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Author(s): Lora Cohen-Vogel, Ellen Goldring, Claire Smrekar
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The Influence of Local Conditions on Social Service Partnerships, Parent Involvement, and Community Engagement in Neighborhood Schools

LORA COHEN-VOGEL
Florida State University

ELLEN GOLDRING
Vanderbilt University

CLAIRE SMREKAR
Vanderbilt University

By using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping software to combine health and crime data with data from 20 schools in one Southeastern district, the study explores whether and how neighborhood conditions affect school-community arrangements. Findings show that the nature of the relationships and the strategies principals and teachers use to partner with social service organizations, encourage parental involvement, and engage with the community, in particular, are influenced by the conditions of the neighborhood in which schools sit. The implications for theory development, policy, and practice are discussed as are ideas for future research.

Propelled in large part by the publication of Wilson's (1987) seminal book, *The Truly Disadvantaged*, interest over the past two decades in the effects of neighborhoods on individuals and the lives of children, in particular, has generated a substantial and growing body of research (Sampson et al. 2002). The recent literature, giving special attention to the urban poor, examines the additive marginal effects of neighborhoods on various outcome measures such as economic opportunity and educational attainment (see, e.g., Clark 2005; Stewart et al. 2007).

At the same time, the school-community relationship has reemerged as a principal focus of sociological research on schooling (Arum 2000), and re-

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searchers have considered the influences local neighborhood conditions have on a school's ability to build and leverage community resources (Shirley 2001). To date, however, no studies in education have systematically combined neighborhood-level health and crime data with data on schools to explore the relationship.

By using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping software and frameworks that explain how social indicators such as poverty and joblessness coalesce in a physical space (e.g., Kornhauser 1978; Park and Burgess 1925; Shevky and Bell 1955), we consider the relationship between neighborhood conditions—economic health, criminal behavior, and community assets (McKnight and Kretzmann 1996)—and school-community connections. Specifically, we ask, How do neighborhood conditions affect the nature of school-community relations and the strategies principals and teachers use to partner with social service organizations, encourage parental involvement, and engage with the community?

We begin with a review of the literature on neighborhoods and their potential as sources of social capital. Next, we describe the research on school-community interactions and the ways educators "bridge" and "buffer" neighborhood influences in an effort to improve their schools. We develop a framework for examining the influence of neighborhood conditions on school-community relations and the coordination of service providers, involvement of parents, and construction of social networks and community ties, in particular. Informed by our framework, we expect to find between-school differences in the level and ways schools interact with their communities, differences that depend at least in part on the neighborhoods in which schools sit.

Understanding the relationships between the neighborhood conditions surrounding a school and the strategies used by educators to build partnerships, involve parents, and strengthen social networks takes on added importance as desegregation orders are lifted and children return in large numbers to neighborhood schools (Orfield 2001; Orfield and Eaton 1997). With these changes, poor and minority children are disproportionately reassigned to schools in economically and socially vulnerable communities, as these com-

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LORA COHEN-VOGEL is an associate professor of educational leadership and policy studies at Florida State University. Her work focuses on the politics of education and school-level governance. ELLEN GOLDRING is Patricia and Rodes Hart Chair of Education Policy and Leadership at Vanderbilt University. Her research focuses on school improvement, with attention to educational leadership, school choice, and access and equity. CLAIRE SMREKAR is an associate professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University. Her work focuses on the social context of education and social policy.

munities are closer to their homes (Goldring et al. 2006). Certainly, as Smrekar and Goldring (2009a) note, these trends raise important new questions about the role and relative significance of "the total ecology of schooling" in a postbusing era that appears to reproduce the corrosive conditions of neighborhood poverty in socioeconomically isolated, high-poverty neighborhood schools. This article attempts to answer one such question.

Neighborhoods as Sources of Social Capital

Neighborhoods function as the social and cultural webs linking families and children to a set of norms, routines, and traditions. Social actions flow from perceptions of safety and opportunity, expectations regarding appropriate parenting styles and child behavior, and norms regarding home maintenance and respect for property (Furstenberg 1993). The neighborhood environment helps define the nature of particular social networks among families and the levels of trust, familiarity, and face-to-face engagement among members (Kerchner and McMurran 2001).

Research highlights the influence neighborhood conditions can exert to shape social action in ways that lead to productive outcomes among residents. According to Chaskin (1999), some neighborhoods consist of a degree of connectedness among neighbors, an assumption of responsibility for collective outcomes, and a mechanism for planning, priority setting, and problem solving (see also Coleman and Hoffer 1987). Other neighborhoods—sometimes referred to as "high risk," "needy," or "vulnerable"—possess few of these attributes.

The weak structures emblematic of vulnerable neighborhoods also complicate the development and sustainability of social capital (Driscoll and Kerchner 1999). The social capital concept bridges human capital theory (Schultz 1963), which underscores the economic value of individuals for collective purposes, and social organization theory (Smrekar 1996). Coleman (1987, 36) defines social capital as "the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up." The critical elements of social capital include shared values, norms, and attitudes that help promote trust, facilitate open communication, and produce meaningful activities that benefit children and adults alike (Smrekar 1996). It takes time, energy, and resources for communities to build social capital, and success depends in part on stability in the family and neighborhood context (Warren 2005).

Family and neighborhood instability—along with the fragile store of social capital that accompanies it—is most frequently found in poor communities (Coleman and Hoffer 1987). In his book, Wilson shows how the ghettoization

of America's inner cities has led to a decline in social capital. When people in poor communities who find good jobs move away, neighborhoods polarize further and provide fewer role models for children. Omnipresent drug trafficking and a threat of victimization may minimize opportunities for interdependence and social interaction among community members. Clusters of corrosive conditions, evidenced by dense, dilapidated housing, threat of violent crime, inaccessible health care, lack of employment opportunities, and limited public transportation give rise to an entrenched culture of fear, disconnection, and distrust (Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987).

In a related conceptualization of social capital, Putnam (1995) argues that it can be built and sustained when there is "a sense of community" or a set of organizational and institutional affiliations (e.g., civic, religious) that bind families in stable, predictable social ties. Neighborhood-based institutions, including youth-serving organizations (e.g., Boys' and Girls' Clubs), religious organizations (mosques), and recreation programs (after-school sports), represent sources for the production of social capital that are essential for enhancing the trust, communication, and sense of community among neighborhood children and families alike (Putnam 2000; Shirley 2001).

Using Coleman's (1987) resource-based conceptualization of social capital helps not only to frame our study but also, taxonomically, to focus our data collection and reporting efforts. Herein, we focus primarily on the ways neighborhood conditions influence schools' capacity to generate and acquire resources, namely, people (e.g., parents), partners, and assistance programs. Putnam's (2000) conceptualization of social capital serves a purpose too. It reminds us to pay attention to community assets like churches and youth service organizations as we operationalize neighborhood conditions.

Schools: Bridging and Buffering Neighborhood Influences

Organizational theorists have examined the ways schools interact with—some would say "manage"—their external environments and the implications of those interactions for the development of social capital. Their work reveals that both "boundaries" inherent in schools as organizations and "buffers" educators may use to protect teaching and learning present barriers to open participation (Goldring 1995; Scott 2003; Williams et al. 2009).

Schools, like most other organizations, possess institutional boundaries. Indeed, according to Ogawa et al. (1999), schools are replete with "boundary" terms that define thresholds to be crossed: "self-contained classrooms," "graduation," "drop-outs," even "the school-community relationship" itself. Yet, just where organizational boundaries fall is not always clear. The distinction between members and nonmembers in schools, for example, is often blurred

(Laumann et al. 1983): "Membership as a criterion assumes considerable ambiguity as one considers such categories of people as parents who volunteer in schools, specialists (psychologists) who may only appear infrequently, . . . teachers-in-training completing a practicum, their university supervisors, and even a school's parents-at-large, whose progeny are trustfully left daily in the care of other adults" (Ogawa et al. 1999, 287). The question of "where organizations end and their environments begin" poses what the authors refer to as an "enduring dilemma of school organization" (Ogawa et al. 1999, 287). The dilemma surfaces when the organizational need for internal coherence bumps up against the need to interface with the environment (Crowson 1998; Goldring 1995). When that happens, members may help build coherence while nonmembers present uncertainty and thus may be perceived as potential threats to coherence (Galbraith 1977; Ogawa et al. 1999).

One manifestation of the boundary dilemma has been the subject of research on schools: the bridging and buffering strategies organizations employ to manage relations with their environments. Studies show that organizations use *bridging* strategies—including bargaining, contracting, and coalition building—when they depend on their environments for resources to provide core technologies (Scott 2003; Thompson 1967). Organizations *buffer* to protect their core technologies from environmental influences they fear may undermine technical efficiency and effectiveness (Ogawa et al. 1999; Thompson 1967). Buffering strategies include blocking or limiting access. Principals may require community groups, social service agencies, and businesses to make their initial contact with them rather than with teachers, for example (DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran 2005). They may also buffer by creating procedures to shield teachers from parental demands (Elmore 2000; Ogawa 1996).

A handful of studies have examined the influence of home and neighborhood conditions on educators' bridging and buffering. Most of this work focuses on the ways educators mediate the association between parents' socioeconomic status and their involvement (Arum 2000; Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel 2001). As explained by Bourdieu (1979), educators tend to use linguistic structures, authority patterns, and curricula with which higher-income children and their parents are already familiar when they enter school. Lower-income families, with different linguistic structures and less familiarity with expectations and curricula, may feel unwelcome and, consequently, less likely to become involved. Recently Warren (2005) has looked beyond parent income at the ways other neighborhood components—namely, community-development initiatives—condition school practices. He concludes that school leaders in low-income neighborhoods working to improve schools typically do so independently, in isolation from larger community-development projects.

Even as teachers and administrators in urban schools increasingly embrace educational professionalism with a new respect for parent involvement, the

value of family-oriented outreach, and school-based efforts to build social capital, they appear to shy away from a partnering role in community revitalization (Crowson 1998). Community revitalization efforts may mean "tackling such issues as economic incentives, employment options and training, a neighborhood's attractiveness to investment capital" (Crowson 1998, 66), as well as crime, poverty, and racism that educators may view as "beyond the reach" of collaborative efforts (Capper 1996, 318). Even the family and children's services idea reopens an unresolved debate around the roles of parents and professionals, the role of noneducator professionals in children's development, and the role of the school in relation to the modern welfare state (Cibulka 1996; Crowson 1998). Indeed, coordination efforts embedded in the school-linked services concept may throw together differing professional cultures and incentive systems, threaten professionally valued autonomy, and require that space and professional "turf" be renegotiated (Crowson and Boyd 1993).

But schools "going it alone" is problematic, Warren (2005) argues, because children who have no access to adequate housing, health care, and nutrition do not learn well (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997), and teachers who lack an understanding of their students' cultures or meaningful relationships with their families do not teach well (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1978). Instead, according to this argument, schools—particularly those in urban, high-poverty areas—should sit at the center of community development efforts (Chung 2002; Wilson 1987). Educational success—even in schools serving poor and working-class families—rests on the ability of school administrators and others to "activate[e] personal, family, and community resources" (Kerchner and McMurran 2001, 47). Over the past 15 years, a small but ambitious community schools movement—with its roots in Dewey (1915)—has embraced this argument and works to forge collaborations between community organizations and schools. This new movement recognizes that collaborations with broad-based community organizations, whose constituents have children attending city schools, can help provide the political power necessary for substantive school reform (Stone et al. 2001; Warren 1998, 2005).

Framing the Study: Schools' Role in Promoting Coordinated Services, Parental Involvement, and Community Engagement

Overall, research has established that schools that "bridge" the community through robust partnerships with local institutions and mutually productive relations with parents may help to provide sustainable elements of social capital. Educators and others who work in schools may also serve as bridges to outside organizations to address barriers to learning, healthy development,

and success in school. As such, it is important to consider the influences neighborhood conditions may have on educators' efforts to strengthen social capital networks that involve not only parents but school-linked service providers as well. Our main question here concerns the ways educators in schools located in neighborhoods with different structures and supports interact with (bridge and buffer) the greater community. How are schools promoting partnerships with community service providers, parental involvement, and social networks—in a phrase, "flows of civic contribution" (Kerchner and McMurran 2001, 47)—especially in neighborhoods deemed "high risk"? Three strategies are explored in this article: coordination of service providers, involvement of parents in schools and at home, and engagement with the community.

Partnering with and Coordinating Service Providers

The critical interaction between social structures and school organization in vulnerable neighborhoods is amplified by the school-linked social services movement launched over 100 years ago and rekindled with new programmatic priorities in the late 1980s (Smrekar and Mawhinney 1999). During the previous two decades, an increasing number of states and localities have developed initiatives designed to address fragmentation issues in the delivery of support services for children and their families. Many of these efforts have targeted public schools as the nexus for linkages among education, health care, employment, and recreation agencies.

Some schools provide "coordinated" services and programs aimed at leveling the playing field for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Dryfoos 1994). Broadening traditional notions of school responsibility, programs like Head Start, family recreation centers, breakfast programs, and nonemergency health care services have been instituted in schools. In order to meet "the multiple and interconnected needs of both children and youth" (Mawhinney 1993, 10), schools and social service agencies are encouraged to work together rather than in isolation to deliver comprehensive and coordinated services to children.

The immediate and the long-term impact of interagency collaboration on school-community relations remains under debate (Dryfoos et al. 2006; Fusarelli 2008). In a review of research on school-linked services, Furman and Merz (1994) reported that, when implemented, such linkages emphasize formal structures and bureaucratic arrangements such as the place of service delivery and the training of new providers, processes they believe are unlikely to lead to the construction of critical elements of social capital: intimacy, trust, and belonging (see also Fusarelli and Lindle, forthcoming). Others have questioned the commitment behind coordinated services, contending that they may be

offered to satisfy minority constituents and replace promises for full desegregation (Orfield and Eaton 1997). Recent research (e.g., Kirst 2008) on coordinated services shifts attention to a new and different challenge and raises questions pointed and potent: How can coordinated, locally delivered health and social services reach into classroom environments and improve children's learning in ways that narrow the achievement gap?

A search of the peer-reviewed literature revealed no empirical studies that directly examine the influence of neighborhood conditions on coordinated services and community partnerships. The studies that have been conducted, however, suggest that social service coordination activities themselves can complicate the traditional school-community relationship in ways that may lead principals toward unilateral decision making, closed communication, and limited participation from the external environment. When confronted by new—and, from the administrator's viewpoint, invasive—school-community arrangements, administrators may resort to familiar routines of control, management, and authority (Cibulka 1996; Crowson and Boyd 1993, 2001; Smrekar and Cohen-Vogel 2009; Smylie et al. 1996).

Involving Parents

Research evidence collected over many decades indicates that parent involvement enhances parents' attitudes about themselves and the school their child attends and builds understanding among parents and educators about the role each plays in the development of the child (Clark 2002; Comer 1980; Epstein and Dauber 1991; Henderson et al. 2007; Reynolds and Clements 2005). This increased understanding promotes greater cooperation, commitment, and trust.

There are strong indications of the connection between teachers' expectations for student performance and parental behavior (Epstein 1987; Epstein et al. 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005). Decisions regarding retention/promotion and ability grouping may hinge on teachers' perceptions of parental commitment. Beyond the benefit of parental involvement on children's progression in school, research suggests that parents' patterns of participation may be an important factor in mediating the negative impact of neighborhood risk factors on the academic performance of elementary school students (Vandell et al. 1999). The types of parental involvement that seem to benefit children in vulnerable neighborhoods include visiting the school for discussions with teachers, supervising homework, and providing children with enrichment activities at home.

Yet parenting in vulnerable and low-socioeconomic neighborhoods may manifest itself in ways that differ dramatically from these involvement types

(Chin and Phillips 2004; Lareau 2003). Studies of parenting practices in these neighborhoods describe parenting as a highly private, protected, and isolated set of activities (Furstenberg 1993; Horvat et al. 2003). Under manifestly dangerous conditions, parents manage risk by adopting stringent child monitoring and "lock down" strategies (Furstenberg 1993; Wilson 1987). These strategies as well as parents' concerns about their own personal safety conflict with after-school and evening involvement in school-based activities. As parents in these communities adopt defensive tactics, increasing numbers of neighbors are disconnected, social networks of support—educational and otherwise—dissolve, and opportunities for constructive collective socialization disappear (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1997; Wilson 1987).

Engaging with the Community

Research suggests that the type and strength of a school community differentially affect the social connections that bond families and schools in the joint enterprise of education. Functional communities are characterized by structural consistency between generations in which social norms and sanctions arise out of the social structure itself and both reinforce and perpetuate that structure (Coleman and Hoffer 1987). These communities exhibit a high degree of uniformity and cohesion within geographical, social, economic, and ideological boundaries (Coleman 1988).

But families of students in vulnerable neighborhoods may possess few if any of the constitutive elements of community. While neighborhood schools a century ago served residential areas that were functional communities, social, economic, and technological changes have transformed many of these communities from enclaves of shared values and daily face-to-face talk to somewhat disparate sets of interests and weak affiliations (Smrekar 1996; Wilson 1987). Constructing elements of a community is not easy. Sociologists point to empowerment zones as an example of an attempt to (re)construct community. In education, incentive programs exist in some places to motivate school personnel to live in the neighborhoods in which they teach. At the school level, efforts to create community might take the form of invitations to community members to speak, visits by students to local businesses, open houses, and space-sharing arrangements.

Overall, evidence suggests the importance of social service partnerships, parental involvement, and a sense of community for school improvement. Conditions in vulnerable neighborhoods, however, may influence the development and maintenance of school-community connections and the strategies educators use to build them.

Method

In this article we ask how neighborhood conditions influence school-community relations. Specifically, we analyze the ways educators in schools located in neighborhoods with different structures and supports interact with (bridge and buffer) parents, service providers, and other community members. To do so, we combine measures of neighborhood demographics, liabilities (Goldring et al. 2006), and assets (Furstenberg and Hughes 1997; McKnight and Kretzmann 1996) from the U.S. Census Bureau and metropolitan police and health departments with data from teacher surveys and principal interviews for 20 schools in one urban district. Before describing the methods by which our data were collected and analyzed, we describe the context in which the study was conducted.

Context of the Study: A District Returning to Neighborhood Schooling

This article is part of a larger study of a midsized, urban school district in the American Southeast, which has an enrollment of over 70,000 students. The majority of the district's student population is African American. Whites compose the second largest subgroup of students, followed by Hispanics and Asians, respectively. Reflecting national trends, the city's public school enrollment consists of substantively higher proportions of poor and minority students than in the city as a whole.

As in dozens of urban school districts throughout the country, the court system has released the district from its order to desegregate (Orfield and Eaton 1997). Here, as elsewhere, the removal of the mandatory desegregation order has meant an end to crosstown busing and a return to neighborhood schools. Beyond district court decrees, some state legislatures have enacted laws requiring districts to devise student assignment plans consistent with the principle and policy of neighborhood schooling (Smrekar and Goldring 2009b). Dismantling a court-ordered desegregation plan in place since 1978, Delaware's Neighborhood Schools Act (2000, 1), for example, mandated that districts "develop a Neighborhood School Plan for their districts that assigns every student within the district to the grade-appropriate school closest to the student's residence without regard to any consideration other than geographic distance and the natural boundaries of the neighborhoods. . . . No student shall be assigned to any school on the basis of race."

While the return to neighborhood schools has in general been met with enthusiasm among blacks and whites (see, e.g., Morris 2001; Pride and May 1999), studies have also shown that it has led to increased segregation, especially for African American and Latino students (Orfield 2001). Moreover,

under neighborhood schooling, poor and minority children are much more likely to be assigned to schools located in impoverished, vulnerable communities, as these communities are closer to their homes (Goldring et al. 2006).

This is the case in our focus district. As we report elsewhere (Goldring et al. 2006), the district's racially isolated and predominantly black schools (wherein African Americans constitute over 80 percent and between 60 percent and 80 percent of the student body, respectively) are significantly more likely than lower-minority schools to be situated in neighborhoods characterized by high unemployment, low high school completion, and a high proportion of residents living in poverty. In fact, racially isolated and predominantly black schools are located in communities with the lowest levels of educational attainment, median household income, and home ownership and the highest unemployment rates, public assistance recipients, single parent households, and number of vacant lots. Integrated schools, wherein 40–60 percent of students are African American, in contrast, are nested in communities with the highest economic and educational indicators.

Moreover, we found that racially isolated black schools are situated in zones with significantly higher rates of crime. During the six-month study period, there were, on average, 56.4 drug arrests per 1,000 residents in the zones surrounding racially isolated black schools compared to 10–13 such arrests in the other school zones. Findings were similar for rates of weapons arrests, other criminal activity, and teen births (Goldring et al. 2006).

The Sample and Data

To explore whether and how neighborhood conditions are related to school-community relations and educators' strategies for partnering with health and social service organizations, encouraging parental involvement, and building community networks, we studied 20 elementary and middle schools in the district. We started by identifying nonmagnet schools in two district "clusters" established as part of the rezoning plan that included a return to neighborhood schools.[1] Cluster I consisted of eight schools in an area made up of mostly urban and working-class households. In total, residents in the neighborhoods that composed the cluster were largely African American (70 percent) and had an average household income of about $21,500. The second cluster had 17 schools and encompassed an area whose African American residents composed under 20 percent of the population and whose average household income was just over $46,500. Twenty of the 23 nonmagnet schools in Clusters I and II agreed to participate. Employing a mixed methods design, we overlaid data from teacher surveys and principal interviews from the school sites atop neighborhood data from local police and health agencies to explore the ways

educators interface with local conditions to weave the fabric of school-community relationships.

Teacher surveys.—Four hundred ninety, or 84 percent, of teachers in the 20 sampled schools responded to surveys collected during faculty meetings held in the 2001–2 school year. Part-time, special education, and specialist (art, music) teachers were omitted from the analyses. Response rates per school ranged from 46 percent to 100 percent.[2] Surveys asked about levels and types of parent and community involvement, programs and resources available at their schools, and the use and effectiveness of such programs.

Coordinated and student support services were measured by items on the teacher survey that asked respondents to estimate the percentage of their students who received a variety of specified support services relative to the percentage in need of such services, such as (*a*) academic tutoring, (*b*) mentoring, (*c*) health services, (*d*) social services, and (*e*) testing for special education services. Parental involvement variables were measured by a set of items about the extent of parental involvement, barriers to parental involvement, and teacher strategies for increasing involvement. Community engagement was measured by items that included the number of times during the school year that teachers brought in guest speakers from the community, talked with students about people and events in their communities as well as their lives at home, interacted informally with parents outside the school, and took students on trips to local sites or organizations.

Principal interviews.—Semistructured interviews were conducted with principals of each of the schools during the 2001–2 school year. Principals were asked about programs and services offered at the school, school partnerships with local organizations, and school strategies to involve parents and the larger community. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and pseudonyms were assigned to each principal and school to protect their identities.

Neighborhood contexts.—Data about the neighborhoods in which each of the sampled schools were located were generated from a community data set, a project of the city government in cooperation with the metropolitan police and health departments. The data set included the addresses for all licensed child care programs, community centers, youth service organizations, churches, hospitals, libraries, and colleges and universities in the city that were operational in 2002; we called these neighborhood *assets*. The database also included addresses for all teen births as well as drug arrests, weapons arrests, domestic violence arrests, and other criminal incidents that occurred the same year; we called these *liabilities*.

We used GIS software to map these data to individual school zones. Inspired by the community disadvantage measure constructed by Simons et al. (2004), we summed these variables to obtain composite scores for liabilities and assets

for each school zone. We then calculated the average liabilities and assets for each zone weighted by the number of residents. Of the 20 sampled schools, eight were located in school zones with an above average number of liabilities per 1,000 residents ($M = 121$, SD = 84.3). We called these *high liability* zones. Twelve schools were located in *low liability* zones, or zones with a less than average number of liabilities per 1,000 residents. Zones in which the number of assets exceeded the average ($M = 40$, SD = 27.9) were designated *high asset* zones. Zones with a below average number of assets were designated *low asset* zones. Five schools were located in high asset communities and 15 were in low.

Data Analysis

We combined teachers' survey responses and principal interview data with community asset and liability data to tell a rich story about the ways neighborhood structures condition the roles schools play in promoting social service partnerships, parent involvement, and community networks. We calculated statistics to describe the frequencies with which teachers across neighborhood settings reported engaging parents and other community members. Means and standard deviations were calculated for the three sets of items—social service partnerships, parent involvement, and community building—outlined under the "Teacher Survey" subsection above. We ran *T*-tests to compare these statistics between schools located in high and low liability and high and low asset neighborhoods, respectively.

We used pattern coding of the principal interview transcripts (Miles and Huberman 1984; Yin 1989) to reveal patterns in the nature of school-community relations. Analysts looked for consistencies and contrasts between the responses of principals in different schools. At the initial stage of analysis, our coding procedures were guided by social capital frameworks (Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Driscoll and Kerchner 1999; Putnam 1995) and the boundary-spanning literature (e.g., Scott 2003; Thompson 1967). Our codes included degree of connectedness, social service partnerships, formal communication structures, parent involvement, social networks, and "bridging" strategies, among others. At the second stage, we developed more codes to capture emerging themes and added them to the original code list. At the third stage, we supplemented the data with codes for information on participants (e.g., experience, race) and neighborhood conditions (e.g., crime rates, community asset type). Finally, we systematically and iteratively coded the data and ensured that we made a systematic effort to examine countervailing evidence (Miles and Huberman 1984).

Findings

By focusing on both commonalities and cleavages within the data sets, we found that the nature of school-community interactions as well as educators' efforts to promote coordinated and support services, parent involvement, and community engagement in part depend on the neighborhood conditions they face.

Coordinated and Support Service Partnerships

Services provided.—As anticipated, teacher perceptions about the number and types of services offered to students differed depending upon the conditions of the neighborhood in which a respondent's school sat. Compared with teachers in low liability zones, respondents who taught in schools located in high liability neighborhoods identified a larger percentage of their students as needing all five types of coordinated and support services included on the survey (i.e., academic tutoring, mentoring, health services, testing for special education services, social services). The largest disparities between teacher perceptions of student need were documented for health and social services, and special education testing. On average, teachers who taught in high liability zones reported that approximately half of all of the students in their classes were in need of health services, social services, and testing for special education eligibility. The average teacher in schools located in low liability neighborhoods, however, identified less than one-quarter of their students as needing the same assistance. On average, teachers in both high- and low-liability neighborhoods reported that the majority (55–75 percent) of their students who needed support services received them.

The types of services offered to students enrolled in schools located in high and low risk communities differed qualitatively, according to principal reports. At Truman Elementary, located in a high liability neighborhood, the principal said, "The YMCA Fun Company provides a before and after care program and there is a tutorial program that's a component of that. Probably I shouldn't say tutorial. It's a study hall kind of thing. There's a teacher who supervises kids who want to work on their homework." But at North Main Middle School, situated in a low liability neighborhood on the perimeter of the city, staff had never before offered a program after school. At the time of our interview with Mr. Alam, the principal, the school was getting ready to initiate a self-run program with full financial support from the district. Unlike at Truman Elementary and other schools in high liability contexts, the out-of-school-time program here was not referred to as "after care." Instead, the program was designed for enrichment and would support four teachers to work with up to

60 children identified by teachers as in need of individualized instruction, intervention, or remediation. During the two-hour program, teachers would "help the students academically for an hour. Then, [for] the other hour, they are going to be doing an accelerated art program."

Efforts to partner with outside organizations: Stocking versus "selling."—Apart from disparities in perceived student needs and the types of programs and services offered at the school sites, principals whose schools were located in different neighborhood contexts varied in terms of the strategies they reported using to garner needed resources and efforts to partner with outside organizations.

Principal Williams, whose school serves two neighboring housing projects and is adjacent to vacant industrial buildings where crime and police presence are part of daily life, spoke of partnering with external constituencies as central to her role as principal. She had established a clothing closet for children, attended several Chamber of Commerce meetings in hopes of forging new partnerships, had planned a food pantry that would serve meals for community members day and night, and was negotiating with a local dental school to set up a satellite practicum site in the school that would provide free dental services to her students and their families.

Across town, Mr. Sizer, principal of an elementary school situated in a low liability area, was busy trying to connect with the community as well. But, Mr. Sizer was not building partnerships with local social service organizations. Instead, he spoke of his continual focus to "sell" his school to a community with a private school option located just down the street. To do so, he attended various community meetings, trumpeting the excellence awards the school had won, and offering free meeting space to the local homeowner's association.

These patterns were also evident at River Run Elementary, where the student body demographic was substantially affected by the neighborhood rezoning plan. The principal of the school whose new zone included new, high liability areas from the "inner city" spoke of adding new advocacy duties to her old "PR" responsibilities (e.g., fun fairs, art project fundraisers) and efforts to gain international accreditation: "The biggest sermon I preached last year (the first year with the new zone) was 'Don't give me these children and not give me the services to go with them.' We were trying to be proactive. . . . 'What are other schools doing?' [One principal] told me about the PESP program [pseudonym], and we were able to contact them and get . . . two full-time folks here with us throughout the day."

Parent Involvement

Understanding neighborhood parents.—On average, teachers reported that contacting parents was "a little difficult," and their responses did not vary by

TABLE 1

Mean and Standard Deviation for Teacher Responses to How Often Factors Limit Parent Involvement (*Likert Scale: 1 = Never to 4 = Often*)

Neighborhood Context	Home-School Distance*	Parent Work Schedule*	Feels Unwelcome*	Parent Apathy
High liability:				
Mean	2.13	2.81	1.50	2.92
Standard deviation	.938	.870	.676	.855
Low liability:				
Mean	2.44	3.07	1.73	2.87
Standard deviation	.981	.727	.785	.780

* Mean difference is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

whether they taught in schools in high liability, low liability, high asset, or low asset neighborhoods. When asked about factors that affect parent involvement at their school, however, significant and unexpected differences emerged. Respondents who taught in schools in low liability zones reported that distance between parents' home and their work ($t = 3.52$, $p < .05$) and parent work schedules ($t = 3.58$, $p < .05$) impeded parent involvement (see table 1) more often than did their counterparts in high liability zones. Furthermore, teachers in schools located in low liability areas were more likely than other teachers to believe that the reason parents did not participate more in school activities was because they "felt unwelcome" ($t = 3.41$, $p < .05$). Perhaps differences in the levels of outreach between teachers explain this finding. As will be shown, teachers whose schools were located in high liability neighborhoods were more likely than their counterparts in low liability neighborhoods to meet with parents, ask students about their cultures, and invite speakers in from the community (see "Efforts to Involve Parents" below). Ratings of parent apathy did not differ significantly between teachers who taught in schools located in zones with different liability conditions. Unlike schools' liability context, the number of assets available in school zones did not affect teachers' perceptions about parental involvement (data not shown).

Faces of involvement: Conferencing and leveraging.—Principals of schools in high liability communities called parental involvement "spotty." When parents were involved, principals described parents coming in to discuss their children's performance or behavior with school staff.

Principals in low liability neighborhoods characterized parent involvement in their schools differently. In these communities, principals reported working to partner with parents to identify and acquire needed (and often free-flowing) resources. The principal of a school located in a catchment area with a median household income over $45,000 and a low crime rate recounted one such relationship: "More than anything else, the PTO has been doing fundraisers

TABLE 2

Mean and Standard Deviation for the Number of Parent Contacts Teachers Report per Week

Neighborhood Context	Phone Calls or Notes	Meetings*
High liability:		
Mean	9.48	4.81
Standard deviation	13.24	7.99
Per student	.59	.30
Per student/year†	22.4	11.4
Low liability:		
Mean	9.27	3.59
Standard deviation	9.02	7.33
Per student	.47	.18
Per student/year	17.9	6.8

* Mean difference is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.
† Based on 38-week school year.

for the last three years. They have bought computers, hardware, software, so that we now have that in every classroom. That cost them over $10,000, so they are our major source of funding. . . . The PTO's getting ready to do another fundraiser. We have estimates from $8,000 to $15,000 to repair our football field. . . . If it weren't for them raising money, we would not have the things we have."

When fundraisers were not enough, these principals often relied on parents to secure other sources of funding: "We have one PTO board member. . . . He's very active in the community and has gotten a number of businesses to donate things to the school, such as luncheons for the teachers and things like that. He is more advocate for us than we are for ourselves because he knows a lot of people in the community and can say 'Look, I know this is a good school and they are in need.'"

Efforts to involve parents.—Teachers in schools located in high liability neighborhoods reported using systematic and formal outreach strategies with parents more often than did teachers in low liability areas. Teachers who taught in high liability zones were more likely to call, write, and meet parents face to face than were those teaching in schools located in low liability zones, although the difference was statistically significant only for meetings ($t = -1.66$, $p < .05$; see table 2). The difference remained significant when the number of face-to-face meetings teachers held with parents in a given week was divided by the total number of students taught in a typical day ($t = -2.63$, $p < .05$). Specifically, teachers teaching in high liability catchment areas reported .30 face-to-face meetings per student per week compared with .18 for teachers whose schools were located in zones with fewer liabilities, or a difference

across a 38-week school year of 4.5 meetings (see table 2). Responses did not differ significantly between teachers in schools in high and low asset zones (data not shown).

Principal data confirmed the outreach pattern we found in the responses from teachers who worked in high liability neighborhoods. With her school located in a zone with nearly 30 percent of residents living in poverty, and with triple the average drug, domestic violence, and weapons arrests, Principal Parker at Deer Creek said, "We walk the neighborhoods, we have town meetings, we invite them [families] in . . . we have grandparents day, we have parent-teacher conferences. We try to get them here in the building as much as possible. If they can't get here, we'll go to them. Sometimes we'll just get in the car and go to a neighborhood just to let them know, 'Hey, we are concerned about your kids. We're here to do what we can to help you.'" At Truman Elementary, located in another high liability neighborhood, the principal reported transporting people who could not come to the school because they were unable to get there: "We go get them. I go get them. Ms. [Smithson] goes to get them. Our school counselor will go. We just go pick them up. . . . When we have particular kids who are really having a hard time for whatever reason, or we have a parent who calls us up and is very angry, a lot of times the first thing we do is to go to that home because the person can't get over here, they won't be able to see us." No principals of schools in low liability zones spoke of physically going into the community to connect to and communicate with parents.

Community Engagement

Understanding the school community.—In our study, there were striking differences between schools located in high and low liability neighborhoods in terms of opportunities to establish relationships with families and community members. Teachers in schools located in high liability zones described fewer informal interactions with parents outside of school than did other teachers. Specifically, teachers who taught in these neighborhoods reported fewer interactions with parents through church and church-related activities ($t = 3.17$, $p < .05$), contacts and chance meetings ($t = 4.47$, $p < .05$), and by living in the same neighborhood ($t = 4.02$, $p < .05$) than did teachers whose schools were located in zones with fewer liabilities (see table 3).

Described another way, the data revealed that 84 percent of teachers who taught in schools in high liability neighborhoods reported never meeting parents in church or church-related activities, compared with 65 percent of respondents teaching in low liability zones (see table 4). In response to how often they met parents because they lived in the same neighborhood, 89

TABLE 3

Mean and Standard Deviation for How Often Teachers Report Meeting Parents in Settings Outside of School (Likert Scale: 1 = Never to 4 = Often)

Neighborhood Context	Church/ Church Activities*	Sports Programs/ Nonschool Activities	Living in Same Neighborhood*	Contacts/ Chance Meetings*
High liability:				
Mean	1.251	1.663	1.231	1.943
Standard deviation	.624	.876	.694	.879
Low liability:				
Mean	1.449	1.792	1.533	2.319
Standard deviation	.742	.945	.955	.957

* Mean difference is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

percent of teachers who taught in high liability zones said "never" compared with 73 percent of teachers whose schools were situated in low liability communities. Similarly, 37 percent of respondents teaching in high liability zones and 24 percent who taught in low liability contexts reported never running into parents through chance meetings or mutual friends/contacts. Differences were not significant between teachers whose schools were located in high and low asset zones.

Efforts to engage the community.—Perhaps because of the absence of informal structures to support the development of functional communities, teachers who taught in high liability zones reported participating in more community outreach than other teachers. On five of seven indicators, respondents who taught in schools in high liability zones reported significantly more outreach activity than those who taught in low liability zones, although differences were significant for only two items (see table 5). Teachers whose schools were located in high liability neighborhoods spoke with students more often about their cultures ($t = -3.16$, $p < .05$) and about issues/concerns in their communities ($t = -2.44$, $p < .05$).

Teachers whose schools were located in low asset zones were also significantly more likely than those in high asset zones to reach out to the community in two ways. Specifically, teachers in schools with low asset catchment areas reported taking students on field trips to local sites ($t = 3.63$, $p < .05$) and bringing in guest speakers from the school community ($t = 2.11$, $p < .05$) more often than those who taught in schools located in higher asset zones.

At Magerl Elementary, situated in a low asset community, Principal Hancock spoke of her efforts to use the school's character education program to link up with the greater school community: "My goal is to get to the point where Chattanooga is. In Chattanooga, all the public schools have the same virtue

TABLE 4

Percentage of Teachers Reporting "Never" to How Often They Meet Parents in Informal Settings Outside of School (%)

Neighborhood Context	Church/Church Activities	Living in Same Neighborhood	Contacts/Chance Meetings
High liability	84	89	37
Low liability	65	73	24

of the month. . . . The entire county supports it. . . . If it's 'Honesty Month,' you will see billboards about honesty. Sunday school programs have connected to the character trait of the month." To move toward her goal, she has reached out to the local community groups and churches: "We had one meeting last year—the churches were just astounded that we would invite them in. . . . If we can hook them into what we are doing it becomes a better atmosphere for the children."

Discussion

Overall, our data suggest that the nature of school-community interactions as well as educators' efforts to promote coordinated services, parent involvement, and community engagement depend in part on the neighborhood conditions they face. Principals of schools located in high liability zones report spending more time attempting to activate assets and build community capacity than their counterparts whose schools are located in low liability zones. The programs they develop and partnerships they forge focus largely on providing for children's basic needs (e.g., care, clothing, food, health). Principals of schools in low liability zones, however, rarely leave the building to find resources; instead, they report that parents and community members come to them with offers of funds and assistance. Moreover, the funds procured and programs developed in these schools often provide not for children's basic care but for enrichment activities and capital projects (e.g., technology, sports fields).

Teachers in schools in high liability neighborhoods also report spending more time communicating with parents and planning activities in the community. Perhaps it is the shared experiences and informal interactions that occur more often outside of school between parents and teachers in low liability than in high liability communities that explain the pattern. Or, maybe it is that students in schools located in high liability communities have more personal, academic, and/or behavioral challenges that warrant parent intervention. Future researchers might probe for the reasons. As they do, they might further ask whether educators' strategies for building social capital are child—

TABLE 5

Mean and Standard Deviation for How Often Teachers Reported Various Community Outreach Activities (Likert Scale: 1 = Never to 5 = Almost Daily)

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT	BROUGHT IN GUEST SPEAKER	WENT ON FIELD TRIP TO COMMUNITY SITE	CONSULTED WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS	TALKED WITH STUDENTS ABOUT . . .			
				Their Cultures*	People in School Community	Their Lives at Home	Issues/Events in School Community*
High liability:							
Mean	1.59	1.91	1.81	3.11	3.01	3.79	3.30
Standard deviation	.693	.681	.852	1.054	1.062	1.143	1.144
Low liability:							
Mean	1.63	1.84	1.87	2.81	2.97	3.61	3.05
Standard deviation	.594	.624	.772	1.017	1.032	1.098	1.103

* Mean difference is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

rather than neighborhood—dependent. That is to say, is the emphasis that teachers and administrators in high liability schools seem to place on providing for children's basic needs, for example, a function of having a critical mass of high need students? Do educators in schools located in low liability areas work in similar ways and with similar emphasis to serve their (fewer) high need students?

Conceptually speaking, the findings seem at least in part to challenge theoretical paths in organizational studies that tend to cast educators primarily as "buffers" to external influences (DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran 2005; Galbraith 1977; Ogawa et al. 1999; Scott 2003; Williams et al. 2009). Teachers and administrators in this study—and those who work in high liability neighborhoods, in particular—believe they are instead working to "bridge" boundaries between neighborhood and school. They do so with more calls home, meetings with parents, invitations to community members to speak, and "walking the neighborhood." In this sense, our findings support what Crowson (1998, 67) calls a recent "realization by the profession that exercises in a supportive outreach to the community and in attempts to build social capital are vital professional behaviors." Follow-up work in the form of observation or ethnography that includes the parent voice might test whether the strategies educators employ ultimately lead to "authentic forms of collaboration" (Warren 2005, 86), collaboration that might further redefine educational professionalism to embrace a partnering role in community investment and revitalization (Crowson 1998).

As more work is done to investigate the effects of neighborhood conditions on the schools that serve them, researchers should work to improve upon or supplement this study in three key ways. First, due to data availability issues, our study operationalized neighborhood conditions somewhat narrowly. Future work might draw from sociology and related disciplines to consider better, more comprehensive ways to measure "concentrated disadvantage and affluence," for example (Sampson et al. 2002; Simons et al. 2004). Second, quantitative approaches for studying the influence of neighborhood conditions on school-community relations could supplement the qualitative studies that currently dominate the education literature. Researchers who use quantitative approaches for testing whether neighborhood effects exist might consider hierarchical linear modeling to account for individual- and neighborhood-level influences. Finally, researchers should work to expand the participant pool we drew on here to include not only school site actors but community members as well. By collecting data—both qualitative and quantitative—from parents, local businesses, social service organizations, and the like, we may gain insight into the ways neighborhood contexts condition whether and how "external" constituents reach out and partner with area schools.

Even with these limitations acknowledged, we believe that our results have

important implications for policy and practice. In terms of practice, the study suggests that teachers and administrators whose schools are located in higher liability contexts may be spending more time on community outreach compared to their counterparts in lower liability zones. Whether those outreach efforts have benefits that outweigh potential costs (to instructional time or preparation, for example) is an important practice-related question and one for future study. Certainly, the findings suggest that those who prepare and develop teachers and administrators should work to build the capacity of future educators to identify and partner effectively with potential community actors. For example, schools of education might consider requiring their teacher candidates to conduct in-home interviews with the families of the students they teach during their student teaching assignment. Prospective principals might also be asked to inventory and describe social service organizations in a selected school zone, prepare a plan for partnering with one organization on the list, and have that plan assessed by the director of the organization.

Finally, in terms of policy, the observed between-school differences in school-community relations take on added significance as courts across the country are lifting district desegregation orders. As discussed earlier, school board members, in replacing their desegregation plans, often eliminate or reduce crosstown busing and reassign students to neighborhood schools. For many poor and minority children, neighborhood schooling has meant returning not to good neighborhoods but to "no zones" with high crime rates and few community assets. As we have shown here, both principals and teachers in schools in these "no zones" have to work harder to engage the community and bind families in networks of support that enhance both parents' and educators' abilities to promote positive educational outcomes for children. For schools in some communities, district policies that return students to their neighborhood schools will not be enough. Additional financial and human resources—in the form of outreach coordinators, professional development for educators, and programs that regularly bring role models from the community into the schools, for example—and a more comprehensive policy for schools located in vulnerable neighborhoods that includes, for example, coordinated services (like health and jobs clinics), parent support groups, student leadership academies, and other out-of-school-time activities may be necessary to enhance schools' capacity to promote and sustain robust school-community linkages and the educational and social benefits these linkages may beget.

Notes

1. Magnet schools were omitted because, by definition, they draw their students from across neighborhoods or attendance zones.
2. High response rates in most schools should moderate concerns related to non-

response bias; indeed, 84 percent of teachers in the 20 sampled schools responded to the survey. The respondents in the school with the 46 percent response rate are similar to other respondents with respect to demographics and years of experience.

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