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## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON CURRICULAR DECISIONS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS: NEGOTIATING PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS, by CHRISTOPHER M. FREER, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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## ABSTRACT

### PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON CURRICULAR DECISIONS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS: NEGOTIATING PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

by  
Christopher M. Freer

Parental input and participation on curricular decisions influence the educational process in private schools. Parental participation in the development and continual examination of the curriculum is essential to maintaining an educational environment that reflects the ideals and goals of all of the stakeholders. However, parents often have differing ideas from schools on what the curriculum should encompass. The problem facing private school leaders is how to negotiate the tensions resulting from conflicting parental expectations for the curriculum of the school. Literature is reviewed surrounding the main research question for this study: *how do school leaders respond to the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools?* Areas of the literature reviewed include the purpose of education, the curriculum development process in schools and the role of educational leadership in the curriculum development process.

The overall research design of this study is framed by a qualitative methodology that includes a multiple-site case study that aims to create a better understanding of the dynamics of parental influences on curriculum in private schools. Data from the Upper Schools of three private schools in a metropolitan area were collected over the period of one academic semester from a variety of sources, including interviews, observations and

document analysis. The emerging themes were constructed around the current and past knowledge of informants within the context of the social interactions of the stakeholders in the three schools. Several significant findings resulted from this study, which provides a framework to understand how school leaders negotiate parental curriculum expectations. These findings include parental influence and expectations, the distinction between leadership with the curriculum versus the co-curriculum, and the factors influencing the negotiation of curriculum conflict.

This inquiry is important because it creates a dialogue among the stakeholders who influence curriculum in private schools. The results of this study help school leaders understand the influences of parents on the curriculum of their schools and offer practical suggestions for private school leaders on how to negotiate the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools.

PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON CURRICULAR DECISIONS IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS:  
NEGOTIATING PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

by  
Christopher M. Freer

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Educational Policy Studies  
in  
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in  
the College of Education  
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA  
2008



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## ABBREVIATIONS

CMCS	Copper Mountain Christian School
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
NCLB	No Child Left Behind

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM

#### *Introduction*

At the heart of any school is the curriculum that is espoused by that institution. In fact, an educational institution is defined by its curriculum. The curriculum provides a “guiding vision” for a school that “can help to clarify and provide a justification for basic educational goals and emphases” (Franklin, 2000, p. 27). An outside observer can learn about a school by examining the curriculum of that school. In addition to the courses offered, the curriculum provides insight into the beliefs, goals and the mission of the school and its community. According to the well-known curriculum scholar William H. Schubert (1986), the curriculum of a school is “the attempt of a society to communicate its highest aspirations and deepest meanings to children and youths” (p. 361). In many ways, the curriculum helps to establish and maintain the culture of the school and, for that matter, society as a whole. John Dewey (1916/1944), the preeminent curriculum scholar and educational philosopher, characterized the role of schools in a democratic society by stating that the “measure of the worth” of the curriculum is the “extent to which [it is] animated by a social spirit” (p. 358). Along these lines, the stakeholders of a school are an essential component in the development and evolution of both the school curriculum and the school culture. The stakeholders in a school include students, parents, teachers, school leaders, alumni, community members and financial benefactors. A



school's curriculum should reflect the collective educational needs of these stakeholders as well as the needs of the larger society. The curriculum should meet the needs of the local community and broader purposes of education, such as sustaining our democracy.

One of the issues surrounding a discussion about curriculum is conflict. At times, a school's curriculum "meets resistance from forces within the school system, and other times, curricular hopes are dashed by larger societal, cultural, and ideological problems" (Schubert, 1986, p. 361). Schools debate curriculum issues, from what courses should be taught to how those courses should be taught. Schools question which textbooks should be used and how subjects, such as history, should be presented. Countless curriculum questions are raised repeatedly, such as: does the teaching of religion belong in the schoolhouse? Will a standards-based reform effort result in further stratification in schools? Whose values should character education programs reflect? What role does multiculturalism play in curriculum development? The overall purpose of schooling and for whom schooling should be geared have been pondered and disputed for as long as schools have existed.

John I. Goodlad (1979), a distinguished curriculum theorist and scholar in educational change, argues that "the school, as the institution charged exclusively with education, should take on only those social purposes that can be converted easily and naturally into educational goals and activities" (p. 103). On the other hand, schools are often viewed as the best vehicle through which social goals and reforms can be achieved. Throughout history, "curriculum fashions ... are subjected to wide pendulum swings" (Kliebard, 2004, p.174). Schools have been charged with achieving a wide-range of political, economical and societal objectives, from aiding in the War on Poverty to

preparing citizens for democracy. Schools possess a “hidden curriculum” that places an emphasis on “traits of behavior and roles expected of students which are rarely written in curriculum guides or acknowledged in the manifest objectives of the school, but which are nonetheless systematically inculcated and rewarded” (Tyack, 1974, p. 49). Children are taught “habits” such as “punctuality, regularity, attention, and silence” in schools so they will be productive members of society (p. 50). Many also believe that one of the purposes of schools is to prepare an educated citizenry. As a result, the “curriculum in a democracy must be dramatically different from the curriculum of indoctrination and compliance in non-democratic nations” (Dayton & Glickman, 1994). While these are all arguably important purposes of schooling, the dichotomy of roles presents an expected, and sometimes accepted, conflict in schools.

An equally important aspect of curriculum development is change. Curricula are not static entities, so change is expected. In fact, change is ubiquitous in schools, because schools are frequently faced with new pedagogy and reform models. Throughout history, curricular changes have been initiated by a wide range of groups including students, parents, teachers, school leaders and policymakers. Curriculum is “shaped by a highly complex network of public and private political forces” (Schubert, 1986, p.127) that influence the priorities in schools. These forces include national goals, legislation, and social agendas. During the Sputnik era, the federal government “linked science education with national security,” warning that our deficiencies in the areas of science and technology posed a “clear and present danger to the nation” (Dow, 1991, p. 2). More recently, legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001[NCLB], have brought increased attention to what subjects schools are teaching and how they are teaching these

subjects (Pub.L. No. 107-110, 2001). More and more, parents are getting involved in the educational development of their children and advocate which opportunities should be afforded their children. As a result, the influence that parents have on the curriculum of the school is significant, and school leaders need to be prepared to negotiate these discussions.

One of the challenges facing curriculum leaders is that the expectations of the parents do not always coincide with the objectives of the school. Often tensions exist between parents and school leaders because of this disconnect. Schools as institutions determine what they think is important for young people to know and develop their curriculum to achieve these knowledge domains. Parents also have a presupposition as to what they want their children to learn in schools. William F. Pinar (2004), a renowned curriculum scholar, explains that many parents choose a school because the mission or curriculum “addresses their aspirations for their children, including aspirations for study of school subjects closely allied with the existing academic disciplines” (p. 228). Often these educational goals coincide for schools and parents, but some do not, and school leaders should be prepared for these conflicts.

### *What Constitutes Curriculum?*

In order to understand the degree to which parents influence curriculum, it is necessary to have a clear definition of what curriculum encompasses. Curriculum includes the program of study that a school adopts and the courses that are offered in the traditional classroom setting. Curriculum, however, goes beyond the classroom and the subjects that students are taught. Curriculum is a set of experiences that students are exposed to and participate in throughout their formal schooling years. Curriculum

includes the arts, athletics, community service learning, and character development programs. In curriculum theory, the term *currere* has been used to encompass the “individual’s lived experience and the impact of the social milieu upon that experience” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004, p. 416). Throughout the literature, authors define curriculum according to the Latin derivative *currere*, which means the “running of the race” (Fleener, 2002, p. 16) or “running a racecourse” (Hlebowitsh, 2005, p. 4). This metaphor provides an illustration of “students running on a planned course, completing the requirements of the race” (Hlebowitsh, 2005, p. 4). While the comparison of a course of study to a race course is not perfect, it does help illustrate the process and the goals that a school and a society establish for their students. Furthermore, while one might assume that a race course would need to be established in advance of the race, many times curriculum and pedagogy change once the race has commenced. Socio-political forces are constantly shifting the goals and requirements of the course of study in schools. One could only imagine the challenges of running a race if the course was constantly changing, yet often schools face this very challenge.

Other important facets of curriculum are the pedagogical practices and philosophies adopted by the school community. It is important to understand that pedagogy reaches beyond the classroom and individual teachers. Public pedagogy, such as assembly programs or guest speakers, is also a significant part of the overarching curriculum of the school. Public pedagogy refers to the use of non-traditional methods of teaching and learning in public spaces and forums in which long-established boundaries and limitations are removed. This “critical engagement within the public” (O’Malley & Brady, 2005, p. 3) allows school leaders to frame discussions in a manner which involves

all of the stakeholders in the school community. Public pedagogy “opens a space for contesting conventional academic boundaries,” (p. 3) which cannot be achieved through traditional curriculum. In this study, I also explore the influence of parents on the broader curricular issues, such as public pedagogy, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

Furthermore, there are a number of distinctions to the curriculum of a school that must be considered. For example, the official curriculum is published in the curriculum guide, but the informal curriculum represents the exceptions that are made for various circumstances (Cuban, 1993, p. 100). These deviations from the written policies are not published, but they exist, and parents are aware of their availability. There is also a taught curriculum versus a learned curriculum in a given school environment. The taught curriculum represents what the teachers are actually teaching in the classrooms, and the learned curriculum represents what the students are actually learning (Cuban, 1993, p. 101).

### *The Context of Private School Expectations*

Parental expectations for curriculum exist at every educational institution but may be more intense at private schools. Parents send their children to private schools for a wide range of reasons, and these parents possess an equally diverse set of expectations. Expectations are sometimes official, but mostly they are “resting in the minds of persons interested in schools, and are usually not precisely formed” (Goodlad, 1979, p. 2). To a large extent, parents are seeking what they believe is a higher-quality educational experience for their children. These parents are motivated by other aspects of a private school education, such as the “relative physical safety compared to public schools,” but

“it is the advantage a [private school] education confers that is primary” (Peshkin, 2001, 96). For many parents, the *advantages* conferred by a private education involve the “acquisition of skills, habits, and understandings that are requisite for reaching the upper echelons of the American Dream” (Peshkin, 2001, p. 120). If they did not believe that a private education was somehow better than a public school education, they would not be willing to pay the additional tuition. But this does beg the question, what is a higher-quality educational experience? The answer to this question varies depending on the values and goals of the parents who are in the market for private education. Higher quality is a value-laden claim and directly reflects the priorities of the parents who are looking for educational options outside the public realm.

For some parents, higher-quality may be defined as smaller class sizes or perhaps a program of study that helps prepare students for acceptance by the right college. In the case of private schooling, many parents are “seeking small classes and personal attention” (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 544) which they feel is not present in public schools. Other parents may be looking for a safer and more secure school environment. Many parents look to private schools to provide a religious education. Some parents may simply determine their choice of private schools based on the conservative or progressive pedagogical philosophy adopted by the school. Regardless of the reasons, many parents question the homogeneous approach that public schools use to accommodate the heterogeneous needs of the diverse student body they serve and look to private schools as an alternative (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 541). At the same time, the market for private schooling has dramatically increased over the last decade in many metropolitan areas of the United States. Private school enrollment in the United States reached an all-time high

of 12.9 % of the total K-12 population in 1965, but decreased to only 9.2 % in 1980. By 1990, however, the percentage of the total kindergarten through twelfth grade [k-12] population enrolled in private schools had rebounded to 11.7 % (Ornstein, 1990). Further evidence of the recent proliferation of private schools is found in a comparison of the membership in an independent school association in a major metropolitan area from 1997 to 2005. In the 1997-98 school year this organization had twenty-four member schools as compared with sixty-nine schools in the 2005-2006 school year (Association of Independent Schools Admissions Directories). Although this increase could be a result of the population growth in this area, the demand for private schools clearly is increasing.

### *Curricular Tensions between Parents and Schools*

Parents and schools often differ on expectations for the curriculum in private secondary schools. These differences may result in conflicts over the mission and purpose of the school as expressed in the overall curriculum. “Parents may be more welcome at school than ever before and are perhaps more influential, but they are not part of the educational establishment, which has always resisted when outsiders propose changes that threaten existing relationships” (Cutler, 2000, p.199). School leaders must settle the terms of the relationship that parents will have with the school and establish reasonable boundaries for their involvement. This negotiation is a careful balance for private school leaders, since ultimately if the mission of the school does not align with the majority of the parents the school may face enrollment problems. Nothing is more critical to the business side of a private school than filling the desks with students. On the other hand, a school cannot adhere to the demands of every parent who questions the

curriculum of the school. These conflicts can be divisive, and school leaders need to know how to mediate successfully a variety of viewpoints.

Another concern for school leaders is the danger of teachers and administrators sending mixed messages. When parents hear different policies communicated from school leaders and classroom teachers, a potential for conflict exists. Parents will lose trust in the school, teachers will begin to resent the school leaders, and nobody will be pleased. The dissatisfaction could lead to students withdrawing from the school, low teacher retention, or a negative school culture.

Tensions often exist between parents and private school leaders with regard to the school's curriculum. From a practitioner's perspective, educational leaders need to realize the potential differences that exist and how they are managed on a daily basis. School leaders need to appreciate that parents are a critical resource in the development of a curriculum, and, in the case of private schools, they are the customers. Some parents expect to influence the curriculum in private schools because they pay tuition in addition to the tax dollars that support public schools. In the market environment of private schooling, it is important to remember that "private industry is better at tracking consumer wants and needs" than public entities (Fox, 1999, p. 29). While private schools "rarely [see] themselves in competition with public schools," (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 541) they do compete with other private schools for students. Just like a business, private schools can adapt to meet the needs of their clientele as they compete with other private schools. This responsiveness is not always the case with public schools and must be considered when analyzing the influence of parents on curriculum development in private schools.



### *Problem Statement*

From the perspective of a school leader at a private school in metro-Atlanta, I believe it would be quite beneficial to better understand the relationship between parents and school leaders as it relates to curriculum issues. Consequently, the main research question for this study is, *how do school leaders respond to the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools?*

The problem facing school leaders is how to negotiate the tensions resulting from parental expectations for the curriculum of the school. Depending on the circumstances, parental input on curricular decisions can be advantageous for the educational process. Parental participation in the development and continual examination of the curriculum is essential for maintaining an educational environment that reasonably reflects the ideals and goals of all of the stakeholders. The dilemma facing school leaders is that while a school benefits from the collective influence of parents as stakeholders, a school cannot acquiesce to the individual curricular aspirations of every parent.

### *Research Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the dynamics of parental influences on curriculum in private schools through an exploration of the ways in which educational leaders negotiate the tensions that develop between parental expectations and a school's curricular mission. Specifically, this study examines how leadership influences a school community with regard to curriculum tensions. Reviews of research related to the influence of stakeholders on curriculum resulted in extensive findings of literature on parental involvement with schools. While "parents and teachers have interacted since the inception of schooling in the United States," (Cutler, 2000, p.1) the relationship and level

of expectation has changed dramatically. There is a gap in the research concerning the significance of parental influence on the curriculum of private schools and the effect on the school community. In addition, the existing research does not specifically address how school leaders negotiate discussions with parents about curriculum issues. This study focuses on the role of leadership throughout the negotiation process and observes how leadership qualities relate to parental influence on the school community with regard to curriculum issues.

In this manner, this inquiry helps school leaders identify what parents desire from schools for their children's educational and personal development. As mentioned earlier, private schools are different from public schools. While public schools are supported by taxes, most private schools require some added financial obligation from parents. These parents desire something different from what is being offered in public schools; those differences are evident in the curriculum offerings of private schools. These curriculum differences may not reside in the courses that are being taught but rather in the overall philosophy of the school. They might be in the form of a religious education or student-to-teacher ratio. In *The Shopping Mall School*, the authors argue that one of the advantages of a private school over a public school education is the "simpler, leaner curriculum than that of the shopping mall high school" (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985, p. 210). Sometimes parents are not searching for additional curricular offerings but fewer curricular requirements. Regardless of their desires, if parents are not getting the curriculum differences that they want from a private school, they will look for another option. This study helps school leaders understand which curriculum attributes parents' desire from private schools.

Furthermore, this study describes the perspective of school leaders with regard to parental influences on curricular issues. For example, the research illustrates the desired level of autonomy that school leaders require when given the job of educating children. Educators have an underlying “fear that parents could become a disorderly and disruptive force” (Cutler, 2000, p. 32) in what they consider to be school business. Parents as a whole are “personally invested in their children’s learning,” and educators believe that “they could easily overstep their bounds, trespassing in the domain of educational policy-making” (Cutler, 2000, p. 32). Private school leaders share a growing feeling that parents expect to have greater influence because they pay tuition. This added financial obligation results in increased tensions between parents and school leaders. As mentioned previously, the expectations for influence may be amplified due to economic factors. This study explores these tensions to determine if school leaders attribute additional expectations to the tuition paid by private school parents.

The investigation also explores the relationship between school leaders and parents from the perspective of the school leader. I believe that the relationship between schools and parents always has been one based on trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility. Parents trust schools with their most valuable possession, their children. Schools not only have a responsibility to the children they teach but to the parents of these children. Ideally, parents should have an obligation to support the school in the education of their child and to be active participants in the process. While this is certainly not always the case in public or private schools, this study helps identify the tensions between private school leaders and the parents they serve.

Finally, the research helps illustrate how school leaders negotiate the tensions between the school's mission and the parents' educational desires for their children. As noted above, the conflict that arises between the school and its parent clientele can influence both the educational and economic goals of the school. The research provides a better understanding of both formal and informal ways to involve parents in discussions pertaining to the school's curriculum without allowing the school to lose sight of its educational goals. Formal opportunities for parent involvement are typically prescribed and established by policy. Usually the school or some accrediting agency has put these steps in place to provide an opportunity for parents to provide input on curricular decisions. These formal influences might include serving on a school improvement committee or attending a parent meeting arranged by the school. Informal avenues also exist and although they are considered unofficial, they can be just as effective as their formal counterparts. Informal opportunities to influence the curriculum of a school might include a conversation between a parent and a school leader at a school event. School leaders need to be aware of and skilled in the use of both formal and informal influences.

### *Significance of the Study*

This inquiry is important because it creates a dialogue about parental influences on curriculum in private schools. As educators, we have a responsibility to investigate all aspects of curriculum development and the influence of all of the stakeholders in this process. This discussion speaks to the purpose of education and the role that parents play in this process. While the functions that schools serve have changed over time, one of the enduring purposes of U.S. public education has been to create an educated citizenry. In his introductory remarks to John Goodlad's book, *What Schools Are For*, Ralph Tyler

explains that the “American public school was instituted after the War of Independence by political and educational leaders of the time in order to educate the new nation’s children to assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy” (1994, p. vii). Thomas Jefferson believed that the “fate of the republic” depended on the “virtue and vigilance of a well-informed citizenry” (Onuf & Sadosky, 2002, p. 80). This underlying principle of public education may be, at least in part, the same central motivation for students and parents in private schools. Indeed, parents in both public and private schools want their children to become productive citizens. Beyond this shared desire, parents have other motivations for sending their students to private schools. Regardless of similarities between public and private schools, “the most basic fact about every type of non-public school is that each is grounded in perceptions of discontent with or of unavailable opportunity in a particular public school or all public schools” (Peshkin, 2001, p. 112). This discussion identifies some of the reasons for enrolling students in a private school.

This research is valuable because it speaks directly to the mission of the school. All schools constantly reexamine what they stand for as educational institutions and often solicit the input of parents to that end. Parents can play a vital role in helping a school establish its mission and can offer a unique perspective that classroom teachers cannot always distinguish. At the same time, however, private school leaders need to ensure that they are not overly reactive to every parent complaint or embellishment to the mission of the school. A school needs to be faithful to its mission and, therefore, cannot comply with every parent request. The research from this study helps to define the balance that must exist between a school’s mission and its obligation to listen to parents.

### *Why private schools?*

Another important question to ask concerning the significance of this study is why is it important to conduct this research in a private school setting? Part of the answer relates to the symbiotic relationship between private and public schools. Since the outset of schooling in the United States, private schools and public schools have coexisted. As a result, any research benefitting the private sector will naturally provide important information for the other. In addition, the high-stakes testing and bureaucratic constraints that often characterize public schools have resulted in a growing popularity of private schools as an alternative to government-run schools (Meier, 2000). The findings from this study will provide insight for public school leaders regarding the parental disaffection with public schools. Finally, there is not much research relating to private schools and the growing number of parents who are choosing to send their children to private schools (Ornstein, 1990). Therefore, this research is useful not only for private school leaders, but also for public school administrators faced with competition from the private sector.

### *Research Questions*

In order to determine how school leaders negotiate differences in curriculum expectations between parents and private secondary schools, the following three research questions were explored:

1. How do parents influence the curriculum development process?
2. How do school leaders' ideas about curriculum differ from the parents' curriculum ideas?
3. How do school leaders negotiate these differences in the curriculum development process?

### *Research Approach*

The overall research approach of this study is framed by a qualitative methodology. I conducted a multiple-site case study in order to create a better understanding of the dynamics of parental influences on curriculum in private schools. Furthermore, I used the data collected from these case studies to describe how educational leaders negotiate the tensions that develop between parental expectations and a school's curricular mission. The three schools that I investigated in this study are Hampton Hills Academy, the Pine Valley School, and Copper Mountain Christian School. The three schools were chosen for this case study because they offer a diverse sampling of the private schools in a large metropolitan area. The study took place over the period of one academic semester and encompassed only the Upper School at each of these institutions. The three schools in this case study are described in greater detail in Chapter Three, and portraits of each school are illustrated in Chapter Four. All three were selected purposefully because of their unique educational and curricular offerings. Although these three schools share many educational objectives, they differ in the ways they approach these goal and in the number of years they have been in existence. The selection of these three schools was designed deliberately to cover the "contextual conditions" (Yin, 2003, p. 13) that surround the phenomenon.

### *Conceptual Framework*

In this study I examined the influence of parents on the curriculum of private schools through the lens of conflict. Although the idea of curriculum conflict suggests an antagonistic point of view, I focused not only on the tensions surrounding curriculum development, but also on the resolutions to this conflict. The relationship between parents

and private schools was observed from a collaborative rather than an adversarial association. Despite the existence of tensions between parents and private schools over curriculum issues, parents ultimately trust the schools in which they enroll their children. Conducting this research through the framework of conflict helped identify how school leaders negotiate these curriculum tensions and prevent conflict from negatively affecting the school community.

### *Curriculum Conflict*

The curriculum of a school reflects the educational purpose and pedagogical philosophy of the institution, therefore, it is not surprising to have conflict over what constitutes that curriculum. Public schools have battled over curriculum issues through school boards, elections and public policy debates throughout the years. The forum may be different, but private schools have the same curriculum disputes.

I view the curricular tensions between parents and school leaders as an ongoing collaboration. The reasons parents initially choose the schools to which they send their children may vary considerably but they typically include considerations such as religious beliefs, social status, safety concerns, class size, college options, academic offerings, and pedagogical philosophies. As I cited above, parents at a private school have a somewhat different perspective since they have chosen to pay tuition for their child's education. This financial decision comes with added expectations for influence on decisions concerning that education. Private school parents have the financial wherewithal to send their student to a school outside the public sector and, therefore, believe this entitles them to evaluate and assess the product they have purchased. Ultimately, parents choose a school that satisfies the needs of their child or perhaps the



educational desires of the parent. Often parents choose a school because the mission or curriculum “addresses their aspirations for their children, including aspirations for study of school subjects closely allied with the existing academic disciplines” (Pinar, 2004, p. 228). I believe that this motivation creates a unique tension between parents and schools with regard to curriculum discussions and, as a result, affects the culture of the school.

#### *An Economic Perspective*

An important aspect of this curriculum conflict is the tension created from the economic perspective. Private schooling can be considered a product that is marketed to parents searching for alternatives to public schools. Like any product, private education has a price in the form of tuition, and this price is responsive to customer demand. In the case of education, people who can afford options are going to seek those options. If people have the economic resources to expand their educational opportunities and increase their prospects for future economic gain, it is in their best interest to do so (Smith, 1994).

Consequently, parents who have the economic ability and are looking out for their children’s best interests are willing to pay tuition dollars beyond the taxes that support public schools. With this additional expenditure, however, come additional expectations. In much the same way a customer wants satisfaction from the product that he buys in a store, private school parents seek satisfaction from the education they have purchased for their child. All parents, of public or private schools, have expectations for their children’s education. Public school parents pay taxes to support their local schools, so according to this line of thinking they also should be considered paying customers. However, the

aggregate tuition and taxes that private school parents pay most likely contributes to an increased level of expectation of curricular influence at their child's school.

### *Negotiating the Conflict*

School leaders are faced with negotiating the tensions that exist between parents and private schools around curriculum issues. Schools have established educative missions, and parents presumably know these goals when they enroll their children. At the same time, schools should be responsive to the needs of the parents and children whom they serve. Parents are a valuable resource and should not be alienated. Furthermore, the influence of all stakeholders, including parents, can enrich the curriculum of a school. School leaders do have to be cautious, though, to not agree to every request by parents lest they lose sight of the objectives of the school. A certain degree of continuity is necessary to be successful and prevent a loss of identity. School leaders who assent to every desire of parent constituency are going to lose favor with the faculty, and the culture of the school will suffer. This study sheds light on these issues and offers practical suggestions for private school leaders attempting to negotiate the tensions relating to the influence of parents on the curriculum of their schools.

### *Overview of the Study*

In the remaining five chapters of this study, I illustrate *how school leaders effectively negotiate the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools*. In Chapter Two, I explore the existing literature surrounding the research. In Chapter Three, I outline the specific qualitative methods utilized for this multiple-site case study design. Chapter Four offers portraits of the three schools included in the study to help the reader understand the context of the research settings. In

Chapter Five, I focus on the research findings and the analysis of the data. Finally, in Chapter Six I elaborate on the results and present my conclusions, the implications of the study, suggestions for future study, and my personal reflections.

### *List of Terms*

Before continuing with Chapter Two, I need to define some terms that are specific to my study.

*Co-Curriculum* – Co-curriculum is used to describe the educational opportunities in the school community that are not part of the formal course of study. There are many educational opportunities and teachable moments that do not occur, or may not be possible, in a traditional classroom setting. The co-curriculum includes, but is not limited to, the use of public pedagogy, athletic teams, fine arts, performing arts, special interest clubs and service-learning opportunities.

*Curriculum* – For the purposes of this study, I have adopted a broad definition of curriculum that encompasses a wide range of aspects of the learning environment. Curriculum cannot be confined by the boundaries of a classroom or even a school community. I frequently refer to the curriculum interchangeably with the co-curriculum, because I believe the co-curriculum is an equally important aspect of the educative process.

*Effective school leader* – Since the primary research question of this study asks how school leaders effectively negotiate the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools, it is important to delineate what I mean by effective. In this instance, effectiveness is determined by how successful the school leader is in negotiating the tensions that exist between the stakeholders regarding the

school's curriculum. This success is not necessarily measured in terms of achieving a compromise between the two sides, but rather in creating an understanding about the curricular mission of the school.

*Faith-based education* – A faith-based school is a private school that has a religious affiliation associated with its mission. The religious affiliation of a faith-based school may be loosely or strictly applied to the curriculum. In either case, the association may be non-denominational.

*Negotiate* – Negotiate refers to the discussion of curriculum issues that takes place between the stakeholders in the school community. The curriculum attempts to address the needs of the students, the educational mission of the school, the pedagogy of the teachers and the expectations of the parents. Where these forces fail to coalesce, tensions arise between the different stakeholders and school leaders are faced with negotiating these differences. This conversation often includes give and take on the part of all of the constituencies in the school community.

*Private school* – A private school, whether faith-based or secular, does not rely on government funds for its operation. A private school may operate on tuition dollars, endowments, or other funding separate from tax revenue. As a result of this financial independence, private schools do not have to follow the same educational standards that public schools must follow.

*Public school* – A public school is any school funded and operated under the direction of a state or municipality. As a result of government funding, the school must adhere to government standards of education and to all state and district laws relating to schools.

*School leader* – A school leader refers to someone who is in a position of authority at the school and has specific administrative duties. In this study, the school leaders included presidents, vice presidents, headmasters and assistant headmasters, principals and assistant principals, deans of students, academic deans/curriculum directors, chaplains and department chairs.

*Upper School* - In this study, the term Upper School is synonymous with high school and encompasses grades nine through twelve. All three of the schools in this study refer to their high schools as Upper Schools.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I explore the related research surrounding the issue of parental influence on the curriculum of private schools. The literature reviewed in these areas served as the sensitizing concepts and context for this qualitative study (Merriam, 1998). In addition to the study of sensitizing concepts, I approached the research from the vantage point of curriculum. This curriculum framework provides the foundation for my research and allows the reader to understand the context of my findings. As I conducted my comprehensive exploration of the related research, I allowed the meaning of the research problem to develop as the research progressed. As a result, the purpose of this literature review is two-fold; I use the literature, first, to explain the topics relating to my research and, second, to build a rationale for my research problem (Mertens, 2005, p. 88). The existing research provided an additional foundation for my investigation. Additional literature was also added in later chapters to help analyze and explain the findings of the study (Merriam, 1998).

In Chapter One, I described the main research question for this study: *how do school leaders respond to the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools?* In order to determine how school leaders negotiate differences in curriculum expectations between parents and private secondary schools,

the following three research questions were explored: *How do parents influence the curriculum development process? How do school leaders' ideas about curriculum differ from the parents' curriculum ideas? How do school leaders negotiate these differences in the curriculum development process?* Each of these research questions relates to issues that are grounded in existing educational research. In this chapter, I framed my research around the essential issues relating to these research questions: the overall purpose of education; the curriculum development process in schools; the role of educational leadership in the curriculum development process; and the role of parents in the development of school curriculum. I used a qualitative methodology in this study in order to construct “well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). The context for this research is the three private schools, but the results and conclusions can be transferable to other contexts and other school leaders. This qualitative approach often can “lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1) that will assist school leaders as they negotiate the tensions that exist between stakeholders when developing the school's curriculum.

### *Purpose of Education*

Before examining the role that stakeholders have on the curriculum of schools, one must understand the overall purpose of education in the United States. The influence of parents on the curriculum of any school, public or private, must be explored within the context of the overall function of education. Of course, there are a multitude of beliefs about the intentions of education, and, depending upon whom one asks, one will get very different responses. For the purposes of this research, however, it is necessary to take a

cursory look at the foundations of education in the United States. Policy-makers and experts in academia have connected education with a wide range of purposes, including democratic principles, economic success and national security.

### *Sustaining Our Democracy*

One of the primary purposes for education in the United States is to sustain our democracy. Throughout our history, scholars and politicians have argued that public education is necessary for democracy to survive. From the perspective of naturalization, “for tens of millions of European immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, public schools served as a bridge to assimilation” (Benveniste, Carnoy & Rothstein, 2003, p. 1). Schools served the purpose of educating future citizens and propagating our democratic ideals. In the United States, “public school was instituted after the War of Independence by political and educational leaders of the time in order to educate the new nation’s children to assume the responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy” (Goodlad, 1979, p. vii). Thomas Jefferson believed that the “fate of the republic” depended on the “virtue and vigilance of a well-informed citizenry” (Onuf & Sadosky, 2002, p. 80).

In her book, *In Schools We Trust*, Deborah Meier explains that “it is in schools that we learn the art of living together as citizens, and it is in public schools that we are obliged to defend the idea of a public, not only a private interest” (2002, p. 176). Meier asserts that “we need to accept the public responsibility of seeing all our children as our common responsibility” and that we must “keep the door open to the varied ways such values can be expressed in a democratic society” (p. 176). Meier is certainly not alone in her beliefs about the purposes of schooling. Renowned educational philosopher John



Dewey (1900/2001) wrote that “all society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members” and any other ideal “destroys our democracy” (p. 5). Dewey touted the democratic purpose of education and believed that “only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself” (p. 1).

### *The Economics of Schooling*

Another rationale for public education can be viewed from an economic perspective. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith argues that public education is necessary for the economic success of the country. He recognized that “the education of the common people requires ... the attention of the public more than that of people of some rank and fortune” (1776/1994, p. 841). In other words, Smith distinguished between the education of the wealthy and the poor. Although he believed that all citizens should be “willing enough to lay out the expense which is necessary for [education],” Smith recognized that the “common people” have “little time to spare for education” (p. 842). Although some parents would be able to pay the cost of educating their children, many would not. Thus, Smith suggests that “for a very small expense the public can facilitate, can encourage, and can even impose upon almost the whole body of the people, the necessity of acquiring those most essential parts of education” (p. 843).

Like Smith, Horace Mann believed that public education was necessary for the economic success of the country. Mann addressed many of the same economic issues when promoting the common school in the mid-1800s. Mann attempted to convince the elites in Massachusetts to share their wealth to benefit the whole. Many of Mann’s opponents simply “opposed the lack of fit between the common school and their own

personal interests” (Urban & Wagoner, 2004, p. 100). Although Mann knew that the elites were “more likely to send their children to private than to common schools,” he appealed to their economic interests, explaining that “employers ... could count on substantially fewer labor problems if they hired workers who had a common school education” (Urban & Wagoner, 2004, p. 100). He argued that the wealthy should “support the common school as a means of protecting their businesses” (p. 100). Furthermore, Mann “stressed that if the wealthy did not support common schooling, they would be threatened and possibly overrun by an ignorant rabble” (p. 101). Mann tried to link the success of the common school to the success of the economy. He clearly framed his argument in such a way as to appeal to the self-interests of those who would be funding the common school.

#### *Schools as National Security*

The purpose of education also has been tied to national security. During the Sputnik era, the federal government “linked science education with national security,” warning that our deficiencies in the areas of science and technology posed a “clear and present danger to the nation” (Dow, 1991, p. 2). Congress “clearly accepted the verdict of the academic critics that educators had foisted a soft and intellectually puerile curriculum on American schools” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 268) and passed the National Defense Education Act on September 2, 1958. Later, in April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education submitted “a report to the nation and the Secretary of Education” entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (The National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). The commission’s self-described purpose in the opening letter of transmittal was to “help

define the problems afflicting American education and to provide solutions, not search for scapegoats” (NCEE, 1983, ¶3). The final report opened in dramatic fashion, stating simply and shockingly that “our Nation is at risk” (NCEE, 1983, ¶1). The risk facing our nation was our failing schools, and one of the themes central to the commission’s argument was the relationship between a quality educational system and the economic success of the country. Throughout this document, the commission appealed to the economic motivation for improving our schools. The report declared that our “unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world” (NCEE, 1983, ¶1). The commission’s concerns reflected society’s fears and affected the purpose of education. Whether fostering democracy, appealing to the economic desires of our capitalist society, or providing a sense of national security, the educative purposes of schooling, as a social construct, are diverse. The underlying principles of public education represent the same motivation for students and parents in private schools. Parents in both public and private schools want their children to become productive citizens.

### *Race and Poverty in Schools*

Another critical component of education in the United States is the role of race and poverty in schools. For decades, the federal government left the running and funding of public schools to the states. In the post-Civil War era however, the federal government began to get involved with public education with “policies designed to bring recalcitrant southern states ... into line with dominant educational sentiment” (Urban & Wagoner, 2004, p. 170). Over time, federal involvement grew as the social responsibilities of schools increased. The most obvious example of this increased involvement with regard

to race was the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Consequently, President Eisenhower sent U.S. military troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to ensure that “nine young black students found their way into Central High School and that a segregationist southern governor upheld the constitution of the land” (Marshall, Sears, Allen, Roberts & Schubert, 2007, p. 35). With this landmark decision, the federal government began the desegregation of public schools, but many stark inequalities still existed.

In 1965, the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA], which was “by far the most costly and comprehensive federal educational law that had ever been passed” (Urban & Wagoner, 2004, p. 329). Through the ESEA, the federal government dispensed billions of dollars for public education to help “educationally disadvantaged youth” and to challenge the “white economic and political power structures of the old South” (Marshall, et al., 2007, p. 77). Although this legislation was motivated by the inadequate education received by poor children, the momentum was quickly lost as the Vietnam War escalated. Schools were seen as a vehicle for the advancement of President Johnson’s War on Poverty until the war effort overshadowed educational reform efforts (Urban & Wagoner, 2004, p. 329). Despite these efforts, schools continue to battle racial and socio-economic inequities. One of the determining factors in poorly funded schools is the relative poverty level of the neighborhood surrounding the school. Some believe that governmental policies actually maintain this “poverty education” (Anyon, 2005, p. 17) in the United States. Regardless of the source of the inequalities, the educational experience in the United States is stratified by racial and socioeconomic demographics.

### *The Choice of Private Schooling*

Once the overriding purposes of education have been acknowledged, it is possible to understand how private schools fit into this discussion. The influence that parents have on the curriculum of private schools cannot be fully understood without delineating the role private schools play within the educational environment. Despite the inclusive objectives and the largely benevolent purpose of public education in the United States, there is a competing demand for private schools throughout the country. Public schools are not meeting the needs of many students, and, as a result, some families are looking for alternatives. The demand for school choice and privatization is not a recent phenomenon, but increased standardization in schools and legislation like *NCLB* has amplified the desire for educational choices (Pub.L. No. 107-110, 2001).

Despite the popular opinion that public schools are failing, they are not failing everyone. According to 1999 statistics from the U.S. Department of Education, “public schools continue to be the mainstay of American education, with approximately 90% of all children in public kindergarten to twelfth grade” (Benveniste, et al., 2003, p. 1). Nevertheless, there are segments of society that believe that schools do not meet the needs of students. Over the last three decades, a significant shift has occurred with the percentage of students attending parochial schools. In the mid-1960s, approximately 90% of the students attending private schools were enrolled in parochial schools. But by the late 1990s, that number had decreased to approximately 50 % (Benveniste, et al., 2003, p. 2). Perhaps this notion of failure is justified; certainly some schools do not meet the needs of some students. Because the deficiencies in public education remain a concern, families continue to look for alternatives to the traditional, publicly funded school.

The debate surrounding school choice has been around for decades, and there are a plethora of options being suggested. Since the beginning of public schooling in this country, citizens have searched beyond the public sector for educational services, and countless private initiatives have been created to satisfy the desires of disenfranchised public school students and parents. In addition to private schools, options include charter schools, magnet schools, interdistrict and intradistrict school choice and home schooling. Even the prominent economist Milton Friedman has entered the debate, suggesting that a voucher system would “encourage privatization” and “unleash the drive, imagination and energy of competitive free enterprise to revolutionize the educational process” (1997, p.341). Regardless of the school-choice preference, the conversation is not going away, and the abundance of alternatives presents a complex educational environment. Within this milieu of educational choice, private schools remain a popular option for many families in the United States.

*What are Parents looking for in Educational Services?*

In the context of an increasing desire for private schooling, it is important to understand why families are looking for an alternative to traditional government-provided public education. While many parents are looking for what they believe will be a better-quality education for their children, there are a variety of other reasons why families consider private school. These considerations include religious beliefs, social status, safety concerns, college options, academic offerings, and pedagogical philosophies. In the case of private schooling, many parents are looking for smaller class sizes and individualized attention, which they feel is not present in public schools (Davies & Quirke, 2005). Many parents are questioning the approach of public schools that revolves

around standardization. These parents desire a school that accommodates learning differences rather than promoting a “one best system” approach (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 541). One reality in the capitalist environment of private school is that “private industry is better at tracking [certain] consumer wants and needs” (Fox, 1999, p. 29) than public entities. In the “market” of education, however, private schools “rarely [see] themselves in competition with public schools,” (Davies & Quirke, 2005, p. 541) so the competition does not enhance the quality of the product with regards to public schools. Just like a business, private schools can adapt to meet the needs of their clientele as they compete with other private schools. This responsiveness is not always the case with public schools.

#### *Who Wants Choice?*

In addition to the reasons for considering school choice, it is important to examine the types of parents currently searching for educational options. As noted above, the “determinants of school choice” (Yang & Kayaardi, 2004, p. 231) include religion, socio-economic status, family structure and demographic characteristics. In the first category, “empirical evidence shows that parental religious preference does have a positive effect on the selection of Catholic or private school” (p. 233). Parents with strong religious beliefs often look for schools that will help instill these beliefs in their children. The education level and income of parents also help determine a family’s interest in private schools. Parents who possess higher levels of education “better understand the importance of education, what different kinds of schools offer and what they want their children to acquire” (p. 233) from schools. Because, family income is a good indicator of the ability to afford private school tuition, there is a strong relationship between family

income level and private school attendance. The research also shows that parents who opt for school choice tend to be “more involved in their child’s education both at home and at school, are better educated, are employed at higher rates, and are less likely to be receiving federal assistance than non-choosing families” (Martinez, Godwin, Kemerer & Perna, 1995, p. 487). All of these demographic differences have significant implications for the kinds of families likely to seek a private school education.

Because “religion is not the only factor that influences parental choice of religious schools” (Yang & Kayaardi, 2004, p. 244), there are many families who choose a parochial school but are not as much concerned with a faith-based education as they are with the fact that the school is outside the public school system. Parents who are most likely to send their children to religious schools are generally those who are “Christian, who are older, who are foreign-born, who have a higher socio-economic status and who have more children” (p. 247). These factors are an important for school leaders seeking to understand why - and which - people are searching for choices in their educational pursuits.

#### *Who Has Access to Choice?*

Another critical component of the discussion regarding the choice of private schooling is who actually has the ability to choose a private education. While demographic differences have significant implications for who is likely to seek a private education, there is also a divide regarding who has access to private schools.

Undoubtedly, the gap in the quality of schools in this country is based on poverty and race (Marshall, et. al., 2007). Not every family has the choice of private schooling. While scholarships are available in many private schools, they are limited in their quantity and



scope. Thus, choice of a private school education in this country is limited by both poverty and race.

As mentioned previously, increased standardization in schools and legislation like *NCLB* has amplified the desire for educational choices (Pub.L. No. 107-110, 2001). The “teach to the test” approach associated with these standards and the “over-reliance on pre-fabricated curricular programs” (Marshall, et. al., 2007, p. 234) that results diminish the pedagogy of teachers and the creativity of the students. Curriculum mandates limit the potential of the entire school community and promote sameness. Instead of inspiring educational growth unique to each school, a “‘pedagogy of poverty’ encourages passivity in students while stifling creativity, curiosity, and the development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills” (p. 234). Public schools have been forced to succumb to the standardization of curriculum and to live with the interference of the federal government (Pinar, 2004). Private schools do not have the same bureaucratic restrictions or standardized curricula, so teachers are freer to adopt a pedagogy that reflects their teaching styles and the needs of their students.

Not every student has a choice of attending private schools. Race, for instance, is a factor in the probability of private school education. Demographic data underscore the inequality in the number of minority students who have access to private schools as compared to their white counterparts. Since 1971, when court-sanctioned busing began for many school systems, “10 million white families nationwide have moved out of cities and into suburbs, or have put their children in private schools, leaving inner-city schools with large numbers of children of color” (Marshall, et. al., 2007, p. 236). Despite strides in parity, schools remain unequal because segregation by race correlates with segregation

by poverty (Marshall, et. al., 2007, p. 236). As long as minority students are poorer than white students, minority students will be less able to afford the tuition of a private education. Any research on private schools must acknowledge the racial and socioeconomic disparity that exists in these schools.

### *What Constitutes Curriculum?*

In order to understand the degree to which parents influence curriculum, one must have a sense of what curriculum encompasses. Curriculum includes the program of study that a school adopts and the courses that are offered in the traditional classroom setting. As discussed in Chapter One, however, curriculum goes well beyond the classroom and the subjects that students are taught. Curriculum is a set of experiences that students are exposed to and participate in throughout their formal schooling years. *Currere*, the “infinite form of curriculum” (Pinar, 2004), includes the “individual’s lived experience and the impact of the social milieu upon that experience” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 416). The curriculum includes a diverse collection of disciplines that are expressed through a variety of mediums. Areas of instruction include the arts, athletics, community service learning, and character development programs. To encapsulate the meaning of curriculum, we must consider its historical roots, illustrate its broad scope, and understand its relevance to pedagogy.

### *A Historical Perspective*

From the outset of formal schooling, the curricula have been pondered and delineated by philosophers, statesmen and educators alike. John Dewey characterizes curriculum as a reflection of our educational values that seeks to teach such ideals as “utility, culture, information, preparation for social efficiency, mental discipline or

power” (1916/1944, p. 231). According to Dewey, the “tendency to assign separate values to each study and to regard the curriculum in its entirety as a kind of composite made by the aggregate of segregated values is a result of the isolation of social groups and classes” (p. 249). Dewey suggested that “the business of education” in a democratic society is to “struggle against this isolation in order that the various interests may reinforce and play into one another.” (p. 249). In other words, a curriculum should not be viewed as a series of individual entities that stand alone. Instead, a curriculum should be viewed as a synthesis of the different aspects of the educational environment of the school. These components work together, building both vertically and cross-curricularly, to produce a community of learning that is not limited by the boundaries of classrooms or specific disciplines. I used Dewey’s description of an integrated curriculum as part of the basis for my broad definition of curriculum outlined later in this chapter. As I investigated each of the three schools in my study, I explored the curriculum as a whole in addition to its individual components.

The debate over what schools should teach has been around since colonial times, and even statesmen have weighed in on what should be included in the curriculum of our schools. Benjamin Franklin spent a significant amount of time planning how to educate the public, and in “1743 he went so far as to draft a proposal for an academy” (Brands, 2000, p. 195). Franklin published articles promoting the “benefits accruing to both individuals and society upon the appropriate education of youth and on the optimal method of that education” (p. 195). Franklin pondered the curriculum that would be offered and suggested that it should include “arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, rhetoric, grammar, literature, history, drawing, handwriting, accounting, geography, morality,

logic, natural history, mechanics, and gardening would be suitable subjects for study” (p. 196). He held great “disdain for much of the attention to the ‘dead languages’ and other trappings of the conventional education of his day,” (Urban & Wagoner, 2004, p. 55) so his program of study focused more on pragmatic subject matter.

### *Curriculum and Pedagogy*

In addition to the subjects taught in schools, another aspect of curriculum that merits discussion is how curriculum relates to pedagogy. The curriculum that exists in a school is closely related to the pedagogical practices and philosophies adopted by the school community. Despite the claim that a shift has occurred “from the tangible presence of the teacher to the remote knowledge and values incarnate in the curriculum” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 1), the teacher still plays a vital role in the way the curriculum is presented. Pedagogy is the deliberate and creative way in which teachers use the curriculum to meet the needs of their students. A student-centered approach to learning puts the child first and the curriculum second. Prominent curriculum scholars James G. Henderson and Richard D. Hawthorne (1995) contend that school leaders and teachers, through transformative curriculum leaders, can adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the child as a learner. Pedagogy provides educators the freedom to put the needs of the students before the needs of the curriculum. Pedagogical practices are as diverse as the courses offered and must be considered when discussing the curriculum.

There are numerous aspects of the curriculum of a school that are constructs of pedagogy and are no less important to the study of curriculum development. One of these components is the presence of a “hidden curriculum” which refers to the teachings and instruction that are not reflected in the formal or official school philosophy or mission

(Apple, 1979). The hidden curriculum includes social norms, values, beliefs and traditions that are not necessarily spelled out in the formal curriculum. The hidden curriculum is responsible for helping students “learn customs and rules”; if students learn to follow these rules, the society is “rewarded by a nicer and more orderly world” (p. 96). Often schools use the hidden curriculum to help teach students the traits needed to be successful, productive citizens in the larger society.

In addition to the hidden curriculum, pedagogy often includes the “official,” “unofficial,” “taught” and “learned” curriculums (Cuban, 1993, p. 100-101). For example, the official curriculum is published in the curriculum guide, but the informal curriculum represents the exceptions that are made for various circumstances. Sometimes the official curriculum conflicts with the hidden curriculum. These deviations from the written policies are not published, but they exist and parents are aware of their availability. There is also the taught curriculum, which represents what the teachers are actually teaching in the classrooms, versus the learned curriculum, which represents what the students are actually learning. School curriculum is shaped by the way teachers interpret the program of study, how they teach, and how the students learn. The pedagogical influence on the curriculum is concerned with the “subject knowledge that teachers have and how they convert that knowledge into language and formats children can understand” (p. 255). The nexus between the courses of study offered at a school and the way in which the teachers instruct is significant and is included in this study.

### *Pedagogy of Humanity and the Curriculum*

A common facet of the taught curriculum and the learned curriculum is the human behavior of teacher and student. Beyond the specific courses that are taught and the

pedagogy espoused by teachers, the curriculum encompasses the people students encounter and the behaviors they see modeled in schools. For this reason, we should explore the significance of non-instructional aspects of the educational process. Students learn far more in schools than just the official curriculum, so it is reasonable to discuss the role of humanity in the school house. Of course, students learn from their classes and their textbooks, but they also learn from their teachers' behaviors. They learn from many aspects of the school community, from the customs and traditions that are honored, to the importance of values such as integrity and morality. These components of the unofficial, taught or learned curricula are powerful pedagogical tools that school leaders must acknowledge and understand in order to lead effectively.

Words like integrity, character, truth and honor envelop our schools through mission statements and proclamations by teachers and school leaders. This "rhetoric," however, does not meet the true needs of our students (Sizer & Sizer, 1999, p. xv). When dealing with schools and, more importantly, with children, there are no absolutes. Because schools are ambiguous settings, teachers must go beyond simply stating words that students should strive to achieve. The curriculum must focus on modeling these behaviors, rather than just defining them. Including character education in the official curriculum is not enough. Through the unofficial, taught and learned curriculums, schools can teach these human elements that are essential for our schools as well as the greater community. The basic argument is that morality involves a certain degree of ambiguity. When schools are founded in absolutes, the results can be detrimental to the educative process. The absolute nature of the official curriculum can be supplemented by the ambiguity of the unofficial, taught and learned curriculums. Character education cannot

be a sometime thing, since “the students watch us all the time” (p. 121). We always need to be cognizant of “what they see and what we want them to learn from it” (p. 121). The lessons of morality and humanity should be deeply imbedded throughout our curricula and not treated as a distinct topic.

Curriculum includes human behaviors that are not static traits, so schools must allow these character lessons to evolve with the school community. Educators must remember that “morality is not achieved” like “trophies” or “certificates” that are displayed in the “glass cases in the school’s front hall” (Sizer & Sizer, 1999, p. 117). Instead, moral behavior should be taught on a daily basis and should be embedded within everything that the school does. Teachers do not simply cover morality, like a lesson in a book, but they model it daily. Even when these lessons are part of the official curriculum, they are also part of the taught and learned curriculums. Schools today, however, offer only superficial attempts at character development as part of the official curriculum. These programs are often considered superfluous content. Furthermore, many school faculty and administrators take a “do as I say but not as I do” (p. 117) approach to behavior. Unfortunately, this is the worst method that adults can adopt. Adult behavior in schools is educative; and, while we know that students are always watching, perhaps we lose sight of this aspect of the curriculum. Human interaction and behavior are important pedagogical influences on the official, unofficial, taught and learned curriculums.

### *Pedagogy beyond the Classroom*

In addition, it is important to understand that pedagogy reaches beyond classroom walls and individual teachers. As discussed in the previous chapter, public pedagogy is an important part of the overriding curriculum of the school. Public pedagogy refers to the

use of non-traditional methods of teaching and learning in public spaces and forums in which long-established boundaries and limitations are removed. This “critical engagement within the public” (O’Malley & Brady, 2005, October, p. 3) allows school leaders to frame discussions in a manner that involves all of the stakeholders in the school community. Public pedagogy, such as assembly programs or guest speakers, “opens a space for contesting conventional academic boundaries” (p. 3) which cannot be achieved through traditional curriculum. This study explores the influence of parents on the broader curricular issues such as public pedagogy.

The concept of public pedagogy can be described through a diverse array of paradigms, meanings, purposes and uses. In the context of this discourse, public pedagogy is defined as the use of non-traditional teaching methods that incorporate open discussion throughout the school community. This open discussion includes a variety of the stakeholders in the school community, and the discussion is not always led by the teacher or administrator. In fact, the public aspect of the discussion necessitates that others be allowed to lead and that teachers be allowed to learn.

Public pedagogy represents a significant mechanism through which any of a school’s stakeholders can influence the school’s culture. In many ways, this public pedagogy is representative of the degree of collaboration that exists within the school community. Collaboration can result in the best decision for the school. School leaders “should provoke in their members a constant discussion, if not argument, as to what schools ought to be” (Smith & Blase, 1988, p. 9). Public pedagogy allows for this open discussion. Effective leaders are not afraid to allow open discussion on a wide variety of issues through a shared governance approach to leadership. The use of pedagogy in the



classroom or outside is a powerful curriculum tool and is explored in the three schools in this study to determine the degrees to which parents exert influence.

### *A Broad Definition of Curriculum*

For the purposes of this study, I have adopted a broad definition of curriculum that encompasses a wide range of aspects of the learning environment. Eisner (1998) describes the need for curriculum leaders to be “educational connoisseurs” (p. 211) who strive to learn as much as possible about the classrooms, teachers, and students in an effort to fully understand the curriculum in action. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I adopted Dewey’s integrated approach to curriculum to create a broad definition of curriculum that encompasses all of the teachable moments in a school and is not limited by the walls of the classroom. My broad view of curriculum is best described by McDonald (1977), who describes the complexity and totality of the curriculum in this way:

Curriculum is the environment in the school and in the classroom. You have there in miniature what you have in life outside the classroom and the school. Curriculum is therefore life! That’s why it is so vital and exciting. That’s what makes it important. There’s nothing out there that doesn’t relate to curriculum.

The complexity and enormity of the curriculum makes it difficult, if not impractical, to try to encapsulate the development of the curriculum in a simple formula or theory. The curriculum is a multi-faceted entity with a unique ability to adapt to the diverse and varying needs of the school community (Schwab, 1978). Consequently, any definition of curriculum should acknowledge and embrace this complexity.

Curriculum cannot be confined by the boundaries of a classroom or even a school community. School leaders must adopt a broad definition of curriculum, since there is no

limit to how or where learning can occur. When developing the curriculum, school leaders cannot focus on one means of educating children and ignore the other, just as they cannot cover all subjects equally (Schwab, 1978). Curriculum development can be considered an “exercise in human judgment,” and this “curriculum wisdom” is what educators possess while “envisioning and enacting a good educational journey” (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p. 4) for the entire school community. Curriculum cannot be developed by simply following a prescribed formula or standardized process. Instead, curriculum development requires “sophisticated professional judgment” (p. 3). This professional judgment should be guided by the teachers who know the curriculum and the needs of the students. Although the teaching professionals are the experts, they should not ignore the input and perspective of all stakeholders. The diverse opinions and experiences represented in the school community should be mirrored in the development of the curriculum.

Henderson and Kesson note that frequently, curriculum leaders fall victim to the bureaucracy or standardization associated with authoritarian school systems and lose sight of the bigger picture. These constraints on the scope of the curriculum inhibit the potential of the educational opportunities afforded the students. Curriculum leaders must work to avoid these pitfalls and maintain a broad approach to what is considered learning.

In this manner, the definition of curriculum should include both the official curriculum and the co-curriculum. There are many educational opportunities and teachable moments that do not occur – and might not be possible - in a traditional classroom setting. As noted before, public pedagogy is one example of how school leaders can reach a much larger audience and, thus, have the potential for significant

educational influence. There is a tendency to separate the curricular and the co-curricular into two distinct entities that cannot co-exist or to undervalue the co-curricular. Dewey (1916/1944) addresses this tendency when he discusses the role of play and work in the curriculum. He acknowledges that the co-curricular is often seen as “relief from the tedium and strain of ‘regular’ school work” (p. 194). This division between work and play limits the educational potential of the curriculum. For this reason, I define curriculum in a much broader manner to include both the curriculum and the co-curriculum as valuable aspects of the learning environment.

Another component of the definition of curriculum that requires discussion is the pedagogical practices of teachers. When curriculum leaders are working to construct the program of study for their school, they cannot overlook the importance of how these courses will be taught. Teaching styles are as extensive and diverse as the subjects taught, and each educational setting has unique methods of teaching and learning. As a result, school leaders must resist trying to develop a set of processes through which teachers ensure a specific outcome or quantifiable objective (Pinar, 2004). Curriculum leaders must acknowledge these diverse pedagogies and embrace the wide-ranging opportunities that teaching offers for achieving learning. This broad definition of curriculum must include the pedagogy adopted by teachers as well as the disciplines that are taught.

Teachers and educational leaders work to build a curriculum that includes an “individual’s lived experience and the impact of the social milieu upon that experience” (Pinar et al., 2004, p. 416). Too often curriculum is defined as a set of courses and objectives, which, if navigated successfully, will result in specific desirable outcomes. This represents a flawed approach to curriculum development, because no one correct

outcome from the educational process exists (Schwab, 1978, p. 363). The definition of curriculum for this study encompasses a much broader approach to educating students. Curriculum certainly includes the course of study in a traditional classroom setting, but it also includes human elements of curriculum, public pedagogy, and all aspects of the unofficial, taught and learned curriculums. These lived experiences for the school community combine to provide an expansive and infinite definition of curriculum.

### *The Role of Educational Leadership*

In order to understand how school leaders effectively negotiate the differences in expectations for curriculum between stakeholders at private secondary schools, it is important to discuss what is meant by school leadership. School leadership can exist in a variety of roles and demonstrated in a diverse array of styles. The roles of educational leaders are inherent in the positions they hold: principals, assistant principals, academic deans or the heads of departments. Other times, these roles are less defined, and teacher-leaders can play integral roles in the spectrum of educational leadership. When teachers are “given the opportunity to exercise their professional talents beyond the classroom, everyone benefits” (Williams-Boyd, 2002, p.29). Teachers are the instructional experts whose “curricular knowledge and pedagogical experience are valuable assets to the school community” (Nelson, Palonsky & McCarthy, 2004, p.390). When teachers assume leadership roles, they are more likely to take ownership for school improvements. Unfortunately, teacher “leadership capabilities and professional skills [often are] limited only to a single classroom” (Williams-Boyd, 2002, p.29). School leaders must recognize the potential of teachers as leaders in the school community, especially with regard to

curriculum decisions. Throughout this study I consider the role teachers play in the leadership process.

*What is Educational Leadership?*

School leaders display a wide range of approaches to educational leadership, which is not surprising since that concept means different things to different people. As a result, the definition of educational leadership will vary from one school to another and certainly from one leader to another. Although there are commonalities in the range of educational leadership, an individual's approach to leadership is shaped by his or her background, beliefs, schooling and experiences. Therefore, a school leader's perspective on educational leadership is the result of a combination of his or her educational background, professional experiences and the relationships they develop over time. Despite the individualistic aspect of school leadership, certain common qualities help to formulate an educational leadership approach. These leadership qualities include a leader's skills in building relationships, establishing trust, using power, adopting educational research, listening and communicating, and involving others in the leadership process.

*Building relationships.*

Educational leadership is defined by the relationships that exist between all of the stakeholders in a school community. Leadership does not belong to a single principal or administrative team. Instead, leadership must be seen as the responsibility of everyone in the school community. This includes school leaders, teachers, staff, students, parents and community members. When "leadership is defined as a concept transcending individuals, roles, and behaviors" (Lambert, 1995, p.29) the entire school community benefits. This

shared approach to leadership espouses a “reciprocal” process in which “anyone in the educational community” can “engage in leadership actions” (p.29). A free exchange of ideas allows stakeholders “to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose about schooling” (p.29). Fostering this collaborative environment and involving all of the stakeholders are essential responsibilities of the effective educational leader.

*Establishing trust.*

The relationship between a school leader and those who follow him or her should be based on mutual trust and respect. “Trust is the essential link” (Evans, 2000, p. 287) between leaders and those being led and without this trust authenticity is not possible. A faculty will not follow a leader whom it does not trust or respect. Trust must be developed over time and respect earned through shared experiences. Nurturing these foundations is perhaps the most significant challenge for an effective school leader. Collaboration creates a vested interest for all stakeholders and results in a feeling of ownership for everyone in the school community.

School leaders are much more likely to gain the support and the confidence of the faculty when the faculty is given an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. This shared-governance approach to leadership results in collaboration among teachers and school leaders as they develop curriculum, establish policies and address other school-wide issues. But without the underpinnings of trust, a school leader cannot expect to achieve collaboration. Furthermore, in an environment in which collaboration with teachers only exists “under a system of formal rules and regulations, which have been negotiated, agreed to, litigated, and enforced, sometimes by coercive means”

(Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 175) the school and its constituencies cannot reach their full potential. This forced collaboration is not genuine and is difficult to sustain over time.

Because trust “is as fragile as it is precious” and “once damaged, it is nearly impossible to repair” (Evans, 2000, p. 287), school leaders must work to build and maintain a trusting environment in which teachers feel comfortable and supported. In this environment, they can achieve candid collaboration and avoid struggles over power and control, which always results in the stifling of both ideas and respect.

*Abuse of power.*

An effective school leader must realize the dangers associated with power and authority and take steps to ensure that he or she does not abuse his or her power. A school leader must be aware that “inequity in power is disruptive of harmonious social relations and drastically limits the possibilities that the power-holder can maintain close and friendly relations with the less powerful” (Kipinis, 1972, p. 428). School leaders must guard against the possible “corruptions” of power that come with their position and, instead, emphasize cooperation rather than manipulation and control (p.428). A school leader has a moral obligation not to exploit his leadership position. Instead, consensus should be reached with all members on equal ground. Power and authority cannot be abused or shared governance will not prevail.

*Manager versus leader.*

From an organizational perspective, educational leaders are often viewed as building managers who are granted authority rather than leaders who build consensus. McGregor (1960) constructed the concept of *Theory X* and *Theory Y* to better understand the relationship between managers and workers. He found that the way managers view

employees helps determine how those employees will respond. In an effort to explain this relationship, McGregor came up with two theories to explain the manager's perception of the employees. According to *Theory X*, managers believe that "subordinates are passive and lazy, have little ambition, prefer to be led, and resist change" (Bolman & Deal, 2006, p. 65). *Theory Y*, on the other hand, contends that "the essential task of management is to arrange organizational conditions so that people can achieve their own goals best by directing their efforts toward organizational rewards" (Bolman & Deal, p. 65-66). Not surprisingly, McGregor found that most managers subscribe to *Theory X*. Educational leaders must resist the temptation of adopting a *Theory X* approach to managing teachers. Instead, school leaders should work to build the relationships and trust that accompany a *Theory Y* approach.

#### *Collaboration.*

Effective school leaders must work to involve collaboration, motivation and inspiration in their educational leadership philosophy. They must foster strong relationships based on a foundation of trust and shared governance. To be successful in building this trust, "everyone works toward what is believed by all to be right for students" (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2001, p. 463). When making decisions, school leaders must remember that what is considered to be "right should never ... be justified by power or status" (p. 463). Instead, teachers and administrators should work together to achieve the goals and the direction of the school. This collaborative effort motivates teachers to support policies because they helped make the decisions. A successful school leader realizes that educational excellence can be achieved only with the combined efforts of the entire school community.



*Critical consumer of educational research.*

An educational leader also must be aware of the latest data and research in the field of education. School leaders must recognize the importance of making research-based decisions. Leaders do not have to be experts in every field but they need to know how to interpret basic research. In other words, school leaders should acquire the ability to recognize, understand, and process research in an effort to comprehend its significance for the school environment. Many new approaches to education are introduced each year; it is the responsibility of leaders to ensure quality instructional practices but to guard against adopting the latest fad. Schools that embrace every proposed reform are often referred to as “Christmas tree school” (Fullan, 2001a, p. 35). Christmas tree schools often “glitter from a distance,” but in reality they are “superficially adorned with many decorations, lacking depth and coherence” (p. 36). School leaders must guard against embracing every reform and focus on selecting new approaches that are most compatible with their schools’ philosophy, culture, and educational goals. To achieve this, they must be able to evaluate clearly the quality, the validity, and the applicability of the research.

*Communicator.*

Good communication with the faculty and the school community is another crucial aspect of effective educational leadership. Schools are less likely to embrace collaboration and solve problems if the headmaster or principal does not encourage and model effective communication. In order for this collaboration to work, school leaders must possess a willingness and the ability to listen to others. This concept is best illustrated by Murphy (2000) in what he describes as the “unheroic side of leadership” (p. 114). Murphy explains that the unheroic leader realizes that it is important to listen to

others and acknowledge differing opinions. The heroic leader, on the other hand, is often less open to input. The tendency of the heroic leader is to communicate “forcefully” (p. 115) in an effort to persuade others that in fact he or she does have all of the right answers. Unheroic leaders realize that not everyone in the school community shares their vision and might have different ideas to share. While the input of stakeholders could certainly be recognized by both of these styles of leadership, the unheroic leader is more likely to build a positive school culture. Conversely, the heroic leader is more likely to use stakeholder influence more discriminately to impose his or her beliefs on the school culture.

*Shared leadership.*

Finally, school leadership involves learning how to depend on others in the school community. According to Murphy (2000), the best leaders are those who can effectively delegate and do not try to control every aspect of the decision-making process. He explains that “top administrators in educational organizations are surprisingly dependent on others to bring about change” (p. 122). The heroic leader, on the other hand, attempts to accrue power in an effort to control organizational improvement. In the heroic leader model, organizational improvement is centered on the single-minded vision of the leader, and who is reluctant to share power, or control with others in the school community. School curricula often reflect this difference in leadership style. The unheroic leader will create opportunities for the school community to grow together in open and uninhibited curriculum discussions, while the heroic leader will attempt to control the curriculum as much as possible in an effort to manage the development of the school’s culture. If leaders want uninhibited discussion, they must accept the concept of “one person, one

vote” (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2001, p. 471). In other words, members of the school community share equally in the responsibility for making curriculum decisions. A school leader cannot force his or her will on a group and call it shared governance. Instead, consensus should be reached with all members on equal ground. Effective school leaders ensure that all of the stakeholders have a voice in the decision-making process.

### *Curriculum Leadership*

Within the context of educational leadership, it is important to discuss the role of school leaders in the curriculum development process. A school leader’s approach to curriculum development is often a reflection of one’s educational leadership style. School leaders who involve the stakeholders in educational decisions are likely to practice the same shared governance with curricular decisions. In contrast, school leaders who adopt a hierarchical approach to decision-making, tend to exert similar control over the curriculum development process. Transformative curriculum leaders are inclined to “draw away from a managerial and organizational view of leadership to one that is more ecological as a basis for bringing together personal, cultural, and moral dimensions of curriculum work” (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p.182). Transformative curriculum leadership is an ongoing process, “an extraordinarily complicated conversation” that must be had by all members of the school community on a regular basis (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995, p. 848). Curriculum leadership can be regarded as a transformative, democratic discussion or more of an autocratic, administrative mandate.

### *Inner curriculum versus outer curriculum.*

One way to view the dichotomy that exists in curriculum leadership is through the characterization of the “outer curriculum” and the “inner curriculum” (Brubaker, 2004, p.

20). The distinction between the outer and inner curriculum parallels the broad and varied definitions of curriculum offered earlier in this discussion. The outer curriculum refers to the “culture of curriculum as a course of study,” in which the authority is “located outside the learner (student and teacher) in textbooks, curriculum guides, and courses of study” (p. 20). The outer curriculum is focused on the “transmission of knowledge” (p. 22) and the control is clearly in the hands of administrators. The inner curriculum, on the other hand, refers to “what each person experiences as learning” and is “cooperatively created” (p. 22) by the school community. In this paradigm, all of the stakeholders help construct the learning experience. Curriculum as a course of study is “transformative” and is “simply a springboard for inner curriculum” (p. 22). The responsibility for learning is shared by the learners, and the curriculum is not dictated by the established bureaucracy or power. This approach to curriculum leadership requires from teachers and school leaders a “willingness to experience ambiguity in the learning context” (Breault, 2005, p. 19). Sometimes educators are so concerned with traditions that they are not willing to embrace innovations. Curriculum leaders must remember that while the “inner curriculum is lived,” the “outer curriculum is taken” (Brubaker, 2004, p. 23). Learning must be lived rather than simply prescribed.

*Protecting local curricular needs.*

Another aspect of curricular leadership is protecting the curriculum needs of your school. The individual needs of a school are best served by decisions made on a more local level. Localism is based on two principles; the “principle of subsidiary” and the “principle of mutuality” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 89 & p. 174). The *principle of subsidiary* focuses on local rights and the belief that society should be free from excessive

intervention from the state or larger institutions. The *principle of mutuality* states that interdependence exists between people and institutions and these relationships should be based on mutual benefit. Each local school has distinctive needs, and standardization does not always serve this uniqueness. Schools can be viewed as “cultural artifacts that people struggle to shape in their own image” (p. 2). Therefore, they are very different institutions that reflect the personality of the local community. National and even state level legislation cannot address all of the individual concerns of a local school. Curriculum leaders must resist the threats associated with efforts to standardize education at the cost of local curricular needs.

### *The Role of Parents in Curriculum Development*

The final element in this discussion is the role that parents play in the curriculum development process. There are many questions concerning the influence that parents have on the curriculum of private schools. Do private school leaders placate the needs of the parents for fear that enrollment will be adversely affected if they don't? Are parents significant players in this curriculum development process, or is their involvement superficial? One of the challenges facing curriculum leaders is that the goals of parents do not always coincide with the objectives of the school. Often tensions exist between parents and school leaders because of this difference. Schools as institutions determine what they think is important for young people to know and develop their curriculum to achieve these knowledge domains. Parents also have a presupposition as to what they want their children to learn in schools. Often these educational goals coincide for schools and parents but sometimes they do not, and school leaders must be prepared for these conflicts.

*Parents as Stakeholders*

Parents are important stakeholders in the school community, and their viewpoints should not only be included in curricular discussions, it should be solicited by school leaders (Horowitz, 1995; Schubert, 1986). Certainly the capacities in which parents are involved in schools should be negotiated by school leaders but ultimately parental involvement is crucial for student achievement. Increased parental involvement in schools is considered an important “strategy to advance the effectiveness and improve the quality of education” (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005, p.509). Parents help their children develop “educational outlooks or attitudes” (Schubert, 1986, p. 158) that significantly influence the development of the school’s curriculum. Furthermore, parents help provide for their children “a level of curiosity, a willingness to learn, a sense of discovery, a process for dealing with problems, and a facility with ideas” (p. 158). Consequently, the curriculum of an educational institution directly affects the learning environment and “schools, families, and communities need to collaborate to produce richer learning environments for students” (p. 158). According to Tyler (1949), schools and the family can strengthen each other. School leaders must work with the stakeholders to determine the best curriculum for the school community. With this influence, Tyler also warns that school leaders must be careful to understand reform movements in curriculum. Often, these “across-the-board” (Horowitz, 1995, p 71) changes become popular without leaders truly understanding their significance. Tyler uses the example of the open-classroom movement to illustrate how schools can adopt a program without the basic understanding of its purpose. School leaders must endorse collaboration in the area

of curriculum in order to guard against falling victim to the “latest fad” (p 71) in curriculum development.

Another reality associated with parental involvement in curriculum development is that parents are naturally the most actively concerned community members. Parents have an obvious “vested interest” in their child’s education, and they tend to seek out “direct involvement through formal organizations such as the PTA and through informal communication with a variety of school personnel” (Schubert, 1986, p. 158). School leaders should determine the best way to channel this initiative in the most productive direction for the school community. These parents represent a wealth of talent and energy that is available to the school. Most parent bodies have a diverse group of occupational backgrounds including doctors, lawyers, financial advisors, scientists, laborers and so on. Most school leaders agree that “not only should parents be involved, but they should be involved differentially according to their expertise” (p. 159). The difficult task for school leaders is to determine how to incorporate these stakeholders in a meaningful way.

One challenge that school leaders face with including parents in the discussion about schooling is how to balance their involvement with the autonomy of teaching as a profession. Teaching is different from many professions, and, indeed, there is still a “concern with the idea of promoting the discipline of education to the status of a fully recognized profession” (Gellert, 2005, p. 325). Teachers do not always receive the same level of credibility that other professions enjoy, and, as a result, school leaders are defensive about the curriculum conversation. For the past four decades, school leaders have worked to return the curriculum discussion to the school house (Marshall, et. al., 2007). This struggle for sovereignty adds to the tension of the negotiation process

between parents and schools (Gellert, 2005). Curriculum leaders must work to create a balance between parental input and interference.

### *Parental Influence in Private Schools*

The increase in school choice options, including private schooling, has created a shift in power to the parents who more than ever are taking responsibility for selecting the educational environment for their child. The increased role of parents as players in the educational decision-making process makes the environment even more complex. As a result, there is greater concern that “different types of parents’ values about education will lead to stratification ... in schools” (Schneider, Marschall, Teske, & Roch, 1998, p.489.) Since different groups will have different concerns, the focus of schools could become a divisive issue rather than a source of unity. Parent concerns often differ on such issues as “the academic quality of the school, the racial composition of its student body, the values espoused by the school, and the school’s disciplinary code” (p. 495). When parents weigh the merits of a private school education they bring differing sets of priorities. The reality is that “education is a complex good with many dimensions”; and when parents assess their options, they must attempt to “strike a balance between the different attributes of education that schools represent” (Schneider & Buckley, 2002, p. 141).

“Parents may be more welcome at school than ever before and are perhaps more influential, but they are not part of the educational establishment, which has always resisted when outsiders propose changes that threaten existing relationships” (Cutler, 2000, p.199). School leaders must settle the terms of the relationship that parents will have with the school and establish reasonable boundaries for their involvement. This



negotiation is a careful balance for private school leaders, involving a balance between the mission of the school and the collective educational desires of the parents. If the parents are not happy with the educative mission, the school may face negative repercussions on enrollment. Nothing is more critical to the business side of a private school than filling the seats with students. On the other hand, a school cannot adhere to the demands of every parent who questions the curriculum of the school. These conflicts can be divisive, and school leaders need to know how to successfully mediate these variations in viewpoints.

### *The Context of Private School Expectations*

As discussed in Chapter One, parental expectations exist at every educational institution but certain expectations can be different at private schools. If parents do not believe that a private education is somehow better than a public school education, they are not be willing to pay the additional tuition. One of the tensions facing school leaders rests in the notion that “highly educated parents who are the typical clientele of elite private schools often feel that they have the right to intercede in educational decisions” (Benveniste, et. al., 2003, p. 85). In contrast, teachers “do not consider it the parents’ responsibility or prerogative to make pedagogical determinations” (p. 86). The resulting conflict must be negotiated by school leaders. Obviously, school leaders cannot satisfy every request from parents to individualize the education that is offered. On the other hand, private schools do want to have parents involved as stakeholders and, from a business perspective, need them to be satisfied. In private education, there exists a perception that parents have elevated expectations because of the tuition they pay and that, consequently, these parents have strong beliefs relating to the education of their

children. Parents characterize the role of private school as “that of a service provider that ought to cater to the individual needs of their children” (p. 87). School leaders are faced with finding meaningful, unobtrusive ways for parents to participate in the educative process without alienating the teachers.

This study will help to describe the point of view of teachers from the perspective of educational leaders with regard to parental influences on curricular issues. For example, the research will illustrate the desired level of autonomy that educators desire when given the job of teaching children. Teachers have an underlying “fear that parents could become a disorderly and disruptive force” (Cutler, 2000, p. 32) in what they consider to be school business. Parents as a whole are “personally invested in their children’s learning,” and teachers believe that “they could easily overstep their bounds, trespassing in the domain of educational policy-making” (Cutler, 2000, p. 32). Private school teachers might have increased feelings that parents expect to have greater influence because they pay tuition, and this added financial obligation could result in increased tensions between parents and teachers. As mentioned previously, this study explores these tensions to determine if teachers attribute additional expectations to the tuition that parents in private schools pay.

### *The Effects of Change on School Curriculum*

When parents influence the curriculum of a school, they effect change. Regardless of the motives or scope of the parental influence, the proposed reform results in some degree of change in the school curriculum. Although the efforts of parents are often seen by school administrators and teachers as a threat or, at the very least, complicated, parents are nonetheless attempting to produce change (Fullan, 2001b, p. 197). Regardless

of the source, one constant in any school is change. Despite school leaders' efforts for consistency and stability, schools are always faced with change. Any time a school implements change, there are consequences. Sometimes this change results in a positive outcome for the school community and sometimes a negative one. Change can be seen by a school community as an opportunity to grow, or it can be viewed as threatening to the status quo. It is important to remember that change is "not synonymous with progress," and sometimes "preserving good practices in the face of challenges is a major achievement" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 5). School leaders are faced with the "paradox of change" since they must "balance the status quo" (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 138) while embracing changes that may result in future improvements. Either way, the end result is change, and, ultimately, this has an influence on the school curriculum. A school's curriculum is first established when the institution is founded, but it is then "shaped by critical incidents, forged through controversy and conflict, and crystallized through triumph and tragedy" (p. 49). Since reform efforts and influence are inevitable and have significant impacts on the school, school leaders should be prepared to help the school community deal with change.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to understand what is meant by change. Change is any alteration in policies or procedures that impact any members of the school community. School community members include students, faculty, administrators, staff and parents. In addition, people who live or work in the community are stakeholders in the school and should be considered when decisions are made about the school. Changes can also be made to the school environment. The environment may include the physical landscape or the personalities that make up the school. Changes can

be subtle or considerable, and they can be planned or totally unexpected. No matter what the form, changes have the potential to significantly influence the curriculum.

This paradox of change creates an environment of “great rapidity and nonlinearity on the one hand and equally great potential for creative breakthrough on the other” (Fullan, 2001b, p. 31). In order to break through and realize its potential, schools must take advantage of opportunities to grow. On the other hand, school leaders must involve the different stakeholders in the change process or change will not succeed. Rather than repress resistance, change leaders must remember that “we are more likely to learn something from people who disagree with us than we are from people who agree” (Fullan, 2001a, p. 41). Another contradiction exists in that teachers often desire change yet resist its implementation. In this sense, schools are conservative in their approach to change and often work to maintain the current situation (Evans, 1996). While some dismiss resistance to change as “the result of popular ignorance or institutional inertia,” this simplification may overlook “well-founded reasons for resisting” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 7). School leaders must work to understand the perspectives that teachers and the school’s culture bring to the reform process.

#### *When Change Leads to Conflict*

Change is a difficult process in most circumstances, but perhaps the most difficult environment for change is one where the change leads to conflict. School leaders may decide to implement changes that they know are not going to be widely accepted by the school community. Not only are school leaders faced with trying to convince stakeholders to embrace the change, but many times they have to consider other forces working against the proposed change. Teachers sometimes resist reform elements

“outright or they [make] adaptations” to fit their pedagogy, particularly “when the rhetoric of the changes does not match the realities of their experiences” (Datnow, 2002, p. 223). Established members of the faculty or other community members might try to sabotage the reform efforts. Often times, schools “absorb” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 146) changes rather than embrace them. Rather than attempting to create deep structural change, the school uses existing assumptions and methods when employing the reform. School leaders also often have to sell their constituents on a proposed change that the school leaders may not fully believe in themselves. These differing agendas complicate an already difficult situation and create conflict.

Furthermore, since much conflict results from what is perceived to be negative change, it is necessary to delineate unpopular change from any other form of change. Often a school is required to change policies or procedures that have become engrained in the school culture. These long-standing traditions, whether antiquated or not, are embraced by many members of the school community. Any change in the way that things have been done can result in conflict, especially when the change is seemingly unnecessary or inappropriate. Some changes, on the other hand, are embraced by the stakeholders or even initiated by someone outside the administration. These grassroots changes might not encounter the same level of resistance or conflict, because they are not perceived as compulsory.

Conversely, a reform movement might create conflict between school community members who are not administrators. Teachers might feel strongly about a change that parents or students do not want to implement. These types of change could create a conflict among different stakeholders, leaving the school leaders to resolve the issue. The

faculty may resent the involvement of the parents and question why the school leaders do not stand up to them. Regardless of the origin or the motivation behind reforms, the response elicited is frequently dichotomous; “change raises hope because it offers growth and progress – but it also stirs fear because it challenges competence and power, creates confusion and conflict and risks the loss of continuity and meaning” (Evans, 1993, p. 20). School change is often messy and complex, but this tension is necessary for successfully achieving actual change (Fullan, 2003). School leaders are left to negotiate these tensions, and their success or failure can result in a positive or negative influence on the school community.

### *Negotiating the Conflict*

School leaders are faced with negotiating the tensions that exist between parents and private schools surrounding curriculum issues. Conflict is seen as “inevitable, endemic, and often legitimate” (Owens, 1998, p. 232) in nature and exists on numerous levels in every type of institution. School leaders should look for ways to promote the individuality and diversity that exist within a school community as they negotiate these differences (Smith & Blase, 1988). Rather than suppressing conflict, school leaders must understand that conflict can result in improvement for the educational community. Effective change leaders work to create an environment of support that includes all stakeholders. Through this collaborative effort, the school community works together to improve the educational environment, which allows the school to address “problems not as weaknesses but as issues to be solved” (Fullan, 2000, p. 160). In this capacity, leadership focus should be on “reculturing” rather than “restructuring” (p. 161). Restructuring simply “refers to changes in the formal structure of schooling in terms of

organization, timetables, roles, and the like” (p. 161) Reculturing, on the other hand, refers to “changing the norms, values, incentives, skills, and relationships in the organization” (p. 161) to reinvent the way people in the school community relate to one another. Reculturing is based on relationships and, as a result, it is quite an emotional process. The leader becomes emotionally involved with the school community, its successes and its failures. Leaders who successfully manage their emotions focus on the school and the task at hand. This, according to Fullan, helps to “contain anxiety” (p. 161) associated with the reform process.

Schools have established educative missions, and parents presumably know these goals when they enroll their children. At the same time, schools should be responsive to the needs of the parents and children that they serve. Parents are a valuable resource and should not be alienated (Schubert, 1986). Furthermore, the influence of all stakeholders, including parents can add to the curriculum of a school. School leaders do have to be cautious, though, to not agree to every request by parents and lose sight of the objectives of the school. School leaders do not want to legitimize every concern relating to the curriculum or parents will think that they have direct influence on the courses of study (Gellert, 2005). A certain degree of continuity is necessary to be successful and prevent identity crisis. School leaders who assent to every desire of the parents are going to lose favor with the faculty; as a result, the culture of the school will suffer. This study sheds light on these issues and offers practical suggestions for private school leaders attempting to negotiate the tensions relating to the influence of parents on the curriculum of their schools.

### *Summary of the Literature*

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature surrounding the main research question for this study; *how do school leaders respond to the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools?* In an effort to ground my study in existing educational research, I constructed my analysis around the fundamental issues relating to the research questions. These issues include the overall purpose of education, the curriculum development process in schools, the role of educational leadership in the curriculum development process, and the influence of parents on the school curriculum.

The purposes of education in the United States are diverse and, public and private schools often have similar goals. Ultimately, the roles of schooling in this country include teaching democratic principles, promoting economic success and ensuring national security. Despite the common goals of education, school choice has been increasingly popular preserving private schools as a viable option for many families. The reasons for families to seek a private education are varied and include factors like religious beliefs, social status, safety concerns, college options, academic offerings, pedagogical philosophies and class size. The types of parents searching for educational options are equally diverse in regard to religion, socio-economic status, family structure and demographic characteristics.

Once the goals of education in the United States and the role of private schooling are understood, the conversation shifts to curriculum concerns. For the purposes of this investigation, curriculum is defined broadly. Curriculum includes the traditional program of study, but learning goes well beyond the classroom. Curriculum is viewed as a set of



experiences that students are exposed to and participate in throughout their formal school years. The curriculum includes a diverse collection of disciplines that are expressed through a variety of mediums. In addition to the course offered, curriculum includes such areas as the arts, athletics, community service learning, character development programs, school assemblies, and even modeled behaviors. During this investigation, anything that is educative is considered part of the curriculum of the school.

The next consideration in this discussion is the role of school leaders, and more specifically curriculum leaders, in the curriculum-development process. School leaders are faced with negotiating the influence of the stakeholders on the curriculum. Within the context of educational leadership, teacher leaders are considered as well as conventional school leaders. Regardless of the participants' leadership capacity, certain common qualities benefit school leaders as they negotiate curriculum concerns, including interpersonal skills, establishment of trust, use of power, consumption of educational research, communication and listening skills, and ability to involve others in the leadership process.

The other critical stakeholders in this discourse are the parents. Parents often have different ideas from those of schools on what the curriculum should encompass. Additionally, parents in private schools have different expectations about the level of influence they should be entitled to regarding the curriculum. Parents have a vested interest in the school, and as stakeholders they should have a voice. In private schools, the fact that parents pay tuition and have a choice about where to send their children to school increases their level of expectation for influence. School leaders, on the other hand, believe that the school has an educative mission and that parents should not expect

the mission of the school to adapt to their individual needs. When parents exude influence in schools, school leaders do not always agree, often resulting in tensions often result. School leaders are then faced with negotiating these tensions.

When parents endeavor to influence the curriculum of the school, the resulting change or ensuing conflict directly affects the school. Reform in schools is inevitable, and the potential for conflict is unavoidable. School leaders should be prepared to help the school community deal with these challenges. The critical purpose of this study is to better understand how private school leaders negotiate the curricular tensions that exist between parents and schools.

#### *Preview of Next Chapter*

In Chapter Three, I detail the methodology I adopted for this research study. I explain the rationale for my methods and describe the curriculum framework through which I conducted the research. I also outline the research questions and describe the setting surrounding the three private schools included in this multiple-site case study design. Through this qualitative research approach, I gained an understanding of the contributions of different stakeholders in the curriculum development process and the leadership qualities evident during this collaboration.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Introduction*

As discussed in specific detail in chapters 1 and 2, the overall purpose of this study was to create an understanding of how school leaders effectively negotiate the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools. Every school has an educational mission and a curriculum designed to help achieve that mission. At the same time, parents who send their children to private schools generally agree with the educative mission of that school. Nevertheless, sometimes parents and school leaders disagree on their respective perceptions or interpretations of how the educational mission should be achieved - or, more to the point, how the educational mission applies to their children. This study investigated how school leaders negotiate the tensions that exist between the different stakeholders in the private school setting. Specifically, I examined the relationship between the parents who send their children to private schools and the educational leaders responsible for the school curriculum.

In this chapter I will outline the details of the methodology I adopted for this research study. I will also explain the rationale for my methodology and describe the curriculum framework through which I viewed the research. After discussing the research questions and setting, I will set forth how I negotiated access to the three schools I

researched. I will describe next my role as the researcher, my data collection plan, my use of triangulation and my data management plan. Finally, I will establish guidelines for the interpretation and the dissemination of my results. The context for this study was the milieu surrounding the three private schools that I investigated. Using a multiple-site case study design, I explored the contributions from the different stakeholders in the curriculum development process and the leadership qualities evident during this collaboration. This information will be invaluable to the literature base of Educational Leadership as well as to individual curriculum leaders, in both public and private settings, as they traverse the often competing agendas of different stakeholders.

### *Methods*

In an effort to construct the knowledge and understanding that is needed to better understand the influence of parents on private schools' curriculum, I conducted a multiple-site case study design with a variety of embedded units of analysis in an effort to enhance the internal and external validity of the findings. Although utilizing a multi-site approach, the study is "intrinsically bounded" (Merriam, 1998, p. 27) by the three schools included in the research. These schools: Hampton Hills Academy, Pine Valley School, and Copper Mountain Christian School. The study encompassed only the Upper Schools at each of these institutions and took place over the period of one academic semester. The three schools in the case study were purposefully selected, for each school offered a unique educational environment and curriculum. While all three of these schools have adopted a college-preparatory curriculum, each one has a different approach to education that reflects the mission of the school and the goals of the parents who send their children there.

*Rationale for Methodology*

As discussed in Chapter One, the research approach of this study was framed by a qualitative methodology. I chose this approach to construct an understanding of the dynamics of parental influences on curriculum in private schools. I used the data collected from these case studies to describe how educational leaders negotiate the tensions that develop between parental expectations and a school's curricular mission. This qualitative methodology was intended to provide "well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts" that can often "lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1).

Throughout this multiple-site case study, I used the qualitative data gathered to shape meaning from the research. Through inductive inquiry, I allowed the experiences of the informants to constitute the knowledge (Merriam, 1998, p. 4). I built this study around the context of the social interactions of the stakeholders in the three schools. The themes that were developed are based upon the current and past knowledge of my informants. This holistic approach was concerned with observing "people's constructions of reality – how they understand the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 203). As the researcher, I listened to the informants in an attempt to "understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). Furthermore, as I weighed the knowledge surrounding the influence of parents on the curriculum on private schools, I emphasized that I cannot separate the research from my own personal beliefs and values (Mertens, 2005).

This case study design incorporated both sociological and historical aspects, as I examined the schools' curricula and the potential influence of parents on these evolving educational programs. Because this was a sociological case study, I attempted to understand the influence of society on the research and the context of the settings (Merriam, 1998). I focused on societal issues surrounding schools, such as parental interests and their impact on the curriculum of the three schools in the study. I paid close attention to demographics, social roles, social institutions and the community. In addition, since I was looking at historical information, such as significant changes that have been made to the curriculum, I interviewed the people who were involved with the past events (Yin, 2003).

#### *A Curriculum Framework*

In this study I used curriculum as the framework through which I examined the data. While the conceptual framework of curriculum conflict was first introduced in Chapter One, the foundations of this curriculum framework were constructed in Chapter Two utilizing the existing literature surrounding the research questions. From the outset, I organized the research, data analysis, findings and discussion around a structure of curriculum. I used this framework to better understand how the results of this multiple-site case study fit into the broader discussion relating to curriculum development. This curriculum framework provided direction and guidance as I researched the influence of parents on the curriculum of private schools.

#### *The Guiding Research Question*

The guiding research question for this study was simply *how do school leaders respond to the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools?*

### *The Research Questions*

In order to determine how school leaders negotiate differences in curriculum expectations between parents and private secondary schools, the following three research questions were explored through conversations and observations at the three targeted institutions:

1. How do parents influence the curriculum development process?
2. How do school leaders' ideas about curriculum differ from the parents' curriculum ideas?
3. How do school leaders negotiate these differences in the curriculum development process?

### *The Research Setting*

The three schools chosen for this case study represented a diverse sampling of private schools in a large metropolitan area. While these three schools share many of the same educative goals, they differed in the ways in which they approach these goals and in the number of years they have been in existence. The research settings chosen for his multi-site case study deliberately covered the “contextual conditions” that are surrounding the phenomenon (Yin, 2003, p. 13). The three schools in the study are briefly described in the following sections and will be described in greater detail in Chapter Four.

### *Hampton Hills Academy*

Hampton Hills Academy has a traditional college preparatory curriculum geared towards students with the highest intellectual aptitude. Founded as a Christian school, Hampton Hills has been in existence since 1951. The school is located in an urban area, just outside a major metropolitan area. The school's mission states that "Hampton Hills is a Christian, independent day school for boys and girls, which seeks to develop the whole person for college and for life through excellent education" (school web site). The Upper School curriculum offers twenty-seven Advanced Placement courses and a variety of honors and college preparatory classes. For the 2007-2008 school year the SAT range for the middle 50 % of the senior class was 1900–2210 out of a possible 2400. The faculty includes 106 faculty members; 81 % of them hold advanced degrees (school web site).

Hampton Hills Academy had an enrollment of 792 students in grades nine through twelve for the 2007- 2008 school year. The tuition for students enrolled in the Upper School is \$18,000 a year. In addition, 12% of the student body received financial aid – an average grant of \$9,200 – in 2007-2008. The endowment for Hampton Hills Academy, as of June 30, 2007, was \$229,000,000 and constituted 35 % of the school's budget (school web site).

### *Pine Valley School*

Pine Valley School, founded in 1971, has adopted a more liberal curriculum that reflects the progressive philosophy of the school. The current headmaster of Pine Valley School founded the school thirty-five years ago. The school is located in an urban area, just outside a major metropolitan area. While Pine Valley does not have a mission per se, "Pine Valley's philosophy is based on the belief that schools can be informal and



individualized, yet still educate well. The school offers a challenging curriculum that emphasizes individual achievement. Pine Valley has excellent programs in the fine and performing arts, sports and community service” (school web site). The Upper School curriculum offers nine Advanced Placement courses and a variety of honors and college preparatory classes. While the school does not advertise SAT scores for its students, 29 % of the class of 2008 was recognized by the National Merit program based on PSAT test results. The faculty includes ninety-nine full-time faculty members and twenty-six part-time teachers; 74 % of them hold advanced degrees (school web site).

Pine Valley School had an enrollment of 396 students in grades nine through twelve for the 2007- 2008 school year. Tuition for students enrolled in the Upper School is \$16,863 per year for students in grades nine through eleven and \$17,063 per year for students in the twelfth grade. A need-based financial aid program funded 110 students in the 2007-2008 school year. A total of \$1,249,461 was spent in 2007-2008 on financial aid, with financial aid awards ranging from 8 – 99 %. The endowment for Pine Valley School was \$17.7 million as of June 2008 (school web site).

#### *Copper Mountain Christian School*

The third school in this case study, Copper Mountain Christian School, was founded in 1989 as a non-denominational Christian preparatory school. Copper Mountain Christian School has seen a great deal of growth in the past two decades, and its curriculum has evolved along the way. The school is located in a suburban area, just outside a major metropolitan area. The mission of the school is “to honor Jesus Christ by equipping college-bound students to become lifelong servant leaders in their communities and in the world” (school web site). The Upper School curriculum offers eight Advanced

Placement courses and a variety of honors and college preparatory classes. The average SAT score for students at Copper Mountain Christian School was 1718 out of a possible 2400 in the 2007-2008 school year. The Upper School faculty includes thirty members; the school did not advertise data on the percentage of the faculty with advanced degrees.

The Copper Mountain Christian School had an enrollment of 228 students in grades nine through twelve for the 2007- 2008 school year. Tuition for students in the Upper School is \$11,310 per year. A need-based financial aid program is available at the Copper Mountain Christian School. According to their web site, “Copper Mountain has limited funding available to offer financial assistance, up to a maximum of 50 % tuition, to those families who can demonstrate objective financial need” (school web site). The endowment for the Copper Mountain Christian School was only \$130,000 as of June 2008.

### *Selection of Schools*

I chose these three private schools and the leaders to interview at each school based on specific criteria. “Nonprobability,” *purposeful sampling* was utilized to create a sample from “which the most [could] be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). The selection of the three schools rests in “grounded theory” through the use of “maximum variation” sampling, which provided “widely varying instances of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 62). By selecting three schools that offer different educative missions and developmental philosophies, the varied segments of the private school community could be represented in the study. Table 1 provides a brief comparison of the three schools:

Table 1

*Comparison of Schools in Study*

	Hampton Hills	Pine Valley	Copper Mountain Christian
Established	1951	1971	1989
Mission	Christian	Progressive	Christ-centered
	College Prep	College Prep	College Prep
Location	Urban	Urban	Suburban
AP Courses	27	9	8
SAT Scores	1900-2210/2400	n/a	1718/2400
Enrollment	792	388	228
Tuition	\$18,000	\$16,863	\$11,310
Endowment	\$229 million	\$17.7 million	\$130,000

*Negotiating Entry*

Although I am employed at a comparable private school, I had to negotiate access to the three private schools in order to conduct my research. The first point of entry was through the presidents or headmasters of each of the schools. Unlike public school systems that have a formal procedure for obtaining access to schools in their district, private schools generally do not have established guidelines for researchers to follow. Despite this lack of a formal process for educational research, the leaders of private schools in this study asked that I explicitly spell out the technical aspects of the research in advance. This initial approval process was completed to the satisfaction of the school heads before any research was conducted. While these procedures were informal, the

school leaders still wanted to understand the research in order to ensure the privacy of their students, teachers and other constituents.

Once access had been granted from each headmaster's office, I secured permission from the administrators and stakeholders in each Upper School. In each case, I contacted the Upper School principal because he or she served as the gatekeeper. I found that if gatekeepers are supporters of one's research, one is more likely to be supported throughout the study by others in the school. I knew that it was essential to develop rapport with all of the people I wanted to interview or observe and with those who controlled the access to informants. Since I initially obtained permission from the headmasters of each of the schools and not from the individual Upper School principals, I realized that it was possible a gatekeeper would not want me to have access to his or her school. School leaders could have seen this study as an intrusion. In addition, since I am employed by a rival private school, many informants and school leaders could have considered my research a threat. Furthermore, any research in the private school sector that focuses on the perceptions of parents can be a sensitive subject. Because informants and school leaders might have considered my research subject threatening, I needed to be aware of the potential for resentment or suspicion and the possibility of negative or biased perceptions.

### *The Researcher's Role*

As the researcher, I served as the "primary research tool" in this study and was deliberately "responsive to the context" (Merriam, 1998, p. 7) of the case. Through a qualitative approach, I endeavored to "describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205) without my biases intruding. Furthermore,

the sociological perspective that I presented allowed the reader to enter into the distinct world of the three schools.

Throughout the study my role was as “observer as participant,” (Merriam, 1998, p. 101) since my activities and role were clearly stated to all informants at the outset. I also ensured that I did not spend an inordinate amount of time in any one of the three schools. Regardless of the quality of the descriptive data being collected at a particular site, I found that it was important to spend an equal amount of time in each school during the semester. In addition, my role as a participant in the schools remained secondary to my role as an observer. As a participant observer, I had extensive access to a wide range of data; but ultimately, my primary purpose was to gather information.

Although there were guiding questions for this study, the procedure and protocol that I employed were allowed to change as determined by where the research led. I allowed the research process to evolve and constructed the meaning around the data. As a researcher, I gained a “tolerance for ambiguity,” developed a certain degree of “sensitivity,” and became a “good communicator” (Merriam, 1998, p. 20). A *tolerance for ambiguity* provided a more interpretive narrative of Hampton Hills Academy, Pine Valley School, and Copper Mountain Christian School. I also learned to be sensitive to the context of the study and the multitude of variables that make up the three schools in the study. I was not interested in controlling the plethora of variables that exist in the culture of the schools. This *sensitivity* permits the variables simply to exist and become part of the study. As the researcher, I allowed this study to adapt to the social context of the school communities. I also believe that a crucial part of the researcher’s role is to be a

*good communicator*. Throughout the study, I worked to establish good rapport with my informants. Being a good listener allowed me to construct their stories.

### *Data Collection Plan*

For data collection, I relied on multiple sources of data to create a comprehensive portrait of the schools involved in the study. Rather than adopt one specific data-collection strategy, I tried to “seek a coign of vantage” that allowed me to “draw on whatever combination of strategies seem appropriate” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 89) for the environment. I used documents, artifacts, observations and interviews to better understand the context relating to the influence of parents on private schools’ curriculum and the affect on the school communities (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). Since my research was limited to a school year, I also sought and utilized historical data. Historical data sources, such as past issues concerning parents and curricular discussions, were helpful in understanding the milieu of the problem. The influence of parents on private schools’ curriculum has been ongoing, and these particular school communities have been negotiating these conflicts for years. In addition, I researched school documents, including mission statements, curriculum guides and graduation requirements. Additional sources of data collection included school publications, memorandums, documents, parent or teacher newsletters, and information on the schools’ web sites.

For this study, I also conducted observations and interviews to better understand the context surrounding the influence of parents on private schools’ curriculum. The use of personal interviews gave the respondents an opportunity to describe their personal perspective on parental influences on curriculum and school leadership without the constraints of standard responses associated with a survey. The data collected from the

personal interviews was used in conjunction with document analysis to portray an environment conducive to successful parental involvement. Throughout the interview process at all three schools, “the criterion for judging when to stop sampling the different groups pertinent to a category is the category’s theoretical saturation” (Glasser & Strauss, 1999, p. 61). The *saturation* point was evident when I began to see the same results over and over again. At this point, I concluded that additional interviews would not reap new data.

### *Selecting Cases*

The three schools chosen for this study are very different schools. As mentioned previously, each represented a unique case study. At the same time, however, there was a degree of consistency among these schools that helps ensure typicality. All three are private schools with college preparatory curriculums and represent typical cases. I identified these particular schools with the help of informed individuals and through an examination of their demographic and programmatic data (Mertens, 2005). This information suggested that the three schools chosen for this study were indeed typical.

### *Selecting Informants*

For this study, I looked for informants who were active in the development and evolution of the schools’ curriculum. This type of “purposeful sampling” provided a “unique sample” (Merriam, 1998, p. 62) that represents a group of informants. I also utilized “network” (Merriam, 1998, p. 63) sampling by asking participants to recommend other informants for my research. I started my interviews at each of the three schools with the headmaster of the schools and the principal of each of the Upper Schools. Through a purposeful sampling approach, I used a “snowballing” (Seidman, 2006, p. 55) technique

to identify additional participants. I asked the school leaders whom I interviewed initially to help identify other participants who should be interviewed. Using this snowballing approach, I made certain that I interviewed the people who possessed information integral to this study (Mertens, 2005).

I interviewed five school leaders at each of the three schools, conducting two, approximately one-hour interviews with each person over the period of one semester. I also had numerous opportunities to observe these participants and other stakeholders in the school community at each of the three schools. As cited earlier in this report, the more "grand-tour," (Spradley, 1979, p. 7) global interview questions listed in appendix A served as a starting point for the initial interviews, but I also used follow-up questions to probe the participant responses. Furthermore, I created my second set of interview questions based on the responses from my first interviews. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to clarify the details of the participant's experiences and to add context to the meaning of their responses (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). These "structural" and "contrasting" (Spradley, 1979, p. 155) questions helped me to discern meaning from an individual informant's responses. These *structural* and *contrasting* questions are listed in appendix B. Finally, I asked each school headmaster if there were occasions or documents reflecting the influence of parents on the school's curriculum that would help triangulate my results.

I also established a clear "chain of evidence," and had "key informants review draft case study reports" (Yin, 2003, p. 34) during the data collection process to ensure validity. These procedures were conducted "continuously throughout the study" (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). The research steps used in this multiple-site case study were



clearly outlined and traceable for increased reliability. I also asked key informants to look over the data and my conclusions to offer additional comments. I reviewed my findings and initial analysis with the school curriculum leaders to confirm my preliminary understandings related to the influence of parents on private school curricula.

Another example of the specific data collection that occurred during the study involved my observations of the relationship between school leaders and stakeholders. I explored how school leaders negotiate the potential tensions that exist between teachers and parents. The study purposefully observed the relationships between school leaders, teachers and parents to determine what tensions exist, why they exist and how school leaders negotiate these tensions. I used observations throughout the study that did not rely on the “question-and-answer format” of an interview, but rather allowed the “interaction within the group” that helped “elicit more of the participants’ points of view” (Mertens, 2005, p. 245). I was interested in observing the behaviors of school leaders as they “naturally occur in terms that appear to be meaningful to the people involved” (Mertens, 2005, p. 382). The use of observations helped demonstrate how school leaders interact, showing both agreements and disagreements, and how they build consensus. The interactions between school leaders and stakeholders added insight to the research that may not be evident in personal interviews. Table 2 summarizes the data collection strategies for each of the research questions. While these data collection strategies evolved with the study, the table delineates the preliminary plan for data collection.

### *Triangulation*

As mentioned previously, I *triangulated* my research with the use of documents, artifacts, interviews and observations. The triangulation of my data helped to “encourage

convergent lines of inquiry” (Yin, 2003, p. 36) and ensure the validity and reliability of my study. Since I was the only researcher in this case study, I did not use multiple investigators to confirm my findings as I progressed. However, my use of multiple methods of data collection strengthened the validity and reliability of the research.

Table 2

*Data Collection Strategies*

Research Questions:	Data Collection Strategies:
<p>1. How do parents influence the curriculum development process?</p> <p>2. How do school leaders’ ideas about curriculum differ from the parents’ curriculum ideas?</p> <p>3. How do school leaders negotiate these differences in the curriculum development process?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview school curriculum leaders</li> <li>• Observe interactions of school leaders with parents and teachers</li> <li>• Explore documents from school leaders to parents and teachers</li> <li>• Examine artifacts displayed in schools</li> </ul>

*Data Management Plan*

Because I was collecting a tremendous amount of data by myself over the course of the school year, I realized from the outset it was essential to create a system for

organizing this data. In order to manage my data efficiently, I began coding and indexing from the very beginning. From the outset, I defined “clear categories” for the data that I used to organize an “explicit structure” to help manage the information (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 45). Although this initial coding scheme evolved, I saw from the beginning that it was critical to record information pertaining to the context of the collected data. For example, pseudonyms were assigned to each person interviewed and the date and place of the interviews noted. Pagination techniques, such as “using unique numbers or letters as locators,” (p. 45) were used to keep my field notes and observations organized.

I used observer comments and self-memos to make sure that important information was not lost over time. No effort was made to keep these “speculations” separate, but rather they were “interwoven” (Merriam, 1998, p. 165) with the raw data. The actual data was initially managed by a combination of handwritten notes, word processing documents and basic Excel spreadsheets to keep the information organized. All field notes and interviews were transcribed with a hard copy and a back-up file on the computer. Once this rudimentary analysis began to develop and the saturation point was reached, the data collection process ceased and the analysis process continued exclusively. Finally, I utilized Atlas.ti, a computer software program, to assist with the coding and organization of these data. While Atlas.ti has the capability to aid in the actual data analysis, I did not employ this aspect of the software.

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis component of this research study was simply to make sense of the data that had been collected and to answer the guiding research question. I used the

descriptive data to establish my findings and to construct meaning from the study. Since this is a multiple case design, I utilized both “within-case” as well as “cross-case” data analysis (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). I initially examined each of the three schools involved in the study as a separate entity. The individual analysis of the three schools is outlined in Chapter Four, using the qualitative technique of portraiture to describe the environment of each of the research settings. This *within-case* analysis created a comprehensive individual context for the three schools. I then used *cross-case* analysis to build abstractions across the three schools. During the data analysis process, I examined the “typicality” of the case study to determine how typical the influence of parents on the curriculum is at the three schools in the study (Merriam, 1998, pp. 211-212). This approach allowed me to compare my data from one situation to the next; furthermore, it should allow the reader to make comparisons to his or her own school.

This case study is also characterized by its “particularistic,” “descriptive,” and “heuristic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29) qualities. As a *particularistic* case study, it focuses on the “particular situation, event, program or phenomenon,” (p. 29) surrounding private schools. The case study is *descriptive* as a result of the thorough, detailed research. Finally, the *heuristic* qualities of the research bring new meaning to the “reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (p. 29). Rather than following a rigid step-by-step approach to data analysis, I employed a *heuristic* method that allows the meaning to evolve through trial and error and helps explain the reasons for the problem.

#### *Validity, Reliability, and Credibility*

As a qualitative researcher, I am responsible for ensuring that this study was valid, reliable, and credible. The triangulation of my data helped to ensure both validity

and reliability. I achieved triangulation by collecting data from multiple sources, including interviews, observations and documents. Despite the desire to triangulate my research, I did allow for inconsistencies and the existence of multiple realities within my sources (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In addition to triangulation, I also used member-checks throughout the study to ensure internal reliability. I took data and my preliminary understandings of that data back to the participants to see if these results were credible. I summarized the initial data collected for the respondents to make sure that my interpretations appropriately reflected their beliefs (Mertens, 2005). In this research study, I paid close attention to the processes to ensure that appropriate procedures were followed. I constructed my interviews to be both reliable and valid; I made sure that the content of the interviews, observations and documents were properly analyzed; and I ensured that my conclusions and assertions were based on the data (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

#### *Transferability and Limitations*

The results of this data analysis include a multi-site case study, assertions regarding research questions and findings, a framework to understand how school leaders negotiate parental expectations, and recommendations for research and practice. The multi-site case study that results from this research provides the reader with an “extensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture” (Mertens, 2005, p. 256) surrounding the three schools. Consequently, the reader has enough detail to determine if the case studies in this research are transferable to his or her situations. This transferability helps ensure external validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In addition to these case studies, the research results in assertions that provide “information that allows the

readers to reconsider their knowledge of the case or even to modify existing generalizations about such cases” (Merriam, 1998, p. 244). Not least, the research provides a “higher-order synthesis in the form of a descriptive picture, patterns or themes, or emerging or substantive theory” (Mertens, 2005, p. 422). These results construct a framework that school leaders can use to better understand how to negotiate parental expectations.

The use of this multi-site case study design helps to strengthen the external validity of the study and consequently the transferability (Yin, 1994). Consumers of this research have enough information to determine if the assertions and findings are transferable to their own situation, but each reader is responsible for making this determination (Mertens, 2005). The reader must understand the limitations associated with this study and acknowledge that the results are unique to the research setting. For example, the findings from this study are limited to private Upper Schools in a metropolitan area. While a school leader from public elementary school in a rural area might find the results interesting, he or she must consider the contextual differences.

### *Confidentiality and Ethics*

In order to ensure confidentiality, I had all informants in this study sign consent forms before interviews or observations took place. A copy of the informed consent agreement is provided in appendix D. I also sought permission to record all of my interviews, and I used member-checks to ensure internal validity. I also used pseudonyms, both for people and places throughout this research. The headmasters will know which schools I have studied; however, I knew that it was essential to keep the identities of the informants confidential, especially those of teachers and school leaders.

Informants needed to be able to respond candidly about the influence of parents on curriculum in private schools without fearing for their job security.

I found that the best way to defend against having my biases influence my findings entailed “clarifying [my] assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). I outlined the curriculum framework used for this study at the beginning and worked to stay neutral throughout the process, not allowing my thoughts on parental influence on curriculum issues to interfere with my research or findings. Since I was the primary instrument for data collection, I understood that it was critical to control my biases and that any “biases that cannot be controlled [should be] discussed in the written report” (Merriam, 1998, p. 216). In addition, my participatory mode of research required “involving participants in all phases of research from conceptualizing the study to writing up the findings” (1998, p. 204).

#### *Guidelines and Issues for Interpretation of Results*

Since my research utilized *typicality*, and *multi-site designs*, the external validity was ensured and the results could be used by other school leaders to better understand their situations. As mentioned previously, during the data analysis process I described how typical the influence of parents is on the curriculum at the three schools in the study. In addition to allowing comparisons in the research from one situation to the next, this approach should allow the reader to make comparisons to his or her own situation (Merriam, 1998). This approach also should allow school leaders to make informed decisions about the influence of parents on the curriculum of private schools. Although I expected similar themes to be constructed from the three schools in my study, I knew it was important to examine each school as a separate, embedded unit of analysis as well as

a component of a more holistic view. There were aspects of parental influences on curriculum that work better or worse in each school, because each is a unique institution with a unique context. I guarded against any preconceived notions about the role that parents play in the development of the curriculum at private schools as I constructed the meaning of the study. I could not allow my biases or any perceived negativity from a school leader's perspective to interfere with my interpretation of the results.

Although the results from this multiple site case study of Hampton Hills Academy, Pine Valley School, and Copper Mountain Christian School did not prove anything about the actual influence of parents on the curriculum of private schools, the findings should allow school leaders to make an educated decision about the role that parents play in the development of the curriculum. The qualitative approach and the inductive reasoning used in this study helped to construct the meaning of the influence of parents on the curriculum in the specific communities of Hampton Hills Academy, Pine Valley School, and Copper Mountain Christian School. The conclusions from the research may be helpful for leaders in other private schools when faced with negotiating the tensions that exist between parents and their school concerning curriculum issues.

#### *Guidelines for Dissemination of Results*

Upon the conclusion of my research, I will disseminate these data relating to the influence of parents on the curriculum of private schools and the significance of these data to the three schools involved in the study. This information will be transmitted both in written and oral fashion. Since my research was conducted through a multiple case study design, the written report will be in a narrative format with a set of open-ended questions. Each question will have answers drawn from these data for each of the cases



involved in the study. This format will allow the readers to “examine the answers to the same question or questions within each case study to begin making cross-case comparisons” (Merriam, 1998, p. 236). The cross-case analysis will allow the readers to look at each case independently and in combination. In addition, I will present the information from the written report to the school leaders to provide a direct insight into what was uncovered in the research.

After the school leaders have been briefed, I will offer to make additional presentations for the individual school communities involved in the study or for the administrators responsible with negotiating the tensions that exist between parents and schools relating to curriculum issues. The schools in the study also might ask to publish the results of the study or to conduct open meetings with the stakeholders in the school community to share the findings. The schools involved with the study, however, also might choose not to share the conclusions on this sensitive topic directly with their parents or teachers. The information might prove more useful to the school leaders who are faced with negotiating these sometimes tumultuous relationships. Finally, the knowledge gained from the research in these three schools could be useful to other private schools interested in understanding the complex relationship between parents and private schools when dealing with curriculum concerns. I will explore publishing the study in professional journals or presenting the results at conferences.

#### *Preview of Next Chapter*

In Chapter Four, I use the qualitative technique of portraiture to describe each of the three schools in the study. Since this is a multiple case design, I utilized both “within-case” as well as “cross-case” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178) data analysis. I first examined

each of the three schools as a separate entity. This *within-case* analysis creates a comprehensive individual context for the three schools. Later, in Chapter Five, I use *cross-case* analysis to build abstractions across the three schools. This chapter focuses on the research findings and the analysis of the data. I outline the three case studies explored in this investigation and their results. As previously noted, the data analysis component of this research study focuses on constructing the knowledge surrounding the research problem. I used the descriptive narratives to establish my findings and to create meaning from the study. Ultimately, these results will help construct an understanding of how private school leaders negotiate the tensions that exist between the different stakeholders relating to the development of the school's curriculum.

## CHAPTER 4

### PORTRAITURE

#### A Portrait of the Schools

To further describe the research setting, this chapter creates a portrait of the three schools in the multi-site case study. Pioneered by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), portraiture is a technique used in qualitative research that helps researchers describe the culture and aesthetic qualities of their research environment. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot, portraiture allows the researcher to “blur the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (1997, p. xv). While portraiture as a methodology can be quite extensive, this chapter utilizes an adapted version of portraiture to provide a sufficiently detailed picture of each school in the case studies. The context of the research setting is depicted through a “vivid description of the geography, the demography, the neighborhood, and a detailed documentation of the physical characteristics of the place that evokes all the senses – visual, auditory, tactile” (1997, p. 44). The purpose of this modified portraiture is for the reader to be “transported into the setting” (1997, p. 45).

The three schools included in this multi-site case study offer a diverse representation of private schools in a major metropolitan area. While these three schools share many of the same educative goals, they differ in the way they approach these goals based on their mission, institutional identity, and number of years they have been in existence. The culture and character of the three schools are illustrated by the mission and

self-identity of the school, the physical environment, the learning environment, and the expectations of parents. In addition, these school portraits examine the demographics of the families who send their children to the school along with the related financial commitments and resources of the schools.

### *Hampton Hills Academy*

As I traveled the major interstate leading to Hampton Hills, I was distracted by the frenzied pace of the ever-present city traffic. After exiting the highway and making a couple of quick turns, I found myself at the entrance to the school. Immediately the scenery changed from the chaos of the morning commute just a few hundred yards away to an almost pastoral retreat. Hampton Hills was busy, too, with students and teachers pouring into the parking lots and rushing off to start their days. However, the feel was much different. There was a sense of purpose and fervor among both the students and the teachers as they settled into their academic adventure for the day. Everyone I observed appeared content and eager to be at school. Students were congregating in the common areas, chatting about their eventful lives as the teachers engaged in collegial conversations in the hallways. The collective level of enthusiasm was intoxicating.

On my initial trip to the campus, I was warmly greeted by the consummate administrative assistant whom I felt I already knew from our numerous e-mail conversations in advance of my visit. Not surprisingly, she presented me with a detailed agenda for my day typed out on a note card emblazoned with the school's letterhead. This attention to detail typified the mode of operation at Hampton Hills. After accepting a cup of coffee, I perused the numerous publications strewn across the table in the main office

as I awaited my escort to the first interview. As I soon found out, most everything at Hampton Hills was orchestrated in this manner.

The brochures were first-rate, rivaling any professionally produced magazine. Parents who picked them up instantly would want their child to have the opportunities illustrated by these pictures and exciting prose. The materials detailed the rich tradition of Hampton Hills Academy. Established in 1951 as a Christian school and located in an urban area just outside a major metropolitan city, Hampton Hills has a traditional college-preparatory curriculum geared towards students with the highest intellectual aptitude. The school's mission states that, "Hampton Hills is a Christian, independent day school for boys and girls, which seeks to develop the whole person for college and for life through excellent education" (school web site).

Hampton Hills' Presbyterian roots are reflected throughout the mission and philosophy of Hampton Hills. The school's mission statement specifically purports a "Christian" education, and the curriculum contains numerous examples of religious studies. The current president of the school is an ordained minister who uses prayer to open all school meetings and the daily devotionals that take place at all grade levels in the school. In addition, the Upper School curriculum includes a Bible Department, which offers a variety of courses. A physical sign of the religious affiliation of the school is the construction of a new chapel on the campus that is currently underway. This chapel will serve as a place for prayer and reflection, and will be accessible to the entire school community. While Hampton Hill's Christian heritage is evident throughout the school community, the religious environment at the school is modest compared to many parochial schools. The promotional materials confirmed my visual impressions of

Hampton Hills as a conservative educational institution, steeped in tradition with subtle religious undertones.

### *An Idyllic Setting*

Visitors to Hampton Hills step into an educational environment rich with tradition, full of privilege, and located in an idyllic setting. One enters the campus through a long, winding road lined on both sides with woods that provide a buffer from the nearby neighborhoods, retail areas, and a major interstate highway. The main road leads to a sprawling campus filled with brick classroom buildings and state-of-the-art athletic facilities, surrounded by a pristine landscape. The Presbyterian-style architecture and the free-standing academic buildings give the impression of a college campus. All in all, the Hampton Hills campus features a total of thirteen academic buildings spread across 180 acres of land. The redbrick buildings housing the classrooms are adorned with the names of the founders of the school, visually celebrating the history of the institution. The immaculate campus and wooded scenery of Hampton Hills are representative of what one might expect an affluent prep school to look like.

The inside of the academic buildings include classrooms, offices, meeting halls and common spaces for gathering and studying. The hallways throughout the school buildings are decorated with examples of the academic, artistic and athletic excellence that Hampton Hills has achieved over the last six decades. Bookcases and bulletin boards line the hallways, filled with championship trophies, newspaper clippings and other memorabilia that illustrate the impressive accomplishments of past and current students. In addition, there are numerous examples of the emphasis placed on philanthropy at Hampton Hills. Pictures, plaques and newspapers articles point to the school's emphasis

on service-learning and giving back to the broader community. The school even offers courses through a privately funded institute dedicated to instilling service-learning in the Hampton Hills community.

### *An Elite Institution*

The most palpable characteristic of the culture of Hampton Hills that permeates the campus is the feeling of elitism. Not elitism in the sense of snobbery or exclusivity, but rather an air of excellence in everything the school attempts. From the facilities to the students and teachers, Hampton Hills is an elite academic institution. This is obvious to any visitor to the campus. Academic excellence is present in the students' conversations with each other or with their teachers as they walk to their next class. Some of these conversations are a continuation of classroom discussions that were interrupted by the bell and flowed into the hallways. These conversations spill out of the classrooms, out of the academic buildings, onto the lawn, where it is not uncommon to see students sitting in small groups studying under a hundred-year-old oak.

This penchant for excellence is not limited to academics. The arts and athletics at Hampton Hills are equally imbued with tradition and an expectation of quality. On one occasion, I witnessed a small group of students practicing their musical instruments together before an upcoming performance. I could not help but notice these musicians, yet other students casually walked by this impromptu concert without so much as a glance in their direction. The students walking by were not being rude; to the contrary, this display was not an uncommon sight. Athletic excellence at Hampton Hills is not only obvious from the gaudy number of championship banners hanging in the rafters of the varsity gym, but also from the tremendous sense of pride felt at home sporting events. A

football game at Hampton Hills is a spirited display of school pride, with spectators ranging from lower school siblings and parents to aging alumni: Decked out in school colors, all of these fans expect their team to win. The game is as much a social event as it is an athletic contest, with the crowd trying to see and be seen. While football games are the extreme example, athletic excellence is evident in a wide-range of sporting opportunities. Some of these sports are more common, like soccer and baseball, and others are traditional prep school sports, like lacrosse and squash. Regardless of the sport, the players, coaches and fans at Hampton Hills strive for excellence.

### *A Traditional Pedagogy*

The pursuit of excellence is most obvious in the classrooms of Hampton Hills. This educational environment is characterized by a rigorous college preparatory curriculum taught by experienced, master teachers. Teachers are enthusiastically engaged with their students in conversations that are initiated by the curriculum but not limited by a text. The academic offerings in the Upper School are diverse, including 27 Advanced Placement courses and a variety of honors and college-preparatory classes. The SAT range for the middle 50 % of the senior class at Hampton Hills was 1900 - 2210 out of a possible 2400 in the 2007-2008 school year. The Upper School faculty includes 106 faculty members, and 81 % of whom hold advanced degrees (school web site). Teachers at Hampton Hills consistently have long tenures, and their seminar-style pedagogy creates a professorial-like faculty.

The professionalism and dedication of the faculty are evident from the passionate way they make their subjects come to life to the way they dress and handle themselves. The prevailing pedagogy, while seemingly traditional in its approach, is creative and



student-centered. For instance, despite years of success teaching science, the school is currently examining its approach to science. Some institutions would see this self-investigation as a threat, but the faculty of Hampton Hills has enough confidence in their own abilities that they embrace the opportunity to grow. The poise and sophisticated presence of the Hampton Hills faculty extends to their appearance. Although the teachers do not have a stated dress code, there is an implicit style of professional dress evident throughout the school. Male teachers were wearing collared oxford shirts, and many were wearing a tie and blazer.

One distinct advantage that the teachers have at Hampton Hills is the low ratio of students to teachers. Hampton Hills has a total enrollment of 1825, with 792 students in grades nine through twelve for the 2007- 2008 school year. In addition, there are approximately 250 members of the faculty school-wide, so the average class size is between fourteen and sixteen students depending on the grade level. According to Charles Philmore, the school president, “in terms of teachers to students it’s a 1 to 9 ratio which, when compared to our benchmark group across the nation, is really good.” Philmore goes on to explain that the school’s budget is based on 1815 students “so anything between 1825 and 1815 is additional revenue, [but] we don’t want to get bigger.” This commitment to staying small helps teachers give students the individual attention they need to achieve excellence in the classroom.

### *The Students*

The students at Hampton Hills appear very happy and comfortable at school. I watched as they traversed the hallways, walkways and spacious lawns on their way to and from classes. They are full of energy and activity, socializing with one another or

conversing about their academics. Groups of students are often scattered around the campus preparing for class or planning their social activities for the day. During the lunch hour, groups of students throw Frisbees or toss lacrosse balls across one of the many green spaces surrounding the academic buildings. The students appear well educated and relaxed in the high profile setting of Hampton Hills Academy. In the classroom, students are respectful of their teachers and exhibit confidence in their own abilities. It is clear that Hampton Hills students have been brought up in a nurturing environment where their opinions are valued. They do not hesitate to offer their views or respond candidly to the questions presented by their teachers. Outside the classroom, the students are equally engaging. Every student I spoke to was remarkably polite and articulate.

The pictures from the school brochures truly come to life as you walk across the Hampton Hills campus. The students are reflective of the youth of an affluent population with their preppy dress and well-mannered behavior. While Hampton Hills does not have a uniform for students, there is a dress code. According to the student handbook, students are expected to be “neat, clean, well-groomed, and decent at all times on campus and when representing the school.” Boys are required to wear a collared shirt that must be tucked in, and girls’ “skirts, dresses, and shorts should be within two inches to the top of the knee” (school web site). The students comply with these policies, and the image of a typical prep school environment is intact without the requirement of a uniform. As far as the diversity of the student population at Hampton Hills is concerned, the students represent a fairly wide-range of ethnic backgrounds. Over 19.5 % of the student body is composed of persons of color. At any point, the students walking across the campus might represent a cross-section of the surrounding urban community.

With the quest for excellence at Hampton Hills, there is a concern that students might succumb to the pressure of being at an elite educational institution with a high level of expectations. The teachers and school leaders at Hampton Hills express a balanced approach to the multitude of demands placed on the students in an effort to avoid a pressure-cooker environment. The students at Hampton Hills seem well adjusted to these pressures. In a parent meeting, both President Philmore and the principal of the Upper School communicated these goals. The purpose of these remarks were twofold; to temper the sometimes unrealistic expectations of the parent who is driven by his desire for his child's admission to an Ivy League college and to ease the fears of another parent who does not want his child to be overwhelmed by the pressure to succeed. The students at Hampton Hills appear to have achieved a healthy balance.

#### *Expectations for the Good Life*

A significant characteristic of the school culture at Hampton Hills is high parental expectations. The expectations of the parent community are defined by the college-preparatory mission of the school. Parents send their children to Hampton Hills to gain access to the most prestigious colleges and universities in the country. Like parents at other elite private prep schools, the parents at Hampton Hills want their children to have what they perceive to be the good life. Although the parents at Hampton Hills have definite educational goals for their children, they see Hampton Hills as a means to an end, a vehicle through which their children can gain access to the most competitive colleges and, eventually, good careers. In meetings with school leaders, parents expressed concerns about which classes students needed to take to ensure admission to these highly competitive institutions. School leaders made no guarantees about their students'

acceptance at specific colleges, but they were certainly cognizant of the expectations of the parent constituency.

### *Wealth and Privilege*

The students who attend Hampton Hills clearly come from wealth and privilege. Beyond their families' ability to pay the \$18,000 annual tuition for the Upper School, Hampton Hills students display other signs of affluence. Just one look at the parking lot confirms this reality. The lot is scattered with luxury cars and sport utility vehicles decorated with stickers from popular resort locations, such as Hilton Head, Nantucket and Jackson Hole. Some of the cars even have decals indicating membership in local golf and country clubs. Beyond these material signs of wealth, the culture of the school reflects privilege. The teachers, students and parents are afforded advantages that are not present throughout society, and the school community is keenly aware of these distinctions. There is a sense of responsibility associated with this extreme privilege, and the school embraces opportunities to educate their students about giving back to the world.

Another indication of the wealth at Hampton Hills is the size of the school's endowment. As of June 30, 2007, that endowment was \$229 million and constituted 35 % of the school's budget (school web site). The large endowment provides the students and teachers at Hampton Hills a number of tangible opportunities. First, many of the teaching positions are endowed, which means funds from the operating budget can be spent on other areas of need. In addition, there are numerous endowed programs, which provide sustainability regardless of budget constraints. For example, Hampton Hills has an endowed institute dedicated to service-learning. Students learn the value of giving back to the community and can take a course in philanthropy. Finally, the endowment at

Hampton Hills gives the school the wherewithal to sustain a generous financial-aid program. Despite the high price tag associated with Hampton Hills, the school has made a commitment to providing financial aid for students in need. The average financial-aid award during the 2007-2008 school year was \$9,200; 12 % of the student body benefited from these grants. This level of financial aid would not be possible without the financial freedom provided by the school's large endowment.

*Pine Valley School*

When I first visited Pine Valley, I was struck by the proximity of the school to the city. The only buffer from the school and a well-traveled highway is a public park that extends about a hundred yards in either direction. The energy of the surrounding urban environment was transmitted to the campus. As I traversed the series of one-way roads that lead to the campus, circling twice to find a parking spot, I realized that the school was actually surrounded on one side by a well-established neighborhood. The contrast of these boundaries added to the diverse feel of the school. The school literally developed in concert with the mostly urban area that serves as the backdrop to the campus.

Wandering from my car to the administrative building, I observed a campus bursting with activity as a swarm of teachers, students, and even parents made their way from one place to another. The students represented a wide-range of ages, since all of the divisions of the school are located on the same grounds. At Pine Valley primary school students are learning alongside Upper School kids. Parents are also a visible presence on the campus on a daily basis, because the school depends on them for a variety of support services. The teachers were freely mingling with the students as they walked to their next

classes. The school had a community feel with all of the stakeholders interacting, all seemingly living and learning together.

The culture of Pine Valley is best described as progressive and free spirited within the context of a traditional college-preparatory curriculum. The progressive philosophy adopted by the school blurs some of the typical boundaries between students and teachers that exist in most learning environments. There appears to be less of a concern with structure and order at Pine Valley than at other independent schools. For example, the scene I witnessed between classes typically involved students moving around the campus in a seemingly chaotic fashion. The commotion was so loud during one interview that the school leader I was interviewing felt the need to investigate what was going on. This outward disorder was actually unobstructed, youthful exuberance. The students I observed were not being disrespectful in any way, but they were very comfortable in their surroundings. In the classroom and in meetings with administrators, the students at Pine Valley appear content and at ease communicating their views.

The feeling of “free spiritedness” extends beyond the students to the overall philosophy of the school. The school leaders and teachers at Pine Valley express a belief that the educational journey is far more important than any one academic discipline or seemingly arbitrary school rule. The ultimate goal of the school is to help students in their quest for knowledge through a progressive approach to education. Teachers help students push boundaries so they can grow as individuals and can develop the problem-solving skills they will need to succeed regardless of the context. Pine Valley wants students to learn how to be critical consumers of information capable of making educated decisions and voicing their concerns. The culture and character of Pine Valley is shaped by a

progressive approach to learning in which students are treated as distinct individuals within the context of a broader community.

### *A Uniquely Progressive School*

The progressive approach adopted by Pine Valley provides a unique educational environment. The school's philosophy is a direct result of its origins. Pine Valley School was established in 1971 by a group of parents who were dissatisfied with the local public school system. Since the school's inception, the traditional yet progressive college-preparatory curriculum has been geared toward students with a variety of learning styles and aptitudes. Pine Valley's academic philosophy states that since students possess "different interests and learning styles, and because they progress at different rates, we take considerable care to tailor our program to the talents and needs of each child" (school web site). The parents who formed the school consisted of mostly highly educated professionals. These concerned parents raised the funds necessary to secure land for the school, and they sought out the original headmaster. The original board of governors was made up of many of the founding parents. Today, the board of governors still consists of past and present parents, but the board is less hands-on than it was in the beginning. While the role of parents has changed over the years, the consistent support from the parent body is evident in the culture of the school.

The founding headmaster, George Jackson, remains the only headmaster that the school has employed. For thirty-seven years, for better or for worse, the direction of the school has been in the hands of one man. This consistency in leadership has added to the unique qualities of the Pine Valley School. Very few schools, public or private, have had the same leadership for four decades. In addition to the headmaster, many of the other

school leaders and faculty have long tenures at the school. For example, David Jefferson, the coordinator of the Upper School, has been at Pine Valley for thirty-five years. As a result of this longevity, there is a sense of familiarity and confidence that permeates the very fabric of the school's culture and is evident in encounters with everyone on the campus. The mission of the school has remained relatively unchanged since its inception and clearly has been infused into the community. Furthermore, it is evident that all of the school leaders share common goals reflecting the needs of the different constituencies.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Pine Valley's progressive philosophy is the non-hierarchical structure of the school's leadership. For example, the principals of each division are referred to as coordinators rather than principals. The department chairs are also called coordinators and rotate every other year. The purpose of this dissolution of power is to avoid the traditional consolidation of authority typical of most school structures. In addition, by not limiting decision-making authority to leadership positions, Pine Valley seeks to broaden the scope of input from the entire school community.

### *An Eclectic Campus*

The Pine Valley campus is as unique as the progressive pedagogy that led to the school's founding. Located in an uptown area, adjacent to a busy road, the Pine Valley campus consists of thirteen academic buildings on sixteen acres of land. While the current physical plant includes numerous modern academic and athletic facilities, some of the original academic buildings are still used today. These distinctive academic buildings are former residences that were converted into classrooms when the school was first established. These Tudor-style homes allow the campus to blend into the surrounding, well-established, historic neighborhood. This neighborhood is somewhat



diverse with single-family, multi-million-dollar houses on one side of the school and town homes and condominiums across the street. A well-maintained public park provides a buffer between the campus and the busy road in front of the school. This park also provides a valued green space for recreation and student socialization. Since the Pine Valley School does not have a cafeteria, this park provides a logical place for the Upper School students to eat lunch when the weather is good. This “commons area” is an integral part of the campus. I frequently observed students picnicking in the park during lunch, playing catch or just socializing with friends.

The inside of the academic buildings is varied. Some of the buildings retain the structural design and charm of the historic homes they once were. The rooms of these old houses have been converted to accommodate classrooms, offices and spaces to congregate. The main administrative building, which served as the initial school building, has all of the original design features unique to early-twentieth-century architecture. As you enter the front door, you are greeted by a large staircase typical of a family home. This staircase, however, leads to offices and classrooms. These converted homes are juxtaposed with the modern classroom spaces that have been introduced throughout the campus over the years. The more contemporary additions to the Pine Valley School represent the growth of the school, not only in enrollment, but also in the services afforded the students. The school recently has added a building dedicated to the arts, and, a new athletic facility is under construction. These are just two examples of how the changes in the curriculum of the school are reflected in the physical environment of the school.

The walls of the Upper School buildings are decorated with a combination of formal and informal symbols of student achievement and expression. There are many plaques and pictures celebrating the successes of Pine Valley students in academics, fine arts and athletics. In addition, there are numerous examples of more informal expression of student life throughout the campus. Whether it is a message board filled with student comments about recent political events or posters advertising upcoming student social events, the Pine Valley culture clearly embraces unstructured student expression. One also notes ample illustrations from school archives commemorating the traditions and history of the school. Photographs from the early years of the school remind students of its heritage and the humble beginnings of a thriving school that was founded in an old converted house.

### *A Progressive Pedagogy*

The educational environment at Pine Valley School is characterized by a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum taught by experienced, creative instructors. While Pine Valley does not have a mission per se, the school does have a philosophy. The absence of a formal mission statement for Pine Valley is purposeful and characteristic of the culture of the school. The school leaders and parents view a mission statement as a bureaucratic construct rather than a useful educational tool. Regardless of the nomenclature, the stated philosophy of the school is quite beneficial in understanding the purpose of the school.

As Pine Valley's web site explains:

Our philosophy is based on the belief that schools can be informal and individualized, yet still educate well. The school offers a challenging curriculum that emphasizes individual achievement. [Pine Valley] has excellent programs in the fine and performing arts, sports and community service.

As part of that curriculum, the Upper School offers 9 Advanced Placement courses and a variety of honors and college preparatory classes. Interestingly, Pine Valley does not publish SAT scores. Philosophically, the school does not adhere to the concept of standardized test scores as indicators of academic success. Instead, the school promotes the fact that all of their graduates are accepted into college. While the school does not advertise SAT scores for its students, 29 % of the class of 2008 were recognized by the National Merit program based on PSAT test results.

Pine Valley employs 99 full-time and 26 part-time teachers; 74 % of them hold advanced degrees. Teachers at Pine Valley are given a great deal of freedom with regard to their pedagogy, which translates into creative and imaginative learning environment. This professional independence, combined with the school's progressive philosophy, has led to minimal teacher attrition with many members of the faculty having long tenures at the institution.

A number of characteristics of Pine Valley's progressive philosophy contribute to the school's unique learning environment. Among the distinctive features of the curriculum are the two short-term periods in the school year. These sessions are offered in January and May each year and provide both flexibility for scheduling and creativity for pedagogy. Teachers, students and even parents are given the opportunity to suggest courses for the short-terms. Another notable example of the different approach that Pine Valley espouses towards education is the fact that students refer to the teachers by their first name rather than by their surname. This anomaly in the private school realm is one more sign of the progressive approach to education at Pine Valley.

*The Students*

One of the most observable characteristics of the students at Pine Valley is their free spirit. Students there seem to have an insatiable desire to have their voices heard and their individuality affirmed. The school encourages students to express their creativity, and one noticeable avenue of expression is attire. Pine Valley does not have a uniform regulation for students and if there is a dress code for faculty, it is not apparent. Many students seem to express their creativity through their dress, although others resemble a typical college student in their attire. Although the teachers I witnessed were all dressed professionally, their clothing was as diverse as that of the students.

This freedom of expression at Pine Valley goes far beyond allowing the students to call adults by their first names or wear outfits that resemble something out of a 1980s MTV video. The progressive approach to learning is embraced by the students and present in classroom discussions, social conversations, club activities and public gatherings. The campus is adorned with posters advocating a service project, advertising an upcoming student event, or showcasing a social cause. The conversations that students are having at Pine Valley are equally provocative and often relate to a social justice issue or perhaps a political debate. There are also less controversial discussions taking place that are perhaps more characteristic of a high school environment. These more typical exchanges revolve around concerns about whom they were taking to the dance or where they hoped to attend college. At the same time, the students are conscious of the broader picture. The students at Pine Valley display a heightened awareness of the world around them and take seriously the fact that they can and should have an opinion about these issues.

*Embarking on an Educational Journey*

Another significant part of the culture at Pine Valley School is parental expectations. Like the other two schools in this study, the parents who send their children to Pine Valley expect a quality college-preparatory education. While the primary goal for Pine Valley parents is preparing students for college, they also expect a somewhat personalized educational experience. One tangible example of this individualized approach at Pine Valley is illustrated by the headmaster's tradition of speaking about each senior at graduation. These personal remarks began with the first graduating class and symbolize the relationship the faculty has with the students at Pine Valley. Along these lines, during one of my observations at a parent coffee, Headmaster Jackson commented that this tradition is getting harder and harder to continue as the enrollment increases. This past year for the first time, the Pine Valley graduating class numbered 100 students. The parents at the coffee made it clear that they do not mind if the tradition ends as long as it does not end while their children are still at Pine Valley. Clearly this custom symbolizes the unique approach to education that Pine Valley parents have come to expect.

Pine Valley parents also express an expectation that their children will enjoy an educational experience in which grades are not as important as learning. Parents place a priority on the individual educational journey that each child encounters at Pine Valley, where teachers place an emphasis on their child's learning styles, strengths and affinities. The school is given the task of educating the whole child and instilling a love of learning that will serve them throughout their lives. With that said, Pine Valley parents do care about grades if for no other reason than grades are seen as a means to an end. In other

words, “good grades” will help the student get into the college of their choice. Parents talk about placing learning above all else, but, ultimately, they want a quantifiable measure of the learning in the form of grades. In this respect, Pine Valley parents are no different from most parents at other private schools.

### *Community and Consciousness*

One advantage of Pine Valley is its relatively small size as compared to many other private schools in its immediate vicinity. The Pine Valley School has a total enrollment of 929, with 396 students in grades nine through twelve for the 2007- 2008 school year. The school has a faculty of 125. In the Upper School, the student-to-teacher ratio is 9 to 1 and the average class size is 14 students. The small class sizes allow teachers and students to engage on a more personal level. Teachers are able to adapt to the different learning styles present in their classrooms and provide a more individualized educational experience.

Another noticeable aspect of the Pine Valley community is the diversity of the student body and the faculty. At Pine Valley, 26 % of the students and 17 % of the teachers are persons of color. In addition, since the school is secular, there is also a significant level of religious diversity. Regardless of the ethnic and religious diversity that exists at Pine Valley, from a socio-economic perspective the school is more homogeneous. The tuition for students enrolled in the Upper School is \$16,863 per year for students in grades 9-11 and \$17,063 per year for students in the twelfth grade. The price tag of the Pine Valley educational experience is too high for many families in the surrounding urban neighborhood. Pine Valley does have a need-based financial aid program that funded 112 students in the 2007-2008 school year. A total of \$1,350,000

was spent that year on financial aid, with financial-aid awards from 17 to 99 %. While the school demonstrates a commendable commitment to providing financial aid to students demonstrating genuine need, Pine Valley is still an expensive educational option that many people cannot afford. The economic wealth of Pine Valley is confirmed by the school's endowment, which in June 2008 was \$17.7 million.

Despite the high cost of tuition that limits access to Pine Valley, the school does an impressive job of exposing students to the broader world. School leaders and teachers purposefully develop a consciousness among their students about social and environmental justice. Across the campus, students are raising awareness about such issues as the dangers of global warming, the tragedies in Darfur and human rights violations in China. Teachers are engaging students in these conversations both in the classroom and in public assemblies. An integral part of the Pine Valley culture is educating young people about their responsibilities in the school community and the global community. While not every Pine Valley student thinks in these terms without prompting, the school challenges them to develop a consciousness about society as a whole.

### *Copper Mountain Christian School*

Nestled in the historic downtown district of a suburb about fifteen miles outside of a major metropolitan area, the Copper Mountain Christian School [CMCS] campus is adjacent to Main Street. Visiting CMCS feels like traveling back in time, distant from the stresses of a big city. Along the two-lane road that connects the school to the interstate, one finds the contrast of cow pastures and residential developments. The area surrounding the school represents the burgeoning growth extending from the city, but the

development in this area is limited and occurred sometime ago. A short drive along these winding roads leads to Main Street in the town center. The buildings in the downtown district are all red brick with store-front windows and old-fashioned signs hanging above the door. The stores lining Main Street include a bank, a hardware store, a grocery, and, of course, a mom-and-pop style restaurant. Franchises and commercial chains have not replaced sole proprietors in this town. Students frequently are seen walking down the sidewalks in this city center, where its shops often celebrate the successes of the CMCS sports teams with signs in their windows. The community has a small-town feel and appears to have a strong relationship with the school.

The school is situated just across the railroad tracks that run parallel to Main Street. CMCS could be any school in America, with non-descript buildings and an assortment of structures that indicate the expansion the school has seen over time. Students move across the campus in an orderly fashion as they go from one class to the next. Both students and faculty are in similar uniform dress. The students' uniform includes clothing - golf shirts, sweatshirts, and jackets – with CMCS monograms. Teachers and school leaders either wear more formal attire, such as ties and blazers, or outfits that incorporate the school logo. The dress identifies those who belong to the CMCS community.

The culture of CMCS is defined by the Christian identity of the school. Religion drives everything at CMCS, from the pedagogy in the classroom to the relationship of the school with parents. The religious mission of the school is a visible presence on the campus, from students wearing crosses around their necks to the art work on the walls. Religion is ingrained in the culture of the school. The school leaders interviewed in the



study regularly referred to the importance of religion in the school's philosophy. I did not find it uncommon to hear conversations between teachers in the hallways about the religious mission of the school. The students were even discussing religion in regard to an upcoming mission trip to Tanzania. A critical component of the culture of CMCS is the mission of the school. Students, teachers, parents and school leaders see the mission of the school as giving back to the broader community through Christ.

Beyond the religious affiliation of the school, the culture of CMCS is characterized by the strong sense of community and humility. The school leaders express the importance of family values and partnering with parents to educate their children. Athletics and the arts play a vital role in establishing this community feeling. The school celebrates the successes of their sports teams and artists as a community. The CMCS constituents appear to be somewhat less affluent than their counterparts in rival private schools. CMCS families are middle-class, and many have sacrificed to send their children to a private school. The families I encountered had an impressive modesty about them and expressed a great appreciation for the education their children receive at CMCS.

#### *A Conventional School*

The identity of CMCS is framed in the context of the proliferation of private schools in the metropolitan area and suburbs where the school resides. Over the years, there has been a growing dissatisfaction with the public schools in the area that surrounds the school. Like many other private schools in this multi-county metropolitan area, CMCS was founded by a group of concerned parents. CMCS was first established in 1989 in a warehouse in the downtown area of the same municipality in which the school currently resides. In 1991, as the school grew in enrollment, CMCS purchased an old

public high school and relocated its operation. This facility is the current home of CMCS and has been expanded to include over sixty acres. While the campus is located in the center of a smaller town, it is just a few miles from both the interstate highway and the metropolis that it feeds. The property consists of 100,000 square feet of building space, which includes academic, fine arts and athletic spaces. The campus also features an impressive athletic complex, including two stadiums that are home to CMCS's many competitive athletic teams.

While the interiors of the academic buildings show some signs of age, they are very well maintained, and, like the exterior of the school, they have been improved by the school community. While some buildings show the wear and tear of many years of existence, the overall physical appearance is impeccable and the antiquated features of the architectural design are compensated by structural expansions and the addition of modern technology. Despite the limitations that the maturity of the campus presents, the school is more than adequate for learning and for achieving the mission of the school. Parent volunteers are always coordinating projects to help improve the facilities. One parents donated his time to paint murals on the walls and ceiling of the cafeteria to brighten the space and create school spirit. Another group of parents initiated landscaping projects for the front of the school to improve the outward appearance of the buildings.

Another obvious characteristic of CMCS is the strong hierarchical structure of the leadership of the school. The roles of the school leaders are clearly defined, and the authority of the headmaster is unquestioned. After the headmaster, power flows to the principal, deans, and department chairs. The chain of command is a significant part of the culture of the school. Both parents and teachers appear to follow this pecking order when

they have issues or concerns. The department chairs are protective of their teachers, and parent inquiries must be channeled first through the teachers. Department heads report to the principal, but important issues are filtered directly through the headmaster. A contradiction to this established power structure lies in the fact that since the headmaster at CMCS is consulted on all significant concerns, chain of command is sometimes ignored.

### *A Christian Education*

CMCS was founded in 1989 as a non-denominational Christian school. CMCS has a traditional college-preparatory curriculum that is geared towards students with a wide range of intellectual ability. The mission of the school is “to honor Jesus Christ by equipping college-bound students to become lifelong servant leaders in their communities and in the world.” Furthermore, CMCS desires to “partner with Christian families to pursue and nurture excellence in the spiritual, academic, artistic, physical, and social growth of our students” (school web site). The headmaster of CMCS, William Simpson, describes the mission of the school as providing students with an education through the lens of a Christ-centered worldview.

A major distinction that separates CMCS from the other schools in this study is its Christian identity. CMCS was established as a Christian school, and this identity is reflected in everything that the school does. The school’s leadership, its web site, its stakeholders and all communication from the school are characterized by religious convictions. Simpson, and all of the school leaders interviewed in this study spoke of partnering with parents to educate children from a Christian perspective. While the school’s mission is clearly rooted in religious mission, a wide range of Christian

denominations is represented in the student population. In fact, CMCS celebrates its diversity within Christianity. The school touts that its “board members, teachers, and families represent over 180 churches,” believing that “this diversity creates a rich, non-denominational Christian education culture.” Within this Christian milieu, some religious conflicts occur over which Christian beliefs should be followed. School leaders are faced with determining the direction of the non-denominational Christian teachings.

*A Traditional, Christ-centered Pedagogy*

CMCS has seen a great deal of growth in the past two decades, and its curriculum has evolved along the way. The educational environment at CMCS is characterized by a rigorous college- preparatory curriculum taught by a group of dedicated teachers with a diverse range of experience. The two cornerstones of the CMCS curriculum are a traditional approach to preparing students for college and a Christ-centered pedagogy. The school’s traditional college- preparatory curriculum includes a wide-range of programs for a variety of learning styles. The Upper School curriculum offers 8 Advanced Placement courses and a variety of honors and college preparatory classes. The average SAT score for students at CMCS was 1718 out of a possible 2400 in the 2007-2008 school year. Student achievement and preparing students for college are the primary academic goals of the school. Nevertheless, parental expectations for the educational mission of CMCS influence the curriculum of the school.

While CMCS parents certainly want their children to gain acceptance to a quality college or university, the intensity of this expectation is tempered by the primary focus of a faith-based education. That is not to say that the parents of CMCS students are not concerned with college acceptance; 98 % of the school’s graduates attend college.

However, the CMCS parents do not exhibit the same level of concern over their student's acceptance at a specific type of college as at other private schools. School leaders at CMCS also reflect this orientation, commenting that the primary expectation for CMCS parents is for their child to receive a Christian education.

The other foundation of the CMCS curriculum is the religious instruction and spiritual development of the students. CMCS offers a Christ-centered approach to learning, which means that everything in the curriculum is viewed through the lens of Christianity. From the classroom to assembly programs, from the playing field to mission trips, the curriculum is driven by religious beliefs. When school leaders are considering a new program or a change at CMCS, one of the litmus tests is how the change might help the school be a better steward for Christ. Religion was an overt part of every interview that I conducted at CMCS, and it was present in casual conversations as well. Questions of character, morality, discipline, as well as academics all came down to religion.

The school's firm belief in Christianity extends to every teacher at CMCS. Part of the mission of the school is to hire teachers who are followers of Christ. As Christians, the teachers have a duty to teach their subject, but their pedagogy also is expected to incorporate religious teachings whenever possible. In addition, each teacher leads a Bible class for a small group of students. In this small faith discussion group, teachers instruct from the Bible but also discuss spiritual and character development. Teachers are seen as the moral compass of the school and are considered servants of Christ.

Beyond the commitment to religious indoctrination, the teachers at CMCS are dedicated professionals who show a true passion for teaching. They appear to have a genuine interest in the academic and spiritual growth of their students. The faculty at

CMCS exhibits a moral approach to educating the whole child. Teachers at CMCS are able to give students individualized attention because of the relatively small size of the student body and the size of the faculty. The Upper School faculty includes 30 members. CMCS has a total enrollment of 779 students with 240 students in grades nine through twelve for the 2007- 2008 school year. The student-to-teacher ratio in the Upper School is approximately 8 to 1 with an average class size of 18 students. As far as appearance is concerned, the faculty and administration follow a dress code similar to that of the students. While some administrators and teachers wore dress shirts with ties, most preferred to wear the more casual golf shirt with the school logo. The school's small size and the similar attire of students and faculty add to its community feel.

### *The Students*

The community feeling of CMCS extends to the students as well. CMCS students appear to be happy and comfortable in their surroundings. They are active and energetic both in and out of the classroom. In the classroom, the level of academic discourse is equal to other private schools and reflects the personalities of both teachers and students. The close supervision of the students does offer a contrast from other private schools. Students at CMCS are tightly controlled by a variety of established rules and procedures. These restrictions range from the carefully thought-out Christian curriculum to the sameness of the school uniform. There is an underlying feeling that the students need to stay in line. Of course, these differences reflect the conservative nature of the school's overall mission.

When you walk cross the CMCS courtyard or sit in one of the classrooms, one notices different types of students that are part of the school community. The racial

diversity of the student body is apparent: approximately 24 % are persons of color, and 20 % of the student population is African-American. A far less obvious component of the diversity at CMCS is its religious diversity. As mentioned previously, the students at CMCS represent a wide range of Christian denominations. This mixture of Christian beliefs adds another element of variety to the campus, giving the campus a less homogeneous feel.

Another observable aspect of the student body at CMCS is their conservative appearance. CMCS has a relatively strict dress code outlined in the student handbook, and students can be disciplined for not abiding by the requirements. The basic uniform for Upper School students consists of a collared golf shirt emblazoned with the school's logo, khaki pants, shorts or skirts and dress shoes. The student handbook also outlines what types of outerwear are acceptable and specifically delineates expectations for appropriate personal grooming and general appearance. These requirements are purposeful, designed to keep the students orderly.

#### *A Partnership with Parents*

Other than the Christian mission of CMCS, the most discernible characteristic of the culture of the school is its emphasis on the partnership that exists between the school and its parents. School leaders at CMCS refer to the educational relationship between the school and the parents as a partnership. This partnership is referenced in almost all conversations with school leaders and teachers. The school leaders at CMCS describe the partnership as a shared responsibility for the education of their children. The school helps the parents achieve their educational goals for their child but from the point of view of

school leaders, the primary responsibility for the direction of this education falls on the parent.

Parents who send their children to CMCS are seeking a college-preparatory, Christ-centered education. CMCS partners with parents to provide this educational experience. The parents I observed at CMCS seemed appreciative of the opportunities given to their children, and they demonstrated a degree of humility that is not present at every private school. The parents did not appear elitist or entitled. Instead, the parents I encountered came across as humble and supportive of the school in its efforts. At CMCS, college admission appeared to take a backseat to religious teachings in terms of the priorities of the parents. Perhaps the unassuming nature of the CMCS parents is due to their middle-class background or perhaps to the school's focus on the partnership between the school and the families.

### *Growing Pains*

One of the greatest challenges facing CMCS is the financial growth of the institution. The proliferation of private school options in the area creates stiff competition for students and tuition dollars. In its relatively short tenure, CMCS has not achieved the same level of wealth as other schools. Furthermore, their financial security is dependent upon full-enrollment. A major distinction between CMCS and the other two schools in the study is the size of the school's endowment. As the youngest and smallest of the three schools in the study, it is not surprising that the endowment for CMCS as of June 2008 was only \$130,000. CMCS obviously does not have the same financial freedom that is afforded the school leadership at Hampton Hills or even Pine Valley.



Tuition for students enrolled in the Upper School is \$11,310 per year. A need-based financial aid program is available. According to their web site, CMCS “has limited funding available to offer financial assistance, up to a maximum of 50 % tuition, to those families who can demonstrate objective financial need.” The availability of financial aid at CMCS is demonstratively less than the other two schools in the study.

The lack of financial resources is evident in the way CMCS approaches school functions. Less sophisticated than more wealthy private schools, CMCS has a basic approach to events such as parent meetings. For example, during a “town hall” meeting with parents, the headmaster had to operate his own power-point presentation. When he experienced technical difficulties, he had no support. This was the same town hall meeting where parents served cookies. CMCS is perhaps not as savvy as some schools, but its sense of community and devotion to the school are impressive. The school may lack certain resources but the education of the students and the passion of the teachers do not reflect this financial disadvantage.

#### *Preview of next chapter*

Chapter Five will explore the findings obtained from these three schools within the socio-cultural contexts described in these portraits. These data were collected through a series of personal interviews, observations and document analysis. I organize these data findings around three main areas: the influence of parents on curriculum; the curriculum views of school leaders; and the negotiation of curriculum conflict.

## CHAPTER 5

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the data collected from the interviews, observations, artifacts and documents. In all three schools in this study, five school leaders were interviewed on two separate occasions, for a total of thirty interviews. These thirty interviews were transcribed and coded. The questions used for the first interviews were characterized as the "grand tour" interview questions and are listed in appendix A. These questions served as a starting point for the initial interviews but I used follow-up questions to probe the participant's responses (Spradley, 1979, p. 7). I then created a second set of interview questions based on the research questions and the responses from my first interviews. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to clarify the details of the participants' experiences and to add context to the meaning of their responses (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). These "structural" and "contrasting" questions helped tease out the meaning from the individual informant's responses and are listed in appendix B (Spradley, 1979, p. 155).

In addition to the interviews, multiple observations, artifacts and documents were analyzed to triangulate the research. I asked each school leader for observation opportunities and for any available documents that reflected the influence of parents on the curriculum of his or her school. The field notes from these observations and the analysis for all relevant documents are incorporated in the subsequent results. Finally, I

utilized Atlas.ti, a computer software program, to assist with the coding and organization of these data. While Atlas.ti has the capability to aid in the actual data analysis, I did not employ this aspect of the software. The coding categories for these data are displayed in appendix C.

### *Influence of parents on curriculum*

Parents played a vital role in the school community in each of the three schools selected for this study, although much of the role of parents was structured to different degrees depending on the leadership of each school. Despite the schools' attempts to structure and manage the role of parents, the influence of parents was not limited to the predetermined roles as set out by the institutions. Throughout my research, solicited and unsolicited parental influence was evident. Parents expressed concern or conflict with the schools, and there was evidence of parental influence on both the curricular and co-curricular aspects of each of the schools. In addition, the research suggests that certain influential parents had an increased influence on the curriculum of private schools. I explore the function of parental expectations for private school education and how these expectations affected the level to which parents influenced the school community.

### *Solicited Feedback*

Parent involvement was either solicited or unsolicited. Solicited parent involvement was any type of parent participation that the school institutionalized through structured or managed means. In other words, the school established channels through which the parents could be involved and, as a result, have some degree of influence on the school community. Examples of solicited parental influence include membership in parent organizations, attendance at parent meetings with school leaders, selection for ad

hoc or standing committees, or participation in school events, such as community service learning projects.

*Parent organizations.*

All three of the schools in this study had well-established parent organizations that played an important role in the success of the schools. These parent organizations included both the traditional PTA-like parents clubs and athletic boosters clubs.

According to Charles Philmore, the headmaster of the Hampton Hills Academy, the parent club at Hampton Hills had a parent-elected leadership team that identified “all the avenues on which they can be helpful and supportive to the school.” Philmore explained that the parents club is:

Basically an advocacy group for the mission of the school, so if there’s a problem within the parent body - let’s say a contingent of parents is upset about something - and then the parent leadership, in partnership with the administration of the school, helps address those things. We really need parents to be present, to be helpful, and to be supportive but always in the context of supporting the mission of the school.

Philmore emphasized that the influence of the parents club was limited in its scope and the school leaders were responsible for maintaining appropriate boundaries.

At Copper Mountain, the athletic boosters club, called the Champions Club, played a critical role in the athletic programs at the school. As a relatively newer school in older buildings, the facilities at Copper Mountain needed more maintenance and, often, the repairs were outside of the scope of the school’s budget. As a result, many of the co-curricular areas, such as athletics and the arts, suffered. The Champions Club was solicited to help fill these voids. The Upper School principal, Jonathan Russell, described how the Champions Club was able to make a difference in the school’s athletic programs.

The Champions Club had taken on a project for all of the athletic teams to build a better weight room, to re-do, refurbish, the weight room because the other one was old and just needed to be updated to keep the kids competitive. The Champions Club ... painted, they came up there and cleaned out the entire weight room. If you could've seen it before versus what it is now ... it's just pretty impressive.

Russell expressed a deep appreciation for the support that the Champions Club provided the school, specifically the athletics department. He believed that this partnership between the parents and the school enhanced the educational environment for the students.

*Parent meetings with school leaders.*

All three schools organized parent meetings throughout the course of the school year and these meetings were referenced throughout the interviews. I had the opportunity to observe many of these gatherings during my research. These parent meetings were planned events to which all parents were invited and given the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns. Although these meetings were open, both in terms of participation and types of questions, they were organized and directed by the school leaders on their terms.

Copper Mountain Christian School, for example, hosted a “town hall” parent forum three times a year to provide information and offer opportunities to ask questions about the direction of the school. The headmaster of Copper Mountain explained that he opened the meeting with a “state of the school” address in which he “explain[s] some of the changes that have been made, some of the things that we’re doing differently this year ... and invites feedback.” Despite the request for feedback, however, the headmaster stated that he did not typically get a lot of criticism from parents at these meetings.

Generally, we don't get a lot of comments ... because and it's kind of my philosophy if you get people looking out the front window, they don't spend a lot of time looking out the side windows and the back windows and trying to figure out what's wrong; they're excited about where you're going.

The heads of both Pine Valley and Hampton Hills also hosted similar meetings with parents to solicit inquiry from these important stakeholders. These meeting had no preconceived agenda; parents were invited to discuss whatever issues concerned them. According to George Jackson, the headmaster of Pine Valley, "I'm not directing a lot of the discussion ... I'll roll out the first few ideas that happen to be in my mind that morning, but [then I say] 'Let's talk about whatever you want to talk about.'" Similarly, at the Hampton Hills Academy, Philmore explained that, "those meetings are typically for two purposes, one to inform the parents of what's going on and also to get their feedback." Philmore would also "meet with the parent association president once every couple of weeks to just talk about what's going on ... to get her input about things [he] needs to know about that she is getting out on the grapevine." Philmore believed that information was, "really, really helpful because it may trigger my contact with this or that administrator to look in to whatever the issue might be, and then that might generate more discussion with parent groups." Philmore explained that this solicited parental feedback "flows back and forth like that again under the rubric of transparency, frequent and effective communication, and no surprises."

*Ad hoc or standing committee meetings.*

Parent influence was also solicited through ad hoc or standing committees to deal with specific, pertinent issues facing the schools. Simpson explained that Copper

Mountain formed an ad hoc committee to address an issue relating to their school uniform.

We put together a committee of parents, students and faculty a couple of years ago to deal with the uniform, the dress code, something that had bubbled up and ... [created] some unrest about ... what we were doing and the appropriateness of some of the things that were going on. So at that point I said, "Okay, let's put together this committee. Let's deal with that."

At Hampton Hills Academy, Thomas Elwood, the assistant headmaster for academic affairs, highlighted an occasion when they formed an ad hoc committee to study the final exam policy for the Upper School. The school leaders had received consistent feedback about the timing of the final exams following the Christmas vacation. The concern was that students either did not retain the information over the break or that they had to spend the holidays studying. According to Elwood, Hampton Hills held "constituent-group forums" to garner input from the stakeholders. Elwood explained that "we got people together and trained facilitators to work with them on soliciting information about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats involving the school."

*Participation in school events.*

School events represent another area in which parents were solicited for school involvement. To varying degrees, all three of the schools invited parents to participate in a wide-range of activities. Copper Mountain Chaplain Robert Gibson illustrated the degree to which his school depended on parental support with community service projects. Gibson revealed that with regard to parents:

I see them on a pretty regular basis. It's mostly event-driven events that I work with parents. Community service-type of things we'll work with parents. We're taking a group of kids to Tanzania in a couple of weeks, and so we'll work with their parents and things like that.

In addition, Gibson asked “a service chairman from one of [the parent] committees” for help with a “playground [project] seeing if that’s something that they’ll support and help to finance.”

### *Summary of Solicited Feedback*

I found very little difference between the three schools in the way they solicited input and feedback from the parents. All three of the schools had formal parent organizations, opportunities to meet with school leaders and the prospects of participating in school events. While Hampton Hills and Copper Mountain utilized committees to solicit parental input and explore issues, I did not see any evidence of Pine Valley employing parent committees. Despite this anomaly, there was a great deal of consistency among the schools with regard to soliciting parental input in these structured methods.

There are numerous ways that the three schools in this study solicited feedback and involvement from their parent constituencies. All three of the schools facilitated parental input that ranged from a somewhat controlled approach to a more open forum. Regardless of the method, all of the schools provided opportunities for parents to get involved and, as a result, have some degree of influence on the school community. Table 3 summarizes the examples of solicited parental influence that were identified in the research.



Table 3

*Solicited Feedback*

Opportunities for Parent Feedback	Examples	Organization	Activities	School Interface	School Support
Parent Organizations	PTA	Parent elected leadership team	Identifies ways they can be helpful and supportive to school	Advocacy group works in with school leaders to address issues	Always in the context of supporting the mission of the school
	Athletic Booster Clubs	Parent-led Champions Club	Refurbishes athletic facilities	Athletic Department	Fills the void in budgets for athletics
Parent Meetings with School Leaders	Town Hall Parent Forum	Open invitations	Informed of what is going on, ask questions, voice concerns	Directed by Headmaster	Input solicited from school leaders; agendas controlled or open
	PTA President Meetings	Regularly Scheduled Meetings	Informed of what is going on, asked for feedback, share parent concerns	Directed by Headmaster	Solicited by Headmaster with open agenda; follow-up with school staff; generates more discussions with parents
Ad Hoc / Standing Committee Meetings	Constituent Group Forums/ Committees	As needed basis	Asked to deal with specific or timely issues affecting the school	Trained facilitators	Feedback on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involving the school
Participation in School Events	Project Specific Committees	Event driven	Community service projects, playground projects, travel	Directed by Headmaster	Help with specific projects, funding

### *Unsolicited Feedback*

In addition to the solicited feedback that their schools received from meetings and committees, school leaders also received input that was not formally requested. This unsolicited input was typically in the form of parents expressing concern or conflict with the school. Unsolicited parent inquiries occurred in a variety of forms. Parents might send an e-mail to a teacher or school leader; they might seek out school leaders at an athletic competition or other school function; or some parents might call to set up an appointment with the school leader to discuss the issue.

Mark Lewis, dean of students at Copper Mountain, illustrated an example of a group of parents who, unsolicited, brought their concerns to the school on the issue of bullying. According to Lewis, the parents were “concerned and very active ... and they were very fired up.” Lewis explained that in this situation “it didn’t come through normal channels.” Lewis clarified that in this particular situation the headmaster did not contact him directly.

He didn't send me a message. I got an e-mail directly from these parents saying .... “Look, we're having a meeting here ... you need to be here,” and I was like, “What is this?” So I go and these parents had done all this research and had a program. They went into the meeting thinking, “This is the program we're going to do. This is going to be added to the curriculum, in the school. This is what we're going to be about.”

In this situation, Lewis confirmed that the parents had directly influenced the curriculum of the school, because the school adopted the recommendations of the parents group concerning the bullying issue.

Another example of unsolicited feedback from a parent involved the religious studies curriculum at Hampton Hills. According to Anne Thompson, the dean of the faculty:

A donor parent expressed an interest in having a Christian Apologetics course in [the] curriculum. The request resulted in a breakfast, where the department chair for Biblical & Religious Studies, sat with that donor, and helped him understand ... that Hampton Hills is not going to [adopt] that kind of a course [because it is] not appropriate for a secondary school curriculum.

In this situation the parent's attempt to influence the curriculum was ultimately unsuccessful. In other words, the parent's request, despite the offer to financially support the program, did not fit with the curricular mission of the school.

At Pine Valley, Erin Patterson, the science department coordinator, said that many unsolicited inquiries originate from the curriculum or pedagogy of the department. Patterson described one teacher who "taught a curriculum that didn't seem very cohesive and parents would question that, and it was hard to answer their questions when we might not have thought it was very cohesive either." In that situation, the inquiry led to classroom observations, and eventually the teacher left the school. In this instance the unsolicited feedback led to personnel changes, thus benefitting the school. Despite the resulting changes in this case, parents were not included in the discussions concerning the release of the teacher. The changes in the teaching faculty were handled by the department and the school leaders. In many other instances, unsolicited feedback from parents did not result in change, but rather in opportunities to enlighten parents on the practices of the school. As Patterson explained:

Parents have questioned some of the teaching techniques in some of the AP biology classrooms, but once they realize that that's how AP biology is taught or AP chemistry or AP physics ... it's much less spoon-feeding than in the lower grades ... so their parents question whether or not it's our fault that their child is not doing as well in that class. [It's more] "Why isn't my child doing well? It must be your fault" and less "Why are you teaching this curriculum?"

Patterson believed that the true motivation behind the inquiry is the child's grade in the class, rather than the pedagogical practices of the teacher or the specific curriculum the school adopts. Regardless, the unsolicited feedback from the parents is acknowledged and the school leaders appropriately address the issue. If it is a matter of informing the parents of the purposes behind the school's philosophy, the school leaders politely explain those principles. If the situation merits further investigation, then the school leaders are responsible for that decision and the school leadership determines if a change is necessary.

Whether through e-mail or a casual conversation at a school event, the existence of unsolicited feedback from parents was clearly present in all three schools in this study. Because these unsolicited concerns were not requested or formalized, they were often viewed as conflict and conveyed a negative connotation. School leaders typically attempted to steer these unsolicited concerns back to the more structured procedures that the school had in place. Table 4 summarizes the examples of unsolicited parental influence identified in the research.

#### *Parents' Influence on Curriculum*

Once the differences between solicited and unsolicited feedback from private school parents are delineated, it is important to explore how parents expressed concern or conflict with the schools. In all three schools, to varying degrees, there was evidence of parental influence on both the curricular and co-curricular aspects of the school.

Table 4

*Unsolicited Feedback*

Forms	Directed to	Examples	Purpose	School Leader's Reaction
Emails from parents	Teacher or school leader	Parents inform school leaders they need to attend a session to discuss bullying	Parents had a curriculum researched with a program to add to the curriculum	Negotiated the changes to the curriculum
Parent contact at athletic events or other school function	School leaders	Complaint about a specific teacher	Does not agree with pedagogy	Politely asks parent to make an appointment to discuss
Parent calls to set up appointments	School leaders	A donor parent asks to set up a course in the religious studies curriculum	Advance religious doctrine through curriculum	Department chair met with donor to explain that the course was not appropriate for a secondary school curriculum
Other inquiries	School leaders, department coordinators	Concerns over teaching techniques and curriculum	Understand why their child was not doing well in AP classes	School leaders, teachers explained the approach taken for AP classes

*Role of parents with curriculum changes.*

School leaders were more reserved in their approach to parents when discussing curricular changes. I found that school leaders, at least at the outset, were reluctant to admit that parents played any role at all with the formation or evolution of the curriculum in their schools. David Jefferson, the principal of Pine Valley, expressed this sentiment when he stated that the role of the parents in the curriculum was purposefully limited:

There is really very little role for parents, since the curriculum in the school is determined by the teachers. Otherwise, it seems to us it'd be rather messy if you had a lot of parents coming in, trying to say, "You've got to do it this way," even if you could find a common voice among them. Besides, experienced teachers know much better than [parents] do, in most cases. That's the way we've set up the school.

In truth, however, I found that the parents played a role of some significance in the development of curriculum of private schools. Elwood, at the Hampton Hills Academy, gave one example of parental inquiry resulting in a curricular change in the Mandarin program in the Upper School. When Hampton Hills was establishing a new course in Mandarin, the administrators decided to offer the program only in the Upper School. Initially, Hampton Hills required students to choose among the language offerings and did not allow more than one language to be scheduled. According to Elwood, parents were:

Curious about Mandarin but weren't so sure that they wanted to leave behind all that they had invested in their Spanish or their French or their Latin or whatever. In working with some parents, we developed kind of a compromise position that basically allows a student to take a second language as a sixth course one time in the 9th grade.

Elwood believed that this case was "an example of how, not so much push back, but just a strong recommendation" from parents resulted in change "which was sensible."

Parental input was evident in the curriculum of all three schools in this study, but the degree to which school leaders acknowledged and embraced this input fluctuated. Furthermore, school leaders did not eagerly solicit input from parents with regard to curricular changes but neither did they ignore parental inquiries. If a school leader was approached by a parent about a curricular concern, the leader was inclined to thank the parent for the input and investigate the concern. As a result, parents might not dictate curricular changes but served as an impetus for change.

*Role of parents with co-curriculum changes.*

Parents played a much more direct and significant role in what school leaders considered co-curricular or extra-curricular changes in the schools. School leaders provided a disproportionate number of examples of curricular involvement from parents that they considered to be in the realm of co-curriculum. Patty Graham, the math department chair for Copper Mountain, underscored the importance of parental involvement in these areas when she said that the “extracurricular things like sports and fine arts, we wouldn’t be able to do it without them. They are [a] very integral [part of] all of those areas.” The case studies provided a wide range of examples of parental influence on the co-curricular, from guest speakers to club activities and athletics to outside experiential programs.

One example of this influence at Copper Mountain was when Russell, the Upper School principal, requested that the parents club fund an outside program called Rachel’s Challenge to provide a speaker to talk to the students about bullying and peer-to-peer relationships.

I thought [Rachel’s Challenge] would tie in to our curriculum and be able to show the importance to students of how the kids treat each other and

how their words impact other students. I met with [the parents club] ... [and] asked them for the money to fund it. They said “yes.”

The parents club approved the funding of the program and thus influenced the curriculum of the school through a co-curricular speaker series.

In the area of school clubs, Pine Valley started a LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, and Trans-gender) club as result of student interest, and, shortly after, a LGBT parent support group formed to provide a forum for parents who either are LGBT or have children who are LGBT. While the student group was generated by student interest, the parent counterpart is an example of an organization initiated by Pine Valley parents. While the headmaster of Pine Valley, George Jackson, has shown tremendous support for this co-curricular aspect of the school, he did say that he had some concerns about the visibility of the program.

There have been a couple of days I was hoping that they would ... be a little lower profile. One year I was up here on Grandparents' Day and the students had put up sensationalized signs to raise consciousness. I don't ... invite the grandparents here to have that discussion. They really don't want to engage school at that level, nor do I.

Athletics is another aspect of the co-curriculum in which private school leaders allow parental inquiry. At Hampton Hills, for example, the president of the school, along with “certain members of the trustees, believed that to elevate [the school] to national status, [they] needed to be seen as engaging in those things that the traditional high- level preparatory schools in America engaged in.” As a result, the school built squash courts and created a squash program. Although parents did not provide the original impetus for the program, they have been very vocal about its direction. Anthony Hines, the school’s director of studies and the squash coach, explained that parents are more inclined to attempt to influence athletics than the classroom.



A much, much larger number of parents assume that they know something about sports, so when things aren't working right in that arena and this coach isn't fair or this isn't properly funded or whatever, we'll get more assertive parent involvement in that area than we do in academics.

Finally, parents have influenced the co-curriculum through inquiries about study abroad or other experiential learning opportunities outside the school that they want it to endorse. Hines explained that:

With increasing frequency, since I've been director of studies, I've been bombarded with offers from off-campus, one semester, year- long programs, "We really would love to have your kids apply to do school in the Bahamas, do school on top of Mount Everest."

As a result of this proliferation of inquiries from both program organizers and parents who were interested in these experiential programs, Hines explained that Hampton Hills has added "an assistant principal in charge of co-curricular activities." This new school leader, according to Hines, is charged with dealing with the growth of these curricular issues.

We have developed a very systematic way of saying, "Okay, we've evaluated this program ... this will match up for our students ... it will match up with our needs as a school [and] we can endorse that." We are beginning to address that piece of it by ... having a very direct channel for these issues to be discussed, evaluated [and for] parental concerns to be heard.

School leaders were much more protective of the formal curriculum than they were the co-curriculum. While there were not as many opportunities for parents to provide input regarding the official curriculum, when parents did voice concerns, they were not ignored. School leaders listened carefully to parent concerns and assured them that their concerns would be explored. The co-curriculum on the other hand, was more approachable and even negotiable. While school leaders were not eager to accept criticisms about the co-curriculum, they were not as protective as they were with the

official curriculum. Table 5 summarizes the influence of parents on the formal curriculum and the co-curriculum.

*Solicited and unsolicited feedback on the curriculum and co-curriculum.*

The principal difference between solicited and unsolicited feedback was the source of the concern. In table 5-4, this source is referred to as the “initiator” of the feedback. It is one thing for a school to ask parents what they think about an issue, but it can be an entirely different proposition when parents volunteer their opinions about the manner in which the school is educating their children. This does not mean that school leaders are not willing or equipped to negotiate these unsolicited concerns; however, their approaches might be somewhat different. In addition, there were significant distinctions in the way school leaders advanced discussions about the curriculum as opposed to discussions about the co-curriculum. While school leaders certainly acknowledged parental concerns about the official curriculum, they often resisted inquiries relating to this discussion. The co-curriculum, on the other hand, was more negotiable. Parents were more likely to effect change with the co-curriculum or at least have their voices heard. Table 6 summarizes some of the distinctions between solicited and unsolicited feedback from the parent constituencies as they relate to the curriculum and the co-curriculum.

Table 5

## Parents' Influence on the Curriculum

	Examples	Initiator	School Leader Attitudes	Parent Roles	School Strategy
Formal Curriculum	Language Program	Parents	Do not eagerly solicit input  Do not ignore parent inquiries  Experienced teachers know more than parents do	No recognized roles	Discussion  Thank parent  Investigate concern  Make decision  Compromise
Co-Curriculum	Speakers Series	Parents	Work in partnership with parents	Bring new ideas	Meet with Parent Club  Ask for funding
	Clubs	Parents	Show tremendous support  Sometimes wish for lower profiles	Bring new ideas	Solicit volunteer and financial support
	Athletics	School Leaders  Parents	Strong programs needed for national status  More assertive parents who think they know more about sports than coaches	Vocal in direction of programs  Funding	Acknowledge concerns  Solicit volunteer and financial support
	Study Abroad/ Experiential Programs	Parents	Fully supportive  Added administrative job to lead	Make inquiries  Ask school to endorse	Evaluate program proposal  Provide communications channels for inquiries  Endorse program

In addition to delineating who initiated the feedback, table 6 also examines the purpose of the feedback, the parental roles in the process, the stakeholder controlling the process, the level of influence the parents have over the curriculum, and the school leadership's reaction to this feedback. The purpose of the feedback varies from supporting the mission of the school to parental desires to alter the curriculum. Just as varied, the parental roles range from school leaders asking parents their opinion about when to schedule final exams to parents interjecting a curriculum on bullying. The control of this process is typically in the hands of the school, but school leaders sometimes defer some of the management of this change to parent constituencies. Table 6 characterizes the level of parental pressure as "direct," "indirect" or both. When parents were solicited for their opinion on the curriculum, their ultimate level of influence was primarily *indirect*. In other words, the school leaders were going to filter the views of the parents with those of the teachers before they effected change. With the co-curriculum, however, solicited feedback was likely to lead to *direct* changes in the programs. With regard to unsolicited feedback, the level of parent influence was described as both direct and indirect, since examples of both existed in the research. Finally, the reaction of the school leaders to this feedback was dependent upon the method in which the views were presented. Opinions that were solicited for both the curriculum and the co-curriculum were "encourage" and "recognize." On the other hand, school leaders tended to distinguish between unsolicited feedback on both the curriculum and the co-curriculum. While they were likely to "investigate" unsolicited inquiries about the co-curriculum, they "discouraged" and "resisted" unsolicited inquiries about the curriculum.

Table 6

*Comparison of Solicited and Unsolicited Feedback on Curriculum and Co-Curriculum*

	Solicited Feedback		Unsolicited Feedback	
	Curriculum	Co-Curriculum	Curriculum	Co-Curriculum
Initiator	School Leader	School Leader	Parents	Parents
Purpose	Support the mission of the school	Fills the void in budgets, assists in planning and program implementation	Influence curriculum offerings	Provide advice on program improvements
Parental Roles	Advocacy, feedback, assistance on specific issues affecting the school	Participate in service projects, raise funds for sports facilities, organize student trips abroad	Bringing new curriculum ideas to school, asking for reviews of teaching techniques and curriculum treatment	Give advice on coaching strategies, suggest clubs that should be started, provide potential guest speakers or topics
Control	School	Parent/School Partnership	School	School
Influence	Indirect	Direct	Direct/Indirect	Direct/Indirect
School Leadership Reaction	Encourage and Recognize	Encourage and Recognize	Discourage and Resist	Discourage, but Investigate

*Role of Influential Parents*

One of the realities of private schools is the presence of influential parents. Some parents, whether through status or income, garner more influence when they express a concern with the school. These influential parents may serve on the school's governing board, they may be successful alumni of the school, they may possess the financial means to donate large sums of money to the school or they may even work at the school.

Regardless of the circumstances, these stakeholders have an increased level of influence on the curriculum of the school. The principal of Copper Mountain, Jonathan Russell, described how these influential parents were consulted when significant curriculum decisions were made at his school. When a change was being considered with the daily schedule of the Upper School, the school leaders talked to:

Key people ... like the president of the parents club, probably the president of the Champions Club, [about] how this [change] will affect [the school], where the strengths of it lie, where the differences are between the schedule we have now, what the schedule we might be going to will be, answering any of their concerns. This gives you people within the community, that if you can answer their questions to their satisfaction, you know when they get asked from other people within the community you'll also have another parent on your side, you know, saying well this is why it's better than what you're doing now. Those different groups help you implement changes.

Not all parents have these opportunities for input, so certainly some parents were more influential than others.

There is a variety of ways through which influential parents could influence the leadership or curriculum of a private school, from programmatic concerns to curriculum changes and admissions decisions to policy implementation. These influential constituents have sway in the development of the curriculum and co-curriculum of private schools. One area that influential parents can apply pressure to private school leaders is in the admissions process. Charles Philmore, the headmaster of Hampton Hills said:

I deal with the trustee requests and have conversations with them and if a family that they're close to needs to speak with me, then I'll do that, but it's always with an admissions officer who knows the details of the case.

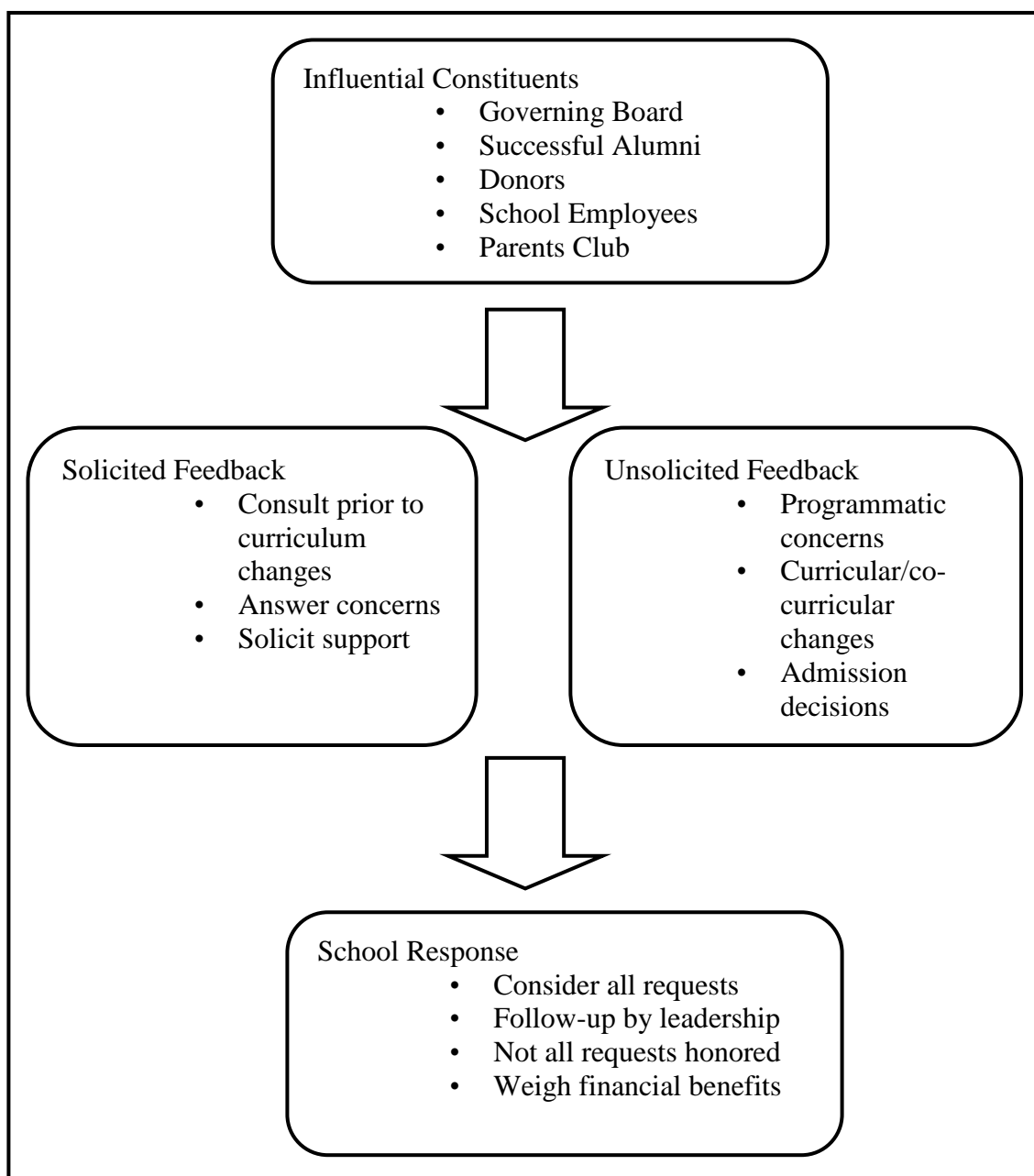
These requests were not always honored, but certainly they were considered. The same cannot be said about admission requests that were made by constituents who did not have

the same degree of influence. Sometimes the admissions process was influenced by the financial benefits that a potential donor may have been able to provide to the school. Erin Patterson, the science department coordinator for Pine Valley, spoke about this reality of private schools: “Like everywhere, you have to take a kid from a certain family so these other five kids can go there through financial aid.”

The process model displayed in figure 1 helps illustrate the role that influential parents played with regard to curriculum decisions in the private schools in this study. Influential parents, such as members of the governing board or potential donors, provided both solicited and unsolicited advice concerning the curriculum of the school. School leaders were faced with responding to these suggestions, weighing the benefits and detriments, and ultimately determining the affect on the educational mission of the school.

#### *Parental Expectations for Private School Education*

Another aspect of the influence of parents on the curriculum of private schools was the function of parental expectations for private school education and how these expectations affected the level to which parents influence the school community. William Simpson, Headmaster of Copper Mountain, illustrated these raised expectations when he described to parents the difference between Copper Mountain and a public education.



*Figure 1*

#### Role of Influential Parents

We are different ... if we're not different, I mean, fundamentally different, then take your \$12,000 you're spending here, put it in your pocket, and send them to the public school, where it's free. If you really believe that education is just the transmittal of knowledge, then by all means, don't spend your money here. It's not worth it. But if you believe that there's a bigger context, and there's a bigger reason for the education, and where



that education springs forth from, then, yes, I believe it's every bit worth the money that they invest in their children's education.

Simpson's remarks portrayed the expectations of parents for something more. These parental expectations included, but were not limited to, concern for the college admission process, religious indoctrination, pedagogical philosophy, extra-curricular opportunities, and access to school personnel.

*Expectations for college admission.*

Throughout this study, school leaders referenced parental expectations relating to the college admissions process. School leaders asserted that one of the reasons parents were willing to spend money on private school tuition was to ensure that their children would get into what they consider to be a good college. Anthony Hines, director of studies at Hampton Hills, stated:

I think that they expect "a really good" education and ... for some of them that means my child should ... have incredible SAT scores by the time they get out of here and go to a really good school, good college.

David Jefferson explained that a parent's "main expectation is the kid's going to get into a good college; and because we describe ourselves as a college prep school, we feed that expectation ... we work toward it."

*Expectations for religious school.*

Another expectation that school leaders in two of the schools in the study expressed was a desire for a religious education. Charles Philmore explained that Hampton Hills is "a Christian school, so those are the underpinnings, of sort, of the ethos of the community here though it's not proselytizing or converting; it's just extending the love of Christ to every person in our community." Copper Mountain Christian School, which has an even stronger religious affiliation when compared to Hampton Hills, has

different parental expectations with regard to religious teachings. Simpson explained that Copper Mountain parents “want a faith-based education ... and they’re more concerned about teachers and administration being followers of Christ than they are about what specific text we’re using in math.” Of course, this expectation was not always met.

Copper Mountain Chaplain Robert Gibson conceded that:

There’s this illusion that because we’re a Christian school that ... our kids are Christian and they’re all going to be nice to each other, and there’s not going to be any conflict ... and all of those issues that you ... deal with in public schools are not present here at Copper Mountain.

Gibson went on to say that “sometimes ... there’s that expectation of parents, then they get here and they realize that’s not the way it is, you know.” Although this expectation was more evident at Copper Mountain, the parents at Hampton Hills also expected a Christian educational environment.

*Expectations for progressive pedagogy.*

One expectation that was unique to Pine Valley was that of a progressive pedagogy. According to David Jefferson, “progressive in one sense ... means that we’re looking at the full development of these young men and women, and we’re caring about all of those levels.” But Jefferson stressed that it also means that the school community was “always striving to be better than before.” Jefferson believed that as a progressive school, Pine Valley must always examine and reexamine how they teach and learn.

One of the expectations at [Pine Valley] ... and it’s modeled from the head all the way down ... [is] that it is a good place for kids to be, that they see that teachers go out and create new courses because they’re interested in it, that they see people like me saying, “Well maybe we can do this better” or “How can we improve on this” and listen to ideas from kids.

*Expectations for opportunities.*

School leaders also consider that private school parents expect their children to be given certain educational or extra-curricular opportunities. George Jackson believed “that they want ... and they hope to get more personal attention. I think they expect more academic and artistic opportunity. I think they expect a higher level of performance, more standards.” Anthony Hines explained how parents would communicate these expectations as opportunities for the children, but they were really expectations for the school:

The favorite phrase that I’ve heard from parents is, “but what’s good for the kids” ... and almost always ... that actually means they’re not interested in what’s good for the kids. They’re interested in what they want for their kid.

Patterson explained that parental expectations for enhancement opportunities were sometimes inappropriate when those parents were really “looking to make sure that their varsity starter is out there on the court all the time ... [or] they’re looking to make sure that their kid’s getting the straight A’s that they’re assuming they deserve.”

*Expectations for access to school personnel.*

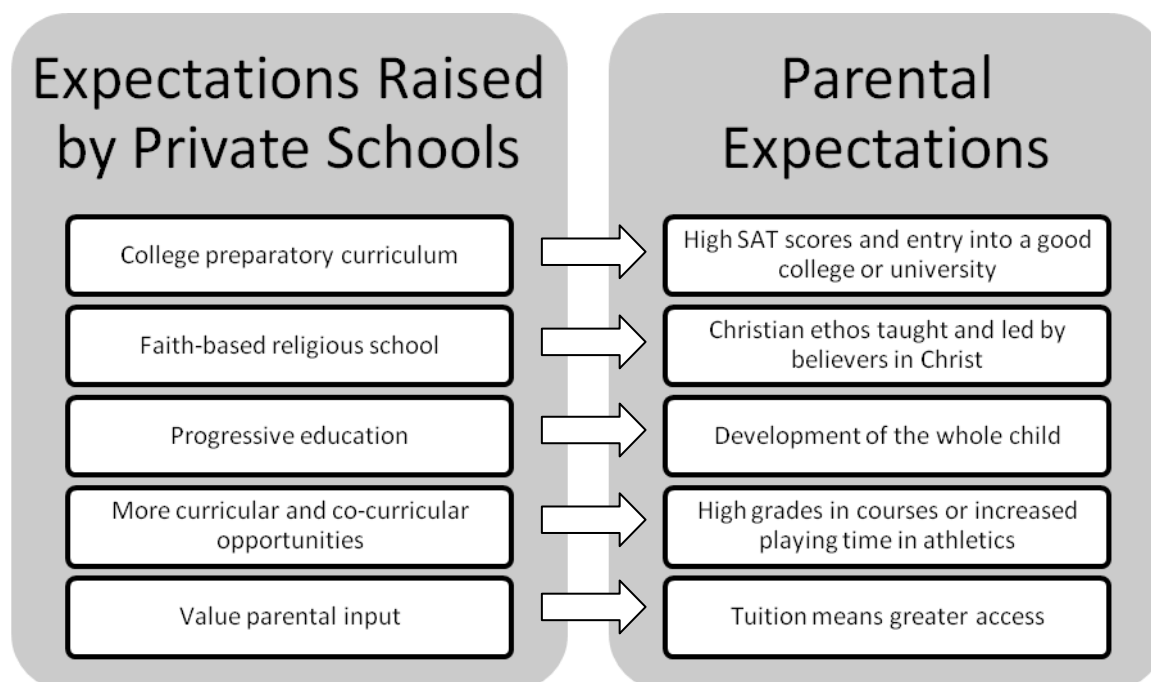
Some parents send their children to private schools because they expect to have greater access to school leaders and teachers. Charles Philmore illustrated this expectation with an example of a parent who told him, “I demand to have a meeting with my child’s first-grade teacher and you, me, and the ... elementary school division head.” Philmore believed that “paying tuition does not give you rights ... it gives you the privilege to be in schools like ours so there is no leverage you gain in power by paying the tuition.” Simpson described how school leaders must balance these different expectations: “We want to value your input ... but that doesn’t mean we’re going to do

everything that you ask. And you're not always going to be happy with everything we do."

One of the realities associated with private schools is a distinctive set of expectations. These expectations not only represent what the parent constituents want from the private school, but they also represent the expectations that the school sets out. In figure 2, the expectations that were raised by private schools in the study are compared with the ensuing parental expectations. For example, all three schools in this study promoted their college preparatory curriculum. They advertised that their graduates would not only gain acceptance into college, but they would be prepared for the demands of a college education. As a result of the school's advertised expectations, parents expected their children to achieve the necessary SAT scores to gain entry into what they considered to be a good college or university. Likewise, if schools promoted a faith-based education, it was logical for parents to expect religious teachings in the curriculum. However, the nexus between what schools expected for their curriculum and how the parent constituents interpreted these advertised expectations did not always coincide.

#### Curriculum Views of School Leaders

School leadership played a major role in all three of the schools included in this study. Often times, the school leaders' view of curriculum was in conflict with the views of the parents. In this study, I examined the broad roles of the school leaders and the more specific significance of their duties with regard to curriculum. Within the context of curriculum leadership, I examined the distinction between traditional curriculum discussions and what is often considered the co-curriculum.



*Figure 2*

Parental Expectations for Private School Education

### *School Leadership*

Before discussing the role of school leaders with regard to curriculum, it is important to understand how school leaders envision their overall philosophy of leadership within the broader school community. In this section I briefly explore the leadership structure and philosophies of each of the three schools involved in the research. For the purposes of this analysis, I looked only at the leadership in each of the Upper Schools, since those were the boundaries of the case study. Specifically, the leadership philosophy of each of these institutions was established primarily by the headmasters and, to a lesser degree, the Upper School principals. While certain commonalities existed, each of the three schools offered a perspective on leadership that was unique to the institution and its culture.

*Copper Mountain Christian School.*

The leadership structure and philosophy at Copper Mountain were relatively uncomplicated compared to the other two schools in the study. Copper Mountain's leadership structure included the headmaster, Upper School principal, chaplain, dean of students and department chairs for each major discipline. The structure was admittedly hierarchical, and all major decisions were required to go through the headmaster, who ultimately was responsible to a governing board.

Simpson, the headmaster of Copper Mountain, described the structure as somewhat of a division of responsibility in which the headmaster identifies the values and the beliefs of the institution and the other school leaders were charged with realizing those goals. Simpson elaborated:

I am more involved in the philosophical component of [the school], saying ... this is where I would like to go, this is what I would like to see, and then I kind of turn it loose to the principal and the department heads to make it become a reality. My primary duty is to cast the vision for what we want to accomplish academically, and then they make it happen. As the headmaster, I am responsible for the philosophical and spiritual direction of the school, as well as academic oversight to make sure that we're on mission in what we want to accomplish.

In addition to the headmaster, the other most influential leader in the Upper School was the principal. As the principal of the Upper School at Copper Mountain, Russell was responsible for "hiring teachers, implementing curriculum, solving problems, assessing, [and] interacting with the students, the teachers and the parents." The primary objective of Russell's role was to "make sure that we're doing what we're telling them we're going to do and answering their concerns or questions, or getting their input to how to make it better." Since this was Russell's first year at Copper Mountain, Simpson admitted that he was more involved with the leadership in the Upper School than he had been in the past. Although Simpson believed that his increased role in the Upper School

would diminish as Russell got accustomed to the school, Simpson was the primary leader for now.

As the point person for the direction of the school, Simpson was often front and center with discussions with the parents. This was a responsibility that Simpson does not take lightly, and he was careful not to abuse his role as the spokesman for the school.

When issues arose and he learned of discontent or concern among parents, he cautiously gauged the sentiment of the community before he responded. Simpson described the significance of the headmaster's role in the school community in this way:

You know, a lot of times I just have to kind of sit back and let the grapevine kind of work itself out because there is not a lot that we can do. And what I don't want to appear is defensive. You know, I hear something and I shoot out an e-mail to my parents. Well, he's just trying to cover up something. You know, I don't want that type of mindset that anytime I hear anything I'm going to address it school-wide. So I'm pretty particular about anything that I'm going to address school-wide. It's going to have to be pretty high-profile and for me, I'm going to have to feel like it's an institutional organizational issue that I need to address. I'm pretty cautious about attaching my name to e-mails, because I don't want my parents getting so many of them that they begin to devalue my communication with them. As my staff kind of says, "That's our silver bullet, you know, for [the headmaster] to send that e-mail out." So I'm pretty careful with that.

The role of the headmaster at Copper Mountain was a direct reflection of Simpson's personality. Simpson explained that his "strengths are casting vision ... I love getting up in front and talking to parents about Christian education ... that's my personality." Simpson commented that school leaders need to enjoy what they were doing and believe in what they were telling constituents. He continued, "I'm very passionate about what we do and I think that builds political capital, for lack of a better word, with our parents ... that they're willing to overlook some things." School leaders build relationships with parents that will help them down the road when negotiating

conflict. Simpson told other school leaders on his administrative team that building this capital was part of the process and “as much as we hate it, this is a political game.”

Simpson’s remarks illustrated one of the realities of private schools, a sense that school leaders needed to keep parents happy.

*Pine Valley School.*

At Pine Valley the leadership was as unique as the school’s diverse buildings. As mentioned in chapter four, the current headmaster, along with a group of dissatisfied public school parents, helped to establish the school in 1971. Jackson has been the only headmaster for the school in its thirty-seven year history. That longevity puts an interesting cast on the school’s leadership structure and philosophy. As he reflected on his long tenure at Pine Valley, Jackson exclaimed, “I just happened to land here, like it, grow with it, and stay with it.” This characterization underestimates the personal attachment Jackson has to the school and his influence on the legacy of the school.

The leadership structure at Pine Valley was described as non-hierarchical in the sense that there was not a principal in charge of the schools, but rather a “coordinator” who was in charge of organizing and managing the schools. There also were no department heads for the different academic disciplines. Instead, the *coordinator* nomenclature was used to describe the leadership in each department. Jackson explained that the leadership structure as it relates to department heads was “coordinated by a weak department structuring in the high school ... in the sense that ... we don’t have permanent department chairs ... they rotate every three or four years.” His claim of a non-hierarchical structure was somewhat duplicitous since all of the school leaders in his school appear to defer to Jackson on all major decisions. Jackson maintained, “I am not



the lone ranger that other people work under because it's a pretty big job,” but he added that “the final decision is mine.” This dynamic was quite clear from the conversations with other school leaders and from the observations of parents.

Jackson believed his role was somewhat self-determined, stating “I think school heads define their roles because there's a lot to do.” As far as his leadership philosophy was concerned, he made a conscious decision to “define the job as headmaster” on his own terms, in a manner that was “not a manager, not interchangeable with somebody with an MBA.” Jackson explained that in the private school realm, there were a variety of ways to envision leadership. Some school heads choose to attend “national meetings” and focus their attention on “all the professional associations in the state [and] in the South” that are referenced with a “series of acronyms.” Jackson devalued the importance of these associations, instead preferring to spend his time in the school. As for outside leadership opportunities, Jackson explained, “I don't do that ... It's fine, it's just that I've chosen, I guess by temperament or whatever, to spend my time much, much, much, much more here than elsewhere.” As a medium-sized private school, Pine Valley offered a wide-range of curricular and co-curricular opportunities and a concomitant range of responsibilities for leadership within the school community. Jackson offered another distinction in his philosophy of leadership compared to some of his contemporaries. He explained that he does not spend a great deal of time catering to influential parents or members of the governing board, declaring the “people I hang out with and identify with are much more the faculty than trustees.”

The other significant force in the leadership construct that guided the Upper School at Pine Valley was Jefferson, the high school coordinator. As mentioned

previously, Jefferson served as the equivalent to the principal of the Upper School. He has been at Pine Valley, serving in this capacity, for thirty-five years. Jefferson explained his leadership philosophy in these terms:

Our focus is always on the student, what's going to be best for the student. So almost no matter what the issue is, the question is what's going to make for the best learning? What's going to help the student the best? But right behind that is what's going to be best for the teacher? Because if teachers are happy, confident, supported, encouraged and feel good about what they're doing, then it's going to be very good for the students. So those are kind of the guiding-principle sorts of things in the way that I look at what I do.

This philosophy was evident throughout the study and was confirmed during the interviews and observations. Another aspect of Jefferson's leadership approach that was obvious from the outset was the way he scheduled time to be available to the stakeholders. In fact, one of our interviews was interrupted by a parent who had a concern. The meeting with the parent was unplanned, but so are many of the issues that arise in schools. Jefferson explained how he addresses these competing demands on his time:

A specific thing that I do is, I try and keep my days unscheduled for at least half the time, so that people who need to talk to me, or have access, and usually immediate access, that I can call a parent, listen to a teacher, deal with a student situation, do it quickly, and have time in my day to do that. And I never sit around and wonder what I'm going to do with my time.

Jefferson believed that as a school leader, one's schedule must be flexible and one must be able to adjust to the needs of the constituents. The impromptu interruption of our interview provided an excellent opportunity to observe Jefferson's interaction with a disconcerted parent. He listened carefully to the parent's complaint and assured him that he would look into the issue and get back to him as soon as he (Jefferson) had all of the

details. After the short conversation with the parent, Jefferson explained to me that his approach with parents who are upset with a teacher is to always listen to the parents, but not to make any promises or come to any conclusions until he has talked with the teacher.

As the leader of the Upper School, Jefferson had numerous responsibilities to a variety of constituents. He characterized his multiple roles and their affect on the school this way:

I create a lot of the mood, just by the way I move around the school. Some days, I think I'm a cheerleader. Some days, I think I'm a therapist. Sometimes I'm an organizer. Sometimes I'm just a watcher. And so I feel kind of a responsibility for all of that.

Throughout my visits to Pine Valley, Jefferson's presence and influence were apparent. While Jackson's philosophy was unmistakable throughout the school community, Jefferson was literally omnipresent. From the LGBT support group meeting I attended to the individual interviews, it seemed that every time I visited the school, Jefferson was nearby.

*Hampton Hills Academy.*

The leadership structure and philosophy at Hampton Hills were characterized by tradition, experience and confidence. While the leadership structure was straightforward, there were multiple leaders and levels of influence that added a degree of complexity not present in the other two schools. The overall decision-making authority resided in the school president, Philmore, who had been at Hampton Hills for seventeen years in that capacity. Philmore explained that his "title is president, and that's always been the nomenclature in this school, [but] it is also headmaster." Philmore pointed out this distinction because at many private schools there is both a president and a headmaster. In most cases the president "works primarily with the board and fund-raising and public

relations” whereas the headmaster “is the operational head of the school.” At Hampton Hills, Philmore played both roles. As he explained:

The title is president, but it could be headmaster. It’s interchangeable here. So the reason I point that out is because I have frontline responsibilities, you know, for the administrative team and all the constituencies of the school and the curriculum and just, you know, the whole operation.

Philmore undoubtedly sets the direction of the school, but he did not do so alone. With regard to his administrative team, he willingly delegated authority to those he entrusted with leadership positions.

In addition to Philmore, Hampton Hills had an assistant headmaster for academic affairs, a dean of faculty, a director of studies and an Upper School principal who all had responsibilities for the leadership and direction of the school. Where Hampton Hills differed from the other two schools was the divergence of power that existed after Philmore. Like the previous two institutions, the principal of the Upper School exerted considerable influence on the leadership philosophy at Hampton Hills. The principal, Sally Miller, described her job as “basically overseeing the daily operation of the high school as well as ... creating a vision, curricularly, cocurricularly, the whole bit.” Although Miller was in her eighteenth year at Hampton Hills, she was in her first year as the principal, and she believed that her vision was what led to her selection as the leader of the Upper School.

Besides the principal, Philmore leaned heavily on Elwood, the assistant headmaster of academic affairs. Elwood explained that he was “the strategic-planning guy for the academic program at the school.” In this capacity, Elwood was responsible “for thinking through policy, direction, implementation issues” and, as he referred to it, “program incubation.” The dean of faculty was primarily responsible for hiring,

supervision and staff development. The director of studies was in charge of “making the schedule” for the Upper School and “implementing the school's academic policies, rules, and guidelines.” The director of studies answers directly to the principal, whereas the dean of faculty and assistant headmaster for academic affairs report directly to President Philmore. While the organizational and leadership structures were clear, the shared governance was evident.

### *Curriculum Leadership*

Having delineated the leadership structures and philosophies of the three schools, I next explored how the roles of school leaders relate to curriculum development. I found that the school leaders had very strong opinions on the development of curriculum and who they believed should be the impetus for curricular reform. Miller, principal of the Hampton Hills Upper School, reflected this attitude concerning changes that occur in curriculum and the co-curriculum when she stated, “I would say that I'm the driving force behind them.” Often the perspective of school leaders differs from that of parents with regard to curriculum and how much influence parents should garner. In particular, school leaders appear to make a distinction between the types of curriculum changes they discuss. Throughout this investigation, curriculum leaders addressed the co-curricular and the formal curriculum differently. School leaders were much less willing to disclose their discussions about what they consider the traditional, core curriculum as opposed to the co-curricular or the more informal curriculum.

### *Role of school leaders with curriculum change.*

There was little inconsistency within the three schools in this study with regard to the development of curriculum. In all three schools, the leaders believed that curriculum

decisions should be made by the school and not parents. To different degrees, the heads of all three schools expressed concern over parents trying to change or adapt the curriculum to serve individual needs. Furthermore, the school leaders articulated an understanding that change should reflect the professional judgment of the faculty.

At Copper Mountain, Simpson believed that curriculum leadership comes from the faculty in concert with school leadership. He balked at the idea that parents influence the core curriculum, explaining that the curriculum was determined by teachers and school leaders. Simpson explained that the people responsible for curriculum changes were:

Almost predominantly the department heads that we have in the different disciplines, and they will drive the curricular decisions. The [department heads] are given pretty wide breadth to be able to go in and make decisions on what is going to be best, what is going to increase our test scores, what's going to be most beneficial to our students who are graduating, going into college. So they take that and then they'll make the recommendation ... to me, and I'll either sign yes or no. I can't ever remember saying no to anything that the department heads [recommend]. That's their discipline, that's what they should be an expert in, [and] so I trust in that.

Simpson distinguished his role in the curriculum process when he explained:

Sometimes ... maybe there's a question out there about the Spanish curriculum ... why are we not offering Spanish? Why did we do away with Spanish? Or why are we putting it back in here and not over here? ... Those types of things, I'll deal with them on a high level.

Simpson's explanation of the Spanish curriculum illustrated the multiple levels of curriculum leadership at Copper Mountain. While the ideas for curriculum change originated with the teachers, larger, more programmatic changes must pass their way through the school leadership.

The philosophy was not much different at Pine Valley when it came to the role of school leaders in curriculum decisions. Jackson believed that the curriculum development process at Pine Valley was “a shared role” that comes from the “teachers.” He explained:

I think I participate in it and sometimes will push on something and not so push in other things, but it's not a top-down school. All the faculty, who are experienced people, [are] full participants in ... the direction of the school. Ultimately [that is] what their experience and wisdom bring us as a [learning institution]. There's nothing on these walls and these bookshelves that says this is the curriculum in the school and it's my baby.

Jefferson noted that “the origin of most curricular issues and choices comes from the teachers and the departments.” He continued, “Occasionally I get kind of involved in those specific things as needed, [but] I don't manage it [or] supervise it.” The departments were left to determine when and what curricular changes were appropriate, and the leadership helps facilitate the process when needed. Jefferson believed that at Pine Valley “the curriculum is pretty well thought out and pretty well planned, [and] there’s a reason for all the different kinds of things that we do.” When stakeholders inquired about the curriculum, Jefferson explained, “Sometimes ... it boils down to saying, ‘I understand why you think that's important, [but] in a school of limited resources ... we're just not able at this point.’” School leaders should remember that the curriculum cannot be limitless. Any time you add something to the curriculum, something else has to give.

Mary Margaret Allen, assistant head of Pine Valley, described this balance facing curriculum leaders in these terms:

The ship of school, I think, and curriculum as well is never a straight course. You always find a need for something, and so you kind of go a little bit that way. Well, that’s taking it a little bit too far, so you kind of go back that way but you tend to over-steer a little bit. So you’re constantly adjusting to changing needs of society and new things in education and technology and student interest and faculty, their particular proclivities or whatever. So there’s always movement. Basically, we leave curriculum up

to the people who are doing the teaching, who are the experts in that field, and so they work among themselves to decide what the best sequence of courses is.

As for the role of curriculum leadership at Hampton Hills, Philmore clarified that they “have an assistant headmaster for academic affairs ... [who] oversees the academic leadership team, which consists of all the chairs of academic departments at the school.”

According to Philmore:

The academic leadership team is ... basically the frontline team to review not only the curriculum that we have and to look at scope and sequence K through 12, but they also are the frontline group for discussing any curricular innovation, new courses that faculty might want to propose or that anyone would like to propose from within the school.

Within this curriculum development dynamic, the headmaster played a critical role. As

Philmore elaborated:

My job is to read as much as I can, see what’s going on out there in the world, anticipate ... where our curriculum really needs to be focused and how we might deliver the curriculum in better ways and to basically prick the side of the institution often enough that we don’t get complacent and settled ... in what we’re doing, because we always need to be improving upon what we have. It’s no different from any physician who has to keep up on surgical techniques. I mean, there may be ...tweaks and new approaches that you can take, or there may be a whole cloth change in the way you do a particular surgical procedure. And you just have to stay up on things. And so my job is to, if you will, from a 20,000-foot level, see the whole forest and anticipate ... where we’re headed ten, twenty years from now and help the school stay focused on any developments and innovations, changes that we need to be entertaining and actually implementing. So it’s a more broad set of lenses that I use in the work that I do with the assistant headmaster of academic affairs and with the principals of each of the three divisions, who are also intimately involved in curricular issues.

Philmore’s remarks exemplified the belief that the school’s leadership was in charge of establishing the vision of the curriculum. While parents were a wealth of resources, the school leadership considered the parental role external to the curriculum development process. At Hampton Hills, the parents generally understood and respected this boundary.

Elwood reinforced this notion, explaining:



We get far more [interest] about athletics than we do about academics. For the most part, parents cede the authority to the academic professionals. People pretty much assume that they are not the experts in the field of chemistry or French or anything else.

One apparent difference of emphasis, articulated more by the leadership at Hampton Hills than at the other two schools was a dependence on institutional processes to bring about curricular reform. While all of the schools talked about the curriculum originating from the faculty, Hampton Hills consistently referenced the procedure and structure in place for discussing curriculum change.

At the same time, however, the leadership at Hampton Hills did stress the importance of the faculty in the curriculum development process. Thompson, dean of faculty, provided an example of the “autonomy” of the classroom teacher with regard to the curriculum development process at the school. She explained:

School leaders do not typically adopt ... a specific text that every tenth-grader uses for English. The teachers have a good bit of latitude, so there are core themes, and then the teachers have a good bit of latitude in developing what pieces of literature they might use.

The faculty played a somewhat dichotomous role with regards to the curriculum. On one hand, they had certain pedagogical freedom, yet, in contrast, the curricular vision was established by tradition and authority.

Regardless of structure or motivation, the leaders of all three schools believed that curriculum decisions should be made by some combination of teachers and school leaders. None of the school leaders interviewed in this study expressed a desire for parents to be part of the curriculum development process. Moreover, the school leaders rejected the proposition that parents have the understanding or knowledge base to offer

help in any meaningful capacity. Their shared belief was that curriculum development should be left to professional educators rather than parents.

*Role of school leaders with co-curricular change.*

Another aspect of school leadership with regard to the curriculum development process was the co-curriculum or the informal curriculum. While school leaders tend to resist parent input with the formal curriculum, they were less threatened by the notion of parents influencing the co-curricular. Whether it was a request to invite a guest speaker or a complaint about athletics, the schools' philosophies on the co-curriculum were less stringent than those for the formal curriculum. As Allen explained, "I don't think we look for a lot of input from parents about the [co-curriculum]. We'll get it about sports and things like that, but we don't necessarily look for it."

At Copper Mountain, Gibson explained that parents will frequently offer ideas for chapel speakers, which were welcomed. Ironically, this form of public pedagogy has the potential to affect the education of more students than a traditional classroom setting and, as Gibson explained, it is "the area that ... the most people are critical of what [Copper Mountain] is doing." He noted that with chapel programs, there is "a tendency to be a little bit sensitive," so school leaders "have to try to keep a balance" on what types of speaker requests are considered. Despite this cautious approach, school leaders at Copper Mountain were willing to consider parental influence with the chapel program. Similarly, at Pine Valley, school leaders have formed a committee to plan the assembly programs. Parents were invited to submit their requests for assemblies in the same manner as teachers. Allen explained how Pine Valley deals with parent requests for guest speakers or other co-curricular requests:

All of these things are good things, but ...if we have an assembly that cuts into teaching time ... it needs to be something that has some kind of particular reason ... that makes sense in the broader scheme of things. So we have an assembly committee, and they can take those kinds of requests from parents ... and look at whether or not that makes sense in terms of the bigger picture. So those are ways that we get a lot of input from parents in terms of ideas for assemblies or ideas for service projects or for other things that kids could do.

Another example of how school leaders approach the co-curricular was illustrated by Edward Sanchez, director of studies at Pine Valley, in reference to their unique short-term offerings. Parents at Pine Valley often inquire not only about what they think should be offered during the short term, but sometimes they request to teach these courses. Sanchez explained how he deals with these parents and his contention about their purpose:

In short term, in particular, I often get parents who are interested in offering courses, and sometimes we take them up on it, depending on whether they have a particular expertise and whether it fits into our overall offerings. I find there's a tendency for people to kind of think of teaching as fun and easy. There's also a tendency to think kids are, perhaps, older than they actually are. There's just an art to what we do as teachers. It's sometimes a little more difficult just walking in off the street to do that. I think it's well-meaning and a desire to share, but sometimes, it's not altogether appropriate. Sometimes ... the parents think the kids are ready to deal with [the subject matter], but they aren't quite there yet. We tend to remember ourselves as we were in college and trying to project that back into high school.

Regardless of the parents' motives, Pine Valley's open philosophy of considering their inquiries was a clear departure from the way curricular requirements were approached.

This attitude was also evident at Hampton Hills. As mentioned earlier, Hampton Hills has had such a proliferation of co-curricular activities, they have added an assistant principal charged with coordinating these activities for the Upper School. Hines pushed for a systematic approach to addressing parental input, since they each year were getting

more and more requests for outside, experiential programs that would count toward the students' records. Hines understands why these programs would be attractive to some parents, explaining:

You look at it, and your kid's not going to be star linebacker at an Ivy League school. The kid's not going to be a virtuoso on the viola, but, ah, your kid has literally done a school year on Mount Everest. No one's done that. I think that that's a place where more and more parents have come in and said, "God, this is great." And I get calls about, "Well, now, if we go do this summer program, we get credit for this, this can substitute for this."

Hines's, and consequently Hampton Hills's approach, to these parental requests was indicative of the difference that existed between what was considered curriculum and co-curriculum. In this case the school not only engaged in these discussions, they began to institutionalize this recent phenomenon with the introduction of outside programs. Hines expanded on this topic in this way:

That's one of the reasons, because of the increasing frequency of this kind of pressure, both from programs wanting to recruit us, and parents beginning to see these opportunities as places that would benefit their children, that [we now have an] assistant principal for co-curricular things, and [he] is trying to pull those things together and have a very systematic way of saying, "Okay, we've evaluated this program. This will match up for our students. It will match up with our needs as a school. We can endorse that." And so ... we're beginning to address that piece of it by putting it into one place and having a very direct channel for these issues to be discussed, evaluated, parental concerns to be heard there.

Another area in the co-curriculum that received widespread parental input was athletics. Parents were much more likely to approach the school to influence the athletic program than they were the academic program. Elwood believed that many more parents were inclined to express their opinion concerning athletics than were willing to express concern about academics. Parents were more assertive about what they think the coach should be doing than the classroom teacher.

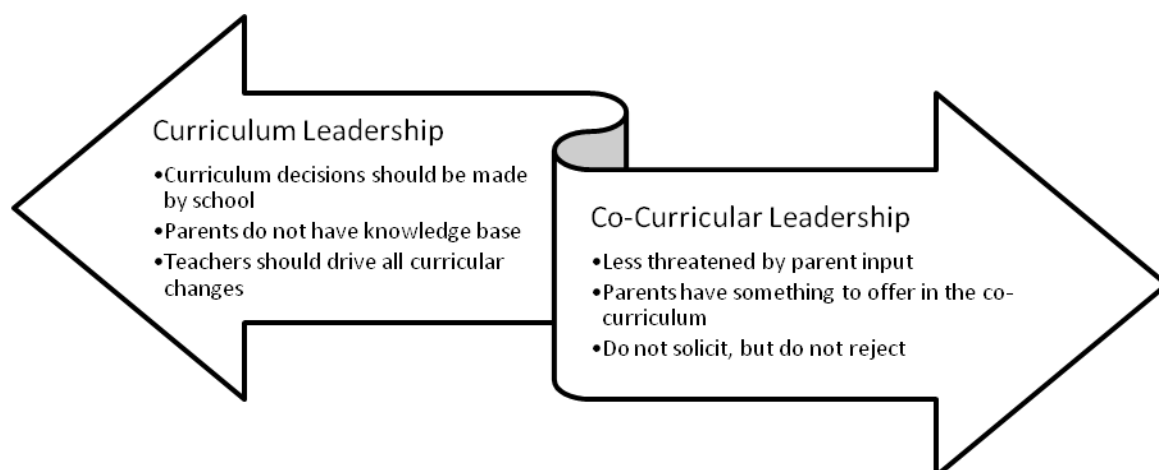
Jefferson at Pine Valley expressed a willingness to try to accommodate parent requests when it came to student organizations. As far as the co-curricular student clubs were concerned, he explained that he occasionally had a parent who inquired about starting a club. Jefferson explained that his response was simple:

"Let's see if we can find a group of kids who are interested in doing this, and our teacher here will work with you and do it." Of course, it's different if they're volunteering to help form it, then there's energy there. If they'd just like to see someone else do it, then maybe it'll work and maybe it won't. I'm happy if half of the great ideas that people come up with, including me, turn out to work. Because there are so many good things you could do in the school, so many things you can add, so many things that you could try. You don't have time or energy for all of it. So part of it is finding somebody to give it a try. I like to encourage things.

This approach was far different from the request to change the science or math curriculum. School leaders were much more willing to consider co-curricular requests. That does not mean that school leaders would automatically accept any co-curricular inquiry or that they would not have an established procedure to determine what was appropriate for the school. Patterson believed Pine Valley's philosophy towards the co-curricular was uncomplicated: "If it fits in, then it happens; and if it doesn't fit into what we're doing, then it doesn't." Regardless, school leaders were demonstratively more willing to listen to inquiries about the co-curricular than the formal curriculum.

In figure 3, some of the differences between curriculum leadership and co-curricular leadership are illustrated. Clearly, school leaders were more flexible in the area of co-curricular leadership than they were curriculum leadership. The official or formal curriculum was much less negotiable, and school leaders were very protective of who had the authority to effect change in these areas. This does not prevent parents from

influencing the direction of the curriculum. However, the leadership divergence was evident and, as figure 3 indicates, the leadership in these two areas was quite different.



*Figure 3*

Curriculum Leadership versus Co-Curricular Leadership

### *Negotiating Curriculum Conflict*

A reality for any school is that parents and school leaders will not always agree on the curriculum of the school. As described in the previous two sections, parents and school leaders often have differing views about curriculum issues and the direction of the school. School leaders are faced with negotiating these conflicts. In private schools, the negotiation process is especially important, since parents have a choice in the private school they attend. School leaders also are faced with balancing the wishes of their parent constituents with the mission of the school. The way in which school leaders approach this negotiation process can affect the entire school community.

When negotiating with parents, open communication is important both for informing parents and establishing boundaries for parental influence. Consequently, school leaders are building relationships with both teachers and parents based on trust and transparency. Another important aspect of this negotiation process is the function of a school's mission and philosophy with regard to parents. Two of the three schools in this study had religious affiliations that were manifested in their missions and affected their leadership philosophies. Furthermore, the progressive philosophy of the Pine Valley School helped to shape the perspective of the school's leadership and its relationship with parents. Finally, the tenure of the schools' leaders can affect the negotiation process. The growth of a school and the development of its leadership style can influence relationships with the parent constituency.

### *Communication*

Throughout this study, school leaders referenced the importance of communication with parents. Simpson's philosophy was that "with the high-profile issues," it was a good idea to "send out a letter telling our parents [how] we are going to address the specific issue." Simpson elaborated by explaining that "if I know it's going to be a big issue, I want to hit it head on." He cited one example about an anticipated tuition increase for the next school year. His letter communicated the amount of the tuition increase, the reasons for the increase and an invitation for parents to ask questions about the tuition changes at the upcoming parent forum. This type of open communication served the dual purpose of informing parents and helping school leaders establish boundaries for parents.

*Informing parents.*

Frequent and open communication with the parent constituency helps to keep parents informed and establish trust. Simpson believed that “in any situation where there’s a lack of information, our parents and our constituencies and any constituent is very quick to fill that vacuum with anything.” Simpson’s remarks were indicative of the beliefs of many of the school leaders in this study. He elaborated on the concerns of this absence of information in this way:

Usually, it’s rumors and opinions, what parents would like to see happen or what they fear is going to happen. Those all of a sudden become the scuttlebutt, and that kind of takes over and creates fear and anxiety among our parents and sometimes our students and, a lot of times, our teachers. So I just feel like if I sense something’s going to be big, it’s better for me to throw it out there. And again, it’s part of that transparency. You know, we’re not trying to hide anything from you. We just want you to know, and this is why we’re doing it. Now, I feel like that really mitigates against a lot of the rumor mill.

The school leaders in this study articulated that the risk of not keeping parents informed was that they would create their own truth. Proactive communication helped school leaders negotiate conflicts and limit misunderstanding.

Another important aspect of communication is that providing information goes a long way in establishing trust with parents. School leaders expressed that parents were more likely to trust a school and, consequently, its leadership, when parents believed that they were receiving regular and explicit information. Simpson discussed the importance of establishing relationships with parents built on trust and the advantages of two-way communication resulting from this trust. He explained:

I develop relationships with students, I develop relationships with parents and I develop relationships with my faculty and staff so that they’re comfortable enough that when they hear something that, you know, kind of sets them on edge or ... they may think ... what’s going on ... they’ll



actually come to me and say, “Matt, you need to know this. You need to know what’s going on.” And I think again that goes back to a trust issue with my faculty, with my parents, with my students that they trust me that I’m not going to take that information and use it in a way that’s going to hurt them or harm them, but that I am going to be a good steward of the image of the school and what we’re trying to accomplish here.

Along these lines, Jackson at Pine Valley illustrated how this flow of information should transpire. He noted that a “school needs to decide what it’s going to do in the process that it follows, or comes to a resolution, and then it ought to inform people ... and how much it informs people depends on the issue.” Jackson provided an example of a situation that occurred in the Upper School that was significant enough for him to write a letter to the entire parent body. In this situation, a group of students had been caught with drugs. Although “it wasn’t that widespread,” Jackson felt it was “big enough that it was scary to people.” As a result, “the word spread ... and, of course, when the word spreads ... it spreads to different degrees of accuracy.” For this reason, Jackson believed it was necessary to address the drug issue from the outset, before the parents created their own narrative.

Graham offered another example of the importance of communication when negotiating conflict with parents concerning the posting of student grades. At Copper Mountain, the Upper School used an internet-based program called Edline to communicate with parents about student progress in the classroom. This software program had become a big selling point for the school, keeping parents informed and up to date with their children’s grades. School leaders, however, had to find a balance as to how much communication was too much communication. Graham explained this negotiation this way:

I think it's a balance. And, yes, we hate parent conflict, we hate parent confrontations, but they're a good thing in a way, because how are the parents ever going to hear the truth about their child? They don't know how their child acts when they get out of the home. So I think there has to be some kind of a meeting of the minds. There has to be ... trust, but there also has to be accountability. It makes life very treacherous at times, but ... you have to have give and take. You have to take the criticism, filter it. Some parents are obsessive. You got to learn that, and you got to figure out, 'Okay, I'm not going to update Edline until once a week.'

The issue of grades and keeping parents informed was an illustration of the compromise school leaders had to negotiate with parents. As Graham described this dichotomy, "yes, we should be accountable, but, yes, they should trust us." School leaders learned how to balance the need for communication with the need for boundaries for parents.

*Establishing boundaries for parents.*

Open communication was also necessary for establishing boundaries for parents. School leaders were faced with circumstances that were not appropriate for the free flow of information to the parent constituency. When negotiating the role of parents in the educational process, school leaders had to determine the proper level of communication for the specific situation. Simpson illustrated this balance for parental communication when he stated, "You've got to come to a level of trust that you trust us to make the good decisions, because we can't share with you every bit of information that we may or may not have."

Jefferson at Pine Valley developed this point further, explaining that sometimes "parents are kind of kept at arm's distance, [and] there are things that schools do that define a dividing line." Jefferson acknowledged that Pine Valley had its "own dividing lines." On curriculum issues, for example, Jefferson maintained that they would "listen, but we're not driven by parents' desire for curriculum, and that's pretty clear." School

leaders needed to communicate these expectations for the parent constituency so that everyone was on the same page and parents understood what the appropriate role was for them in the educational process. As Jefferson explained, this did not mean that parents cannot inquire; however, they understood that an inquiry did not translate into the right to create changes in the area of curriculum.

Philmore, at Hampton Hills, referred to the relationship between parents and the school as a partnership, adding that the parents “know from the get-go ... that we view the school’s relationship with [them] as a partnership, that they know things about their children that we don’t have a clue to.” He stated that the school “know[s] things about their children that they don’t have a clue to ... and it’s critically important that we come together as partners to work on behalf of how we can nurture and help care for and raise and educate their children, and we need to do that together.” Philmore qualified this partnership by explaining that Hampton Hills was “not a democratic institution or a parent cooperative.” He argued that parents “have to trust us to do the professional job that we’re responsible for doing ... and so the partnership is not about equality of decision making or equality of involvement in decision making.” The relationship was “complementary,” he noted, “and we have to be in constant communication with each other.” Philmore’s remarks reflected the need for open communication to both inform and establish boundaries for parents.

### *Building Relationships*

Another important aspect of the negotiation process for school leaders involve the relationships that school leaders build with parents and teachers. Both of these

constituencies have expectations, and school leaders might work to cultivate a rapport with both groups. Miller confirmed the importance of these relationships when she said:

I love to tell parents - and I genuinely believe it - that we are partners, and we both, from the seats that we sit in, want what's best for these kids for their learning as whole people ... not just their intellectual growth but their ... self-confidence.

This type of feedback was important for building relationships with parents. Parents wanted to hear from school leaders that their children were a priority, and they were more willing to trust the school if they believed this to be true. On the other hand, when building relationships with parents, school leaders wanted to guard against alienating the teachers. The partnership that Miller and others referred to involved balancing the needs of the school, the parents and the teachers. School leaders should be cognizant of these sometimes competing needs when negotiating with parents.

*Relationship between school leaders and teachers.*

For a school leader negotiating the curriculum with parents, it is important to be cognizant of the role teachers play in this process. School leaders are faced with balancing the requests of the parents with the expectations of the faculty. Furthermore, this balancing act takes place within the context of maintaining the mission of the school. This does not mean that school leaders must capitulate to the desires of the teachers or that school leaders should not have the latitude to bargain with parents. The negotiation process in a private school is a two-way street, and teachers should understand that reality. Along those lines, school leaders cultivate a relationship with teachers that acknowledge that this negotiation may involve some compromise.

Patty Graham gave an example involving a parent questioning the pedagogy of one of her teachers in the math department at Copper Mountain. Graham said that when

she is dealing with a parent's concerns with a pedagogy, she tells that teacher that in order to establish trust and transparency the parent's concerns need to be addressed directly. Graham explained her philosophy with these parent - and teacher - related issues in this manner:

It's in your best interest to let that parent see ... how that child acts in your class, if that's the issue. We shouldn't have anything to hide, so I would just be honest with the teacher and say, "It will help Mrs. So and So or Mr. So and So if he can see for himself that you know what you're talking about and that you run your class well." I sit in there with them if that makes the teacher feel better. I'd probably start going into that classroom every other day just to get the teacher used to having another presence and probably send a few other adults in there, too, because I don't think it hurts. It doesn't hurt for parents to see that we are proactive and that we are listening to them, because it's horrible to not be listened to when you have such a big thing at stake like money and your child.

*School leaders build relationship with parents.*

In all three of these case studies, the school leaders expressed the importance of trust and transparency when building relationships with parents. Many of the school leaders I interviewed referenced the need for transparency to build trust. The concept of transparency refers to the need for openness in schools and the desire for parents to understand why school leaders are making the decisions that they are making.

Going back to the earlier example that Graham cited about a parent questioning the teaching style of a teacher in her department, one notes that this also serves as an example of the transparency school leaders hope to create at Copper Mountain. When she was dealing with that parent's concerns with a teacher's pedagogy, Graham explained, that she "would also invite the parent to come and sit in" on the class. She stated that "I don't think it's unreasonable to welcome a parent into the classroom." Graham believed that "as stakeholders ... I think they have a right." She continued:

In private schools they're paying good money, and most of them want what's best for their child. Probably all of them want what's best for their child. And they want to know that their child is being well taken care of.

This type of parental input was necessary for school leaders. As a department head, Graham believed that “if something's happening in a classroom that shouldn't be, we need to know it.” Establishing strong relationships helped school leaders stay tuned in to what was going on in their own school. Simpson believed that, “probably more than anything, transparency creates trust” and relationships built on trust were going to benefit the school. As Simpson remarked, when parents do feel the need to bring an issue to his attention, they knew he was going to be “a good steward with it.” As a result of this strong relational bond, the parents knew that Simpson would use the information to protect the mission of the school and protect the child as well.

Of course, building these relationships was not always an easy process. Miller explained that some parents brought their own personal baggage with them from their school experiences, and “in some ways you have to earn their trust back from what may have happened to them on some level that they're worried is going to happen to their kid.” School leaders understood that often, negotiations with parents were “shaped by their own autobiographical stories and by the broader cultural and historical narratives that inform their identities, their values, and their sense of place in the world” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003, p. 3). These dialogues were not always easy, and they could be quite time consuming, but they were important to building trust and meaningful relationships with parents. To attempt to avoid or circumvent this necessary part of the process could sabotage the negotiation process.

Furthermore, these relationships were not developed instantly. School leaders and teachers committed to building genuine relationships with parents over time, so that when conflict did occur, negotiation was easier. As Simpson explained:

You have to make deposits into these bank accounts of these parents before you're going to be able to withdraw from them. So I tell my teachers ... one of our core values is we want to build a community of love and grace. Well, if that teacher will extend grace to those students, and I'm talking about, you know, being understanding of, you know, "I didn't get my homework done last night because we were at the hospital with such-and-such," instead of saying, "Well, you know that the homework policy is this – tough," - say, "Okay, well, get it to me by tomorrow," or something like that. That when you begin to interact with your kids and with your students with a gracious and loving attitude, when you make a mistake as a teacher, or as an administrator, they are going to be more apt to turn around and say, "Okay, you know what? He's shown grace to me, I'm going to show grace to him." And it just creates a better environment for everybody. And if I can get my teachers to realize that, because you know, you get teachers that are just anal - I mean, this is the rule and this is the way it is.

Building relationships was a necessary aspect of negotiating conflict with parents. School leaders in all three schools focused on the development of relationships between parents, teachers and school leaders. These genuine relationships were based on trust and transparency and were nurtured over time. Consequently, these relationships paid dividends for school leaders during the negotiations. While that does not necessarily mean that the parents would agree with a decision, parents were more inclined to understand why school leaders were making the decisions that they were making.

#### *Role of Mission and/or Philosophy with Parents*

With private schools in particular, the mission of the school or the philosophy of the school's leaders can play a significant role in the negotiation of parental conflict. The schools in this study had missions or philosophies unique to their culture. As highlighted in Chapter Four, the Pine Valley School espoused a progressive curriculum, the Hampton

Hills Academy had a rich tradition coupled with a loose religious affiliation, and Copper Mountain Christian School had a strong religious mission. The mission and/or the philosophy of a school are also closely linked to the curriculum of the school. The mission of the school reflects the educational goals and philosophical views of its constituents. School leaders develop a curriculum that serves the school's mission. It does not matter if the mission of the school was to create followers of Christ or independent thinkers; these goals were evident in the classrooms and explicitly linked to the school's curriculum.

*A progressive philosophy.*

As a self-professed progressive school, Pine Valley created an educational environment that from the outset seemed to be open to negotiation. The Pine Valley experience offered unique pedagogical qualities and educational opportunities that differed from many private schools in the area. The existence of a short-term curriculum that was both flexible and imaginative, the personal remarks the headmaster made about each graduating senior, and the simple fact that students called their teachers by their first name, all contributed to the progressive persona of Pine Valley. This focus on the individual student was intentional and was a big part of the philosophy of the school and its leadership. Jackson described Pine Valley as special because “we work a lot on being more individualized,” but he was quick to caution that does not “mean we've arrived to that Promised Land.”

Regardless, the perception of progressivism and individualized attention was a major aspect of the culture at Pine Valley, and this philosophy played an important role in negotiating parental conflict. Allen described a progressive school as one that has a “real



strong belief in the individual” and a realization that education is “much more a collaboration of a group of students and teachers than it is some institutionalized imparting of [knowledge] to our students.” In this approach, school leaders might find it difficult to embrace a collaborative mission yet not include parents in the collaboration. Consequently, a school that espoused a progressive philosophy was willing to include all of the stakeholders in the discussion.

Sanchez believed that progressivism translated into leadership differences that existed at Pine Valley but not necessarily at other private schools. He alluded that the leaders at many private schools were focused on the business side of running a school and “there were heads who basically do function dealing mostly with board [members] and their administration, and that's [one] “model” of leadership. Sanchez believed that at Pine Valley leadership was different. Here leaders were still educators, and this leads Sanchez to hope “that this school would stand for a different model or would want a different model.”

#### *Tradition.*

Another important aspect of a school’s mission when negotiating conflict with parents is the role of tradition. For many private schools, maintaining well-established traditions is as much a part of the school’s undertaking as a progressive or religious curriculum. At Hampton Hills, Philmore explained, the mission of the school was at the forefront of his thoughts when negotiating conflict with parent constituencies. He makes clear to parents that “if we try to become all things to all people and to meet every expectation and need, we’ll be spread so thin and won’t do anything really well.” While Philmore believed that “parents pretty much understand that,” he also acknowledges that

“some zealotry ... floats up from time to time, and that’s genuine excitement on the part of a parent.” School leaders need to “honor” and “respect” differences of opinion, but Philmore asserted that “there is a process and a set of protocols that fit the mission and the operation of the school ... that’s not trumped by parents’ zealotry.”

The mission of a school needs to be protected by the leaders of the school. When parents want to change the curriculum, there was an ensuing effect on the mission of the institution. School leaders serve as the stewards of this mission. As Thompson explained:

We can’t do everything for everybody; and if we have a good mission and a strong grounding in what we think we can do well, we then have a responsibility to stand up for it. [As school leaders], you must determine what you really do well and you ... push away some of the other stuff.

Furthermore, Thompson believed that when it comes to the mission of the school, school leaders “have to stand firmly” and that sometimes with parental requests you have to say, “It’s not a fit.” Tradition can be both a help and a hindrance when defending the mission of the school in the context of parental conflict.

An excellent example of this tradition-oriented mission was the earlier example of Hampton Hills adding a squash program to the athletic department because administrators believed that to “elevate [the school] to national status, [they] needed to be seen as engaging in those things that the traditional high-level preparatory schools in America engaged in.” According to Hines, Hampton Hills needed to embrace programs that “sent the message that we’re not this funky little anomaly down here in the South, that we really do understand a very broad approach to traditional preparatory school education.” The desire to continue to build a reputation of excellence and opportunity, both in and out of the classroom, drove many of the decisions at Hampton Hills. School

leaders and parents understood this aspect of the school's culture, and this shared understanding entered the conversations surrounding the direction of the school.

*Role of religion.*

The most demonstrative differences in the negotiation of conflict with parents often arise from a school's religious philosophy. At both Copper Mountain and, to a lesser degree, Hampton Hills, the school leaders expressed the importance of their religious mission when negotiating curriculum concerns with parents. The comparison of Hampton Hills and Copper Mountain offered a look at the diverse role religion plays in Christian schools.

Hines explained the role of religion and the Christian mission of Hampton Hills in these terms:

We are not a covenant school [or] a school that follows a particular theological or doctrinal policy based on a specific denomination or sect. It's extremely important that a student be in an environment where issues of faith are discussed as a matter of course, rather than the exception, and we also believe that ... at the core of this is a general belief in Christianity, Christianity in the broadest sense of the term. Consequently, if that is not going to work for you, then perhaps this is not the place for your child. In a class we're going to study the Christian text ... [and] we're going to study the Christian scriptures, and our teachers for the most part are going to be - they all are - ... Christians.

While Hampton Hills did consider itself a Christian school, some of its leaders minimized the significance of this aspect of the school's mission. Miller, the principal of the Upper School, explained that Hampton Hills had "two Bible classes that are required in high school, Old Testament in ninth grade and New Testament in twelfth grade." She acknowledged that "some teachers probably teach [those courses] more from a faith perspective than others." Despite this religious emphasis in the curriculum, Miller believed that Hampton Hills was "really more interested in teaching [religion] from ... an

academic perspective and certainly encouraging people to explore ... their own faith journeys.” She went on to state that Hampton Hills’s approach to religion had evolved over the years and now had a “less ... evangelical bent to the way [religious] courses are taught than maybe at sometime in the past there might have been.”

Despite this apparent shift to play down the role of religion, Hampton Hills still saw Christianity as part of their mission, and it continued to play a role in negotiations with parents about the educational and spiritual direction of the school. One example of this reality was illustrated by the earlier discussion concerning Hampton Hills’s fall semester exam schedule. As noted above, school leaders had consistently received feedback about the scheduling of the final exams following the Christmas vacation. Parents expressed concern that the placement of the exams after the holidays took a toll on the enjoyment of the Christmas holidays. Elwood explained that as “a Christian school [this discussion] is more complicated than at a non-religious school.” In this negotiation religion played a major role, and since “two-thirds” of the parents wanted the schedule changed, the school changed the exam policy. Elwood illustrated the trade-offs in religious terms, explaining that although the school will “get a much better Christmas vacation ... the downside is ... a more tense Advent season.” Clearly, the religious implications of this decision were primary in this negotiation with parent constituencies.

Another example of religion influencing the negotiation of a curriculum conflict at Hampton Hills was cited earlier in regard to the adoption of a Christian apologetics course. In this situation a parent wanted to make a significant donation to the school to assure an elective course in this area. Elwood explained his conversation with the parent:

We looked at it carefully and thought carefully about it and had to say no, that we have two full years of Bible study in the high school, and our

approach to Bible study is academic. The purpose of those courses is not to proselytize. We have students who come from a wide variety of Christian denominational backgrounds as well as students outside that heritage. A course in apologetics is almost by definition a persuasive course--one ought to do this as opposed to not do this--and that's not where we are in terms of philosophy. Plus, we didn't have a good place to put it, so we said no--thank you, but no. And that is a very awkward place for us to be a Christian school - saying no to an offer of a curriculum in Christian education, but it is one of those things that if we wanted to do it, we would have done that. I mean, we did not need funding to create a course in Christian apologetics. What that turns into is somebody saying, "I want you to have a course in Christian apologetics. I think that that is good for your school. Here, do this. And oh, by the way, I'll give you some money to do it." The money might have helped pay for somebody who could teach it or maybe some materials, but it wouldn't create the space in the curriculum for people to make a choice about it. So it had both logistical as well as philosophical, you know, issues associated with it. Not an easy conversation.

Philmore concurred that negotiating this conversation was difficult. Parents were eager to get involved and want to help make the school a better place, but it is the responsibility of the school leaders to determine the direction of the school, not the parents. As he explained:

When you have a parent that's been very, very, very generous to the school, but he has a religious agenda and he wants the school to utilize a body of material, from outside the school, that he thinks is just what the kids need to be learning, it is hard ... because the parent is excited and is convinced that this is what the school needs as a Christian school. But the fundamental message is parents do not determine the curriculum ... the administration and the educators do. We will listen to ideas, and there may be things that come along from parents that are brilliant and great, but they all go through the screening process here, and we make the decision about it.

At Copper Mountain, religion had an even greater influence than at Hampton Hills. Where Hampton Hills considered itself a school with a Christian heritage, Copper Mountain considered itself a Christian school. Simpson explained Copper Mountain's mission and how religion was infused throughout the curriculum:

We believe that the Bible is the foundational truth upon which all knowledge and wisdom comes, therefore, what we try to teach is a Biblical world view that the way that you view life, the way that you interpret the events of life, has to be filtered through something. And everybody has that filter and what we try to accomplish is to create a Biblical filter, that the events of life should be interpreted through Scripture, so that is a fundamental difference. I think a lot of people would argue, well, math is math, English is English, and you can have Chapel, and that makes it Christian. Well, that's really not what we're talkin' about here. We're talkin' about, hopefully, that our faith is integrated, fused with every single thing that we do here, so that when we're teaching history, there's a context of - ... history has a purpose, that it's going towards a future event that God has ordained, that when you're studying English, it's the beauty of God expressed through words of people. You know, even math, there's order to it. There's finiteness ... it's not chaotic, so that's representative of God.

School leaders used their religious philosophy and the religious underpinnings of the school to approach conflict and negotiations. Instead of influential parents, such as board members or potential donors, Simpson believed that his “biggest audience is ... God,” and that was who he was “here to please.” According to Simpson, “not even my board or a particular donor” was more important, and “if I can stand before God and say I believe this is the right decision and this is where we're supposed to go, I'm a pretty confident guy once I get to that point in that I really don't care who I irritate.”

Russell also described how faith influenced his decisions when negotiating tough situations with parents:

I mean, if you're looking at it from a Christian faith-based perspective, the way we interact with each other should be modeled from that perspective, and that really eliminates a lot of problems from ever occurring, if we're all doing that. If I'm only interested in me, then that's a selfish motive versus if I'm interested in doing what I think the Lord - what makes Him happy - then that's not me doing anything for me, that's me operating for Him. And if we're all doing that, then things get much clearer when you have to make hard calls because if you're making ... calls based on faith, you know it's right and you just do it, even though if it might be a tough call.

Lewis, dean of students at Copper Mountain, provided a tangible example of what he believed should separate a Christ-centered school from a secular environment when negotiating conflicts with parents. Lewis explained that sometimes when school leaders were working through differences with parents, negotiations become intense and the parents threaten a lawsuit. According to Lewis, “the Bible is very specific about how you handle lawsuits among brothers.” He believed “it’s way outside the realm of how Christians are to behave with one another” to threaten litigation. Although this might seem to be an insignificant issue for some, for Lewis it was a “deal breaker,” and it provided a critical distinction of how religion guides school leadership.

#### *Tenure of School and Leadership*

A final aspect of the negotiation process that was evident in my research is the role of tenure in the institutions included in the case studies. Throughout the investigation, it was clear that the longer a school has existed, the more comfortable and confident the school leaders are in dealing with parental conflict. School leaders also referenced the importance of experience in negotiating with parents. Multiple participants indicated that longevity and leadership practice were factors in knowing how best to traverse disagreements. Undoubtedly, negotiations were affected by the growth of a school as well as the growth of individual school leaders.

#### *Growth in school.*

The growth of an educational institution plays a role in how conflict is approached and resolved. Certainly the financial independence that comes with the maturity of an institution helps alleviate tensions in the negotiation process and lessens the pressure on school leaders to satisfy every parent request. However, beyond the fiscal

freedom associated with the development of the school, leaders also benefit from experience and historical perspective. As a well-established commodity, private schools have an easier time establishing boundaries for parents and other influential constituencies. The growing pains that many schools experience early in their tenure serve as a point of reference in future negotiations. Without these experiences, schools are more vulnerable to parent interference.

Hines believed that Hampton Hills “has grown increasingly” over the years and that school leaders have made a conscious effort to “do everything we can to stay away from ... undue influences.” Hines exclaimed:

I’m appalled when I hear about places where board members were called up because of something a faculty member did in class. A board member has got no business calling a faculty member or calling a department head about an issue in the classroom.

He claimed that this behavior was analogous to a school leader’s telling a board member how to do his or her job, saying, “I’m not gonna call you up down at the brokerage house or wherever you work ... [to say] you shouldn’t have made that move.” Hines believed that the successful tenure and excellent reputation of Hampton Hills provided credibility with parents and went a long way in preventing this type of interference.

Hines also contended that this longevity was an asset when school leaders were negotiating conflicts with parents.

When you've been around a very long time, and you're very large, it's somewhat easier to steer the conversation in the direction of, "We've tried certain things. We've found that these kinds of things don't really work very well, and our resources are such that with all the other things we provide, we really don't have any more resources to add on." And I think that's because you can say, "Well, yeah, we can't do this, but look at all the other opportunities that we can help steer you toward if you want to try these things."



At Copper Mountain the growth of the school has meant a change in the role of the school's governing board. The original board, which consisted of current parents, was very active at the school's inception. According to Gibson, "early in this school, the board would meet every week, [and] that caused some problems." Graham remembered when Copper Mountain was founded:

The school was small; the group of five men that started the school, they stayed on the board and brought in a few other friends, and that group ran the school. The board ran the school in the first days ... not the administration. The administration was like a pawn for the board. But that's totally changed now. Of course, Matt wouldn't come here if it hadn't change, knowing his personality. Those were all parents ... I think of that as being the parent nucleus group from back then. They really ran the school. If they didn't like something, you knew it. And you knew it right away. And anybody could go to the board, and the board would change their mind for them. If you had enough money, if you had enough clout ... If you were bringing fifty more students in, or five more students in, they would listen to you. But everybody circumvented the administration back then, because the board was the place to go. I don't think that's true anymore.

Gibson agreed that the role of the board has changed over the years. He contended that things have improved and that the board did not interfere as often with the operation of the school. He explained that this was not always the case.

Now ... we got a really good board, and it seems they understand their role and they're not involved in the day-to-day kind of things. They had to be taught ... somebody had to [say] this is what a board does. But it wasn't always a pretty picture with the board early in our school's history.

Gibson believed that the current role of the board was more appropriate and was much less intrusive in the daily operation of the school.

Lewis provided an anecdote regarding the way his board and, consequently, parents influenced the decision-making process during this early time period in his school's growth. Near the beginning of his career at Copper Mountain, Lewis was

involved in a situation where students had been caught drinking and were facing disciplinary actions. Although Lewis originally was involved in the discipline procedure, he found that his firm position that these students should be expelled led to his removal from the proceedings. Lewis believed that the discipline policies of the school were a direct reflection of the mission of the school and, consequently, part of the school's educational purpose. He expressed the opinion that discipline policies were part of the character development of CMCS students. At CMCS, teaching character was as important of an educational goal as math or science. Lewis explained that this was "the first time something like that had happened where you really kind of see the politics" of the negotiation process. Lewis's account illustrated the significant role parents originally played in the decision-making process of the school. He now contends that this type of interference would no longer occur at Copper Mountain. He believed that the school has grown since those early years and that its administrators were much more confident stewards of the school's mission.

*Growth in leadership.*

The development of a leadership style also can influence relationships with parent constituencies. Simpson acknowledged that "early in [a] career, especially early in [a] career at [a new] school," leaders were more inclined to be susceptible to parental influence. He maintains that "once they get to know you [and] to trust you," parents were less likely to question everything you do. Simpson believed that you must first "build trust and it takes time to do that." He remembered that when he first arrived at Copper Mountain, many people questioned his decisions and leadership. Now, however, Simpson affirmed that "over the [past] five years I've earned, if not the respect, at least the chance

to make decisions and for them to trust those decisions that I've made." Gibson agreed, explaining that "since [Simpson] has come [to Copper Mountain], it's gotten progressively better and more stable." Gibson attributed the progress to Simpson's developing his philosophy and growing as a leader. He explained that "the first two or three years ... we've kind of worked through [Simpson's] philosophy and making sure that everybody understands" the mission of the school. Both Gibson and Simpson believed that school leaders have to grow into their positions and that this personal leadership growth has a distinct influence on the negotiation of conflict with parents.

Growth by a school leader takes more than just time and experience. Although these qualities were important in earning the trust of the stakeholders, leadership growth also required a knowledge base. At Hampton Hills, Hines offered his perspective on the growth of a school leader:

I think the first thing is, it's really, really important to know your stuff. You know, I think the first year or two in this job, not always knowing and feeling really comfortable with what the established guidelines, the established parameters and practices were, that's hard. Because you get in and someone makes a logical argument, and then you're like, God, okay, I don't know what I'm doing. So I think really, really understanding what's going on, and particularly, as much as possible, trying to understand the historical logic behind the school's position on things. That's, I think, just the foundation that I wish someone had gotten and said, 'You know, go home, do a little studying on this, and ask all the questions right away.'

The knowledge that Hines has developed as he has grown into his position has helped him negotiate with parents. School leaders need to be armed with as much information as possible to know how to handle curriculum discussions and how to fit those discussions into the context of the school's mission.

This growth of leadership in combination with the growth of the academic institution afforded school leaders the luxury of confidence and experience when

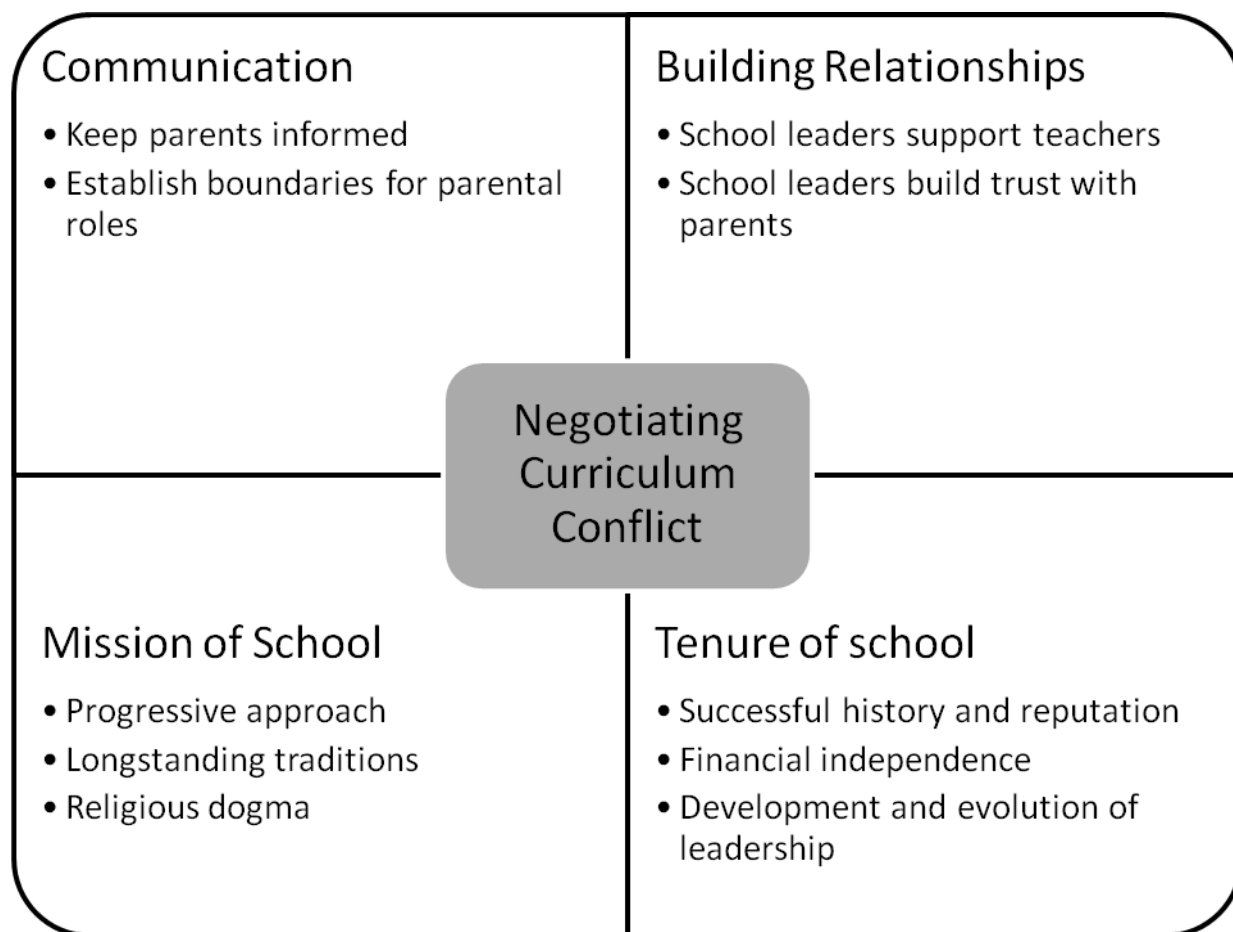
negotiating conflict with parents. The schools in this case study, by design, had varied histories. Additionally, the leaders at these schools represented a wide range of experience levels at their respective institutions. In these three cases the longevity of the institution and the experience level of the school leaders played significant roles in the negotiation process.

*The factors of the negotiation process.*

The research in this study indicated that when a school leader faced conflicts surrounding the curriculum of his school, there were four factors that he considers in order to negotiate the concern. These aspects of curriculum negotiation included communication, relationship building, the school's mission, and the longevity of the school. As shown in figure 4, these four factors played an equal role in the negotiation process.

The matrix in figure 4 highlights the relationship of these four factors to the sum total. School leaders expressed the importance of communication to both keep parents informed of what the school was doing and to establish boundaries for parents. These same leaders communicated a need to build relationships with parents and teachers based on trust. Boundaries were important to helping parents understand what conversations about curriculum were appropriate for parents to have with school leaders and what areas were left to the professionals. Another important characteristic of the negotiation process was the mission of the school. The three schools in this study had different missions, and each mission affected the negotiation process. For example, the progressive mission of the Pine Valley School affected the negotiation of curriculum conflict, since a progressive school was willing to consider progressive ideas. Finally, the tenure of the

school played a significant role in the negotiation process. In this study, it was clear that a successful history of educational excellence went a long way in negotiating with parents. Furthermore, the longer the school had been in existence, the greater its financial independence. This monetary freedom provided leaders of private schools the ability to make decisions about the curriculum without worrying about a negative effect on tuition. Tuition-driven schools, on the other hand, were more likely to consider parent requests when it came to curriculum development. The significance of tenure also applied to school leaders, since school leaders who had experience express more confidence in the negotiation process. Clearly the development and evolution of leadership contributed to this assurance when dealing with parental feedback. All four of the factors influencing the negotiation of curriculum conflict that are illustrated in figure 4 were equally important and cannot be sacrificed.



*Figure 4*

Factors Influencing the Negotiation of Curriculum Conflict

### *Summary of Findings*

The findings from this multiple-site case study begin to help school leaders better understand how to negotiate effectively the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and the leaders of private secondary schools. These data were first explored through the perspective of the parent constituency, delineating solicited

feedback from unsolicited feedback. While schools often asked parents for input as stakeholders, parents also volunteered opinions on how they believed the school should educate. Parental curricular concerns were then divided into two distinct areas, the official curriculum and the co-curriculum. The official curriculum, or the formal curriculum, referred to the more traditional courses of study and the pedagogy adopted by the institution. The co-curriculum, on the other hand, included additional educational opportunities like guest speakers, fine arts and athletic programs, clubs and other student-life activities. School leaders in this study clearly believed that that the curriculum was far less negotiable with parents than the co-curriculum. While school leaders were willing to concede that parental inquiry may have affected the co-curriculum, they resisted the notion that parents could influence the formal curriculum. Although the co-curriculum was not as protected, the findings concluded that the parents did have some subtle influence on the official curriculum.

The research suggested that one group had an increased level of power with regard to the curriculum of private schools – its influential parents. This category included groups like potential donors and successful alumni. The case studies showed that these influential parents frequently were consulted about possible changes to the curriculum, and when they voiced concerns, their questions were addressed. That did not guarantee that these influential parents succeed in their requests, but their concerns were investigated, and that was not always the case with other parent constituencies. The study also explored the function of parental expectations for private school education and how these expectations affected the level to which parents influenced the school community. Undoubtedly, the expectations were set out by the schools in this study and the resulting

expectations of the parents influenced the curriculum of the three schools. As private schools, all three of the institutions in this study professed to value parental input. These schools promoted a partnership of sorts with parents in the education of their children. The schools created an expectation that parents would have some level of input in the development of the educational process. Some parents, however, might have created different expectations, interpreting the partnership notion to mean that since they pay tuition, their concerns should always be met. The expectations of parents and the expectations of the institution did not always coincide.

Following this analysis from the parental perspective, the study examined the role of school leadership. First, the point of view of the school leaders and their educational philosophies were delineated. Within the school leadership analysis, its findings were explored to understand the significance of curriculum leadership in the three schools. The findings showed that the role of school leaders in the curriculum development process varied depending on what aspect of the curriculum parents were questioning. School leaders differentiated depending on whether the concerns were with the official curriculum or the co-curriculum. As mentioned previously, the school leaders had a different perspective when dealing with the formal curriculum. School leaders expressed apprehension, resistance, and disregard when faced with questions about the curriculum. The findings suggested that the co-curriculum, however, elicited a different reaction from school leaders. Co-curricular leadership, according to the findings, was more flexible and open to discussion. This did not prevent parents from influencing or attempting to influence the direction of the official curriculum, but the leadership approach in each sphere was different.



Finally, the findings examined how school leaders negotiated differences with parent constituencies. The case studies suggested that when school leaders were negotiating curriculum conflicts, there were four important leadership components that influenced the negotiation process. These pieces of the curriculum negotiation puzzle included communication, relationship building, the mission of the school, and the tenure of the school. School leaders paid close attention to these factors when negotiating curriculum concerns with parents. The findings were clear that communication with parents was important for keeping stakeholders informed and establishing boundaries. If parents did not have the information to understand a school's curriculum decisions, they would create their own reality. Good communication from school leaders could alleviate this confusion. Furthermore, parents were going to try to influence the curriculum of the school to satisfy their interests if they thought they could succeed. If school leaders communicated boundaries clearly, parents were less likely to push these limits.

As a result of this quality communication, a level of trust developed between school leaders, teachers and parents. This trust helped build strong relationships between these stakeholders. The findings showed that it was important for school leaders to build relationships with parents in order to negotiate effectively curriculum conflicts. The mission of the school also could play a vital role in the negotiation process. The schools in this study possessed distinctive educational goals, and often parental requests did not agree with these goals. Deviations from the stated mission of the school were easier to negotiate when school leaders kept the mission of the school at the forefront of the negotiation process. The fourth feature of the negotiation process revealed in the findings was the relevance of the tenure of the school and its leadership. The research implied that

as a well-established educational institution with a well-respected reputation and a successful history, a school had credibility in the negotiation process. A newer school, on the other hand, did not receive the same level of deference from parent constituents in curriculum negotiations. Furthermore, in this particular study, it was clear that the longer the school had existed, the greater the endowment. This increased financial freedom, coupled with tradition of educational excellence, created substantial good will for the school among parents. Similarly, school leaders who had been through the negotiation process countless times and had ample experience, were more likely to have confidence when dealing with parents. Ultimately, this combination of experience and tradition paid dividends for schools and their leaders in curriculum negotiations with parents.

#### *Preview of Next Chapter*

Chapter Six is dedicated to the discussion of the results as they relate to the research questions. I focus the discussion around each of the three research questions: How do parents influence the curriculum development process? How do school leaders' ideas about curriculum differ from the parents' curriculum ideas? How do school leaders negotiate these differences in the curriculum development process? I then summarize the findings of the study, make assertions based on the findings, and make recommendations for future research. Finally, I offer a personal reflection concerning the meaning and consequences of this study.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION

#### *Discussion*

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the meaning of the case studies and make recommendations based on the findings. This discussion is organized around the three research questions: How do parents influence the curriculum development process? How do school leaders' ideas about curriculum differ from the parents' curriculum ideas? How do school leaders negotiate these differences in the curriculum development process? The multiple-site case study I conducted revealed a wealth of information relating to these original research questions. From these data, a number of assertions can be made about the influence of parents on the curriculum of the private schools in this investigation. This qualitative inquiry led to "serendipitous findings and to new integrations" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1) that have the potential to assist school leaders as they negotiate the tensions that exist among stakeholders when developing a school's curriculum. In addition, claims are made about how school leaders differ in their view of the curriculum development process and how these differences are negotiated. The ensuing narrative for each research question is structured around a series of assertions resulting from the findings. Finally, the chapter includes recommendations for future research, implications for educational leadership, and my personal reflections from the study.

The assertions concerning the research questions and findings provide a framework for understanding how school leaders negotiate parental curriculum expectations. These claims offer private and public school leaders recommendations for research and practice. Although the case studies were conducted in private schools, the findings from this study may also provide insight for public school leaders. This research provides an “extensive and careful description of the time, place, context, and culture” (Mertens, 2005, p. 256) surrounding the schools involved in the study. Consequently, readers have enough detail to determine if the case studies in this research are transferable to their own situations. The following assertions offer “information that allows the readers to reconsider their knowledge of the case or even to modify existing generalizations about such cases” (Merriam, 1998, p. 244). In addition, the research provides a “higher-order synthesis in the form of a descriptive picture, patterns or themes, or emerging or substantive theory” (Mertens, 2005, p. 422). These data constitute a framework that school leaders, both private and public, can use to better understand how to negotiate parental curriculum expectations unique to their circumstances.

*Focus Question on the Influence of Parents on Curriculum*

The first question raised in this study is how parents influence the curriculum of private schools. One claim resulting from the study is that parents expect to exert some degree of influence on the curriculum of private schools. The school leaders in this study maintained that private school parents have definite expectations about the curriculum and pedagogy. At the same time, these school leaders believed that parents need to trust the school to determine the appropriate course of study for their children. School leaders

do solicit input from parents but within the context of the mission of the school. Of course, parents also provide unsolicited feedback that reflects their personal desires.

Educational leaders are faced with balancing the role of parents with the professional autonomy of teachers. Unlike many professions, there is still a “concern with the idea of promoting the discipline of education to the status of a fully recognized profession” (Gellert, 2005, p. 325). Leaders are freely questioned about their pedagogy or curriculum decisions by parents who would be less willing to question a doctor or lawyer. Consequently, school leaders are protective of these conversations and want to control the access to the discussion. The school leaders cannot address every parental curriculum concern or parents will think that they have direct influence on the curriculum (Gellert, 2005). Since the 1970s, curriculum leaders have worked to return the curriculum discussion to the teachers (Marshall, et. al., 2007, p. 105). This struggle for autonomy adds to the tension of the negotiation process (Gellert, 2005). The school leaders in this study expressed a desire to include parents in the school community but were apprehensive about allowing access to discussions relating to the formal curriculum. This careful balance produced different responses from school leaders for solicited feedback and unsolicited feedback.

*Assertion: Solicited parental input might be limited in scope.*

Solicited parental input, although encouraged and always acknowledged by school leaders, is limited in scope. As stakeholders in the school community, parents provide a critical resource for schools, and school leaders routinely solicit feedback from these constituents (Horowitz, 1995; Schubert, 1986). Solicited feedback comes in many forms and occurs throughout the school year. Some examples include town hall meetings,

ad hoc committees, and formal surveys. While these opportunities are important and encouraged by school leaders, they are determined by the timetable and terms established by the school. School leaders schedule these opportunities and typically set the agenda for the discussion. Although parents are not prevented from speaking their minds, school leaders determine the ground rules for the conversation. As a result, the scope of the dialogue is somewhat limited. While opportunities for open discussions are available to parent groups, school leaders frequently initiate the exchange. Although dialogue might evolve from the original topic, school leaders control the direction of the discussion. Furthermore, if the discussion enters areas that school leaders think is inappropriate for parents, the school leaders might intervene. Parents have the opportunity to voice their concerns but the extent of their feedback is often limited by the school.

*Assertion: Unsolicited parental input might be resisted.*

Unsolicited parental inquiry might be both discouraged and resisted. School leaders do not always promote an open discussion concerning the curriculum of the school, so often the concerns that they express are unsolicited. School leaders attempt to channel these inquiries through the established parent organizations rather than addressing unsolicited concerns directly (Culter, 2000). Of course, unsolicited feedback typically comes with a negative connotation for school leaders. Most unsolicited inquiries by parents result from a problem, concern or complaint (Peshkin, 2001). Consequently, school leaders are suspicious and somewhat defensive of this type of inquiry. Furthermore, school leaders do not want to acknowledge unsolicited curriculum feedback, since addressing these concerns lends credibility to the problem. Since school leaders do not always want to encourage parents to express their views on curriculum,

parents will find ways to articulate their opinions. This unsolicited feedback often comes in the form of phone calls, scheduled or impromptu meetings, e-mails and informal encounters at school events. School leaders are always ready for these types of inquiries and prepared to defer their answers to a later time. School leaders might recognize a concern, but they will not commit to a response.

*Assertion: School leaders investigate unsolicited concerns.*

Although unsolicited inquiry is typically downplayed, school leaders are likely to investigate these concerns. Throughout this study school leaders implied that even if they do not acknowledge the curriculum concerns offered by parents directly, they often examine curriculum conflicts to make sure that there are no problems. Sometimes the unsolicited feedback is acknowledged and the parents are thanked for their feedback. For example, if a parent expresses concern with a teacher's pedagogy, the school will likely thank the parent for bringing the issue to the school's attention and promise to look into the situation. In this instance, the school leader will explore the claim and will contact the parent to assure him or her that the issue has been addressed. The school leader might not tell the parent specifically how the problem was addressed, but he acknowledges that the issue has been investigated.

In other instances, school leaders might take note of the curriculum concerns of parents without recognizing the complaint directly. The school leaders do not want to legitimize every curriculum concern because they do not want the parents to think that they have direct influence on the courses of study (Gellert, 2005). The school leaders are cognizant of the collective concerns, and if enough people show an interest, they may examine the concerns further. Obviously, parents are an important stakeholders in the

school community, and their educational perspective is going to have some influence on the curriculum of the school (Schubert, 1986). However, the school leader is going to control the discussion when it relates to the formal curriculum. For example, if a parent expresses interest in adding a new program to the curriculum, the school may assure the parent that the curriculum offerings in place are appropriate or perhaps inform the parent that the school has examined the addition and determined that it does not fit the program. At the same time, however, the school leaders register the interest of the parent, which might eventually evoke changes to the curriculum. The impetus for the modification might originate from parents, but the school leaders ultimately make the decision to change the curriculum. The school maintains control over shaping the formal curriculum, but the unsolicited inquiry of parents has an indirect influence.

*Assertion: Influential parents affect curriculum development.*

Private schools typically have parents who possess an increased level of influence on the curriculum development process. Although many leaders interviewed in this study expressed the opinion that private school parents tend to expect to influence the decision-making process, they all acknowledged the existence of specific influential parents (Benveniste, et. al., 2003). These parents affect the curriculum of private schools because they possess a higher level of influence than typical parents. Influential parents may be alumni of the school, major donors, governing board members or employees of the school. Throughout this study, it was evident that these influential parents enjoy an increased level of influence on the curriculum of the school. Although school leaders are often hesitant to admit that these influential parents have more input, the reality is clear. If a member of the school governing board makes a suggestion concerning the curriculum



of the school, the school leaders are naturally more inclined to consider the suggestion than if the suggestion came from an ordinary parent. In the examples discovered in this study, when school leaders were approached about the curriculum by influential parents, the situation was admittedly handled differently. This reaction is only human nature. School leaders are cognizant of the role certain parents play in the school community.

*Assertion: Parental expectations raised by school.*

Parents who send their children to private schools have raised expectations which have been promoted by the school they choose. In this study, it was apparent that parental expectations are at least in part due to the expectations raised by the private school. All three of the private schools in this study promote characteristics and opportunities that are unique to their school in an effort to attract students. By advertising these facets of their school, school leaders promote a set of expectations for the parents of current and prospective students. For example, parents who send their children to a Christian school expect a faith-based education in much the same way that parents who send their children to a school touted as a progressive expect a progressive learning environment. In the case of a faith-based school, parents with strong religious beliefs look for school environments that will help instill these beliefs in their children (Yang & Kayaardi, 2004, p. 233). The expectations these parents have for the religious education of their children have been elevated by the school.

Beyond these obvious expectations, however, this study revealed how schools raise additional expectations among parents. For instance, many private school parents expressed an expectation that their child was going to gain admission in a quality college or university. While a private school might promote a college preparatory curriculum and

have an excellent academic reputation, no school leader communicated to parents that the school would guarantee admission to a specific college. While the expectations for college acceptance may vary from one institution to the next, private school parents have expectations for college admissions. These expectations are evident in the parent constituency, and the existence of the expectations originated with the school's advertised mission as college preparatory.

*Focus Question on the Curriculum Differences between School Leaders and Parents*

The second question examined in this research concerns the differing curriculum perspectives that exist between parents and school leaders. While parents may believe that they have or should have influence on the curriculum of private schools, the school leaders in this study possess very different beliefs. All of the school leaders included in this study expressed a belief that parents should leave the curriculum to the professionals. While all of these school leaders consider parents important to the educational process, they unequivocally contend that school leaders and teachers should determine the curriculum. The leaders in this study spoke of parents partnering with the school, but the partnership was not democratic. The partnership was not equal in the sense that the school leaders and the parents would make decisions together. Partnership to the school leaders means that parents defer to the school to know how best to educate their students and the parents are expected to help achieve these educational goals.

If school leaders expect parents to leave the development of the formal curriculum to the experts, there is a responsibility for educators to create a curriculum that reflects the needs of the entire school community. School leaders should make curriculum decisions with the understanding that "what the best and wisest parent wants for his own

children that must the community want for all its children” (Dewey, 2001, p. 5).

Fundamentally, educators are given the task of developing a curriculum that encompasses all of the complexities and issues that the most conscientious, thoughtful parent would want for their child. Schools leaders should work to develop multifaceted curriculums that represent the unique and diverse needs of their school communities (Schwab, 1978).

The other component of this discussion relating to the curriculum differences between school leaders and parents is the apparent distinction between the formal curriculum and the co-curriculum. This difference was clearly delineated in the three schools in this study, with the role of parents in the curriculum versus the co-curriculum. School leaders expressed less concern with allowing parents to influence the co-curriculum than they did in regard to the more formal curriculum. Part of this discussion includes a de-emphasis or devaluation of the co-curriculum. Curriculum leaders should not allow the educational mission of the school to be limited to the formal curriculum. The co-curriculum should be seen as a powerful opportunity to expand learning beyond the classroom. When developing the course of study, school leaders should not concentrate on one subject and ignore others, in the same way they should not focus on just the formal curriculum and ignore the co-curriculum (Schwab, 1978, p. 307). The curriculum milieu of any educational setting presents a formidable challenge for school leaders who try to simplify and categorize the course of study to make it fit neatly into a prescribed formula (Schwab, 1978). School leaders espouse an expansive definition of curriculum, since there is no limit to how or where learning can occur.

*Assertion: Curriculum leadership may be protectionist.*

The approach of school leaders to curriculum leadership is far more protective than co-curricular leadership. Throughout this study, the school leaders expressed concern when parents question the curriculum of the school. Every school leader in this study articulated the sentiment that the formal curriculum should be determined by the teachers and not directly influenced by the parents. This protectionist philosophy was evident in all three schools, and the school leaders interviewed were resolute about the importance of not allowing the parents to determine the formal program of study. In many ways the program of study represents the mission of the school, and that mission is not negotiable on the individual level. Despite an increased role in schools, “parents are not part of the educational establishment,” (Culter, 2000, p. 199) and their presence is resisted by school leaders. Certainly the collective concerns of the parent constituency are addressed by the mission of the school. Parents as stakeholders do have a say in the direction of the school, but only as a group and on the terms designated by the school’s leaders. Not only would it be impractical, but it also would jeopardize the overriding identity of the school if school leaders acquiesce to every individual parental concern. School leaders contend that to allow individual parents to influence the central direction of the school would take away from the cohesion of the school’s mission.

*Assertion: Co-curriculum leadership tends to be flexible.*

School leaders are far more willing to solicit parental input for co-curricular issues than formal curricular matters. In all three schools, the leaders appeared less threatened by the prospect of parents assisting with the co-curricular. The school leaders almost came to expect that the parents would be involved in some capacity with the co-

curriculum. In many instances throughout this study, school leaders expressed that they could not get by without the support of parents. The parents chaperone many of the school field trips, assist with student organizations and even coach some of the athletic teams. From a purely practical standpoint, parent volunteers help coordinate much of the fund-raising that supports the different teams, clubs and other student organizations. As existing research shows (Schubert, 1986) (Horowitz, 1995) (Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005), parent volunteers are an integral part of the school, and school leaders depend on their support.

*Assertion: Parents are more likely to inquire about the co-curriculum.*

Parents are more willing to inquire about co-curricular than the curricular.

Whether this is a result of the parents acknowledging the boundaries established by the school or the fact that parents accept that the teachers are the experts, parents are less likely to question the formal curriculum. In many instances, the talents and affinities of the parents are more closely represented by the co-curricular programs, so there is a natural attraction to these areas. For example, parents may serve as guest speakers in a form of public pedagogy when their area of expertise is relevant to the school (O'Malley & Brady, 2005, October, p. 3). Although this is part of the co-curriculum, the teachers can then make the connection between the guest lecturer and the classroom. These lessons may not be part of the official curriculum, but they are a very real aspect of the informal and taught curriculum (Cuban, 1993, p. 100). From a pedagogical standpoint, teachers are using these opportunities to expand their classrooms beyond the constraints of the formal course of study (O'Malley & Brady, 2005, October, p. 3). Another example is in the area of athletics. Many parents have interests in sports or have backgrounds that

include experiences with athletics. As a result, these parents offer to assist the school in coaching or supporting the teams. The school sets the parameters for this help, but typically accepts the assistance. This same offer to assist in the classroom is unlikely to be accepted. For example, while a parent might have expertise or an interest in physics, the school is unlikely to seek advice from that parent.

*Focus Question on How School Leaders Negotiate Differences with Parents*

The final research question in this study related to how school leaders negotiate curriculum differences with parents. The investigation offered a number of assertions relating to the stress school leaders face in trying to satisfy their parent constituents and maintain their educational identity. School leaders work to create a balance between all of the competing needs of the school community; curriculum issues are not immune from this collaboration. They develop strong relationships with parents and teachers based on trust. Trust is only achieved when “everyone works toward what is believed by all to be right for students” (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2001, p. 463). The study revealed a number of strategies utilized by school leaders during this negotiation process. In addition, the research showed several clear characteristics of school leadership that affected the curriculum development.

*Assertion: School leadership should be transparent.*

School leaders should strive to be transparent in all curriculum decision-making. Transparency is best achieved through good communication. Frequent and meaningful communication between school leaders and parents can help to alleviate some of the tensions surrounding curriculum discussions. School leaders should model open communication and encourage collaboration in order to ensure transparency (Smith &

Blase, 1988, p. 9). Although school leaders repeatedly expressed a belief that teachers rather than parents should be responsible for making changes in the curriculum, school leaders did agree that communication helps ease differences and prevent misunderstandings. School leaders should remain as transparent as possible in order to maintain trust with stakeholders, including parents. In the absence of information, people create their own reality. While school leaders cannot always disclose sensitive information, they should be forthright whenever possible.

*Assertion: School leaders should build strong relationships with parents.*

Building strong relationships with parents is critical for school leaders to negotiate curriculum conflicts successfully. Along with transparency, school leaders benefit from building strong relationships with the parent constituencies. Many aspects of school leadership are based on trust, and curriculum negotiations are no different. “Trust is the essential link” (Evans, 2000, p. 287) that school leaders cannot ignore. There are often times when school leaders have to ask parents to trust the school with regard to the curriculum. This confidence is much easier to instill when school leaders have a rapport with the parents. Of course, there are trade-offs with these relationships that could result in increased expectations for parents. School leaders must be careful to maintain boundaries with parents while establishing these relationships. For example, school leaders should guard against making any promises to parents that could conflict with the mission of the school.

*Assertion: School leaders should build strong relationships with teachers.*

School leaders work to build strong relationships with teachers in order to establish trust. Although school leaders clearly benefit from establishing strong

relationships with parents, they cannot neglect their relationship with the faculty.

Teachers are often referred to as the heart and soul of a school, and school leaders should not forget to cultivate these relations as well. School leaders need to remember to include teachers in conversations relating to the curriculum. A transformative curriculum leader encourages professional collaboration in which teachers engage in “substantive reciprocal interactions that includes exchanging, modeling, coaching, supervising, and mentoring” (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p. 159). When given the opportunity to lead in this area, teachers can use their “professional talents beyond the classroom” (Williams-Boyd, 2002, p. 29). The leaders interviewed in this study warned about spending an inordinate amount of time trying to establish relationships with parents and forgetting to spend the necessary time to create genuine, meaningful relationships with teachers. They caution that teachers will begin to resent the school leaders if they sense that their motives are not authentic. Authenticity requires time, but these relationships also necessitate trust (Evans, 2000). Trust develops through positive, shared experiences. When school leaders tell parents whatever they think the parents want to hear, or they compromise the mission of the school to placate stakeholders, teachers lose trust in the leader. Curriculum leaders have to pay particular attention, since the curriculum is especially important to the teachers.

*Assertion: The mission of the school affects the curriculum negotiation process.*

School leaders recognize that the school’s mission has a significant effect on the curriculum development process and the role of the parent constituencies. Clearly, the mission of the school directly affects the curriculum negotiation process. Both school leaders and parents use the mission of the school when negotiating the curriculum. The mission of the school can play a large part in these negotiations, particularly when the



school has strong religious beliefs. School leaders at religious schools cited the religious doctrine of the school numerous times when referencing parent negotiations. In some cases, a faith-based education can make the negotiation process easier. Some school leaders showed a tendency to refer back to the school's religious purpose whenever a difficult curriculum decision was necessary. On the other hand, parents also used the mission of the school to argue their point concerning the curriculum. Many parents choose a school because the mission or curriculum "addresses their aspirations for their children, including aspirations for study of school subjects closely allied with the existing academic disciplines" (Pinar, 2004, p. 228). School leaders have to be well versed in the mission of the school and capable of interpreting how this mission applies to a variety of curricular discussions. School leaders should also be prepared for parents to attempt to use the mission of the school to their advantage when arguing for curricular changes.

*Assertion: Schools with long tenures have an easier time negotiating curriculum conflict.*

Schools with long tenures have fewer problems negotiating the curriculum with parents. Evident from this study, the longer a school has been in operation, the easier the curriculum negotiation process becomes. The tenure of a school can influence the negotiation of curriculum conflict with parents. Schools that have been in existence for an extended period of time with a history of success educating students have built up a certain amount of collateral with parents. Parents know that the school has a proven record, so they are more likely to trust school leaders when they make recommendations on curriculum or pedagogy (Evans, 2000; Fullan, 2001b). School leaders are also more confident in the negotiation process, since they can honestly state that as an institution

this is what we have found works best. On the other hand, schools that are relatively new need to work harder to convince parents that they know what they are doing; there seems to be an increased likelihood in these schools that parents will question the curriculum. Schools with long, successful tenures tend to develop an increased level of trust with their parent constituencies. That does not mean that the parents in these schools do not ever question the curriculum. As evidenced throughout this study, the parents in all three schools try to influence the curriculum. However, the track record of the schools that had been in existence longer gives school leaders credibility when negotiating the curriculum. Newer schools do not enjoy this luxury, and the negotiation process can be more difficult in certain situations for this reason. The parents at newer schools may ultimately accept the reasoning that the school leaders offer, but it takes more time and negotiation. There is a certain level of trust that comes with institutional success.

*Assertion: Experience offers school leaders further influence in the negotiation process.*

More experienced school leaders have an increased level of influence in the negotiation of curriculum conflict with parents. In this study, there was a varying degree of experience in the leaders, from longevity that spanned decades to the naiveté of a first-year principal. The research showed that the level of experience of the school leader related to his or her level of confidence in negotiating curriculum conflict. School leaders who were relatively new to a school were less likely to take a stand against interference from parents than their more experienced counterparts. Less experienced leaders are also more inclined to use their position of leadership as justification for curriculum decisions. School leaders cannot simply use their position of authority to influence the curriculum

discussion if they hope to maintain trust with stakeholders (Kipinis, 1972). More inexperienced leaders have a more reserved approach to parents. They tend to be very deliberate with their comments about parents and are careful not to alienate any of the constituents. The more experienced leaders, on the other hand, are content with the prospect of telling parents that their concerns are not shared by the school. By no means are these more experienced leaders flippant or capricious with their explanations to parents, but they are firm in their belief that the curriculum decisions should be made by the professionals. This same level of confidence was not expressed by the novice leaders.

*Assertion: Less established schools are more dependent on parents.*

New schools tend to rely heavily on parents for support. The newer the school, the more likely the school will be dependent upon parents for support. Parents are going to be much more important to a school early in its development, because they are needed for both financial and volunteer support. All schools need parental support in order to be successful and to achieve the mission of the school. However, newer schools do not enjoy the same experience, structure or financial independence that more established schools possess. Newer schools do not have the established processes or personnel to deal with all of the challenges that come with running a school. Typically, newer schools do not have as many employees, so they depend on parent volunteers to fill the gaps. As for the monetary needs of the school, the financial establishment of a private school is measured by its endowment. The larger the schools' endowment, the less dependent it is on parents for financial support. Likewise, the more financial independence the school has, the less likely it is to depend on tuition dollars. A school with a smaller endowment, on the other hand, depends exclusively on the annual giving of supporters, such as parents. The

financial freedom derived from a substantial endowment affords school leaders the luxury of refusing the aid of parents if that help conflicts with the mission of the school. Established schools possess an “institutional advantage” (Peshkin, 2001, p. 120) that gives them increased credibility with both parents and the broader community. Less established schools do not have the same autonomy, since they depend on the parent constituency for financial and volunteer support.

*Assertion: Less established schools tend to have less control over parent involvement.*

New schools have less control over parental involvement. In this study, the less established schools do not exhibit the same control over the parents and their involvement in the curriculum of the school. This lack of control could be a consequence of the relative inexperience of the school leadership in channeling parent concerns, or perhaps there is an increased reliance on parents for support, which results in less control. Schools that have been around for a longer period of time, however, have a well-established process in place to channel the efforts of parents in directions the school leaders determine. More established schools exhibit greater efficiency in organizing and coordinating parent support. In their schools, parent groups have officers who meet regularly with the school leaders, and the school provides guidance on projects that call for parent involvement. Some schools even have staff members in charge of coordinating parent involvement. Newer schools also might have organized parent groups, but the structure and direction of the parent support is much less controlled. At newer schools, the parents seem to determine on their own those areas where their efforts should be channeled. At a less-established school, parents are more likely to determine the

programs that the school needs to adopt. If the parents see a need for a change, they may take the initiative to research the program and present it to the school leaders for implementation. The school leadership may be appreciative and supportive of the project, but the impetus for the change originated from the parents and not the school leaders. This grassroots effort among the parents to effect change is less likely to occur in a school that has been in existence for a longer period of time.

### *A Framework for Curriculum Leadership in Private Schools*

The preceding assertions provide a framework for curriculum leadership in private schools. The following framework is a result of the findings from the three case studies in this research and is grounded in the existing educational research cited throughout this investigation. While this framework was constructed from the specific context of these case studies, school leaders are provided enough information about the research settings to draw conclusions about their own circumstance. The purpose of this framework is to understand *how school leaders respond to the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools*. Furthermore, this framework helps reinforce how transformative curriculum leaders can move out of “isolation” and join in a “professional collaboration” (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p.160). Curriculum leadership is an “extraordinary complicated conversation” that is “intensely historical, political, racial, gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological, and international” (Pinar et al., 1995, pp. 847-848). School leaders should encourage this multifaceted conversation throughout the curriculum development process. School leader and curriculum leader are used interchangeably throughout this framework, since for the purposes of this discussion; they are one and the same.

1. *Communicate and Remain Transparent.* Curriculum leaders should communicate frequently and clearly to provide transparency to their constituents. School leaders should promote open lines of communication among the school community and the stakeholders. Good communication with the faculty and the parents is important when conducting curriculum negotiations.
2. *Build Relationships and Establish Trust.* School leadership is based on relationships between all of the stakeholders in a school community. The relationship between a school leader and those that follow this leader is based on mutual trust and respect. Teachers and parents are less likely to follow a leader they do not trust or respect. Trust must be developed over time and respect must be earned through shared experiences. Cultivating these foundations is an essential aspect to becoming an effective curriculum leader.
3. *Be Cautious with Influential Parents.* School leaders should be cautious when allowing influential parents to have greater access to curriculum negotiations. Although influential parents are significant in a private school setting, school leaders should be careful not to allow these parents to have increased influence due to their financial support or increased stature in the community. Allowing influential parents increased clout promotes mistrust with teachers and other parents.
4. *Do not Automatically Resist Input.* School leaders should not automatically resist input from parents. While curriculum leaders need to maintain a balance between allowing parents to dictate the curriculum and not allowing any input at all, school leaders should not refuse to accept feedback from parents that is unsolicited.

5. *Value the Co-curriculum.* Curriculum leaders should value the co-curriculum. Not all learning takes place in the classroom within the context of the formal curriculum. School leaders should embrace opportunities to educate the broader community through co-curricular experiences like assemblies, athletics and the arts.
6. *Embrace your Tenure.* School leaders should understand and embrace the tenure of their educational institution and their own leadership. Time and shared, positive experiences help to establish trust with stakeholders. New schools and new school leaders cannot replicate this experience. Furthermore, longevity for a private school often means increased financial stability. Curriculum leaders need to be aware of the role that tenure plays in the negotiation process with parents.
7. *Lead with a Quiet Confidence.* School leaders should lead with a sense of quiet confidence. Curriculum leaders should be confident in their abilities as an educational leader to determine the best course of action for the school. This also means to be confident enough to listen to others and understand that the best decision is determined as a community of learners. Curriculum leaders should possess a quiet confidence in knowing that leadership is not about power and authority, but authenticity and shared responsibility.
8. *Be True to your Mission.* School leaders should keep the mission of the school front and center when making curriculum decisions. It is easy for school leaders to lose sight of the school's educational mission with the competing demands on the curriculum. Curriculum leaders should continually examine the relationship between the curriculum and the mission of the school.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

While this study resulted in a number of assertions for educational leaders concerning the influence of parents on the curriculum of private schools, there are some areas that I believe deserve further investigation. Future research could include expanding the number of participants in the study along with investigating certain aspects of the findings in greater detail. The participants in this study were limited to school leaders, but parents, teachers and even students would offer a different perspective. Also, there were several findings that were quite intriguing and deserve added exploration. Some of the findings that merit additional research include parental expectations that result from the school's mission, the relationship of the curriculum to the co-curriculum and the significance of a school's endowment on the negotiation process.

#### *Interview Other Stakeholders*

The most obvious recommendation for future research in this area is to replicate the study with different stakeholders as participants. For instance, the findings from this study would be enhanced by interviewing parents or teachers at the three schools. Parent respondents would offer a different point of view from the school leaders interviewed in this study, since they could speak more directly to how they hope to influence the curriculum of private schools. While the most attractive stakeholders to research for this study would be parents, teachers would certainly add a unique outlook as well. Teachers are intimately involved in the development of the curriculum but not always in the negotiation process. The faculty would add a distinctive perspective on how school leaders navigate the tensions between the mission of the school and parental expectations.



### *Parental Expectations and the School's Mission*

Another recommendation for future research is to look at parental expectations more closely to better understand how these expectations relate to the mission of the school. In this study I began to explore the relationship between the expectations raised by the school and the ensuing parental expectations. Clearly, parents choose private schools based on their educational mission and the opportunities afforded to students both inside and outside of the classroom. This relationship deserves additional inquiry from the perspective of the parents. In other words, school leaders would benefit from knowing how parental expectations are shaped by the characteristics promoted by the school. Furthermore, since all private schools recruit their students, they spend a significant amount of time and energy promoting their school to potential students and parents. Educational leaders would benefit from knowing how the recruitment and admissions process influences the ongoing expectations of their constituents.

### *Curriculum versus Co-curriculum*

Another aspect of this research that I believe needs continued exploration is the significance of the curriculum and the co-curriculum to the educational process. In this study, I constructed the definition of the curriculum and co-curriculum from existing literature, and their functions evolved throughout my research. Future research might examine the roles of curriculum and co-curriculum through the eyes of the stakeholders. It would be interesting to learn how school leaders envision the role of the formal course of study versus the co-curricular. Clearly, there is a distinction between the curriculum and the co-curriculum, but both provide opportunities for learning. Often the priority is placed on the curriculum, so the co-curriculum becomes an afterthought. While this

emphasis is certainly justified, the advantages of the co-curriculum should not be overlooked. As mentioned in this study, many parts of the co-curriculum provide opportunities that are not available in the formal curriculum. For example, many school leaders consider assembly programs part of the co-curriculum. A guest speaker, through public pedagogy, can reach a much larger audience than a teacher in a conventional classroom setting. Future research would help school leaders determine the advantages offered by each of these aspects of the learning environment.

#### *Influence of Endowment on Curriculum Negotiations*

A final prospect for additional research is a more detailed examination of the significance of a school's endowment in the negotiation of curriculum conflict with parents. While this study briefly highlighted the disparity in financial stability among the three schools, the degree of financial stability in a school makes a difference in the way a school leader might approach the negotiation process. I believe that the financial freedom associated with a large endowment allows a school to make decisions independent from possible implications to the tuition revenue of the school. For example, if a school with a large endowment does not want to adopt a program that is proposed by a potential donor, its leader can comfortably turn down a significant donation. On the other hand, a school with a relatively small endowment might have a more difficult time turning down the donation. As a result, the school's mission may be compromised in an effort to achieve financial security. Schools with ample financial resources do not have to endorse for economic reasons any programs that conflict with their mission. My research did not scrutinize this aspect of the negotiation process, but I believe it would be an interesting and beneficial study.

### *Implications for Educational Leadership*

The above framework for curriculum leadership in private schools also produced a number of significant implications for educational leadership. This qualitative study resulted in “well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). The context for this research was the three private schools, but the results and conclusions may be used to benefit other school leaders. These data suggest ways that educational leadership programs can prepare school leaders for their work. Educational leadership programs should prepare school leaders to understand the importance of the co-curriculum, the need for transparency, and the benefits of building meaningful relationships with members of the entire school community. Furthermore, the research has implications for professional development for both teachers and leaders with regards to their preparation and practice. Schools and school leaders simply cannot address these concerns during their training or educational development. Educational leadership is a constant development process, and leaders should continue to grow in these areas. These findings suggest that school communities should establish professional development programs to encourage and educate participants about such issues as preserving transparency and understanding the importance of the co-curriculum.

### *The Co-curriculum’s Importance to Learning*

One important implication from the research is the value of the co-curriculum to the educational process. Although the research shows a division between the formal curriculum and the co-curriculum, school leaders need to recognize that the co-curriculum is no less important or educational. As described above, the co-curriculum

provides a wealth of opportunities for learning that are outside the normal pedagogical processes and can sometimes reach a broader audience. From the inception of schooling in this country, educators have touted the importance of the co-curriculum. Benjamin Franklin warned against the “trappings of the conventional education” (Urban & Wagoner, 2004, p. 55) and supported the notion that learning can occur through pragmatic instruction. Often educators are so consumed by the traditional educational structure that they overlook or devalue the role of the co-curriculum.

In much the same way that Dewey (1916/1944) discusses the “tendency to assign separate values to each study,” (p. 249) school leaders often assign separate values to the curriculum and the co-curriculum. Dewey suggests that school leaders should “struggle against this isolation in order that the various interests may reinforce and play into one another.” (p. 249). Educational leaders should acknowledge the significance of the co-curriculum as an important educational opportunity.

Schools will benefit from curriculum leaders embracing opportunities that are external to the formal curriculum. We should not allow co-curricular opportunities to be “torn away from their original place in experience” to be “classified” and “pigeonholed” (Dewey, 2001, p. 105-106) into something less important than learning. Educational leadership programs should help prepare school leaders to explore the role of the co-curriculum and encourage them to find creative ways to incorporate the co-curriculum into their school’s learning environment. School leaders who believe in the value of the co-curriculum will endorse professional development opportunities for their faculty that capitalize on the co-curriculum in conjunction with the formal curriculum.

*Leadership Requires Some Level of Transparency*

Another significant implication for educational leaders is the importance of transparency. School leaders need to be transparent in making decisions about the curriculum so that stakeholders trust their motives. Transparency does not mean that school leaders have to disclose every aspect of the decision-making process. There will be occasions when school leaders will not be able to divulge confidential information. A pattern of openness, however, creates trust that affords leaders a level of credibility with stakeholders (Murphy, 2000). Without transparency, teachers and parents will speculate as to why curriculum changes were made. This speculation often creates suspicion and can negatively affect a leader's ability to lead. Trust is important to developing strong relationships with all members of the school community; transparency helps create this trust (Evans, 2000). Leadership programs can equip school leaders with the tools necessary to recognize transparency and to know when confidentiality prevents full disclosure. Often school leaders are so concerned about privacy that they do not offer any information to the school community when important decisions are being made by administrators. This discretion is viewed as a lack of transparency. School leaders would benefit from knowing when it is appropriate to disclose information to the faculty and stakeholders.

*Building Relationships is Time Well Spent*

In this regard, the trust that results from leaders being transparent goes a long way in helping to nurture relationships that are important to a school community (Evans, 2000). School leaders recognize the importance of personal relationships in the leadership process. Schools are different from many types of organizations and depend largely upon

the relationships that exist between all of the stakeholders. The relationship between student and teacher, teacher and parent, teachers and school leader, and school leader and parent, all influence the learning environment. Strong relationships enable the school community to share ideas and discuss concerns before they become conflict (Fullan, 2001b). This study confirms the importance of educational leaders building strong, meaningful relationships with all of the members of the school community. Educational leadership programs should not underestimate this personal side to school leadership. While relationship building is in some ways an innate quality that certain leaders possess more than others, leadership programs can stress the value of these associations and the need to spend time establishing confidence with others. Aspiring school leaders recognize the critical importance of building relationships with their colleagues and stakeholders.

### *Personal Reflections*

Reflecting on this multi-site case study, I have a number of personal reactions regarding the experience and the process. Having such unfettered access to the three schools in this study was both intriguing and humbling. All three of the schools in the study were extremely helpful with my research, and the gatekeepers at all of the schools went out of their way to provide the entrée necessary to conduct my research. I found the process personally rewarding, and I made valuable connections with my contemporaries at other private schools in the area. The access I enjoyed allowed me to submerge myself in the school community and provided a glimpse into the culture of the schools. Every interview and observation provided an exciting opportunity to probe deeper into the context of the curriculum negotiation process at the schools.

Despite this positive experience, the study did produce a number of challenges, frustrations and limitations. Throughout this study, one of the greatest challenges I faced was maintaining my focus on the research questions. There were many times during the interviews when I wanted to ask questions that did not relate to my study, but I managed to resist. I did make several observations and notes on issues that, while not relevant for this study, will be useful to me as a school leader.

Another challenge that I faced with the research process was trying not to get discouraged when things did not go according to plan. There were some frustrating aspects of the research process. As the researcher, I learned to be flexible with the process and to allow things to unfold. For example, the interviews did not always go as planned. Sometimes I struggled to get the participants to remain focused and to stay on the subject. I learned to rephrase the questions to steer them back to my research, rather than the tangential issue they wanted to discuss. I also grew a little frustrated at times with logistical issues. One particular interview was almost inaudible at times because the participant kept moving around the room. I adapted to these challenges and, when appropriate, was more assertive with the interview protocol.

Of course, there were also limitations that I learned to deal with during the research process. Particularly with the first round of questions, the participants were not immediately forthright with their answers. The participants were not being dishonest, but they were understandably guarded with their responses. I spent time developing a rapport with the respondents in order to gain their trust. Once I gained the trust of the school leaders, I was able to tease out the details in their previously vague answers. This process took some time, but I believe it paid tremendous dividends with the data I received. As is

the case with any study, time constraints placed certain limitations on the research.

Consequently, the additional time that was necessary for building relationships with the respondents contributed to the limitations of this study.

Despite these challenges and limitations, the findings provide a comprehensive view of the influence of parents on the curriculum of the three private schools involved in this study. I believe these case studies provide a beneficial guideline for private school leadership. The qualitative design of the study provides the details that distinguish the schools and their leadership. School leaders can examine these studies and relate the findings to their own situations. Educational leaders benefit from continually examining the role that all of the stakeholders play in the curriculum development process, and the influence of parents cannot be underestimated. The assertions outlined in Chapter Six provide another resource for private school leaders orchestrating cooperative efforts of parents, teachers and educational leaders. Beyond these direct benefits from the findings, as they relate to my research, I learned a great deal about the three schools in the study and their leaders. I gained a valuable perspective on three unique schools and the distinctive leadership styles of the participants I interviewed. I view this research as the beginning of a life-long process of gaining a better understanding of educational leadership, and I believe similar, ongoing inquiries are important to the development of any school leader.



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## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

#### Interview Questions “Grand Tour”

1. What leadership roles are you responsible for in the Upper School?
2. How does your role in the Upper School relate to curriculum development?
3. Who else is responsible for leadership in the Upper School?
4. Can you describe some of the ways that the parents in the Upper School get involved with the school?
5. How do parents influence what goes on in your school?
6. What role do parents play with curriculum development in the Upper School?
7. How do you see parents influencing curriculum development? Can you give any examples?
8. Do school leaders’ ideas about curriculum ever differ from the parents’ curriculum ideas? If so, how do they differ?
9. How do you negotiate these differences?
10. When changes are made to the curriculum how do they occur?
11. Who are some of the other school leaders I should talk to about the role of parents in the Upper School?
12. Can you think of any documents or opportunities for observation relating to the role of parents and curriculum in the Upper School?

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions “Structural/Contrasting”

1. When you are dealing with certain “hot button” issues such as a complaint about a teacher or a specific course offering, how do you approach the role of parents?
2. How do you approach parents who want to go straight to the top with their issue?
3. Where do most curriculum (extra-curricular) conflicts in the Upper School occur?
4. How do you negotiate these conflicts?
5. Can you describe a recent example of a curriculum conflict that you negotiated with a parent?
6. How did you perceive the conflict?
7. How did you negotiate this conflict?
8. What were your concerns with the negotiation of this conflict?
9. Is parent involvement typically solicited or unsolicited?
10. When you do invite parents to participate in changes, how do you structure this involvement?
11. How would you characterize the expectations of parents who send their children to private schools? Christian background of the school? Money?
12. How do school leaders build trust with parents and teachers when they differ on issues relating to the school?
13. Has the role of parents changed over your time here at Hampton Hills?

14. How do you deal with the parent who is the big donor or a member of the governing board?
15. Do any other examples come to mind for you or anyone else in terms of curricular conflicts or change?
16. If anything comes up what would be the best way for me to get in touch with you?  
Would phone or e-mail be better?

## APPENDIX C

### Coding Categories

Co-curriculum  
Curriculum Change  
Curriculum Role  
Demographics/History  
Expectations  
Growth - Leadership  
Growth - school  
Leadership Role  
Mission/Philosophy  
Negotiate differences  
Parent-conflict/concern  
Parent - Relationship  
Parent - solicited  
Parent - unsolicited  
Parent -Influential  
Parent Communication  
Religion  
Teachers Role

## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent

Georgia State University  
Department of Educational Policy Studies  
Informed Consent

**Title:**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Eric Freeman  
**Student Principal Investigator:** Chris Freer

I. Purpose:

I am inviting you to participate in a voluntary research study. The purpose of the study is to understand the dynamics of parental influences on curriculum in private schools by exploring how educational leaders negotiate the tensions that develop between parental expectations and a school's curricular mission. You are invited to participate because you are a school leadership position dealing with curricular issues. A total of 10-15 participants will be recruited for this study. Approximately 3-5 school leaders from 3 different private schools. Participation will require two individual interviews and one focus group session that in total will take approximately three hours of your time on the dates selected by you during the months of January through April of 2008.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will participate in two interviews and one focus group discussion. The interviews and focus group discussion will last about one hour each. I will personally conduct the interview and focus group discussion at a location chosen by you on a date selected by you during the months of January through April of 2008. The focus groups will consist of the same 3-5 school leaders who are interviewed at each of the three schools. One separate focus group will be conducted for each of the three schools in the study at a location chosen by the participants on a date selected by the participants during the months of January through April of 2008. The interviews and focus group discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed. You will receive a \$15 gift card for your participation.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life. It is possible that in discussing your negotiations with parents on curricular tensions that you may experience some discomfort. If this does occur you are free to stop the interview at any time or to withdraw your participation in the interview. Although I cannot guarantee confidentiality in the focus group discussions, you are free to withdraw your participation in the focus group discussion at any time.

#### IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally. The interview will allow you the opportunity to discuss concerns you have with your negotiations with parents on curricular tensions. Overall, I hope to gain information about how school leaders negotiate the differences in expectations for curriculum between parents and private secondary schools.

#### V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

#### VI. Confidentiality:

I will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. I will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. Your name will appear only on this consent form and the list of possible participants provided to me when you agreed to consider participating in an in-depth interview. Only the researchers will have access to the information you provide. The audio recording of the interview will be kept in my home office in a locked file cabinet. The audio recording of the interview will be transcribed within 48 hours of the interview. The transcript will be stored on a password- and firewall-protected computer in my home office. Your name or other facts that might point to you will not appear when I present this study or publish its results. In addition, the key to the participants will be stored in a separate location from the data. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

#### VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Eric Freeman at (404) 413-8269 or [Efreesman@gsu.edu](mailto:Efreesman@gsu.edu) or Chris Freer at (404) 765-4457 or [chris.freer@woodward.edu](mailto:chris.freer@woodward.edu) if you have questions about this study. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this research study, you may contact Susan Vogtner in the Office of Research Integrity at 404-413-3513 or [svogtner1@gsu.edu](mailto:svogtner1@gsu.edu).

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

I will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



*Consent Form Approved by Georgia State University IRB January 09, 2008 - January 07, 2009*