

Edges of Dreams for Marginalized, Urban, Latino Students: Building a Community School

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Abstract

This study examines the way an urban Hispanic school in New Mexico, ranked 50th academically in the United States, grapples with the issues of poverty, disconnection, race, conflicting visions, and hope. Investigating the school's transition to a community school, a movement that is sweeping high-poverty areas, provides a more encompassing way to look at school reform. In its one-year existence as a community school in Las Cruces, Lynn Middle School has engaged a vast number of stakeholders along with the School Board and City Council who have begun to work on turning this 'ghetto' school into a vibrant community school. The paper answers the research question, 'What are the process, procedures and challenges in starting a community school?' and rather than simply continue to test students, thus providing data that reflect their failure, community schools collaboratively ameliorate the non-academic barriers to student success. What then might be the anticipated benefits for students, families and neighborhoods?

Keywords: poverty, community schools, Hispanics, urban schools, relationships

1. Introduction: Backdrop

We are a nation of hope and of despair, of democracy and of intolerance, of promise and of unrealized dreams. We say we are a nation of immigrants when in truth we are a nation of the Other, those outside of the Anglo-dominant culture, spending billions of dollars building walls to keep out the unwanted, while relegating the original peoples to unwanted land. The United States of America is where the Other is defined by ethnicity as well as by social and economic status. The fractured country of freedom for all defines immigrant cultures by the stereotypes that are comfortable and unchallenged. The white middle-class and its institutions, though becoming outnumbered, remain the dominant culture, comfortable in its segregation of the poor and of the Other. When a child stops dreaming by the third-grade, our proclamations of 'one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all' remain ugly, unfulfilled and starkly divisive. The dominant culture's untroubled portrayal of Hispanic peoples, particularly those from Mexico, as problematically lazy, uneducated, transient, poor and burdensome, causes little hope of their realizing what was once the American Dream (Fox, 1996).

But the story doesn't end there. If we only need goals (Snyder, 1994) and those who possess them to move to the arena of hope, I found them in a New Mexico border town, undaunted, committed, visionary and as mindless of defeat as they are dauntless in achieving a better life for all the school's marginalized Latino/a students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical, Cultural Conflict

Since the 1300s, while the mestizos grappled with their dual cultural backgrounds attempting but failing to assume a dominant cultural set of beliefs and mores, the Anglos were unchallenged in their sense of themselves and established the precursors of their current more aggressive sense of enterprise and ownership. The combined religious control and economic challenges of colonial New Mexico created an oppressive atmosphere which suppressed independence of thought or action and left, "Spanish Americans peculiarly ill-fitted to cope with Anglo-American culture" (Zeleny, 1987).

Reciprocal rejection is often manifested when two cultures meet and as they move forward at varying levels of sophisticated development. Some of the causes of initial rejection become endemic which propagates stereotypes that either group intractably believes are correct. These lead to cultural notions that become prejudices which are difficult to dispel (Campa, 1979). Hispanics were erroneously seen as culturally conflicted to the point of being anti-American, while Anglos were seen as both acquisitive and aggressive, however, rarely motivated by anything other than individual aggrandizement (Campa, 1979).

Anglos set in motion a thinking of the low-wage earner as a financial credit to Anglo expansion. They saw Hispanics as communal people who were willing to work for low wages, lacking in resolve to better themselves through better paying jobs. It seems the Anglos developed a pathology of dismissal that released them from any culpability for providing long-term employment, training workers in skilled labor, and thus in creating more skilled jobs. The ensuing stereotypes in New Mexico became both obdurate and implacable, creating a lower and even underclass Hispanic population.

2.2 Socio-historical Setting

Las Cruces sits in southern New Mexico's Mesilla Valley, in the shadow of the Organ Mountains. Although it is the second largest city in New Mexico, for most of its 10,000-year recorded history, it has been a small farm town situated on the Rio Grande.

The study of Las Cruces and the Hispanic population offers a snapshot of a part of a culture often subjugated to the margins, transient, non-assimilated through resistance to the dominant culture. Too, it speaks to the essence of their proud historical and cultural identity.

Las Cruces is the second largest school district in New Mexico with 25,000 students, 76% of whom are Hispanic. It has 25 elementary, nine middle, six high schools, one early college high school, and one alternative school. Academically Las Cruces Public Schools rank 45th out of 91 school districts in New Mexico. For the past eight years it has had the highest child poverty and lowest graduation rate in the state. The majority of the residents self-identify as living in financial distress (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). David Greenberg, District Coordinator for Community Schools notes,

At a board meeting, every person coming up to speak was a doctor or a lawyer. There is such extreme class segregation. (Interview, 27 February, 2018).

There exist deep pockets of economic disparity across the city.

3. Methodology

3.1 Framework Questions

This study investigates the apologetics and the historical and environmental factors which called for a move to a community school in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The procedural questions that guide this first phase of the work are: 'What are the processes and procedures that initiate the building of a community school?' 'What are the challenges?' 'How does one engage stakeholders in the work?' And the focus question is, 'How does a community school contest socially constructed poverty, racism, classism and disparagement of a neighborhood?'--a critical question not fully answered until the second-year paper.

3.2 Conduct of the Study

This ethnographic grounded theory study, uses qualitative, interdisciplinary, multimethod techniques understood from an inductive, methodological position. Its perspective is naturalistic and ecologically interpretive. It stresses the socially-constructed nature of reality, the relationship between the researcher and the Mentor-Others—a positional view of those people marginalized by the greater society and labeled as 'Other'. Categories emerge from open-ended observations, elite interviews, focus groups and a formal data set.

3.3 Research Findings: Data Collection--The Bankruptcy of Poverty

Lynn Middle School is an urban, minority, media, art and engineering magnet program, and is referred to by some as the 'ghetto' school of Las Cruces given its surrounding neighborhood. Parent Maria Duran said, "We heard that Lynn was a very bad school. And I was kind of scared of my daughter going there. I know what that's like because I grew up in schools like that" (Interview, 26, 2018). This is a neighborhood of drugs, violence, truancy, literacy, unemployment, the lack of basic needs (housing food, clothing), crime, school drop-outs, gangs, a lack of technology in the home, mental and physical health issues, but a neighborhood that wants the best education for its children. In Las Cruces itself there is a wealth of potential resources.

An 8th grade Lynn student, Madie, said,

Sadly, our school is called the ghetto school because of the area it's in. There's a lot of drugs in this area. The projects are right across the street (from the school). Everyone thinks of us as the ghetto school. It can be, at sometimes, but there are a lot of very bright children here and they don't understand it because they think people don't take us seriously. There is a policeman here full time and he circles around the block and around the park and if any one gets into trouble, he's the one who files the report. He helps teachers if there's a bad situation. (Interview February 21, 2018)

Drugs, gangs, violence, aggression and repercussions of poverty surround the school and are manifest in the school through bullying, substance abuse, and low academic performance.

3.4 Data Analysis: Schools and Poverty

This paper contends it is poverty, not minority status alone, which is highly correlated with school failure. Given the definition of cultural development as the adaptability of a social group to address recurring problems in a successful fashion without superimposing one set of rights and wrongs onto another, it becomes clear that the behavior of poor children has been an adaptive process of survival. To ignore poverty as our country continues to do, is to turn a blind-eye to the common characteristics that describe failing schools in the United States. To unseat the plight of the poor in its broadest definition—health, education, behavior, psychological and linguistic

dimensions, and poverty itself, must be addressed. New Mexico was ranked 40th in child education, health and family and community well-being in 1995, 43rd in 2009 and last in the nation by 2013. Today more than 20% of New Mexicans live at or below the poverty level (Kids Count: 2015-2018).

3.5 Societal Construct

By the turn of the 21st century, the contentious constructs of social class, ethnicity, race and culture were born out in abject poverty particularly in minority groups including Hispanic schools. Alienation and its progeny—children living in poverty, those who are homeless or inadequately housed, kids and families mired in bogs of dissolution (Brofenbrenner, 1986), kids disconnected and dispossessed born of the environmental genetics which breed and perpetuate disenfranchisement and dissolution—charge contemporary society to forge new connections, collaborative links within the overlapping communities of care and counsel.

3.6 Urban Education

Academic achievement among poor, urban immigrants is below state, national and many international assessment scores. Interestingly, according to Berliner (Berliner, 2006), small reductions in a family's level of poverty will positively affect a student's behavior and academic performance thus making it the most effective way to increase student success.

By 2017, New Mexico's poverty rate was 19.1%. New immigrants, primarily Hispanics and African Americans who live in urban areas, are particularly found in the underclass (Mishel, I. Bernstein, J. & Allegretto S., 2005). Las Cruces is segregated more socio-economically than racially.

Acknowledging the means that suppress and disenfranchise the poor and the federal and state neglect which continues to subjugate them, marginalized families and their neighborhoods are left to struggle for themselves. Mandates such as NCLB, new standards, high-stake tests and other legislative directives have demonstrated minute if any success for the students in poverty as they return to neighborhoods that are replete with destruction, social defeatism, and environmentally-induced ill-health. These are punitive policies which 'punish' both teachers and students while ignoring systemic injustice, for they marginalize the racially and economically challenged. They deny the cultural-linguistic skills necessary to engage in the dominant culture's discourse and leave the 'Other' with no tools to guide their potential mobility. The average student loses two months of learning across the summer months when they are not in school; additionally, across the full year, most students spend five times longer in the neighborhood than in their homes. Valuable social and academic gains can become easily disjunctive as students return to their neighborhoods.

3.7 Urban Testing

"Is this a social phenomenon unparalleled by any other comparable industrialized country? Or is it a decolonization of non-dominant groups of people and an abrogation of authentic social responsibility?" (Williams-Boyd, 2014). This paper would argue it is a reductionist, bereft view of school reform. In a stratified society such as found in the U.S., rather than insist the neighborhood school would improve if teachers and students were more frequently tested, if principals were tougher and if curricula were rewritten, the deeper issues of achievement inequality are founded in social pathologies, economic ills and archaic thinking. A veteran teacher's response to this was:

I think I'm a very caring teacher. I'm guilty of being a whole-child person but that's not what they want these days. They (administrators and legislators) want test scores. Our evaluations are based on student test scores. I like the tutoring, the nurturing of the whole child. I like working with kids who feel they don't have a lot of confidence in themselves. I went to the presentation they (Greenberg, Parr-Sanchez) did on Community Schools, but I kind of like what I hear. But I'm not interested if it is just one more thing to do (Interview with Mary Ann Loftus, February 22, 2018).

While the state average proficiency in reading for grade eight is 23%, Lynn's proficiency is 16%; however, while the state average in math for the same grade is 18%, Lynn's is 20%. And for students with disabilities, the state average is 12% in reading and Lynn's is 1%. This presents a critical action point with regard to services for students with disabilities. (Great Schools, org.)

4. Results: Community Schools

4.1 Collaborative Perspective

School and community people have begun to realize and articulate that alone, schools cannot ameliorate all the students' academic and non-academic barriers and 'neighborhood ills.' Schools need the aid of health, human and social services and the investment of the community at large. In the early 1900's, Jane Addams' Chicago Hull House settlement provided social and medical services for uneducated tenement, immigrant children. The contemporary community schools movement is a similar vision of a school in an impoverished neighborhood that could provide coordinated, collaborative community resources, a concept that has been spreading across our

country. We are not speaking of structural changes, but of changes that are based on the developmental, academic, emotional and biopsychosocial needs of students. This calls for our thinking to begin with young people, a reconceptualization that places schools and their student-families in the center of the neighborhood, a community which seeks to mitigate barriers in the service of student academic and social success. “Community schools are revolutionizing the way we solve educational and poverty-related challenges” (United Way of the Bay Area, 2014).

By recognizing contextual interconnections resonant in the whole child-family, by understanding the student from a relational standpoint, one which represents a student-family from a holistic perspective, the structuring of linked services begins to alter what otherwise would be poor outcomes on behalf of the nation’s low-income students. These interconnections begin to reweave the tapestry of promise and hope. Community schools empirically address the belief that if a school could collaboratively offer quality, equitable education at the same site in which access to necessary health, social and cultural services for children and families is provided, both education and biopsychosocial outcomes would be enhanced. Community schools exercise a critical pro-family perspective of educational and human resource services that speak to the integrated, developmental and preventive needs of a community whose infrastructure is limited both in resources and in access to such. A linked system is sensitive to individuals with disabilities and to issues of race, gender, culture and economic status.

4.2 Lynn Middle School

Lynn Middle School a 6th, 7th, 8th grade configuration, has been an example of all that is disparaging about this country and the hope for all the dreams that can be realized. Unique to us as a country and as a collective peoples is the persistence of the concept of the caring community as played out in the local public school. Despite what may well be divisive political polemics as witnessed in the larger social context, it is the school which becomes the catalyst for binding the wounds and for propagating health for a species driven by hope.

4.3 Data Planning: A Vision More Inclusive

This single case study focuses on the beginning, on starting a Community School (CS). Where and how does one person with a vision begin to move through the community, enlisting the assistance of partners and resources from a predominantly marginalized Hispanic community with the singular purpose of helping students and their families succeed academically and socially?

Informal Assessment. Prior to the formal surveys and assessments given to the parents, the teachers, the students and the community, school board member Maria Flores, along with David Greenberg and Mary Parr-Sanchez (The Team) critically looked at the Lynn neighborhood and formed a general needs assessment which was asset-based.¹

Planning Themes. In preparation for the upcoming summit, the three visionaries noted planning themes writ large: children kept in the center of all thinking and planning; cultural diversity, school personnel’s cultural competence, and culturally relevant curriculum; ethnicity, race, urban mission, special needs students, open borders, community assets and integration of potential stakeholders.

Asset-based Approach. Initially the community assets were businesses, churches, hospitals, City Council, Kiwanis, colleges and universities, the police department and individual families and youth. However, that soon expanded.

Conceptual Base. The dominant concepts that underpinned The Team’s thinking and their work were student self-efficacy, social and cultural capital, health, academic accomplishment, strategic planning, collaboration, stakeholders, family as valued participants; coordinated, comprehensive services; the integration of needs and services; site-based decision-making; and shared governance. In essence this is a call for systems change whose competent practice is informed advocacy and citizenship, strategically rethought and comprehensively reconceived. Common has been the reform-from-above model rather than reform-from-within which is the reconceptualization called community schools.

4.4 The Engagement Phase: Leveraging Voices

In 2013, the nonprofit Ngage New Mexico received a Kellogg Foundation grant to initiate a collective impact education initiative later called the SUCCESS! Partnership. Ngage New Mexico hired young high school history teacher David Greenberg as the Director of Community Schools, to support the development of this partnership which has since tapped into one-hundred community partners in facilitating collaborative action around local education issues. This collective impact grant maintained that when groups in the community—faith-based organizations, businesses, local government, philanthropic groups, non-profits and schools, families and

¹ All data comparisons used in this paper were collected by David Greenberg and Maria Parr-Sanchez; used with permission; New Mexico State University, Center for Community Analysis disaggregated the data.

students-- were collaboratively and boldly engaged in the community, lives would be enriched through 'collective social justice and racial equity. Education would be improved and the capacity for change would be enhanced' (<https://successdac.org/about-ngage>). The SUCCESS! Partnership organized a "leaders Circle" of cross-sector stakeholders which elected Mary Parr-Sanchez, a twenty-five year veteran middle school teacher, the state National Education Association (NEA) Vice-President, as its vice-Chair, serving alongside the Leaders Circle Chair, State Senator Bill Soules. The SUCCESS! Partnership hosted a series of community dialogues around education in which there was clear demand for a new paradigm for education in Las Cruces.

4.5 Involvement, Push-Back and Collegial Support

In 2014 Mary Parr-Sanchez returned from a National Education Association training that featured community schools soon became an indefatigable community school's liaison. "We did a needs assessment and had our ten goals, but we were looking for something to rally around because there was a lot of anxiety people had about doing something else. So, we decided on a community school model" (Parr-Sanchez, February 27, 2018). NEA substantially contributed to Parr-Sanchez and Greenberg's salary to build the capacity in Las Cruces to Launch a community schools campaign; hence the movement is union-drive.

And we hope to have more union involvement. But teachers don't show up because they are tired.

They don't like professional learning because it's awful. It's difficult to get them to show up.

They are pretty beat up right now and they don't show up for things. So, it's a challenge. They in turn are challenging us because we have become the disrupters to the status quo and people may not like the status quo, but they are at least comfortable with it. People are miserable; they just don't want things to change. They are super hard to penetrate (Parr-Sanchez, February 26, 2018).

Data Gathering. Between January and August of 2017, 800 Lynn students, staff, families and residents participated in surveys. They were adapted from other community schools' instruments and added questions indigenous to Las Cruces. The Lynn Team enlisted students, faculty and administrators, stakeholders, and volunteers mentoring youth, in answering two questions: one, aimed at discovering the needs, hopes, barriers, and struggles of these stakeholder groups; and two, engaging stakeholders in the process of the community school (New Mexico State University supported The Team.) In November, wanting to go deeply into the massive survey data, 50 volunteers in four stakeholder teams conducted focus groups and elite interviews, canvassed the community and administered staff interviews

The surveys starkly revealed how serious the problems of Lynn Middle were. These volunteers worked for 350 hours with the stakeholder teams, ferreting out issues surrounding staff, student, family and neighborhood engagement. 100% of the staff and 450 students returned their anonymous surveys. Surveys of families were placed in registration packets and given out at outreach festivals. The school was ready to talk about itself and find out what could be done. For the success of this initial phase, very intentional data gathering from a variety of diverse and politically aligned stakeholders was necessary.

The massive data collection was organized thematically and then distilled into fifteen different focus areas which essentially included discipline, mental health, staff communication, bullying, and family engagement. The team developed four priority areas for Lynn: Restorative Practices (discipline concern), school culture, instructional support and wrap-around services.

Classroom Discipline. On the Lynn Faculty Assessment Survey, when asked what the number one professional learning development need was, the answer was discipline. Table 1 shows the gap between the faculty's and the students' perceptions of school conduct. While 74% of the faculty noted they had a 'good understanding' of positive discipline and half of the students felt they 'got along well with each other' or 'no problem', 43% felt there were problems 'sometimes' or 'never'. 35% of the students experienced emotional bullying and 32% of the girls reported cyberbullying 'often' or 'almost always'. In the first 90 days of the 2017-2018 school year, Lynn had 115 suspensions with nearly half of them occurring in October.

Table 1. Faculty and Students' Perceptions Of Discipline/Conduct



Table 2. Parents' Perceptions of How Students were Disciplined

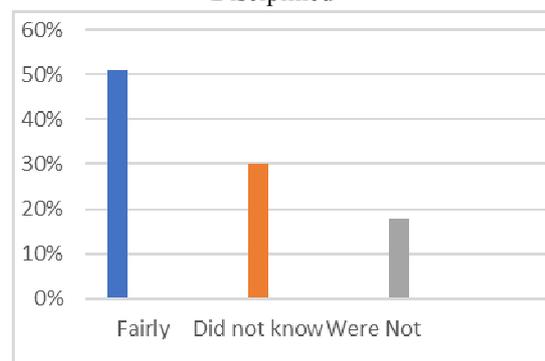


Table 2 indicates 51% of the parents felt their child was disciplined fairly at school, 18% felt they weren't treated fairly, and 30% said they did not know. 40% of the staff indicated the need for more resources in working with 'difficult' students. 45% of the staff are Hispanic and 78% of the student body are Latino/a (Adair, J., S. Colegrove & M. McManus, 2018). The data were not disaggregated by race regarding staff and disruptive student behavior.

Although the staff had been trained in Restorative Justice (a student-centered program founded on respect, responsibility, relationship-building and relationship-repairing), there appeared to be a lack of deep understanding, investment and foundational use in the daily classroom. Restorative Justice is absent discipline and punishment and rather uses the opportunity for both conflicted parties to talk out their perceptions of the altercation guided by questions such as 'What happened? How did it happen? and What can be done to set the situation right?' Students learn to move from enabling to empowering themselves and each other through maturely resolving conflicts. Students develop trusting and caring relationships, foster skills to resolve conflict, minimize punitive measures, and see "every instance of wrongdoing and conflicts as an opportunity for learning" (Ashley, J., & Burke, K. (n.d.). <https://www.weareteachers.com>). In moving from a punitive view of student behavior to a respectful classroom management frame using restorative justice, students experience a positive, non-threatening environment.

40% of the staff felt they had the necessary resources to reach all students, despite the out-of-school suspension rate. Even in the most supportive classrooms where both teacher and student are Hispanic, (Adair, Colegrove and McManus, 2018) argue all teachers may need extra resources and skills in offering more agency, culturally responsive curriculum and teaching strategies in the classroom, despite the fact 40% of the staff felt they had the necessary resources to teach all students. 61% of the staff indicated they felt the school considered students' cultural backgrounds in planning lessons. Deficit thinking or lack of cultural attentiveness at any level can minimize the possibilities of a young learner's perception of where she/he belongs in the learning environment of the school. Additionally, deterrents to student success include bullying, mental health and attendance issues. Staff felt partnering with families, working more collaboratively and consistently with fellow teachers and seeking more active, student-centered, project-oriented learning would engage more students.

Addressing Noted Needs. When students were surveyed as to the most important activity to have at the school, the number one response was "a safe place to talk, like a room with punching bags to relieve stress and a person that students can talk to. They wanted to vote on school issues, access more health and mental health resources, and hold student-led groups to stop bullying" (Survey, Student Assessment, 2017). We have recently seen the power of student voice in the fight against gun violence in general and in schools in particular.

Although 77% of the staff enjoyed their teaching and 73% felt they had a good work/life balance, the data would suggest a disconnect between their responses and what was happening in the school. Parr-Sanchez noted, "So at Lynn we started with just trying to stop the madness and we brought in some mindfulness training, a practiced way of reflecting (for teachers)" (Parr-Sanchez, February 21, 2018). Parr-Sanchez notes that given the current environment and given the nature of the insurance company, all the stress and trauma teachers and students feel lead to increased health care cost; therefore, Lynn partnered with the President of New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority and trained 2000 people, with 500 educators doing the follow-up online nine-week component. There were 1400 responses to the survey, an unprecedented response interpreted by The Team as evidence that using data to support what needs to be done is useful and effective.

The Team also offered a trauma-informed school training, the companion piece to the Mindfulness Training. The intent was to raise awareness because school is a white, middle-class institution dealing with a majority of students and families who are neither. Parr-Sanchez observes,

So, there is a real disconnect. In response, we're going to start a district-wide cadre of restorative justice. There is one in place, but it has stalled a bit because we need to get

together. People scatter in crisis and we are dealing with our employee assistance person who gets a lot of calls from people in despair, people in serious trouble... We know we have to back up and focus on the staff person and then focus on socio-emotional learning, then talk about mental health interventions (Parr-Sanchez, Interview, February 27, 2018).

The Principal asks,

How do we get staff to see the big picture? Restorative Justice needs to be part of the day in everything. Staff feel isolated and it becomes more like a building use thing. No. It's about the people in the building. The biggest challenge is that the teachers are only seeing parts of a community school. I want to see the kids being successful, not just when they have problems.

How do we show the neighborhood and the faculty, this is a fusion of the community? How do we get the teachers to buy into it? We had pods of people doing this and pods of people do something else. We can't have this. And then teachers said, 'And now we're going to change everything?' A student can't go to science and they're going to get yelled at and written up and then move to the next class and the teacher simply talks with them (Interview, Hull, 26 February, 2018).

These comments suggest more collaborative focused time may well need to be spent with the faculty in order to visualize and implement the staff development they have received and to experience the ways in which these concepts can assist with student engagement and socio-emotional as well as academic success. The school may need specialists to relieve teachers of some exceptional disciplinary situations for which teachers may not have been trained.

4.6 Stakeholders and Partnerships

Greenberg and Parr-Sanchez engaged eighty community stakeholders from the business community, along with elected officials, judges, health workers, parents, funders and Las Cruces-NEA representatives, in an educational summit. The emphasis, built on commonality across sectors, was on penetrating the operation of the school and emphasizing the teacher's voice. They asked process questions such as, "How can we work differently and smarter to support young people and families?" One school board member in attendance called for a different narrative of education, one that centered on the whole child and that keeps students at the center of everything.

Out of the summit came an agenda that included ten community goals and twenty partnerships as presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Ten Community Goals

Community Values	Community Support	Children's Success
*cultural and bilingual competency	*parent, student, community voice	*early childhood education
*creative student-centered education	*equitable and sufficient educational resources	*high school completion
*whole childhood well-being	*educational workforce development	*post-secondary access and success
		*community opportunities for graduates

Table 4: New Community Partnerships and Programs

Organization	Service
Hunger Task Force of Las Cruces & Roadrunner Food Bank	*Provide and distribute over 1500 free dinners to children; 1600 baskets of groceries *Provide arts activities every Tuesday to cover 100 students
Juvenile Assessment and Reporting Center (JARC) solely at Lynn Middle School	*Offers case management for at-risk youth and families; connects them with appropriate services
Families and Youth, Inc.	*Non-profit provides low-cost social services for at-risk youth and families since 1977, now from a mobile unit to also provide case management; focus: integrity of family unit; Two for Tuesday (free dinners and programming); Juvenile Assessment Reporting Center (JARC an FYI referral program); provides dinners in partnership with the Las Cruces Hunger Task Force
Boys' and Girls' Club	*Adds 20 hours of after-school activities; Summer camps at Lynn; Rise Up Fridays
New Mexico State University	*STEM Outreach Center, Dona Ana Cooperative Extension Service; mathematically connected communities-Math Explorers Club
New Mexico State University Extension	*Explore Club, ICAN Nutrition Program for families and students
Peace Lutheran Church	*Individual donations given to Lynn families, volunteers at various events
DACC Adult Education	*Migrant Program
ENLACE	*Culturally relevant curriculum program that is an elective; initiated through NMSU College of Education; pre-service teachers serve as volunteers, part of service learning partnership and community school process;
New Mexico Lions Club & Crane Reading Foundation	*Occasional vision screenings at Lynn
Dona Ana Communities United	*Timebank, Neighborhood Engagement
La Semilla	*After-school programming on gardening & cooking
HAZLO Foundation	*Funding for student projects; mentors students on choosing projects and provides all supplies
Learning Action Buffet	*Offers engaging creative activities, drumming at Lynn
Las Cruces Police Department	*Presence in the school; Police Academy camps in the summer; patrols neighborhood
Children's Reading Alliance	*Classes for parents on how to teach early literacy and numeracy to young children
Also offers:	*DanceFit, tutoring, variety of athletics, MESA and clubs
Forthcoming:	*Three Rivers Foundation-tutoring; Ben Archer Medical Facility on campus; Memorial Medical Center-partnership with residency programs, residents will tutor Lynn students

When an eighth-grade student was asked if she were involved in any before- or after-school activities, she responded:

Yes, I'm the Vice-President of the Builder's Club, a branch of Kiwanis. We have Explore Club after school where we do arts and crafts and we do money- management. On Tuesday and Thursday, I have gardening cub and then on Friday we have Rise Up Friday which is a meal, athletics and crafts. We have Builder's Club: Character Counts. I like doing the service projects the most. We did the pancake breakfast where I served and helped to cook. Then we did the one day which was cleaning up the courtyard (Interview, February 22, 2018).

In 2015 after years of noncooperation between the boards of the school district and the city council, using the SUCCESS! Partnership community agenda brought both groups together. Newly-elected School Board President Maria Flores won unanimous support for Lynn Middle School's becoming a community school. Through the School Board and Team partnership, they collaboratively developed six pillars for their community schools:

1. Curricula that are engaging, culturally relevant and challenging; before and after-school programs and GED preparation
2. An emphasis on high-quality teaching, rather than on high-stakes testing
3. Wrap-around support and opportunities such as health and eye care and socio-emotional support that mitigate barriers to academic achievement; year-round services available to the entire

- community, before, during and after school; alignment of services to data collection analysis and reflection
4. Positive discipline practices such as restorative justice, whose main tenets are accountability, community safety and competency development (George Lucas Educational Foundation, May 4, 2018)
 5. Authentic parent and community engagement which acknowledges the imperative link between school success and community development
 6. Inclusive school leadership which ensures stakeholders' voices are heard and responded to during planning and implementation of practices ("Community Schools: Transforming all Schools into Thriving schools", n.d. National Education Association, Washington, D.C. Author)

These foundational pillars called for a social justice arm, a new position for the school district. The Assistant Superintendent is now responsible for equity, innovation and social justice. The SUCCESS! Partnership focused on high school completion and fostered the initial collaborative work. The Team attributes their inspiration to NEA at every level, along with the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, an alliance of parents, youth, community and labor organizations, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the Center for Popular Democracy and the American Federation of Teachers. This alliance represents over seven million people nationwide; they maintain they are "fighting to reclaim the promise of public education as our nation's gateway to a strong democracy and racial and economic justice". They believe that achieving this goal is accomplished through a system of public funding and equitable and democratic control of public schools, and through the work of united parents, young people, teacher professionals and unions ("About the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools", 2018). Included in this alliance are the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and the Center for Popular Democracy. Because all six pillars are not yet in place, the school is in a transitional period moving toward becoming a community school with the unprecedented support of both the Las Cruces City Council and the Las Cruces Board of Education.

Priorities. The summit surveys, focus groups and discussions gave rise to Lynn's priorities as presented in Table 5:

Table 5. Lynn Middle School Priorities
 (David Greenberg, Mary Parr-Sanchez, 2018, Used with Permission)

*Discipline	*After-School Programs
*Empathy and Bullying	*Access to Mental/physical Health
*Internal Staff Communications	*Family Engagement
*Preparing Students for their futures	*Culturally Relevant/Creative Instruction
*Safe Places/Student Connectedness	*Student Voice
*Family Resources	*Facilities/Safety/Technology
*Too many D's and F's	*Attendance
*Student Food	

Several larger themes that emerged from this data were: the importance of relationships, instructional connections, the provision of services and family engagement.

5. Discussion: Relationships

5.1 The Importance of Leadership: Relationships

Having had four school principals in a short period of time, Lynn experienced a crisis of leadership. Finally, in February of 2018 Dr. Toni Hull, a dynamic principal with experience serving a community school, was hired at Lynn. She is the hallmark of putting students at the center of everything, of site-based decision making and of shared-distributed leadership. She has moved from head learner to 'collaborative leader', from an implementer to an initiator, from conflict manager to risk taker though she has characteristics of all of these assets. Most particularly she is shifting her role and work in the school from being solely an administrative leader meeting the district and school requirements, to a servant leader meeting the needs of her school milieu (Lightfoot, S. 1983). For Hull, the hermeneutical question is, "What is best for kids?" She holds, "We have to expect a high level of engagement, a high level of expectation and the kids will reach them. We expect you to be great, and there might be missteps, but every day is a new day and we start over" (Interview, February 23, 2018). Principal Hull sets high standards for everyone when she adamantly states,

Some teachers aren't doing anything, but some are, and they are getting a lot of push back; so, I want everyone to find their spot. One of the things stated at the leadership team meeting was, 'Some teachers just don't like to talk to kids. What!' All I could say was, 'Now that's a problem.

What are we here for if not to build relationships with kids?' (Interview Hull, February 23, 2018)

She has a vision for her school, her teachers, her students and their families. Middle level teaming would allow more coordination of culturally responsive content and of knowledge about shared students.

I want my teachers to thrive in the profession... There's got to be someone in this school that a kid can talk to or a kid won't tell us when he's in trouble and instead clock someone in the face. We're trying to build a bridge, to build an environment (Hull, 2018).

Greenberg notes, "A community school begins with a good principal, and the success of our community school is when Dr. Hull took over, because that's really the elevating principle" (Interview, February 26, 2018).

Community of School. Hull, Greenberg and Parr-Sanchez, The New Team, are base-building at Lynn. They are creating what Sergiovanni (1994) has identified as schools as communities: caring, learning, professional, collegial and inquiring communities. The kind of leadership which is critical to systemic change in becoming a community school is "the capacity of a human community to shape its future, and specifically to sustain the significant processes of change required to do so" (Senge, 2012). As well, a new on-site coordinator was hired, to be funded by the city.

5.2 Processing the Relational Needs Assessment

Notes Parr-Sanchez,

"We have had a whirlwind of things that have landed on us, but again (some of them) are not strategic and not tied back to the data (Interview February 25, 2018). This time the difference is the team is going to listen to what the stakeholders say and then strategically pull in programs and support. There were things we had to have in place and now we do, an involved infrastructure, a supportive Board, a knowledgeable principal, an on-site coordinator and data." (Interview, Parr-Sanchez, February 27, 2018).

Beginnings of Student Engagement. 54% of the students are involved in before- and after-school activities, while 46% cite non-interest, home commitments, and other interests. Most of this group wanted sports, field trips, music while parents wanted dancing classes for their kids along with board games like chess and scrabble. The question of who put these programs in place is a critical one: Did students request them or did adults either within or outside of the school volunteer to offer them? The answer perhaps speaks to investment of students.

Student Non-academic Needs. Only 50% of the staff maintained they were meeting the mental health needs of the students and only 44% felt the school supported the mental health needs of the staff (survey data). From this data it appears more mental and physical health workers are needed. The data support deeper levels of counseling, physical health providers and a transition program for students who have been suspended to re-entry. Staff indicated they need more support and training in traumatic situations. Lynn has just learned it is going to have on site the first school health clinic in New Mexico. That and the architectural plans are impressive. This adds to the four pillars Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESSA) has noted as the features of an array of characteristics important to school improvement (Maier, Daniel, Oakes & Lam, 2017).

Relationships Between Teachers and Students. Only 56% of the students felt comfortable speaking or connecting with teachers (survey data). And only 22% of the students felt the school had no 'safe zone' for them. Kids felt a lack of trust in sharing problems, fearing retribution or lack of confidentiality. But they suggested mentorships with high school students and NMSU students. Advisory period, intended to provide one advocate for 15-16 students, would also help them in thinking of their futures, the possible careers they could enter and the preparation that would be necessary.

Relationships between Teachers and Teachers. 61% of the staff felt they had a common understanding of high quality teaching. Only half the staff reported they spent time planning and analyzing student work together. Although there are exceptional individual teachers, both new and veteran, the Lynn staff lacks the collegiality that common planning time and sharing the same students in a grade level would afford. 60% of the faculty felt they were disengaged in the decisions made by the school. Likewise, faculty felt isolated in their sharing of information and working with other 'groups' of teachers in the school. Investment of the faculty in decision-making, in sharing information about their teaching practices and about students was another

potential action point. Students note teachers know what material needs to be 'covered' but students are rushed through without 'uncovering' any understanding of the lesson.

5.3 Building Relationships: The Family and the Neighborhood

The disparity among the degree to which 95% of the faculty value family engagement, to those 59% who feel the school stresses family involvement and to the 32% with who are willing to engage parents. Faculty felt they had no time during the day to talk with parents, but more interesting they felt parents 'did not care'. This, too could be noted as a critical action point. Staff expressed the belief that families often don't fully realize the importance of continuous attendance. Contrary to faculty assumptions, half of Lynn's parents, particularly single parents and foster homes, wanted more contact and communication with the faculty (survey data). Further, families indicated they wanted more mental health support, i.e. counseling. They wanted a space within the school to meet and assistance with finances, computer and college prep classes. For Frank Duran, parent to three students who went through Lynn Middle School, two broad goals which developed organically are neighborhood

connectedness and neighborhood voice in action. Although there were posters and flyers advertising meeting, personal interaction among the parents was scant until the Saturday Neighborhood Parent Meeting which is a beginning.

A brainstorming session was hosted in the summer of 2017. In attendance at the neighborhood meeting were representatives of the organizations included in the Nevada Neighborhood Project, a city initiative that included the City of Las Cruces (CLC) Housing and Neighborhood Services. Also present were the Fire Department, CLC Parks and Recreation, CLC Utilities and CLC Community Development parents and the School Board President. Many collaborative projects were suggested.

How does the movement get more parents involved? And how do they define a sense of space? In a private interview with parents Frank and Maria Duran, Frank said,

With our daily lives, it's hard to engage together in any activities because you feel pulled in so many directions. Most parents (both of them) are working two jobs. They're not home. That's the interactions of the center base of the family which is almost decayed in today's world. (Interview, 26 February, 2018).

Maria spoke for many other families when she said,

A little bit has to do with myself growing up. I never questioned or you know higher authority (sic).

We never talked back to teachers, principals, or interacted with them; they kind of made me nervous.

I think a lot is put on parents' shoulders. And the school is so focused on testing now. I remember learning cursive when I was younger, but now it's not learning, it's testing. People are afraid to speak up. They're afraid to talk to administrators, principals, superintendents and that has a little bit to do with how we grow up. It has to do with our ethnicity (Interview 26 February, 2018).

Her husband added, "Some parents feel intimidated. The accessibility to assist the kids with their homework isn't there because the parents don't have the education their kids are getting or should get." Maria stated her grandmother is raising her great grandchildren and has to teach them everything. "She is kind of lost. I think that's why a lot of parents don't get involved. They don't have computers or a smart phone there. They're intimidated. They don't want to feel dumb." Frank stated, "And there are those who don't care." Frank holds a bachelor's degree in engineering and can't find a job in which he can use his skills. When asked what Community Schools can do for the Lynn neighborhood, the Durans quickly answered,

Keep the door open. It's just a matter of time before more people come through and begin to Participate. Keep on talking. People like us will be out there talking to other people. When Lynn Community School begins providing services that fulfill a need, services that will improve the quality of life, people will know they will benefit. They are often either too needy to ask or they think they are not as bad off as other people. So they don't ask. Or are embarrassed to ask. They need a little help, little food, a little bit of clothes. They're not sure if they are taking advantage of the services. When they learn there is a lot of benefit for them, then they will probably be involved. We're moving in the right direction (Interview, 26 February, 2018).

5.4 Relational Reflection of the Team: A Shared Vision

The Durans held high praise for The Team. In speaking of each other as a team Parr-Sanchez describes Greenberg as "a person who is able to meet and have coffee and visit with people and keep the work moving down the road. He gets calls and contacts." Greenberg describes Parr-Sanchez as

The person who has the ability to move the bureaucracy from within. You have to be able to address some of the barriers head on. It's been a wonderful combination...The victories have been great, but the bumps have been painful. Nothing has happened by accident. We've worked...

We need our teachers and our educational association. Maybe we grew too fast. Maybe we didn't have the infrastructure in the local to withstand the pressures that were now put on us by the state and national organization because there were only a few of us doing the work. That's part of learning how to grow and build capacity. That's a part of distributive leadership (Interview 26 February, 2018).

Some of the bumps Greenberg noted

"were around grant funding and others around relationships. To sum it up maybe it's just conflicting visions and definitions around what community schools should and can be and the forces of the status quo working to try and limit the impact this movement has on destabilizing the powers it has on the local and school community. It's all about shared vision and problem solving (Interview February 26, 2018).

6. Conclusion

What has been accomplished in a year's time as Lynn Community School is unusual and exceptional. There are critical action points noted throughout the paper that need revisiting and continued examination. But this is a school to watch as I follow them through the next two years, looking for academic and attitudinal changes on the

part of the students, parental and student access to health and human services on the school's campus, after- and before-school programs responsive to youth request, the sense of family ownership and investment in the work of the school and the continued involvement of local stakeholders. How will the teaching staff be more directly involved in and embrace the community school concept? How will the community school's services be more frequented by students? The structure of a quality community school is strategically in place. Investment by all concerned is the next step. Listening to The Team I heard the following steps reflected in broad strokes as the process which has brought them to this point:

1. Have a studied vision of what the school could be for students.
2. Know the socio-cultural, ethnic, racial demographics across the history of the population.
3. Access deliberate funding sources.
4. Understand how poverty affects all areas of your school and the student-family.
5. Engage in a needs assessment.
6. Begin strategic planning based on the data: cull conceptual themes and develop data-based goals and priorities.
7. Develop a civic infrastructure and stakeholder group and continue to add services in a focused, data-driven fashion.
8. Develop a close working relationship with the building principal who believes in: shared, distributive leadership, students and families at the center of all concerns, and success everyone.
9. Invest in the faculty as to how this will support them rather than adding more work.
10. Listen to students and respond to their sense of their needs.
11. Listen to parents and enlist them as valued partners from an asset-based perspective.
12. Move cyclically from research-assessment-engagement to investment.
13. Expect push back, 'bumps in the road', and keep focused on the connection between the data and the work.

The next paper's essential question is, 'How will all who are invested and involved in Lynn's becoming a community school and those who will be affected by its purpose, respond more fully to the tenets and services of this model?'

A Community School is an exercise in hope, freedom, equity and justice. Freire's guiding principle in his liberatory work was, "Freedom is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion" (Freire,1993). David Greenberg holds, "Schools should be temples of justice. They should embody the best of our country's equitable ideals" (Interview, February 28, 2018).

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