I think people, you know, even some of the parents who were very against it, but have known me for a long time. You know, our kids have gone to school together for whatever and would come to me and well, here's what I'm hearing. Is this the truth? Is this what's really going to happen? I'd be like, where did you hear that? Where if they went to teachers or if they went to administrators, they felt like they were getting the district line. And I always tell people, if you talk to somebody and they seem confused about it then give them my email, give them my phone number. I'm happy to clarify it for anybody, because I just felt like parents were coming from a position of ignorance because they really didn't understand what was happening and how this would benefit their children. They had their one thing that they thought was going to be bad about it and they didn't see any of the bigger picture and didn't have people they could trust that they felt like they were getting good information from, so.

In the following excerpt Melodie continues her experience with reconfiguration. Here she



recounts attending a school district board meeting where, according to her, she made a public comment that shifted the perspective of one of the board members. Public comments in school district meetings are very controlled and typically not allowed unless the individual has been put on the agenda beforehand. Despite not being on the agenda, Melodie was able to speak. Here she starts by talking about a board member who was not fully understanding the parameters of the decision:

**Melodie:** Anyway, but he's out here in this area and I felt like he wasn't understanding the whole CTE question and why that mattered. And so he had addressed the president of our community council, the chair of the Crescent Community Council, a couple of times with a couple of questions asking for clarification and like I'm just gonna take a shot at it. I'm like, I'm the Crescent Junior High Community Council chair and is it okay if I address what you're questioning here from the junior high perspective? And he's like yeah, I think that's OK. So then I kind of explained to him and he then voted in favor of it. And afterwards, let me know that my explanation, my clarification had completely opened his mind to a different aspect of it that he hadn't even considered. (Interview 7)

As with Nancy, Melodie supported the reconfiguration decision from the beginning. She also pushed the decision early in her school and network and felt “a little bit betrayed” when the district moved on the sixth-grade decision soon after implementing the ninth-grade change. Feeling responsible for pushing the original decision and assuring other parents that sixth grade would not move, she reported feeling internal conflict and the disjuncture between the school district and parents.

In order to address both the internal and mediating forms of dissonance, she worked to be a person parents “could trust, that they felt they were getting good information from.” These one-on-one conversations were complemented by meeting actions at the district as she played a key role in moving the decision forward. As the chair of the junior high SCC at the time, she also took many actions organizing meetings

and implementing the decision at the school level.

This case demonstrates that multiple paths on the developmental dissonance cycle can be experienced simultaneously by the same person. The reconfiguration decision was both an advisory and an invested decision and Melodie expressed both internal and mediating dissonance. What is more, these states can change over time in such a prolonged decision. As the decision progressed, Melodie responded to new conditions that emerged from the decision. She originally did not feel internal conflict because she fully supported the decision—given that it did not include the sixth grade. Only after the ninth-grade reconfiguration was complete, did the sixth-grade option become a serious consideration. According to her account, it was at this point that parents started to approach her regarding the decision, and she started to act in earnest to assuage concerns. In this way, dissonant conditions can sometimes emerge unexpectedly from decisions that the parent member originally supports. Furthermore, the consequences of decisions can impact a member far into the future. Because SCC terms last 2 years and parents often renew throughout the school years of their children, a member can be responsive to a single decision's consequences for years and often respond to emerging issues with historical sensitivity.

### **Sara**

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Sara is 57 years old and one of her three children attends Crescent High. She lives outside of the official boundaries of the school, but close enough to commute daily. She has lived in her home for 19 years. This is her 1<sup>st</sup> year on the School Community Council

and she currently serves as a parent member on the Crescent High SCC and as a member of the school district community council. The district council is made up of SCC members from around the entire district and is a nonbinding body that directly advises the school board and district administration through monthly meetings. Sara has not served on the PTA and plans to serve on the SCC for 1 year in order to finish out her 2-year term. Sara is Latina, middle-lower income, and completed a doctorate in medicine. While participating on the SCC, Sara regularly made her opinion known about the issues at hand. In the first meeting I observed at the school, Sara explained to the council at length the importance of Concurrent Enrollment classes (relative to Advanced Placement) for Spanish-speaking students and continued to advocate for this population throughout the year. She is acutely aware of her accent and feels as though others react to her negatively because she is Latina. As Sara reports, this “reacting” from others does not stop her from continually advancing her opinion in meetings when she feels something is important. During the interview, she spoke directly, focused intently, and used her hands frequently to punctuate her thoughts and drive home her points.

### **Power and Responsibility**

Sara spoke about power on the SCC as a matter of getting things done and implementing decisions that are good for the students. She also talked about improving education for students in the “west” so that they could have better opportunities in life (“west” refers to the location of the school and the lower socioeconomic status on the west side of the metropolitan area as compared to the east). In terms of her sense of responsibility, she is actively in contact with many families in the Hispanic and refugee

communities and demonstrates her sense of responsibility by relaying personal accounts of interacting with parents in those communities.

**Sara:** This is my first year that I decided to be involved in community council. Why? Because you see conflicts or issues or something that is not good for both parts, administrations and students and I will never take a position for students or for the administration. My position 100 percent is to see that students will have what we are meant to say in our plan. That they will be ready for college. That they will be ready for the next step in life. And if we just lose our time on the 'I told you,' 'You said and I said' and nobody wins and everybody disagree and we will not get done anything. (Interview 6)

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**Sara:** So I speak with parents that are refugees and I speak with Hispanic parents too.

**Interviewer:** And you speak often about the school community council with them?

**Sara:** They asked me because they know that I'm in the community council and they know that I'm the community council representation for Crescent network. So, they always have questions for me, mostly Spanish speakers and I tell them I use a lot of pamphlets. I make them to go to the counselors and get them from there. And when they have the book, then I can meet with them and I can speak about it. How I made it with my daughters, they can make it with their own sons and daughters and I have a couple meetings with three parents that, they are in the swimming team. They came from Venezuela. They are refugees. (Interview 6)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Sara described two invested decisions, one advisory decision, and one decision on which the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. The total interview length was shorter than others but covered many topics that were important to Sara and the Latino community she sees herself as representing. Sara expressed disagreement with all four of the decisions and stated her opinion publicly for three decisions. Sara talked about three of the decisions in relation to her own children, which

signaled the importance of the decisions along with her personal actions on all four decisions. She expressed a desire to change the outcome of three decisions and described all four decisions in negative terms. Two of the decisions were repeated in multiple meetings and were prolonged over time for Sara. Lastly, Sara reported taking various actions on all four of the decisions. Her actions varied from information gathering on three decisions to strategic talking for two decisions, meeting actions for three decisions, and finally speech withholding on one decision.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: ACT Subsidy

In their October meeting, the Crescent High SCC extensively debated a proposal to fund the ACT test for students in the ACT prep course. Having already been given the ability to take the test once free of charge, this funding would allow students to take the test two times free of charge. Ultimately, with Sara's prompting, it was motioned that they would subsidize the payment for those with good grades only and not pay for the test outright for all students. Sara only spoke briefly during the discussion, but reported this afterwards:

**Sara:** You know, I didn't was agree when they want get funds for the ACT.

**Interviewer:** Say that again. You didn't what?

**Sara:** I didn't was agree.

**Interviewer:** Oh you weren't, you didn't agree?

**Sara:** When they proposed to get money for the ACT.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Why? Yeah.

**Sara:** Because I think that is responsibility for the family. Because what I have been figured out is when you give the students a portion or a full amount for something, they don't value that and those kids that really, really, really want to do more, want ACT and they will have the chance. They need to pay something. They need to value what it cost and I am minority, okay? I am a low income. So I really understand that if you don't pay for something, you no value. So that's why I was in a conflict with them that day [...] and I was very quiet that day.

And then they said, come on, guys, we need to vote for this. And I told the president, I think it was Nancy and another one that wasn't agreed, was agree with me and there was that lady that was typing and she made the comment too. And I because I pay for every single ACT that my daughter present and we paid five until she get the point that we want.

Directly after the meeting she reported having the following conversation with Katie

Flores, the teacher who pushed for the decision:

**Sara:** I think that they need to value how the things cost. And I talked to Mrs. Flores. I think that, you know, you are like us or like them. You were a student, you came from a low income family. You get “becas,” or scholarships, so you should know better. She was a little reacting when I said that. (Interview 6)

In this sequence, Sara reports an invested decision which she voted to approve, yet clearly disagrees with. Even prior to actually voting on behalf of the decision, she told “Nancy and another one that I wasn't agreed.” Experiencing the internal dissonance between her actions and thoughts, she explained her position that if the students or their families do not pay for the test, “they don't value that.” She demonstrated the importance of the decision by giving personal examples of her own children and as a minority and low-income individual. She also indicated her desire that the outcome be different and used the word “really” four times in order to emphasize her point and make her case.

Sara immediately acted in three ways: First she suggested directly in the meeting that the payment should be a subsidy rather than paying for the full test (meeting action); she withheld speaking her mind further in the meeting about her outright disagreement with the idea itself. According to her account she was “very quiet that day” (speech

withholding). Lastly, she spoke directly after the meeting with the teacher who proposed and advanced the idea during the debate (strategic talking).

What stands out in this account is the immediate and even preemptive nature of dissonance reduction. Even before Sara voted to approve the decision, she was sure to tell others that she disapproved. Furthermore, rather than pondering the decision over time as other members tend to do, she immediately approached the most vocal proponent of the decision and expressed her unfiltered position. This immediate need demonstrates the potency of the motivational state during the developmental dissonance cycle and may also stem from Sara being new to the SCC and her discomfort with public disagreement.

#### Decision 2: Proficiency-based Grading

In the following excerpt, Sara describes a dynamic situation wherein she acts as a liaison between the district school board, the Crescent High SCC, Crescent High teachers, and her “network”—which includes all SCC members at elementary and junior high schools that feed into Crescent High School. She starts by describing the resistance from the teachers at Crescent High:

**Sara:** there was some resistance from the teachers. I sent in an email and I get that information from the website. So I making sure that my network will have the information accessible to them to assign understanding the performance rating. I said if you have any concerns or any issues, please let us know. Crescent High was the only one to have the comments regarding the performance grading. So when the second meeting that we met on the policy council of the district. I forgot the name of this guy, but she was telling me that teachers should be... and I said, I understand but do you have any idea how much the teachers does? Do you have any idea how much is on her tray for all these reports? And testing implies you wanted to do the transition and be quick. Do you have the funds to give it to the principal to disperse of it be as efficient as you want? Have you been in Crescent High to explain them well?

**Interviewer:** This to the district member like the district board members,

Superintendent?

**Sara:** The person that is in charge of performing grading.

**Interviewer:** Oh, yeah okay. Yes.

**Sara:** So then she took the time to come to Crescent and talk to the staff, but I was disappointed because she trained them like it was like training condition, make sense? She was telling them, you have to do this, you don't have a choice because this is where we are going as a district. And I didn't like that approach because when I talked to Emilia and I ask her how this lady was doing it, she felt so bad and that was not my intention. So in order...

**Interviewer:** [...] She came, you think, to Crescent because of what you said. But the way that she did that...

**Sara:** Approach, it was not what I was expected.

**Interviewer:** And were you in that meeting and watched it or you just heard from the teachers?

**Sara:** I asked a couple of teachers. We need to be sometimes sneaky to see if they will get across what are you thinking and it was not always a good result. When it's the staff they can tell you are supplying one thing. But when you came in and you told the staff you have to do it because we are going that direction and you don't give it to them, we search and sustain you. Boy, it was frustrating for me.

In an effort to address the situation, Sara took an opportunity at the district school community council meeting to alert the district school board of the situation at Crescent High School and invite the school board president to the upcoming Crescent High SCC meeting:

**Sara:** I think that he came because I was telling them on the meeting previous that he came to our meeting that it is important that before they start pushing this out they need to hear the teacher's opinion. And when he came, Emilia, and a professor make their point and they requested, Emilia requested a scientific foundation on those moving forward for the change on the performance grading to the typical grading, right? So what happened? I know that he came because we talked about it in the meeting.

**Interviewer:** So he came because of what you said in the district meeting?



**Sara:** Yes and then when he hear that confronting for the teacher he was changed his position because he was 100% that moving forward to that. And I was saying, how are you going to do that without talk to the persons are actually doing that that are the teachers? So Emilia sent the email, even though that I didn't know that she sent the email. But he came because of the previous meetings and he wants to hear and he was like a little shy because when they were making the point across against what he has agreed at that meeting. He said, oh, I know this lady. He was in the meeting and he said, I know. What is your concern? I will do what the students will need. His position change when he hear the teachers. So then after that, this older lady that is in charge of the performance grading came in to the do the training. (Interview 6)

As with other members on the council, Sara describes at length the advisory decision of proficiency-based grading. From the beginning of her explanation, Sara illustrates in full detail the pressures of mediating dissonance. Her persistent questions to the school board and her many actions to address the issue demonstrate that the issue was important to Sara. Furthermore, although she never states her disagreement with the decision, she regularly voices that she “didn’t like that approach.” Having regularly voiced that concern in meetings, we understand that she disagreed with the form of the decision and stated that disagreement. As can be deduced from her repeated meetings and conversations, the decision was prolonged for many months and she desired a different outcome. “Boy, it was frustrating to me,” she said.

In an effort to address the situation, she gathered information from the school website, disseminated that information by email to SCC members in her network, and directly confronted the individual in charge of the policy for the district. Furthermore, she had to act “sometimes sneaky” to verify that the district was implementing the policy adequately for the teachers and students. This entailed many one-on-one conversations with teachers at the school that she reported about extensively in the interview.

This decision is perhaps the most detailed and multidimensional example of

mediating dissonance. Throughout the entire interview, Sara gave no indication that she disagreed with proficiency-based grading, but in her position as district SCC member she is caught between very divergent interested parties. The parents and teachers at Crescent High are, according to Sara, the most vocal antagonists in the district and Sara represented them directly to the school board and district administrators implementing the decision. In this position of mediating dissonance, she acted repeatedly in several different ways to address the issue. A last observation worth noting is that Sara did not mention her own children while reporting this decision and regularly did so with other decisions. This suggests that it is the position on the SCC, both empowered and responsible, that entangled Sara in the decision and led to the many pro-civic behaviors she exhibited.

## Laurie

### **Biographical Sketch**

Laurie is 45 years old and two of her children attend Crescent High School. She has lived in her home for 9 years and has lived in the community for 20 years. Laurie has served on the School Community Council for a total of 3 years. She is currently a parent member on the Crescent High SCC and serves as the chair of the SCC at a charter school where her younger children attend school. She plans to serve on the School Community Council for, “as long as my kids attend the school.” Laurie is White, upper-middle income, and completed a bachelor’s degree. As some of the more experienced members observed, Laurie is very active on the council and especially thorough in her knowledge regarding particular topics. Her initiative regularly takes her beyond the council into

other venues where her influence might be felt such as district school board meetings and parent teacher conferences. In the interview she spoke with a flare of conviction and at one point became teary-eyed as she explained the pitfalls of proficiency-based grading. In one of the most memorable meeting moments of the entire study, Laurie faced off with Principal Holman about proficiency-based grading. Her voice elevated and her face became flushed as she listed the fine points of misunderstanding still prevalent in the policy. As the debate escalated, her voice reached a crescendo and she said in exasperation, “I’ll stop....I’ll go off!”

### **Power and Responsibility**

Laurie made clear in her interview that she believed the decision-making power of the SCC was very limited. She chafed at the restrictions placed on the SCC by “ridiculous bureaucracies” and what she felt was the heavy-handed influence of the school district. She also spoke of her purpose on the SCC being to glean information at the school that she otherwise would not learn. While she believed the decision-making power of the SCC was limited and really went for the information, she spoke regularly about being a voice to the school district for community concerns. She regularly referred to the SCC as an “in-between.”

**Laurie:** I just feel that we are, I can't think of the right word, that we are figureheads. I don't really feel like we are really making decisions that are effectual. I just feel like we're there to weed out the easy answer yeses and that really the district's going to make the decision anyway. They already have told us and limited us so much that I just feel like the district could do it and this is all just to show....

The main reason I'm on the council is not because I feel like I can affect any change. It's because I learned different things about what's going on in the school that I wouldn't otherwise through school bulletins or being on the PTA.

**Interviewer:** Interesting. Interesting. So it's more about learning. And you feel like that's a reason to continue to...

**Laurie:** To keep that commitment to show up once a month to the meetings. It's because I do. It does afford me those relationships with people in the school and I get to hear about, you know, oh, well, we can't do this because this department is having this crazy thing going on and I learn about these different things that I wouldn't otherwise. (Interview 5)

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**Laurie:** We are supposed to be able to be a voice to the district about community concerns. So the purpose is not just only to look at these proposals and pass them on and to disperse that the land trust fund moneys. It's also to act as advocates for the parents who have concerns. (Interview 5)

### **Decision Synopsis**

During her interview, Laurie described three invested decisions and one advisory decision. Due to her extensive knowledge and experience with the topic of proficiency-based grading, over an hour of the interview was dedicated to that issue alone. Laurie expressed substantive disagreement with all four of the decisions and stated her opinion publicly for two of the decisions. Laurie took personal action on three of the decisions, but only talked about her children in relation to one decision. She expressed a desire to change the outcome of all four decisions and described three decisions in negative language. Two of the decisions were repeated in multiple meetings and were prolonged over time for Laurie. Furthermore, Laurie's actions varied and she reported acting in several different ways on one decision alone. Although she was very active in meeting discussions, she reported withholding speech on two different decisions. She also gathered information, engaged in strategic talks, and acted in meetings to advance decisions.

## Decision Processes

### Decision 1: Proficiency-based Grading

As with others on the council, proficiency-based grading weighed heavily on Laurie throughout the year. According to other parent members and my meeting observations, Laurie was one of the strongest voices against the implementation methods of proficiency-based grading. It had become such a large issue by the end of the year that when I asked Laurie about it, she replied: “Well, this is gonna be a long interview. I have a lot to say about it.” She then started in and gave me the backstory to the meeting I had observed when she confronted Principal Holman:

**Laurie:** Okay, so at the meeting. So the thing is with the community councils is on the school website, it says that parents are welcome to come to the meetings and express concerns that they have for their children because the community council is supposed to be an in-between. We are supposed to be able to be a voice to the district about community concerns. So the purpose is not just only to look at these proposals and pass them on and to disperse the land trust fund moneys. It's also to act as advocates for the parents who have concerns. And so in that role, so at that meeting where I was talking to the principal, the reason why I was so frustrated and so animated is because of two things. I had just gone to the district meeting and it was frustrating because parents aren't allowed to just come and speak for two minutes. And like is there any more public comment?

**Interviewer:** They're not allowed to do that?

**Laurie:** You are not allowed to do that. You have to get a hold of a person at the district, whoever this person is, at least 24 hours in advance, sign up to speak and then they let you know if you're approved to speak. So as a parent, I'm not even allowed to just come. I have to be approved and they have to know the topic I'm going to speak about and so I went and I spoke and then there was another mother whose children are in Valley School District, but she also teaches for the Valley School District. She got up and spoke too and said, like everything that I didn't have time to say but spoke very eloquently and we both were just very frustrated about it. And I'll explain what my problems with it are. From there, I came back and was talking actually to the librarian and one of the counselors about... I think the parents need to know that the only way we're going to be heard about proficiency-based grading is that they need to be on the ground, school district board, their tail they need to be... bombard them with public comment. They need to email them. And so I had written up little fliers with all of their email addresses

and then two days later, it was this community council meeting and I was like, come to our community council meeting express your concerns and we will. Or, you know, if you don't want to type in this email address, come, we'll pass on your concerns. And then I went to parent teacher conferences the next day. And the librarian was like, yeah that would be fine. You know, just trying to ask a veteran teacher and community council person. So I was passing them around at parent teacher conferences and just saying, you know, have you been, have you been affected by proficiency-based grading and do you have concerns or questions come to the community council meeting or reach out to the Valley School district board members and here's their email addresses. That's all it said, a little flyer was passing them around. Well, Mr. Holman stopped me and told me that I was not allowed to pass those out and he said that at the parent teacher conference. And I was like, but parents don't know what avenues of communication they have to express their concerns. They can go and complain to the teachers, but the teachers feel like their hands are tied. And I'm like, they need to know that they have an advocacy group for parents. And the community council is that avenue. And they need to know they can come and that they don't need to type up an email. They can just come tell us. We'll pass on their concerns. And if we can collect enough concerns, maybe it'll make a dent. And so he told me I wasn't allowed to do that. And he also said that the representative from the district got a hold of him after I spoke at the district meeting and pretty much was told that they needed to rein me in. And I was furious! I was like, no, you don't get to rein me in. I can say what I want about this. And I can gather support from other parents who have similar concerns because you will hear us. And so I felt very frustrated and almost betrayed because I felt like Mr. Holman should, you know? And like, he was like, I don't know what to tell you. His comments were very veiled. It was, I understand your frustrations. I understand that. However, as an employee of Valley School District, it was pretty much like, I have to tell you this because they're my bosses, but you're right and it is a bunch of crap. That's the impression I got. And so in the community council meeting, that's what we were... That's what the whole deal was. Then okay fine, this will go on the minutes and I will express my concerns here on the minutes and I will also let everybody else here on this council know that here is a huge, huge issue and I'm not going to back down. (Interview 5)

For Laurie, the entire issue of proficiency-based grading is understood from a mediating position between parents and the district. This short excerpt represents only 7 minutes of an hour-long detailed play-by-play of all the events she related about the decision—including the direct impact on her children. Throughout her account she regularly described the particular points where the implementation of the decision had gone awry: the mistranslation of the new number-based system into historical grade point

averages, the misunderstanding and application of rubrics, and most importantly the meaning of proficient and what an “A” means in the new system. Yet, while her disagreement was clearly articulated, she makes clear that she is not against proficiency-based grading, but “how [Crescent] is doing proficiency-based grading.” She regularly described her feelings about this issue in negative language: “so frustrated,” “so animated,” “I was furious.” She also expressed a desire to change the policy in clear prescriptive terms and mentioned these changes in repeated meetings throughout the year.

As can be seen from the excerpt, she sought to address the issue by various deliberate actions. Her participation in the district board meeting as one of two parent representatives, creating and distributing flyers at parent teacher conferences, strategic talks with teachers and the librarian, and phone calls with district board members. She also reported withholding speech in a couple of meetings due to her frustration and her perception of the political dynamics at play.

In this example, we learn how all-consuming one SCC decision can be for a given parent member. As can be seen from the other parent members, this decision took on immense importance for the entire SCC, but for Laurie it reached a very personal and profound emotional depth. As evidenced by the emotion-laden language, tears in her eyes during the interview, and her various actions, SCC decisions and the dissonance felt can deeply impact a parent member’s emotional and motivational state. More than any other interview on the topic, her motivational language was articulate and repeated: “you don’t get to rein me in,” and “you will hear us.”

## Decision 2: Latinos in Action and People of the Pacific

It is a regular occasion on the Crescent High SCC that funding proposals are specifically designated for two particular clubs: Latinos in Action and People of the Pacific. A teacher on the SCC, Katie Flores, is involved with the clubs and regularly advocates for proposals for the groups. As Laurie recounted these decisions, she expressed the following:

**Laurie:** Yeah, it does seem to be like everyone when something comes up with like the People of the Pacific group or L.I.A. stuff people just seem to be all excited and get behind it. But I feel conflicted every time it comes up because I feel like so much support goes behind that. I had brought up several years ago, you know, can we submit proposals and suggested submitting a proposal for a scholarship for a group of students. The teachers could also submit a student that had made the most progress, you know and I was told that that was too... [we] couldn't single out, you know, like 15, 20 students because the money is to go towards affecting the most population in the school and yet every time they do the POP, stuff like that, that group has like 15 to 20 students in it.

**Interviewer:** Is that right? There's that.

**Laurie:** Yeah. And I was like, well, you know, why is that group OK? Is it because it's the ethnic part of it, you know but yet, if we were both... if we were gonna just pull from the bottom, no matter what race, no matter what language and just pull from whoever had improved the most, it would affect more students in the school, you know, and give them a scholarship. Not necessarily to source school, but just money for whatever they wanted, you know? And so, yeah, I feel conflicted with that because I feel like there's a lot of focus, a lot of money put on ESL students. And I also have a conflict with that because I have several family members who are teachers in elementary schools and so I see the conflict that they have with not just trying to teach, but now they have to send home any communication with the parents that if they're sending home an e-mail or a letter, they have to get the school to translate it and so it has to go home in two languages. And so they're not only teachers now, they're supposed to be bilingual and so the stuff with the ESL makes me really frustrated because I just feel like, I don't really feel like we're serving our students in the best way. And so, yeah, I generally don't speak out about that, but I feel like a lot of people think it's great or at least they act like it's great. Yeah. Let's serve these minority populations and I just, I feel frustrated with it but I don't say very much. But I generally feel like most people think anything to give support in clubs and groups and fieldwork and funding to the minorities is going to help them. I don't necessarily think that that's working in the way that we have it set up now. (Interview 5)



In this segment, Laurie described repeated invested decisions taken by the SCC which she regularly voted to approve. She described this dissonance this way: “I feel conflicted every time it comes up.” Her actions to vote on behalf of the decisions belied her thoughts and she expresses a sense of internal conflict or dissonance. She expressed a desire for the funds to be spent more broadly for underperforming students and admitted that she feels “really frustrated.” The decisions are recurring, which prolongs this sense of conflict for Laurie over an extended period of time.

Although she raised her thoughts “several years ago,” her predominant actions were withholding speech in meetings. She mentioned that, “I generally don’t speak” and “I don’t say very much” when these items come up. She mentioned later in the interview that she doesn’t speak in fear that she, “might come off sounding racist” and “might sound very unkind.” She surmises that that is why others do not speak up as well.

The unique aspect of this decision is that the actions stemming from the internal dissonance are exclusively speech withholding. In repeated instances Laurie withholds her thoughts and votes on behalf of decisions she disagrees with. In other words, Laurie prefers to hold back in order to manage her relationships and reputation with others rather than resolve her dissonance regarding the issue. Perhaps what can be learned from this segment is that the motivational state to resolve dissonance can be in conflict with other reputational pressures during decision-making. This leads to prolonged dissonance that continues at a fairly significant intensity over a long period of time and possibly drives parent members to reduce dissonance by changing behaviors outside of the SCC. Laurie, for example, runs a nonprofit that helps Latino immigrant families integrate into public schools. She spoke of that work extensively during the interview in relation to this

decision.

## Deana

### **Biographical Sketch**

Deana is 44 years old and both of her children attend Crescent High School. She has lived in her home for 7 years and has lived in the community for 24 years. Deana has served on the community council for a total of 6 years, including stints as chairperson at the junior high where her children attended. She currently serves as a parent member on the Crescent High SCC. She plans to participate on the school community council for “at least two years, ” and possibly more in order to stay on while her youngest child is still attending school. Deana is White, lower-middle income, and did not attend college.

Deana speaks very little in SCC meetings and describes herself as “a silent observer.” She said that she felt particularly reserved in the high school SCC because it is “really intense sometimes.” In her role as the chair of the junior high SCC she reported feeling a little more comfortable, but was “always pretty quiet.” This was also the case in the interview, which was the shortest interview of a Crescent SCC member by almost an hour. While I asked the same questions in all interviews, Deana took 37 minutes to discuss the questions, whereas the other interviews averaged well over 90 minutes. When I started in with the first question about a time she felt like she made a difference, she laughed nervously, paused and said, “these are going to be difficult questions.”

## Power and Responsibility

Deana was clear about her purpose for participating on the SCC. She wanted to glean information that she otherwise wouldn't know and stay up to date about the happenings at the school. She does not care for the decision-making and allocation of the budget. Additionally, she does not talk to neighbors or anyone else in the community about the SCC and continues serving because, "I want to." She does not express a sense of responsibility to her own family over the community; rather Deana simply does not seem to think of her council participation in that way.

**Deana:** I don't feel like I go into the community council with a goal or agenda or something for my kids. I like to go because of the information that I get because I'm not at the school. I like to hear about the different like, I would have not known about the den that they created because my son doesn't tell me those things. So that's my, why I go is just to keep knowledge of what's happening at the school and those kinds of things....

I mean, I like it when the principal gives us his spill on what's going on. You know, projects for the schools or those kinds of things. Those are my favorite things. As far as spending the money, sometimes it's like redundant. Yeah, they want money, here we go, let's just send it. It's okay, but I like more information from the principal, type thing. (Interview 1)

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**Deana:** I don't really have conversations with anybody. I don't, you know, socialize outside of there with anybody there. And there, don't really talk about it. Just, hey, you comin'? Did you get my email? Those kinds of things. I don't really have any kind of... Did you get the minutes done today? This week?

**Interviewer:** Interesting, yeah, so no conversations like with other, so other parents that aren't on the School Community Council. Yeah. Neighbors or friends or anything...

**Deana:** I don't know of anybody else that doesn't go unless they have to go. They that want to be there and are voting. I don't know of anybody that just goes to the meetings just to go to the meetings. (Interview 1)

## Decision Synopsis

During her interview, Deana described one invested decision and one advisory decision. In contrast to decision reports in other interviews, both decisions were only briefly addressed even after repeated follow up questions about issue specifics. Deana expressed substantive disagreement with both decisions and stated her disagreement at an SCC meeting for one of the two decisions. As she stated early in her interview, the decision-making on the SCC was not important to Deana, although she referenced her children in connection with both decisions. The decision on which she did act and mention her child was proficiency-based grading—the most salient issue of the entire year. Due to the nature of the decision, it was prolonged for many months. The one action Deana reported in reference to proficiency-based grading was speaking to Laurie after a meeting.

## Decision Processes

### Decision 1: Proficiency-Based Grading

As we discussed proficiency-based grading, Deana started to describe her position when her daughter, Katherine, joined the conversation from the couch:

**Deana:** I don't completely agree with the proficiency-based grading. I don't. I mean, I understand their reasoning behind it, they want to make sure they are proficient in something. But at the same time, just throw it in like with Laurie's daughter being that senior, throwing all that in right before college. You know, it seems...But, you know, what do you do? At this point, you can't really change it [laugh]. So...

**Interviewer:** Mmm, Yeah. Is the, because people have mentioned... like when, tell me your name again, sorry?

**Deana:** Katherine.

**Interviewer:** Katherine, sorry. When Katherine was saying that an a minus isn't good enough. I heard a couple parents say, and this is kind of what your suggestion was too - that it's really the fact that the new grading system is making it so A's are harder to get or something.

**Deana:** Uh huh, Yeah,.

**Interviewer:** Is that the main problem?

**Deana:** Yeah, I think it is because they're saying that three is proficient, but then here's that other number that's still up here that kids like Katherine see that number and like well there's more for me to get. Normally they would just get a hundred percent.

**Katherine:** Actually, some teachers actually don't put fours in, so we can only get an A minus. And it goes as an A minus on gradebook and drops your grade.

**Interviewer:** Interesting, I see.

**Katherine:** It pisses me off.

**Deana:** That's the difficult part. Because of the, when they say you have to have a three, but, you know, but...(Interview 1)

In this excerpt, Deana describes the particular disagreement that she has with proficiency-based grading. Her own daughter, typically a straight A student, is unable to get As in those classes where proficiency-based grading has already been implemented. Given that her daughter is immediately impacted, it is clear that the issue is important to Deana. She also designates the particular problem and expresses a desire to change how they translate the new number system into grade point averages. She and her daughter use language that expresses their negative emotional states: “It pisses me off,” “That’s the difficult part,” and “That was hard.”

In order to understand and address the issue, Deana spoke to Laurie in one-on-one conversations during and before the meetings. She reported that she and Laurie discussed “how they have the one, two, three, four and three is proficient.” In other words, they

went over the particulars of the grading scale. In addition to these conversations, Deana described the issue to Principal Holman in a meeting and in a different meeting gave the example of Katherine not wanting to take an art class graded on the new scale because she did not want to get a bad grade.

In the process of this decision, Deana reported almost all of the psychobehavioral conditions of the developmental dissonance process, but it is unclear whether she experienced dissonance at all. In the other SCC members' accounts of this issue it becomes clear very early on that they see themselves acting between discordant parties, but here Deana does not mention those parties directly. What is possibly occurring in this anomalous example is that Deana is missing the basic sense of responsibility and power and thus the disagreement and importance of the decision do not register as internal or mediating conflict. Right after articulating her disagreement with the issue, she says, "...But, you know, what do you do? At this point, you can't really change it [laugh]. So..." In a situation where your actions do not impact the decision and there is no one to account to, the decision is perhaps "difficult," but not dissonance-inducing.

#### Decision 2: AVID [College Eligibility Program]

After I asked about decisions made by the SCC regarding minority students, Deana expressed frustration with programs that target specific demographic groups:

**Deana:** The only thing that I can think I can remember right now is that they do talk a lot about AVID and stuff, and I think it's great that they do that. But they also don't do anything for normal, middle of the road kind of kids that I have, you know? They don't get any help at all. But, I mean, I appreciate what they do for the kids that wouldn't have any help at all family wise.

**Interviewer:** What is AVID? Do you know?

**Deana:** It think it is like a Latino push for college kind of a thing?

**Interviewer:** I see, it's different, because there's AVID. There's a bunch of acronyms that I'm still...

**Deana:** Yeah, I don't know what they all are.

**Interviewer:** But AVID and then there's LIA [Latinos in Action], which is a different kind of thing. Right? So AVID, you're saying, is kind of like college prep for Latino students?

**Deana:** I think so. Is that what it is?

**Katherine:** Yeah. Yeah. That's why...

**Deana:** I just feel like they, you know, I mean, I don't, I'm not opposed to them supporting that, I just feel like those kinds is just what they focus on, alot. They should focus on, you know, everyone.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah. And do you ever say anything?

**Deana:** No [laughs].

**Interviewer:** How come do you think?

**Deana:** I feel like the members that are on the community council at the high school are[n't] really the type of people you say those kinds of things to. I feel like I'm better off just going with the flow [laugh].

**Interviewer:** Oh, interesting, huh. Can you say more about that? Is it... There's another question that might help elaborate about that. But you say that they're not the kind of people that you...

**Deana:** I feel like it's just better if I just... that's their majority decision and just, we'll just keep going with that [laugh].

**Interviewer:** Yeah, I see.

**Deana:** I'm not the type that's going to say anything that's going to rock the boat or, yeah... (Interview 1)

In this sequence, Deana described an invested decision to fund college prep activities for Latino students. Although she didn't reference a particular decision, proposals of different kinds for AVID and LIA come up often in the Crescent High SCC

meetings. Deana was measured in her disagreement with the decisions: “I think it's great that they do that. But they also don't do anything for normal, middle-of-the-road kind of kids that I have.” Despite her disagreement, she repeatedly voted in favor of these decisions. Her statements—frequently moving between hesitant support and disagreement—expressed her internal conflict regarding the issue. She also specifically proposed her desired alternative: “They should focus on, you know, everyone.”

When I asked whether she had said anything about the topic, she said “no,” and laughs. Thus, the primary action stemming from this situation was speech withholding. Because these decisions came around fairly frequently, she was regularly withholding speech in order to not “rock the boat.” She also stated that she didn’t speak up because it was “their majority decision.”

As with other situations where members opted to withhold speech, this decision illustrates the countervailing social pressures in SCC meetings. The motivation to resolve dissonance for Deana did not outweigh her desire to keep the peace. As a less talkative person, the social pressures extant at the meeting might have far outweighed her internal drive for personal consistency. Yet, another factor in this case was the limited importance that Deana placed on these decisions in the first place. Furthermore, her disagreement with the issue was quite modest and thus the discomfort of the dissonance might have been similarly attenuated.

### **Conclusion: Pragmatic Citizenship at the Crescent High SCC**

The individual level data presented above demonstrates the significant amount of civic activity that took place on the Crescent High SCC during the year of the study. As



the most parent-strong council, the Crescent High SCC made more decisions during the year than all three of the other councils combined. With an average of over nine decisions voted on per meeting, there were a perpetual number of incidents where disagreement emerged and the dissonance cycle initiated for individual parent members on the council. Furthermore, nearly every member reported feeling empowered to make decisions on the SCC and a strong sense of responsibility for the decisions at hand. Only Laurie and Deana suggested differently, and although Laurie complained that the decision power of the SCC was restrained, she, more than any other member, saw the SCC as a powerful intermediary between the parents of the school and the school district. This combination of heightened activity and members who felt empowered to make decisions provided the most educational institutional context for pragmatic citizenship among the four cases. The parent members of the Crescent High SCC were constantly put into positions that required behavioral adjustments in order to direct the outcome of decisions.

In order to demonstrate the educational nature of these experiences for pragmatic education, I conclude by detailing the actions of the members for the largest decision reported in interviews: proficiency-based grading. As stated earlier, although the sheer volume of decisions was so high on the Crescent High SCC, single decisions took on outsize significance and represented a large portion of time, resources, and efforts made by the SCC parent members. As seen above, proficiency-based grading was reported by six of the seven members as one of the two most important decisions. While each account stands separately above, when analyzed across individual cases, it becomes clear that many of the individual actions parent members took increased the points of interest that were party to the decision (recognition of difference) and coordinated actions toward a

desired outcome (coordination of interest). Based on these two criteria of experiential education, the activities of the members of the Crescent High SCC were highly educational for democratic citizenship.

One of the most surprising findings of the interviews was that two members, Melodie and Marilyn, originally agreed with the policy of proficiency-based grading. In her interview, Melodie recounted that she had been a proponent of proficiency-based grading for many years and that she had anticipated the policy eagerly from the district (Interview 7). Marilyn similarly expressed confusion at why the policy was such a big deal and why so many people were upset about the policy (Interview 3). Although each member began with a positive view of the issue, each one then detailed a process whereby the SCC meeting interactions convinced them that there was a problem with implementation of the grading system. In response, Melodie reported gathering information on the website and expanding her understanding of the problem. She also reported an increased recognition of the difficulty for the teachers who did not “know how to do it” (Interview 7). Melodie’s youngest child had graduated high school before the year of the study, so the increased awareness of other interests came at a time when she had very little reason to oppose the policy. Her actions demonstrate a willingness to not only recognize the plight of teachers and the position of other parents, but to make personal efforts to change the situation. She explained that after becoming aware of the poor implementation of the policy, she regularly checked the explanation of the policy on the district website and sent a message to the district administrators to clarify the information so that parents could better understand it (Interview 7).

Additionally, while Marilyn admitted that originally the policy “wasn’t affecting

me the same way” because her child was near graduation, she started “listening to [the other members]” because of how often the issue was raised and how insistent the other members were (Interview 3). This repeated interaction about the poor implementation of the policy at SCC meetings made her “rethink” the issue and prompted her to go to the district website on her own to find out more. Thus, similar to Melodie, Marilyn increasingly recognized the interests of the other parents and adjusted her behavior to further learn about their problems and ultimately “sympathize with them” (Interview 3).

While Melodie’s actions to contact the district administration demonstrate efforts to coordinate between parents and administrators, it was the other members of the council, Sara, Nancy, and Laurie, who went to great lengths to coordinate various interested parties around a different outcome for the policy. Sara, as a member of the school district SCC (and the Crescent High SCC), reported in her interview about her efforts to inform the district superintendent and district board members about the problems with the policy for Crescent High teachers (Interview 6). She not only told the “person that is charge of performing grading,” but emailed her entire network of SCC members at other schools in the area about the issue. From her efforts, she explained that the district performed a training for the teachers at Crescent High and that she personally talked to teachers afterward to assure the training went well. Additionally, she said that the president of the school board came to a Crescent High SCC meeting, “because I was telling them” to come to Crescent High at the district SCC meeting (Interview 6). Having repeatedly insisted on that message, the president did come to a Crescent High SCC meeting in November 2018 and received detailed accounts from teachers, the librarian, and the SCC parents about their struggle with the new grading policy. The most

memorable exchange of the meeting was when Nancy, the chair of the SCC, explicitly said that she could not support the policy if it did not change. Nancy reported in her interview that the meeting with the president was not her only attempt to address the policy with district administrators. She also reported two direct exchanges with district board members at a town hall meeting in which she articulated anew the problems of the policy (Interview 4).

These actions by Sara and Nancy with district board members, teachers, and SCC members further coordinated the interests and clarified the problems with the implementation of the policy. Yet, no one did more on the Crescent SCC than Laurie in this regard. Her interview account details her personal efforts to disseminate information about the policy to parents at the school, thus informing them about the problem and giving them contact information for board members in order to register their own complaints with the issue (Interview 5). Additionally, Laurie spoke with teachers on various occasions about the policy and listened to their first-hand accounts with the new system. What is more, Laurie contacted district board members by phone, registered to speak at a board meeting, and delivered to the board pointed critiques collected from teacher and parent experience (Interview 5). These efforts by Nancy, Sara, and Laurie demonstrate individual efforts by each to coordinate interests among various parties around the issue of proficiency-based grading. Ultimately, each sought to improve the implementation of the policy and made some gains along the way. According to their accounts, Principal Holman made accommodations for teachers in the school regarding the policy. Furthermore, the school board president, after hearing the complaints of the SCC parents and teachers, said he was willing to change his vote about the policy.

At the end of the study, the proficiency-based grading issue continued to evolve without conclusion. Laurie and Nancy explicitly stated that they would take further action. As each further action is taken, new circumstances will emerge, new parties will engage. Nancy already told of other parents on the elementary SCC whom she might tutor in their interactions with the district school board (Interview 4). In these ways and many others, as the issue continues, parent members will continue to readjust and other interested parties become aware of the issue. As members become increasingly aware of other perspectives through this active process and seek to direct the outcome in their own way, each will build increasing capacity to solve future problems that arise at Crescent High School.

## CHAPTER 6

### RIVERSIDE HIGH SCHOOL SCC

In what follows, I detail the developmental dissonance cycle with seven individual parent members of the Riverside High School SCC: Wendy, Ellen, Rick, Allison, Paula, Natalie, and Jenny. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, the Riverside High SCC is a parent-strong council. The meetings are organized, called to order, and directed throughout by Allison, the parent chair. Furthermore, the council meetings consistently last more than 2 hours and cover a wide range of topics. The primary point of difference between the Riverside SCC and the other parent-strong SCC, Crescent High, is the number of decisions made per meeting. Whereas both SCCs are closely matched on all other institutional indicators, the Riverside SCC makes five decisions per meeting on average, whereas the Crescent High SCC makes over nine decisions. During the observations and interviews, it became apparent that the decision-making disparity between the two parent-strong councils was due to the way in which they allocated their annual Land Trust budget. Whereas the Crescent SCC allocates their budget based on teacher proposals in every meeting, the Riverside SCC ceased that form of allocation the year prior to the study and instead transitioned to a system of funding three large programs over multiple years. This significantly reduced the number of decisions made per meeting and thus the opportunity for disagreement on the council. As will be seen in

the individual cases, this form of decision-making especially limits instances of internal dissonance where a member votes to approve a decision she disagrees with. Yet even with these marked differences, the members of the Riverside High SCC still make invested decisions with which individual members disagree and the council regularly weighs in on advisory decisions, which often introduces individual members into experiences of mediating dissonance.

The Riverside High School SCC is composed of 12 parent members, 5 teachers, the school vice principal and the school principal. Of the 12 parent members, 9 regularly attend SCC meetings and I interviewed 7 of these 9 members. Eleven of the 12 members are women. Eleven of the 12 members were born in the United States and White, and one member immigrated from Latin America and is Latino. There is a relatively consistent amount of experience on the council with most members having served between 4 and 9 years on school community councils. Only one member had served for less than 4 years and she is currently serving in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year. No member is currently serving on multiple SCCs and all but one have previously served on the PTA or nonprofit boards. Four of the seven members are considered upper income and have average annual household incomes greater than \$200,000. Of the three remaining members, two have average household incomes greater than \$100,000 and only one is considered lower middle income at \$50,000 to \$100,000. All of the members interviewed have completed a 4-year bachelor's degree and five of the seven members have completed graduate degrees. Lastly, all of the members interviewed are in their late 40s and early 50s. There is little variation in age, approximately 8 years, among the parent members of the council.

## Wendy

### **Biographical Sketch**

Wendy is 47 years old and has one child who attends Riverside High School. She has lived in her home for 20 years and lived in the same community her entire life. In total, she has served on School Community Councils for 5 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Riverside High SCC and did not mention having served in any additional positions on the SCC. She has served on “several non-profit boards” and plans to serve on the SCC for 1 additional year. Wendy is White, upper income, and completed a master's degree. She is a working professional and hosted the interview in a very tidy high-rise office in downtown Salt Lake City. Like her orderly office, her comments always follow a direct line of logic and she addresses each point, rarely missing an aspect of the question. Despite the orderliness of her speech and environment, at one point during the interview her formal presentation gave way to emotion as she wiped a tear while talking about lower-income students at Riverside High School. In SCC meetings she occasionally crochets while listening. She speaks less frequently than others, but when she does speak she often asks direct questions or explains well considered proposals.

### **Power and Responsibility**

Wendy speaks about the purpose of the SCC in terms of a decision-making body that is meant to govern by consensus. As she expresses below, she desires to be part of a community that promotes the learning of less-advantaged students:

**Wendy:** And I think part of it is just because of the way the SCC process works, where it's designed to be so collaborative. And they you know, you've been there



where sometimes the discussions go on a very, very long time that by the time we get to sort of vote, like I feel like we've really worked through it. I've had my chance to be part of this decision in some way and I feel like we've been good at modifying things when we've looked at it. Like, okay, here are a couple of things up on the board for Trust Lands and do we go with this one? We've talked through it, we've made a solid decision. (Interview 8)

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**Wendy:** So, if you send, you know, five debaters to the Tournament of Champions or Stanford or Berkeley, you know, for a weekend tournament, you know, you've sent like five or six kids. And that's a great experience for them. But, if they've, if they're doing well enough to qualify for those, you know, they've got some good skills behind them. They're going to graduate from high school. But, if you've got kids who have no English proficiency, if they get through high school at all, it's going to be very, very hard for them to have jobs and support their families. So, it's what's going to have the longer, the bigger impact over the longer time period and that can have a measurable outcome. So it's hard to say, you know we've spent money on debate travel, to say like, okay, here's the difference that it made. Do you see any performance outcomes for that? Like you teach kids to read, you can. They've learned to read.

**Interviewer:** Okay, so all those things are kind of playing into why on ELL it makes more sense. Yeah. Interesting.

**Wendy:** Yeah. I mean it better fulfills what the mission of trust lands money is for and also sort of as a member of the community what I want to promote. (Interview 8)

## Decision Synopsis

In her interview, Wendy described one invested decision, two advisory decisions, and two decisions on which the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. Of the five total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with three of them. She substantively disagreed with the decision on all three accounts and expressed that disagreement in SCC meetings for two decisions. In terms of importance to Wendy, she referenced her own child in connection with one decision and personally took action on four of the five decisions. She expressed a desire for a different

decision outcome for two of the decisions and characterized one decision negatively. Four of the decisions she recounted in her interview were raised in multiple meetings throughout the year. Lastly, she reported taking personal action in the following ways: one-on-one talks with stakeholders for three decisions, taking action in meetings for two decisions, and withholding speech for one decision.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Fall Break

In this excerpt, Wendy describes a decision proposed by the school district to remove fall break (also known as UEA in Utah) from the school calendar. As she recounts here, when the SCC discussed the issue, Wendy decided to take action:

**Wendy:** The most recent experience that comes to mind is working on the calendar committee change. So we talked about it at SCC and, you know everybody listened to my, like, why do we not get to keep UEA? Tamara Bentley (School Board member) made her suggestions, like go complain to the school board about it. So I did. And then I emailed all the SCCs in the district and said, hey, here's what you know, here's our concern. Here's the speech I gave at SCC, if you want some talking points. Here are the e-mail addresses for all the school board members and the ones representing your school. So let me know if you would like to keep UEA too. And then they ended up re-opening the calendar committee and then brought it back. So anyway, that was my personal, yes, I helped save UEA! (Interview 8)

In recounting this decision, Wendy described an advisory decision on which the Riverside High SCC was asked to vote on calendar options for the upcoming school years. All three options proposed would have removed fall break and, although the calendar committee had already narrowed the choices, Wendy disagreed with all three options: “why do we not get to keep UEA?” she asked. Wendy very quickly portrayed herself in a mediating position between SCC members and district administrators. She

expressed a desire to change the available calendar options presented and then took it on herself to initiate the change.

As the primary actor between SCC members and district administrators, Wendy first spoke out in the SCC meeting and then “emailed all the SCCs in the district” about the details of the issue, including talking points and board member email addresses. The action in the meetings along with the strategic communication to other SCC parent members in the district was accompanied by her personally appearing at the district board meeting. In the original SCC meeting, a district board member, Tamara, suggested that Wendy complain and gave her instructions about getting onto the agenda. She went to the meeting and “did my little speech.” After her efforts, she reported, “they ended up re-opening the calendar committee and then brought it back.”

In this case it becomes clear that mediating dissonance can be immediately felt and acted upon. Whereas most mediating situations are prolonged affairs lasting many months, here Wendy described one meeting interaction and her prompt actions to address the disagreement. Although Wendy only briefly described the SCC meeting interaction with other parent members, nearly all members vocally disagreed with the position of the district and Wendy became the designated representative of those views to the district. In this mediating position between SCC parent members and district administrators, she promptly acted in various ways and was successful in changing the decision. Throughout, she described herself as the primary actor in the district wide decision: “I helped save UEA!”

## Decision 2: Dress Code

In this excerpt, Wendy describes a situation where she is at odds with most parent members of the SCC regarding a dress code decision. As the SCC continued to talk about the decision repeatedly over the year, Wendy expressed her disagreement by email and then backed off after pushback from the chair.

**Wendy:** So that year several of the parents on the SCC were really focused on dress code and that just sucked up this huge chunk of the agenda at every single meeting. And I was really frustrated. I was like there are 200 refugee kids in this school, there's this, this, this. Why dress code for the year? And at one point, a couple of parents had sent out... I mean, there were, like they felt really strongly. They wanted to get rid of the dress code. They're like, oh, it's gender biased. Kids are getting shamed and blah blah blah and we need to get rid of it. And so at one point I sent an email out to the, you know, there was some discussion going back forth. And I sent an email around just to the other SCC parents and I said: totally get your point, but just one thing to consider is high school is preparing kids for adulthood and like here are experiences I've seen professionally where people out on their first jobs are not getting promoted because they don't know how to dress at work. Or they're getting sent home to change or, you know, in terms of the legislature or, you know, different jobs I've had or here it's like... You know, it's like they need to, you know, yes, it's annoying, but they need to learn it sooner or later, so you might as well be embarrassed in high school getting pulled out for dress code, then sent home from work for dress code. That was sort of my point. And the chair who was one of the like adamant, I want to get rid of the dress code people, sent me a note back and said, if you want something to go out to the committee, you need to send it to me and I'll decide if it should be distributed or not. You cannot contact the rest of the committee. I was like, really? Like I've been on SCC's before. And I emailed her back and said okay, but if that's the case then you need to let everybody on SCC know because here are the other people in SCC that I have gotten group emails from before.

**Interviewer:** Oh, I see, keep the standards the same.

**Wendy:** You know, you can't just say that when you're disagreeing with what I sent. And at that point I was like, okay, this is just not kind of the hill I want to die on. If they just want people to wear whatever to school like fine. But anyway, but it just sucked up the whole year. And it really frustrated me because I felt like there were other more important things that we could have been spending our time on. (Interview 8)

In this sequence, Wendy describes an advisory decision that was addressed over

and over again at SCC meetings. Here, Wendy says she originally expressed her disagreement with spending so much time on the dress code when, according to her, there were other more important things to discuss: “I was like, there are 200 refugee kids in this school, there’s this, this, this. Why dress code for the year?” In this situation where the other members continued to raise an issue of relatively less importance from her perspective, Wendy became “really frustrated.”

In order to address the situation, Wendy decided to write an email to all the members of the SCC to express her position: “I said, totally get your point, but just one thing to consider is high school is preparing kids for adulthood.” In sending this email, Wendy not only expressed her disagreement with the time spent on the decision (form), but the idea to change the dress code (substance). After a combative email exchange with the chair of the committee, Wendy made the decision to back off: “And at that point, I was like, okay, this is just not kind of the hill I want to die on. If they just want people to wear whatever [to] school, like fine.”

What is not clear from Wendy’s account is whether she represented any other parents who also disagreed with the policy change. Because of this missing information, it is unknown whether she experienced mediating dissonance and felt pressures to resist the change because of those responsibilities. What is also unique about this case is that Wendy clearly expressed frustration because of time spent on the topic, but did so primarily *before* the decision was finalized. Thus, her internal conflict was not a result of a decision she was party to in the past, but too much time spent on a decision she might have been fine to discuss in shorter segments. The frustration she felt resembles internal dissonance (resulting from unwarranted time spent on the topic) and this prompted her to

send an email to the entire SCC. As she reports, the email exchange was unproductive and she adjusted her subsequent behavior by withholding speech in later meetings. She ultimately reduced dissonance by adjusting cognition to align with her acquiescent behavior: “this is just not kind of the hill I want to die on.”

## **Ellen**

### **Biographical Sketch**

Ellen is 55 years old and has three children who attend Riverside High School. She has lived in her current residence for 16 years and lived in the community for 35 years. In total, she has served on school community councils for 5 years. She serves on the Riverside High SCC as a parent member and plans to serve for 4 or 5 more years. In addition to her work on the SCC, she has served on the PTA, Home Owners Association boards, and religious councils for over 20 years. Ellen is White, upper-middle income, and completed a bachelor’s degree. Ellen’s participation in SCC meetings is often jovial and marked by short flourishes of humor. Her one-off comments are accompanied by a grin that typically lightens the mood. She says she participates on the SCC “out of responsibility” and sees her time as an important “human sacrifice” that is necessary for the appropriate care of Land Trust funds.

### **Power and Responsibility**

The idea of sacrificing her time for the good of the community infused most of Ellen’s comments about the SCC. She repeatedly made clear that she values the governance structure of the SCC and feels that local decision-making needs to be

protected from the district superintendent and the “feds.” When I asked her to clarify what she meant about being a sacrificial lamb and why she continues to participate, she addressed both the purpose of the SCC as a decision-making body and the responsibility she feels toward the entire community:

**Ellen:** Yeah. Out of responsibility. Out of a feeling of responsibility to be... And to be a watchdog for Land Trust money. I think there is a real, I actually think that they're right now with this superintendent, it's an attack on trust land money and governance, shared governance. I think there, it feels very much just recently, in the last couple of years maybe, that there's a big pulling back power to the district, trying to get control of it. And less out to their shared governance and letting us decide about that. You know, I feel like they're really get out of their business and into our business about that. And this district is very much, in the state, very much is about shared governance. That is important to me. That is a huge thing, that local government control. You know, get the feds out and local school control, get the district out of as much as they can. You know, have them be the big support. But when you're really deciding about your school, it should be specific to that [...] So that's the other reason I think it's really important to be that sacrificial lamb. Like I don't want to be on another committee. I don't want to sit through a seven hour, you know, five hour meeting at night. I don't want... But it is important for the whole community to have that watched, to have the administration and the school watched. (Interview 9)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Ellen described one invested decision, one advisory decision, and one decision where the SCC has both invested and advisory authority. Of the four total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with two of them. She substantively disagreed in both cases and expressed that disagreement in SCC meetings for one decision. In terms of importance to Ellen, she referenced her own child in connection with one decision and personally took action on two of the three decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for two of the decisions and characterized two decisions negatively. Of the decisions she recounted in

her interview, one was raised in multiple meetings throughout the year. She reported taking personal action in the following ways: gathering information for one decision, one-on-one talks with stakeholders for one decision, taking action in meetings for two decisions, and withholding speech for one decision.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Fundraiser

In the following three excerpts, Ellen describes a fundraiser that was initiated by a student at Riverside High to pay for the student fees for IB tests (exams for the International Baccalaureate program). As the SCC gets involved, one member, Rick, begins to lead the initiative with a prominent member of the Riverside parent community and Ellen “smells a rat”:

**Ellen:** This student girl started down this road of we're just going to raise this endowment so that nobody has to pay for IB tests. That was a simple, clean, great idea. Then Rick kind of took it, got hooked in with this guy and took it to, we can raise three hundred thousand dollars. But this to me smelled bad. Like there was something wrong with this. It was really quick. This gala was ill advised. This one guy was driving the agenda. Then I run with this girl who's got zillions of dollars and she was saying... I started being, kind of venting my frustration about this. You know, he doesn't get that he's being played. I feel like he's being played, but I don't know. So it's hard for me to speak up in the SCC, meaning I don't want to slam him in front of people.

After describing the exchange with her friend, she detailed the reaction from the other members of the SCC and her personal actions to address the situation:

**Ellen:** Everybody smelled a rat, but most of them ended up going. Rick was just disgusted with all of us. He got no support from us. Nobody wanted to go. Well everybody smelled this like something was going on. This doesn't feel like Riverside. This isn't about Riverside and sure enough, so I met with Larry [Principal at Riverside High] and I said this is what I feel like is going on. I don't want you to be played. I want you to be very careful about how you... when you're at the gala and when you stand up and whatever that you say, this is their



thing. We're happy to accept, but I would not be at this gala because what you're going to do is offend the donors. Or let me just tell you, the donors don't know they're giving to Riverside.

After extensively describing the event and personal interactions, Ellen talks about her role on the SCC and how she navigates the situation:

**Ellen:** Yeah. I feel like that SCC involvement is what, one made me even aware. I have the gut feeling... And then gave me access to Larry. See I didn't, in the SCC, want to be super combative with Rick in front of everybody. And that's why I asked for Larry to meet with me separately so that I could describe to him why I felt like what was happening. That it wasn't happening. Rick wasn't doing it to us, it was happening to Rick. And he was a part of it and he was just giving Kyle's (prominent parent from Riverside) party line to us. And I didn't feel like he needed to be beat up by all... Because he kind of, it ended up being where people would kind of dogpile on Rick. That, like, come on Rick this doesn't make sense.

And, you know, Tamara (School Board member) is not one that you let anything get by and she and I have many conversations about this and I'm like... So, yeah I felt like that was the change I made and maybe sitting in those first meetings, the frustration of I... things are happening and I don't have a voice or I'm not sure what to say at this point or I can't change the tide of this, where this gala is going. Nor did I have the time. I was in the middle of my own stuff. So I felt kind of frustrated by this is happening. You know this is being voted on and happening as a go ahead and I am not comfortable with this. (Interview 9)

In this example, Ellen revealed the multidimensional aspects of one of the most controversial decisions of the year for the Riverside High SCC. The decision to raise money on behalf of Riverside High was an invested and advisory decision for the SCC and developed over many months as members of the SCC became increasingly involved with the initiative. From the moment Kyle got involved, Ellen disagrees with the direction of the fundraising initiative: "But to me this smelled bad." Yet, even as she disagreed she was occupied with her own work and did not initially attend to the decision. The decision came to a head as Ellen discussed the fundraiser with a friend who was asked to donate and as the SCC moved toward a vote: "you know this is being voted on and happening as a go ahead and I am not comfortable with this." As the decision

gained more momentum and started to impact her personally, it became more important to Ellen.

As Ellen moved forward publicly and approved the decision, she began to address her internal conflict by seeking one-on-one conversations with other stakeholders outside of the meeting and gathering information from friends. She also reported a number of times when she refrained from speaking in the meetings so as not to be publicly combative with Rick. In this effort she sought out the principal to speak privately, had “many conversations” with the district board member Tamara Bentley, and discussed the issue at length with her friend who was one of the donors. In the end, she worked in many different ways to secure the money for Riverside and allow the principal to save face in the ordeal. In her words, “we were just able to kind of manipulate the manipulator into getting that money after all.”

In this case, we learn that SCC decisions can be part invested and part advisory and thereby prompt both dissonance patterns simultaneously for the same parent member. By Ellen’s account, it was the voting decision of the SCC that increased her own internal conflict and catalyzed her initial actions. Additionally, she explained a contemporaneous experience with her friend who had been asked to donate to the initiative. Her friend’s account of the fundraising purpose was at odds with the original purpose of the fundraiser as explained to the SCC. Experiencing internal dissonance from her SCC commitment and mediating dissonance with her friend, she moved swiftly to attenuate the conflict. Although the initiative was impossible to stop, Ellen’s comments about her intervening actions are telling: “I couldn't stop it from happening. It's kind of a train that was going to wreck. So I just felt like I made everybody aware that this train is coming through town

and clear the tracks. I didn't stop it, but at least we cleared the tracks and nobody got killed.”

## Decision 2: Traffic Light

In this section, Ellen recounted a situation at her elementary school SCC where the majority of the council wanted to put in a traffic light and she disagreed:

**Ellen:** If you teach them (the school children) to use the tunnel, that's the safest. Nobody will argue the fact that the safest route across the street is the tunnel. Nobody would argue that you only have to go half a block either way to access the door. There is no need for a traffic light there. And so what they were trying to do is all different and everything the city was denying and they were getting more and more angry about it and demanding to do something. So what the city finally decided to give. And I kept saying the city keeps telling you the same thing. The fire department tells you the same thing. The police department tells you the same thing. Use the tunnel. (Interview 9)

From the beginning of her account, Ellen reported disagreeing with the council members about the advisory decision to install a traffic light. Furthermore, it is clear in excerpts not included above that the decision was important to Ellen. She referenced her own children in relation to the issue and also acted in various meetings to direct the decision. To clarify her disagreement, she expressed the desire that the school children use the walking tunnel instead of the stoplight and repeatedly voiced that desire.

As the decision proceeds, Ellen's primary action was to speak out in opposition in the meetings. As she was not yet a formal member, she saw the issue as her main reason to attend the meetings: “I wasn't an official member but I went to these meetings specifically for this issue and that's the first kind of foray into the SCC.”

Although many of the steps of the dissonance cycle are accounted for in this decision, it is likely that Ellen did not feel dissonance in connection with this decision.

Although disagreement and importance are necessary components of a decision in order to produce dissonance, internal dissonant conflict is not inevitable with these conditions. In other words, disagreement does not equate to dissonance. In this case, Ellen retained her original position throughout the decision and did not act in a way that ran contrary to her opinion. By her account her actions were very consistent and she does not seem conflicted about the result of the decision: “I know we are losing this battle but it's okay. I want to be that voice that says use the tunnel.” The absence of dissonance here can be partially explained by the absence of responsibility on Ellen’s part. She was not yet a member of the SCC and thus was not accountable to any parents about the decision. Furthermore, her newness on the council sheds light on why she did not report feeling any mediating dissonance. Even though she agreed with the city, she did not reference any personal encounters or connections to city administrators or outside parents and thus felt little or no sense of discord between the parties.

## **Rick**

### **Biographical Sketch**

Rick is 53 years old and has two children who attend Riverside High School. Rick moved to the community 6 years ago and has lived in the same residence since. In total, he has served on the SCC for 4 years. He serves on the Riverside SCC as a parent member and plans to serve for 2 more years. Prior to serving on the SCC, Rick served as a board member for a charter school for 6 years. Rick is White, upper income, and completed a medical doctorate degree. After being asked a question in the interview, Rick regularly paused to think, pursed his lips, and then replied. His somewhat reserved

and pensive demeanor also came out in SCC meetings where he participated less than other parent members. He appreciates the SCC as a place where you “tie everything together—the teacher, the students, the parents and principal.”

### **Power and Responsibility**

Rick sees the SCC as an oversight council, especially in terms of overseeing the work of the school principal. Additionally, he said he works on the council so that the SCC funds do not go to “just white rich kids” and thus evinced a broader view of the SCC.

**Rick:** Well, I think it actually, I mean it's designed to have oversight over, you know, the principal. You know, as to its effectiveness, that's a little of a question. Especially, I'm sure you have a better perspective than I do, whether other SCCs have any oversight. You know, I doubt it. We do some and so I think that's a big function of SCC and you know by holding a little bit of a, a little purse of trust funds. You know, so I think to me that's the main function. The oversight of the principal to make sure he's, you know doing what he says he needs to be doing, and what he's supposed to be doing. (Interview 10)

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**Rick:** And that was awesome getting great feedback and I think the committee was, I give them credit. They're very fair and actually a little more focused on trying to support minority and socially economically challenged families at Riverside. I love that focus. (Interview 10)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In his interview, Rick recounted two invested decisions, two advisory decisions, and one decision where the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. Of the five total decisions Rick reported, he expressed personal disagreement with two of them. He substantively disagreed with one decision, but did not express that disagreement in an

SCC meeting. He also disagreed with the form of another decision and did express that disagreement in a meeting. Rick referenced his own child in connection with one decision and took personal action on four decisions. He expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for three decisions and characterized one decision negatively. Four of the five decisions he recounted in the interview were introduced in multiple meetings. He recalled taking personal action in the following ways: strategic talks with stakeholders for one decision, taking action in meetings for three decisions, and withholding speech for three decisions.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Fundraiser

As might be inferred from Ellen's experience, at the time of our interview, Rick was the primary SCC parent member on the SCC subcommittee for fundraising. Halfway through the first SCC meeting of the year at Riverside, Rick was asked to give an update on his fundraising activities. The following is a description of the interaction sequence from my field notes:

**Field Notes:** He [Rick] began to explain that he is on the board of a committee that is raising money and that they are working to incorporate a 501(c)3. Once they are able to incorporate as a full 501(c)3, they have more commitments of money that will come into the organization. At that point they are opening up the money for grants to be accepted for the funds. At one point he said that they (the members of the committee) were a little disappointed because people at Riverside had not helped the efforts. No sooner had he introduced the initiative were there immediate comments about the way that the money was being raised. One of the first questions was in regard to Kyle Johnson [Riverside parent] and how much power he had on the committee. One member asked, "Why does he [Kyle Johnson] have so much power?" As the discussion continued, many members responded to the conversation in a way that expressed disapproval about the way things had been handled. For instance, one member [Jenny] mentioned that when they attended the fundraising gala it was unclear who the attendees were donating

too. She suggested that some people were told that they were donating to Riverside High School and others did not know who they were donating to. Another member [Ellen], said that she has a very wealthy friend that attended the gala and thought she was donating to “Utah Partners” which was a large organization dedicated to improving education state-wide and that this friend had expressed concern about where the money was going. Another member added that the attendees suspected that Kyle Johnson might be running for office because the governor was there and he and the governor are friends.

As Rick recalled this interaction in the interview, he reported the following:

**Rick:** Yeah, that's when I got raped. I don't know if you, were you there during that part?

**Interviewer:** I was in that meeting, I was in that meeting. That was the first meeting I attended.

**Rick:** I got raped by them for raising \$300,000 [laugh].

I then asked about what the meeting was like for him and he replied:

**Rick:** I was just trying not to mouth off. Really.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Trying not to mouth off.

**Rick:** Yeah, oh yeah. It's a long story. It started off, I set up a committee. A few parents showed up. Very few. And then Kyle, I finally had a one-on-one with Kyle. He had the same vision that I did. Why can't we raise money for you know, for these schools? I don't know if you know about him. I mean he runs an education consultancy there and so one of their divisions is supporting school in terms of their, bringing them back and things if they failed. And he said why can't we raise money you know, for Riverside? It's such a big, strong base. He knew business people and why can't we do that for the school, for our kids? He's got like five kids. He is going to be here for like twelve years if it's going to work out for him. I don't know what he'll decide. If he might end up going back to a private school, so I don't know. Anyway, we had this great same vision and we got this meeting together and then Kyle just wants to kind of do it. But I was trying to push for oversight, some other parents. So the first fight was, let's divide up the money before we even had the money. How are we going to divide it up? So we had like three meetings arguing that. I was like je! [laugh] Already the turf battles had started before we even raised the money. So Kyle got tired of that and says we'll just do our own 501c. Cause I was trying to run it through the Education Foundation.

After describing the meeting interactions and the overall issue at length, Rick explains more about how he felt in the meeting:

**Rick:** I mean just that, that day that I got raked over the goals for raising money. I didn't necessarily feel that I could say everything I wanted. Saying that you guys are a bunch of babies and then the good thing about that, was Larry came in and said some really good things about Kyle and about the program and about what was happening. So anyway, I felt supported and I still didn't speak up anymore.

**Interviewer:** You didn't speak up anymore after that. Yeah. Yeah. But you felt like you held back?

**Rick:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. You gotta be politically correct sometimes [laugh].

He then shared how he felt after the meeting and reports that a group email was sent to him from one of the members:

**Rick:** Again, on that issue. What ended up happening afterwards is I was still kind of roiling over that and boiling over that. And I actually, so somebody said afterwards, sent an email saying Rick thank you. Hopefully this wasn't, hopefully you didn't take this personally about how harsh people were. I can't think of the wording.

**Interviewer:** Someone wrote an email to you?

**Rick:** Yeah. And it was a group email. So in that email, I actually took several hours to form a letter to explain the whole situation that I told you from the start to the end and where that money came from. And I sent it out to everybody. And people definitely thanked me for kind of giving them that whole picture. So it ended up being some positive feedback. (Interview 10)

In these excerpts, Rick describes a decision in which the SCC has advisory and invested authority. The original subcommittee for fundraising was created by the SCC, but as Rick explained, outside entities become involved and the SCC did not have decision-making authority over the new outside entities. Rick initially led a months-long initiative and planned 12 meetings in order to carry out the idea. In more evidence of the importance of the issue, he also said fundraising is his “primary concern” when joining the SCC. He also makes clear that there was strong disagreement on the council over how the money is raised: “I got raped by them for raising \$300,000.” While he clearly felt attacked by the other SCC members in the meeting, he also expressed a desire to raise the



money differently than Kyle Johnson. By his own efforts, he sought to include oversight from the SCC committee and originally attempted to raise the funds through the Salt Lake Education Foundation. His personal efforts diverged from those of Kyle Johnson, who ended up forming an independent 501(c)3 and leading the organization of the fundraising gala. Here, Rick described a situation where he moved forward with Kyle while going against his initial efforts: “Sometimes you just gotta trust the man that brings you money.”

As Rick recalled the contentious meeting he pointed out that months after the gala, the fundraising was still a work in progress: “We still had a fundraiser without even having a 501(c)3.” By his account, his own original efforts failed and he found himself in a meeting defending an initiative that went much differently than he originally envisioned. In this position, he reported withholding speech during the meeting: “You gotta be politically correct sometimes.” He then described his own internal “roiling” after the meeting and the communication by email that ensued among the members of the SCC. To address the issue, he “took several hours to form a letter to explain the whole situation.”

This complex decision dynamic can be understood as a situation where, similar to what Ellen experienced, Rick felt both internal dissonance and mediating dissonance. During the first phase of the issue, Rick acted in a way that was contrary to his own thoughts and previous actions in order to go along with Kyle. Having supported Kyle, Rick was the member of the SCC who mediated between SCC members and Kyle. In his efforts to regain internal consonance and reputational consistency, Rick wrote a letter explaining the fluid situation to the entire SCC. What is also noteworthy in this case is

that Rick held back during the confrontation in the SCC meeting. While not fully explainable as dissonance resolution, it is likely that defending Kyle more during the meeting would have compromised the perception of his original fundraising efforts. Undoubtedly, the “political correctness” he exhibited helped foster the “positive feedback” and reputational repair that he received from the council by email.

#### Decision 2: Land Trust Allocation

In the interview, I asked Rick the standard question of whether he had ever left an SCC meeting thinking that the council should have made a different decision from the one they had voted on. He then replied:

**Rick:** Just that decision about allocating resources to the board's bigger programs. I had to think about it for a couple months, but luckily when it was brought up there was no vote on it. I actually think it was actually two months later when the vote came along. So I had time to think about it. They had discussed it enough that...

**Interviewer:** Yeah, that decision got made over multiple months? Yeah, interesting.

**Rick:** Yeah. So that kind of helped. I was skeptical about that initially. I don't know whether I should say anything or if I did, I want... I did bring up the fact that, you know, I did like that concept of bringing in, engaging the teachers with these... But then I was okay not voting for [teacher proposals]. (Interview 10)

In this response, Rick recalled his own skepticism about the invested council decision to allocate the Land Trust funds to larger programs rather than ad hoc teacher proposals. As the suggestion was made for the change, he had “to think about it for a couple months” because he liked the teacher proposal format used in previous years. While his skepticism demonstrates some disagreement, it is unclear from his account how important the decision was to Rick. What is clear is that the decision was made over many months and over time Rick “was okay not voting for” the teacher proposals.

As the council moved to vote on the decision, Rick spoke out in the meeting and, still feeling some apparent conflict, expressed his liking of the previous format with the teachers. As I witnessed in my observations, Rick's comments and similar comments from others raised awareness of the issue, and the council ultimately designated a small portion of the funds for teacher proposals.

In Rick's account of this decision, we learn that internal conflict can be reduced through deliberation leading up to a decision: "they had discussed it enough." The multimonth discussion persuaded Rick to a point where he felt comfortable moving forward despite his opposing opinions. Yet, even though he was partially persuaded, as the decision came to a vote, Rick acted in the meeting by voicing his opinion. This was unique for Rick because in my observation he participated only seldom in meetings. Although months of deliberation partially assuaged his internal conflict, Rick still felt enough discomfort to act in a way he otherwise rarely did in order to regain consonance.

### Allison

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Allison is 53 years old and has two children who attend Riverside High School. Allison moved to the community 20 years ago and has since lived in the same residence. In total, she has served on SCCs for 8 years. She currently serves as the chair of the Riverside SCC and plans to serve "until my youngest graduates –three more years." In addition to serving on the SCC, Allison served on the PTA at her children's elementary school for 7 years. Allison is White, lower-middle income, and completed a bachelor's degree. As the chair of the committee, Allison always arrived first at SCC meetings. As

members entered, she directed them to the nicely stacked agendas on the entry table and invited them to pick up some food. Under her direction, the monthly meetings often went on for over 2 hours and followed a predictable cadence. She initiated every agenda item and weighed in regularly throughout the meeting. As the discussions progressed, she often stated out loud whether the council was coming to a consensus or whether they would plan to discuss further at upcoming meetings. She regularly reminded the council that we “govern by consensus” and actively worked to assure that consensus was attained prior to finalizing decisions. Multiple members commented positively in their interviews about her leadership on the council and about the collaborative environment that she created as chair.

### **Power and Responsibility**

Allison sees her purpose on the SCC in terms of her chair responsibilities. She views the council as a decision-making body heavily dependent on teacher and principal input. As chair she has sought to move the council forward as a united group and did not mention sitting on the SCC in order to achieve any specific goals for her own children or family. In this excerpt Allison explains how a long-time member (Mark Graham) mentored her on the council in her 1<sup>st</sup> year and her reaction to parent input on the council:

**Allison:** Yeah and people are like hot or cold on him because he was very outspoken, he was saying whatever he wanted, he is very opinionated. But he had so much knowledge. In that first year, he was the one that would like help me figure out like how to run meetings and what could be done and all that. So he was really valuable and yet a pain in the butt. But he loves Riverside and his heart was always in the right place and that's always what I looked at. So he is under the, he was always saying that parents are the ones that need to be making all the decisions. That's why we have an SCC, because they want more parent input. And I say yes, we need to help. But when it comes to things like distant programs or major decisions for the school, the parents do not know as much as the teachers

and the principal. So I very much favor like okay we need to have their input and then parents, we give our input as well. But, I don't feel like we should be saying this is how you're going to do your professional development unless we're trained in that area. So he always felt like he always knew what should happen.

**Interviewer:** Oh, he did. Even about that stuff?

**Allison:** Oh yes, he has all the best ideas. And sometimes he did, but not always. So I felt a lot of pressure from him. I really need to take control and do this and I'm like well we're going to see what the principal and teachers want because if you know, they're the ones that are with the students every day. And if even if it's a great program, if we don't have their buy in, what are we going to do? We're not their boss. (Interview 11)

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**Allison:** I think that there might be some chairs that are like I want to make these changes, so I'm going to do that, but that's not really mine. That's not the way I came into it. I mean essentially you know, they asked me to do it. I said, okay, but I am like, I'll run the meetings and I'll get consensus and we'll move together as a group but I really count on everybody else's voices. I guess not driving some vision of mine. It's the whole group. So to be a chair and just to be organized enough to keep with the minutes and the materials and everything and then just to run the meeting. (Interview 11)

## Decision Synopsis

In her interview, Allison recounted four invested decisions, one advisory decision, and two decisions on which the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. Of the seven total decisions Allison reported, she expressed personal disagreement with four of them. She substantively disagreed with three decisions, but did not express that disagreement in an SCC meeting. She also disagreed with the form of another decision, but also did not express that disagreement in a meeting. Allison did not reference her own child in connection with any decision and took personal action on three decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for three decisions and characterized two decisions negatively. Four of the seven decisions she recounted in the interview were

introduced in multiple meetings. She reported taking personal action in the following ways: strategic talks with stakeholders for one decision, taking action in meetings for one decision, and withholding speech for one decision.

## **Decision Processes**

### Decision 1: Computer Program

In this decision, Allison explains deliberations around purchasing a computer program, which she took part in early in her tenure on the SCC at Riverside High:

**Allison:** There was one meeting a few years ago when I was brand new to Riverside and it was proposed that okay, we need this computer program. They brought it up at one meeting and somebody already had the solution, Mark Graham. And it ended up being like his company or something. It was weird and they pushed through the vote that night. And I went home and I was like I am just not comfortable with that. We shouldn't make decisions and decide to spend, you know, ten thousand, fifteen thousand dollars on the same night if we haven't had time to think about it and, and make those decisions. So that's kind of always been in the back of my mind whenever we're talking about things. Like I don't like to, I don't like to make decisions at one meeting if we can spread it out.

A couple of minutes later when I asked if she ever had an experience when she disagreed with an SCC member, she elaborates further on her experience after the meeting:

**Allison:** Yeah, so that probably is a good example of that. Like, I disagreed with it. Although, I didn't fully disagree with it until I thought about it. And so I hadn't, I didn't say anything at the meeting. Cause I was like, uh, I don't... I just kind of get like a vague feeling like, I'm just not comfortable. But, okay everybody else seems to be going along with it. So, okay, whatever, it's not enough to raise a stink about I guess. (Interview 11)

In recounting this situation, Allison described an invested decision where the SCC decided to purchase a computer program with Land Trust funds. During the meeting she recalled feeling somewhat uncomfortable, but voted to approve the decision anyway. Her account of hesitation and subsequent thinking reveal that she disagreed with the decision

in both form and substance, but it is unclear how important the decision was for Allison. She noted that the decision has since “always been in the back of my mind” and so the decision took on importance, at least after the fact. She expressed a desire to not make decisions in one meeting where possible because of the experience with that decision. Although the memory of the dissonant decision remained with her for many years, the decision itself was proposed and voted on in one meeting.

As Allison contemplated speaking out in the meeting, she decided to withhold speech as the decision was “not enough to raise a stink about.” Yet, while her primary action in relation to the immediate decision was speech withholding, her comments suggests that for decisions she is now directing as chair: “I don't like to make decisions at one meeting if we can spread it out.” This desire to consider decisions over multiple meetings was practiced again and again at the Riverside High SCC. Allison repeatedly raised decisions months before they were to be finalized. For example, the decision to allocate the Land Trust funds to large programs was to be decided in March and they started discussing the decision in earnest during the previous October meeting. In comparison to the other SCCs, this practice of consistently prolonging decisions over multiple meetings was unique to the Riverside SCC and the way in which Allison conducted meetings.

This decision is an example of internal dissonance. Here Allison voted to approve a decision that she disagreed with. Having made the decision, she expressed, “like a vague feeling like, I'm just not comfortable.” Interestingly, she did not resolve her dissonance in a way that justified the decision, but rather sought to ensure that future decisions did not replicate the same pattern. Given that her voting actions cannot be

changed, and she continues to disagree with the decision, the dissonance created by the decision is not easily resolved and thus remains with her in the “back of [her] mind.”

#### Decision 2: Tardy Policy

Toward the end of a recent SCC meeting, Principal Beeker gives an overview of a new tardy policy he is planning to implement at Riverside High. Here Allison details her response:

**Allison:** We have no influence over this, but I think there's a decision going on with a new tardy policy for next year which I probably will bring up at the beginning of the year because I keep thinking about it and keep thinking that is way too tough. I don't know if you were there for that part of the meeting, or if you had left already.

**Interviewer:** I left earlier this last meeting unfortunately.

**Allison:** Yeah. So they're looking at having a policy where I think it's three tardies equals an unexcused absence. And five unexcused absences means you have no grade in the class. And I don't know that that will help. I don't think it's going to help the kids that are tardy all the time and sluffing anyhow because they'll just know that they're not going to get a grade. It'll help with a certain narrow band of kids but that seems really extreme, especially right now as I'm discussing all of these seniors that are waiting until tomorrow to know if they're graduating.

She then explains that she already approached the principal about the issue:

**Allison:** Yeah, and I went into Larry yesterday actually. And I said I just want to put something on your radar because, you know, parents are stressed, kids are stressed. We've had all these discussions about, you know, teens being suicidal and there's so much stress and we need more relaxation and at the school we need to incorporate some kind of stress management more than we do. (Interview 11)

In this case, Allison described an advisory decision over which she suggests “we have no influence.” She raised the issue in the interview because it is a policy she disagrees with: “I keep thinking about it and I keep thinking that is way too tough.” Although she did not mention her own children specifically in relation to the policy, she did mention “IB kids” repeatedly and her own children are IB students. IB students at



Riverside are part of the international baccalaureate program within the school and according to Allison are “super stressed.” As she recounted the decision, Allison talked about conversations she was having “with all of these seniors” about their upcoming graduation. In this way she was communicating with both students at the school who would be impacted by the policy and the administration who was deciding to implement the policy.

Although the policy change was still just a proposal, Allison recounted going to the principal within days of his discussing the change in the SCC meeting. In her one-on-one discussion with Principal Beeker she explicitly mentioned the talks in the SCC about mental wellness and suggests that the policy might be too severe. Over the course of the year, conversations about stress and suicide recurred frequently in the SCC meetings.

This case represents the early stages of mediating dissonance for Allison. Her description included detailed conversations with two parties to the decision. What is unclear about the decision is whether the students and student parents disagreed with the policy in the way that Allison did. As with many advisory decisions, the policy was likely to take many months or even years to implement and thus over time the disagreement would either materialize with Allison as an intermediary or not. Either way, even though Allison purports to believe that she cannot influence the decision, she sought out the principal very early in the process and let him know her position regarding the policy.

## Paula

### **Biographical Sketch**

Paula is 48 years old and has two children who attend Riverside High School. Paula moved to the community 6 years ago and has since lived in the same residence. In total, she has served on the SCC for 4 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Riverside SCC and plans to serve 1 more year. When asked on the exit survey about her future tenure, she wrote, "I could stay longer given children's ages." It becomes apparent in the interview that she does not desire to stay longer than her current term on the SCC. When asked whether she has participated on a council or board similar to the school community council, she replied: "sort of." Paula is White, upper income, and completed a master's degree. In her words, Paula joined the council to "rabble rouse around communication." Although she feels that she has not accomplished her desired goals, she commented frequently in the SCC meetings about nearly all topics. Besides the chair, Paula is the parent who spoke most in the meetings I attended and frequently interjected with statements about needing more data regarding decisions. Her lively participation in meetings was matched in her interview where she spoke in animated tones and colorful language about her experience on the SCC. When discussing the Land Trust budget she exclaimed: "It's a fucking joke. Like this is garbage money."

### **Power and Responsibility**

She expressed that her goal in joining the SCC was to improve communication with parents, but her ongoing purpose is to glean information about the school that is otherwise a "black box." She also expressed repeatedly her view that the SCC has very

little to no decision-making power and that, at best, the body gives the illusion of oversight.

**Paula:** So, I feel like it's just there isn't... I feel like we're supposed to be really strong advocates for a particular school plan. Like really be involved in the school plan. I don't think we are. I think that we are rubber stampers.

When I ask a follow up question about whether the SCC has a meaningful role in holding people accountable, she replied:

**Paula:** So, I think that there is an illusion of it being a meaningful place that that could happen. But my cynical knowledge of the actual world would tell me that if there were illegal things going on or bad things or irresponsible or budgetary mishaps, you know, they just wouldn't bring the information to the SCC.  
(Interview 12)

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**Paula:** So I, at least on this community council I feel like it's mostly privileged, educated, upper class people who have kids that are excelling and they're in advanced programs. And I feel like most of those same people still prioritize low income, struggling challenged students. So that's why I'm there. I'm not there for my child. My child would be fine. I do want to know a little bit more about what goes on at the school because of my child. Like just generally, it's a black box. So I didn't want to go in to change something for my child. I wanted to understand the culture, the climate, the priorities, what's happening in case that ever was relevant to do something for my child. I do want to, you know, I am worried for parents that they are not aware of how their children are doing until it's too late. And so I was like how can I find out more about all of that? (Interview 12)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Paula recounted one invested decision, two advisory decisions, and one decision on which the SCC has both invested and advisory authority. Of the four total decisions Paula reported she expressed personal disagreement with two of them. She substantively disagreed with two decisions and expressed that disagreement in SCC meetings. Paula referenced her own child in connection with one decision and took

personal actions on all four decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for three decisions and characterized three decisions negatively. Three of the four decisions she recounted in the interview were introduced in multiple meetings. She reported taking personal action in the following ways: gathering information for two decisions, strategic talks with stakeholders for four decisions, taking action in meetings for three decisions, and withholding speech for two decisions.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Fundraiser

In the following excerpts, Paula gives her account of the meeting exchange in September about the fundraiser. She opened by talking about Rick:

**Paula:** There was a long time where he said he was going to be kind of like making this gala thing happen and nothing was happening because he was the head of that committee. I was the head of the communication committee whatever that is. And for a while I was like why isn't he doing anything? So it's not a disagreement but more like, what is the holdup? But I didn't say anything because I'm not doing it. It's a nightmare to do a gala. Thank God you took it on, you know? So like, I'm going to keep my mouth shut because how ungrateful it would be to try to rush somebody who's donated enough time. But then it all happened and then afterwards this year when you were there, yeah, talking about how basically Johnson has control of the business and everyone in the room was kind of, you know, up in arms about how this went.

And I remember feeling, you know, super grateful to him for all the years but at this point, I was pissed. I was just like, this is absurd. More mad at Kyle Johnson, but the person in the room is the one that decides. Like that is our go-between that has maybe some power and I can't remember what the disagreement was but it was, you know, something about the power that Kyle had to choose things to dictate where the money went. And I remember like actually feeling frustrated. And oftentimes I get a little frustrated and I'm getting hot and bothered and I want to open my mouth and I don't. Sometimes I do. And then I'm embarrassed that I sounded a little gruff. And this time I remember, you know, just saying like something pissy like, well, this is ridiculous. And like our own school should be able to do it.

**Interviewer:** You said something?

**Paula:** I did. I did say something because for a couple reasons. One, I felt very strongly. And when else am I going to say? Who else is going to say it but less in this room? And because other people were clearly a little pissed too, cause I was like, okay, crazy, right? I can see that other people are also flabbergasted. So knowing that, I mean, I'm happy to be the only voice in the room, but knowing that I think I'm on the right track with this is weird gave me a little bit more okay to say something out loud, to pile on. Which is sad for him. But nothing was being like... People were expressing concerns but he and Larry weren't really acknowledging or addressing them in a way that felt enough. It was glossing over or like interesting. No, no, no, no. What's the answer? And what the hell is going on? Can't we change this? Because the whole reason we did this was so that there would be flexible funds to help low income kids at the school and who does this guy think he is coming up? So I remember being more agitated than I normally would be and speaking out. I felt good that I did it. I also felt embarrassed that I was not as polite as I should have been. And I felt bad that two people who are trying hard are kind of bearing the brunt of a lot of the negativity that should be really going elsewhere because we have nowhere else to put it. So did I...

**Interviewer:** Two people like Larry [principal] and Rick? Sorry I remembered the name. It's Rick.

**Paula:** Yeah, Rick, Yeah. Larry and Rick because they're trying to do what's best and they're in a terrible position. And when I disagree with people, when I don't like the outcome of these meetings and definitely leave taking it with me. I think about it in the car on the way home. I often tell my husband after I get home. I don't call the paper. I don't talk to other parents. I don't you know, I don't go often anywhere else with it. I occasionally might go back to the SCC board chair and say, like, can we put this back on the agenda? Or, you know, every once in a blue moon, I've done something else, like with the approval of the SCC, I've written a letter to the superintendent or something. But, I tend not to disagree heavily with anyone in the SCC over tiny little things. We have a difference of opinion about something small. Yeah, so speak wise I'll say something. If the group doesn't grab onto that idea, I let it go. I've done, you know, I've done something and sometimes I feel frustrated. Sometimes I, you know, I'm sitting there thinking about it. And I just think there's no benefit to me harping on this thing, because if a room full of well-intentioned, educated people aren't as riled up about it as me, then maybe it's my problem. I'll try sometimes, but not about everything. I think I may have apologized to Rick after that.

**Interviewer:** I was just going to ask about it. Yeah. Did you do this on that particular one? You took that home with you? You felt really bad?

**Paula:** I either sent him an email. We did have an email communication afterwards. A number of us on the... Maybe the whole SCC about that issue,

about control of the money, ba ba ba whatever, the Kyle Johnson stuff. And I do recall making very clear in my email that I appreciated, like everything Rick did. That he was in a really hard position and it sucks to see where he is and he's tried really hard. So that's the only time I've apologized since I joined the SCC because it was the only time I felt like I was disrespectful and unnecessarily like snippy. (Interview 12)

In the beginning of her account, Paula reported not disagreeing with Rick about the fundraiser, but simply wondering about what was happening. She then stated that she “was pissed” as she learned in the meeting exchange about how the fundraiser played out. Being encouraged by other members voicing their opinions, she joined in during the exchange because “she felt very strongly” that what had happened was wrong. As she characterized the exchange, she made clear that her frustration was actually with Kyle Johnson and not with Rick, but that Rick was in the unfortunate position as head of the fundraising committee for the SCC. While she disagreed verbally in this one meeting exchange, it remains unclear how important the decision was for Paula. It is also not apparent whether she experienced internal conflict regarding the decision, although she clearly desired a different outcome.

She responded to the issue by speaking out in the meeting and apologizing to Rick after the meeting in the form of an email. According to her account, this is “the only time I’ve apologized since I joined the SCC.”

In this case, it is not clear whether Paula experienced dissonance in connection with the decision. While she participated in the conflictual exchange, she did not reference other parties to the decision to whom she is accountable (mediating dissonance), nor did she express being personally implicated in the decision (internal dissonance). Finally, she did not act in a way that was inconsistent with her own opinions. This is an important example of a disagreement that does not entail dissonance.

Whereas in the same decision Ellen felt responsible and worked between the principal and her friend, Paula did not act in a similar fashion. As responsibility and power are the preconditions of dissonance during decision-making, their absence in Paula's case helps explain the anomalous situation when disagreement in decision-making does not equate to dissonance. Lastly, it is possible that the action to apologize via email was not motivated by dissonance, but by regret over being disrespectful.

#### Decision 2: Late Start Times

In this decision Paula describes a district decision 3 years in the making to start high schools at a later time:

**Paula:** There is definitely a disagreement in the room about the start times of the school and that's been three years going and I a hundred percent think we should start later. And I have made myself clear many times and I have raised my voice about it and I've gotten agitated about it. And I roll my eyes about it and I make myself very clear and I'm not apologizing and I only say about 25 percent of what I want to say.

**Interviewer:** Interesting. That hasn't happened this year.

**Paula:** I did talk about it at the last meeting. Do you remember Tamara Bentley? We were talking about the bus routes, the walking stuff and part of that went to the start times because that was on the agenda, start times 'cause we were talking about it and it affects bus routes. Sometimes I don't have to talk about it much because Tamara Bentley is so like pro-later start time and I am also pro-later. So I let her kind of bear the brunt of whatever like she just goes off but she pretty much did that. And when people say things that I've been very vocal about refuting, no not refuting, disagreeing with people in the past, about them being concerned about sports after school or being disrupted. And I've definitely gotten into debates about it in the SCC meetings. That's the one thing that I've been really passionately disagreeing with people about and it's a pretty healthy group. So we're all still really polite. I make sure to, you know, not going to as much as I would if I was disagreeing with my husband you know.

**Interviewer:** You said you say about 25% of what you want to?

**Paula:** Yeah, like I'd want to say more. I want to go on more. I want to be louder.

I'd want to be more strident about my opinion but I know that's not a good way to convince people. I would be embarrassed because everyone in there is pretty laid back and that's not the culture. We're not going sit around and argue but I do make my opinion heard numerous times. And afterwards, after those conversations, I often feel like it didn't matter what I said. It's not gonna change anything. So it's frustrating or I hope I didn't get too radical like angry about it because that's not going to help. They're just going to say that I'm crazy. And I might think like I should probably make that argument again and again because no one's listening. And so when I leave I think about it and I think about how could I better make that argument. Like, is there a chance for us to change it? The SCC is probably the place to do it anyway. (Interview 12)

In this case, Paula describes an advisory decision that is very important to her and about which she disagrees repeatedly with other SCC members. Based on her report, she substantively disagrees with others who are concerned about extracurricular activities after school. She describes being “agitated” and “rolling my eyes” during the SCC exchanges. As she confirms, the decision has been debated for years and has still not passed at the district level.

Paula’s primary actions in this decision are speaking in meetings and withholding speech in meetings. She reported, “I have made myself clear many times” and that “I only say about 25 percent of what I want to say.” She did not recount any additional actions in reference to the decision.

Being an advisory decision, this situation would often lead to mediating dissonance where Paula was situated between parents who disagree with the position of the school district administration. Yet, in this case, Paula said that Tamara Bentley, the board member who regularly attended Riverside SCC meetings, as a “pro-later,” and as typically more outspoken than Paula about the issue. Thus, the disagreement about the decision as with other members on the SCC, but the district board member agreed with Paula. Paula also made no mention of communicating with other parents outside the



SCC, whom she represents, regarding the issue. Because she did not mention two discordant parties outside of herself and she did not act as an intermediary, it is likely that she did not experience mediating dissonance in this instance.

## Natalie

### **Biographical Sketch**

Natalie is 55 years old and has two children who attend Riverside High School. Natalie has lived in the community for 33 years and lived in her current residence for 28 years. In total, she has served on the SCC for 9 years. She currently serves as the secretary of the Riverside SCC and plans to serve for 1 more year. In addition to serving on the SCC, Natalie has served on the PTA and on the Joint Educator Evaluation Committee for many years. Natalie is White, upper-middle income, and holds a master's degree. As the secretary of the committee, Natalie always sat next to Allison and hurriedly jotted down notes while the meetings progressed. Given the nature of that job, she commented less than others, but regularly provided comic relief during the meetings with pithy one-liners. Natalie has served with Allison for many years and laughed in the interview as she said, "I'm telling you, I do what she says."

### **Power and Responsibility**

Natalie expressed that the SCC is a decision-making body where there should be significant input from parents. In her interview she recounted an experience on the junior high SCC where parent input on decisions did not occur and felt as a result that the experience was very different from her experience at Riverside.

**Natalie:** And I didn't feel like there was a lot of input from parents. It felt like more regurgitation and more... It just seemed more structured for the principal. And just, it just wasn't all that interesting. I felt like I learned things about the school, but I didn't really have any input. There wasn't a whole lot of discussion. So I definitely, in general, and I was on that, I guess I was on that for two years. I did not feel like I made a difference. I don't think anyone did. It was very... It just wasn't anything. (Interview 13)

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When talking about Land Trust funds going toward minority students, Natalie said,

**Natalie:** In general, I would say the SCC funds, land trust does need to address that to some degree because we don't have enough money in the school system. So I understand that that's a huge part of it.

She then added:

**Natalie:** And so I do feel like Ellen and I and some of us were trying to make sure that everybody was being lifted up. It was so much focus on the people at the bottom being lifted up. But the fact is, everybody needs to be challenged. Everybody needs to be challenged. And a school needs to make certain that that's happening. And it did feel like that was getting dropped. In, in the end, it kind of was. (Interview 13)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Natalie recounted four invested decisions, four advisory decisions, and one decision on which the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. Of the nine total decisions Natalie reported, she expressed personal disagreement with five of them. She substantively disagreed with three decisions, but did not express that disagreement in SCC meetings. She also disagreed with the form of two decisions and did not speak in SCC meetings about her disagreement. Natalie referenced her own child in connection with two decisions and took personal action on four decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for five decisions and characterized six decisions negatively. Two of the nine decisions she recounted in the interview were

introduced in multiple meetings. She reported taking personal action in the following ways: strategic talks with stakeholders for three decisions and taking action in meetings for two decisions.

## **Decision Processes**

### **Decision 1: Fundraiser**

Like many other respondents, Natalie also discussed the fundraiser in her interview and expressed disappointment in the way it was handled with Kyle Johnson:

**Natalie:** Yes. That was, that became hotly contested because it was so confusing. That became a little bit emotional last year. And I think it's still is kind of confusing because I mean, we've never met this guy. We don't really know what his agenda is. We don't really understand why we're getting all this money from Riverside. There's been a lot of cross communication, a lot of poor communication. And there was frustration because originally it was supposed to be more stakeholder input with fundraising and getting this whole thing developed. It became a whole other thing. I mean, it's the end of the year. Did they even have another event? I heard nothing about it. And I found that to be actually pretty awful. And some of it was so poorly done, like some of Ellen's friends, actually. She comes from a bit of money. She knows a lot of people who go to these fundraising events and who donate large sums of money and a lot of her friends thought, were confused by where the money was going. It was very poorly handled. And I think the SCC wanted more input and more say in how that was working. And that never came to be. And it's still is sort of, we ended up, other things I think dominated this year as far as discussion. So we didn't go back to that a whole lot but I...

**Interviewer:** It came up at the first meeting.

**Natalie:** And that was it.

**Interviewer:** In September. Yeah. Yeah, that's right. I remember being brought up again.

**Natalie:** Correct. And that was to me, that was something where Ellen and I and others really fought to get our voices heard with what was going on and to really push some clarity with that and we never really felt like that came to fruition.

**Interviewer:** What would you, you mean in the meetings or else like a...

**Natalie:** Kind of both like I think we ended up meeting with Larry [principal] for a little bit just to get some clarification about that whole thing. Because he needed to be aware that there were people donating funds that thought it was one thing, it was something else. So, yes, there had been a lot of discussion. And then I felt like it was sort of brushed under the carpet and I actually I literally forgot about it. I do feel like that's something else that should be brought up again. (Interview 13)

In Natalie's account, the fundraiser was "very poorly handled" and "pretty awful." She questioned the way that the money was raised and expressed a desire for more "stakeholder input." While she expressed disagreement, it does not seem to have been an important issue for Natalie. Toward the end of her interview she stated that she had forgotten about the issue until it was brought up at the meeting. Yet, when the issue did come up she and Ellen "really fought to get our voices heard."

Natalie's actions related to the issue were speaking in the September meeting and also seeking out a one-on-one meeting with Principal Larry Beeker. In her view, that meeting was both a place to gain clarification on the issue and also to inform Principal Beeker about the confusion amongst the donors.

Throughout her account, Natalie portrays herself in conjunction with Ellen. She talks about how "we really fought" and "we ended up meeting." The account is different from Ellen's, who portrayed these same instances with personal pronouns and does not mention others in the meeting. Natalie also did not reference direct interactions with other parent members the way that Ellen did. In fact, she referenced Ellen's friend and corroborated Ellen's account, but also thereby distanced herself from the narrative. Lastly, Natalie only spoke about the issue less than 3 minutes during the interview and omitted many of the specific details related to the decision. Given these conditions wherein the decision was apparently less important to Natalie and she did not portray herself in a key decision role, it is likely that she did not feel either internal or mediating

dissonance.

## Decision 2: RCP Program

In this excerpt Natalie describes the recent SCC decision to allocate funds to large programs, specifically the RCP program, which is a life-skills course given to all incoming freshman at Riverside High School:

**Natalie:** I think the biggest topic of discussion where there's been a little bit of a divide is that RCP program. There's some people who are really just not into it. I'm still frustrated that we haven't really seen good data. My daughter was the first class to do it. So she's a junior this year, but we've been asking for data for that for a long time. And I don't feel like we've really received information to see if things have been working or not. So many parents who have IB students, AP students felt like it was a waste of time. I didn't get that from my kid, but she's pretty easygoing. I kind of feel like no matter what hopefully you're going to learn something within that class either, you know, time management skill, life skills, yoga, meditation, things like that. Don't know how well that's working as far as data. I mean, I even brought that up to her now because this was her bad year as far as doing IB and I said, what about some of the stuff you learn at RCP about time management, all that? She's like, that was two years ago. I thought that was interesting.

So that's where I mean, that's where there is that feeling of they're trying to find a way to make all members of the school, all students in a classroom situation. So you're not just with a very small group of people. I don't think that's a bad thing. But it's an entire classroom period that's taken where a student could be doing something else. Is that valuable? I don't know. I mean, I kind of thought it was. I think that that's okay and she did get to know some people she would not normally have gotten to know. Is the program working? I would like more information on that, because I do think it's not hitting the kids who maybe can handle itself. However, the other side of it is a lot of kids are super bright. They're not good with time management or they're not good at being organized and that is some of the stuff they're trying to learn. So that's where I feel like I don't know if it's so bad. But there are many, many IB parents who would say this was a waste of my kid's time in a big way. So... (Interview 13)

In this case, Natalie questioned the merits of the RCP program, which is the largest expenditure of the annual SCC budget at Riverside. A month prior to our interview, Natalie voted along with the rest of the council to approve a \$178,000

expenditure toward the RCP program out of a total annual Land Trust budget of \$328,000. She portrayed the decision as “a little bit of a divide” and expressed that, “I’m still frustrated that we haven’t really seen good data.” While she expressed this frustration, she also expressed openness to the possibility that it might be a positive program for some students. Thus, while her frustration was clear in her account, it was mitigated by the hope that the program will turn out to benefit students.

She reported that “many parents...felt like it was a waste of time” inferring that she personally communicated with those parents. She also brought up the issue with her own daughter to assess whether it was helpful for her in terms of learning time management. Although her actions were communicating with stakeholders, she portrayed them as information-gathering activities and continually expressed the desire for more information or “data.”

In this case we learn that the moderate discomfort caused by internal dissonance can persist for long periods of time and recur if still in a developing stage. It is clear from this case that Natalie felt a continued sense of discomfort about the largest expenditure of the SCC. She approved the expenditure at least twice over the past 2 years and claimed to not know whether the program is working. Given that she acted in a way that conflicted with her developing opinions, it is likely that she feels internal dissonance. That internal dissonance is further evidenced by her frequent moving between the positive and negative aspects of the program during her interview. Interestingly, she never took significant action in relation to the decision. Her reticence to take action was likely related to the moderate level of dissonance and her persistent hope that it would be a positive program.

## Jenny

### **Biographical Sketch**

Jenny did not list her age on the exit survey, but is likely in her late 40s or early 50s, based on the average age of the members of the Riverside SCC. She has two children who attend Riverside High School and has lived in the community for 20 years. At the time of the study she served on the SCC as the IB (International Baccalaureate) steering committee liaison. As such, she sat on the IB steering committee and gave regular updates to the SCC about the IB program. She also acted as a regular voting parent member of the SCC and, outside of her IB program updates, participated in a manner very similar to other parent members. She had served on the SCC for a total of 2 years and had plans to participate on the community council for “at least a few more years.” In addition to serving on the SCC, Jenny has served on the IB steering committee for 5 years and the elementary school PTA for 8 years. Jenny is White, upper income, and completed a PhD in neuroscience. Jenny chooses her words carefully, very rarely speaks out of turn, and carefully addressed all topics during the interview. When discussing her involvement in a conflict that arose on the SCC, she said, “I fancy myself diplomatic.”

### **Power and Responsibility**

Jenny did not directly state her thoughts regarding the purpose of the SCC, but she regularly spoke about the SCC as a place where we “decided as a community.” In the excerpt below she recalls an exchange with a Latino mother who attended an SCC meeting:

**Jenny:** Your kid’s important too and I hope you know that. You know, that I think that too. Because I think I felt like it was a valid point. I think we do care

about everybody as a community. It's just that it's a matter of the squeaky wheel gets the grease. The people who attend these things, they tend to be advocating for their own kids and they tend to, you know, be concerned with how am I going to optimize my kid's experience. And, I'm sure I'd do that, too, you know? I'm sure, I do that, too. But I do like to think, you gotta think broader than that. You know, you gotta think about everybody. This is a school community. You've got to think about other people in the community that are just not your kid, you know? Not just your kid's situation and their issues. So that was what was going through my head I guess. (Interview 14)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Jenny recounted three invested decisions and one decision on which the SCC had both invested and advisory authority. Of the four total decisions Jenny reported, she expressed personal disagreement with two of them. She substantively disagreed with two decisions and stated her disagreement about one decision in an SCC meeting. Jenny referenced her own child in connection with one decision and took personal action on three decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for three decisions and characterized one decision negatively. Two of the four decisions she recounted in the interview were introduced in multiple meetings. She reported taking personal action in the following ways: one-on-one talks with stakeholders for two decisions, taking action in meetings for three decisions, and withholding speech for three decisions.

### **Decision Processes**

#### **Decision 1: Fundraiser**

As with many other parent members, Jenny spoke at length about the fundraiser. She explained that she had been part of the original committee for the fundraiser with the



Riverside High School student who initiated the idea:

**Jenny:** I had been chair at the time that these events were getting sorted out, okay. And what happened is we had a very dynamic young student in JoEllen Dilworth. Anyway, she took it upon herself that she was going to raise money to pay for students who can't afford to pay for AP exams. She took this on. It was like a junior or senior project. She raised like fifty thousand dollars almost in the end. Went to the bank, you know, she has some connections with her family, but she went to the bank presidents et cetera and raised this money. And we wanted to support her and build on that and say, let's do this. Let's build a foundation. Let's build some kind of trust, you know, for these kids. Because there's, you know, it's expensive to take AP exams. It's expensive to take IB exams and there are kids who are under served, you know, and don't really, can't afford to take these things. So we thought let's do that. So we got JoEllen, we had lots of meetings with JoEllen and [pause] Kyle started to attend our meetings.

As Kyle Johnson began to attend the committee meetings, he promoted the idea of having a gala and began to significantly influence the direction of the initiative. In response, JoEllen, Jenny and other members of the committee ultimately resigned.

**Jenny:** And her mother, who was the head of the medical school, was like, no, I wouldn't do that, JoEllen. You know what I mean? She said, you know, JoEllen, galas never make money in the first year. You're just going to spend more money to put on the gala than you're going to create. So she just said, don't, don't do it. Don't be involved with this guy's scheme and she backed out. So, it became very like, you know what we're here to support JoEllen's efforts, not whatever it is Kyle was trying to accomplish. Which seemed to become much, much more grandiose by the meeting. You know, like he'd booked the governor, he booked... You know, and it was like, what do we need all these people for? You know, what do they care about our community here? Which clearly they don't. You know, I mean, I don't say they totally don't care, but it became innovative educational practices. It seemed so fake and Kyle has a consulting company which has an educational consulting lean to it. So it just started to look really like you want us to use your people, maybe, I don't know, use your people to help us innovate our educational practices. It just started to look really fishy to me and he had wanted us to plan the gala. Like, I kind of honestly felt that the men were like, I'm going to invite the governor, you ladies go figure out how to put on a party. And I was like, not doing it [laugh]. I'm not going to be your social, you know, figure out your catering. It's not what I do. And I don't even like doing it, you know? So we all three backed out from this little subcommittee.

After further explanation, Jenny explained that after she and the other members resigned, Kyle moved forward with his own plan for the fundraiser. The new plan, according to Jenny, became a “train wreck” that she did not want to help plan or be associated with:

**Jenny:** I mean, in addition to the fact that the fundraising goals just seemed to be completely veering off into another course... Like I was okay with it being for Riverside widely. But it was clear that Kyle had something else in mind, you know? And I still don't really understand what that was. But in addition to that, it just seemed like a train wreck [laugh]. Like the whole thing was like, I don't want to be in charge of this. That was my feeling. Like, I don't know how to put on a gala. I've never done it. I don't know how to organize that many people and if it was maybe something I really cared about, I'd figured out. But I started to... and that was where I was up until the point that I realized, no I can't. You know, this is a train wreck. You guys don't know what you're doing, you know? And I don't know what I'm doing to put on such a large party with the governor and everything. And I'm not going to do that if it's not for goals that I can, you know, put my name behind. Right? So I think Kyle got a lot of his corporate people, his own company people, to help him put this in, and then it just became something that, that was all over the place, you know, and put together really last minute. And I know that, you know, he probably dislikes me a lot but, you know, what I [laugh] I didn't want him dictating to me. You know what I mean? He took this and ran in a different direction and I didn't want to go in that direction. I didn't feel like that was worth my time and energy. I've never put together a gala before and I thought if I'm going to do it, it's going to be for something that at least seems a little more clear-cut.

Although she resigned from the fundraising committee, Jenny did attend the gala and described her experience at length in the interview. She then recounted the experience in the September SCC meeting where she confronted Rick about the issue months after the gala took place:

**Jenny:** I mean, I definitely had to take kind of a gulp and go, okay, am I going to do this? Am I going to go there? And I thought, yeah, I have to, you know? I have to. I have to point out what was wrong with this, you know? And I felt it was important to do it publicly, you know? That we were misled, frankly. And it may not be Rick's fault, but that this was a mischaracterization to our community about, you know, the goals of this fundraiser. But yeah I had to take a deep breath. Cause you know who likes conflicts in a meeting, right? (Interview 14)

In this case, Jenny described her own experience in the prolonged fundraising

initiative in which the SCC had both advisory and invested authority. The importance of the initiative to Jenny is demonstrated by her initial participation on the committee and her enthusiasm about the project: “And we wanted to support her and build on that and say, let's do this. Let's build a foundation.” As the meetings progressed and Kyle Johnson became more involved, Jenny began to question the direction of the initiative and ultimately resigned because of her disagreement. As she explained, she did not want to “do that if it's not for goals that I can, you know, put my name behind.” She did not describe how long her disagreement persisted before resigning.

Having resigned, Jenny still participated in the gala. Although her actions to resign from the committee followed from her disapproval of the fundraiser, she expressed a need to further explain the situation publicly to the SCC: “And I felt it was important to do it publicly, you know?” According to her account, her actions stemming from the disagreement were her resignation and stating her position in the SCC meeting. She did not recount any additional information gathering or stakeholder conversations.

It is unclear from her report whether she felt a sense of internal dissonance regarding the fundraiser. In fact, her actions to resign and speak out aligned with her reported thoughts regarding the decision. Yet, as a representative member of the SCC on the fundraising committee, for a time she played a mediating role between the SCC parent members and Kyle Johnson. What is particularly noteworthy about this case is that Jenny felt strongly that something needed to be said in the SCC meeting months after the fundraiser had taken place, and many months after she had resigned from the fundraising committee. Her emphasis on the public nature of her comments and the

mischaracterization of the events give a sense that months later she still felt a need to establish a consistent narrative about her role in the fundraising activities.

#### Decision 2: RCP Program

As with others on the council, Jenny also felt conflicted about the RCP program and the large portion of the budget dedicated to the program:

**Jenny:** Because I'm not totally convinced that it's serving all the students. It's like I do see that, and it takes up a ton of our money, you know? But I'm not against it either. You know, I see that it could be a good thing. I see that, you know, like getting more people to challenge themselves and to, you know what I mean, stay engaged with school and all that stuff is all legitimate and totally worthy goals. And if PXP is helping to accomplish that, then great, you know? But, I do question the total shift of money towards that. I know that is in Larry's initiative to do that and I'm not... I think it's his particular interpretation. This is where I'm getting when I said before, there's things about the Land Trust that I don't totally understand. But like, this is his interpretation and I believe, I guess there's some legal advice that went into this. That Land Trust money has to be exclusively dedicated to and, you know, this is back to this means tested... It's just like measurable end goals. And I think we interpreted that very loosely in the past, maybe too loosely, you know? And now we're being extremely strict with that [laugh] and I do worry about the things that, the entities that depended on that money having fallen away and now they're just kind of on their own with funding. Because, it may be that some of those things were way too specific. You know, this teacher's idea to go do whatever. You know what I mean? But on the other hand, I think that if the goal of Land Trust money is to improve the quality of education for the school, I think that some of those things that used to get funded were meeting that end, you know? But maybe in a way that, you know, can you measure it? You know what I mean? Can you measure something like, okay, here's the students RCP. Where were they? What were they like before? What are they... you know, maybe. When you have in the writing that it has to be measurable gains I think it sets up a whole a can of worms that, you know, that is maybe not always easy to demonstrate. And it means that certain things that are a little more qualitative and not as easy to measure, you know, like a test score, get thrown out. So, I do feel conflicted about that shift. I feel particularly conflicted about it for so much going to RCP because I'm not totally convinced that it's meeting everybody's needs, you know? But, I'm not totally against it either.

After detailing her inner conflict, she comments on her participation in the meetings regarding the decision:

**Jenny:** But like, but I'm good with it for now. And, but I didn't feel, I didn't feel strong enough about it to like go... First of all, it's already been worked out. We've been discussing it all year and like for me to go yeah, I don't agree with that you know? I think you should do it all differently, when I haven't put the time into this. You know what I mean, I haven't put the time into setting up that budget and really what that entails. So it's like, okay, but I have... I'm skeptical. (Interview 14)

As is the case with other SCC members, Jenny described an invested decision to allocate significant funds to the RCP program at Riverside High. This shift in funding was a major change from previous years and Jenny reported feeling conflicted about that shift. At the time of the interview, she had voted twice to approve funding for the program about which she remained “skeptical.” Yet, while she expressed disagreement, she also stated that “I’m not against it either” and “I’m good with it for now.” This perhaps suggests that her position was modulating over time and might change in the future based on the results of the program. With her moderate disagreement of the decision, it remains unclear how important the decision was and is to Jenny. Toward the end of her account, she admitted, “I haven’t put time into this.”

The actions she reported related to the decision are speech withholding in SCC meetings. She “didn’t feel strong enough” to say something and thus continued to support the decision despite feeling some conflict about it.

This case represents a moderate case of internal dissonance. Jenny acted in a way that was inconsistent with her opinions, but those opinions are still being developed. The way in which she moved between questioning the decision and offering tacit support for the decision demonstrate her inner conflict. Given its muted state, the motivation to resolve the dissonance was not as strong as the motivation to keep the peace in the SCC meetings. Thus, Jenny was skeptical and adopted a wait-and-see attitude where the

internal dissonance will likely be prolonged and revisited for an extended period of time.

**Conclusion: Pragmatic Citizenship at the Riverside High SCC**

The Riverside High SCC is the other parent-strong case in the study. The chair, Allison, directed and ran the meetings and parent members provided regular input during SCC meetings. Yet, compared to the Crescent High SCC, it was a relatively staid operation. As Allison reported, she governed by consensus and disagreements were often worked out over time prior to decisions being made. This style contrasted sharply with the rapid and numerous decisions taken by the Crescent High SCC each meeting. The interviews also revealed that this form of decision-making was new on the council and heavily influenced by large programs initiated by the principal. The years prior to the study, the Riverside SCC operated much the same as Crescent High SCC with new teacher proposals to decide upon each meeting. As reported by the members, this change was occurring in real time, and many members including Rick, Jenny, and Natalie were adopting a wait and see attitude with the programs that were newly funded. In the end, this change reduced the number of decisions made by the SCC significantly where the Riverside SCC only made roughly half of the decisions per meeting compared to the Crescent High SCC.

As can be seen from the reports, the members of the Riverside SCC also had a more reduced sense of power and responsibility than the Crescent SCC members. This sentiment emanated from the chair who simply stated, “the parents do not know as much as the teachers and the principal” (Interview 11). This also contrasts sharply with the chair of the Crescent High SCC, who reiterated many times that SCC is supposed to be a

parent-run organization (Interview 4). Likewise, there are no examples of members on the Riverside SCC who express amazement about the amount of power the SCCs hold, as many members of Crescent High do. Rather, two Riverside members, Rick and Ellen, feel that their role is explicitly one of oversight on the principal to “make sure he’s, you know doing what he says he needs to be doing” (Interview 10). Another member, Paula, expressed that even this role of oversight is an “illusion” and that in reality “I think that we are rubber stampers.” (Interview 12). While one member of the Crescent High SCC, Deana, expressed a distaste for decision-making, no Crescent members believed they did not have decision-making power or that their role was reduced to oversight of the principal.

While the Riverside SCC operated distinctly from the Crescent SCC in these ways, it was still a place where parents felt that their voices were heard. Many members also expressed concern for the underrepresented populations on the SCC and one SCC meeting during the year was held at a junior high in the poorer, more ethnically diverse area of the school boundaries in order to deliberately engage those populations. While operating differently, the same criteria of pragmatic citizenship must be applied to the Riverside SCC to understand the educational value of participation for SCC members. In other words, even though the Riverside SCC made fewer decisions and the members had a lower sense of efficacy, did participation increase the recognition of varied points of interest and did parent members’ actions coordinate interests among those parties toward desired outcomes?

In order to assess these criteria of experiential civic education, I review the most important decision raised by the members of the Riverside SCC. Although the fundraiser

decision was only addressed during the first meeting of the year, it continued to be top of mind to the members 8 months later when I interviewed them. Their accounts demonstrate an interconnected web of activity that allows us to more clearly assess the educational value of the experience.

The fundraiser, as reported by many SCC members, was initiated by a student at Riverside High. Soon after she successfully raised the initial funds to pay for AP and IB testing, Jenny and Rick became heavily involved in the project. Importantly, the fundraising efforts were initially meant for lower SES populations at the school who were not able to afford to pay for Advanced Placement tests. Based on interview statements and the exit survey, the children of the SCC members Rick and Jenny were not part of this lower SES population and would not directly benefit from the fundraiser. Thus, the initial involvement, as a subcommittee of the SCC, can be seen as expanding the interests involved and attempting to coordinate different interested parties to benefit the lower income families of the school.

Yet, these initial goals for the fundraiser became muddled by the involvement of an outside member, Kyle Johnson. Due to Kyle's involvement and the new direction of the fundraising activities, Jenny resigned from the committee (Interview 14). The action to resign did not further coordinate interests, but rather Kyle and Rick continued to pursue the fundraising activities and the other SCC members no longer played an active role in the initiative. During this stage, the recognition of interests also contracted as Kyle formed his own 501c3 (Interview 10). Yet, this process of divergence unfolded over many months and, according to Rick, he attempted to coordinate between the district and the SCC on numerous occasions before the split. According to his report, he scheduled



numerous meetings and sought to raise funds through a district approved entity and build oversight into the process from the SCC (Interview 10). Furthermore, even after Jenny's resignation and the formation of the 501c3, Ellen and Natalie continued to work in their own ways to achieve a particular outcome. Ellen spoke with her friend, calibrated her actions very carefully in meetings so as not to offend Rick, and sought out Principal Beeker before the fundraising event and gave him explicit directives on how to portray Riverside at the gala (Interview 9). Likewise, Natalie reported about how she and Ellen "really fought to get our voices heard," although she felt their efforts did not yield fruit. Yet, in Ellen's account, her actions did have effect and, though the fundraiser did not happen as she wished, she "made everybody aware that this train is coming through town and clear the tracks. I didn't stop it, but at least we cleared the tracks and nobody got killed" (Interview 9).

By the time the issue was raised in the September SCC meeting, all of the events and interactions reported were in the distant past. The gala took place 4 months prior to the SCC meeting and it was the last major event of the fundraising activities. Accordingly, it might be said that the experiences of SCC members relative to the fundraiser were both educative and miseducative. In the end, some interests were bypassed in order to accomplish the fundraiser and it left many members of the SCC upset about the issue. Yet, the September SCC meeting and its aftermath demonstrate the educative value of decision-making when citizens feel responsibility for the decisions made.

According to the account of the SCC meeting by Rick, he "got raped" by the other members (Interview 10). Yet, in that same exchange, Jenny's reports summoning her

own courage to “take a deep breath” and speak publicly about the issue in order correct the “mischaracterization” of the goals of the fundraiser (Interview 14). Natalie reported fighting to “get our voices heard” (Interview 13). Paula spoke in the meeting because she, “felt very strongly” about the issue (Interview 12). Additionally, Paula, Jenny, and Ellen explicitly stated that while they voiced their opinions strongly that day, they did not blame Rick for the situation. As Paula expressed it, Rick was “the person in the room” and the go between in the issue (Interview 12). In the end, Rick and Paula reported that a group email was sent as an apology to Rick after the meeting. In response, Rick spent hours drafting an email explaining in detail the various aspects of the situation (Interview 10). All these actions and behavioral adjustments came after the reportedly flawed fundraising initiative. While certainly some of the actions inhibited the future possibility for the SCC to address problems at the school, many of them were educative in that they increased awareness of varied efforts and interests related to the issue and sought to coordinate efforts between interested parties, even if only to avoid a train wreck.

## CHAPTER 7

### LAKEVIEW HIGH SCHOOL SCC

In this chapter, I investigate the developmental dissonance cycle with three parent members of the Lakeview High School SCC: Linda, Heidi, and Denise. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, the Lakeview High School SCC is a principal-strong council. The meetings are opened by the parent chair, Cecilia, but afterwards nearly all agenda items and discussion topics are initiated and carried out by the two assistant principals who are not formal members of the council. In all meetings I observed except one, there were three assistant principals and the principal in attendance. These administrators were the focal point of each meeting and parents responded to agenda items initiated and directed by them. Nonetheless, I observed that the parents on the Lakeview SCC spoke much more on average than the parents on the Oakwood council (next chapter). Furthermore, though I was unable to gain access to the Lakeview council for the first few months of the study, interview reports demonstrate that there were extensive exchanges between the parents and the school administrators during the early meetings that I did not observe. Moreover, the interviews also reveal that SCCs at feeder schools to Lakeview often have significant parent involvement and operate as decision-making bodies. Thus, some parent members of the Lakeview SCC have years of experience participating in parent-strong SCCs and bring that experience to the Lakeview SCC. Lastly, Lakeview High School was in its 1<sup>st</sup>

year of operation during the year of this study. As such, there was an informal approach to the institutional practices and an unfamiliarity between people that did not exist at other case SCCs. Although the archival data and observational data corroborate that Lakeview is a principal-strong council, it exhibits a more fluid authority structure than other SCCs. As will be seen in the individual cases, the fluid authority structure generates instances of mediating dissonance as individual parent members arbitrate the impact of advisory decisions made by the school administration on Lakeview High students and their parents.

The Lakeview High School SCC is composed of seven parent members, four teachers, and the school principal. As noted, all three vice principals, although not members, also regularly attend meetings and direct the affairs of the council. Of the seven parent members, six regularly attend SCC meetings, and I interviewed three of these six members. Six of the seven members are women. All seven members were born in the United States and are White. The experience of the three members I interviewed varies significantly. One is serving in her 1st year on the SCC, one has served for 6 years, and one has served for 12 years on different SCCs. Additionally, the three members I interviewed have varied outside volunteer experience. As noted by the members, the Lakeview parent population is relatively well-off economically. All three of the members I interviewed have completed bachelor's degrees. The age of the members is very similar to other high school SCCs in the study—members are in their 40s and early 50s with little variation in age among members.

## Linda

### **Biographical Sketch**

Linda is 44 years old and has one child who attends Lakeview High School. She has lived in her current residence for 2 years and has lived in the community for 4 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Lakeview High SCC, and has been on the council for 1 year. She has served on the PTA for over 10 years and additional religious councils for over 15 years. She plans to serve on the SCC for at least 2 more years. Linda is White, upper income, and completed a bachelor's degree. Linda is a teacher at the local feeder junior high school but has not served on the SCC at her junior high. Being new to the SCC, she expressed concern during the interview that her experience might not be helpful for the study. She also regularly double checked whether her response to the interview questions were correct even after being reassured that there are no right or wrong answers. When reflecting on her participation on the SCC she says that she regularly avoids talking about her child because she does not want to cry in front of the other SCC members: "I just try not to say anything because I know I'll cry [laugh]....So I don't say a lot because I'm like, oh, I'm just, my emotions are high, I'll just keep my mouth shut."

### **Power and Responsibility**

Her newness on the SCC is reflected in the way she thinks about the purpose of her participation. She was originally looking for a simple way to get involved, but has since come to realize that parents can make a difference on the SCC. She mentioned that she will likely bring different ideas next year because of what she learned during her 1<sup>st</sup>

year. She also expressed a desire to alter her role on the SCC in order to be a parent member that represents students that have unique needs in the school.

**Linda:** So I just thought, well that's something I could do that would be at least a little bit involved, a little bit helpful, a little bit of, you know, a say or to hear. Like, the hearing part for me is huge like to be able to hear why we're doing things. So that's, I don't think I came with a goal or project or something that I was hoping to see. Again, not really realizing. And now I think going into next year should be a little bit even different. Where okay, actually, parents can shift things or make a difference if you, you know, check and balance a little bit. So maybe that will change my mind for what I think about through the summer to bring in next year. (Interview 15)

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**Linda:** I understand my child is different and then as I've gone through and then I'm like, but who is representing the different? So I'm like okay so next year where I feel I've been really careful to not bring that up one, because he's got his buddies, his other parents and so I try to be really careful about what I say.

**Interviewer:** Oh interesting, his buddy's parents are on the council?

**Linda:** Yes. So I'd be careful about what I say about him personally. But then I need to, then I thought who's representing the difference? Or, who's representing the ones whose needs are not being met educationally, they're not able to access their education by this platform. Or by the way that the structure of school is made. So maybe that's kind of what my role is, you know? (Interview 15)

## Decision Synopsis

In her interview, Linda described one invested decision and one advisory decision. Of the two total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with both of them. She substantively disagreed with the one decision, but did not state her disagreement in an SCC meeting. Alternatively, she disagreed with the form of another decision and did state her disagreement in an SCC meeting. She referenced her own child in connection with both decisions and personally took action on both decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for one decision,

but did not characterize either decision negatively. Both decisions were raised multiple times in meetings throughout the year. She reported taking personal action in the following ways: one-on-one talks with stakeholders for one decision, taking action in a meeting for one decision, and withholding speech for one decision.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: ACT

In this exchange, Linda describes a time early in the year on the SCC when she had a particular question about ACT scores. Her question, which she continued to ask because she did not get a clear answer from the school administrators, was specifically about whether the ACT scores had improved since implementing the new technology program (Summit Learning) at the school:

**Linda:** So, I feel like, so I was one of the first ones who initiated the talk about the ACT. So, that was my very first things I got... So I've got a couple of kids. One who's full ride scholarship at BYU, right? And I've got another one who can't make a grade to save his life, right? So, and he's the one at Lakeview High right now. So, I'm looking at it from her, like she's already through the system, right? But her ACT experience amounts to a critical thing for her, right?

**Interviewer:** Yes. She's the one at BYU?

**Linda:** Yeah. So that was my first question that I brought up to them is... I would love to see scores coming out of the ACT. So I think that sparked a lot of discussion for the rest of the meetings and maybe that's something. But I don't feel like I could continue to push it. Like it got to the point where I felt like I'd ask, every time we had an agenda, that I was asking the same question over and over again and never felt like I was really receiving any follow up. I feel like they were trying to find a solution to help with kids scores, but not... My question was, what are the ACT scores coming out of this (Summit Learning program)?

She then explained that the school administrators (vice principals and principal) began to advocate for SCC expenditure and programing that “addressed the ACT.” While she says she was appreciative of their efforts, she repeated in the interview that their comments

about the ACT initiative were not an answer to her question.

**Linda:** [They] addressed the ACT, but not... Like here's what we're going to do to prep the kids for the ACT and we're going to put all this money into this ACT strategies lady. And she's going to come in to do this. Which I can appreciate, I have appreciation for it. I don't know that that was the answer to my question. And even after that, even in that last meeting he (vice principal) was like, I'm going to get those scores for you. And I was like we're in May! I'm not asking what the kids got this year. They had a full year as a sophomore at a different high school. So they're coming in with a year behind them and then maybe six months of Summit or whatever. So I'm just curious.

She then questioned the purpose of the ACT prep initiative and, although it was the first listed objective of the SCC school plan and was allocated \$19,800 as an SCC expenditure, she said she does not remember voting for it:

**Linda:** But again, I'm thinking why are we doing this? When I was just... Yes. I just want to see if they're learning what they need to learn [laugh]. And so then they've done a bunch of stuff to help the kids and again it might be super great. That's why I'm like, okay let's try for a year, let's see if this is beneficial...

**Interviewer:** Sure. So the decision they made was that, allocating that money to Amanda Grove. Because I remember the conversation about Amanda Grove. That's what came out of Land Trust?

**Linda:** I don't remember like raising our hands to it.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. I don't remember that well either actually. It could have just gotten put into the Land Trust Plan. You signed off on it.

**Linda:** Yes. So we pulled it out of, you know, this or we've pulled money from... So I know where it came from, but I know that it was like and this is how much this is going to cost [...] But, I don't remember like voting for it. (Interview 15)

In this interview sequence, Linda describes the circuitous evolution of an invested SCC decision. Initially, Linda simply raised a question in an SCC meeting about ACT test scores as they related to the newly implemented technology program at the school. The issue was important to Linda, as evidenced by the fact that she mentioned that this question directly influences her child in the school, and that she repeatedly raised the question in SCC meetings. In fact, she raised the question so often that eventually, she



explains, “I don’t feel like I could continue to push it.” In her account, the administrators of the school, who regularly attend the SCC meetings, did not address her question and instead began to promote a decision to develop an ACT prep program with SCC funds. Initially she was “appreciative” of their efforts, but eventually asked, as she stated in her interview, “why are we doing this?” But the decision to create the ACT prep program moved forward with an allocation of \$19,800 and became part of the annual plan.

Linda’s actions related to the issue took the form of asking questions about the ACT scores in many SCC meetings. Her actions occurred prior to and in concurrence with the decision-making process to create an ACT prep program.

Whereas it is common for an invested decision to lead to internal dissonance, especially when it is important to the individual and they disagree with the decision, Linda did not report being conflicted about the decision. One factor in her lack of dissonance may be that she does not feel a sense of responsibility for the decision. In fact, she said she does not “remember like voting for it.” It is also clear from her account that the decision was driven by the administrators: “they've done a bunch of stuff to help the kids.” Accordingly, without feeling able to impact the decision or the responsibility of voting for it, Linda did not consciously act in a way that was inconsistent with her opinions.

#### Decision 2: Summit Learning Program

The decision to implement the Summit Learning program was an advisory decision of the SCC. The school administrators selected the program and implemented it at the school at the beginning of the school year and the SCC members acted in an

advisory role throughout this first months of the rollout. In Linda's experience, her questions about the ACT are linked to the performance of Summit and here she explains her questions particularly as they pertain to her underperforming son:

**Linda:** So coming out of Summit after three years or after two years as a sophomore and junior, what are their ACT scores? Are they learning enough material to prepare them for the ACT or are they only learning enough to get them? You know, my son right now is just doing it to pass, right? So there's not that, for him, a different level of understanding.

As she expressed concern for her son's performance, she also expressed a more general concern about how to address the needs of students who are not succeeding. She also talked about the pressures she felt in the SCC meetings to speak in general terms and not mention her own child specifically:

**Linda:** So what are we doing for the kids who are not succeeding? What are we doing for the kids that are falling behind? You know, and again.. So it's hard because I try to not say his name. Well, my child is falling behind. So I don't know. You know what I mean, I just try to protect him that way. But it's like what are we doing when... Okay, so like last community council, what are we doing with the kids that are not passing this term, you know? You let every term overlap with grades, but now we are at the end, so now what? Where is the cut off? What should I be expecting?

**Interviewer:** So I'm curious about, like when you're saying that you don't want to mention his name because you want to protect him. Is that right? Are there any other reasons why you wouldn't mention him, like him specifically?

**Linda:** Right. I think just that... I think it's just really trying to either... Either I'm worried about that these parents go home and say... Because again, he's got friends and each of the groups or each of those parents... And so then is it, he goes home or is he now on the, okay, if we don't take care of him, then she's going to say something in community council [laugh]. So I am just trying to be more general, but I probably should be... I mean, if that's what I'm representing, I should be more vocal. If that's my agenda. You know, then I should be more bold and brave about what I need to do to defend.

At this point, I stated that I thought those feelings were typical for SCC members. She then added:

**Linda:** That's a feeling that I feel. That I have to be careful with what I say because of peer pressure.

After relating that she feels peer pressure to not talk in SCC meetings, she shared this experience with a teacher at Lakeview High:

**Linda:** We were at a baseball game just a few weeks ago and another teacher that does a Special Ed in Lakeview. She was, I said you know, how do your kids do with this program? She was like, oh, you know, terrible. And I have asked the administration to do this and this and this. She, as a teacher, not getting her needs met to be able to teach the difference to the children that have different needs. And so I thought, okay that's... so you're not being heard from a teacher's point. If I came in as a parent, maybe that would be really helpful. (Interview 15)

As can be seen from this excerpt, Linda's opinion of the Summit Learning program is directly connected to the experience of her underperforming son. She expressed frustration about the Summit program through repeated questions: "You let every term overlap with grades, but now we are at the end, so now what?" She invoked her child repeatedly and so it is likely that the issue is important to her. Her account spans a large time frame and she says she asked about the ACT scores in multiple meetings. She had plans to continue to address the issue during the upcoming year. Lastly, she expressed a desire for the administration to address the problems that arise from students who underperform.

As she addressed the issue, she felt "peer pressure" in the meetings and as a result withheld from speaking about her child directly. She also spoke with a teacher at the school about the program and realized, "if I came in as a parent, maybe that would be really helpful."

In this case Linda explained the beginnings of a situation of mediating dissonance. She spoke with a teacher at the school who expressed her negative opinion about the Summit program and she was in regular contact with the school administrators

who were implementing the program. In response, she considered out loud that her involvement might be helpful and contemplated that possibility for the future. Yet, to that point, Linda had been hesitant to speak out about the program. Not being heavily involved in the decision at that point, based on her comments it is unclear whether she felt responsibility to the teacher and other parents who might disagree with the administration. Given that Lakeview is a principal-strong council it is also unclear how much she would be able to influence changes to the program moving forward. Yet, in thinking about her continued involvement she expressed a desire to act differently next year: “And now I think going into next year should be a little bit even different. Where okay, actually, parents can shift things or make a difference if you, you know, check and balance a little bit. So maybe that will change my mind for what I think about through the summer to bring in next year.”

### **Heidi**

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Heidi is 45 years old and has one child who attends Lakeview High School. She has lived in her current residence for 5 years and has lived in the community for 17 years. In total, she has served on the community council for 6 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Lakeview High SCC. In addition to her SCC participation, she has served on the PTA for 3 years. She plans to serve on the SCC for at least 2 more years. Heidi is White, upper middle income, and completed a bachelor’s degree. Heidi regularly takes on large initiatives in her position at the junior high SCC. Of all of the parents on the Lakeview High SCC, Heidi spoke the most frequently in meetings I attended.

Although the meetings were primarily run by the vice principals of the school, she was the most willing of all members to offer a contrary opinion and often introduces new ideas or issues for the council to consider. She expressed an eagerness to be on the community council because “if they we’re making decisions like that, I wanted to be involved.”

### **Power and Responsibility**

Heidi sees the SCC as a decision-making body and speaks often about her responsibility to represent the community in her role as a parent on the council.

**Heidi:** I guess I didn’t really realize what the community council, what they did. How much power I guess they held because really, I mean they make a lot of decisions. They decide where all the money, the school trust land money, goes which is huge. You know, new programs or anything that. I do feel like in all the community councils I’ve sat on, the administration really adheres to what the community wants and tries to do what they want. So in that aspect I felt like you need to have people that are on the community council that are educated and wanting to or have a strong opinion on what they want for their kids. (Interview 16)

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**Heidi:** I go to the community council and I’ll go get the feedback because that’s part of your job, right? As the member of the community council is to hopefully represent the voice of the community. (Interview 16)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Heidi described four advisory decisions and no invested decisions. Of the four total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with all four of them. She stated her disagreement in an SCC meeting for three of the four decisions. She referenced her own child in connection with

two decisions and personally took action on all four decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for all four decisions, but only characterized one decision negatively. All four decisions were raised multiple times in SCC meetings. She reported taking personal action in the following ways: gathering information for one decision, taking action in a meeting for four decisions, and withholding speech for one decision.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Summit Learning Program

During the first part of the year, Heidi had numerous conversations with the school administration and parents about the newly implemented Summit Learning program. In this excerpt she explains the details of that process:

**Heidi:** So this year Lakeview was rolling out the Summit Learning program and it was a pretty painful process actually because it was brand new and they didn't really prepare or know how to prepare parents. I don't think it was necessarily their fault. They just were not understanding how to deal with either. And so there was a lot of people upset about their kids and what they were learning and feeling like they weren't being taught. And so in the community especially in Lakeview it's a very highly, I think it's one of the highest educated communities per capita in the state. And so obviously with that comes parents that are very passionate about their kids education and having a good education and very involved in education. So those were parents that were very, very upset with the fact that they didn't understand that Lakeview was going to be a blended learning school. Well they knew it was going to be a blended learning school. They did not understand that it was going to be based on this Summit Program and they didn't feel like they had been given information to make an educated choice as to whether they wanted their children to go to Lakeview. So anyway on the community council those first few months especially it was a lot of discussion about that process and I had quite a few parents that had come to me with frustrations and wanting to know why it was that the kids were not being taught per say and that they were having things done. And in fact my own daughter that was attending, because she is a very good student, and she was also struggling, feeling like she had to learn everything on her own. So we had a lot of conversations in community council where I just kind of approached the principal and said you know you need to let us know why you chose this platform? What it is, because there's not really any data that you're giving out especially for ACT testing. That's what parents are most worried about

was these kids are not being taught the basics especially in math and science because the Summit Learning program is where you kind of learn in your own group and by asking questions and by reading and researching and so math and science it's hard to fall into that category. And so they were very worried about the ACT test. We talked about you know what kind of data do you have to show these parents that these kids are going to be okay? And then by their educational environment. And do you have anything to show that this was a success in other schools? So anyway, it was a pretty intense conversation for a couple of months because I feel like we weren't really on board. And the principal was kind of standing alone and it was actually his decision. He was the one that decided the platform to use. So, you know it was a blended learning school, but he was the one that decided to use the Summit platform. And so that was a lot of pressure on him. But he did a great job and tried his best to inform and educate. So anyway, I think that I brought a lot of things to the table such as how the teachers were teaching and the kids were responding and not being able to take assessment tests when they need to take assessment tests and things like that. So, I think that has been a successful conversation over this year and it has improved. The Summit program has improved and the way they're educating parents on it this coming year, for those coming in, is much better because we as a community council said this is just not really okay. The community is not feeling good about what's going on in the school right now.

After explaining the process, she then added more detail about her mediating position between parents and administrators:

**Heidi:** Yes, because I felt like I understood also where the administration was coming from and the fact that they were trying to roll the program out. And that was a big daunting task for them as well to be able to do something like that. So, I just felt like part of my job was to also support them as much as possible. But then, you know, listen to the concerns of the community because that's what the council is for. But I didn't feel like, I felt like I was more supportive of the administration when I was talking to the people in the community. But, when I would go to that community council meeting I was definitely on the side of the parents because I understood, I felt the same way. I just couldn't voice exactly what I was, you know, because if not then you're gonna have total upheaval when everyone is saying... You know because everyone's drastic, no one believes in it, everyone hates it. Well, it's not everyone and it's not no one. But, it's a lot of people probably that are feeling the same way. (Interview 16)

In this case, Heidi provided an account of an advisory decision worked out over the course of many meetings. At the time Heidi's account started, the school administration had already purchased and implemented the Summit Learning platform.

As with many advisory decisions, the controversy regarding the decision came during the implementation of the platform. From the beginning of our interview, Heidi characterized her position as one in between Lakeview High parents and the school administration. “I had quite a few parents that had come to me with frustrations,” she said. Thus, she regularly interacted with parents who were frustrated about the platform and the school administration who made the decision to implement the platform. She also expressed personal frustration with the rollout and lack of data, but was open to the possibility that it could improve. Based on her references to her own daughter’s experience, her multiple interactions with others, and her meeting involvement, it is very likely that the issue was important to Heidi.

Heidi’s actions were multiple and varied as she responded to the issue. She characterized herself as a leading voice who “had a lot of conversations in community council where I just kind of approached the principal.” She also reported one-on-one conversations with “quite a few parents” who came to her with frustrations. What is more she reported that she “couldn't voice exactly” what she was thinking in the meetings and held back from saying things to both parents and the principal.

This case represents a situation of mediating dissonance. From the beginning, Heidi characterized herself as a primary actor between two discordant parties and sought to address the situation repeatedly while cultivating a consistent position herself. She was selective in her communications and overstated or limited her words when necessary to maintain a consistent reputation with the discordant parties. What is unexpected about this case is the amount of influence Heidi reports to have had on the decision, given that Lakeview is a principal-strong council. From her account, the improvement was directly



connected to the intervention of parents on the SCC: “The Summit program has improved and the way they’re educating parents on it this coming year, for those coming in, is much better because we as a Community Council said this is just not really okay.” This case demonstrates the dynamic nature of authority on the Lakeview SCC. While the predominant practices of the SCC limit parent authority, parents can exert their influence when organized effectively.

### Decision 2: Cell Phones

In her interview, Heidi also related that she successfully implemented a new cell phone policy through her SCC work at the junior high:

**Heidi:** I was able to implement this year the cell phone policy school wide where they have cell phone door hangers so that they can turn their cell phones in at the beginning of class and then get them at the end of class and it's a school wide policy. I did a lot of research on cell phones and teenagers and how the productivity of kids in context and in class go down even just with their cell phones in their pocket and buzzing even if they don't pull it out. It's just dropping them from learning and how... I mean there's a lot of research to back the fact that it's causing test scores to go down, which we actually saw this year in the junior high. Their testing scores went down and I mean just if they have their phone they're going to be on their phone and not paying attention to what's going on. So anyway that was another successful thing that happened this year was that they were able to implement that to try to alleviate cell phones in the school.

When I asked her the process of the decision, she replied:

**Heidi:** I did ask to be on the agenda one of the months and then I brought a hand out of information that I passed around. And it was pretty much a presentation on the effects of cellphones in schools and had research. When, you know, a lot of different countries like France had gotten rid of all cell phones in school from the age of 15 and under no one is allowed to have cellphones in school and they've watched their testing scores rise because of it. And then there are actually quite a few schools around the country that are implementing a similar policy. My sister actually has a daughter that goes to school in Arizona and there they have a very strict at their school. No cellphone plan policy and they actually don't even really use technology for their education and they are one of the top schools in the country. So I had a lot of research to side with that because some parents are

saying they don't want to like give their kids boundaries which is weird you know. So I felt like I had to have some good research and actually the parents are not the ones that were against it. It was the teachers. The principal had to take it to the teachers because that was his play and the teachers were not wanting to do that. And I think that's because the teachers used that as a babysitting tool a lot as well. It makes it easy to be lazy as a teacher. When, you know, if you do good on this then I'll let you play on your cell phones for thirty minutes of class. I mean it's just like as a parent with kids it's way easier to let your kids watch a movie on the device than to actively play with them or be with them and I feel like that happening in the education system, a lot. So it was, actually I got more pushback from teachers than I got from the parents. And so that's why they gave everyone, they actually bought the door hanger pockets, the school did pay for those. But I don't know that they're enforcing that. I was wanting that to be like a strict policy that teachers had to enforce. But I think it's more of a choice for the teachers if they want to use them they can.

She then related her experience at the high school seeking to implement the same policy:

**Heidi:** On the flip side I tried to do that in high school and they weren't nearly as receptive obviously because the kids are older I'm sure. Also because they don't want to implement such strict regulation in a high school environment. But I still think it should be done, but not everyone agreed. (Interview 16)

In this case, Heidi described an advisory decision that she initiated and successfully implemented at the junior high. She then described an attempt to implement the same decision at the high school. When she originally sought to implement the decision at the junior high, she explained that she “got more pushback from teachers than I got from the parents.” This implies that she got pushback from *both* teachers *and* parents on the decision and that there was significant disagreement about the decision. She also indicated that the decision was important to her because she initiated the decision and acted in various ways to carry it out. She did not address how long the decision took to implement, but did attempt to introduce the decision at the high school after the junior high.

In order to implement and present the decision she asked “to be put on the agenda,” “did a lot of research,” and made a “handout.” Her efforts continued as she dealt

with the complaints that emerged from the parents and the teachers. She reported that the principal acts as the main liaison to the teachers, but she does not explain why the principal took that role instead of her. Other than the principal's intervention with the teachers, she reported herself to be the primary actor in implementing the policy.

This decision is unique in that it was an advisory decision initiated by a parent member rather than the school or district administration. As the initiator of the decision, Heidi did not mediate between two discordant parties, but two parties both disagreed with her policy to differing extents. Being the prime mover in the decision, most of her actions were in preparation for the decision rather than responding to the decision. Given these factors, it is not likely she experienced mediating dissonance. What is also noteworthy in this case is that her efforts were successful in the junior high and unsuccessful in the high school. She did not elaborate on this point, but in my observation, the nature of the Lakeview SCC is such that parent initiatives rarely were given significant time on the agenda.

### **Denise**

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Denise is 50 years old and has two children who attend Lakeview High School. She has lived in her current residence and the community for 18 years. In total, she has served on the community council for 12 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Lakeview High SCC. She has not served on the PTA or other voluntary councils or boards outside of her SCC participation. She plans to serve on the SCC for 2 more years. Denise is White and has completed a bachelor's degree. She did not record her household

income level. Denise reported that she made a concerted effort with friends and acquaintances to get on the SCC: “I actually lobbied to get on the community council.” As their representative she was in regular communication with them.

Denise described seeing her participation as a vehicle to understand what is going on at the school, have access to the principal, and get a sense for the energy of the school. She also reported feeling a strong sense of responsibility to her friends who voted her onto the council.

### **Power and Responsibility**

**Denise:** That's why I wanted to get on, because I think that having the principal know you face to face and the principal knows that you are involved enough to be on the community council, then when I have an issue the principal has treated me like, hey, this person is involved. (Interview 17)

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**Denise:** Yeah. It really is because I actually lobbied to get on the community council. I had talked to a lot of my friends and said you vote for me and I'll try to keep you as in the loop as I can. After every community council meeting I actually try to send a group text out that just kind of gives the summary of what we talked about and then people respond to that text and then it gets going you know like they kind of add on to that.

**Interviewer:** Huh. So after almost every school community council you're sending that out to them to update them on what's going on?

**Denise:** Yeah. Yeah. Because I feel like I owe it to them because they voted me in. (Interview 17)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Denise described three invested decisions and one advisory decision. Of the four total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal

disagreement with all four of them. She substantively disagreed with three decisions, disagreeing with the form of one decision, and stated her disagreement in SCC meetings in all cases. She referenced her own child in connection with three decisions and personally took action on all four decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for all four decisions and characterized three decisions negatively. Two of the four decisions were raised multiple times in SCC meetings. She reported taking personal action in the following ways: a one-on-one conversation with a stakeholder for one decision, taking action in a meeting for four decisions, and withholding speech for two decisions.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Summit Learning Program

Similar to Linda and Heidi, Denise commented at length about the Summit

Learning program decision. Here she begins by relating a conversation with a friend:

**Denise:** For example, like I remember early in the year, that my friend Jessica, that I exercise with, she was asking me, you know, like, so how do you feel about the Summit? How do you think it's being received, all of that? And I told her I said, it's so interesting because I'm super excited about it. And I think it's going to be awesome and I said I go to this community council meeting and all of the parents are so concerned. And I remember thinking, gosh, should I be concerned? I wasn't concerned before, I just thought it was gonna be awesome. And then throughout the year all of us have been, all of the parents on the community council have kind of been more on the same page by the end of the year. And so I've been a little bit more I see the pros and cons and they are seeing more the pros and cons. And we are both in kind of an alignment. So I have talked to friends outside the community council a lot and I think that they're looking to me to kind of get a little bit of a feel of hey, is this a good thing or is that a bad thing? Are we going to like this or not? And so I try to be as positive as I can be whenever I can be. And I think it's really important just for the community, for everything else, that I really try so hard to be as positive about the principal, as positive about the teachers. And so when I come back and tell them things, you know, I'm not going to lie to them and I'm not going to make it rosy colored if it's

not, but I also try to put the most positive spin as I can on it so that because I want everyone to be happy and work together and think it's awesome.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Interesting. So when you're talking to your friends, you're kind of talking in positive terms about what's happening at the school.

**Denise:** Yes. As much as I possibly can.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. What about when you come back the other way? So what about when you come back to the school from your friends? How does that go or what's your idea there, you know?

**Denise:** I feel like it's been really received well when I had. Because just this last one, I had a problem with Nate (Denise's son) piling everything up to the end of the year. You know how Summit lets you do that? So I was concerned and I have been, I feel like I tried to be super positive all year long on anything that I say, but on that I just wanted to tell the principal that I am frustrated. That now we are in this bind and I told him that based on other friends that have said the same thing with their kids. I mean, you know, we've been talking like my son has eighteen content assessments he has to take. And, you know, they're saying, oh, my gosh, mine has twenty five, mine has projects and mine da, da, da, da. So when I took that back, I didn't know what response I was going to get, so I was really tentative to say anything. And, but when I did I felt like the principal listened and I felt like the other parents were jumping in and saying, yeah, we're in the same boat. And it made me feel better to know that the principal was at least aware that there are people that are behind and that they were going to try to meet with those kids. And so that they had already thought of it also and that made me feel a lot better and everything. (Interview 17)

In this case, Denise provided an account of her own unique experience with the advisory decision to implement the Summit Learning platform. As with significant advisory decisions on other SCCs, the Summit Learning platform took on an outsized significance in the experience of Lakeview SCC parent members. Here Denise describes a decision that she originally supported and was “super excited” about. Yet as the situation progressed, her views begin to align with those of the other SCC parents and she became frustrated with the implementation of the platform. Although the decision was originally not a concern for her, it became more important over time as it impacted her friends, the other members of the SCC, and her own son. As she recounts, the issue came

up in multiple meetings as it developed through the year.

Her actions regarding the decision were originally casual conversations with friends as they inquired about the program. From there, she became more involved and the conversations with her friends became more serious: “I think that they’re looking to me to kind of get a little bit of a feel of hey, is this a good thing or is that a bad thing?” She then recounted a meeting exchange with the principal when she personally vented her frustration.

Similar to Heidi’s experience, this case represents a situation of mediating dissonance when Denise acted as a representative of parents who disagreed with the decision of the school administrators. More than other SCC members, Denise is very connected to those parents who voted her onto the council and thus she reported to the principal about their experience as well as her own. She also reported putting a “positive spin” on her communication so that “everyone can be happy and work together and think it’s awesome.” This suggests that she was selective in her communication to both sides and sought to cultivate a consistent message as she mediated the conflict between them and sought to address the problem. From her account this process as encouraging and although she reported feeling “really tentative,” she also reported that the principal listened and was making efforts to meet with struggling students.

## Decision 2: Advanced Programs

**Denise:** So, my kids are slightly above average. I'm not saying that they are genius level but sure slightly above average and I felt like all of the resources go to the lower levels. And that was really frustrating to me because I'm like it seems like we're like the crabs that we're squashing the top and spending all of our money at the bottom and yet it's the top is going to make America great, you know? And they're the ones that are going to do the wonderful things. And so I

had a few parents that were in line with me and like in those meetings it's nice because I felt like there were other parents that felt the same way about their kids so they even speak up for it. But, it was also interesting because I also learned through the whole system that the government and everything else it kind of works to the bottom third. So I'd had kind of both experiences where I have felt like the principal, the teachers were really against me because they're saying that we have to, like those kids will be lost forever and they're never going to succeed. And so then I'm like okay well I get that and I feel bad for those people and I do want to help them. But, I also want to help the upper. And so it's been enlightening for me to realize what I thought was like oh my gosh why are we not helping the better kids, you know? Like why are we not giving them more opportunities to grow? And when I saw their point of view, I kind of got that also. And so I don't think that we ever had really good resolutions [laugh]. Like we tried to put money to both and whatever. And I also thought, you know, the mainstream kids get no extra money. And I don't know how I feel about that, but I also see that there's no really clear cut answer. So, I don't know. So, I don't know if that helps or not but I have felt that that's always been kind of a battle for me. (Interview 17)

In this case, Denise described the decision process to allocate Land Trust funds. The allocation of these resources is fully within the legal mandate of the SCC, making it an invested decision. Rather than explain one specific decision, Denise described her desire to allocate funds toward advanced programs. In her various attempts to advance this idea, she encountered significant resistance from school administrators and teachers: “the principal, the teachers were really against me.” It is likely that these decisions were important to Denise because she framed the entire sequence with the impact of these decisions on her own children. As she described the situation, she did not relate any particular conclusion, but described an ongoing scenario that does not have any good resolutions and continues to be “kind of a battle for me.”

The actions Denise took in reference to this decision were primarily meeting actions. Although not included in the excerpt above, she described one specific meeting with an elementary principal during which teachers “kind of jumped on it” when she tried to explain her case. As a result she says she “clammed up” because “I did get shut down.”



She also described a different meeting when she spoke on this topic with a junior high principal where he “was able to explain just the real challenges.”

In this case Denise described invested decisions to allocate the land trust budget, which she views as an “ongoing battle.” Because the decisions were invested decisions, Denise repeatedly voted to allocate funds toward initiatives that she did not fully agree with or would have preferred to allocate in different ways. Thus, her behavior ran against her own best opinions for the money and the professed interest of her children. That state of conflict led her to bring up the issue in many SCC meetings as well as private meetings with principals and teachers at various schools. While she described her position at one point as “just being selfish,” she also reported exchanges where she “saw their point of view I kind of got that also.” While summarizing the decisions, she expressed that “there’s no really clear-cut answer.”

### **Conclusion: Pragmatic Citizenship at the Lakeview High SCC**

Perhaps the most surprising finding of the study was the discrepancy between the observations of the Lakeview High SCC meetings and the interview reports given by the parent members. As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, the vice principals who attended the meetings directed the majority of the agenda items and SCC parent members were primarily reactive to them. As described in Chapter 2, the Lakeview High SCC addressed the fewest items per meeting compared to the other three SCCs and only made, on average, just over one decision per meeting, which was often the approval of meeting minutes from the month before. This, in addition to the meetings being the shortest and least organized of the four cases, led me to believe that it was possibly the most principal-

strong council of all the cases.

Yet, as I began to interview parent members, I realized that my observations failed to reveal some major workings of the SCC prior to my meeting attendance. Hence, the three parent members of the Lakeview SCC interviewed for the study expressed a stronger sense of power and responsibility, on average, than the members of the Riverside High SCC. Linda, serving in her 1<sup>st</sup> year on the SCC, expressed that her new understanding of the power that parents have will alter her participation in the coming year (Interview 15). Heidi repeatedly puzzled aloud that most parents fail to understand “how much power” SCCs really have (Interview 16). What is more, these feelings of efficacy were supported by their experience on the Lakeview SCC.

As with the two parent-strong councils, Lakeview also had a major issue that was reported by all three members: The Summit Learning Program. As the following analysis attests, the experience with the Summit Learning Program decision increased the recognition of various interests to the decision and the parent members actively coordinated those interests to achieve a better outcome.

Before the school year started, the principal made the decision to implement the Summit Learning Program. As her low-performing child participated in the program, Linda began to see that he was falling behind (Interview 15). Curious about this problem, she inquired to a Special Ed teacher about whether her students were performing well on the program. The Special Ed teacher reported very poor results from her students and Linda began to realize that not only was her underperforming son not doing well, but other students with special needs were also not doing well. This broadened realization made Linda wonder aloud in her interview whether she should not “be more bold and

brave” about defending the needs of underperforming students (Interview 15). While Linda recognized the broader needs of a group of students, it is in the accounts of Heidi and Denise where we see the coordination of interests between administrators and parents.

Heidi initiated her report of the Summit Learning Program by recognizing both the plight of the administrators and the parents. The administrators had chosen the program, but it is wasn't “necessarily their fault” because it was a brand new school and they had simply failed to prepare parents for the rollout (Interview 16). Her entire account moved between the position of the parents and administrators, seeking to further articulate and lend credibility to their positions. She then spoke directly with parents, her own daughter and the administrators to clarify the information about the program. Additionally, she spoke with teachers and “brought a lot of things to the table” about their experience to help the administrators understand and address the problems (Interview 16). Denise also worked in her own way to address the issue. She described “trying to be as positive as I can be whenever I can be” in order to bring the two sides together over the decision. In this effort she explicitly tailored her message to both sides in ways that she felt would help improve the situation. She moved between these parties putting a “positive spin” on her communication until finally she realized there was a real problem with the platform. She felt tentative to say something to the principal, but in the end spoke up and the principal listened and subsequently made plans to address the problem (Interview 17).

From Heidi's account, these efforts to coordinate the interests between the parents and the administrators bore significant fruit: “the Summit Program has improved and the

way they're educating parents on it this coming year" (Interview 16). Throughout the accounts of all three members, the steps that they took to coordinate interests between parents and the administration were not comfortable. They were "hard conversations" and parents at the school were "very worried" about the situation. Similar reports about the challenging nature of interest coordination echoed in the experience of members at Riverside and Crescent High. The relevant point in the Lakeview accounts is that the responsibility over the Summit decision led to constant readjustment of behavior by the SCC members in order to resolve the problem. Putting on a happy face or summoning courage for a hard conversation is the stuff of pragmatic citizenship. Indeed, the motivation to adjust behaviors and arbitrate between disagreeing parties must be abiding because otherwise the discomfort of problem solving will hinder further action. As can be seen from this example, when citizens feel empowered to make decisions and responsible for those decisions, they often continue to face the uncomfortable situations and at times even feel invigorated by the work.

## CHAPTER 8

### OAKWOOD HIGH SCHOOL SCC

In this chapter, I review the developmental dissonance cycle with five individual parent members of the Oakwood High School SCC: Janet, Emily, Lynn, Kelly, and Lisa. Of the four SCC cases, the Oakwood High School is the most principal-strong council. The meetings are opened, typically with a deferential smirk, by the SCC chair and then the remainder of the time is given to the principal Jack Bailey. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, over 50% of the agenda items have “Jack” or the first name of the assistant principal listed next to them. Although the archival data in Chapter 2 demonstrated that the administrators directed just over 50% of the meetings, in practice Jack and his assistant principal took nearly 80 to 90% of the discussion time during the meetings. There were one or two times during the year when a visiting school board member took a few minutes to explain a policy, but otherwise the meetings were primarily directed by the principal or vice principal. Additionally, the topics addressed in the meetings throughout the year were largely outside of the scope of the Land Trust budget allocation. Whereas all the of the other SCCs dedicated significant amounts of time in multiple meetings throughout the year to the budget allocation, the Oakwood SCC addressed it only briefly toward the end of a few meetings. When the budget was addressed, no particulars were discussed and the floor was not genuinely open for additional comment.

While my observations and the archival data corroborate this finding, so too do the interviews with parent members of the SCC. As demonstrated below, many members expressed frustration or confusion regarding the Land Trust funds and their own role in the budget allocation. As detailed earlier, this point is significant because the Land Trust budget is the only resource that the SCC has formal authority over. Compared to the Lakeview High SCC, the other principal-strong SCC, the Oakwood SCC authority structure operated more rigidly and member interviews attest to a long history of the SCC being organized in this way. Although parent members on the SCC have limited decision-making power, this does not fully preclude their experience of the developmental dissonance cycle. The parent members of the Oakwood SCC had, on average, the longest running SCC experience of all parent members in this study. Thus, some members reported experiences of conflict and dissonance, although these experiences largely occurred on School Community Councils outside of the Oakwood SCC. Lastly, members on the Oakwood SCC felt that particular decisions are important and expressed disagreement, but without decision-making responsibility these decisions rarely lead to experiences of dissonance.

The Oakwood High School SCC is composed of 15 parent members, 4 teachers, and the school principal. The vice principal and the principal's administrative assistant also regularly attend and participate in SCC meetings. Of the 15 parent members, 9 regularly attend SCC meetings and I interviewed 5 of these 9 members. Fourteen of the 15 members are women. All 15 of the members were born in the United States and White. The length of SCC experience of the five members I interviewed is significant and very similar. Four of the five members have served on school community councils for 10

years or more and one had served for 8 years. All five members have significant voluntary experience outside of the SCC including the PTA, Library Board, Church, and Nonprofit experience. All five members come from lower-middle or upper-middle income households with no households qualifying as upper income or lower income. Additionally, all five members had completed bachelor's degrees and one member had completed a master's degree. The age of the members is also very similar to that of all of the SCC members in the study. All members of the Oakwood SCC are in their 40s to 50s.

### **Janet**

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Janet is 45 years old and has one child who attends Oakwood High School. She has lived in her home for 11 years and lived in the community for 23 years. In total, she has served on school community councils for 13 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Oakwood High SCC. She has served previously on the PTA, a bond committee for school construction, and "several religious councils." She plans to serve on the SCC "until my daughter graduates." Janet is White, lower middle income, and completed a bachelor's degree. When talking about her experience on a bond committee to fund two new high schools in the area, she emphatically said, "when it became political to get the bond passed, I was like, oh, I do not like the political angle at all." In her work on the SCC and the bond committee she relates that she loves data, but has a strong distaste for "government work" and situations that become political. As with most members of the Oakwood SCC, she participates very seldom in SCC meetings. She candidly states in the interview that throughout her long tenure on SCCs, "I've always felt

like just a supporting crew, listening, paying attention.”

### **Power and Responsibility**

Janet continues to participate on the SCC in order to gain information about the school and maintain a good relationship with the school administrators. When thinking about her responsibility on the council, she expressed the need to see “the bigger picture.”

**Janet:** I don't know. I don't think I've ever felt like I've made a difference on community council like ever. I felt like I don't know, I think when you're... I've always felt like just a supporting crew, listening, paying attention. I think the reason because so much of it is government work, that's like check the boxes, fill out a form, blah, blah, blah, get your money and I know. I dealt with that on our farm. It was like, she was asking the same question over and over again in a different way and it's just a waste of time, but you got to do it. You got to go through their hoops or you don't get the funds. And so a lot of it is just checking the boxes, all of like how we met, we had, but the things where for me, the purpose that it serves was like being involved having a face with the people that were leading the school that my kids were in and having a good relationship with those people. And just being able to be informed myself of what's going on in the community and what's going on in our schools. (Interview 18)

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**Janet:** There are definitely times when I say I want to say that's not my experience. You know, like I don't, like that is not how my child went through this. But I don't. I don't because I feel like there's a bigger picture. I feel like you're covering. You represent thirteen hundred students. So I try to keep a bigger picture in mind and never focus just on my own personal needs. (Interview 18)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Janet described three invested decisions and no advisory decisions. Of the three total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with one of them. She substantively disagreed with the decision, but did not express that disagreement in an SCC meeting. In terms of importance to Janet,



she did not reference her own children in connection with any decisions and personally took action on two decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for one decision and characterized one decision negatively. Both decisions that she recounted in her interview were raised in multiple meetings throughout the year. She reported taking action in the following ways: one-on-one talks with stakeholders for one decision and taking action in meetings for two decisions.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Land Trust

In this excerpt, Janet compares the different ways in which SCCs allocates their Land Trust budget. She has participated on many SCCs and describes what she would do differently if she could go back to her first council experience:

**Janet:** Back then when they were just doing individual teacher recommendations and I thought there's gotta be a better way. This feels really like any teacher can just want anything and come and ask and we're going to say yes, because you have to spend the money. But is it really a benefit? Like, technology to me is a hard thing because it changes so fast and you're spending... So I really like when they use our personnel and programs and things like that, because the human interaction is to me going to get you way further than any and you can get tons of other... There's so many, what, what is the word I'm looking for with the foundation. There are so many grants out there that you can apply for technology stuff that... And I know you have to stay up on technology. That's fine. But I always felt like the personnel, the people are more important than the... So I did leave a lot of times just thinking this is just the way they run it. I don't know what you can do. And so that was only my second experience. Once I got over to Washington and I was like, oh, there's people that spend it in a different way. I'm starting to connect the dots. And I was like, if I could go back, I would say, why don't we work on helping at risk students. Like focus the money on students that need help in a program. Now, I would have so much better, after going through it all, like to go back and say, hey, let's rethink this. (Interview 18)

In this short excerpt Janet reviewed her experiences allocating Land Trust funds and questions the original SCC practices: “But is it really a benefit?” Although she

expresses disagreement with those decisions, it is unclear how important the decisions are to Janet. She does propose an alternative way of allocating funds that privileges “human interaction” over technology. Having voted to approve many of these decisions, she remembered leaving with a sense of conflict and dismay: “I did leave a lot of times just thinking this is just the way they run it. I don’t know what you can do.”

When recalling the experiences on her first SCC, she did not recount any actions that she took on that council. Instead, she provided a hypothetical situation in which she could “go back” and she offered proposals on how to better allocate the funds of the SCC: “Now, I would [know] so much better, after going through it all.”

In this case Janet recalled repeated instances where she felt conflicted about invested decisions. Having voted repeatedly to approve these decisions, she recalled the sense of conflict and internal dissonance regarding the situation. This case is of interest because Janet is not currently working through these issues, but provided a window into her learning process by participating on other SCCs. She speaks confidently about how she would be able to allocate the funds in a much better way were she given a chance. Yet, while she spoke this way in hypothetical terms, she remained very passive during the meetings on the Oakwood SCC. She mentioned in passing that “Oakwood does a really good job too dealing with some of those at risk things.” We are left to infer from this that she approved of the budget allocation from Oakwood. During the year there was very little discussion about the allocation of the SCC budget and when the principal asked for volunteers to help prepare the budget in the March meeting, no parents volunteered.

## Decision 2: Cheer Team

In this decision, Janet becomes aware of a conflictual situation with the cheer team's official designation after having approved a decision to keep the team as it was:

**Janet:** I mean, well, they were, they wanted to go competitive and they were running it past us to decide that or not and I didn't know what the advantages were, why we would want to. But then I voted just the way it was because I couldn't see a problem with it like it was, I didn't know.

**Interviewer:** To stay noncompetitive?

**Janet:** There were lots of problems with it that I didn't understand. And a whole lot of people came to me after that and explained to me what the problems were behind the scenes and all of that and why it needed to go a different direction and things like that and I thought, oh, we need to bring this up again and has to come again. So then I went and said, I think we need to revisit this, this year. So we were able to get that switched over to the competitive team and go that round. I mean, I still don't have skin in the game, but I understand it better, what's everybody's, where they're coming from. (Interview 18)

In this case, Janet described an invested decision in which the SCC voted to keep the cheer team with their current noncompetitive designation. Janet voted to retain the designation not knowing "what the advantages were." As she recounted, she does not disagree with the decision, but she realized the need to bring it up again in an SCC meeting because other parents disagree with the decision. She specifically mentioned that she does not "have skin in the game" and even after the decision, she simply came to understand it better. Having raised the issue and successfully altered the decision, she does not report any conflict over the decision.

When she first heard the problems with the decision, Janet raised the decision in a subsequent meeting and voted to approve the new decision to make the cheer team competitive. Although she doesn't report the conversations specifically, we can assume she had one-on-one conversations with parents regarding the decision.

Because Janet does not disagree with the decision and feels that it is relatively unimportant, it is not likely that she felt dissonance regarding the decision. Had the conflict between the parents and the administration persisted, it is likely that she would have experienced mediating dissonance. Yet, as Janet reports, the council was quickly able to raise the issue and change the decision without the issue carrying on for an extended period.

### Emily

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Emily is 51 years old and has one child who attends Oakwood High School. She has lived in her home and the community for 13 years. In total, she has served on school community councils for 12 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Oakwood High SCC. She has also served on the library board for 11 years, the city council for 5 years, and in a church council for 3 years. She plans to serve on the SCC for 5 more years. Emily is White, upper middle income, and completed a master's degree. As her service on the library and city council attest, Emily is very active in public service. Throughout her interview she talks about being a liaison between the SCC and the municipal government for projects where school and city jurisdictions overlap. While there is very little discussion or conflict throughout the entire year on the Oakwood SCC, Emily is the sole member who openly questioned a policy of the school administration.

## Power and Responsibility

In a candid moment in her interview, Emily expressed confusion about the actual purpose of the SCC: “I know what each one does. I just don't know if that's the whole reason that they were formed.” She was not discouraged by this lack of clarity because she felt that “they’re still doing good.” As a long time member, she did make clear that the SCC is not supposed to be run by the principal. Those SCCs that are run by the principal are the more “formal” SCCs in her experience.

**Emily:** I know. Listening to all the videos and classes they have you go to, they say the main purpose of the community council is to help oversee the trust funds but it seems to me that that's only one little part of what the community council actually does. I mean, we talked a lot, especially at the junior high of safety as far as getting kids to and from safely, what happens while they're there. Keeping them safe which really had very little to do with trust funds. They only pay for safety stuff. So, I am still trying to after years and years and years decide exactly what community council is supposed to be doing, (Interview 19)

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**Emily:** Depending on the principal, depended on how formal it was. And we actually had to really... The one gal that took over after the first principal that had been there twenty years, when she took over, she didn't understand that the community council wasn't to be run by her. And so she kind of came in and would chair the meeting and tell everybody this is what we do, so we kind of have to have a discussion with her and said, no, it's the chair that chairs the meeting. Yes, you contribute. Yes, we can't do this without you but you don't run the show. And then the same thing with the young guy. When he came in, he was the same way. He wanted to take control over this community council and run it and didn't know that that wasn't his job. (Interview 19)

## Decision Synopsis

In her interview, Emily described nine advisory decisions and no invested decisions. Of the nine total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with four of them. In all four decisions, she substantively

disagreed with the decisions and expressed that disagreement in SCC meetings. In terms of importance to Emily, she referenced her own children in connection with two decisions and personally took action on five decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for four decisions and characterized three decisions negatively. Two decisions that she recounted in her interview are raised in multiple meetings throughout the year. She reported taking action in the following ways: one-on-one talks with stakeholders for two decisions and taking action in meetings for four decisions.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Social Media Policy

In this exchange, Emily recounts an exchange she has with the principal in an SCC meeting regarding the punishments for the improper use of social media. The policy proposed that students be removed from extracurricular activities such as sport teams if caught using social media improperly. She disagreed with the policy because, as she explains below, it seemed contradictory:

**Emily:** It was when they we were talking about taking kids out of the sports and events.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that's right.

**Emily:** If they're caught with doing some kind of interaction. And I am all for people being reprimanded. I'll be the first one to say yes, they need some reprimand. But my husband also has a Masters in counseling and to take a child away from those kids that could be good influences on them and just take them totally out of that I think is very dangerous.

After she explains her position, she reflects on whether it made an impact:

**Emily:** I don't think it changed anything, but at least I stated my position.

Although I do think if the situation comes up... Because they said we will do this on an individual basis and I think they'll be more apt to consider what would be the repercussions of if we took this person out before they actually did it. That's one thing, I think, that might be different. And I did talk to a couple of the counselors about it.

**Interviewer:** You did after the meeting. How did those conversations go? What did you say? Why?

**Emily:** I just explained why... Because I was like, I don't know what I said came across the way I was meaning it. So I just explained what my position was and like yeah, we're all about mental health thing. And I think they're actually the ones that will ultimately make that decision whether this person gets taken out or not. And so maybe it will make a difference there.

Toward the end of the interview, I asked her about a time on the SCC when someone did something that she disagreed with. In response, she explained how the social media decision impacted her:

**Emily:** I mean, probably the one that affected me the most was that one about the pulling the kids out of their groups. And that really bothered me for probably a week. But then after talking to the councilors and explaining myself again, at least I felt like I had said my piece and there wasn't anything else I could do. So I was going to be done with it [laugh]. (Interview 19)

In this case, Emily recounted an advisory decision that turned somewhat contentious in an SCC meeting. The school administration brought the policy to the SCC for their approval and Emily explained that she felt like enforcing the policy might be “very dangerous.” During the meeting she repeated her position at least three times, while others in the room largely defended the policy and the principal at last said that they would look at it on a “case by case” basis. The policy seemed important for Emily as she referenced her husband who is a mental health professional, quickly remembered the encounter in the interview, and took actions to address the concern. She described specific alternative solutions for the policy that might work better and provided reasons for those alternatives.

Emily reported that the decision “really bothered me for probably a week.” She then recounted that she went and talked to multiple counselors about the issue. From her perspective, the counselors are the ones who “will ultimately make that decision.” Thus, while her initial actions were to speak out in the meeting, she continued to pursue one-on-one talks with stakeholders after the meeting concluded. Those actions assuaged her internal conflict to some degree: “at least I felt like I had said my piece.”

Although the decision to pass the social media policy was an advisory decision, the conflict Emily reported resembles internal dissonance more than mediating dissonance. This seems to be the case even though the minutes for the meeting record no formal vote regarding the social media policy. As there was no formal vote, Emily did not act in a way that was inconsistent with her opinions regarding the matter. She stated her case plainly and repeatedly and continued to believe she was correct after the meeting. Perhaps the source of her ongoing internal conflict was due to the perceptions of others. She went to lengths to “explain herself” and to assure others that she was “all for people being reprimanded.” It is this residual internal conflict that led her to speak one-on-one to the counselors and say her piece. Of all policy decisions throughout the year, this decision prompted the most discussion, which was primarily driven by Emily. One additional consideration is that Emily’s investment in the decision increased her sense of responsibility for the decision even though she did not formally vote for it.

#### Decision 2: Title 1 Funding

In the following sequence, Emily recalls a situation on an elementary school SCC when the principal begged members of the SCC to “drum up customers” to apply for free



and reduced lunch so that the school could qualify for Title 1 funding. She begins by speaking about the principal:

**Emily:** He was concerned that we were going to lose the Title 1 funding. And so he begged each member of the council to apply for free and reduced lunch. And then asked us to go out and drum up customers [laugh], I guess, to apply so that he could keep his title 1 funding. And I told him I wouldn't do it. I said, number one I think we qualify. I had seven kids and so that threshold's huge [laugh]. I'm like, but I can afford to provide my kids lunches. I'm not going to apply for that. I don't want it [laugh]. And he got really upset that I wouldn't do it. And he was like well you don't have to use it! I'm like, I don't want to apply [laugh]. Anyway, that was a struggle. And I definitely wouldn't go around telling people to do it. I mean, I will let them know it's available if you need it. But, if you don't need it, I'm not going to make you go apply for it.

After she explained her own reasoning for not applying, I asked her if the school retained Title 1 status. She replied:

**Emily:** We did until about three years ago. And it was so funny, this is hilarious. This is another thing at the community council meeting, because they were all... You know, the principal came in all worried about it, we're losing this. And I'm like that is fantastic! Think of what's happening to our community. If we're losing Title 1 funding, that means that our income has gone up. Either that or people are being able to afford stuff for, you know, their students and they don't even apply like me [laugh]. I was like, that is fantastic. And a couple of them agreed with me. It's kind of cool [laugh].

**Interviewer:** Interesting, but the principal was worried?

**Emily:** She was but then she realized, well yeah that is a good thing. (Interview 19)

In this case, Emily described an advisory decision to advocate for additional parents to sign up for free and reduced lunch. She strongly disagreed with the decision: “I told him I wouldn’t do it.” Additionally, she mentioned her own seven children and said that she very likely qualified for free and reduced lunch, but out of principle will not sign up. As she recounted her personal reasons, not included above, she told of her experience with the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program as a new mother and reported that “it was a nightmare.” She also expressed her opinion about how the programs should be

used: “And I just, I don't agree with people using our programs just because it's available. And I totally agree if it's needed.” In her account, the issue came up repeatedly for years and she continued to hold her position.

In her account, the actions Emily took in relation to the issue are meeting actions. She registered her disagreement to the original principal and the second principal. She reported that her actions persuaded others on the council and ended by stating that even the principal eventually realized it was a good thing.

Of all nine decisions that Emily reported in her interview, this and the social media policy decision were the most likely to lead to developmental dissonance because of the strong disagreement and importance that Emily reported regarding each decision. Yet, throughout this decision, Emily held her opinion consistent and her actions aligned with her opinion. Furthermore, there were no decisions taken by the council to formalize a plan. The principal simply petitioned their help and the parent members provided advice on the decision. In addition to Emily holding her opinion and actions consistent, she did not report about other parents who disagreed with her position or that of the principal. In this case, even though Emily disagreed, it is not likely that she experienced mediating dissonance because she did not claim to represent other parents who also disagree. Due to these circumstances, it is likely that Emily did not feel dissonance in this case and her meeting actions were motivated by other factors.

## Lynn

### **Biographical Sketch**

Lynn is 47 years old and has one child who attends Oakwood High School. She has lived in her current residence and the community for 12 years. In total, she has served on School Community Councils for 12 years, 10 of which have been spent on the Oakwood High SCC. She currently serves as a parent member of the Oakwood High SCC. She has not served on the PTA, but has been a member of a childcare association for 15 years. The year of the study was the last year she plans to serve on the SCC. Lynn is White, lower middle income, and completed a bachelor's degree. Lynn does not participate often in the meetings and stopped attending meetings for the second half of the school year. She does not address her absence in the interview, but she has served for many years prior. She is actively running a daycare inside her home, a few blocks from the high school. Throughout the interview many children were in the room and she bobbed a newborn on her knee for nearly an hour of the interview.

### **Power and Responsibility**

When speaking of her purpose on the council, she repeatedly expressed that the parents have very little input. She compared the Oakwood SCC to the elementary school council and lamented the limited influence she is able to exert at Oakwood. Relatedly, her goal on the council was to know what was going on at the school. In her interview, Lynn was very direct in explaining her objectives:

**Lynn:** My goal was more personal. I want to know what was going on in the school so that I could protect my children. I think Oakwood was an excellent school and I've never really had any great concerns. But I wanted to know what was going on, what's going on, you know, that kind of stuff so that I could help

my children if I had to. Was I hearing rumors, something that was about it was going on. And could I do something about that, you know, take them out, put them some place else. So that was kind of my goal. (Interview 20)

Here she expresses concern about the lack of parent input and portrays a historical pattern that has been occurring for years:

**Lynn:** I really appreciate all the hard work that the principal and those that worked on it did but it was really just, this is what we're doing and we want your signature. I wish we could have a little more input, you know, why did you choose this and stuff like that? And I don't feel sometimes we had that very much. So it would've been nice to do that. And that's every year.

**Interviewer:** That's every year. Yeah. Has it ever been different because you've been on for so long.

**Lynn:** No, not really and maybe that's just you know, they know what they need. They know what they want to do and stuff like that. But it's not really it's more of a put your signature on the line saying we've talked to you about it and we don't get much say in that. (Interview 20)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Lynn described three invested decisions and three advisory decisions. Of the six total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with three of them. She substantively disagreed with one decision and disagreed with the form of two decisions, but did not share her disagreement in SCC meetings. In terms of importance to Lynn, she referenced her own children in connection with two decisions and personally took action on four decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for four decisions and characterized two decisions negatively. Three of the decisions she recounted in her interview were raised in multiple SCC meetings throughout the year. She reported taking action in the following ways:

one-on-one talks with stakeholders for one decision, taking action in meetings for three decisions, and withholding speech for one decision.

## **Decision Processes**

### Decision 1: Rock Hour

Below, Lynn describes a controversy that emerged during the hiring process of a new principal at Oakwood. As part of the decision, there was the risk of the possible elimination of a program called Rock Hour at Oakwood High School—a 1-hour preparation period each day for students outside of their typical class schedule.

**Lynn:** But the way that the school district hired the new principal was very underhanded and sneaky. And then when they, they made this huge big issue of look at who your new principal's gonna be. Isn't he just wonderful? When we had no idea who he was, what he was doing. He had been a vice principal at a nearby high school so he had a good experience. I'm sure that's fine. He was hired under the guise of getting rid of rock hours. The south end of the valley does... And what do they call it? An extra hour, flex hour. That's what they call it. And the administration, they all live there. All their kids have flex hours and they wanted the whole school district to be flex houred. So we had people apply to be principal from Oakwood. But if they said if they were going to keep rock hour, they were eliminated. He was hired specifically because he was going to bring flex hour to Oakwood. And it was not a surprise that they hired someone who was gonna do that. Well, when he got hired, the PTA of Oakwood, they went against him and they made a huge issue about this school. I love rock hour. I don't know how I could have handled the flex hour. It's so different. And it was a rough patch, that year we had [...].

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Do you feel like when the moment you know, the Rock Hour thing and the hiring, do you feel like on the SCC you had any role in what was happening or like you said, the PTA made a big stink but was there anything that you...

**Lynn:** Oakwood community council, the chairperson at that time, she now works for Oakwood. Oh my gosh, I can't remember her name anyway. She was really mad too. So the Oakwood community council pretty much told him that we were gonna fight for Rock Hour. And so I think, he probably kind of just had a roll over because we liked it.

**Interviewer:** Rock hour stayed?

**Lynn:** Rock hour stayed. So the new high school and Oakwood both have rock hour. First of all, rock hour was really started with the previous principal. He really pushed for it. He really fought for it. And it was the year before Keith came in that we really pushed. We went to the board. The board had no idea what was going on. The school board had no idea what was going on. And so when we came in, and made just a big stink about it, it opened their eyes to, oh, things are going on in the district that we don't know what's going on. And so we had some really great council members, Cindy Beck, she comes to the meetings. She was just awesome to work with.

**Interviewer:** Were you involved in that stuff?

**Lynn:** I didn't really deal a lot, but I you know, what I did was just tell them that if they needed help, that I would be there to help support them. And they had a big meeting. The school board called in lots of people to testify and stuff like that. And I told them that if they needed to, I would be willing to but I'm a pretty emotional person and when I have strong feelings, I am a terrible person to talk because I cry a lot.

She then shared about her interactions with neighbors and family members during the process:

**Lynn:** Yes. My husband's family all lives around here. We all have kids that are the same age. So if there is a big issue coming up, like I talked to lots of different parents when we were talking about, you know, my whole entire neighborhood. It was pretty much a canvas type thing. Because when the saving rock hour and you know. it was a big, big issue. I did a lot of talking to different people, different church groups, families, trying to help spread the word and stuff like that. (Interview 20)

In this example, Lynn detailed an advisory decision in which the school district hired a new principal (the acting principal) for Oakwood High School. According to Lynn, the new principal was hired to “bring flex hour” which was a different program altogether. Lynn was “pretty upset with how they handled it” and worked with other parents to resist the change. In addition to disagreeing with the decision, the issue was important to Lynn: She spoke at length about the issue in her interview, referenced her children in connection to the issue, and took action to resist the change.

According to her account, it is unclear how involved Lynn was in resisting the

change. As the principal was getting hired, she said “we went to the board.” A few moments later when I asked specifically about her involvement, she replied, “I didn’t really deal a lot” and described a more distant position where she offered support if needed. Yet, while it is unclear how involved she was directly with district administrators and in SCC meetings, she reported “talking to a lot of different parents” and family members about the issue.

In this case, Lynn described an advisory decision when she acted as an intermediary between district administrators and parents. While her account equivocated on the level of her involvement, she nevertheless made clear that she had conversations and meetings with stakeholders on both sides of the issue. In their efforts, the SCC and PTA members “opened the eyes” of the district administrators and were ultimately able to persuade the incoming principal and the district to not change Rock Hour. Rock Hour is still practiced at Oakwood. What is unique in this case as compared to others is that it is relatively short in duration. The conflict arose, and the parent associations resisted and quickly achieved their goal. In many advisory decisions, there is a long and complex process as the decision is proposed, finalized, and implemented. Yet even though it was short in duration, the conflict and her mediating position activated Lynn to some degree and it is likely that she experienced mediating dissonance.

#### Decision 2: Boys and Girls Club

**Lynn:** So, I mean, I questioned some changes like Boys and Girls Club. I don't think I have any concerns about lifestyles. Everyone's entitled to their own, but I don't think there's anything wrong with the name Boys and Girls Club.

**Interviewer:** So it got changed to?

**Lynn:** Eagles are Great Association.

**Interviewer:** Why?

**Lynn:** Because some people were complaining that, oh, well, I'm in a girl's body, but really, I'm a boy. So they wanted to be on the boys side, so they changed it. So now they still have the association, they still have boys and girls and they still have people fulfilling the same rules that they did before. They just changed the name. I think that's a little weird.

**Interviewer:** Did you do any...

**Lynn:** I didn't really say anything. What am I gonna say? If I said, I don't understand why you're changing it? People are like, we'll be like because that's our climate today. Well, you just don't like transgender people. No, I don't really care. You know, they're welcome to their opinion but... So I didn't really say anything. I just think, yeah, okay whatever. (Interview 20)

In this case, Lynn described an advisory decision to change the name of the Boys and Girls Club. She expressed disagreement with the change even though “everyone is entitled to their own” lifestyle. While she expressed disagreement, it is unclear how important the issue is to Lynn. She did not reference her children in connection with the decision and did not claim any other personal connections. She also did not report whether the issue was raised repeatedly or was only brought up in one SCC meeting. What is clear is that she thought changing the name was “a little weird” and expressed a desire for it to remain the same.

Her actions in connection with the decision were withholding speech. She openly asked me in the interview, “what am I going to say?” This statement implies that there is nothing to say that that she already understands the response in advance: “well, you just don’t like transgender people.”

With the limited detail shared about this decision, it is very difficult to determine whether Lynn experienced dissonance. Because it is an advisory decision, the most likely



scenario is that she experienced mediating dissonance if parents were also upset about the decision and in conflict with the school administration. What is unique about this case is that the actions are all withholding. In the face of a disagreement, there were pressures that arose in the SCC that limited what Lynn is willing to say. Because of this, she held back from speaking and possibly increased her likelihood of living with the dissonance into the future.

### Kelly

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Kelly is 44 years old and has two children who attend Oakwood High School. She has lived in her current residence for 8 years and has lived in the community for 16 years. In total, she has served on school community councils for 8 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Oakwood High SCC and her local elementary school. In addition to her participation on the SCC, she has served on the PTA for over 6 years and on the public library board for 3 years. She plans to participate on the SCC for “as long as needed.” Kelly is White, upper middle income, and completed a bachelor’s degree. Toward the end of SCC meetings, Kelly regularly raised news items about the state laws impacting education. She followed the state legislature closely and often explained to other members about the implications of bills that were being considered at the state level. Although she remained fairly restrained for most of the meetings like other parent members, she predictably initiated conversations as the meetings came to a close or shortly after they ended. In her interview she reported about a number of direct confrontations with the principal at Oakwood, and her reserved demeanor during the

meetings stemmed from those encounters rather than a propensity to be passive in meetings.

### **Power and Responsibility**

Kelly repeatedly stated that the parents do not have decision-making power in the SCC. Because of the legal restrictions on the money, the administrators decide where the funds go and the parents simply concur. When she described her purpose for continuing on the council she suggested that she wants to stay involved at the school and that the SCC is a good way to glean information about the school.

**Kelly:** Yeah. And so, you know, I don't know what the original intent was, but that the... actually what happens is this is the appropriation of the money is thrown to the administrators, but they also have to justify where they're spending all the money. Yeah, but the parents, the parents aren't having a say. And the teachers aren't having a say. And that's mostly because the administrators are the ones that have to fill out the plan and do it. And they're the ones that have to back it up with data. And so they're the ones that are bringing it. And it's not... They're open to suggestions a little bit, but they've got to back everything up, you know? So... (Interview 21)

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**Kelly:** That's the main reason I keep doing it, is because I know they need parents on their and I want to be involved as much as I can in the schools.[...] it kind of keeps, you in the know of just a little bit, not of everything but things that are important to the administration that they think are important for parents to know. That's what we get in that meeting. And I don't think you really get that at a PTA meeting, not the PTA meetings I've been to anyway. (Interview 21)

### **Decision Synopsis**

In her interview, Kelly described four invested decisions and one advisory decision. Of the five total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with three of them. She substantively disagreed with one decision and

disagreed with the form of two decisions. She stated her substantive disagreement in an SCC meeting, but did not share her disagreement about the form of the decisions in SCC meetings. In terms of importance to Lynn, she referenced her own children in connection with two decisions and personally took action on three decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for three decisions and characterized two decisions negatively. Three of the decisions she recounted in her interview were raised in multiple SCC meetings throughout the year. She reported taking action in the following ways: taking action in meetings for two decisions.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Monday Night Event

In this case, Kelly explains an advisory decision in which the school administration plans an event on a Monday night. She was upset with the administration because Monday night is a common night for family religious observance among Mormon congregants. The long time practice of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is to have “family night” on Monday nights.

**Kelly:** It was a great thing, but they scheduled it on a Monday night. I was ticked.

**Interviewer:** Because they scheduled it on a Monday night?

**Kelly:** Yeah. Yeah. Of all the times they could have scheduled it, they scheduled it on a Monday night. I was mad and I let him have it. I let the administration have it because they opened it up.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean? Sorry, in a meeting you did? Tell me what happened, yeah.

**Kelly:** Yeah. So we had gotten like through the agenda and they were like, OK, does anyone else have anything else. I was like, yeah, I have something. I'm really mad about this. And I'm really mad that you guys did this. And I said, what the heck? You know! You know what's going on up here! I was like, you guys know

that you shouldn't be having school sponsored things on a Monday night. You know! [laugh] And I was like, you know!

**Interviewer:** Who was in the meeting?

**Kelly:** Jack Bailey's been a bishop. You know, I'm like, you guys know that you shouldn't be doing this. You know what the prevailing religion is and you know what we believe you know? So I was like, who scheduled that?

After reporting about the meeting exchange, she then talks about the decision the next year:

**Kelly:** They scheduled it on Monday night the next year, but I didn't say anything the next year. I just thought, well, I said my piece and I was pretty straight forward. So it's fine. They can do what they want. My kids didn't go. I kept them home. I mean, I just I try to not, I've tried to have them at home on Monday nights, but now that's changing a little bit. But, you know, at the time I was like, seriously? If it's that important, then why are you scheduling it on a Monday night? (Interview 21)

In this case, Kelly recounted an advisory decision to schedule an event for the school. Upon initiating the story, she immediately expressed her disagreement with the decision: "I was ticked." She then continued to spell out the disagreement based on observed religious practices and the neglect of those practices by the school administration. In the full exchange, she referenced her children repeatedly and talked about her personal difficulty with events on Monday nights. As can be seen from the account, she also reported about the subsequent year and followed the decision, although she did not say anything in the meeting.

Kelly's actions in this decision were meeting actions to contest the decision to the administration in an SCC meeting. She also reported withholding speech during the 2<sup>nd</sup> year when it was brought up again.

In her report Kelly acted in a way that was consistent with her opinions. She believed that the event should not be planned for Monday night, and she said as much in a direct confrontation with the administration who planned the event. Here children did

not attend the event. She also did not bring up additional parties to the decision that she might have represented to the administration. In acting consistently with her cognitions and doing so alone, she is not likely to have experienced internal or mediating dissonance. She was clearly frustrated and in conflict with the administration, but was not inconsistent. What is interesting about this case is that in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year she withheld speech. Withholding speech is inconsistent with her cognitions and her previous actions and it's possible that she experienced some dissonance in the meeting where they discussed the issue, depending on the context of the meeting. Those are details that are not shared during her account.

#### Decision 2: Land Trust

In the following excerpts, Kelly describes her frustration with the process of allocating Land Trust funds:

**Kelly:** I have been frustrated. I said this already that there's not a little more leeway for parents to be able to say, hey, can we talk about. I see this as an issue. Can we talk about it and put some money towards that? Because and over the years, it's gotten more so that the administration comes. It's all written out. It's all approved. If you've been on for a length of time, you know how much time they're putting into putting all that together. And so you don't want to be messing with you know, let's make you go through all this work for so you can re-appropriate ten thousand dollars, whatever. It's not worth the amount of money that you could maybe debate about is not worth the time and effort to change everything in that plan. So but that that's a reflection of the laws, not necessarily the feel of it. I don't know how they train the administrators. As far as I know, what I see is the administration putting, you know, looking and saying what the needs of their school are and then putting it together. They're not, the administrators are not coming to the council and saying, what do you feel like would make this a better school? It's the other way round. So the administrators are coming and saying, this is what we feel we do and we've got all that. This is what's going to back it up. And it's all typed up. And so we can say yes. So if they're wanting it to go the other direction, you know, it's not.

**Interviewer:** It's not. Yeah, it's not. And you feel like that's kind of two things.

It's this state restricting it a little bit. But then the administrators are kind of hinting at the fact the administrators are kind of not there. They're typing it out. It takes a lot of time. There's a lot of effort put into that so by the time they come to you, you don't feel like it's kind of worth...

**Kelly:** Yeah. Like, why? Why, why would I have a conversation about, you know, because then I know they've got to go back... I mean depending on what we decide, but I know I've just made a ton more work for them. So I do think a little bit of that is because of the way, because you have to have your plans submitted by April. (Interview 21)

In this case, Kelly described her frustration with the Land Trust budget allocation process, which encompasses all invested decisions of the SCC. To register disagreement with the decision, she initiated her account by expressing her feelings: "I have been frustrated." She explained that the SCC rules have changed over time and, with time, there has been less and less parent input into decision-making. It was not clear how important this issue is for Kelly. She did not reference her children and her actions were very limited.

In her report she asked the rhetorical question "why would I have a conversation about" the Land Trust budget. She said that such a conversation would cause more work for the administrators. Understanding that, she chose to not speak up in the meetings about a primary issue that recurs on both the elementary SCC and the High School SCC every year.

In this decision case, Kelly votes to approve the annual plan of the SCC every year. She made clear from her comments that she would like to have more input into the process and thus demonstrated some level of disagreement with the process. Having continued to vote to approve plans that she disagrees with it is likely that Kelly feels internal dissonance. In this case, she continued to withhold speech and justified her decision to do so. Because she did not act in any other ways, it is likely that her

dissonance was prolonged and reintroduced over time. It is also likely that the pressures created in the principal-strong councils to not speak are strong and that there is little incentive to act because of the risks that are involved. Her other accounts in her interview report numerous times she has spoken in meetings and either been shut down directly or disregarded as in the previous decision case.

### **Lisa**

#### **Biographical Sketch**

Lisa is 51 years old and has one child who attends Oakwood High School. She has lived in her current residence and the community for 24 years. In total she has served on school community councils for 10 years. She currently serves as a parent member of the Oakwood High SCC. In addition to her participation on the SCC, she has served on the PTA and in voluntary leadership positions in her church. She plans to participate on the SCC for 4 more years. Lisa is White, upper-middle income, and completed a bachelor's degree. Although Lisa rarely spoke during SCC meetings, she seemed to be very comfortable at the school and with the front office staff. Prior to our interview, she was "chatting" with the secretaries in the main office and apologized to me for not noticing that I had arrived. Attending SCC meetings in a more passive role, she expressed difficulty remembering her experiences on the SCC over the years. There were various points in the interview where she was not able to think of particular examples. At one point during the interview as she tried to recall a specific example, she said, "You're gonna think I have no memory."

## Power and Responsibility

Lisa talked about her purpose on the SCC as two fold. First, that people should contribute to their community and second, to be in “the know” about what is happening at the school. She reiterated many times in her interview that it is important to contribute to the community because of lessons she learned from her dad growing up.

**Lisa:** There's two reasons I'm on the Community Council. One, is I feel like I have the flexibility in my schedule and in my time and in my life that I can. And I feel like people should contribute to their community. And so that's one reason and I do really do believe that. And I feel like that's the one reason I do it. The second reason I do it is if I know what's going on at school and I'm friends with these people here at the school and kind of like not that they have your back, but they maybe have a listening ear better when you talk to them. I'm not saying that I'm political at all like I'm trying to get something, but I feel like you're in the know. You know what's going on and it's beneficial to your students, it's beneficial to your kids if you have associations with the school. So that might sound kind of selfish, but it's honest. (Interview 22)

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**Lisa:** Well it was interesting because my dad has always served on lots of different boards and committees and he's done a lot in politics and stuff like that. And I've watched him growing up just serving on lots of different political and not just political, but lots of different committees and boards and committees. And he's had his... cause has been in a position where he could be sure. And I've watched him and I felt like, you know, he's contributed a lot to the community because of it. And so I kind of grew up seeing that. And so that's why I thought, well, I guess there's some people that can't because of their situation in life, they can't necessarily serve because they have to be at work too early or they you know what I mean? But I can. I can be here. And so I'm like, what if I don't? Then who will? (Interview 22)

## Decision Synopsis

In her interview, Lisa described three invested decisions and three advisory decisions. Of the six total decisions she reported in her interview, she expressed personal disagreement with two of them. She substantively disagreed with two decisions and



stated her disagreement for one decision in an SCC meeting. In terms of importance to Lisa, she referenced her own children in connection with two decisions and personally took action on three decisions. She expressed a desire for a different decision outcome for two decisions and characterized one decision negatively. Two of the decisions she recounted in her interview are raised in multiple SCC meetings throughout the year. She reported taking action in the following ways: one-on-one talks with stakeholders for one decision, taking action in meetings for two decisions, and withholding speech for one decision.

### **Decision Processes**

#### Decision 1: Rock Hour

Similar to Lynn, Lisa discussed the Rock Hour decision at length in her interview.

Below she starts to explain how the decision originally unfolded:

**Lisa:** And when the new high schools were coming into the valley and one of the rumors was that their superintendent was going to maybe do away with what's known as Rock Hour. I don't know if you've heard about Rock Hour.

**Interviewer:** Just in SCC meeting I've heard it, but did not know what it meant but yeah.

**Lisa:** Yeah. So I can't remember exactly. So there was a rumor that they were going to do away with Oakwood and at community council we felt passionately that they should not because we love it. I've seen so many benefits for my students. And I've had, my fourth student is at Oakwood and my oldest one, they didn't have Rock Hour at that time but, you know, I've seen kids like I feel like their grades from Rock Hour have gone from like my kids are A students. But I feel like partly why they are able to be A students is cause they have access to teachers during that time. So it's basically just a great time to...

Additionally she recounted that the existing principal, who originated Rock Hour and was moving to another school, got involved. Then, she and other parent members took action:

**Lisa:** The principal actually went and collected the data. I think he was trying to defend because he is the one that implemented it five years prior to that. I think he was trying to defend it and Jack Bailey, who's now the principal, he was coming from another high school in the valley and we love him, but at the time, we didn't know him. And we're like, oh, he's coming from the other high school. The superintendent wants to bring that program here and so we all felt a bit threatened, like they are going to take away what we love and they didn't... And I remember us saying, let's write letters and I believe we did send him into the superintendent. I don't think we did like a petition or anything like that but we've read the data from the students. We wrote our own letters. We felt very passionate that it shouldn't go away. I think when Bailey came here we were like, don't take it away. I mean, we talked to him personally. (Interview 22)

In this case, Lisa explained the advisory decision, already reported earlier by Lynn, to possibly do away with “Rock Hour” at Oakwood High. As the SCC members heard the rumors about the decision, Lisa reported that “we felt passionately that they should not because we love it.” As such, according to her report, multiple SCC members disagreed with the decision and expressed a desire to speak out about the change. Lisa also recounted multiple meetings where SCC members interacted among themselves or with district and school administrators.

The actions she took were to write the superintendent a letter regarding the issue and speak directly to the incoming principal about the issue. She confirmed multiple times during the interview that “I think we made a difference” because ultimately the policy did not change.

While it is clear that this decision is both important to Lisa and she disagreed with the original plan, it is unclear from her account whether she felt dissonance regarding the decision. As it is an advisory decision, it is more likely that she might feel mediating dissonance, but she only briefly mentioned conversations with other parents as they were “trying to get everybody to tell the superintendent.” The decision was not implemented at the school and, consequently, the issue simply ended with the reversal of the original

proposal.

## Decision 2: Cheerleaders

**Lisa:** Well, I remember one time and it wasn't really part of the meeting, but the parents were talking about the way they select cheerleaders here at Oakwood. And they were really against the way they did it. My daughter had been a cheerleader and I kind of disagreed with them because I was like, no the way they do it actually works. I don't know if you know how they have done it at Oakwood?

She then explains that the cheerleaders try out in front of the school and other parents want to implement private tryouts that are more consistent with sports teams:

**Lisa:** They might want to change it and I get why they said that, because it is a little humiliating to try out in front of your school. Because they don't make the basketball team go do lay ups and free throws to get on the basketball team. You know what I'm saying? We don't all get to vote. So I get that. I totally get it. But I also appreciate the point of view that the girls need to be, you know, kind individuals if they want to be a represent... Because they looked at it more as a student government position than just a cheerleader. But now it's all changed because I think the district said you're going to compete now. So they don't do that anymore, the just tryout in front of judges. Which I get both ways. But I remember it kind of became an issue at a meeting and the people kind of on tangents and I... I didn't say thing and I maybe should have, but I just think there's two sides to that. Because I can see both sides. Because sometimes I felt like oh that's kind of rude to make them try out in front of the school and that's kind of humiliating. So I kind of thought that. But at the same time, I thought there is a reason. (Interview 22)

In this case, Lisa described an advisory decision to change the tryout format of the school cheerleaders. While the decision was likely connected to Janet's decision to make the team a competitive team, Lisa did not report about an invested decision by the SCC. In her account, she disagreed with the other members of the SCC, but could see the issue from their perspective as well. It is not clear how important the issue was to Lisa, but she did reference her daughter's experience regarding the issue.

When thinking about her own actions, Lisa stated, "maybe I should have" said

something. She ultimately withheld from speaking at the SCC meeting. She also described the issue interactions more as side conversations than a conversation for the entire SCC as an agenda item.

By her account, it is not likely that Lisa experienced internal or mediating dissonance related to this issue. She did describe conflicting thoughts regarding the issue and there is a time when she was holding inconsistent thoughts about the cheer tryout format. It is possible that she began to consider the new format because of the ideas introduced at the SCC meeting, but she does not give a full account of her thoughts in this regard. Thus, if she did experience internal dissonance it was due to holding inconsistent thoughts, but did not involve her actions regarding the issue. She did not participate in a voting decision and the decision, by her account, was advisory. She also did not mention other parents she interacted with who disagreed with the policy and thus is likely not to have experienced mediating dissonance.

### **Conclusion: Pragmatic Citizenship at the Oakwood High SCC**

The experience of the Oakwood SCC members perhaps best illustrates that not all actions on the SCC are educative of pragmatic citizenship. It is in this case where it is possible to identify many actions that are miseducative and fail to increase the points of interest to a decision or coordinate interests toward a desired outcome. Very rarely did one of the five members report addressing a problem on the SCC in tandem with other members. It is no wonder that the members expressed general confusion about the purpose of the SCC (Interview 19), a distaste for when things turned political (Interview 18), and a general sense of impotence regarding the process (Interview 21). What is

interesting is that not one of the members criticized the school administration for their experience. Instead, as Kelly suggested, SCCs operate without parent input because of the way the state law has evolved (Interview 21). Overall, there is a general sense of detachment regarding the experience. Not one of the members described the SCC as a place where parents have real influence or decision-making power as in Crescent High and Lakeview High. Nor did the parents describe the SCC as a means to represent parent interests to the district or to act in an oversight capacity toward the school administration.

While there were significant cross member issues for the three other SCCs, Oakwood did not have a single issue that occurred during the year of the study that multiple people raised in their interview. Instead, two members reported about the Rock Hour issue and two members reported about the Cheerleading issue. Both of these issues occurred years ago.

With limited power and responsibility, it is not surprising that there was much less dissonance reported in the Oakwood cases. While there were many examples of disagreement and even importance, very few members reported the basic conditions that lead to dissonance. For example, Kelly reported many disagreements in her interview issues ranging from the Land Trust allocation to the disagreement about the Monday night event (Interview 21). As she rehearsed all of her conflicts with the administration, Kelly's lack of power in the situation revealed repeated situations of resentment. Over the years, she had raised issues in SCC meetings and was repeatedly shut down by the administration or ignored by them. While these decisions were very important to her and full of disagreement, none produced dissonance because Kelly was simply not given the opportunity to influence the decisions. She was shut out of the process and left to resent

the administrators (Interview 21).

This pattern was repeated in Emily's case. Emily disagreed with the Social Media Policy, defended her position repeatedly, but could only register the complaint. She had no apparent means or power to change the policy, and no other parent members joined her. She resorted to speaking to the counselors to try to impact the decision, but on the SCC she had no opportunity to raise the issue again, propose a vote or change the wording (Interview 19).

Although these conditions of power asymmetry persisted on the SCC throughout the year, it is still possible to assess the educative value of the larger issues that were reported by the SCC members. The Rock Hour issue was reported by both Lynn and Lisa. In the accounts of both members, there were rumors that the new principal would likely rid the school of "Rock Hour" – which was a very valuable and popular program. While their accounts lack a lot of detail about the issue, both members reported speaking with other SCC members to coordinate actions at the district level. Lynn reported that she and others "went to the board and made a big stink about it" (Interview 20). When I asked how much she was involved, she hesitated in the interview and said that she did not actually go to the district meeting because she often gets emotional when asked to speak publicly. For the same issue, Lisa wrote a letter to the district superintendent and reported that she and other SCC members passionately tried to keep the program by working with the outgoing principal.

From this example, it is clear that there are occasional issues on the Oakwood SCC which prompt procivic behavioral adjustments from the members. In order to save the Rock Hour program, both Lisa and Lynn reported talking to others and thus expanded

the interests weighing in on the decision. Furthermore, each reported acting in concert with others to communicate with the district and thereby coordinated actions around a specific outcome. As each reported, they were successful and Rock Hour remained after the new principal was hired at the school.

What is noteworthy about the Rock Hour issue is that it occurred during a time when the administration of the school was changing. The issue predated the current principal and was in a time of transition when the authority structure of the SCC was more open to influence. Similar to the Lakeview SCC, when authority structures become fluid, moments emerge for parents to assert their interests. Outside of this issue, there were no decisions reported by the five Oakwood members on which parents interacted with district administrators in order to advance an issue or influence a decision. With limited power and responsibility, SCC members on the Oakwood council had very few experiences of internal or mediating dissonance and thus very few moments of pragmatic civic education.

## CHAPTER 9

### CASE COMPARISON

In Chapters 5-8, I provided individual level data points in the “decision synopsis” sections for each SCC parent member interviewed for this study. In the coding structure for those sections, the developmental dissonance cycle was analytically broken down into stages (Decision, Disagreement, Importance, etc.) through which members pass during the decision-making process. The stages were further broken down into codes that can be seen in the “Coding Scheme” in Appendix B (For full numerical data for each member see Appendix C). In this chapter, I compare the data points from each stage across cases and draw some general conclusions about the data at the SCC case level rather than the individual level. The interview data points from specific codes in the dissonance process are aggregated at the case level and then averaged in order to compare across cases.

As explained previously, the data utilized to track the developmental dissonance cycle are from semistructured narrative interviews. As points of descriptive data, they are intended to demonstrate general patterns across the cases. Although the number of interviewees and school cases is relatively few, the data fit expectations about the developmental dissonance process when comparing parent-strong and principal-strong cases. That said, the Lakeview High SCC is the one case that consistently defies expectations. As will be seen, the Lakeview High SCC members reported high levels of



disagreement, importance, and motivation, which would lead us to believe that these members experienced high levels of developmental dissonance. While it is very likely that the Lakeview High SCC is a mixed case between parent-strong and principal-strong, it is also likely that the relatively few interviews and the phone interview format for two of the members prompted them to only report the most salient issues during their interviews. As was demonstrated in Chapter 7, there were only three parent members interviewed from the Lakeview High SCC. Two of the interviews were performed by telephone (the only two phone interviews in the entire study) and were significantly shorter in duration than other interviews of the study. As a result, it is likely that the Lakeview SCC numbers below are somewhat exaggerated. With this in mind, the data reported for the other cases match expectations and demonstrate that members of parent-strong councils experience stages of the developmental dissonance process much more regularly than members of principal-strong councils. In the following sections, I take each stage of the developmental dissonance cycle in turn and compare the descriptive data points across the cases.

### **Invested Decisions and Advisory Decisions**

All coded data presented in Chapters 5-8 are from interview segments when a parent member recounts a specific decision taken by the SCC. Once the full decision was marked in the coding document, it was then determined whether the decision was an invested decision or an advisory decision. This distinction of decision type is fundamental to understanding the nature of the decision dynamics in SCC meetings. All invested decisions are voted on by SCC members by law and the SCC has full vested

authority over invested decisions as a governing body. Advisory decisions, on the other hand, are typically not voted on by SCC members, and the level of influence of SCC members varies greatly depending on the decision at hand. Advisory decisions are typically brought to the council by the principal or the district school board. Additionally, there are some cases in which parents raise awareness about decisions being actively taken by the school and district administration and proactively seek to influence the direction of the decisions.

In the interviews, members were not prompted to specifically recall either advisory decisions or invested decisions. Rather, each member was asked about different experiences on the SCC and raised whatever decision fit with the experience requested. For example, during the first question members were asked to remember a time that they made a difference on the SCC. In response to this question, many members recalled invested decisions and others recounted advisory decisions. This pattern of recalling a mix of invested and advisory decisions carried throughout all interview questions.

Lastly, as can be seen from the case study data, SCC members drew occasionally from experiences that occurred on SCCs at other elementary and junior high schools where they had participated. This practice was invited and open to all members during the interview. While this practice slightly obscured the institutional practices of the four case high school SCCs, it added to the full picture of participation of the individual parent members. The learning from earlier experience continues with the member throughout their service on the high school SCCs and the majority of the parent members had participated on other SCCs prior to the high school SCC that they served on during the study. Furthermore, the study was ultimately about the individual SCC experience in its

entirety and the dissonance process within that experience regardless of which SCC decision prompted it. Of the 44 full decision cases presented in the previous four chapters, only 6 are from elementary or junior high SCCs; the rest are from experiences within the four case high school SCCs.

Figure 10 demonstrates the average number of invested decisions, advisory decisions, and mixed decisions reported by members in their interviews by case. On average, members of the Crescent High SCC reported 3.4 invested decisions, 1.4 advisory decisions, and .6 mixed decisions for a total average of 5.4 decisions. As can be seen when we compare these data to the archival data in Chapter 2, the average number of decisions reported in the interview does not reflect the actual number of decisions taken by the council. Whereas the Crescent High SCC made nearly two times as many decisions per meeting as the Riverside SCC and more than four times as many decisions as the Lakeview and Oakwood SCCs, interviewees in all cases reported nearly the same total number of decisions in their interviews.

One difference apparent in this overview of decisions is that both Crescent and Riverside members reported mixed decisions where the SCC had invested and advisory authority, whereas Lakeview and Oakwood members did not. This mixed decision pattern that occurred in parent-strong councils did not occur on principal-strong councils. In a mixed decision, some portion of actual voting authority for the decision has been given to the SCC by the school or district administration, or that authority has been appropriated by the SCC. For example, in reconfiguration at Crescent High, SCCs were given local decision-making discretion for their own school in a district wide decision. In the fundraising example at Riverside, the SCC voted to establish a subcommittee on the

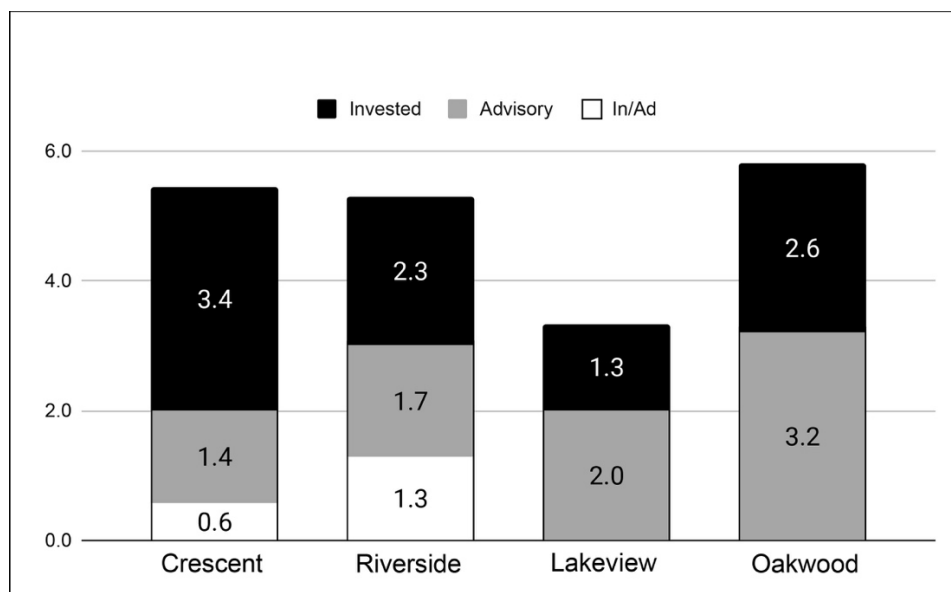


Figure 10: Average Decisions Reported by Decision Type

SCC for oversight of the fundraising activities. These examples of mixed decisions demonstrate the interconnectedness and extension of authority to outside authority structures in parent-strong councils that did not occur in the principal-strong council cases.

Another clear difference in these cases is the total average number of decisions reported by the Lakeview SCC members compared to the other SCC members. As discussed in the chapter introduction, this discrepancy was as much due to the telephone format of the interviews as it was to any meaningful difference in decision-making between cases. The constraint of time in these interviews is one likely cause for the discrepancy in the overall number of decisions recounted. This is further evidenced by the fact that members of the Oakwood council, which is the other principal-strong SCC, reported a slightly greater average number of total decisions than either of the parent-strong councils.

In addition to these findings, it is noteworthy that all councils reported a significant number of invested and advisory decisions. While the members from the Crescent High SCC reported a greater average number of invested decisions and members from the Oakwood SCC reported a greater number of advisory decisions, members reported both types of decisions in all four cases. As the developmental dissonance cycle is catalyzed by both invested and advisory decisions, we should expect that there is a strong likelihood that members from all councils experience both internal and mediating dissonance. What is obscured by this overview of decisions is that to report a decision does not mean to report an experience of dissonance. All decisions in interviews were recorded regardless of their likelihood to create dissonance for the individual member. Thus, while the overview of total decisions does give some insight into the workings of the SCCs, it is not until we understand the level of disagreement and importance that individuals felt regarding the decisions that we begin to understand the frequency of dissonance for individual members.

### **Disagreement and Importance**

In order to gain clarity on the expected frequency of dissonance for individual members, I recorded each time an individual experienced disagreement in the decision they reported. In the majority of the cases, the individual expressed disagreement with the decision as it was presented or implemented by an administrator (advisory) or with the decision as voted on by the SCC (invested). Occasionally, the individual member agreed with the decision, but experienced disagreement with the other members of the council who offered opposing opinions about the decision. In either case, disagreement was

recorded for the decision. Furthermore, I recorded each time an individual member mentioned their own child in reference to the decision. This, along with actions taken by the members, indicated the importance of the decision in the coding scheme. As detailed in Chapter 3, if the decision was important to the parent member and she also disagreed with the decision, it often led to dissonance. This was especially the case when members voted for a decision that they disagreed with (internal dissonance) or they represented other parents to school administrators (mediating dissonance).

As such, one way in which it is possible to understand the difference of dissonance experiences by council is to understand how often parent members reported disagreeing with the decisions. Figure 11 demonstrates the average rate of disagreement for members of each SCC. The percentage indicates the ratio of the average number of decisions reported to have disagreement divided by the average number of decisions reported by members of the SCC. For example, Crescent SCC members reported 5.4

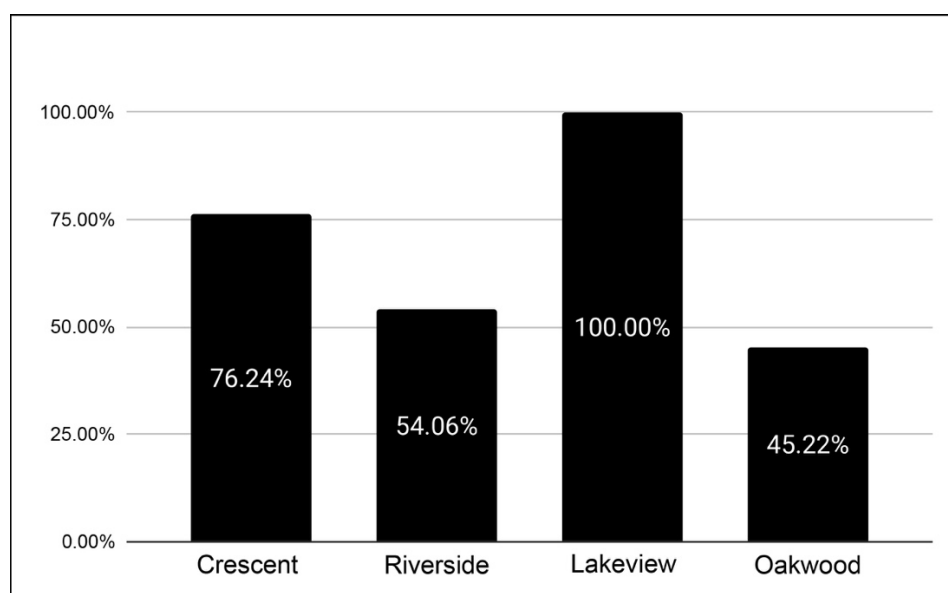


Figure 11: Average Disagreement Rate by SCC

decisions on average in their interviews and expressed disagreement on 4.1 out of every 5.4 decisions reported. Thus, the rate of disagreement is 76% for members of the Crescent High SCC.

What is initially surprising about this finding is that Lakeview members reported disagreeing with every decision that they reported in their interviews. As with the decision type report above, this proportionally high ratio is partially due to the short time frame of the interviews. It is often the case that interviewees remember the decisions with the most disagreement first and report on those decisions early in the interview. As can be seen in Figure 10, Lakeview members reported on far fewer decisions than other members. Yet, as can be seen from the case write ups in Chapter 7, the members of the Lakeview council did, in fact, experience dissonance conditions and that is partially due to levels of disagreement that members felt regarding the decisions of the SCC.

The important finding regarding disagreement among the other three councils is that the Crescent High SCC members expressed disagreement with decisions roughly 20% more often than Riverside High council members and more than 30% more often than Oakwood SCC members. Members from all three SCCs reported approximately the same number of total decisions, but it is clear that the Crescent SCC members disagreed more often than members of other councils. My first-hand observations of SCC meetings corroborate this finding. Not only did the Crescent High SCC make more than double the number of decisions per meeting than any other SCC, the meetings were regularly contentious. At some point in nearly all meetings, members expressed disagreement with one another regarding decisions or offered conflicting viewpoints. Additionally, in the interviews, members of the Crescent SCC expressed the need for disagreement and a

variety of viewpoints and valued the process of disagreeing as a mechanism for enhanced decision-making (Interview 2; Interview 7). This sentiment was also expressed by members of the Riverside SCC (Interview 9; Interview 14), but was not expressed by members of the Lakeview or Oakwood SCCs.

Additionally, it is important to emphasize the difference in disagreement rates between the two parent-strong councils Crescent and Riverside. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the Riverside chair regularly postponed decisions with disagreement to future meetings. She actively cultivated this practice and knowingly tabled many decisions throughout the year if disagreement persisted regarding the decision. As members reported, this often attenuated the level of disagreement that the members felt regarding the decision. Alternatively, the Crescent High SCC chair regularly pushed decisions through in rapid succession. There was rarely a time where the Crescent SCC delayed a decision in order to gain more clarity before taking a vote. Also, three members of the Crescent SCC reported either voting no or desiring to vote no on a decision and thus publicly demonstrate their disagreement on the decision (Interview 2, Interview 5, Interview 7). Thus, disagreement on the Crescent High SCC was regular and often valued by the members of the SCC. This rate of disagreement and decision frequency combined to create many conditions of individual dissonance for parent members of the Crescent High SCC.

In order to assess the importance of decisions, I recorded each time a member spoke about their own child in reference to the decision and when they reported taking action related to the decision. While the full detail of the actions individuals took will be elaborated in a later section, here I created a percentage rate of importance based on the



average of the two measures. In Figure 12, the percentages demonstrated are the averaged frequency that SCC members in each case mentioned their child in relation to a decision and the number of times they took action related to a decision. Since the Crescent High School parent members referenced their child in 50% of the decisions they reported and took action on 74% of the decisions they reported, the combined measure of importance rate is 61% for Crescent High parent members.

As with the rate of disagreement, the surprising finding here is the importance rate from the Lakeview SCC members. Again, the nature of the interviews influences this finding, yet what became clear over the study and is worth repeating is that the Lakeview SCC exhibited characteristics of both principal-strong and parent-strong SCCs. For example, although the archival data suggest that meetings were largely run by the school administration, the members report that the administrators were open to them when they did raise issues (Interview 16; Interview 17). So, while the school administrators directed

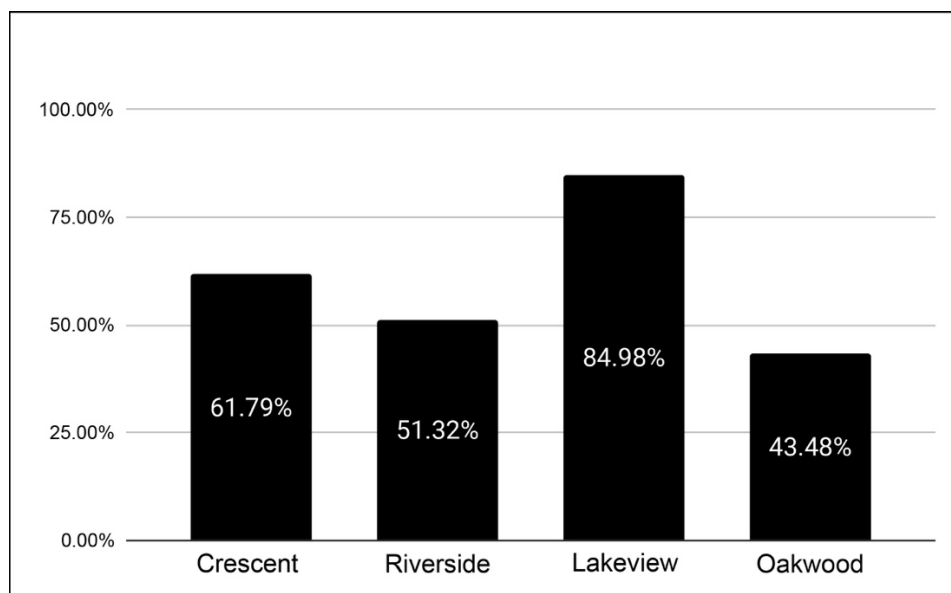


Figure 12: Average Importance Rate by SCC

the meetings and largely determined the agenda, there were still meaningful opportunities for parent input on the council. While the rates of disagreement and importance are most likely less pronounced relative to the other councils, members of the Lakeview SCC reported experiencing dissonance in long drawn out decisions with the school administrators.

As might be expected, the other three SCCs exhibit the same pattern here as in the disagreement rate. The Crescent High SCC demonstrated that the decisions were important over 10% more often than the Riverside members and nearly 20% more often than the Oakwood members. Because the Crescent High SCC members had more power and responsibility over the decisions, it is expected that the decisions would be more important to them. With power comes the ability to initiate and shape decisions in the first place, and there are many instances when SCC members from Crescent High initiated agenda items and deliberated about those items at length in the SCC. In a similar fashion, it is expected that the Riverside SCC has a higher rate of decision importance than the Oakwood SCC. Together, the higher rates of disagreement and importance increase the likelihood that members of the SCC will experience dissonance during decision-making.

### **Motivation and Prolongation**

In addition to disagreement and importance, I recorded each instance that parent members expressed a desire for a different decision outcome as well as each instance when they described the decision negatively. Whereas these measures further confirm that the individual disagrees with the decision, the measures are also an attempt to

capture the motivational state of the individual. A central aspect of dissonance theory is the simple idea that those who experience dissonance feel discomfort and are motivated to resolve it. While motivation is difficult to capture, I attempted to do so through attending to desire for a different decision outcome and negativity expressed about the decision. Regarding expressed desire, it is one thing to disagree with a decision, but it takes additional effort to articulate an alternative outcome to the decision and that is why this measure is relevant to motivation. Likewise, negativity about the decision seeks to capture an emotional state. Motivation to act is often accompanied by emotion, and capturing negativity is one additional way to identify motivation.

Similar to importance, I combine the motivation measures into an average percentage in order to compare the differences between cases in the study. What is shown in Figure 13 is the averaged measure of desire and negativity expressed per decision for members of each SCC. It is assumed that the higher average rates on this indicator

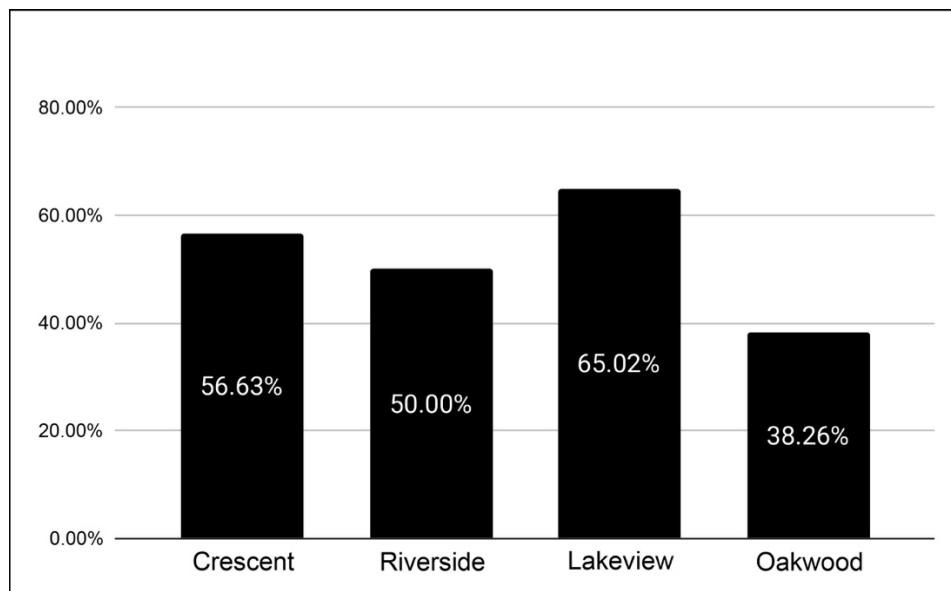


Figure 13: Average Motivation Rate by SCC

demonstrate greater motivation to resolve dissonance during decision-making.

Similar to the other findings, the Lakeview SCC members demonstrate the highest rates of motivation. In like manner as before, these findings are in part due to the interview format. I have chosen to keep Lakeview in the report because, regardless of the smaller number of interviews, it is still of particular interest that three members expressed these high rates of motivation even if they only had time in their interviews for the most salient issues. The consistency in the pattern at Lakeview at least demonstrates that the members felt the possibility of change and their own ability to do so. As stated earlier, this suggests that the authority structure at Lakeview was open to change and influence by the members.

Among the three more comparable cases, Crescent SCC members more often expressed a desire for an alternative outcome and expressed negative feelings about decisions 6% more often than Riverside High members and almost 20% more often than Oakwood High SCC members. These measures indicate that the members from the Crescent High SCC are, on average, more motivated to take action than the other members. Indeed the case interviews in Chapter 5 demonstrate that Crescent High SCC members feel motivated and regularly acted to implement the alternative desires that they expressed. The inverse regarding Oakwood is also true. Having little power or responsibility over decisions, individual members felt relatively less motivation to impact decisions. In fact, some expressed distaste for decision-making and others expressed frustration at being disempowered (Interview 18; Interview 20; Interview 21). In any case, the members of Oakwood experienced conditions that led to dissonance far less than members at Crescent High and thus the discomfort that motivates procivic actions.

In addition to these findings about motivation, I recorded any time that a decision was raised in more than one meeting according to the interview report. This measure was intended to demonstrate the repeated and prolonged nature of dissonance that is possible within SCCs. If an individual disagrees with a decision, it is very likely that the decision will recur in future meetings. The recurrence of topics is the most consistent finding across the cases. In Crescent, decisions recurred in multiple meetings 47% of the time, in Riverside 54% of the time, in Lakeview 80% of the time, and in Oakwood 41% of the time. Again, because Lakeview members likely reported only the most salient issues it is no wonder that these issues recurred in multiple meetings. For the remaining cases the differences decisions recurred 41% - 54% of the time. What I hope to convey here is not that dissonance always recurs at this frequency, but that there are many times when parent members revisit decisions that they disagreed with. This institutional condition is unique to proximate governance institutions and, even when dissonance is in beginning or moderate stages, the revisiting of issues can incentivize individuals to modulate their behaviors over years at a time. For example, the Riverside findings demonstrate the highest rate of issue recurrence among the three comparable cases, and moreover, in the individual case studies it was demonstrated that multiple members disagree moderately with the RCP program, which is the largest annual budget allocation (Interview 10; Interview 13; Interview 14). The members interviewed had voted to approve the expenditure twice, but expressed the desire for data and more information to assure that the program was working. The members understood that the issue would likely be raised again in subsequent years and expressed disagreement in a way that anticipated those future decisions and the possible change in opinion based on the data that they receive

about the program. In this way, the recurrence of issues continues to modify actions over time, often for many years.

### **Taking Action**

As detailed in the introduction to the four case chapters, the developmental dissonance cycle is broken into two major parts: process and actions. The process, represented in the previous sections, is the interaction that the individual has with the institution, which produces the motivation to act. Ultimately, what the developmental dissonance cycle is meant to explain are the behavioral modifications that members make. The previous four chapters cataloged these activities in detail for individual interviewees within each SCC. In this section, I aggregate the information about action taking in order to compare the SCCs.

The individual level data about actions in the previous four chapters demonstrates each time a parent member took a specific action in relation to the decision. For example, if Emily stated that she looked up information on the district website, it was counted as information gathering for that decision. If Emily gathered information two separate times for the same decision, it was only counted once. Similarly if Emily talked to an individual one-on-one during the decision-making process, it was counted as strategic talking for that decision. If Emily talked to more than one person regarding the same decision, it was only counted once. This was also true for meeting actions and speech withholding. While this method of data collection is limited, it also standardized the measurements across the cases to make them more reliable. What is important to note is that the differences between cases are likely stronger than the numbers indicate. In other words, parent

members from Crescent High often repeated the actions in different ways regarding the same decision, whereas this was less frequent on the principal-strong councils. Even with this limitation, the differences among the cases are telling regarding the number of individual actions parent members took on parent-strong councils versus principal-strong councils. The trends follow the theoretical expectations that those members who experience more dissonance, on average, will be more motivated to act.

In Figure 14, I display the average total actions taken per parent member. As can be seen, parents members of the Crescent High SCC reported taking 7.29 actions on average. Similarly, Riverside parent members reported taking 6.43 actions on average, Lakewood members reported taking 5.33 actions on average, and Oakwood members reported 4.4 actions on average. In addition to total actions, I also measured actions reported per decision in order to draw another comparison across cases. The average actions reported per decision, for each SCC, can be seen in Figure 15.

In terms of total actions taken, members of parent-strong councils reported taking action much more often, over a broader range of issues, than principal-strong councils. In other words, parent members of the Crescent High SCC took more actions on average than members of the other councils and they also took action on less significant issues than did the members of the other councils. While the average actions per decision demonstrate that Lakeview members took 1.6 actions for every decision reported, the three members from Lakeview only reported on the personally most important issues on the SCC. In contrast, members of the other three councils reported on a wide variety of issues. Even when accounting for the breadth of issues covered by Crescent High members, these parents still reported taking action 1.34 times per decision they reported.

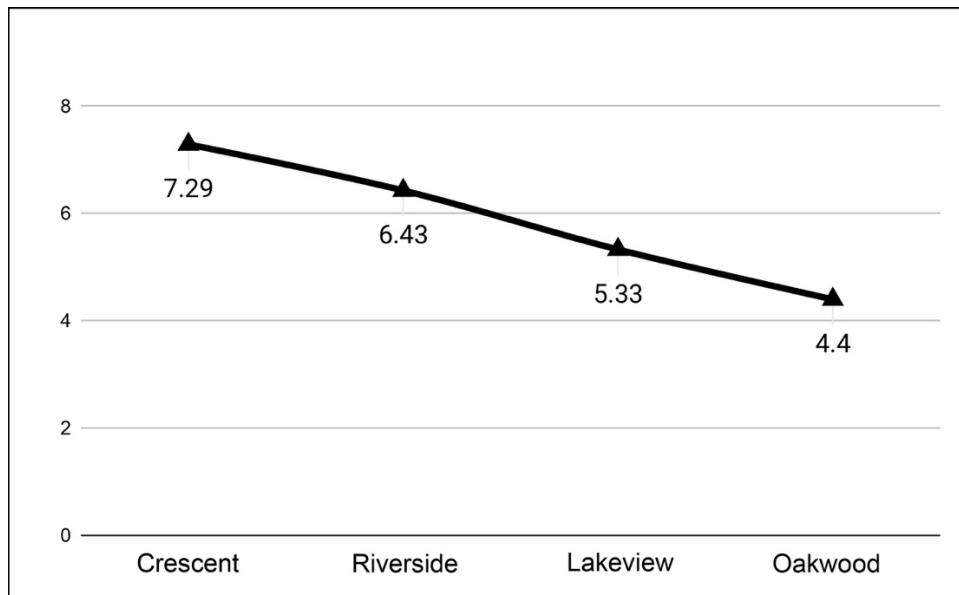


Figure 14: Actions Reported per Member

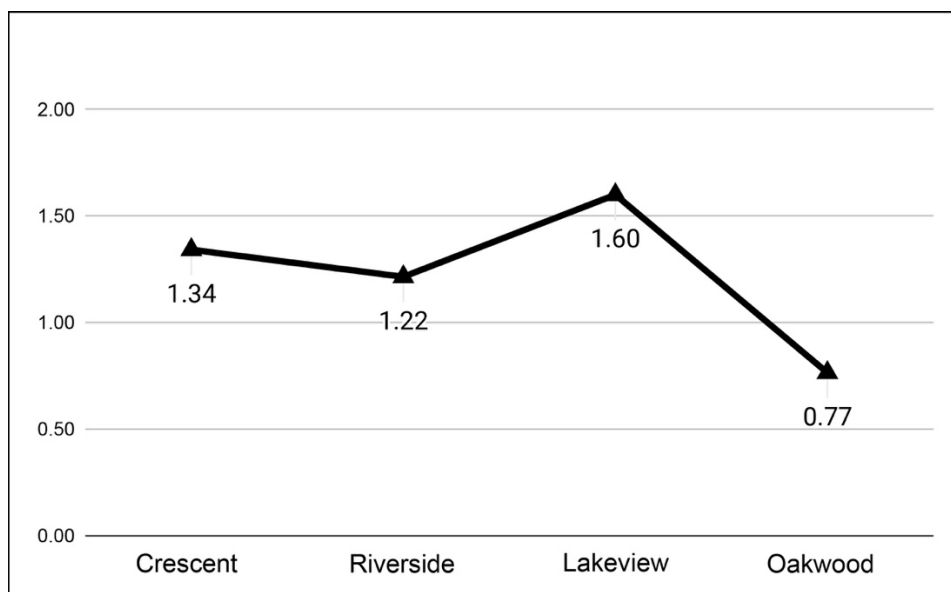


Figure 15: Actions Reported per Decision



Similarly Riverside High SCC parents reported taking a total of 6.43 actions per person and 1.22 actions per decision reported. In contrast, Lakeview SCC parent members reported taking 5.33 actions per person and 1.60 actions per decision. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Oakwood SCC parents reported taking 4.4 actions per person and .77 actions per decision. The more comparable cases of Crescent, Riverside, and Oakwood demonstrate an important difference in actions taken. On average, Oakwood parents take action only 57% of the number of times that Crescent High members take action.

### **Independent Actions**

What demonstrates a stronger contrast between cases is the types of actions taken by members of different SCCs. In order to distinguish between the types of actions, I designate information gathering and strategic talking as independent actions and meeting actions and speech withholding as dependent actions. What is meant by this distinction is that information gathering and strategic talking require independent initiative from the parent member outside of SCC meetings. These actions are more self-directed and require more planning. Furthermore, these actions are taken by the parent member outside of the immediate pressures of the SCC meeting. It is when we distinguish between these types of action that the differences between members of parent-strong councils and principal-strong councils become the strongest as seen in Figure 16.

Among the independent actions taken, members of the Crescent High SCC and Riverside SCC report strategic talking more than twice as often as members of the Lakeview and Oakwood SCCs. The difference in strategic talking is the largest of all

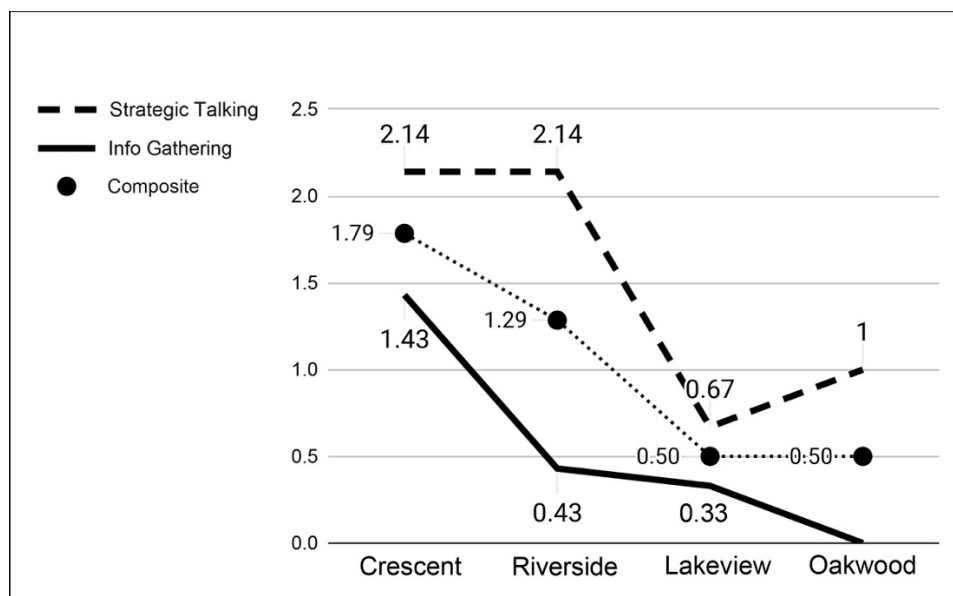


Figure 16: Independent Actions Reported per Member

differences in actions reported and is worth elaborating briefly here. Strategic talking is the process of seeking out one-on-one conversations with decision stakeholders. This includes speaking to the school administrators outside of SCC meetings, talking to district administrators after large townhall meetings, and talking to other parents outside of SCC meetings. What is obscured in the data here is that not only do members of the parent-strong councils regularly seek out these one-on-one conversations, they very often do so with district-level and school-level administrators. While this occurred on many issues by various parent members on the Crescent High and Riverside SCCs, there are no instances of district level communication in the Lakeview cases and the only instance of district level interaction in the Oakwood case. In order to communicate with district level administrators, SCC members often have to attend repeated meetings to develop a rapport and understand the appropriate means by which to contact a district representative. For the Crescent High members, the size of the school district is also more than twice the size

of the Oakwood district and, thus, the school administrators are more distant and difficult to reach.

The notable difference in the data for information gathering is the Crescent High SCC compared to the remainder of the cases. Of the seven members of the Crescent SCC I interviewed, five of them reported information gathering activities in relation to particular issues. In contrast, there were only two members who reported information gathering on the Riverside SCC, one member on the Lakeview SCC and zero members out of five on the Oakwood SCC. Very often, the Crescent SCC members reported not only gathering the information, but also utilizing the information in meetings during decision-making (Interview 2; Interview 5; Interview 6; Interview 7). As information can often lead to greater power, it is unsurprising that the parents in the most parent-strong council developed this widespread practice. In contrast, the members of the Oakwood SCC did not report one instance of information gathering. This is similarly unsurprising because members of the Oakwood SCC had very little power relatively and the few members who reported raising new ideas or initiatives also reported being shut down by school administrators (Interview 19; Interview 20; Interview 21).

### **Dependent Actions**

In contrast to actions that occur outside meetings, both types of dependent actions occur primarily within SCC meetings. There are some occasions, on parent-strong councils, when members speak in district town hall meetings or district board meetings, but the vast majority of meeting actions and speech withholding took place in monthly SCC meetings. As noted in the introduction to the four case SCC chapters, meeting

actions are those times when members speak in a meeting about the issue reported in the interview. Similar to all of the actions, meeting actions are those moments recalled by parent members of the SCCs during interviews. As these moments are reliant on memory recall, only the most memorable moments in meetings are typically remembered well enough to be recalled. In other words, the meeting actions recorded are typically important moments in which the decision is being discussed. Often the meeting action was also influential in determining the outcome of the decision. That said, both meeting actions and speech withholding are dependent on the meeting context and happen in real time as the meeting unfolds. While it still takes significant amounts of courage to speak up (according to many members), speaking in a meeting does not take the same planning that independent actions require. Even more so, speech withholding is an action that occurs without notice of anyone else on the SCC. The member withholds from saying something during a meeting exchange about the decision and others are unaware of the event. What is important to note about speech withholding and why it is recorded as an action is that members regularly identified these moments as important events in their own SCC experience. To withhold from speaking often allowed a decision to move forward and members frequently recalled holding back and doing so remained a memorable “act” that they performed on the council. Lastly, the decision to hold back is often done with the parent member knowing that the speaking up will change the course of the discussion. With this in mind, to withhold speech in a meeting is a very different type of act from seeking conversations outside of SCC meetings or gathering information on one’s own. As such, speech withholding is also a dependent action because it happens only within SCC meetings and is responsive to the meeting dynamics. As can be seen in

Figure 17, average dependent actions are fairly evenly spread across all SCC members.

Meeting actions are the most widespread action that parent members took on SCCs. All members interviewed except one attended meetings regularly throughout the year of the study and many members reported feeling comfortable speaking in meetings even in principal-strong councils where parents spoke much less on average. It is also the case that because parent members speak a lot less on principal-strong councils relative to parent-strong councils. When parents do speak, they remember the interaction well and often recall those moments in the interview. What is demonstrated from these data is that, on average, parent members across cases regularly speak up in meetings about important decisions.

While the speech withholding is relatively even across the cases, it is noteworthy that the Riverside and Lakeview councils reported withholding speech more often than the Crescent and Oakwood councils. Compared to Crescent and Oakwood, the Riverside

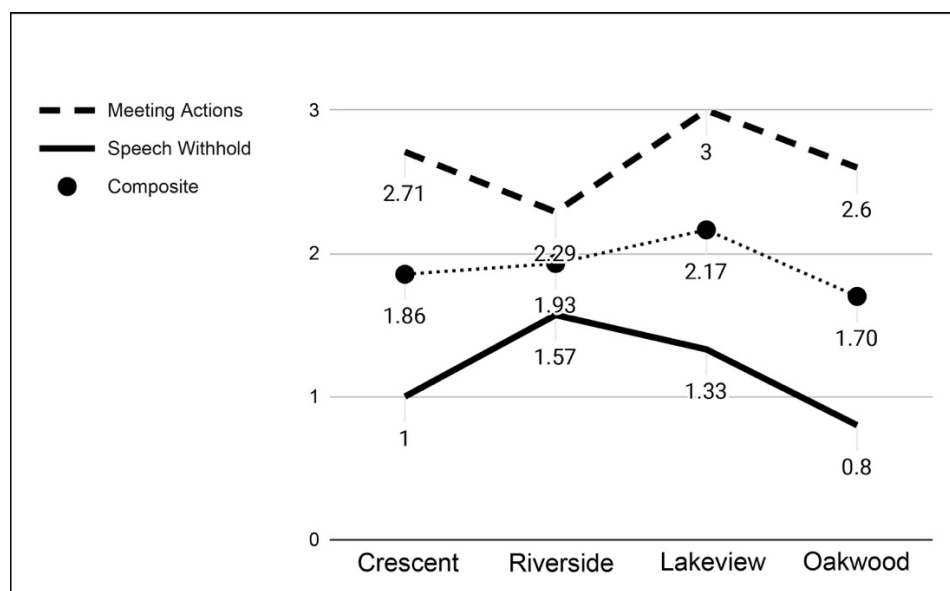


Figure 17: Dependent Actions Reported per Member

and Lakeview SCCs had more dynamic authority structures. Members of these councils reported many instances of prolonged personal considerations about speaking in meetings. Two parents on the Lakeview council also reported selecting words carefully in meetings because they were unaware of how others would respond (Interview 15; Interview 16). Alternatively, the expectations around speaking are very clear in the Crescent and Oakwood SCCs due to more predictable authority structures and meeting dynamics.

What is also noteworthy about the relatively consistent levels of speech withholding is that speech withholding has the most complex relationship with dissonance theory. Unlike the three other actions, speech withholding can be an invisible action and can often prolong dissonance rather than resolve it. For example, members of the Riverside case report withholding speech during the decision to fund the RCP program (Interview 10; Interview 13; Interview 14). The withholding of speech is an action that they report, but it prolongs dissonance because those same members end up voting to approve decisions that they disagree with. Undoubtedly, withholding speech can also resolve internal and mediating conflict because it is an action that is consistent with previous actions or represented positions. This complexity of speech withholding is not further developed in this project, but is an area for further exploration in future projects. It is possible that, if the pattern of prolonging dissonance holds over many differentiated cases, it might alter some aspects of the developmental dissonance cycle. Because it is the lowest reported action, it is not possible to make conclusive arguments about it at this time.

### **Conclusion**

While individual level data in Chapters 5-8 demonstrate the nuance of the individual experience in the developmental dissonance cycle, this chapter aggregated and averaged the individual level data in order to compare across cases. The first consistent finding in the aggregate level data is that parent-strong councils demonstrate higher levels of frequency in nearly all measures of the developmental dissonance cycle on average than principal-strong councils. This finding can especially be seen when comparing the Crescent High SCC findings to the Oakwood SCC findings. In all measures except dependent actions, the Crescent High members reported higher frequencies of all experiences in the developmental dissonance cycle. This is also true when comparing the Riverside SCC members to the Oakwood High SCC members, although the margin of difference is slightly smaller. The second finding is that the Lakeview High SCC is likely a mix between a principal-strong and parent-strong council. While the data presented here are from three interviews only, the consistent high frequency in each measurement indicates that at least the members interviewed experienced the developmental dissonance cycle in almost every verifiable stage.

Although much of the data presentation in this chapter regards the contrast between principal-strong and parent-strong councils, it is also important to note that the developmental dissonance cycle can occur for individuals on principal-strong councils. Although parent members of principal-strong councils have less responsibility and power relative to parent-strong councils, this does not mean that they have no responsibility or power. As seen from the individual reports, the individual's sense of responsibility can change during different experiences and the authority structures of all SCCs are fluid to

some degree. Indeed, one of the lessons from this research is that, even though parents belong to principal-strong SCCs, they can often, by coordinating actions, alter the structure of authority and thereby gain more decision-making power.



## CHAPTER 10

### CREATING PRAGMATIC CITIZENS

Congressman Chaffetz's 2017 town hall meeting at Brighton High school was so raucous, it received national media attention for the following month. Soon after the town hall, he brazenly claimed that out-of-state protesters were paid to attend and said in an NPR interview that he didn't mind criticism, "but I did think it was a bit over the top for an hour-and-15-plus minutes to yell, scream, flail and try to, I think intimidate and to bully people" (Bowmer, 2017). Less than a year later, I started observations of four School Community Councils at high schools across Utah, two of which were in the same metropolitan area as Brighton High School. The contrast between disempowered citizens yelling, screaming, and flailing and the empowered citizens I observed organizing, deliberating, and executing public decisions could not be sharper. The central thesis of this dissertation is that the institutional context in which citizens participate matters greatly for their ability to develop civic capacities. In particular, when citizens are given decision-making power and responsibility, they develop skills and dispositions that allow them to better address public problems. This thesis raises then the final concern of this dissertation: What are the particular considerations we should make when forming proximate governance institutions and what individual dispositions and skills are developed in institutions that are well designed?

In the first section of this chapter, I offer considerations on the major institutional features of proximate governance laid out in this dissertation: power, responsibility, and scale. All political institutions have some portion of power, but how to shape the apportionment of power among citizens poses unique challenges for civic educational theorists and practitioners. Furthermore, public responsibility is often a political football regularly tossed off or avoided where feasible. Is it possible to organize proximate governance institutions that regularly and somewhat equally bestow responsibility among citizens? Lastly, both power and responsibility are directly related to the scale of the organization. Scale influences levels of power and responsibility simultaneously and the nearness of proximate governance requires careful consideration both in the immediate numbers of people in the room and the size and proximity of the represented constituency. In the second section of this chapter, I offer considerations on the individual characteristics of pragmatic citizens. In contrast to liberal virtues of autonomy and reasonableness, the dispositions of pragmatic citizens are characterized by a democratic sensibility of mutually solving public problems. In particular, as has been noted, pragmatic citizens learn experientially in ways that expand the recognition of interests and coordinate interests to achieve particular outcomes. What personal qualities does a democratic citizen have who regularly adjusts behavior toward these ends? I argue that in order to recognize the interests of others, pragmatic citizens develop qualities of openness and adaptability. Furthermore, in order to coordinate interests, pragmatic citizens develop skills of social connection, calibrated communication, and a disposition of courage. Each of these institutional and personal characteristics will be taken in turn and examples from the study will be utilized to illustrate the particular facets of each.

Yet, prior to moving to the considerations mentioned above it is also important to reemphasize briefly the means of pragmatic civic education, so as to not confuse it with other forms of civic education so commonly practiced. It might be first helpful to state what pragmatic civic education is not. Pragmatic civic education is not a new history course reviewing the exemplary figures of social movements. Pragmatic civic education is not a blended learning University course where students volunteer in the community. Pragmatic civic education is certainly not a requirement for all high school seniors to pass the naturalization test prior to graduation (Spataro Jr., 2019). Pragmatic civic education is also not the cultivation of reasonableness through national public policies (Macedo, 2000), or the cultivation of the “deliberative character” through consideration and discussion (Gutmann, 1984, p. 52), or the development of autonomy through hypothetical imagination and argumentation (Callan, 1997; Kohlberg, 1984; Rawls, 1971). Pragmatic civic education is no less than the actual experience of holding public power. It is no less than the actual experience of holding public responsibility. Any substitute for the experiential education of public decision-making is likely valuable in its own right, but it is not pragmatic civic education.

A particular challenge lies in this fact for teachers, principals, professors, public administrators, and politicians. Citizens need to hold power in order to learn. This perhaps forms the largest barrier to pragmatic civic education. While this dilemma is one of the oldest problems of democratic theory (Rousseau, 1978), it also requires new thinking in contemporary times. Those who have experimented with pragmatic civic education in different settings have developed insights regarding the process of authority transfer to citizens. While there are many considerations to be made, Oser et al. (2008)

suggest that those in power develop an approach they call “trust-in-advance” in order to facilitate democratic decision-making (p. 408). This entails that those in power convey “the message that they trust everybody to contribute to the discussion as much as they think is necessary, to make informed decisions, to be able to live with the consequences and, thus, to act as responsible and engaged citizens” (Oser et al., 2008, p. 409). For pragmatic citizenship to be cultivated on a large scale our institutional configuration would ultimately reflect this “trust-in-advance” posture. The prescriptions for such configurations are the subject of further research, but here it is important to name this fundamental challenge to pragmatic civic education. In what follows, I offer specific considerations of the institutional and individual characteristics that pertain to pragmatic civic education in School Community Councils.

### **Institutional Characteristics**

#### **Power**

There was almost no pattern more consistent in this study than the overt recognition of power by SCC members. There was no question of power directly in the interview guide, yet nearly all members commented on their level of power in the organization. From amazement about the influence SCCs wield (Interview 2; Interview 7; Interview 16), to the rejected state of “rubber stampers” (Interview 12), the common thread was that SCC members were keenly aware of their level of influence. What is more, SCC members regularly identified the principal as either the purveyor or negator of power on the SCC. In discussions regarding past SCC experience, members regularly talked about how other principals operate differently and expressed their opinions

regarding the principal in light of the influence given to parents on the council (Interview 18; Interview 19; Interview 20). Only one or two members, of the Crescent High SCC, spoke about the SCC in terms disconnected from dependence on the principal of the school.

This keen sensitivity to power dynamics and the felt dependence on the principal was surprising both because of its ubiquity and because SCCs are deliberately set up by legal code in order to give majority power to parents. Many members know that parents have a majority and yet still consider their relational position to the principal as paramount (Interview 11). As demonstrated in the previous chapters, there is good reason for parents to attend to the principal. When principals assert their power, they are often able to direct the resources of the SCC to their own ends. In these conditions, parents regularly acquiesce and only in the most parent-strong councils do parents actively resist and continue to assert power in reaction to a power-ascendant principal (Interview 2; Interview 4).

With these conditions in mind, both the sensitivity to and fragility of parent power in School Community Councils are primary points of interest for civic education. The sensitivity to power frames much of the individual perception of parents (Interview 12) and thus the connection with educational opportunities. In other words, even when parents have decision-making power, the belief that they do not can inhibit openness to behavioral modification and educational experiences. Alternatively, even when parents have relatively little power, a belief that they do can engender educational experiences. In the first instance, Paula of the Riverside SCC is a good example. She repeatedly disparaged the power of the SCC saying that the budget was a “fucking joke.” This

perception pervaded her interview, while in meetings, she was one of the most active participants on the SCC. The civic educational implications of the limited perception of power came to a head in her interview, when she said she planned to quit the SCC in the coming year (Interview 12). Those, on the contrary, who have a positive perception of their own power nearly always continued for an indefinite time on the SCC. It goes without saying that more time participating in public decision-making institutions will lead to more educational experiences for a citizen.

In contrast to parent sensitivity to power, the fragility of power deals more with parent's willingness to continue to organize in a way that maintains or asserts power relative to the principal. As seen in Chapter 2, the ways in which parents organize to maintain power are varied, but involve setting the right environment, planning meetings at certain times and for a long enough period, providing opportunities for parents to build rapport with each other before and after meetings, and perhaps, most significantly, the strong leadership of the parent chair. When these practices become institutionalized, the power parents wield directly impacts the decision-making of the SCC. Those parents who are empowered actors on SCCs experience repeated conditions that challenge their beliefs through disagreement and prompt continual recognition of difference through direct contact during decision-making.

Together these considerations about the sensitivity to power and the fragility of parent power speak directly to the institutional arrangements of proximate governance institutions. It suggests that legal authority is not enough to ensure power for citizens who voluntarily participate in shared governance organizations alongside professionals who participate as part of their employment. In such conditions, the voluntary party is likely to

need more than majority status to ensure their power. The informal practices displayed by the parents of parent-strong SCC are perhaps an important place to start. Either way, ensuring power for voluntary citizens is essential for civic educational experiences in proximate governance institutions.

### **Responsibility**

Although all SCC meetings are, by law, public, many parents in public schools around the state of Utah are still unaware that SCCs exist. Furthermore, parent members of SCCs know this (Interview 7) and their sense of responsibility is directly related to this understanding. Indeed, one of the surprising aspects of the Lakeview SCC members' experience was the connection that the members fostered with parents of the school that were not on the SCC (Interview 16; Interview 17). This undoubtedly played a significant role in the levels of disagreement and dissonance that the Lakeview members reported. Denise, for example, sent an email out to a group of parents after every SCC meeting to update them on the meeting. She reported that it was an obligation that she had to them because they had voted her into the position (Interview 17). Heidi was also in constant contact with parents about issues on the SCC, which she explained as significantly influencing the way that she acted on the SCC (Interview 16). This same sentiment was expressed by members of the Crescent High SCC (Interview 2; Interview 5; Interview 7).

The consideration this raises is that those proximate governance institutions that are most likely to generate educational experiences are those with a representative aspect to the positions held. Those parents on SCCs who understand themselves to be representatives regularly expressed a stronger sense of responsibility in their work on the

SCC. As might be expected, representativeness also excludes possible individuals who want to participate but lose elections. This difficulty can be partially managed by term lengths in proximate governance institutions. School Community Councils have 2-year terms and this frequency seemed an appropriate balance between time needed for training and continued opportunity for others to join the council.

In addition to representativeness in proximate governance institutions, responsibility is also engendered by the public nature of the meetings. Parent members regularly referred to the meeting minutes that would be published on the website and suggested that they wanted their actions to be recorded in the minutes (Interview 2; Interview 5). The standard practice of SCCs is to publish the list of names of current members, upcoming agendas, and past meeting minutes on the school website. According to the interviews, this practice did little to involve outside parents in the process, but it regularly impacted the way that SCC parents behaved on the council. The thought of their actions being public mattered and built an aspect of responsibility. As with power, the representative and public aspects of SCCs engendered repeated instances where members increasingly recognized the interests of different parties to the decisions they took on the SCC. Thus, the character of responsibility given in proximate governance institutions is an important consideration for fostering pragmatic civic education.

### **Scale**

The final institutional aspect to consider when thinking about experiential civic education is scale. The consideration of scale arose in two ways with the SCCs in this study. First, the scale of the immediate institution in terms of the number of individuals



who attend meetings and have voting power on the council. Secondly, the scale of the total number of individuals represented by the parent SCC members on the council. The first consideration of scale is connected to the amount of power that individuals have and the second consideration is connected to the amount of responsibility that individuals feel.

In SCCs, the common practice is that councils are typically below 30 people and what Gastil (2014) suggests is the ideal size for “small group democracy” (p. 5). It was sometimes the case that meetings at Riverside High would exceed 30 individuals and those meetings required a more formal agenda and clear direction from the chair. The consideration of maintaining the group at fewer than 30 individuals in scale is important for the educational quality of the experience as it relates to personal power. As discussed earlier, the personal power one feels on the council is often related to whether they can propose agenda items and deliberate meaningfully about the issues at hand. In my observations, groups that were between 10-20 often sat closer together. Also, with 10-20 people in the meeting, most everyone was able to speak as desired. In fact, what I observed is that SCCs this size often generated primary conversations and side conversations at the same time. Individual members often conferred with their neighbor and then moved from that interaction to the larger interaction. This type of neighbor talk did not exist in groups smaller than 10. What was interesting about these neighbor talks was that they directly bore on the main conversation and parents often built relationships with seating neighbors in this context. Thus, while Gastil (2014) says that a group should not be too small to lose cohesiveness, the ideal number for generating robust and open discussion tended to be between approximately 10-20 individuals. While the groups in

my study that had the most robust discussions typically landed between 10-20 individuals, that did not mean that groups within that range always had robust discussion. What became clear is that the dynamic changed significantly when the group was less than 10 and over 20. Constructing proximate governance institutions with this in mind is likely to give members the best possible conditions for discursive exchange during the meetings. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, opportunities to speak in SCC meetings make up a significant portion of actions during the developmental dissonance cycle.

While of the scale of the immediate proximate governance institution has been heavily theorized (Fung, 2001; Gastil, 2014; Pincock, 2011; Sale, 2017), the scale of population that the proximate governance institutions represent has not. What I found repeatedly during the study is that the immediacy of a high school, the familiarity of the institution, and the connection between parents, played a significant role in the experience of parent members. Parents regularly reported their personal interactions with other parents at school activities, on walks, at baseball games, etc... (Interview 9; Interview 15). While it was sometimes the case that these were close friends, many times the parents reported speaking with other parents who were concerned about issues at the school or had children who were facing similar issues (Interview 4). The casual encounters in the neighborhood, the store, the baseball game, and parent teacher conferences mattered for the flow of information and the sense of responsibility that parent members felt toward the individuals they were representing.

Furthermore, scale in this regard was also raised in reference to the confidence individuals had in participating on the SCC. Many members expressed that knowing the

chair was helpful for their participation and the fact that she was a parent, just like them, encouraged their participation on the SCC. The scale of public school boundaries never seemed to exceed a number where the representatives on the council were established experts. Surely many participated for multiple terms, but lines between experienced parents and new parents were rarely acknowledged or reified during SCC meetings. This normalization of SCC participation has much to do with the scale of the geographic area represented and the resulting familiarity engendered.

Lastly, what was interesting about the scale of a school boundary is that while it was near enough to build familiarity, it was also large enough to regularly introduce different experiences and opinions. New members would regularly join the council and, not coming from the particular neighborhood of other members, would have unique experiences that were voiced on the council. This novelty and diversity of opinion also seemed to engender enough formality on the SCC to treat decisions as official business and give them appropriate concern.

### **Individual Characteristics**

The institutional characteristics mentioned above foster constant activity in proximate governance institutions which translate into educationally rich civic experiences. In the remainder of the chapter, I will provide general observations about the characteristics that pragmatic citizens develop. As argued throughout, the two primary activities of a pragmatic citizenship are the recognition of difference and the coordination of interests. I will first argue that those with the ability to increasingly recognize difference are those who demonstrate openness and adaptability. Furthermore, I will

argue that those who excel at coordinating various interests toward a specific outcome are those who connect with others, calibrate their interactions, and have the courage to speak up.

### **Openness**

In one of the most memorable decision cases, Beth described her internal struggle with reconfiguration (Interview 2). She was decidedly against the policy to move sixth graders to junior high and had personal reasons to resist the change because it negatively impacted her children. She was also chair of the junior high SCC and could have used that position to scuttle the decision. Instead, she reported that when she entered the first meeting to discuss the issue she “went in pretty decided, but still willing to listen” (Interview 2). The disposition of openness often expresses itself in these terms. Members reported feeling strong about their own positions, “but...” For example, Marilyn felt that the proficiency-based grading issue was not a big deal, but after the repeated complaints of other members to the principal, she researched more about the issue (Interview 3). Similarly, Marilyn was also against the literary magazine for the school and thought it was not valuable for the students, “*but* maybe for a few it is” (Interview 3, Emphasis Added). This pattern of openness was also expressed by Rick and Jenny on the Riverside High SCC about the RCP program. Both members shared opinions that they disagreed with the value of the program, but were willing to see it play out (Interview 10; Interview 14).

In this way, openness in pragmatic citizenship is not the absence of opinions. Rather it resembles something like holding of opinions in strong probabilities. The citizen

is sure of their opinion, but leaves some space for alternative explanations or considerations. That small space at the extent of the opinion is the openness demonstrated by pragmatic citizens. The constant exchange of opinion in parent-strong councils often develops this sensibility through direct contact and forced recognition of other opinions as opposing decisions carry in the group. Parent members often stated that a particular decision might be beneficial for the ones who were advancing it on the SCC. Recurrent encounters with the opposing opinions seemed to cultivate openness to those opinions in the future. Certainly in order to move decisions forward in the SCC, members had to be open to the viewpoints of others. Openness formed the initial receptivity in the process of recognizing other interests.

### **Adaptability**

After members demonstrated their openness to differing opinions, they often supported the opinion through their behavior toward the decision. In decision-making environments, it is not enough to be open to differing ideas; you are expected to act on those ideas should you be persuaded. Thus, pragmatic citizens demonstrated an adaptability to the continually new circumstances that emerged during the decision-making process.

To continue the example of Beth, she not only expressed openness to other opinions, but she concluded her account with the comment that “I’ve changed” (Interview 2). Indeed, her account demonstrated that after meetings where she heard the perspective of other parents, she headed up the initiative, called meetings, drafted letters, and coordinated between multiple schools and the district in order to execute the change

(Interview 2). The decision-making process of proximate governance often demands the adaptability of citizens because decisions modulate and take different form over time. Nancy and Melodie both reported that the reconfiguration decision was their original idea and that they played an important role in initiating the decision for the entire district (Interview 4; Interview 7). Yet, both also reported that although the district board had assured them that sixth graders would not move to junior high, it soon began to happen.

Adaptability, like openness, is not the constant change of behavior, but the trained behavioral reaction to readjust to new circumstances as they unfold. In Nancy and Melodie's case, adaptability was revealed through their conversations with parents and continual work on the SCC even as others began to blame them for a change they weren't responsible for. Each explained to parents that they did not anticipate the change and Nancy reminded the parents of the original conversations with the administrators (Interview 4). Melodie worked to become a reliable source of information for parents as the policy continued to unfold (Interview 7). As Nancy and Melodie exemplify, adaptability is the continual behavioral demonstration of the recognition of other interests.

### **Connection**

As parent members of SCCs recognized other interests through openness and adaptability, they also demonstrated the ability to coordinate interests around particular outcomes. A major part of this coordination was fostering social connection between the relevant parties to the decision. Indeed, the individuals who demonstrated the strongest civic capability were regularly in contact with a wide network of parent SCC members,

school administrators, teachers, parent constituents, and school district administrators. As members described these interactions, they described a certain level of consistency without a strong level of intimacy. In other words, the social connection that was fostered was not friendship, but something more akin to connected acquaintanceship. These relationships were actively fostered, but not with any particular purpose in mind. Often members would have parents approach them from the school at drop offs or parent teacher conferences. Others regularly stayed after SCC meetings to speak with the other members of the SCC.

Nearly all members with a strong sense of connection sought out the school administrators or intentionally kept those relationships warm in case they were needed at any point in the future. One of the strongest and most repeated findings of the entire study was that parent SCC members participated in order to have some future access to the administration should they need it. This phenomenon even occurred in the most principal-strong councils. In her interview, Lisa from the Oakwood SCC expressed that one primary reason she was on the council was so that the people at the school “maybe have a listening ear [...] when you talk to them” (Interview 22). Denise, from Lakeview, expressed it this way: “having the principal know you face to face and the principal knows that you are involved enough to be on the community council, then when I have an issue the principal has treated me like, hey, this person is involved” (Interview 7). Thus, while the connection with the principal and administration was intentionally fostered, it was often not immediately tied to a need the parent had. Rather it was fostered just in case a need came up in the future.

While there were personal examples that illustrated this characteristic, the parent-

strong councils built institutional mechanisms to foster this level of social connection. As noted in Chapter 2, the Crescent and Riverside SCCs regularly provided food for their members. This created an environment in every meeting where members socialized while serving their food and eating it before the meeting. It also provided a topic of conversation for the members that gave them commonality in their conversations. Again, the SCCs did not promote outside activities that fostered deeper connections of friendship, but actively worked to foster trusted acquaintances.

Finally, some members connected regularly with their parent constituents and saw it as their responsibility to keep them informed about the happenings at the school. Nancy became a source for parents around the neighborhood to learn about issues at the school. As she explained it, parents called her “all the time” and she described these parents as friends of friends. In her account parents would tell other parents to call her and she would inform them about the goings on (Interview 4). This type of constituent connection was also reported by Denise, who regularly sent synopsis emails of SCC meetings (Interview 17). As the Summit decision evolved over the year, Denise described multiple conversations with these individuals and her reports to them about the updates from the school.

By fostering “just in case” connections with other stakeholders, members of SCCs were then able to coordinate between these different stakeholders as issues arose. In this way connection provides the foundation of interest coordination for pragmatic citizens. The maintenance of these relationships constitutes a resource members can draw on when they begin to advocate for particular issues at the school.



## Calibration

While connection is a preparatory characteristic of pragmatic citizenship, calibration is the skill demonstrated during the real time decision-making in the SCCs. Members frequently reported choosing their words wisely, not saying everything they thought, or otherwise restraining themselves during conversations on SCCs. The action of speech withholding was one of the most ubiquitous actions throughout the study. Yet, rather than simply withholding speech, calibration is better understood as the careful selection of words while one is speaking. The skill is thus a communication skill that is developed as individuals repeatedly work through decisions on SCCs.

For example, during the Summit issue, Heidi explained that as she moved between the principal and the parents, she would often take the opposing side's position. In her words, "I felt like I was more supportive of the administration when I was talking to the people in the community. But, when I would go to that community council meeting I was definitely on the side of the parents" (Interview 16). In her calibration of words, there was overt recognition of the audience and a selection of message that was appropriate for that audience. In Heidi's experience, this was necessary because "everyone's drastic," and if she leaned to their side too much in the conversations, there would be "total upheaval" (Interview 16).

As in the above examples, calibration occurred by the careful selection of words, but it also happened more forthrightly in Beth's case. After the principal had pushed through a decision that she disagreed with, she approached a teacher impacted by the decision and asked her perspective. She then returned to the principal and said, "okay, without getting anyone in trouble, how do I tell you that..." (Interview 2). Here Beth

made the principal aware that she had talked to the teacher and that she was not going to tell the principal whom she had spoken with. In this way, calibration can also be made known in conversation as it transpires.

Without a doubt calibration, of all of the characteristics of pragmatic citizenship, feels the most “political.” What is interesting about the accounts is that not one of the members reported calibration as feeling deceptive or untruthful. Rather, they portrayed these types of interactions as the necessary work of political decision-making. Indeed, when attempting to coordinate disagreeing parties around a certain outcome, it seems essential to have intermediary parties that can speak to those parties and appropriately calibrate their conversations in order to move with them toward a particular outcome.

### **Courage**

Lastly, there were numerous examples throughout the study of members feeling afraid to do something, but moving forward despite their fear. Courage was demonstrated at two distinct times during decision-making. First, during times of serious conflict and, second, during conversations of power asymmetry. What was interesting is that although members regularly recounted their fear, they also regularly acted in the face of fear. Members often portrayed the dynamics of the interaction as though they were compelled to speak, although they were afraid of the possible consequences of their actions.

During the fundraiser issue at Riverside, Jenny explained this dynamic during her conflict with Rick and Kyle. She had resigned from the fundraising committee months prior and was upset with the fundraising initiative since her resignation. As she expressed, “it just seemed like a train wreck” (Interview 14). According to her account,

the Riverside community had been mischaracterized through the ordeal and when she arrived in the SCC meeting, she felt the need to correct the story. In her words, “I mean, I definitely had to take kind of a gulp and go, okay, am I going to do this? Am I going to go there? And I thought, yeah, I have to, you know? I have to. I have to point out what was wrong with this, you know? And I felt it was important to do it publicly” (Interview 14). SCC members repeatedly expressed that they had to ‘kind of take a gulp’ before talking. There was often an internal debate about whether it was worth it and then a conviction expressed about the importance of their act. Again, as in Jenny’s account, it was as though courage overcame fear as a necessary part of the decision-making process. Courage was not summoned in isolation or for self-interested purposes, but to set a record straight for the community. In this way, courage was often closely connected with responsibility. When members felt that their actions would be heard publicly or were on behalf of other parents, they regularly exhibited courage during conflict.

Additionally, courage was regularly reported when parent members of the SCC spoke with the principal or district school board. In these interactions, it was always clear to the parent that the principal or the school board had more power. Speaking up to power was often intimidating and members reported building up courage to say what they needed to say. In this position, Denise told about her meeting encounter with the principal. Before the meeting, she had spoken with other parents and her children about the problems with the Summit program. Many students were falling behind and after putting on a “positive spin” on the program for months, the issue came to a head. She went to the SCC meeting and, “didn't know what response I was going to get, so I was really tentative to say anything” (Interview 17). Yet despite her fear, she did speak and

many other parents also spoke in the meeting about the same problems (Interview 17). Just as with Jenny's case, Denise registered not only her own complaint about the program, but that of other parents whom she represented on the council.

As with connection and calibration, courage is a disposition fostered by pragmatic citizenship. As citizens face distinct decision-making dynamics they are often in conflict with other parties or have to speak up to someone in power about a problem they are facing. As reported by SCC members, these moments are often motivated by the responsibility that they feel to the community that the SCC represents.

### **Conclusion**

As discussed in this chapter and throughout this dissertation, pragmatic citizenship is active participation in public decision-making by ordinary citizens. In an effort to address public problems, citizens come together in proximate governance institutions to expand the interested parties to decisions and coordinate those interests toward desired outcomes. Pragmatic civic education, as argued in this chapter, requires careful attention to the institutional design of proximate governance institutions. When those institutions give citizens meaningful power and responsibility, citizens experience a range of dynamics that foster individual civic characteristics that enhance their ability to solve public problems in the future. Among the dispositions of a pragmatic citizen are openness to difference and behavioral adaptability to accommodate that difference. Furthermore, pragmatic citizens regularly connect with other stakeholders in a preemptive manner so that they might further coordinate interests when needed. As pragmatic citizens arbitrate between the various interested parties, they calibrate their

communication to be understood so as not to exacerbate extreme and unworkable positions. Lastly, when faced with conflict or greater power, pragmatic citizens speak up and summon courage in order to fulfill their responsibility and address the more challenging points of public decisions. While these attributes are highly desirable and even necessary for democratic societies to function properly, pragmatic citizenship can only be fostered by the direct participation of citizens in governance itself. It is likely up to us, as citizens, to assure we assume that power.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Interview Guide

1. I want you to take a little time and think about two experiences that you've had on the SCC. The first is a time that you remember quite well, when you felt that you were able to make a difference. The second is a time when you really wanted to make a difference and you wish you had, but you couldn't make a difference.
2. Just like the first question, I'm going to give you a little roadmap. I want you to really think back this time for two other specific experiences. The first is a memory you have of sitting in one of your very first SCC Meetings - what happened in that meeting and what was that like? The second is a time when you were sitting in an SCC meeting and you realized, wow, I know this stuff. I know how this works. What happened at that meeting? What did you feel like? What did you say? What did people say that made you feel like that?
3. What I hear from others is that often they come into the School Community Councils with different goals. Some have goals for their children and family, some have other goals for the school and community or some project that they care about. Can you first tell me about a time when you felt that you had goal or something that you wanted for your kid, or on behalf of your kid, that was aligned with the other members, and then can you remember a particular time when you felt that you wanted something that was at odds with the other members. Take time to think back about both experiences. Just like the other questions, I'm really interested in how you experienced the meetings and conversations when this happened. Often these things aren't said and I'm sure that you experienced these meetings very differently than others. What happened and what was it like for you?
4. Many of the SCCs that I have observed make regular decisions about poorer families and often about minority students as well. It is a regular occasion that funds go toward populations that are different than most members of the SCC. Can you think back to a time when the SCC was talking about or ended up giving money or resources to the poorer families of the school or students that are immigrants or minorities? What was the decision and what happened in the meeting? These can be delicate topics and often not a lot is said during the meetings when these items come up. I'd really like to know how you felt and what you thought when the SCC talked about these decisions. What did you think about the ideas and were you able to speak your mind? If you did speak up, what happened? If not, why not? What was it like to talk about the issue in the meeting? How did others react to the discussion and how did that make you feel?

5. I want you to think about a time when a person on the SCC said or did something that you disagreed with. You may not have said anything or you may have said something, but I am interested in how you felt when the person said or did that thing. If you did say something, what did you say? How did you feel while observing this person? Did you continue to think about it after the meeting? If you didn't say something, why not? Did you share the experience with others?
6. This question is about the other people on the council and parents of kids that are not on the council. Can you remember a time when you talked to another parent, whether a member or not, about the school community council outside of a school community council meeting? Who was the person and what did you talk about? What was it like to talk about the SCC with someone outside of an SCC meeting? Does this happen often and what is it like when it does happen?
7. Can you think back to a time when the council made a decision and you left the meeting thinking that you should have made a different decision? Can you describe the situation and how you felt as you thought about the decision?
8. Lastly, I want you to think about two experiences, similar to the first few questions. Can you think of a time when you wanted to participate at an SCC meeting but you felt that you couldn't because someone else did something or said something that made you feel like you shouldn't say anything? Next, is there a time when you felt like you could participate because someone else said something or did something that made you feel encouraged to participate?



APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW CODING INSTRUCTIONS  
AND CODING SCHEME

## Interview Coding

### **Instructions**

Each interview from the four sample high schools in the study will be coded according to the following process.

1. Identify and copy to a different document all segments in the interview where interviewee reports about decisions made by the SCC in their entirety.
  - a. Identify and highlight in blue all questions from the interview guide in the interview transcript. See Appendix 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE.
  - b. Nearly all decision reports start in response to a question in the interview guide. Move question by question and highlight in yellow entire decision reports from the first word in the paragraph where decision starts to last word in the paragraph where decision report ends.
    - i. Decisions are originally identified in interview by particular topic areas such as RCP, or Proficiency-based Grading, or Chrome Books, or ACT funding.
    - ii. Decision reports can also recur at other moments in the interview. When this occurs, highlight the portion of the interview pertaining to the decision in yellow and add to the end of the decision segment in the separate document.
2. Number and title decisions in new document, with coding table below. Center justified and bold, for example:

#### **Decision 1: Proficiency-based Grading**

<b>DEC</b>	<b>DIS</b>	<b>IMP</b>	<b>MOT</b>	<b>PRO</b>	<b>ACT</b>

3. Review each decision and include pertinent code in the box with uniquely highlighted color.
  - a. DEC = Decision and highlight color is gray
    - i. Include only one decision type either IN or AD.
    - ii. For decisions that include both IN and AD attributes, code reads IN/AD
  - b. DIS = Disagreement and highlight color is green
    - i. Include only one disagreement type either SS, SR, FS, or FR
  - c. IMP = Importance and highlight color is pink
    - i. Include total wordcount number first
    - ii. Include CH if code applies in decision
    - iii. Include AC if code applies in decision

- d. MOT = Motivation and highlight color is red
  - i. Include DES if code applies in decision
  - ii. Include NEG if code applies in decision
- e. PRO = Prolong and highlight color is blue
  - i. Include REP if code applies in decision
- f. ACT = Actions and highlight color is yellow
  - i. Include IG if applies in decision at least once
  - ii. Include ST if applies in decision at least once
  - iii. Include MA if applies in decision at least once
  - iv. Include SW if applies in decision at least once

## Codes

**Decision Inclusion in Coding:** Must be a decision made or immediately impending by SCC, school administration, or school district. Decisions far into the future or initiatives such as helping with the website do not count as decisions. Decisions by other bodies unrelated to SCC are also not included i.e. PTA or church. Furthermore, conflicts about newly presented topics in the meeting also do not count as decisions

- Examples: Pi Day in Kelly Shelton's interview is not a decision. Pi Day in this example is proposed as an idea and turned down before being considered as a decision; In another example from Kelly's interview, the principal brings up AP classes and asks why more students are not taking the classes. Kelly and the principal have a public disagreement, but there is not decision in the balance, just a clarifying discussion about why something is happening.

**Decision Inclusion in Decision Process Sections:** Two decisions to be included for each member. Each decision included must have disagreement and importance as those are the primary elements that initiate the developmental dissonance cycle. The disagreement can be any type SS, SR, FS, or FR. In order to determine importance, compare the following among decisions: interview word count, children impacted, and actions taken. For the decision to be included, it has to exceed the other decision in two of the three areas.

- Example: greater word count + greater number of actions will beat out a different decision even if that other decision impacts the children of the member.

**Decision (General):** Determining whether a decision is invested or advisory is typically not reported by the interviewee, but by the coder understanding the difference between the decision types and applying the code accordingly. The differences can often be indicated by the member stating whether they voted on the decision or not. Nearly all decisions on which SCC members take a vote are invested decisions. Similarly, if the decision is referred to as a school district decision, or the principal's decision, than it is almost always advisory.

**Decision (IN):** Applies when decisions are under the full authority of the SCC. According to the legal code, this authority is to allocate Land Trust funds by the committee and establish a safe walking plan.

- Examples: chromebooks, math software programs, teacher compensation, classroom aides, classroom materials etc...

**Decision (AD):** Applies when decisions are under the authority of the principal or the school district or the jurisdiction of municipality and fall outside of Land Trust funds.

- Examples: proficiency-based grading, security equipment and protocols, crosswalks or signage.

**Disagree (SS):** Applies when a member disagrees with the substance of the decision which is stated by the member in a meeting OR agrees with the substance of a decision and others on the council disagree. The substance of the decision refers to the particular points of the decision itself.

- Examples: Nancy states in a meeting that she is not happy with readjustment because she thinks 6th graders should stay in elementary; Beth says in a meeting that she does not believe they should subsidize the ACT; Sara pushes for a decision to fund pamphlets and knows that others disagree with her position because of what they say in the meeting.

**Disagree (SR):** Applies when a member disagrees with the substance of the decision which is not stated by a member in a meeting, but reported in the interview.

- See above for examples and definition of substance.

**Disagree (FS):** Applies when a member disagrees with the form of the decision which is stated by the member in a meeting OR agrees with the form of the decision and others on the council disagree. The form of the decision refers to the manner in which the decision was made, or the implementation of the decision, rather than disagreeing points of the decision.

- Examples: the decision was to hire an aide was rushed; I was supportive of the Summit program, but then there were problems later in the year; or every year the trust land plan is created without our input.

**Disagree (FR):** Applies when a member disagrees with the form of the decision which is not stated by a member in a meeting, but reported in the interview.

- See above for examples and definition of form.

**Importance (CH):** Applies when a member talks about the decision impacting their own child, typically stating them by name or giving an example of their experience with the consequences of the decision as it plays out in the school.

- Examples: Tessa saw the new ninth graders in the school and really complained to me; Jimmy is taking physics and has a C because of proficiency-based grading; My daughter used the math program this year and really liked it.

**Importance (AC):** Applies when a member takes any of the actions in the "Action" section of the coding scheme related to the decision.

- See "Action" section below for examples of information gathering, strategic talking, meeting actions, and withholding

**Motivation (DES):** Applies when member gives an alternative path or suggested action for the decision. Rather than simply disagree, the member states what might be better.

- Examples- I wanted to use the money for AP tests rather than subsidize the ACT; I think the money could have been better used for a new parking lot; I've seen this done better at the elementary school and this is how they did it; We talked about this and can you show us data for this?

**Motivation (NEG):** Applies when member uses negative adjectives to describe their own feelings regarding a situation.

- Examples- "I was really frustrated", "That made me so mad", "I couldn't believe that", "I felt conflicted" etc...

**Prolong (REP):** Applies when the decision or issue arises in more than one SCC, school, or school district meeting attended by the interviewee.

- Examples- At this SCC meeting we voted....Then I attended a townhall about the issue; Yeah, we talked about the math program in the February meeting and the March meeting.

**Action (IG):** Applies when member recounts personally accessing information related to the SCC decision on a website, book, scholarly article, or knowledgeable person.

- Examples- Yeah, I looked up how schools deal with cell phones in other countries; The information on the website about the district budget was very helpful; The librarian knows how many computer the school needs, so I just asked her before the meeting.

**Action (ST):** Applies when member recounts personally talking, emailing, or sending a letter to another decision stakeholder outside an SCC meeting. A decision stakeholder includes school administrators, parents (SCC members and not), and district administrators. These conversations are most often one-to-one, but can sometimes include 3-4 people, especially before and after SCC meetings.

- Examples- Sharon and I talked after the meeting about the reading program and we seemed to be on the same page; So I called the board member and told her about the problem with the information they were disseminating; Emilia, the

history teacher, and I spoke before the meeting and I asked her how it was going with the new books.

**Action (MA):** Applies when a member speaks aloud, initiates or seconds a motion to vote, or otherwise makes their opinion known to entire group in an SCC, School, or School District meeting regarding the SCC decision. SCC members most often state that "I said xyz" or "I stood up and spoke". Most often this is when a member recalls this event which adds weight to its importance in their minds. Only rarely does MA apply, from my observation notes, in cases where the member has spoken and failed to remember what they said.

- Examples- So then I presented the information I had researched about the use of cellphones in schools; I said that we should just subsidize the test rather than pay for the whole thing; So I stood up and spoke in front of the town hall meeting because I was the chair and the board member asked me to; I motioned the decision and someone else seconded me.

**Action (SW):** Applies when a member relates withholding speech in a meeting about an SCC decision. This means that they either disagree or have an opinion that they deliberately omit in the meeting. This often comes from social pressures, a feeling of futility, or time sensitivity.

- Examples- I disagreed, but I didn't say anything; I just sat there and let it go, what do you say when you are running out of time?; I thought that I should say something, but I know the teachers really wanted it.

## APPENDIX C

### INDIVIDUAL LEVEL DATA

Individual Level Data**Crescent High School SCC**

Table 5: Beth

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 5 AD - 3 IN/AD - 1	SS - 2 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 3	CH - 2 AC - 7	DES - 6 NEG - 3	REP - 5	IG - 4 ST - 2 MA - 5 SW - 1

Table 6: Marilyn

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 7 AD - 1 IN/AD - 0	SS - 0 SR - 4 FS - 1 FR - 1	CH - 5 AC - 5	DES - 3 NEG - 5	REP - 3	IG - 1 ST - 3 MA - 2 SW - 1

Table 7: Nancy

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 2 AD - 2 IN/AD - 1	SS - 3 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 3 AC - 4	DES - 4 NEG - 2	REP - 3	IG - 0 ST - 2 MA - 4 SW - 1



Table 8: Melodie

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 4 AD - 1 IN/AD - 1	SS - 1 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 1	CH - 2 AC - 5	DES - 1 NEG - 2	REP - 2	IG - 1 ST - 4 MA - 4 SW - 0

Table 9: Sara

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 2 AD - 1 IN/AD - 1	SS - 2 SR - 1 FS - 1 FR - 0	CH - 3 AC - 4	DES - 3 NEG - 4	REP - 2	IG - 3 ST - 2 MA - 3 SW - 1

Table 10: Laurie

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 3 AD - 1 IN/AD - 0	SS - 2 SR - 2 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 1 AC - 3	DES - 4 NEG - 3	REP - 2	IG - 1 ST - 1 MA - 1 SW - 2

Table 11: Deana

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 1 AD - 1 IN/AD - 0	SS - 1 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 2 AC - 2	DES - 2 EM - 1	REP - 1	IG - 0 ST - 1 MA - 0 SW - 1

**Riverside High School SCC**

Table 12: Wendy

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 1 AD - 2 IN/AD - 2	SS - 2 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 1 AC - 4	DES - 2 NEG - 1	REP - 4	IG - 0 ST - 3 MA - 2 SW - 1

Table 13: Ellen

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 1 AD - 1 IN/AD - 1	SS - 1 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 1 AC - 2	DES - 2 NEG - 2	REP - 1	IG - 1 ST - 1 MA - 2 SW - 1

Table 14: Rick

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 2 AD - 2 IN/AD - 1	SS - 0 SR - 1 FS - 1 FR - 0	CH - 1 AC - 4	DES - 3 NEG - 1	REP - 4	IG - 0 ST - 1 MA - 3 SW - 3

Table 15: Allison

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 4 AD - 1 IN/AD - 2	SS - 0 SR - 3 FS - 0 FR - 1	CH - 0 AC - 3	DES - 3 NEG - 2	REP - 4	IG - 0 ST - 1 MA - 1 SW - 1

Table 16: Paula

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 1 AD - 2 IN/AD - 1	SS - 2 SR - 0 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 1 AC - 4	DES - 3 NEG - 3	REP - 3	IG - 2 ST - 4 MA - 3 SW - 2

Table 17: Natalie

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 4 AD - 4 IN/AD - 1	SS - 0 SR - 3 FS - 0 FR - 2	CH - 2 AC - 4	DES - 5 NEG - 6	REP - 2	IG - 0 ST - 3 MA - 2 SW - 0

Table 18: Jenny

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 3 AD - 0 IN/AD - 1	SS - 1 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 1 AC - 3	DES - 3 NEG - 1	REP - 2	IG - 0 ST - 2 MA - 3 SW - 3

**Lakeview High School SCC**

Table 19: Linda

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 1 AD - 1 IN/AD - 0	SS - 0 SR - 1 FS - 1 FR - 0	CH - 2 AC - 2	DES - 1 NEG - 0	REP - 2	IG - 0 ST - 1 MA - 1 SW - 1

Table 20: Heidi

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 0 AD - 4 IN/AD - 0	SS - 3 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 2 AC - 4	DES - 4 NEG - 1	REP - 4	IG - 1 ST - 0 MA - 4 SW - 1

Table 21: Denise

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 3 AD - 1 IN/AD - 0	SS - 3 SR - 0 FS - 1 FR - 0	CH - 3 AC - 4	DES - 4 NEG - 3	REP - 2	IG - 0 ST - 1 MA - 4 SW - 2

### Oakwood High School SCC

Table 22: Janet

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 3 AD - 0 IN/AD - 0	SS - 0 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 0 AC - 2	DES - 1 NEG - 1	REP - 2	IG - 0 ST - 1 MA - 2 SW - 0

Table 23: Emily

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 0 AD - 9 IN/AD - 0	SS - 4 SR - 0 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 2 AC - 5	DES - 4 NEG - 3	REP - 2	IG - 0 ST - 2 MA - 4 SW - 0

Table 24: Lynn

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 3 AD - 3 IN/AD - 0	SS - 0 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 2	CH - 2 AC - 4	DES - 3 NEG - 2	REP - 3	IG - 0 ST - 1 MA - 3 SW - 1

Table 25: Kelly

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 4 AD - 1 IN/AD - 0	SS - 1 SR - 0 FS - 0 FR - 2	CH - 2 AC - 3	DES - 3 NEG - 2	REP - 3	IG - 0 ST - 0 MA - 2 SW - 2

Table 26: Lisa

Decision	Disagree	Importance	Motivation	Prolong	Action
IN - 3 AD - 3 IN/AD - 0	SS - 1 SR - 1 FS - 0 FR - 0	CH - 2 AC - 3	DES - 2 NEG - 1	REP - 2	IG - 0 ST - 1 MA - 2 SW - 1

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW LIST



Interview List

## Interviews

- 1: Deana, Crescent High SCC, June 2019
- 2: Beth, Crescent High SCC, June 2019
- 3: Marilyn, Crescent High SCC, June 2019
- 4: Nancy, Crescent High SCC, June 2019
- 5: Laurie, Crescent High SCC, June 2019
- 6: Sara, Crescent High SCC, June 2019
- 7: Melodie, Crescent High SCC, June 2019
- 8: Wendy, Riverside High SCC, May 2019
- 9: Ellen, Riverside High SCC, June 2019
- 10: Rick, Riverside High SCC, June 2019
- 11: Allison, Riverside High SCC, May 2019
- 12: Paula, Riverside High SCC, May 2019
- 13: Natalie, Riverside High SCC, May 2019
- 14: Jenny, Riverside High SCC, May 2019
- 15: Linda, Lakeview High SCC, May 2019
- 16: Heidi, Lakeview High SCC, May 2019
- 17: Denise, Lakeview High SCC, May 2019
- 18: Janet, Oakwood High SCC, June 2019
- 19: Emily, Oakwood High SCC, June 2019
- 20: Lynn, Oakwood High SCC, April 2019
- 21: Kelly, Oakwood High SCC, April 2019

22: Lisa, Oakwood High SCC, April 2019

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