

A STUDY OF DECISION MAKING IN THE CASE OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT
DETERMINING THE LOCATION FOR A NEW HIGH SCHOOL

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A STUDY OF DECISION MAKING IN THE CASE OF A SCHOOL DISTRICT
DETERMINING THE LOCATION FOR A NEW HIGH SCHOOL

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A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	ix
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Research Purpose	2
Research Questions.....	2
Problem Overview	2
Background.....	3
Description of the case.....	3
Conceptual Framework.....	4
School site selection.....	4
Decision Making and Planning.....	6
Collaborative Planning.....	6
Evidence based decision making.	7
Making sense of social and political contexts and evidence.	8
Statement of Problem.....	9
Significance of problem.....	9
Design and Methods	10

Significance of the Research for Leadership Practice	12
Summary	13
2. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Background and Setting.....	15
Literature Review.....	17
Decision making	17
Collaborative planning.....	18
Rational versus collaborative.....	19
Ontology of collaborative planning.....	19
Epistemology of collaborative planning.....	20
Ideology of collaborative planning.....	21
Methodology of collaborative planning.....	22
Summary.....	24
Evidence and its influence on decision making.....	24
Research on evidence use at the school district level.....	24
Purpose of evidence use.....	26
Summary.....	27
Making sense of information, context, and social interaction in decision making.....	27
Evidence search.....	28

	Evidence incorporation.....	29
	Summary.....	30
	School Facilities.....	31
	School facilities planning.....	31
	School site selection.....	34
	Summary.....	36
3.	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS.....	38
	Setting.....	38
	Purpose.....	41
	Research Questions.....	41
	Research Design.....	42
	Population and Study Sample.....	44
	Sampling procedures.....	45
	Data Collection and Procedures.....	46
	Data analysis procedures.....	49
	Strategies to Address Issues of Quality.....	50
	Study Limitations.....	51
	Researcher’s Role.....	51
	Positionality of the Researcher.....	52
	Summary.....	52

4. FINDINGS	53
Synopsis of case	54
Contextual Constraints of the Decision Making Process.....	58
Location	59
How to draw lines?	59
East or West?	63
Where in the east?.....	64
What about the north?.....	68
Site Evaluation	69
School board considerations	70
If you build it, they will come.....	74
The committee process	76
The Closed Versus Open Decision Making Process.....	81
The Influence of Precedent	82
Leadership.....	87
Leadership and the school board’s decision process	88
Interactions among the school district, the city, and the county ...	92
The reconsideration: a shift in leadership	94
Benefits and Costs of Closed and Open Decision Making Processes	97
Private people want privacy.....	98

Going public.....	103
Was this Decision Appropriate for a School Board?	107
Politics.....	108
Communication with the City and County	109
Public Perception	112
The arguments against	113
Media	116
Impact of decline in public trust	118
The Superintendent Factor	120
No such thing as an “objective other”	126
Summary	129
5. DISCUSSION	131
Lack of Forethought in Planning the Process	131
Heterogeneity of Knowledge in Collaborative Planning	134
Evidence Use and Omission	137
The Importance of Public Trust to the Decision Process.....	138
In the End, More Care or Less Care Might Not Have Mattered.....	141
Implications for Leadership Practice	143
Summary.....	144
APPENDIX.....	145

A. Interview Questions	145
REFERENCES	146
VITA.....	154

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Dr. Jay P. Scribner, Dissertation Advisory

ABSTRACT

Decision making at the school district level is examined through a historical case study of one large, Midwestern school district's process to choose the site on which to build a new high school. The case is viewed from a collaborative planning perspective, a model describing reality and knowledge as socially constructed and encouraging the inclusion of all viewpoints, which exposes power relationships. Inclusion is intended to acknowledge the political reality within the ever-changing and unique contextual features of any decision making process. Evidence, or information, is used within these social structures to inform decisions, within context and among the unique knowledge and experiences of the individuals involved. The case study used participant interviews and document analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public school districts are charged with providing quality education for every American child. Instructional and curricular decisions have been at the forefront of the research on decision making in schools and school districts, but decisions involving facilities also have an impact on the education of students. School districts must plan for growth and dealing with aging facilities. Classical planning theories describing the planning process as rational, fail to consider the social, political, and economic contexts within which facilities planning decisions are made. Research on school facilities planning reveals a body of potential factors used when deciding how to respond to changing conditions within a school district. Once the decision is made to build a new school, the decision of the location of the school must be made. This historical case study will examine decision making, informed by concepts from collaborative planning models and evidence based decision making at the school district level, through the case of a school district determining the location for a new high school.

This chapter provides the blueprint for the study by presenting a problem overview, including a description of the case, a summary of the literature on school site selection and decision making, through collaborative planning, evidence based decision making, and ways in which both concepts are pulled together to make sense of information and context, a statement of the problem, and a short discussion on significance to research. After the research purpose and research questions is a problem statement, including a brief description of the case, an explanation of the conceptual framework providing a lens through which this case will be viewed, a review of the

literature grounding the conceptual framework and study, and a formal statement of the problem. The design and methods of the case study will be described, followed by a statement on the significance of the study.

To maintain the anonymity of all participants in this research study, pseudonyms are used throughout this dissertation.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this historical case study is to understand the decision making processes of a school district administration in the planning of a new comprehensive high school in Adler. The decision making process will generally be defined as the activities and actions leading to the placement of Shaw High School at its site on Zachary Road.

Research Questions

How did school district leadership make decisions about the location of a new high school?

- 1) What factors influenced the decision making process?
- 2) How did they decide what evidence, or information, to use and not use?
- 3) How did administrators make sense of information and context during the decision making process?

Problem Overview

This study will be examined from a conceptual lens of decision making formed by the confluence of collaborative planning models, both from urban planning research and that of adult and continuing education theorists, and evidence based decision making. Situated within and intertwined among unique contextual factors, these concepts help provide an understanding of the case of a school district's site selection process for a new

high school. Literature on school facilities planning and specifically school site selection, reviewed below, places the case among the national dialogue about school facilities and the relationship with urban planning. In the background section, a description of the case is followed by a summary of the literature on school site selection and school facilities planning. Focus will then be shifted to a short review of the literature on collaborative planning and evidence based decision making, and the way in which these come together to inform the conceptual framework on decision making used for this case study. A formal statement of the problem will be followed by a short statement of significance of the study, which will be expanded later in the paper.

Background

Description of the case.

In August, 2013, the Adler Public Schools in Adler, a small city in a Midwestern state, will open its third comprehensive high school, Ellen Walker Shaw High School (Shaw High School), on Zachary Road in the northeast part of the greater Adler area. The last time a high school was opened in Adler was 1973. The school district has perceived the need to open an additional high school for several years, responding to a steady growth pattern in the town. After deciding to move forward with the project, the district had to determine where the school would be placed. The decision making process went through several phases unique to this case. Interestingly, an official announcement of the site for the new high school was made. It would be on a donated piece of land on Berkley Road on the east side of town. Soon after, public concern arose and the city and county showed wavering support to upgrade the insufficient infrastructure to the proposed site. The decision was revisited by a large committee with diverse community representation,

led by a retired district administrator. Using a process different than the one which led to the original decision, the new committee recommended the site on Zachary Road, where the construction for the high school is in process at this time.

Conceptual Framework.

The decision making process used to determine the location of a new high school will be viewed through a framework defined by research on collaborative planning, educational planning, and evidence based decision making, with an eye toward school facilities planning to better inform the reader of the situation and circumstances around it. Decision making is viewed as the conglomeration of each of these areas, highlighting the socially constructed knowledge used by decision makers to make meaning from new evidence in conjunction with the experiences and beliefs of individuals involved. Decisions are made within a political environment where power relationships are constantly being negotiated within the unique context of the situation. Evidence is joined with what is known from research and local knowledge--individual, group, prior, and working--and unique contextual constructs in a process where decision actors are constantly negotiating political realities and unique social interactions to form meaning and actions.

School site selection.

Schools are a part of the infrastructure of a city. Beyond the obvious physical realities of land, buildings, utilities, roads, and development patterns, a school is also part of a unique political and social infrastructure (Vincent, 2006). Schools can cause demographic shifts within communities, impacting the schools and neighborhoods and contributing to racial and economic segregation trends. The impact of schools on a city

would seem to call for careful coordination between local governments and school districts. The reality is urban planning often ignores school facilities planning completely (Donnelly, 2003; Orfield, 1997; Steward, 1999; Vincent, 2006). Likewise, educational leadership rarely inserts itself into the process or field of urban planning (Vincent). Research on school facilities planning recognizes a variety of factors influencing school facilities decisions. Norton (2007) examined the factors school districts in Michigan used when deciding whether to renovate or build new facilities. He found there to be no influence, even when solicited, of public participation or coordination with local planning on a school district's decision to renovate or build. Further, when decisions were made to build new schools, superintendents reported local officials had little impact on school siting decisions, even when school officials reported a high level of consultation with local government agencies. Questions can be asked regarding the disconnect between school facilities planning and urban planning: What process structures could facilitate more meaningful collaboration between schools and local governments? What responsibility do school districts have to be aware of, and responsible for, the demographic, economic, social, and political impacts of school facilities decisions?

Research has been conducted on the factors school districts use to make school siting decisions in situations where the decision to build a new school has already been made. In the same study cited above, Norton (2007) identified potential factors used for deciding the placement of a new school from a previous case study analysis. When superintendents were surveyed about what factors impacted school site decisions, the responses suggested the two most influential factors were the availability of land to purchase, or be given, and the easy availability of land already owned by the district.

Social, political, and greater community economic factors seemed to have little effect. These findings beg the questions: Is it the responsibility of a school district to consider the larger implications of school location choice when building new? And, would decisions influenced by more socially-conscious factors be perceived as misusing limited resources?

Decision Making and Planning

In this case study, decision making is described within the context of planning. Instead of the classical, rational approach to planning, collaborative planning is rooted in the belief that reality and knowledge are socially constructed (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Healey, 2004; Cervero & Wilson, 1994). Viewing ever-changing and unique contextual features of any situation from a collaborative planning perspective encourages the inclusion of all viewpoints and the exposing of power relationships. Doing so is not intended to equalize power relationships, but to approach the process with an acknowledgement of the political reality within the decision making process (Innes & Booher, 1999; Coaffee & Healey, 2003; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Hillier, 2003). Evidence, or information, is used within these social structures to inform decisions, within context and among the unique knowledge and experiences of all individuals involved (Kennedy, 1982, 1984; Honig & Coburn, 2007; Marsh, 2006).

Collaborative Planning.

Planning theory, both from the field of urban planning and educational planning, is rooted in a rational tradition. Planning as a recipe, or a step by step process, taking into account all factors and delivers an approach to achieve some end is an efficient way to construct a plan. This approach fails to recognize social, political, economic, and other

contextual realities within which planning happens. Additionally, the individuals included in the planning process or, at the planning table (Cervero & Wilson, 2006), bring with them a perspective and among them, power relationships dictate the direction taken by the group.

Alternative theories to classical planning theory, which came after, look more closely at factors early models excluded. Collaborative planning is a way of viewing planning as a complex process that is much more contextual than concrete. Interactions among planners define a process where knowledge is socially constructed (Healey, 2004) and political and power connections are always in the foreground defining the course taken by a team of planners (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007). Cervero & Wilson (2006) take a similar approach to planning by describing the planning table as “a metaphor to focus attention on what matters in educational planning: namely, the fact that people make judgments with others in social contexts about specific program features....variants of this metaphor speak to the issues of power, participation, and decision making across all areas of social life” (p. 6).

Both collaborative planning and the planning table approach view planning as a participatory, democratic process. Planning processes must deal uniquely with the spoken and unspoken contextual factors and those found within the content of the planning. In short, context matters and the complexities of context must be negotiated in the process of planning (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Healey, 2004).

Evidence based decision making.

Evidence based decision making is highly social, complex, and political. “The process involves discrete subactivities that may be obscured by the singular term

‘evidence use’ (Honig & Coburn, 2008, p. 579). The use of evidence in making decisions has been studied extensively in education, but the vast majority of that work has been at the school or classroom level (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). Studies at the central office level reveal “evidence” informed decisions rely heavily on local knowledge, including context and prior knowledge, and less on research, which is often ignored or used only for political purposes to sway a stakeholder to support an already-made decision. Studies have also found evidence inclusion is usually skewed toward what is already known or easily accessed. Decision making is often impacted equally by evidence excluded and included in the process (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Honig & Coburn).

Evidence use in decision making is not discrete and most often, the evidence joins a mire of prior knowledge among individuals and the contextual cauldron of the situation and those involved in making decisions. From all of this, sense must be made of information to inform a decision (Kennedy, 1982, 1984; Honig & Coburn, 2008).

Making sense of social and political contexts and evidence.

Prior knowledge, brought by individuals and context, local knowledge (Honig & Coburn, 2008), and working knowledge (Kennedy, 1982) are all used to make sense of new realities. Kennedy defines working knowledge as:

the organized body of knowledge that administrators and policy makers spontaneously and routinely use in the context of their work. It includes the entire array of beliefs, assumptions, and experiences that influence the behavior of individuals at work. It also includes social science knowledge. (pp. 1-2)

Teams of people often make meaning, or sense, of information, in shared ways (Kennedy, 1982; Vaughan, 1996), yet shared understandings may or may not be

consistent among individuals (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Spillane, 1998). Navigating these dichotomies is done through formal (meetings) and informal structures (Kennedy, 1982; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Research in decision making illustrates the tendency to revert back to prior constructs. Spillane and his colleagues conducted research on school district decisions about implementation of research-based standards in core subject areas. They found decisions gravitated toward prior practice (Spillane, 1998, 2000; Spillane & Callahan, 2000; Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

Statement of Problem

I am studying how the decision was made to place Shaw High School at its location on Zachary Road because I want to gain a greater understanding of the how decision makers are influenced by socially constructed process within a unique contextual reality shaped by the individual and collective use of evidence and interpretations of the political landscape.

Significance of problem

The significance of the research for leadership practice will be discussed later. The significance of the problem within the discipline of educational leadership is to contribute to the knowledge of the complex phenomenon of decision making. Researchers could use this case study either to inform the development of theory or to add to the collection of unique cases from which to draw questions for future research on evidence based decision making or school facilities planning. Practitioners could use the study as a reference for how decisions were made in one district, perhaps finding similarities within their own situation.

Design and Methods

Case study research is a qualitative approach involving “the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The purpose of this study is to better understand the phenomenon of decision making processes of school district administration. The site-selection process for a new high school in the Adler Public Schools provides the case through which the concept is illustrated. Creswell called this a single-instrument case study. This case study is also considered heuristic, referring to studies that “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 44). The case is examined from a historical perspective (Merriam), since the high school site has already been selected.

Mertens (2005) suggested the following steps for designing a case study:

1. Develop the research questions.
2. Identify the propositions (if any) for the study.
3. Specify the unit of analysis.
4. Establish the logic linking the data to the propositions.
5. The criteria for interpretation of the findings should be explained (pp. 238-239).

The words “how” and “why” in the research questions of this study point to case study as an appropriate research method (Mertens). Yin (2003) states the statement of purpose can be in lieu of propositions, which is the approach taken in this study.

The following will describe the case (unit of analysis) on which the study is based. This single case study involves the Adler Public School district in Adler. The Adler Public School district will be represented specifically by the central office

administration and board of education in place, during the time of and the time prior to the decision to place the new high school on Zachary Road. The case begins from the time discussion began about the location of the new school (late 2006) to the date of decision (2007).

The case study follows Yin's (2003) description of a holistic or embedded analysis, establishing the link between the data and the propositions by first presenting the data as a detailed description of the case, including the history and chronology of events. After the data is presented, an analysis of themes is used to understand the complexity of the case. Data analysis uses criteria for interpreting findings that become evident within the data from the context of the case and grounded in the literature and the conceptual framework on decision making from the perspective of collaborative planning and evidence based decision making directed toward school facilities planning. Themes emerge from a careful analysis of the data and provide a way of describing how the theory can be understood within this particular case (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2005).

The methods used include data collection from some of the six types of information Yin (2009) recommends for case study research: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts (pp. 101-114). Document sources include school board policy and other statutes. Newspaper articles, school board minutes, committee agendas and minutes, demographic data, and land deal proposals are included in the archival records. Interviews were conducted with key players in the decision making process from among the superintendent, the appropriate assistant superintendents, school board members, and outside consultants. Direct observations are represented within the researcher's

description of the data, since the researcher has been a member of the community and a school district employee during the time of the case. Physical artifacts exist in the pieces of land considered for the site.

Each data source was chosen for either being a unique player or component within the case (i.e., superintendent; tract of land ultimately chosen for the site) or as a describer of the case at the time (i.e., meeting minutes, newspaper articles). Initial data sources will be identified, but data sources will be discovered within the process of data collection using the snowball technique (Merriam, 2009; Mertens 2005). The use of multiple sources of data will allow for triangulation (Merriam), establishing construct validity of the study. A case study database will be created and a chain of evidence will be maintained to increase reliability.

Significance of the Research for Leadership Practice

Like many aspects of leadership, decision making is often a complicated problem, where a solution is not always obvious nor even exists. More questions and more problems can result from any course of action or inaction on the part of decision makers. The complexities involved in the decision making process highlight the complexities of the intended and unintended outcomes. For school districts that serve, and are uniquely a part of diverse communities, decisions and decision making processes will never make everyone happy. The mutually dependent relationship of a community and its schools require a school district to handle decision making with care, informed thoughtfulness, and often a collaborative approach over and above what most organizations would take.

The ever-shifting dynamics of school district level leadership requires an acute attention to the immediate, while keeping the broader picture (with its view of the general

direction and the hazards, both seen and unseen) constantly in mind, as well. Decision making processes at the school district level are sometimes bound within formal and informal policies and structures that help navigate the course. In the cases of school siting decisions, policies and process structures are generally non-existent and the decision actors are left to make sense of available information to both guide the process and inform the decision. This case study will be helpful to school district leaders needing a greater depth and breadth of situations from which to draw. By describing this case with a focus on the way decision makers made sense of the evidence in the presence of unique, though not unfamiliar contextual realities, this study will provide leaders with the opportunity to view their own situations from a different perspective.

Summary

School districts are often involved in complex decision-making processes. The unique combination of stakeholders, the difficulty of the problems at hand, and the ever-changing contextual landscape cause decision making to be unique and situational. This introduction has described how a case study will be used to enhance the understanding of how a school district can make sense of evidence in a school siting decision making process. By examining the case, school leaders can gain additional experiences from which to draw when dealing with their own complex decisions.

2. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Decision making is a broad topic providing many possible angles from which to view any one situation. For the context of this case study, decision making processes will be examined from a planning perspective. Planning, as a type of decision making, will be conceived as parallel concept to decision making in this study. As a discipline, planning is often considered a rational, step-by-step process using protocols and relevant information that lead planners to logical products. In the same way, the concept of decision making presents evidence as an arrow pointing in the correct direction. Collaborative planning models and research in evidence based decision making illuminate messier processes and murkier decision making rules that may or may not link solidly to evidence. Each area is governed by social, cultural, and political realities situated in unique and fluctuating contexts. Making sense of all the information and context within any decision making situation is a complex process.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the background and setting for this case study, followed by the literature review. The conceptual lens through which the study will be viewed is based in decision making informed by the theory of collaborative planning and research on evidence use in decision making. These two areas will be used to describe the process of pulling together of all the information and contextual pieces for any given situation to make sense of the decision making process. From this focal point, the chapter will shift to a review of the context of the case, which is school facilities planning with an emphasis on school site selection.

Background and Setting

As a precursor to the literature review grounding the conceptual framework for this study, the background and setting for the case will be discussed, briefly, with more detail reserved for the findings.

The Adler Public School district (APS) is the only public school system in Adler, a small city of about 100,000 in the center of a Midwestern state (Panbuck (PN)), between and equidistant from two metropolitan cities. Adler is the home of the state's flagship public university, as well as the main campuses for two smaller private colleges and satellite campuses for a few other colleges and community colleges. The top employer is the state university, followed by the university's hospital and clinics, APS, River Hospital, and the City of Adler. Other than education and health care, insurance is a main force in the economy with two large insurers having regional offices in Adler.

The population of Adler has grown continually, increasing by over 20,000 between the 2000 and 2010 census. APS added two elementary schools in that time and has plans to add five more in the next several years. There are two comprehensive high schools in the district and one alternative high school. The newer of the two comprehensive high schools, built in 1973, was originally built to serve about half the number of students as the older high school could. Discussions have been ongoing for many years about the need for a third comprehensive high school. In the early days of the debate, concern was centered on a growing population and capacity issues in the high schools. Pressure on the capacity of both schools motivated APS to expand the newer of the two in 2000 to make them closer to equal enrollment. A change in attendance area

boundaries accompanied the construction. Presently, both comprehensive high schools serve nearly 1900 students.

After the student population concerns were addressed, at least temporarily, by expanding one of the high schools, APS sought input from the community about the direction of secondary schools. There was still a need to consider how to accommodate growth, though the growth rates had slowed somewhat from the rapid growth seen in the 1990s and early 2000s. A larger concern surfaced about the number of transitions an APS student made through the course of a career. The current configuration has three middle schools with grades six and seven, three junior high schools with grades eight and nine, and high schools serving grades ten, eleven, and twelve. The community gave feedback indicating three transitions, one from elementary to middle school, one from middle school to junior high school, and one from junior high school to high school, was undesirable. The decision was officially made in late 2006 to build a new high school and, at the same time, reconfigure all secondary schools to eliminate a transition. When the new high school, Shaw High School, opens in August 2013, the district will convert all current middle schools and junior high schools to intermediate schools (now called middle schools), serving grades six, seven and eight. This will give APS six middle schools and three comprehensive high schools for grades nine through twelve.

After the decision was made to build the third comprehensive high school, the site selection process began. The decision making process surrounding that activity will be investigated in this case study. Process structures, timelines, and factors, will be examined to provide a better picture of the decision process. The process had an interesting feature. A decision was made and announced, revealing the location of the

new school. Soon after, feedback from the general public and city planners caused the district to revisit the decision. A new committee reviewed several land proposals and recommended a different site for Shaw High School. The school board agreed and approved the new site, where the school is being constructed today.

This case will be examined using a conceptual framework on decision making, formed by the concepts of collaborative planning and evidence use in decision making. These two areas will be used to describe the process of making sense of all the “stuff” surrounding the decision making process. The contextual approach will be undergirded with the research on school facilities planning and a specific emphasis on school site selection. These concepts are addressed in the literature review.

Literature Review

This section will begin with a review of the literature on collaborative planning models and evidence use in decision making at the school district level. These two concepts will be pulled together to describe the process of pulling all the informational and contextual factors surrounding a decision to make sense of the decision making process. The last section will look at the research on school facilities planning and school site selection.

Decision making

Decision making in this case study will be described in the context of planning. Collaborative planning is an alternative to the classical, rational approach to planning. Instead of seeing planning as a step-by-step process, collaborative planning is rooted in the belief that reality and knowledge are socially constructed. The contextual features of any situation are dynamic and political, and collaborative planning encourages the

inclusion of all viewpoints and the exposing of power relationships. This is not to equalize power among stakeholders, but to proceed with an acknowledgement of the political reality within the decision making process. Evidence, or information, is used to inform decisions, though not without the influence of context and the unique knowledge and experiences of all individuals involved (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2006, 2010; Kennedy, 1982, 1984; Honig & Coburn, 2007).

Collaborative planning.

Decision making, in this case, is related to and synonymous with planning. There are different ways to structure planning, depending on the way in which the concept of planning is viewed. In this section, classical planning theories will be discussed briefly, but the majority of attention will be given to the contrasting theory being used to shape the conceptual framework in this study, collaborative planning models. Based on Brand & Gaffikin's (2007) presentation of collaborative planning models, the ontology, epistemology, ideology, and methodology of the theory will be used to present the concept.

In this study, the conceptual foundation for planning is informed by urban planning, with support from the field of educational planning. Planning theory comes from the study of planning for land use and municipalities. The conceptual portion from educational planning used for this study, mainly from Cervero & Wilson (1994, 2006, 2010), is described within the context of adult and continuing education. Neither of these content areas specifically addresses the content of this case, but the concepts are useful in developing a framework for understanding the dynamics of the decision making processes of a school district in choosing a site for the new high school.

Rational versus collaborative.

Classical planning theories espouse planning as a rational process, or what Sork (1996) called a technical-rational lens for planning. Sork argues using this approach distorts our view of decision making and ignores the influence of social dynamics in the process of planning. Cervero & Wilson (2010) acknowledged Tyler's (1949) principles of curriculum and instructional planning as the standard for scientifically rational planning. The principles were a prescriptive, linear set of guidelines. However, Cervero & Wilson argued these approaches ignore the influences of context, politics, and power in planning.

In contrast to rational planning structures are those which acknowledge the influence of human interaction on decision making. Collaborative planning is an "inclusive dialogue approach to shaping social space" (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007). Collaborative planning, also called communicative planning, is a theory for city planning that encourages representation from all viewpoints within decision making while negotiating the power relationships and political landscape. Brand & Gaffikin used the lenses of ontology, epistemology, ideology, and methodology to set the stage for their case study research conducted in Northern Ireland. The same organization will be used below to describe collaborative planning and highlight connections to inclusive planning models in education.

Ontology of collaborative planning.

Collaborative planning operates from a view of reality that is relational and constructed. Space and time are situated within contexts creating alternative experiential units for similar or equal phenomena, physical and otherwise. A mile in one direction may yield a different experiential length as a mile in another direction (Graham &

Healey, 1999). Ten minutes spent in a park setting provides a different experience of time than ten minutes at a landfill. “Accordingly, the object of any planning endeavor must not be treated as a blank slate but as a unique component of an incredibly complex larger system” (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007, p. 285). The contextual factors and influence of experiences brought by individuals situates the process and product of planning within a greater narrative, making each planning experience different than the last.

The ontological view underlying collaborative planning models with regard to humans and human interactions is also contextual. Humans are the products of social interactions (Barber, 1984) and political beings (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007). Collaborative planning adheres to the idea of complex adaptive systems, characterized by “fragmentation, uncertainty, and complexity” (Innes & Booher, 2003, p. 10). Instead of a rational approach, featuring a predictable, robotic system, collaborative planning sees the nature of the world as more like an organism (Brand & Gaffikin ; Innes & Booher, 1999; Jacobs, 1961): moving, growing, and responsive to the environment.

Epistemology of collaborative planning.

Collaborative planning is undergirded by the view that knowledge is socially constructed and layered, with the unseen layers influencing the way in which the most visible is formed. Healey (2004) urged an awareness of what seems obvious, but also to “step back and think more about the underlying strategic patterns that derive from the system in which the more immediate patterns are defined” (p. 6). Brand & Gaffikin (2007) bring together the work of many authors on collaborative planning: “In a similar context, Sandercock (1998) reminds us that we need to ‘make the invisible visible’ and Innes and Booher (1999) encourage us to generate ‘emancipatory knowledge [which]

transcends the blinders created by our conditions and institutions” (p. 287). Peeling back the layers exposes the building blocks of knowledge construction, but also reveals the social influences helping to shape the collective understanding, including power relationships: “power is exercised through taken-for-granted norms and practices” (Coaffee & Healey, 2003 as cited in Brand & Gaffikin, p. 287).

Knowledge creation, as understood through collaborative planning, is a co-construction among many. This implies a negotiated knowledge that can “arbitrate among diverse claims and priorities” (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007, p. 287). In the same way, Cervero & Wilson (1994) used a “planning-as-negotiation-of-interests” (Sork, 1996, p.83) metaphor for program planning in adult education. Bringing stakeholders to the table, paying attention to the planning actors, and keeping power interests in the foreground, planning can be more transparent and inclusive, generating a more representative outcome (Sork).

Brand & Gaffikin (2007) pointed to another part of the epistemological claim behind collaborative planning. All types of knowledge must be taken into account, “implying an acknowledgement of tacit knowledge as a major factor driving human decisions and actions, even if it cannot be articulated, let alone measured” (p. 287). The inclusion of tacit knowledge and the co-constructed nature of knowledge is consistent Kennedy’s (1982) definition of working knowledge, which will be discussed later in looking at ways information and context are used to inform decision making.

Ideology of collaborative planning.

Collaborative planning models reject traditional value-free planning processes, instead encouraging open discussion about values during planning. Value-driven

planning seeks to expose the power relationships present with the intention “not to dissolve relations of power in a utopia of transparent communication but to play games with a minimum of domination” (Flyvberg, 1996, p. 391; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007, p. 289). This stance focuses on a democratic process giving “voice to the voiceless” (Sarkissian, 2005). Collaborative planning does not assume an equal level of influence among the politically strong and the voiceless, but seeks to acknowledge the existence of different contributing forces to any decision process.

Methodology of collaborative planning.

In practice, collaborative planning seeks to discourage compartmentalization. Following from the epistemological view, the model calls to “harness the heterogeneity of knowledge” (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007, p. 290). Forester (1999) encouraged broadening the knowledge base for planning. By bringing many viewpoints to the table, pulling back the veil on power relationships, and engaging in inclusive, open dialogue, planning decisions emerge from the co-construction of knowledge among the voices included. This demands a shift away from representational and toward participatory forms of decision making with real-time, face-to-face deliberation (Graham & Healey, 1999; Friedmann, 1993; Brand & Gaffikin).

These democratic ideals drive practice in collaborative planning toward consensus decision rules and away from less participatory models like top-down expertise and majority-rule (Graham & Healey, 1999). Collaborative planning allows for planners to be facilitators instead of regulatory, managerial, or controlling actors in the process (Healey, 1997; Wissink, 1995; Forester, 1996; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007). Sagir & Gastil (2006) conducted a study on the impact of decision making rules on zero history groups and

found groups that identified themselves as using consensus decision rule over majority-rule were more satisfied with the decision making process. Individuals in the consensus using groups also felt decisions reflected the inclusion of their own ideas and the ideas of other group members. Cervero and Wilson (1994; 2006) focused on the concepts of power, interests, negotiation, and an ethical commitment to democratic principles. They argued consensus decision making rules are important, but it is just as important to be attentive to who is included at the table and the power relationships among those involved in the process.

Collaborative planning models do not seek to equalize the power inequities among planning groups, but merely to expose them and provide awareness from which to work. Critics have argued collaborative models may be over-ambitious (Hillier, 2003), in that “antagonism and conflict are intrinsic to human relations, and this ‘us’ and ‘them’ are particularly manifest in the diversities of contemporary society “(Amin, 2002 as cited in Brand & Gaffikin, 2007, p. 292;). Innes (2004) responded by highlighting the value of the complexity of collaborative relationships. The second order consequences of the messiness of the planning process--new partnerships, seeing situations in a new context, and new institutional forms--have value even within antagonism. The political realities both created and inherent in power disparities can bring about productive conflict (Brand & Gaffikin). Mouffe (2000) noted:

An important difference with the model of “deliberative democracy”, is that for “agonistic pluralism”, the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards democratic designs. (p. 15)

Summary.

Viewing decision making within the realm of planning theory and educational planning, with a specific emphasis on collaborative planning models, reveals a bias toward decision processes consistent with the ontological, epistemological, ideological, and methodological underpinnings of collaborative planning. This sets the stage for looking at how decisions are made in these participatory structures. The use of evidence and the ways decision actors make sense of available information and context will be examined in the next sections.

Evidence and its influence on decision making

Kennedy (1982) offered a combined definition for decision and evidence: “In its simplest form, a decision is a choice among two or more options and evidence is the stuff that informs the choice” (p. 59). Taken at face value, this definition implies decision making as a linear, rational process and evidence is discrete knowledge used to instruct the decision makers to the right answer. Kennedy (1984) calls this approach the instrumental model for evidence. Decision making rarely happens in this way. An alternative model, which Kennedy called the conceptual model, situates evidence not as an instruction to a decision, but as an influence on the user as a human information processor. Evidence causes an individual or a group to think and use working knowledge to help make sense of the information on the path to decisions. The conceptual model is more consistent with collaborative planning models and consensus decision rules.

Research on evidence use at the school district level.

A limited body of research exists on the use of evidence on decision making by school districts. The following section is a summary of what is known, which will set up

a discussion of the ways decision makers make sense of evidence within greater contexts. The work of pulling all the pieces together and developing decisions will finish defining the conceptual framework for this study.

School districts are mandated by policy to use and prove the use of evidence in many decisions. Educational policy, which reflects a stance viewing decision making as a rational process, dictates use of formal and discrete evidence, like student achievement data in the form of test scores. Research on evidence use and policy, which will not be discussed in detail in this literature review, reveals some use of evidence as intended by policy. However, more often research has shown school districts make decisions based on evidence that is not formal, “including information by practitioners and laypeople through their experience, sometimes called practitioner or local knowledge” (Honig & Coburn, 2007, p. 586; Kennedy, 1982, 1984; Marsh 2006; Spillane 1998, 2000; Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Massell, 2001; Massell & Goertz, 2002)

The use of evidence by school district central offices may not be as intended by policy most of the time, but evidence, as understood by a broader conception, is used regularly. Beyond the formal types identified in federal and state mandates are the informal kinds of evidence informing decision making. Information gained by experience is one of the most widely used forms (Honig & Coburn, 2007). This type of evidence influences a range of decisions, including decisions on curriculum and school reform models (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). Another form of informal evidence is input from parents and community members. Marsh (2003, 2006) conducted a study of two mid-sized school districts in California that used community-wide planning groups to look at student achievement data and suggest improvement designs. The central office

members used this feedback to help inform decisions, and research findings showed the process helped build community and support for the schools through improvement initiatives. Knowledge of other local issues and the opinions of those within schools and the community contribute to decision making as well (Honig & Coburn).

Purpose of evidence use.

Research regarding evidence use in school districts has addressed the purposes for evidence use, which are broader than to instruct decision making. As has been stated, the temptation to make evidence use prescriptive leads to a linear view of decision making, much like the language in education policy would imply. The purposes for such evidence use would be to inform a decision through a bounded process yielding a product (decision) for implementation. Actual decision making and evidence use is more complex than this model. The steps in decision making--or even describing the decision making process as having steps--differ for each situation.

Political motivations have often been found to motivate the use of evidence. Evidence is used for building political support (Corcoran et al., 2001; Marsh, 2006) and to “stabilize” and promote “buy in” within a school district (Boeckx, 1994, p .24). School district personnel will make decisions, then use evidence, in the form of local evidence or research, to convince others of the decision’s merit. Corcoran et al. found the use of this type of evidence included a selective use of research in order to provide the strongest case. Experts were even used, on occasion, to justify an approach, new program, or other type of decision. Some researchers have gone so far as to say evidence is not used to inform decisions directly at all. Instead, “evidence influences public opinion and public

opinion directly impacts decision making” (Honig & Coburn, 2007, p. 589; Englert, Kean, & Scribner, 1977; Kennedy, 1982).

In situations where evidence was used to directly inform decision making, it was used selectively to support a previously held opinion. In a study looking at central office decision making in 16 school districts, Kennedy (1982) found school district administrators rarely sought research evidence to help make specific decisions or solve problems. Instead, they “looked for and incorporated evidence into their decision making when that evidence promised to address their interests” (Honig & Coburn, 2007, p. 590).

Summary.

Whether evidence is used directly or indirectly, for political reasons or other, the ways evidence influences decisions is a complex and highly social endeavor (Coburn & Talbot, 2006; Honig & Coburn, 2007; Kennedy 1982). The next section will discuss what research says about this process. Specifically, how evidence, or the broader concept of information, is searched for and incorporated into decision making process.

Making sense of information, context, and social interaction in decision making.

Situational and organizational contexts influence the conception of evidence by individuals (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). Groups, both as a collection of individuals and as an entity of itself use prior experience and knowledge situated within context to incorporate new evidence into decision making (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Coburn & Talbert; Honig & Coburn, 2007; Kennedy, 1982, 1984). The process of making the decision is a complex interaction among what each individual brings to the table and the social interactions among a group of humans, who are political beings negotiating within existing and ever-changing power structures (Brand & Gaffikin, Cervero & Wilson,

1994, 2006; Coburn & Talbert; Healey, 1997; Honig & Coburn; Innes & Booher, 1999; Kennedy).

Sensemaking theorists look at how individuals or groups make meaning of new information (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Vaughan, 1996; Weick, 1995). Much of sensemaking is shaped by the complex processes of group dynamics. Researchers have found “over time, individuals who work with one another in subunits, work groups, or task forces develop shared ways of thinking (Coburn & Talbert, p. 471). It follows that social interaction within groups will influence individual beliefs within the mix of political factors and new and changing information. In other words, evidence alone does not make decisions but rather the interaction of all the “stuff” of individual beliefs and knowledge, group processes, and political negotiations.

In a review of the research on evidence based decision making in school districts at the central office level, Honig & Coburn (2007) found a few key studies (Hannaway, 1989; Honig, 2003; Kennedy 1982; Spillane, 1998; Spillane & Jennings, 1997) investigating the way evidence is used. They found multiple activities that could be categorized as evidence use, but most could be described as one of two major functions: “(a) searching for or accessing evidence from a variety of sources...and (b) incorporating or deliberately deciding not to incorporate evidence into organizational decisions through sometimes complex intensive process of interpretation (Honig & Coburn, p. 590). Each function is swayed by the forces of politics and context, which further complicates the process of decision making.

Evidence search.

Searching for evidence was found to be haphazard in most cases, though there were instances of formal searches. Among the sources found to be used were those internal to the school system (ie. student performance data) and external sources, including research and development organizations, researchers themselves, and intermediary organizations. As stated above, the stages at which any evidence is sought and used may not be the same in every case. The search for evidence may not be at the beginning or within the process of making a decision. Evidence may not be sought to inform the outcome, rather after the fact in order to gain support or build political or social capital.

Evidence incorporation.

Once evidence has been accessed, it must be used--or not. The process of incorporation or not incorporating is where sensemaking occurs (Honig & Coburn, 2007). Some argue the value of evidence is or can be known, but this rational view is inconsistent with practice. Sensemaking theorists and collaborative planning theories are in agreement on the socially constructed nature of knowledge (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Cervero & Wilson, 1996; Healey, 1997). "Information becomes meaningful and prompts action when decision makers socially construct it--when they grapple with the meaning of the evidenced and its implications" (Honig & Coburn, p. 592).

When new information comes into a decision making process, it joins preexisting cognitive and cultural frameworks (Honig & Coburn, 2007). Kennedy (1982) referred to these frameworks as working knowledge:

the organized body of knowledge that administrators and policy makers spontaneously and routinely use in the context of their work. It includes the entire

array of beliefs, assumptions, and experiences that influence the behavior of individuals at work. It also includes social science knowledge. (pp. 1-2)

The degree to which new information has an impact is situational, though Kennedy never found an instance in which new evidence directly informed a decision. Evidence was instead incorporated into the working knowledge of the individuals and collective working knowledge of the group. Spillane and others (Spillane, 1998, 2000; Spillane & Callahan, 2000; Spillane & Thompson, 1997) conducted a series of studies over several years to investigate the processes and contextual influences on the implementation of research-based standards in math, reading, and science. They found decision makers gravitated toward approaches matching their prior practice and preexisting conceptions of curriculum and instruction.

Incorporation is a “profoundly social process--often highly interactive and involving many people in and across a series of meetings and informal conversations over time” (Honig & Coburn, 2007, p. 593). Kennedy (1982) found these social processes created shared beliefs and understandings within the individuals in a group. Consensus was achieved by the development of a common way of framing problems and how to manage different demands within the context of the situation. These findings are in concert with those of collaborative planning theorist who also found socially constructed knowledge and attitudes influenced a shared way of reaching agreements (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Sagir & Gastil, 2006).

Summary.

Making sense of the melding of preexisting information and new information with social, political, and structural contexts is the heart of decision making. This complex and

often jumbled process defies the conception of a logical and prescriptive use of evidence to inform decisions. Collecting all the pieces making up the puzzle and arranging them into what generates a decision or plan requires viewing each situation through a lens allowing all the contextual factors to be considered. The unique way all factors are related and influenced form meaning within each case and help in understanding the process of decision making.

School Facilities

From this point, the focus of the literature review will shift from decision making to a discussion of school facilities planning. After looking at the issues and research surrounding the area of school facilities planning, school site selection will be specifically addressed. The body of research in these areas is within the discipline of urban planning and is rarely addressed by education researchers.

School facilities planning.

Public schools are an essential part of the infrastructure of any city. There is a mutually dependent relationship between the quality of a city and the quality of its schools--each relies on the strength of the other (Vincent, 2006). Decisions about school facilities have an impact on any city, most notably in demographic trends and social justice issues. The concept of urban sprawl, therefore, is a major concern among some planning researchers. Baum (2004) defined sprawl as “migrants to suburbs and rural areas...using more land than some consider desirable” (p. 14). The impact of sprawl include: homogenization of housing types and choices within designated areas; decreased access for non-motorized transportation; segregated interest groups based on housing patterns; development decisions based on power and economic forces instead of a

broader interest for a more diverse representation; loss of open space, farmland, natural beauty, and environmental areas; lack of variety in transportation choices; deterioration of existing communities; and little regard for space efficiency in building design (Baum; DeGrove, 1991).

These issues and others motivate and are addressed through initiatives like Smart Growth, growth management, New Urbanism, and regionalism (Baum, 2004). Baum argued these approaches fail to represent the interests of disadvantaged economic and racial groups and ignores problems like urban education, making them limited in their ability to control suburban growth. Vincent (2006) pushed this argument further to insist education be included in the conversation on the impacts of urban sprawl. He urged planners to “more substantially add to the national dialogue on public schools, especially around facility and land use issues and provide more critical research on how development and redevelopment decisions ultimately impact our public schools” (p. 434).

There is a disconnect between school facilities planning and urban planning. Urban planning programs at universities rarely include school facilities planning as part of their program of study and educational leadership programs include no preparation within the area of urban planning with regard to school facilities (Norton, 2007; Vincent, 2006). School districts are allowed to make all their facilities planning decisions independent of local municipalities. This “silo planning” (Vincent, p. 434) autonomy is encouraged by the lack of mandates for cooperation or collaboration. In a representative case, a court in South Carolina ruled a school district did not have to work with local planners to select the site for a new school (Kouri, 1999). Additionally, there are no consistent policies within educational governance suggesting the inclusion of city

planners in school facilities decisions, nor guidelines for the decisions themselves. For instance, in a listing of school acreage requirements by state, the department(s) issuing regulations or specifications, the acreage requirements themselves, whether requirements exist, and the level of expected compliance (ie. some are merely suggestions are some are mandates) vary among all fifty states (Weihs, 2003).

The lack of consistent policy related to school facilities planning and the issues of urban sprawl have contributed to a chicken-or-the-egg issue. Is the phenomenon of sprawl pulling school facilities into exurban areas? Or, are school districts contributing to sprawl by building schools in exurban areas, causing suburban development to push out to the school (Norton, 2007; Vincent, 2006)? The cause and effect relationship among school facilities and sprawl is not as important as the impact of the connection on each. As noted above, urban sprawl raises a variety of concerning issues. Most notably in regards to schools is “white flight” (Baum, 2004; Frankenberg & Lee, 2002; Noguera, 2003; Norton; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Rothstein, 2004; Vincent), or the movement of the racial majority and economically advantaged away from urban areas and into the suburbs. School facilities are often newer and nicer in these areas, leaving older buildings, often in disrepair, for the students inside the city. This has caused segregation in schools and raises equity issues about the quality of education for different populations.

Based from a position relating urban sprawl to school facilities planning, Norton (2007) conducted a systematic assessment of school facilities planning in Michigan using a series of web based surveys in 2005 with both school superintendents and city planning officials. In preparation for his study, Norton identified three areas of research needing more attention: 1) schools and sprawl, 2) factors motivating decision making on the

renovation of existing schools and the construction of new, and 3) considerations influencing local governments with regard to planning for schools within the infrastructure plans for the city and those of school districts to consider planning related issues when making facilities decisions. Norton's research focused primarily on the second area. The study found most (93% of those surveyed) school superintendents included public input when considering whether to undertake school facilities improvement initiatives and slightly less (80%) sought community feedback when actually making decisions to move forward. Factors influencing the decisions to renovate existing buildings or build new buildings were identified, but within those factors, the influence of public participation or the input of local planning had no influence, even when solicited, on the final decisions, as the decision making process was described by superintendents.

Vincent (2006) and Norton (2007) called for further research. Among Vincent's questions to be answered was, "What factors lead school districts to build where they do" (p. 436)? In a listing of several issues to be addressed, Norton identified areas to be studied regarding decisions school districts face including, whether to embark on school facilities initiatives at all, whether to renovate existing facilities or to build new, where to site new facilities, what programs to house within new facilities, and how will new facilities be designed (p. 480). For the purposes of this case study, the question of school siting will be the focus.

School site selection.

As stated above, guidelines for school facilities planning and, more specifically, school site selection are varied and inconsistent at best. The state has no oversight for

school capital facilities projects and any specifications, including acreage suggestions and school size and design suggestions based on population, are merely guidelines (Weihs, 2003; Panbuck Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website). In perhaps the most telling example of the lack of recent guidelines for school site selection, the American Planning Association has a report on its website with guidelines for school site selection. Since it is the only report found on the website for this purpose, it must be assumed this report is the most recent produced by the organization. The report is dated August, 1963 (Schrader).

There are many other organizations with more recent guidelines and specifications for school site selection (ie. National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities, British Columbia Ministry of Education) but they are written from the perspective of specific state government agencies or the special interests of the organization. A school district choosing to base school site decisions on one of these documents risks an over representation of certain viewpoints and under representation of others. All such lists, especially highlighted by the 1963 report (American Society of Planning Officials), are criterion based, contributing to a rational approach to decision making. The American Society of Planning Officials report goes so far as to include a worksheet with a scoring system to help provide the appropriate weight for each of the factors identified as important.

On the one hand, the lack of clear guidelines for site selection could cause problems for a school district that does not make decisions like this on a regular basis. Some guidelines would be helpful to shape the discourse. Alternatively, subscribing to the notion of a checklist or score-sheet approach to making school site decisions ignores

the social, political, and cultural contexts surrounding such decisions. When looking at how school districts in Michigan made decision on new school locations, Norton (2007) found superintendent survey responses suggested the two most influential factors were the availability of land to purchase, or be given, and the ease of availability of land already owned by the district. Whether the decision making processes took into account other factors before making decisions based on these factors was not investigated.

Little research has been done about the decision making process for school site selection, as conceived by the conceptual framework for decision making described in this literature review. The word “factors” connotes pieces of evidence on which a decision was based. The conceptual lens through which this case study will be viewed will see “factors” to include the preexisting knowledge and beliefs of those invited to the table, the political environment surrounding the decision, and the impact of structural processes of consensus decision making in addition to new information in the form of evidence entering the process.

Summary

A case study of the decision making process leading to the decision on where to place Shaw High School will be viewed from a conceptual lens for decision making. The framework pulls together the views of collaborative planning and research on evidence use to describe how decision actors make sense of all the factors present. Socially constructed knowledge is used by decision makers to make meaning from new evidence in conjunction with the experiences and beliefs of individuals involved. Decisions are made within a political environment where power relationships are constantly being negotiated within the unique context of the situation. School facilities planning and

school site selection are areas where there is little guidance as to how to base decisions, leaving the decision making process for any school subject to local political and contextual dynamics.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The following is a description of the design and methods guiding the historical case study to examine the decision of the Adler Public Schools (Adler, PN), to place Shaw High School on Zachary Road. The study seeks to provide an understanding of the process leading to the school site decision from the perspective of a conceptual framework on decision making taking concepts from collaborative planning and evidence based decision making, together, to emphasize the importance of context and social, cultural, and political realities. The setting for the case will be described briefly, followed by the purpose and research questions. The work on qualitative research and case study design of Creswell (2007), Merriam (2009), Mertens (2005), and Yin (2009) will be used to support a description of the research design, the population and sample to be studied, sampling procedures, data gathering tools and procedures, data analysis procedures, and strategies to address quality. Finally, a short discussion of the limitations of the study and a reflective statement of the researcher's role in relation to the case will precede a brief summary.

Setting

Pseudonyms will be used in reference to all places, people, and organizational names used in this historical case study. Any identifying references used in this dissertation will be referred to by their pseudonym name, but the researcher has catalogued all referenced materials.

Adler is a small city of about 100,000 centered in a Midwestern state, directly between two major cities on an interstate highway. The growing city is the home of the

state university, as well as the main campuses of two private colleges and satellite campuses for a few other small colleges and community colleges. The public school district, Adler Public Schools (APS), is the third largest employer in the city and its student population, 17,550 in 2011, places it among the largest school districts in the state. In 2010, the demographic breakdown for students was 66.2% white, 5.7% Asian, 23.4% black, 4.1% Hispanic, 0.7% Indian, and 38.9% free/reduced lunch. The district has 20 elementary schools, three sixth and seventh grade middle schools, three eighth and ninth grade junior highs, two comprehensive high schools serving tenth through twelfth grades, one alternative high school, and one area career center, serving ninth through twelfth graders from APS and other school districts in River County.

Adler's population and the population of its school district has grown steadily over that last several decades. From 1980-81 through 2010-11, the enrollment has grown 57%, though the majority of the growth has been at the elementary level, 70.9% as compared to 42.6% for high school (<http://www.Adler.k12.pn.us/reports/enrhist.pdf>). In that time, four elementary schools have been added to the district. Between 1994 and 1997, the three middle schools were added to the district, changing the grade configurations from K-6 elementary, 7-9 junior high, and 10-12 high school to K-5 elementary, 6-7 middle school, 8-9 junior high, and 10-12 high school. The district accommodated the growth at the high school level with an addition to the newer and smaller of the two high schools in 2000. The doubling of floor space and a redrawing of school attendance area lines eventually leveled out the enrollment at the two existing high schools by the end of the decade. In 2010-11, Franklin High School had an enrollment of 1942 and Lakewood High School 1820. These enrollments only reflect the 10-12th grade

enrollments. Ninth grade students, housed in the three junior high schools, are considered students at the high school in the attendance area where they live. Each junior high school has students who live in each high school attendance area.

The addition of a third comprehensive high school has been discussed for several years. The district became more interested in the early 2000s when a community survey and the results from community forums revealed a desire to reduce the number of school transitions from kindergarten through graduation. A plan was devised in the mid 2000s to leave the elementary schools at K-5, but change all middle schools and junior highs to traditional middle schools serving 6-8, and move ninth graders to the high schools. The ninth grade move would put too much demand on the capacity of each of the existing high schools, so a third high school would be built to accommodate the new configuration. The school would open in the fall of 2010 and be the first high school added to the district since Lakewood High School was opened in 1973.

The original plan was to build the high school over the course of three different bond initiatives of \$60 million spread over the course of nine years. The first was passed in April 2007. The new school would open in August 2010 with only ninth and tenth graders, with more added in subsequent years. With the support of bond issues passed in 2010 and 2013, the building, along with several other capital projects including the addition of at least two elementary schools, the high school would be completed and eventually house the capacity number of students. The plan would eventually make the enrollments at each of the three high schools around 1800. When a change in superintendent happened in August 2008, the plan was reconceived and APS brought another bond issue to the voters in April 2009 for the remaining \$120 million to complete

the high school in one continuous building project as well as address the other capital needs identified in the former three-bond issue plan. The \$120 bond represented no tax increase, but an increase in time frame to repay the bonds. The voters passed it. The timeline for the building of the new high school was delayed to August 2013 and would open with 9-11 in the first year, adding twelfth graders in the subsequent year.

In January 2007, APS announced they were accepting a donation of 40 acres of land on Berkley Road in eastern River County and had agreed to purchase an adjacent 40 acres from the same landowner. The school board approved property as the site for the new school in June. Immediately following the announcement, critics questioned the decision and the district defended the decision throughout the summer. By late August, a citizen review board had been appointed to consider sites for the new school. By November, the decision had been changed from the Berkley Road location to a site on Zachary Road, in the northeastern part of the greater Adler area. In November 2010, the school was named Ellen Walker Shaw High School, or Shaw High School. Dr. Ellen Walker Shaw was the first African American principal in APS.

Purpose

The purpose of this historical case study is to understand the decision making processes of a school district administration in the planning of a new comprehensive high school in Adler. The decision making process will generally be defined as the activities and actions leading to the placement of Shaw High School at its site on Zachary Road.

Research Questions

How did school district leadership make decisions about the location of a new high school?

- 1) What factors influenced the decision making process?
- 2) How did they decide what evidence, or information, to use and not use?
- 3) How did administrators make sense of information and context during the decision making process?

Research Design

Yin (2009) suggested the form of a research question(s) is a clue to the kind of research design is appropriate for the study. In the use of *who*, *what*, *how*, *why*, and *when* to form research questions, those containing *how* and *why* are good candidates for the use of case study. Creswell (2007) described case study as a qualitative approach exploring an issue through one or more bounded systems (p. 73). For this study, the issue at hand is school district level decision making. The bounded system is the decision for the site of the new high school. Creswell would classify the study a single-instrument case study. Merriam's (2009) description of a heuristic case study, "illuminat(ing) the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 44) also matches this design. Since the site has already been selected and the process to be studied has ended, the study can be classified a historical case study (Merriam).

The form of the research questions in this study point to case study as an appropriate method, as discussed previously. The focus on making sense of information and context makes an even stronger case for the use of case study. Merriam (2009) identifies four ways case study knowledge is different from other research knowledge: it is more concrete, contextual, developed by reader interpretation, and based on reference populations determined by the reader (pp. 44-45). The school district's decision making process will be better understood through case study given the nature of the knowledge as

Merriam describes it, making the knowledge more useful to the reader in the way each individual needs to interpret the information.

Mertens (2005) suggested the following steps for designing a case study:

1. Develop the research questions.
2. Identify the propositions (if any) for the study.
3. Specify the unit of analysis.
4. Establish the logic linking the data to the propositions.
5. The criteria for interpretation of the findings should be explained (pp. 238-239).

The research questions are stated above. Yin (2009) asserted the statement of purpose, also stated above, can be in lieu of propositions, which was the approach taken in this study. The unit of analysis, or the case, in this single case study involved the Adler Public School district. More specifically, the school district as represented by central office administration and school board during the time of and the time prior to the decision to place the new high school on Zachary Road. The case started from the time discussion began about the location of the new school (early 2006) to the date of decision (2007).

The case study followed Yin's (2009) description of a holistic or embedded analysis, establishing the link between the data and the propositions by first presenting the data as a detailed description of the case, including the history and chronology of events. After the data were presented, an analysis of themes was used to understand the complexity of the case. Data analysis used criteria for interpreting findings that become evident within the data from the context of the case and grounded in the literature and the conceptual framework on collaborative planning and evidence based decision making and

school facilities planning. Themes emerged from a careful analysis of the data and provided a way of describing how the theory can be understood within this particular case (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2005). In this way, the case study seeks to explain the process through an understanding of the conceptual framework.

Population and Study Sample

The case study was not designed to generalize, rather to gain a greater understanding of the concept of district level decision making in the school district within the case. Given this aim, the no population for the study is defined as the school district, which can include all individuals associated with the school district, though the case study will focus specifically on those involved in the decision making process for the location of the new high school (Mertens, 2005). Nonprobability sampling, the most common form being purposive or purposeful sampling, is most appropriate for studies like this one. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009). In case study research, two levels of sampling should take place. The first level is the identification of the case or cases. The second would be to sample within the case to determine what people, documents, or activities will be used to contribute to the description (Merriam). In this single case study, the purpose of the study identified the case: the decision making process used by the Adler Public School district to place Shaw High School on Zachary Road. The sampling within the case will be described in the next section.

Sampling procedures

Merriam (2009) suggested the starting place for purposeful sampling is to use the study's purpose to establish criteria for participation in the study. For this case study, the criterion for identifying interview candidates would be leaders from the school district directly involved in the decision making process, at any stage. In the case of other data sources, each contributed to a thick, rich description of the case, aimed at addressing the research questions.

Within purposeful sampling are several kinds of sampling procedures. One of the most common forms is snowball, chain, or network sampling (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2005). Snowball sampling was used in this study. The strategy of this sampling procedure is to identify a few key participants who meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. As each participant is interviewed, they are asked if there are others who would be helpful to talk with. The sample of people grows, or "snowballs" as participants suggest others (Merriam).

For this case study, the snowball procedure was used through participant interviews. Additionally, interview candidates were identified through analysis of newspaper articles. Individuals who were mentioned repeatedly in articles describing the decision making process or those quoted or referenced as important players in the process were considered. Through researcher prior knowledge, the superintendent of the school district and the president of the school board at the time of the decision were identified as initial candidates for inclusion in the study. After a review of newspaper coverage for the case, more interview candidates were identified. Once interviews began, interview data

identified a few other key players within the decision making process to include in the interview pool. In all, ten individuals were interviewed for this case study.

Data Collection and Procedures

Creswell (2007) has a more expanded definition of case study than the short description referenced above: “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case *description* and case-based themes” (p. 73, emphasis in original). Yin (2009) also advocated collecting evidence from multiple sources and identifies six in his book on case studies. Documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts are all possible source types for case studies (pp. 99-114).

Interviews were conducted with the ten key players in the decision making process. As already discussed, the initial interview candidates were determined based on the researcher’s knowledge of the case and information gleaned from the newspaper chronology. The snowball approach, including input from original and subsequent interview candidates and information from other data sources, revealed other important individuals to the decision making process. Interviews were “guided conversations rather than structured queries” (Yin, 2009, p. 106). Creswell (2007) suggested using an interview protocol with a few open-ended questions. The interview questions for this study were designed to contribute to the detailed description of the case and to address the research questions, based on the unique perspective of the interviewee. Interview

candidates were invited to participate. All but one interview candidate accepted and each signed a consent form. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions and field notes from each interview were added to the data.

The community of the school district in this case has two daily newspapers and three local television stations. Like the snowball approach for interview candidates, the Adler Daily Herald's coverage of the decision making process for the placement of Shaw High School served as the springboard for uncovering other archived information, as well information from other source types. Archived material from media sources were used to situate the case and help the researcher know other sources of data to seek, such as meeting agendas and minutes and interview candidates. A thorough review of newspaper articles included month-by-month internet searches for stories pertinent to the school district and the new high school. Each story was read and field notes were made on the first time through. A second review of all articles resulted in the separation of articles specifically related to the site selection process. Those articles joined the interview transcripts and field notes as the basis for the data used for coding.

Document sources used for this study included: memoranda, emails, letters, hand written notes; meeting agendas and minutes from school board meetings, as well as meetings of the citizen committee to review potential properties; proposals from landowners for potential sites; formal studies related to this particular case (ie. Norton, 2007); newspaper articles and archived information from other media (Yin, 2009). The value of documents in case-study research is to support data collected from other sources. Documents were important in helping to create the detailed description of the case and to inform the approach to interviews. Demographic data from the census, school district

budget and bond records, and maps from the city of Adler and River County, are among the archival information used (Yin). The majority of the documents used were provided by one of the interview participants who had an extensive collection. The participant gave all of these documents to the researcher for use.

Direct observations are reflected in the researcher's description of the data, having been a member of the community and a school district employee before, during, and after the time bounds of the case. Participant observations are not applicable in this study. The researcher was not a part of the decision making process. Physical artifacts exist in the parcels of land considered for the site.

The sample size for qualitative studies is dependent on the study and should be determined by the data as it is being collected. The goal should be variety and not necessarily representation. Decisions on data sources should consider access and time constraints (Mertens, 2005). With other types of qualitative studies, like grounded theory and phenomenological, the concept of saturation, or the experience of not gaining any new information or understanding with the collection of new data indicates the completion of data collection (Creswell, 2007). In case studies, the development of the thick, rich description of the case and the emergent themes addressing the research questions may or may not lead to a saturation situation. Time constraints, redundancy, access issues, and having developed a detailed enough description of the case to provided the researcher sufficient information to analyze the guided the decision to collect more data in this study.

Data analysis procedures

The plan for analyzing the data in this study was based on Yin's (2009) description of the analytic technique of explanation building. Yin called explanation building a "special type of pattern matching" (p. 141) with the goal of analyzing the case study data "by building an explanation about the case" (p. 141). The case of the decision to place Shaw High School on Zachary Road was used to help understand decision making as informed by concepts from collaborative planning and evidence based decision making. The analysis built an explanation of the decision making process by using the data with a constant eye toward the research questions. The researcher repeatedly asked, "What does the data tell us about the research questions in this case?"

Yin (2009) identified four principles for social science research. Each was used to help guide the data analysis for this case study. First, the analysis should attend to all of the evidence. In other words, leave no loose ends that would lead to holes in the logic used to build an explanation. Using all the evidence to build the case would not necessarily be appropriate, but attending to all the evidence so contributing information is not missed is essential. Second, address all major rival interpretations in the analysis. There will be alternative explanations and it is important to include them. Third, the analysis should address the most significant aspect of the case study. This ensures the analysis stays focused and attends to the major issue that emerges. The explanations and information gleaned from the case study can be weakened if lesser issues take away from the major information. Finally, the researcher should use his or her own prior, expert knowledge. This gives the opportunity for the researcher to demonstrate an awareness and depth of knowledge of the issues addressed within the case study. With this approach

to data analysis and the collection and organization of the data, quality issues were addressed within.

Strategies to Address Issues of Quality

Yin (2009) suggested the use of three guiding principles to maximize the benefits of the six types of information used as data for case studies, as well as help establish construct validity and reliability in a case study (pp. 114-124). The first principle is to use multiple sources of evidence. The technique used will be triangulation of data sources. This case study had a variety of data sources. Triangulation of data sources allows for the development of “converging lines of inquiry” (p. 115), addressing the construct validity of the study by providing corroboration of emergent themes and information from multiple sources. Data analysis to build an explanation required agreement among the sources of data.

The second principle is to create a case study database. Yin (2009) asserted a problem in case study research is the investigator tends to keep the data exclusively within the narrative in the case study report. Without keeping data separate, there is no opportunity for a critical reader to review the data leading to the conclusions in the study. The collection of data in a separate database increases the reliability of the study. In this study, data was kept in the researcher’s notes, transcripts of interviews, and documents; basically a collection of all information used as data in the case. The database is currently maintained by the researcher and can be produced upon request, in order to preserve anonymity of those involved in the case.

The third principle is to maintain a chain of evidence, which also increases the reliability of the case study. This technique is used to build a solid, logical case supported

by the evidence from the data. Yin (2009) suggests the evidentiary process must be traceable both from the research questions to the case study report, as well as backward from the report to the questions. To do so, first there should be “sufficient citations to the relevant portions of the case study database” (p. 123). Next, the database should reveal the evidence and an explanation of the conditions under which it was collected (time, data, procedure, etc). Third, the circumstances around which the data was collected should match those of the research design and methods. Finally, the case study protocol (design) should tie the content of the protocol to the case study questions (Yin, 2009, pp. 122-124). This method was used to ensure reliability within this case study.

Study Limitations

This case study is useful for the greater audience in its transferability, not unlike most case study research. The study will not develop general theory, but the description of the case will provide insight for leaders in similar complicated decision making situations. The case, though still recent enough to be relevant to those who participated in the study, may reveal itself in a different way than it would have during the time of the decision, or after more time has passed since. The researcher’s position within the district (a school level administrator) may have censored the responses of some of the participants, perhaps changing the data enough to lead to inaccurate or incomplete explanations.

Researcher’s Role

As stated previously, the researcher is a school level administrator within APS. While this position provides for bias, both from the position of an employee and a community member, it also affords a great advantage in the ability to provide a detailed

description of the case. The researcher's long history in the community and with APS also gives a perspective to the case that was helpful in developing an understanding of context, which is essential to the conceptual framework guiding this study. The majority of the participants are not still involved, directly, with the school district.

Positionality of the Researcher

It is important to note throughout this dissertation, especially with the findings and discussion, the researcher's position within the school district used for this case study has an important effect on the interpretation of the case. Prior relationships with interview candidates, natural biases about media sources, personal opinions and history, and general knowledge of the community are among a variety of factors influencing the retelling of the case represented in these pages. Assertions made by the researcher may be informed by more than an isolated analysis of the data, but a deeper knowledge and attachment to the case.

Summary

The sections above have outlined the research design and methods for the historical case study of the decision to place Shaw High School on Zachary Road. This chapter provides an initial description of the setting and insight to the details in the area of research design, sampling, data gathering, data analysis, and quality issues. Relying heavily on Creswell (2007), Mertens (2005), Yin (2009), and Merriam (2009), the case study design has been presented in a way explaining to the reader the intent of the study in addressing the research purpose and questions. The study's limitations and the researcher's role in the case are acknowledged near the end.

4. FINDINGS

Decision making will be described through the case of a public school district's process for selecting the site for the construction of a new high school. The concepts of collaborative planning and evidence use will be combined to view this case contextually, focusing on the major factors which contributed to the unique process used, not necessarily the outcome. This chapter will begin with a brief recounting of the background to allow the reader to easily join the story as it is discussed thematically and not chronologically throughout.

The chapter has three major theme areas evident in this case: the contextual constraints on the decision making process, a comparison of the closed and open decision making processes, and the political nature of public processes. The context of this case includes a very real set of constraining factors, defined broadly as location issues and site evaluation issues. This section examines the details of the physical and social infrastructural limitations impacting the decision making process for the new high school. These constraining factors highlight the reality of decision making processes and the fact that, the best choices are not always among the possible options.

The differences evident in a closed and an open decision making process can be viewed through this case because it featured both processes. The influence of precedent and the role of leadership will be described in the context of this case, followed by a discussion of the political and social costs and benefits resulting from the unique process undertaken in this case. Lastly will be a short discussion on whether it is an appropriate expectation for a school board to make decisions like the one in this case, in terms of making technical decisions which seem to require some level of expert input. The section

will not evaluate which process is better as every situation is unique. This portion of the chapter will highlight the influence of context on the closed and open processes, as well as looking at the features of the processes themselves.

Political factors wove throughout this case and influenced each of the closed and open decision making processes. The relationship between the school district and other governmental entities defined a major political problem for school district leaders in this decision making process. This will be discussed in the first part of the section on politics. Public perception was influenced and was an influence on the decisions made, as well as the ability to make decisions by those charged with doing so. The factors related to perception issues will be described, followed by an examination of the impact of the superintendent's relationship to the community on the decision making process. Finally, the local and personal nature of this case, relative to the decision makers' membership in the community, contributes more to the situating of the case uniquely in context.

Synopsis of case

What follows is a brief chronological retelling this case, including the features necessary for the reader to understand the contextual references throughout the remainder of the chapter. To maintain anonymity for those involved in this case, pseudonyms will be used for all names of people, places, physical features, and organizations. Common terms will be used interchangeably. The Board of Education in this case will be referenced by this phrase, in addition to the terms school board or the board. References to data used in this research will be referred to by pseudonym, but is catalogued by the researcher by actual title and available, if necessary, upon request.

The Adler Public Schools in Adler, Panbuck, knew the need for a third comprehensive high school for a number of years before the succession of events placed school district leadership in position to act. A facilities committee reported, in a one and a half year study, the need to reconfigure secondary schools in the fall of 2006. The plan included restructuring the three sixth and seventh grade middle schools and three eighth and ninth grade junior high schools to six seventh, eighth, and ninth grade middle schools. The ninth graders would be moved to the high school level, which had been serving tenth through twelfth graders. Doing so would create the need to build a third high school to accommodate the expanded grade configuration at the high school level and the continued growth in the Adler community. The Board of Education approved the recommendation of the facilities committee in November 2006.

The first step in building the new school would be to determine a site. The superintendent sought the help of the former superintendent, a trusted community leader in Adler, to advise the process by which the district would find and acquire land for such a large project. The precedent, as described by the former superintendent, was to quietly go about the search for land because making it public would most assuredly increase the price of any potential properties and put the district in a difficult financial position. He suggested finding someone who knew the community to do the work of a real estate consultant. A retired assistant superintendent was asked to fill this roll and upon his acceptance, an agreement was made to pay him a moderate salary and commission for contracted services. The consultant's job was to find land the district could acquire in the eastern part of the greater Adler area, for the purposes of building a school, not necessarily a high school. APS had current and future needs for schools of other levels,

and having land available to them was important for more than just the high school project. The work of the real estate consultant began in September 2006, in knowledge of the facilities committee work and the seemingly inevitable push for new buildings.

During the behind the scenes search for land, a retired farmer who had since moved out of state negotiated a deal with APS to donate 40 acres of farmland in the extreme eastern parts of the county, about five miles away from the main population of the city of Adler. Additionally, the school district could buy an adjacent 40 acres of land, providing an 80-acre tract of roadside land at a cost of \$500,000. In January of 2007, the Board of Education agreed to the deal and acquired this piece of property, known as the Bonner site, named for the last name of the donating/selling landowner. The intended purpose for the Bonner site was not decided at the time of purchase.

The funding plan for construction of the high school, and several other capital projects, included the passage of three \$60 million bond issues spaces over a period of six to seven years, the first of which went to the voters in April 2007 and passed with 76% approval. The money from the sale of the bonds was sufficient to build a first phase of the high school, to accommodate ninth and tenth graders by August 2010. Future bond issues would fund the expansion of the building, allowing it to add grade levels in subsequent years. In order to meet the August 2010 deadline, the architect communicated to the superintendent the site would need to be designated by early summer 2007.

After several closed sessions of the school board throughout the months in which the real estate consultant was doing his work, where property negotiations were discussed, but not specifically the issue of high school site, the superintendent called for a decision about the site for the new high school in June 2007. The district owned one

appropriate property, in size and relative location at that time and knew of no other viable options. The Bonner site was designated in a public, morning meeting of the school board in June, in the presence of a handful of concerned citizens who were neighbors to the property.

The month of July featured some public outcry against using the Bonner site for the building of the new high school. In early August, the superintendent and school board president attended a pre-meeting of the city council, where they assumed they would be presenting a current status of the high school construction project to a supportive city, based on messages of support they believed had been secured through previous conversations with city leaders. The reaction of the city council members was, instead, condescending and rebuking of the school district for making a decision about the high school site without the input of the city council or of the public.

Soon after, another land owner came forward and publically offered to donate a comparably sized property, also in the east part of the county, as an alternative to the Bonner site. With the addition of another option, the superintendent announced the school district would reconsider their decision and called for those who had appropriate property and interested in having it considered for the new high school site to submit a proposal. All proposed properties would be evaluated by a 21-person citizen committee, using an extensive collection of infrastructural factors, informed by a thorough review conducted by an engineering firm. The committee was chaired by the former superintendent, who first advised the current superintendent about property search procedures. Within two months, the committee made a recommendation to consider a different site, farther north from the Bonner site, on Zachary Road. The school board approved the recommendation

in November 2007, and Adler's third high school is under construction during the time of the writing of this dissertation.

Contextual Constraints of the Decision Making Process

The end goal of any decision making process shapes the process itself. There are a variety of possible outcome types for decisions, including, but not limited to: to take action or not, making a choice or choices among a pre-determined collection of possibilities, determining the options before deciding which to choose, or developing a plan. The decision making processes in this case study had an end goal of designating a site for the new high school in Adler. In theory, the entire non-developed land area of the APS school district would represent the pool for consideration. There were a number of limiting factors which narrowed the search to a particular region of the Adler area. Within that area, the criteria used to determine the feasibility of any prospective site created further parameters to narrow the field of options. In this section, the unique contextual factors that focused and constrained the property search to a certain area within the school district will be described.

The conceptual framework used as the lens through which to view this case highlights the multiple factors within which decision criteria are embedded. The entangling of context, evidence, and the complexities of human interaction, including political and power dynamics, creates a connected system in which no single factor acts independently on the process (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2006, 2010; Honig & Coburn, 2007). The contextual factors unique to this case combined with some specific limitations to provide a standard by which any given piece of land was judged. After the discussion of the factors that shaped the general location within the

APS district from which a site would be chosen, a section will describe the constraints on the process of determining a final site.

Location

The decision making process to choose the property on which the new high school would be built in Adler began after addressing the question of where the high school site should be located, in a general sense, within the greater Adler area. The decision making process surrounding the much broader concept of location had been going on within the Adler Public School administration for many years. It was well known that APS would need to build a third comprehensive high school eventually. The factors that shaped the answer to the question of general location are discussed below. Each of these factors placed a constraint on the process of making the decision of where to put the high school, providing a more focused search for sites. There were some who disagreed with the logic district leaders applied to the process. This section begins with a discussion of the impact drawing attendance area boundaries would have on the potential high school location. Next, population density, growth trends, demographic information, and infrastructural realities that further narrowed the search will be described. This will be followed by highlighting the unique features of current attendance areas that influenced a much more focused idea about location around which a site should be considered. Finally, an alternative perspective will be described.

How to draw lines?

In the case of the location of the third comprehensive high school in APS, a variety of factors had to be considered. The location of the school, relative to the two existing high schools, narrowed options. There was an obvious need to keep the high

schools reasonably separated by distance. The current high schools are both located on the major north-south street, Highland Road, dividing the city of Adler and River County eastern and western halves. APS boundaries extend to both the eastern and western borders of River County. The population distribution, though not equally distributed to the east and west, has a high density close to Highland Road, and reduces as you move to the east and west. In general, there is a higher population to the west of Highland than to the east within the city.

The two high schools are separated by about five miles, with Franklin High School to the north, and Lakewood High School to the south. Franklin is one block south of I-92 and about one mile north of Main, the main east-west street in Adler, roughly dividing the city into a north half and a south half. Lakewood is about 3.6 miles south of Main. The boundary line dividing the attendance areas for the two high schools is a meandering east-west line through the school district. The two high schools are about the same size, with Franklin being historically much larger than Lakewood, but a boundary change in 2000 made the two populations now differ by only around 100 students. The boundary line drops a little farther south in the western part of the district, bumping slightly more north through the central part of the city, and then coming back to the south in the eastern side of the district, though not as far south as in the west. The variation is minor and upon a birds-eye glance, it is a west-to-east line.

When considering where a third high school should be located, reimagining the boundary lines was an early factor considered by district administrators. Splitting the map into three equal regions instead of two, in relation to population distribution, could be done in a few different ways. The two configurations given the most consideration were a

“pie-shaped” map and a tiered or layered map. A tiered map would feature two generally horizontal, or east-west, lines, dividing the district into a northern band, a middle or central band, and a southern band. Placing the high school in the north was generally believed to be the way in which to achieve this configuration, given that Lakewood High School was already so far south in the district, in relation to the population distribution, and Franklin High School, though considered on the north side, was also still considered part of the central part of the city.

The tiered map was not a popular option for APS administrators. Adler had been growing consistently and beginning to experience some of the challenges of a larger urban area. It was believed that by developing a north-south-central city attendance area configuration, the central tier, which would be assigned to Franklin High School, would make Franklin an “inner city” school. Protecting Franklin from a disproportionate number of economically disadvantaged students was a big concern, and steered district officials away from a tiered map.

The preferred configuration among district administrators was a pie-shaped map. This map would have an established “center” of the school district, from which three lines would be drawn, dividing the district into three pie pieces, or wedges, defining the three attendance areas. The pie-shaped map could allow for more consistent bussing patterns, but most important to district personnel was the ability more equitably distribute student populations, demographically, among the three high schools. The central part of the city included a high concentration of historically disadvantaged populations. If the lines emanated from a central point, those populations could, theoretically, be distributed among each of the high schools. One former administrator remembered:

When Kent Pearson was superintendent, and when we had those discussions, there was always discussion about that third high school. And there was concern about tearing apart the infrastructure of what everybody thought was good about Franklin and Lakewood both.... This is an emotional discussion. We always felt, at least the prevailing thought at that time, was you're gonna bus kids somewhere and you had to do a pie shape in the community to pull out--to get any kind of equity if at all.

A former school board member said, "Franklin would turn into the ghetto school was the thought. That was a thought of mine--that was a concern." A newspaper article reported community members, like this former county commissioner, thought building the school in the north would produce negative consequences.

Ribbet said it would be a "grave mistake" to build a school north for that reason.

"That's part of the logic that people aren't getting," he said. "I think we want to keep Franklin from becoming an inner-city school or geographically landlocked."

The general idea relied on the assumption that the concentration of disadvantaged students decreases moving outward from the center, and there are more-or-less similar demographically distributed ring-shaped bands moving outward from a center point.

Thinking of population distribution in this way, in any city, is flawed when you get past the generalizations. Given the fact there is no perfectly distributed population map, in density or demographic make-up, district officials make a best effort to develop a general configuration concept to best match the situation in any given district. Applying the concept and dealing with the unique and ever changing realities of population and demographics is challenging work. For Adler, though not a perfect idea, striving for a

pie-shaped map instead of a tiered map was thought to create a better opportunity for equitably distributed high school populations.

East or West?

The approach of locating the third high school, in terms of creating a situation where pie-shaped boundary lines could be drawn, essentially eliminated a northern site. Doing so would have created a situation in which one or more high schools may not naturally be located inside its attendance area or allowances would have to be made to account for the fact Franklin High School and a northern high school would lie, essentially, on or near a necessary line from the center dividing the two attendance areas. It would be hard to justify the pie-shaped concept for attendance areas with a northern site. A southern site would have caused the same issue with Lakewood High School. For this reason, the thoughts were more concentrated toward whether to go east or west.

There is more population west of Highland Road than east, though the plans and predictions for the city of Adler and River County are for the next big growth movement to move east. There is consistent growth to the west, but the potential for a boom to the west is limited at this time due to several smaller factors and one larger one. The county has done less in the last several years to pave roads in the western part of the county than in the east. The topography of the western part of the county is more challenging in terms of being hilly, rocky, and more difficult to create infrastructure than the east and northeast, which is a relatively flatter and offers fewer impediments to infrastructure. The main infrastructural issue with westward expansion is the potential for extending the city sewer system. There is a ridge along a state highway which extends north and west from the western side of the current city limits. To tie into the city sewer system, sewer would

have to be pumped over the ridge before a gravity flow system could bring it back to Adler. A system like this will be very costly and although it is believed it will eventually happen, the costs for expanding sewer and other infrastructure to the east is much cheaper and more feasible in the near-term.

The plan to go east was informed by years of thought, watching population growth and distribution patterns, periodic discussions and consultation with city, county, and state officials, and general hunches from years of being in Adler. A former district administrator said,

What we discovered, which we kind of already knew was that everybody was ready for the east to blow. It was going to blow, it was blowing because things were happening at the university with some corridor stuff, and some road development had already been put in, and they already had plans for sewers....And the state was also being clear with us that, yeah it's going to happen. That's the next spot and it's going to grow and it's going to develop and things are going to pop out there. For five to ten years, it's not. But then in 15 years, it's going to be the new Lakewood type environment out there.

The eastern bias was held by those who had been in the district and in positions of leadership for a long time, many of which had since formally left the school district, through retirement or moving to other positions. Some of those people were still around for consultation, informally or formally, when a decision time would eventually come.

Where in the east?

Beliefs about the placement of a school, especially a high school, its relationship with the established physical and social infrastructure, and its impact on future physical

and social infrastructure vary greatly. The relationship of new schools and the phenomena of urban sprawl is a great concern to those who believe in being intentional about a more dense urban population and slower growth outward. Both current high schools in Adler are inside the city limits and considered “in town”, in relation to the development areas loosely defining being in town versus outside of town.

The Panbuck Department of Elementary and Secondary Education suggests a guideline for acreage needed for a high school to be 30 acres plus one acre for every student. Given a projected student population of 2000, which is a high estimate but is an easy number to communicate, potential properties for a school site would need to be at least 50 acres. APS consistently communicated they were looking for 80 or more acres. Either way, available properties of this size are rare, if not non-existent, within the city limits, whether the search is restricted to the east side or not. The area outside the city limits but still relatively close to being in town does not feature many more options. Pieces of land of appropriate size are more widely available farther away from the city. A former school board member said,

But, you can't get a perfect location because you can't get 80 acres in town--it doesn't exist. You can put it south or north--out. There is no place closer in to do it right now that would allow for districting and allowed for athletic fields, and all the stuff you have to have. Can't do it.

This availability issue dictates an almost unavoidable contribution to sprawl when building a new high school.

All things being equal, once the push to the east was established, at least some administrators believed the best location scenario would feature an equal pull from both

the current Franklin and Lakewood attendance areas. It was hoped this option would help equitably distribute the political and emotional “pain” caused by the eminent redrawing of boundary lines. The reassigning of one-third of the population of school-aged children to a new high school and away from the one with which they identified themselves would be a difficult process. In theory, finding a location as close to the current boundary line between the Franklin and Lakewood attendance areas would achieve this. Finding appropriate and available land on or near this line at the right price at the right time was a challenge.

From the APS perspective, which was a general sense gleaned from the personal beliefs of a group of leaders whose membership was always in flux and influenced by different experiences and values, staying near the Franklin/Lakewood boundary line was just one of the factors to keep in mind while seeking potential high school sites in the east. Access via roads was another one. Road accessibility had to be considered, in addition to the quality of the access. Administrators generally believed that staying away from I-92 was important, both from the standpoint of keeping large numbers of student drivers off the interstate as much as possible for safety reasons, and to avoid some of the issues they had been seeing at Franklin High School with people from the outside posing a safety threat at the school. The major interstate artery had brought some undesirable people in and around the Franklin campus, though it was not a chronic issue. There were some who believed this kind of disruption could be minimized by keeping the school a reasonable distance from I-92. The ability of a road to handle the traffic volume of a large high school was a concern, but not considered a huge limiting factor, based on the limitations of the existing road infrastructure on the east side of the city and county, and

the precedent of Lakewood High School. Lakewood opened in 1973 with limited road access and generally low road volume capacity. The belief was, among APS administrators, although it could take a good deal of time, eventually the roads would be improved to match the need, and the school would get by in the meantime, as other schools in Adler had done in the past. This stance communicated a fairly low standard in terms of needed road infrastructure to support the high school, but there was no other position which would ensure a new school would be built in the east within a reasonable timetable. The Adler Area Transportation Study Organization (AATSO) had developed an extensive plan for the road expansion and improvement in the eastern part of the county, which provided some guidance to district administrators. The timetables were not necessarily aggressive, nor could any timetable be considered dependable, given the changing political and budgetary environment of any government entity.

There were other growth catalyst projects in the works toward the east part of the city and county at the same time. Coliseum Boulevard, which currently ends at US Highway 37 on its east end has been planned for expansion eastward, then north toward I-92 for several years. The University of Panbuck had recently announced the development of a biotech research park, designed to lure biotech companies to Adler. The area was in the southeastern part of the greater Adler area, on US Hwy 37. A large, upscale golf course had recently been built about three miles east of Adler on a state highway and the housing development around it was in process during the mid to late 2000s. Another large housing development had begun near the golf course community. Additional commercial development was being planned in conjunction with each of these and other growth projects.

What about the north?

To this point, the justification for placing the high school in the east part of town to achieve a pie-shaped attendance area configuration and to follow what was believed to be the next big area for growth had been established from the perspective of APS administrators. There was at least one other perspective which became a more than minor issue during the summer and fall decision period. There were those who believed putting the high school in the north and not the east was the best choice.

The mid to late 1990s and early part of the 2000s featured explosive population growth in the northern part of Adler. Houses were being built at a rapid pace in housing developments in what had been rural areas. In general, housing was less expensive in the north part of town than comparable housing in the south and west parts of the city. There were and still are some cultural stereotypes in the Adler community: simplistically, the south is economically and politically advantaged and the north is not. There was a sense among some that placing a high school in the north would serve a growth population already existing, not one imagined in the future. There was an argument that choosing to place the new high school in the east and not north would be ignoring this area of town and APS would be perpetuating the disadvantaged perception of the north.

There was another issue APS believed existed with a potential northern site, in addition to the very real concern for protecting Franklin High School from being assigned a disproportionate population of disadvantaged students. The district was too shallow from north to south, and especially from Franklin north to the northern boundaries, to justify placing the three high schools in a generally linear pattern from north to south.

"If people actually look at the boundaries of Adler Public Schools, they'll see we don't have as much land north as we do going east or south," (Superintendent) Green said. "Fairington [school district] cuts into the northern border."

In places, the northern boundary to the district is less than five miles north of I-92. It is in these areas, where the distance from I-92 to the northern boundary is the least, where the highest concentration of the northern population resides. In the farther northwest and northeast regions of the district, the northern boundary is farther north, but the population density in these areas is much less, weakening the argument for placing a northern high school within the established growth population. This issue will be examined further in other sections of this dissertation.

Site Evaluation

Having an idea about the general location for the new high school defines a search area for potential properties on which the school could be placed. Evaluating the appropriateness and advantage of any one site can be done a variety of ways, using a variety of criteria and standards, arranged by a prioritization dependent on people and circumstance. All of these variables changed several times throughout the course of both decision processes in the case of the new high school site in APS.

This section features a description of the way the Board of Education considered evaluation standards for the appropriateness of a site. Next, the effects of the school board's process provide a context for the third and final part of this section, which will discuss how the community committee charged with evaluating the site options interacted with evaluation criteria. The differences in the two processes in this case provide an

example of the way decision making processes can vary according to dynamic contextual realities.

School board considerations

In later sections of this dissertation, the manner in which land options were presented to the Board of Education will be described in more detail. To gain a greater understanding of how physical infrastructure was considered by the board, it is important to know that Brian Lindsay, the former APS administrator who was contracted to find property the school district may acquire, was tasked with finding land for purchase, not necessarily for the purpose of building a high school. Given the school district is in the business of educating children in schools, it can reasonably be assumed that when a school district acquires land, they intend for it to be the site of a future school. Lindsay's private and confidential conversations and negotiations with landowners, however, were vague and never included a specific description of for what the land was intended. This was not misleading because the intended use for any one piece of land was not known during this stage. Lindsay's job was to engage in negotiations with willing property owners, and report back to the superintendent about the progress of those negotiations. Occasionally, the superintendent would have Lindsay report to the school board on the progress of his negotiations. It was understood if any of those negotiations reached the point where a decision needed to be made about whether to acquire the land, Lindsay would report all the necessary information to the board, then they would make the decision.

Lindsay started his work in September of 2006 and by December the Bonner property was ready for such a decision. An informal, private assessment of the feasibility

of building a school on the property was done at that time, mostly based on the opinion of a few people well-versed in the school district property acquisition and school site readiness. Lindsay had concerns about some of the infrastructural challenges of the property, but on the whole, the offer and the property were, in his opinion, too good to pass up. It was considered to be a nice piece of land for a school at some point in the future, and the gift of 40 acres, coupled with the reasonably priced adjacent 40 acres (\$500,000) made it a smart buy for the district. Lindsay's confidant remembered, "He had looked at the Bonner property and had had some concerns about it. Especially about the infrastructure. He made Dr. Green aware of those concerns." The deal was approved by the board, pending environmental studies to determine if the land was suitable for construction.

The official decision to place the new high school on the Bonner Property was made in January. The board made no decisions or announcements during the remainder of the winter and the spring about where the new high school would be located, nor for what the Bonner property would be used. Publically, the reason given was it was inappropriate to decide the high school location before the voters approved the \$60 million bond issue in April of that year, which would fund the first phase of the building. During this time, Lindsay continued to pursue land acquisition agreements with several landowners, though not all of those included properties appropriate, in acreage or otherwise, for a high school. The district had plans for additional elementary schools, and future middle schools may be a possibility, so a variety of buildable land was being sought.

The bond issue passed and, in closed meetings, the superintendent and board continued to hear from Lindsay about progress toward land acquisition. The process was slow, but moving forward. Sometime between the April election and the late June work session of the board, a necessary timetable for determining a school site to allow sufficient time to design and build the first phase of the high school for an August 2010 opening created a sense of urgency. When it became time to make the decision, the school district had ownership of one piece of land of appropriate size with the appropriate attributes for the construction of a large comprehensive high school: the Bonner site. The superintendent asked Lindsay to endorse, to the board, the Bonner site for location of the new high school, which he did not do. He had concerns about infrastructural issues that he shared with the superintendent, and he warned against entering a decision on the use of that property without addressing those. School board members had differing levels of understanding about the infrastructural readiness of the Bonner site for the construction of a high school, but none felt, in hindsight, they had conducted a thorough assessment prior to deeming it the high school site. Different board members had been on the board for different lengths of time, and each board member had a different level of experience with the process at hand, but also the greater issue of land acquisition and the APS stance on where the school should be located.

When asked to recall the depth in which the board went to determine the site for the new high school, each was clear that while there was not a great deal of depth, it did not change the fact there was only one option at that time. Even with the understanding the land had some infrastructural challenges, none (that they knew of) were severe enough to overcome the “rightness” of the property. The 80-acre property was relatively

flat and on the east side of the county. The roads to the site, though narrow and without shoulders, were paved and well-traveled. The benevolence of the donor/seller and his apparent sole motivation, to honor his late wife with the donation of property for a new school, coupled with the timing of the acquisition of the land made it seem like the right choice. A school board member remembered:

So for instance, some of things about the terrain, and because the Bonner site was more flat and had a better contour--there wasn't much of an issue and it didn't get discussed much at all: didn't look to be a problem. The transportation issue--yeah we know the roads aren't developed and all that stuff out that way, but you presume that they're going to be and something's going to have to happen to allow it to serve and be suitable for [a school].

The board knew the sewer issue would have to be addressed, as well as road improvements, but they could not imagine any site in eastern River County where significant infrastructure challenges would not have to be overcome.

Ultimately, they were not equipped to conduct an analysis of infrastructural readiness of the site. They were a school board, charged with responsibly governing the school district toward educating students. The majority of the board members felt the selection of the Bonner property was the best educational decision they had at the time. The ability the Bonner site afforded for establishing attendance areas with a somewhat equitable demographic balance was known. The board did not consider this factor in depth, but several knew the advantages of the Bonner site based on its relative location: just south of the Franklin-Lakewood borderline in the extreme eastern part of the district.

Board members also noted how similar the site was, in terms of being significantly away from the development borders of the city and in the direction of anticipated growth to the site where Lakewood was built in the early 1970s. Thirty-five years later, the successful growth and development of the area around Lakewood gave the board a sense they were making a decision consistent with those who came before.

If you build it, they will come

Given all of the information they had, the precedent of the past, and the “right” feeling they had about Harlen Bonner’s gift, the board felt the decision was right, even in the face of challenges. They believed, “If you build it, they will come.” One of the school members recalled,

So we had the right property--our costs going in for land were good. I really think we felt like we didn't have a lot of other options in terms of the site--in terms of location so, for me, thought went through, yes it's a long ways out--5 miles out, but the comparison that we made was: well, look how far Lakewood was from the center of the city, basically from Franklin, if you will, when Lakewood was first conceived and built and all of that. It was a little bit of a, “If you build it they will come” thought. And that was also the thought about the infrastructure to. Without knowing, I know for myself, without knowing how the infrastructure stuff works it was a bit of a, “If you build it they will come”. Or, surely the city and county are going to have an interest in having a high school there and they will do their part to help get ‘er done.

The Board of Education had a confidence in their process and place in the community. They were Adler Public Schools, the third largest employer in Adler, and the entity

entrusted with the high quality education of every student within the district. Their job was not to figure out how to make it work, but they believed it would work, with the cooperation of the city and county, with whom they would be working, and the public, *for* whom they would be working. There was an assumed level of trust on which they were counting in order to give the decision they knew would be controversial the best chance to survive in the face of adversity. Surely the factors they believed were important about the site for the new high school would override any challenges--infrastructural or otherwise.

The board felt assured due diligence had been followed by Lindsay and district administrators with the city and county to set up the necessary conditions to ensure support from those entities. The details of the conversations and agreements with city and county officials were not known to the school board. There was also a sense that the city and county had always been in support of the school district's new school sites in the past and had always worked to provide necessary infrastructure to make things happen. More will be discussed about the nature of the communication among school district officials and those of the city and county later in the dissertation. In summary, communication happened between some in the school district, and some in the city and county, but all the stakeholders were not included, and no concrete agreements were made. There had only been a general attempt from district officials to keep the other entities informed, and hear pertinent information from the other direction. In the end, infrastructural issues and inconsistent communication caused public perception and trust issues among the political subdivisions involved.

The largest issues with infrastructure leading to unrest in the community and among leaders were the sewer and the roads. The Bonner site had no sewer system on or attached to the site. To solve the problem, the county was proposing building an on-site treatment plant, which was a very expensive option. The other option, pumping three miles then allowing another one mile of gravity flow into an existing sewer line, was even more expensive. The question of who would pay for the necessary measures needed to fix the sewer problem at the Bonner site was unknown.

The roads leading to the site were under mounting scrutiny over the summer. Hampton Road, the main access from the west was a two lane, blacktop road with no painted center-line, no shoulders, and deep ditches on either side. Berkley Road, the access from the north and the south was the same type of road to Hampton. There were no CATSO plans in the near future to improve either road. In addition to the safety concerns for high school aged drivers, the wear and tear on the roads, and the ability of roads with limited capacity to handle a large traffic flow was very difficult for the district to get past, especially since they were not in a position, nor was it their responsibility to improve the roads. If development would move into the area, developers would be responsible for the addition of roads, but not for improving the existing ones.

The committee process

The process used by the community committee appointed to evaluate the options for the site of the new high school had a different task than the school board had in their first decision making process. The board was in a position to decide whether or not the Bonner site would be the high school site. The committee was asked to rank among six potential sites the most appropriate for placing the new high school. Alternatively to the

process used by the board, the community committee process had a more focused and concrete set of criteria to consider, and a more extensive set of options on which to apply the criteria. The letter written to committee members and the press release describing the committee's work identified an extensive list of infrastructural categories to be used to help assess the value of any of the sites to be a potential site for the new high school. The instructions were:

While the criteria of land acreage and cost will be considered, evaluations conducted on the sites specific to engineering and geological surveys will be available. Once proposals have been received, Smith & Bennett Engineers, a local group of engineers, geologists, and land surveyors will prepare a preliminary site evaluation to include the following:

- Site location
- Size and shape of the property
- Sewer
- Water
- Telephone
- Cable TV
- Gas
- Electric
- Storm sewer
- Storm water management
- Site topography
- Sinkholes

- Wetlands
- Environmental impairments
- Cultural resources
- Floodplain
- Jurisdictional streams
- Climax Forest
- Current Zoning
- Is annexation needed?
- Off-site improvements needed
- Encroachments
- Legal lot status
- Compatibility of adjacent property owners
- Traffic signals
- Assessor-Real property summary
- Maps

The 21-person committee included the following:

- an architect with the district's architectural firm
- a realtor
- owner of a local company and member of the Adler Public Schools Foundation
- an attorney and Adler Chamber of Commerce board member

- a representative from University of Panbuck-Adler Extension Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis
- a River County commissioner
- an owner of a local company
- a retired educator and the executive director of Panbuck Association of Secondary School Principals
- the president of Adler Chamber of Commerce
- a member of River County Smart Growth Coalition
- the chairman of district enrollment planning committees and former school board member
- two parents, each with children enrolled in APS
- an emeritus professor at University of Panbuck who owned property adjacent to Bonner site (vocal opponent to Bonner site for the high school)
- a retired educator and member of Adler Public Schools Foundation
- a retired superintendent
- vice president of a local bank
- a president of a local bank
- the executive director of Central Panbuck Development Council and former River County presiding commissioner
- the Adler city planning director

The directions given from district administration, the nature of the information provided to this committee, and the representative interests of those on the committee

created a situation where physical infrastructure issues were magnified in relative priority to all other factors. Very little time in committee work was given to social infrastructure issues, like the impact on the demographic enrollment distribution of each of the high schools if the new high school were on any of the given property choices. There is evidence in the media coverage and through interviews that at least some of the committee members were aware of these issues, though they had different opinions about the importance.

There was a message during the public backlash by some in the community that the board did not do a thorough job of considering physical infrastructural concerns when making their first decision. This stance assumes physical infrastructural concerns are the most important factors to be considered when determining the site for school. If this assumption were true, it seems the board members may have been blinded by what they considered a glaring “rightness” of the Bonner property: the size, relatively flat topography, low cost, ease in finding, benevolence of the donor/seller, relative location in the east. This caused them to ignore the significant infrastructural challenges: lack of sewer, insufficient roads, and distance from the city, leading to increased transportation costs.

There is another possibility. It is possible the board was aware of the physical infrastructure issues, though perhaps not to the level they should have been, and proceeded because of the combination of “right” factors and the potential for demographic balance. The data would indicate at least some of the board members considered the demographic factors in balance with other factors. The decision making process the board undertook was not as self-aware as this alternative assumption would

suggest, but it does highlight the misguided assumptions by those in disagreement that the board chose not to weigh important factors. They did, but not in the same way others believed they should have.

The Closed Versus Open Decision Making Process

Collaborative planning models encourage open processes which expose power relationships among the stakeholders involved in decision making (Innes & Booher, 1999; Coaffee & Healey, 2003; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Hillier, 2003). Instead of describing a process as a technical analysis of a set of evidence which point to a decision, the collaborative approach takes into account context and the influence of social interactions that shape the decision making process and the way in which evidence fits with all other factors (Brand & Gaffikin; Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2006, 2010). In this case, contextual realities defined a unique process which exemplified the differences evident when contrasting a closed process for making a public decision and an open committee process.

There were two distinct decision events in this case. The first was a result of a quiet, closed, some would say secretive process by district officials. The second was the result of an extremely open committee process by a purposefully chosen group of citizens and exposed by the media. This feature of this case, above all others, allows the examination of the relationship between a school district and the public within the context of a decision which has broad ramifications for a community.

This section begins with a recounting of the justifications for and the process used by the Board of Education, based on precedent, to determine their decision for the high school site. The section then turns to an examination of how leadership factored into

three different aspects of the decision process: the first decision, made by the Board of Education; the interaction between the school district and the city and county; and the second decision making process, which reconsidered the decision originally made. The benefits and costs of each process, for the individuals involved, the community, and future decision making processes within APS will be described. Finally, the question of the appropriateness of a school board making an independent decision like the siting of a new high school will be discussed.

The Influence of Precedent

In the state of Panbuck, there is no guidebook for public school districts to help with making new school site decisions. There are minimum suggestions for acreage and design, based on capacity and grade levels of the students a school will serve, but no mandates or assistance is offered for decisions about school location. There is also a lack of restrictions, for instance, schools are exempt from zoning rules. While this leaves options quite open for an expanding school district, sometimes having few parameters makes the decision making process more difficult.

APS had been considering the need for building another comprehensive high school for many years and ideas about where to place it had been developed, though not to detail. The process of choosing a site for a high school had not happened since 1967, though the district had built several elementary and middle schools since that time. The superintendent had never been a superintendent prior to serving as one in Adler. She was in her fourth year with APS during the decision making process described in this case. She was not from Adler and she was hired from the outside for her proven record as an assistant superintendent in other districts in the area of curriculum and instruction,

specifically, increasing student achievement. Her experience with the financial and facilities side of school governance was not as extensive.

The facilities committee worked for over a year before making their recommendations to the board in November 2006 that it was time to reconfigure the secondary schools and build another high school. The committee's work was common knowledge and it was apparent the time was coming near for the district to start to move in the direction of action with the new high school. Dr. Green sought the advice of her predecessor, Dr. Kent Pearson, who had been with the Adler Public Schools as a teacher, guidance counselor, and administrator for many years. He retired as assistant superintendent in the early 1990s, but returned as superintendent in 1998, when he replaced a severely disliked superintendent who was viewed to have destroyed the credibility of the district. Pearson was hailed as a hero upon his return and throughout his tenure, which was characterized by stability and public trust. He continues to be popular and regarded as a local icon that knows and understands the community.

Pearson instructed Green and the board to keep the process of searching for land for the new high school quiet. The goal was to get the best property as cheaply as possible and if word got out, the price of any potential land would most definitely go up. It was believed and communicated that once a site was found, the city and county would support the decision and work to make the infrastructure meet the need. The message was, "If you build it, they will come." This is the process that had always been done in the past, and it was what Adler was used to. Whether this process had worked smoothly in the past is unknown, but the perception indicated it had. A former assistant superintendent recalled,

Up till that point in time, in the history of Adler, had been: the school district decided where they wanted to build it, called the city manager, and the county commissioners--and, yeah it was probably done in the back room--but by the time the school district rolled out a building, the roads were there... The classic example is Rocky Fork Elementary. When Rocky Fork was built, Rocky Fork was in a field. While it was still kind of in town there was a gravel road from Rocky Fork... When the school board, at that time, rolled out the plan for Rocky Fork, the next night the city council rolled out an annexation plan and the pavement plan.

The next step was to find an “objective other”, the term Dr. Green used to describe the position, to represent to the district in the quiet search for potential sites. Retired assistant superintendent, Brian Lindsay, was asked to be the real estate consultant for the district. Lindsay had worked under Dr. Green and other superintendents in APS and was one of the most trusted advisors to Dr. Pearson. His job was to find potential properties for the district to acquire, not necessarily for the purpose of building a new high school. The long range facilities plan called for the addition of several elementary schools as well as a high school in the coming years, and there was a belief that the addition of middle schools could be in the near future. Lindsay started work in September of 2006, two months before the facilities committee recommendations were made to the board about the immediate addition of two new elementary schools and a new high school.

Throughout the next few months, Lindsay quietly contacted landowners about the possibility of selling their land to the school district. During that time, he reported

regularly to Dr. Green on his progress, and occasionally to the school board in closed session. Harlen Bonner was one of the land owners Lindsay worked with. The offer from Bonner was brought by Lindsay to the school board by December of 2006. Bonner would donate 40 acres of his land on Berkley Road, and the district could purchase an adjacent 40 acres for \$500,000. Lindsay had some concerns about the infrastructural features and location of the property, which he shared with Dr. Green. The concerns were based on the prospect of the property becoming the site of the new high school in the very near future. They were not concerns about the property and the value of the deal offered by Bonner. It was an ideal piece of property and the price was extremely generous. Lindsay recommended the board acquire the land, without reservation.

He also recommended the district not reveal the Bonner deal to the public, yet. Lindsay was in negotiations with several others and felt they were close to the acquisition of a number of properties at a very reasonable price, if the process were allowed to continue quietly. The board decided to announce the acquisition of the Bonner property in January of 2007, though the district's purpose for the site was not yet determined. The way in which the Bonner property had been found or the deal had been made was not revealed, and Lindsay was able to continue working in the shadows on negotiations for other properties.

On a day in late June 2007, with no prior warning, the local newspapers published articles announcing the school board was expected to designate the Bonner property as the site for Adler's next high school during a special meeting the next day. The decision set in motion a wave of negative reaction from concerned citizens throughout the summer. The rallying cry of those who were against the new high school site was the

secrecy in which the school board had come to their decision. The lack of public input was the foundation on which other arguments were placed, among them: student safety issues due to insufficient roads; high expense, both in bringing sewer to the property and increased transportation due to distance; the insult to the north side of town for choosing a site in the southeast; and the irresponsibility of contributing to urban sprawl by building in a relatively undeveloped outlying area.

The backlash caught the administration and school board a little off guard. The process they used was the same, they believed, as had been done in the past. They had been advised by the great and wise Kent Pearson. In hindsight, different school board members wondered why they never considered a different process, but at the time, they were completely supportive of following precedent. When it became apparent later in the summer that reconsidering through an open process would be necessary, some school board members had a hard time accepting the change in course.

Lindsay warned them of the potential for a negative community reaction. He recounted the results of the decisions for the locations of both of the two existing high schools. The superintendent in 1925 was fired for putting Franklin High School on the site of what had been the fairgrounds because it was too far from the city center. The superintendent in the late 1960s barely kept his job after the decision to put Lakewood out in the country south of town. Though the administration was spared, several school board members were not reelected. Lindsay tried to impress upon them a similar reaction was probable in this case, no matter what site was chosen. Indeed, history repeated itself. Only this time, the school district succumbed to the pressure from the community, and

perhaps responded to what were a few miscues in the leadership throughout the process, by choosing to reconsider their decision.

Leadership

The leadership of public processes, especially in cases where multiple entities are interacting, is a complex interplay between leadership actors in an ever-changing and loosely defined system featuring ambiguous designations of power and a responsiveness to changes in context. Leadership is not a major theme being examined in this case study, but the impact of leadership on this case will be examined in this section, specifically for its influence on the first, closed process undertaken by the school board, the interplay among the school district and city and county officials, and the second, open committee process to evaluate potential high school sites. A description of each of these three will follow a short contextual introduction.

The district's position, in relation to the addition of a new high school, had been anticipatory for a long period of time. It was certainly in the thoughts and distant plans, but a timeline and specific action steps had not been developed prior to the facilities committee starting their work in 2005/2006. The transition from latent anticipation to a position of acting on a plan happened rather quietly. The district put out a bid to secure an architectural firm to design both the new elementary school and new high school in the fall of 2006. The board approved the firm recommended by a subcommittee of the facilities committee in January 2007. The firm would be working on conceptual designs prior to the April bond election. Upon successful bond passage, they would shift to actual building design. Neither public record nor media reports mentioned any more about planning or progress by the district or the architectural firm from January to April. The

newspaper reports announcing the successful passage of the \$60 million bond issue was the first mention of a timeline, saying they, “hope to open...the first phase of the high school by fall 2010”. At that time, a site for the high school had not been designated and the district only owned one property large enough to consider.

Leadership and the school board’s decision process

At some point during the period between April and June, the August 2010 deadline for the first phase of the high school was used by the architectural firm to determine by when a site needed to be designated on which to design the school. The school board continued to have occasional meetings with Lindsay to receive briefs on potential land acquisition progress, but those meetings never formally positioned the Bonner property as the site of the new high school. On June 21, the board had a special session at 8:30am. An article in the newspaper the day before announced one of the agenda items for that meeting would be the approval of the Bonner property as the location of the new high school. There were six community members who spoke against the decision during public comment, including two pairs of married couples. Five of the six lived in close proximity to the Bonner property.

Most board members reported they knew the Bonner property would be the site for the new high school going into the June special session. They had discussed land opportunities throughout the previous few months and felt confident that the only appropriate property the district owned was also a great location for the new high school. Only one, having been elected in April and therefore only privy to information shared since joining the board, had reservations about the decision. The new board member had a difficult time supporting the decision, due to the lack of background information and

process time, but complicated by the fact the landowners of property adjacent to the Bonner property, one of the couples who spoke against the decision and later led the negative campaign throughout the summer, were lifelong friends.

The decision was made in favor of the Bonner property by a six to one vote. The consensus was formed throughout several months of discussion in occasional, closed special session. Dr. Green led the process by which the school board confidently approved the site designation. The decision was the board's to make in June, but Dr. Green's decision was made long before that. In her mind, the Bonner property had been the site for the new high school since the district acquired the property in January.

At that point we had the Bonner property, and once we had that gift, I mean, the blinders went on. It was like, "Oh yeah, this is destined! I mean, look at this!" And... it was huge. I mean here we were out looking for property, and this guy says, "Here's a gift: A gift to the city; a gift to the schools." It just felt so good that we were probably--I know I was closed to anything else.

The precedent of finding sites for new schools seemed to support the feeling that the Bonner property was the right site. The district, through its consultant, had quietly proceeded to find potential property. A generous man donates a relatively flat piece of farmland and offers an adjacent piece at a reduced price, all for the purpose of building a school, to honor his late wife, who had been an educator. No other viable options had become available. The land was in the east part of the county, the direction the district had been looking for years to match what all city and county leaders agreed would be the direction for the next big area of growth. It was a significant distance from town, which was not something most were looking for, but it provided another parallel to the selection

of the Lakewood High School site in the late 1960s. Everything about the site looked the same, even down to the insufficient road infrastructure. The only apparent difference was the land for the new high school was in the east rather than the south: another parallel to history. The next big projected growth area for Adler in the late 1960s was south.

Given the benefit of hindsight, Dr. Green and the board were able to look at Lakewood High School, which now sat in the midst of a vibrant and fully developed area of Adler and imagine the future for the area around the Bonner property. The focus of their decision making process was what was right about the property and not much about what might have been wrong. Lindsay shared his concerns about some of the infrastructural challenges of the site with Dr. Green, but those were not viewed as important enough to engage the board in significant discussions. Green asked Lindsay to recommend the board designate the Bonner property as the site for the high school, but he declined. Lindsay felt that was not consistent with the job he had been given and although he did not indicate he disagreed with the decision, he was not going to endorse any property for a given purpose, as his task was to find property, not determine its use.

While Lindsay was the main negotiator with Bonner in the acquisition of the property, Dr. Green had several conversations with him, as well. It was revealed, two months after the board's decision to place the high school on the property, that Green and Bonner shared a common understanding at the time of purchase, months before the official decision: the land would be the site for Adler's new high school. Green acknowledged Lindsay's continued search for properties could introduce other possibilities, but the feeling she had about how all the pieces had fallen into place with the Bonner site influenced her leadership of the board throughout the spring. The only

time the board discussed property was in closed session, and all information came from Lindsay or Green.

At the time of the deliberation and decision, board members seemed to be supportive of the process and satisfied with the information they were given. The rightness of the Bonner property had them convinced of the merits of putting the school on that site, as well. When looking back on it, there were some concerns about the control of information from the superintendent. For instance, most board members did not know how it was decided a real estate consultant would be hired, how Lindsay was chosen, and how much he would be paid. All of that was done by Dr. Green, and the board was introduced to the idea when Lindsay began giving them reports of his progress. One board member recalls asking Dr. Green about the Lindsay decisions, and the response was “It was in your board book.” The board member felt placing the information in the board book was somewhat burying it to keep it out of the spotlight. This board member also felt the instance was indicative of other communication between the superintendent and the board. Another board member wondered why it had never occurred to them to consider other processes to make this decision.

But we never sat down and said, okay--we know we need the school, we know we have inadequate facilities, we have crowding in them, and elementary schools, in certain middle schools, and we could see this wave coming--we didn't sit down and say, all right, what's the criteria for finding a location? Let's brainstorm! Let's make a list, right? We never even did that! We sort of thought about it--I remember sitting in the meeting and someone said, who's done this before? Kent

Pearson! So we bring Kent Pearson, right, and he got us on this path--that's the way it worked. It worked for him and it was fine.

Interactions among the school district, the city, and the county

Periodic and somewhat regular meetings have always happened between the leadership of the city and county and the school district in Adler. There are sometimes specific agenda items for discussion, but these meetings mainly feature each entity sharing, mostly generalities, about the state of affairs. When specific projects and plans needed to be discussed, those conversations, at least prior to the site designation of the new high school, took place among individual leaders and not in large, open meetings. Dr. Green took the main responsibility for communicating with the city and county regarding the new high school. She reported meeting with the city manager and city planner, as well as at least some of the county commissioners throughout the fall prior to the acquisition of the Bonner property, the winter and the spring leading up to the decision to site the high school there, and during the summer. Lindsay also reports having discussions with all of these leaders. On a few occasions, the board president joined Dr. Green in meetings with city leaders. The content of these discussions is not known, but Green believed all shared a common understanding during the conversations, and she got the indication that the city and county was aware of the direction the district would like to go, in terms of the location of the high school. She also believed they had plans to support the site with infrastructure--either already in place or they understood what plans still need to be made to do so.

In August, Dr. Green and the school board president went to a pre-session of a regular city council meeting to share information regarding the progress toward placing

the high school on the Bonner site. The two believed this would be an information session, since they thought the city manager had indicated support and understanding from the city. Instead, they experienced an angry backlash from a few of the council members, who chastised the school district for leaving them out of the decision making process and putting the city in a position from which they could not infrastructurally support the district's decision. The council members indicated they did not know where the funding would come from to provide sewer services to the site. The main criticism was the fact the school district had never sought public input for the location decision. After a few rebuttals, Green responded to the grilling from the city council members with, "Point well taken."

Some questioned the strength of the relationship among the leadership at the top of the school district, the city, and county. One school board member reported wishing the board had been more aware of the nature of the conversations happening between the superintendent and the leaders of the city and county. The board member also wished the board had done a better job supporting the relationship among all the political subdivisions instead of assuming someone else was taking care of those things. There was an assumption among the board, after it was revealed the city council was not in support, that even though Dr. Green had spoken with the city manager and city planner, the messages did not get to the city council. The city manager reportedly did talk with the city council, but the content of those conversations did not lead to support from the council members.

A gap in communication seemed to provide barriers for a collaborative relationship between the city, the county, and the school district. The leadership among

the three talked, but common understandings and agreements, if there were any, did not make their way to the elected officials in each subdivision. The responsibility for coordination of the communication would seem to fall on APS, since the project was for a school. Coordinating that effort was more complicated than the leadership, either in APS or within the other two entities, understood at the time. The city has paid leadership in the manager and planner, elected leadership in the council, and the planning and zoning committee, who also has a stake in projects like these. The same kinds of subgroups exist within the county. One of the problems of leadership in pulling together different governmental entities in a coordinated effort toward a complex project, like deciding where to build a high school, is determining when a shared understanding and commitment has been achieved. Dr. Green believed she had assurances from both the city and county they were “on board” with placing the high school on the Bonner property, but in reality, it seemed those assurances were not backed past the person who gave them. Knowing the strength of any given agreement or promise seems nearly impossible when dealing with multiple, complex, and political organizations.

The reconsideration: a shift in leadership

The public outcry against the site from a few vocal citizens was well known as they had been making their case throughout the summer. The medium for voicing their concerns was mainly through open letters in the newspaper and anonymous comments to newspaper articles on the internet. There were emails to school board members as well. The city council incident in August seemed to fuel the opposition. A website was started by the most vocal neighbor of the Bonner property to collect names in an online petition against placing the high school there.

The tipping point for Dr. Green, by her own account, was not necessarily the complaining from concerned citizens, but the changing conditions from those who could support infrastructure. The negative response from the city council shed light on deteriorating support from the city and the county for the decision to place the high school at the Bonner site. What seemed like solid support from the city to add sewer infrastructure began to weaken, or at least it appeared to weaken from what Green had been told in earlier conversations. Green had also believed there would be some alterations to planned road improvements in the eastern part of the county to include support for the high school, but after checking again, it seemed those plans were much more tenuous than she thought. Simply put, it had appeared all the conditions were right, and suddenly, they were not.

You know, it was just, from a trickle to a--we could tell that a movement was beginning and we could tell that the city with [the city manager]--they weren't as strong as they had been behind the scenes with us in terms of how they were going to make the sewer happen. At one point we heard because they were doing the overpass on [US Hwy] 37 that in fact, while they did that, they would put in a sewer underneath there, that they were planning to build this road down the, maybe the Coliseum extension. But, then they began to back away from that as the city council did not seem to be firm in their beliefs as to what could happen. [Conditions] began to fall apart. It was not nearly as strong as we, at one time, we thought it was.

The message from the city council and the arguments from the opposition about the lack of public input, combined with a crumbling foundation of support from the city

and county, led Dr. Green to announce APS would reconsider its choice for the site of the new high school. A necessary component for that decision was the introduction of another option. The Bonner decision was made, partially, based on the fact there were no other options. In August, another landowner, Allan Perego, offered to donate 80 acres of land to APS for the purpose of building the new high school. The property was near the intersection of a state road and I-92, about four miles north of the Bonner property. This was not the first time Perego had offered land to APS, but it was the first time he had offered an 80-acre tract that was appropriate in size and features for a high school.

Dr. Green formally announced the district would consider any offer made by landowners for property appropriate for a high school. The Bonner and Perego properties were already known. In all, five more offers were extended to the school district, though one was retracted before consideration. A 21-member committee was appointed by Dr. Green, with input from all the school board members, to consider each offer and rank the options based on a set of criteria heavily favoring infrastructural concerns. The committee make-up included those who were against the Bonner property, representatives from the city and county, and people representing a variety of other interest groups, like realtors, bankers, educators, parents, the Chamber of Commerce, and other groups interested in the development of the city. The committee's meetings were open and Dr. Pearson was appointed the chair. Dr. Green and the school board members were present for each of the meetings, but they did not have a vote nor did they choose to have a say in the committee's deliberations.

The committee met once in September and once in October, when they made their recommendation to the board. All meetings were public. Dr. Pearson kept the process

open, making sure at both of the meetings, after expert presenters gave their information (mostly on infrastructural issues in relation to each property), the committee asked questions and discussed. After all committee discussion seemed over, he then invited members of the audience to come forward for comment. Between meetings, the committee would share via email. Those emails were not published, but they were accessible upon request and referenced during the meetings. The purpose of the email conversation was to have committee members share ideas and opinions in writing so that, during the meeting, they could join the conversation in progress, and perhaps save time during committee meetings.

The leadership shifted throughout the course of both decision making processes, from the superintendent to the public, in an intentional attempt to remove the influence of the district and the superintendent from the decision making. The result changed the way APS would lead decision making in the future. Similar processes in Adler, today, begin with the giving up of leadership control from the beginning, to an extent, by appointing citizen committees to consider the decision at hand.

Benefits and Costs of Closed and Open Decision Making Processes

A major finding of this case study is there was not an aspect of the decision making process, in all phases, that was totally right or totally wrong. Instead, there were benefits and costs associated with the unique processes taken by APS in determining a site for the new high school. Many of the effects associated with decisions made, in conjunction with the context of the case, were only evident with the benefit of hindsight. The reasons for conducting a decision making process in an open or closed way vary as much as the nature of the decisions to be made. In the case of the determining the

location of the new high school in Adler, the underlying reason for making the decision quietly was to control land costs. As it happened, the other costs associated with keeping the public out of the process may have outweighed a little higher price for the land. This section begins by looking at the first, closed decision making process and the resulting effects, followed by an examination of the second, open, decision process.

Private people want privacy

Lindsay described the impact of revealing the process of APS searching for land:

One of the things that happens is, as soon as the light shines on all that, and you've got a set of people out there who say, "Well the light should shine on it, that's a good thing. That's the way the best decisions are made and you get a better price, etc." I'm not going to argue one way or another, but let's put it this way, when the light is shown, people scatter. And they didn't come forward again. And when they did come forward again, this is where I'll start to fudge because I don't want to bust up any confidences, but things changed, okay? They didn't change for the better, let's put it that way. Now, is that a problem? Nah, whatever--it's not a problem. Negotiations are what they are: things are here, things change, and now they are here. That's okay. But they didn't change for the better. Then the scattering caused some people to just say no, we are out. And that's okay, too.

Lindsay spent a good deal of time making connections with landowners in the eastern part of the greater Adler area. He carefully considered as many options as possible and was in active negotiations in no less than seven properties. Not all of those properties were appropriate for a high school, but all could have been of use to APS for some type of school. The Bonner property was the first one which resulted in an acquisition, but

Lindsay reported the district was getting very close to securing multiple properties at very reasonable prices. Decisions about how to use, or whether to use, all of those properties would be done at a later time.

All of those land negotiations were being done in strict confidence. Lindsay was the main negotiator, but he was reporting to Dr. Green throughout the process and he had a trusted confidant who knew the district and community situations very well. The secrecy of these deals was for the purpose of keeping the price low for the school district, but the landowners also wanted to keep things quiet.

In July, news began to surface in the newspapers about Lindsay's involvement in the search for land. The confidence in a quiet process among the landowners began to wane, and the possibilities of obtaining a good deal of land at reasonable prices slipped away. People who were involved behind the scenes preferred to stay there, and when asked by the media if they had been contacted by the school district, the responses were mostly denial. Lindsay pointed out, most did not have to lie in order to mislead reporters:

...one of the really curious things, but not that curious, was whenever ... the Panbuckan (newspaper) did sort of a survey. They called a bunch of people and said, "Have you talked to the school district about the high school site?" First of all, as I just said, I wasn't just doing high school site, and I was never telling people that this was for a high school. I never told Harlen Bonner it was for a high school, I just said, "A school." Now, he knew it could have been a high school, but never came to that conclusion. Some of the people who answer to them--well, let's put it this way: you own a piece of property. You have realtors that mess with you, you have developers that mess around with you, you have a lawyer that

messes around with you, you might even have a couple of business partners. I just named five, six, seven individuals. Well, with any number of those properties that were asked, “Did you talk with the school district?”--I had talked with one of those seven individuals, but they call you and say, “Have you talked to the school district?” It's easy for you to say, “No I haven't.” And you haven't talked to the school district. Now, your partner's guy who did some of the development has talked with me, but no. That was kind of interesting. They were making the assumption that no, they didn't do their--they didn't make their contacts, they just kind of landed over here on this one (the Bonner property). All of that not true, but I wasn't going to say anything, I'm just going to leave it alone.

The assumptions being made by the media were used as arguments against the district for their lack of due diligence in selecting a site for the new high school. Statements were made in the fall by those opposed to using the Bonner site, after multiple other properties were publically offered for the high school site, that Lindsay nor other district officials had not contacted the landowners of the newly offered real estate. Lindsay would not reveal whether he had contact with each of the landowners of the properties being considered during the public committee process, but indicated the assumptions otherwise were “not true”. Lindsay's confidant confirmed that at least the Zachary Road property, the site eventually chosen as the location for the high school, was one of the properties Lindsay was working with, but indicated the price was not appropriate at that time.

Why some landowners would come forward when the process went public and some would not is unknown. Bonner, for instance, was revealed to the public after the

land deal he negotiated with APS was complete. When the media and opposition began to make assumptions about what had and had not happened in relation to the district's search for land and high school site, and specifically about the Bonner property deal, Bonner became frustrated. Lindsay recounted,

Mr. Bonner is a really good guy and an honest man and I think he feels he was burned on all this. Especially when all the media stuff happened and things were being said. He would wonder why, "Why don't you tell them otherwise? Why don't you set the record straight?" Well, some things couldn't really be set straight in a public way, and we weren't going to get into these arguments with "people who buy ink by the barrel", as they say. It was kind of tough for Mr. Bonner and I felt bad for him because he got in the middle of all that, and I think it kind of hurt him. He was never told it would be a high school, he was told it would either be an elementary school, a middle school, or a high school.

Who was and was not involved ahead of time, and what the terms and conditions were before and after the process was opened up seems impossible to piece together. Bonner is evidence there are those who seek to work with school districts for the purposes of doing good work and perhaps honoring loved ones along the way. Bonner did not receive any money in the land deal he made with APS. He donated 40 acres to the school district and donated the other 40 acres to the University of Panbuck. APS purchased the latter 40 acres from the University and the money was used to set up a minority scholarship endowment in the name of Bonner's late wife. The political and public nature of the media coverage after the fact was frustrating to Bonner. Perhaps there were other

landowners who had similar intentions and desires about their own land, but were not interested in being in the public eye in any way.

Perego, who offered to donate the 80 acres for the purpose of building a high school in August 2007, had offered land to the district previously. Each of his offers came from the same larger piece of property which sat very near I-92 on the eastern side of River County. His first offer, in 2005, was 28 acres for the purposes of building an elementary school. That offer was considered by the facilities committee and came well before the district was seriously searching for land for a high school. Dr. Hank Mersell, former assistant superintendent, recalls the first offer from Perego:

The Perego property had come up. And we vetted the Perego property at that time. Perego and his realtor were not happy. They wanted to give us 20 acres, ten of which was in the hundred year floodplain. The additional acreage that we thought we needed for high school, at the time we were thinking 75 to 100 acres, the additional acreage was about 2 1/2 times the average going rate in the County. So, we had taken it back to the facilities committee, and they said, “Not only no, but hell no.”

Perego’s second offer was 50 acres for the purpose of building “any school”. Mersell declined this offer, stating it was inappropriate for the district to consider it before having a long-range plan in place. The third offer was the 80 acre piece for the purpose of the new high school, which came in August 2007. The media characterized the offer as a “two year offer” which still stood, though the offers two years prior had not been 80 acres and had been in a different part of the Perego’s larger property. The letter

from Perego's attorney detailing the conditions of the third offer confirms that each of the offers was different.

The mixture of what was being done behind the scenes and what was out in the open created an awkward sense of reality that was not necessarily accurate. The media was telling the story using incomplete information, and the story was causing questions and innuendos placing the district, and specifically Green, in a negative light. One such instance involved the Perego offers. As discussed above, each of the first two Perego offers came through the facilities committee and Dr. Mersell. It was the committee and Dr. Mersell's decision to reject both offers. When the third offer came, the media wondered why such a generous offer had been rejected in the past, even though the terms, conditions, and context were all different at the time of the first two offers. When reporters began to ask questions, Dr. Green reported not having known about the first two Perego offers. This was true. Not only were the offers considered in the facilities committee, but Dr. Green's husband had died shortly before the offer was considered by the district through the facilities committee. Situations like these were used to indicate Green and the district were not putting forth a coordinated effort toward land acquisition, even though the incident in question happened well before any sort of coordinated effort was in place.

Going public

What happens when a decision making process which had been private goes public? In the case of the new high school site in Adler, it is possible the number of options available for land decreased. It is also possible more options became available. It is also possible the price for potential pieces of land went up, though based on the

available data, it is probable the impact on price when the process went public was a combination of increased and decreased pricing, as well as a varying changes in terms and conditions from what might have been in place prior. There is little question the political nature of the situation increased with increased exposure. A more thorough look at the political nature of the decision making process will be later in this chapter.

One of the school board members, when asked if they would have done anything differently, in hindsight, responded, “I might have been more questioning when we were still allowed to be in confidential settings.” This statement indicates the board member felt there was information they should have sought earlier in the process, but also that the ability to do so was lost when the board and their discussions were no longer protected by confidentiality. A school board in the state of Panbuck is not able to meet confidentially except when considering personnel issues and issues involving the purchase of real estate. The deliberations about the Bonner property and any other potential land deals, in late 2006 and 2007, were conducted in special closed sessions.

There are considerations that might be taken by a school board in closed session that might not be otherwise. For a variety of reasons, discussions behind closed doors allows for more candor and perhaps a less politicized approach. As discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, the school board may have considered infrastructural issues, but also, though perhaps informally, considered issues of demographic balance among school enrollments which would potentially result given the location of the new high school. These issues are sensitive and are not always seen as appropriate to discuss in public settings, which may have been the reason they were not seriously considered when the larger public committee reviewed the potential locations.

Another board member had stronger feelings about the ability for public boards to have confidential discussions, in this case and in general.

You know, this is just my personal thinking at this point, and at the time, I was really big on public input. And still, I mean, I facilitated the public forums [referring to public forums about the proposed boundary lines for the secondary reorganization planned in conjunction with the opening of the new high school], I think it's important process. But, in issues like this, you get a--this is going to sound terrible--but you get a bunch of people that don't know the details and the complexity of what you're dealing with, and I would even put myself in that same boat. But I trusted the city leaders and the city administrators and the school district administrators and the due diligence that they put into it. I think part of our problem today, in society, this is a bigger question, but there's too much input. There's too much information that people are only getting bits and pieces of. I almost wish that C-SPAN wouldn't show coverage of Congress so that they could have some conversations without worrying about their ten second sound bite. I think that there is value to closed-door discussion because you can get people who know what's going on to actually have conversations. Even the people that are there for the wrong reasons--you could still have a more real conversation that is planful and thoughtful and includes more variables than having a public conversation with 1000 people. So, I'm going back and forth between wanting today and what I was thinking at the time. I was hopeful that the public process would come to the same conclusion that we had come to privately--we found that there were... It just got so caught up in--I think a lot of the people that were upset

didn't have any idea what they were upset about I don't think they had the slightest clue, other than there wasn't public input. And that's where the Herald (newspaper) was. The Herald was pushing that whole angle. But I don't think people understood--I don't think that the issue of the property itself was a public outcry. So, it just got all scrambled up and a lot of things didn't matter at all--and the things that did matter the most were not being reported.

The open committee process provided some advantages, as seen by some of the board members. They communicated they believed the process used by the committee separated the decision from bias, even though there were different interests represented by committee members. Pearson reported that though a few may have come to the process with an agenda, most seemed to be motivated by a genuine desire to find the best location for the school. Another board member was less concerned about whether bias was present, but had learned through the experience of public service that the public process was important. It had to be done in order to legitimize any decision.

The question of whether the committee process resulted in a correct or better decision resulted in a mixed response from board members and others. More important than the quality of the decision was the fact the process was open and, in a way, an answer to critics of the first decision. Green indicated that when it was time to reconsider, it was important to give the decision completely over to the open process, and if they were able to find a better option, that was an advantage to all. She and others emphasized that by making the decision to turn the issue over to a public committee, they needed to trust the process. The process resulted in a recommendation to the board that was different than the site the board selected in the first place, and the board trusted the public

process by changing course. Dr. Green and several of the board members indicated they should have opened the process up from the beginning.

Was this Decision Appropriate for a School Board?

The nature of the first decision making process was a quiet, closed process, led by the superintendent and undertaken by the board of education in what was admittedly a less than thorough analysis of all the information they had available to them. Precedent and the advice of a trusted expert influenced the way in which the leaders considered their job. In the end, changing course and putting the decision to an open, committee process changed the original decision of the board and placed the new high school at a different location. The way the school district makes other important decisions, including determining the location for a new school now undergoes a process more similar to the open committee process than that of the closed, confidential process involving just the superintendent and the board.

One school board member suggested it was an unreasonable expectation, from the beginning of this case, to ask the school board to make a school site decision in a way that adequately takes into consideration all the factors necessary to make a sound decision. The board has a long list of functions and not only is it a tremendous drain on resources for the board to engage in that kind of work, the expertise of board members varies by experience on the board and experiences outside of their work on the board. The board member who had been elected in April prior to the June decision admitted not having adequate background with which to make an educated decision. Another board member had been on the school board for over a year at the time of the decision, and also felt inadequately prepared to make such a decision, in hindsight.

Additionally, board members are members of the community. The emotional nature of a decision like this one, that can change the course of the development of the city and the county, and impact the lifestyle and possibly the financial situation of those living in close proximity, makes it a socially and politically risky proposition for an elected official to undertake. This risk is, perhaps, accepted by elected officials, but would it change the kind of engagement and input a board member would give to the process, if they felt there were fewer political or social implications to their decision?

A committee, like the site evaluation committee appointed by APS, is usually focused on a one-time task. Their meetings have one main agenda and though it could take a lot of time to get through the myriad of information and factors available to consider, they are not distracted by other jobs they must do. There is also opportunity with a committee to appoint people with more expertise than those elected on a school board. Several of the school board members appreciated watching and learning from those who knew more than they did about some of the issues related to the potential school sites consider the choices.

Politics

Decision making, as conceptualized in the viewing of this case, results from a complex intermingling of a collaborative, imperfect process, the influence of evidence and context, and the social interactions among the individuals involved, which include the knowledge and attitudes each brings to the table and politicized power relationships (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2006, 2010; Honig & Coburn, 2007, Healey, 1997). Ignoring any of these factors can cause leaders to have missteps in the midst of the process. In most cases, doing so perpetuates political problems that can limit

options for the process and cause power shifts among stakeholders, creating new contextual realities within which decision processes work. Just as the overall process involves the conglomeration of a variety of factors, the interconnectedness of all factors means inattentiveness to any one factor will have an effect on the influence of all others.

Surrounding and embedded within the decision making process for the location of Adler's new high school was a political environment in which leaders had to navigate. The emotional connection people in a community have with their schools and the political nature of public service combined to create a difficult and complicated situation that made the process messy and prone to questions from critical members of the community. In the last major section of this chapter, the political realities within this case will be discussed. Those political factors will first be addressed through the issues with communication between the school district and the city about county. Next, the political causes and ramifications of public perception, in the context of this case are examined through the details of the arguments against the school board's decision to place the high school on the Bonner site, the role of the media and its impact on public sentiment, and the results of a decline in the public trust. A unique component to this case in the person and perception of the superintendent will then be discussed. Lastly, the impact of the local nature of this case in the relationships of the stakeholders to each other and their community will be described.

Communication with the City and County

School districts cannot build schools without the cooperation of other local governmental agencies to provide needed infrastructural and political support. There is no protocol for the way in which this support is fostered within any community. In this case,

the protocol of a long standing network of “good old boys”, as many of the people interviewed for this case study at the school district level had established relationships with city and county leaders and the benefit of a strong and well-respected school district. Decision making processes in a system like this followed a different procedure than this case, featuring a relatively new and not well connected superintendent.

The superintendent, the school board president, and the real estate consultant all reported having talks with the leaders of the city and county. At a city council pre-meeting in early August 2007, council members said they were not consulted about the high school location decision. A representative from the Planning & Zoning Commission was quoted in the newspapers the commission was not consulted. The presiding county commissioner (who took office on January 1, 2007) told reporters he communicated the superintendent and real estate consultant on one occasion--after the board had already decided to place the school on the Bonner property. Another county commissioner implied in a newspaper article, quoted below, he and the other commissioners were also left out of the process,

River County Northern District Commissioner Chuck Bearing said it would have helped to be involved from the start in conversations about a school site.

"It's always nice to be included on the front end of those decisions that will have an impact on infrastructure," Bearing said. "That way we can try to provide information so that they can make as much of an informed decision as possible.

"I would hope with any future sites--they don't have to give us a specific location--that they could give us a general area, and we can tell them the infrastructure implications to try to help them make an informed decision."

Lindsay says those conversations did happen and the infrastructure implications were shared.

The communication issue between APS, the City of Adler, and River County became a political problem for the district as they tried to defend their choice for the high school site. The burden of proof for any communication with the city and county lay with APS and they were not in a position to share the details of those discussions. Revealing the nature and existence of conversations could have compromised some of the confidences held with landowners who were assured anonymity. By the time the issue was presented to the public through the city council pre-meeting and subsequent media coverage, the defensible position of school leaders had been weakened to a point where active rebuttals would likely have had only adverse affects.

Had due diligence been done, in terms of appropriate communication with the city and county? School district leaders would agree with others that it had not. It was glaringly obvious that whatever communication had happened in preparation for, and after, choosing a site was not sufficient to garner the necessary support from the city and the county. The reports of not having included important leaders in both the political subdivisions, whether true or not and to what degree, was irrelevant by the time it became a public issue. A closed process, where several different entities should be included in communication, proved to be a difficult mechanism for creating ownership among all stakeholders. The assumption on the part of the superintendent and board president was

communication, and the building of support, was continuing down the line from those with who they were in contact. This was not the case

Beyond the city council members who argued the city could not afford to extend sewer service to the Bonner site, the espoused issue was less about the ability for the city and county to support and partner with the district in building the high school at the Bonner site and more about communication. City and county leaders simply wanted to be included. Pearson recalled in school siting choices in the past, the necessary conversations had happened to set up the support of the city and county by the time the district was ready to reveal their decision. The differences in the frequency, persons involved, and the nature of preliminary conversations between school district leadership and the city and county, when comparing previous school site decisions and that of the new high school, cannot be determined. Regardless, the relationships among the long-time Adlerite school district leadership of the past and those of the superintendent, who was not from the town, provided a situation where the same level of communication as had happened in the past might not have been sufficient, even if the same in all other aspects.

Public Perception

Public processes rely on public support, as much as those processes react to changes in public sentiment. Gaining an understanding of what the public is thinking and feeling about an issue is a challenge of leadership. The ability to respond varies based on the situation, which can change by any number of factors at anytime. After a brief introduction, this section lays out two of the major factors in this case that impacted the public perception, and the resulting political landscape within which APS leaders found

themselves working. The citizens who vocalized their displeasure with the Bonner site for the new high school had some specific arguments they used, some successfully. The media in Adler became a factor in this case, especially in the way in which they covered the story and the ability the media websites offered disgruntled community members to post opinions. Finally, the impact of the incremental decline in public trust on APS leaders will be discussed.

There was a sense among school district leadership that public disapproval was mounting, reaching its height near the end of the summer. Whether the general perception was accurate can never be known. The contextual factors surrounding the political landscape had an impact on what was believed, by district leadership, to be the sentiment of community members surrounding their decision to place the high school at the Bonner site.

The arguments against

Citizens came forward to speak against the Bonner site as that of the new high school, citing a variety of reasons. A major theme of the complaints was the exclusion of the northern part of the city by placing the high school in the southeast part of the county. The concern was first raised by the adjacent neighbor to the Bonner property, who continued to emphasize this point throughout the campaign against the board's decision. It was not until later in the process when people who actually lived in the north joined this argument.

It had been the plan for several years, among the central office leadership, to build the next high school in the east. Most Adler leaders agreed the next big area of growth would be east, and although the last growth boom had been to the north, the land area

within district boundaries north of Franklin High School was small, in relation to the space afforded by going east or west. A high school in the north would be too close to Franklin. Additionally, it was the desire of district officials to avoid creating a north-south-central city, tiered style attendance area configuration, which would create an imbalance in the demographic distribution among the enrollments of the three high schools. By building in the east, a pie-shaped map could provide a better opportunity to create a more equitable balance among enrollments.

This message was not sufficiently communicated to the community. Even though it was the most consistent message from APS in the months leading up to, and after the Bonner property designation, one or two board members mentioned, in newspaper articles, the north as a possibility in late 2006. Those comments were enough to ground an argument by a few citizens for the north that carried through until the large, open committee process began in September 2007. One of the points made by the most vocal neighbor of the Bonner property was the new high school should be located near the students it was supposed to serve. It would have been a hardship on families in the northern part of the city to travel all the way down to that site to go to high school. In open letter to the editor of one of the daily newspapers, he wrote:

The high school should be placed where the people for whom it is being built live. Many parents in the northern part of the school district were stunned and justifiably disappointed to see a location southeast of Adler selected. That extra several miles of commute each way would place a heavy burden on many families in terms of both cost of gas and much longer drive times.

This argument was flawed. The new high school was not planned to serve any specific population of students. The plan was, and had always been, to choose a site, then follow with a committee-designed attendance configuration, changing the boundaries for all three high schools. In fact, it was the desire of Pearson and others to choose a site which drew from both the Franklin and Lakewood attendance areas, meaning the new school would likely be serving students from portions of the central, east, north, northeast, south, and southeast.

There was another, more political, argument for the north used by the opposition. There was a belief the north, in general, was being left out of economic development opportunities in development plans in Adler and adding a high school in that part of the city could do a lot to change that injustice. Related to this argument was the fact a population boom had been happening in the north and the district should have been working to serve that population instead of building in a yet undeveloped area in anticipation of growth. Those in the east added to this concern by accusing APS of contributing to urban sprawl by putting the high school in the undeveloped eastern part of the county. Not only was this a disruption to the lifestyle of those who chose to live in that area, it would force an unnaturally paced growth toward the site.

The insufficient road infrastructure was also a major concern of the citizen campaign against the Bonner site. The road providing access from the north and south, as well as both the access roads from the west were two-lane with no shoulders. One road was a state road, but the other two were county roads. There was a not a plan in place by the state or the county to improve any of those roadways in the near future, which concerned the public. In addition to the stress the high volume of traffic a large high

school would bring to roads built for significantly less use, the safety of young drivers on narrow roads with deep ditches on either side was a major concern.

The distance from the city and majority of the population would result in significantly increased transportation costs for the district. Staggeringly large numbers were determined by private citizens and reported in the media as the estimated transportation cost increase. An additional concern was the lack of sewer service to the property. The public did not use this argument as actively as the city and county did, but it was definitely seen as a concern.

The points being made against the selection of the Bonner site as the location for the new high school were punctuated by an emotional appeal which accused APS of having conspiracy-like motives for making decisions in a closed process. The lack of public input was seen as a ploy to push an agenda to exclude citizens and ignore the will of the people. Questions about why the process had been so secret discounted the claims by the district that the quiet nature of the decision was to keep the land costs as low as possible. Some citizens rejected the notion there would have been any price inflation by opening the process and implied the reason for keeping it closed must have been for reasons the district was not willing to admit. The media, through the way in which they reported the story and the avenues they provided for citizens to voice their opinions, seemed to accentuate the emotional nature of the opposition.

Media

Two factors define the media's role in this case: the influence of a dedicated education reporter and the opportunity for anyone to post a comment to every news story published on the newspapers' websites. The education beat reporter for the larger of the

two daily newspapers in town was well known, and somewhat feared by APS officials, for her ability to create a negative spin on most stories about the school district. School board members reported being paranoid about talking with her and most also had the feeling another board member was feeding information to the reporter to cause question and suspicion about the work they were doing. A more thorough analysis of the structure, style, perceived intent, and tone of the articles written by the reporter could be done to determine if the perceptions of the school board members were accurate. Whether there was actual intent to discredit APS through her stories, this was the perception among those within the district, including school board members and central office administration.

The newspapers in town had free online access at the time of this case. This included the ability to read the full versions of all published articles from the print version of the newspaper, and to post comments anonymously by creating a free user profile. Comments could be read by anyone accessing any article, regardless of whether they had a user profile themselves. Though public comment online was not a new concept, it provided a new wrinkle to the political nature of the high school site decision. Anonymous comments were generally negative, questioning of the school district, and somewhat mean-spirited. One school board member described it as the “wild west”, in terms of people saying whatever they wanted to without fear of repercussion or a sense of responsibility. The frequency of these kinds of comments created a perception of a widespread negative sentiment among the public. It was impossible to know the true level of opposition to the site decision. In the absence of information otherwise, it appeared the district was being bombarded with messages suggesting they had made a terrible mistake.

Impact of decline in public trust

The Adler Public Schools had enjoyed a long period of a high level of public trust under the leadership of the established, hometown administration of the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. Under the leadership of the same superintendent for seventeen years, the district passed 15 consecutive ballot issues and built several schools. After his retirement in 1994, two superintendents followed from outside the community. The first had his contract bought out after a sexual harassment scandal, and the second was perceived as one of the most disliked public figures in recent memory in Adler. Pearson returned and brought stability to the public trust for the five years he served as superintendent. In the fourth year of Dr. Green's tenure, the tide was starting to turn back in the direction of suspicion and distrust for the school district. The school board, which usually featured long tenured members who provided steady leadership in concert with administration, was starting to be questioned. One new school board member at the time of the decision recalled,

the tenor of the community was so negative--the groundswell: "You people don't know what you're doing"...and we may have known what we were doing, but it wasn't perceived that way in the eyes of community because of the naysayers

The vocal neighbor to the Bonner property had his first audience with the school board at the meeting in which the decision was made to place the high school on the Bonner site. The arguments used at that time did not hold much weight with the board. Board members recalled his concern with the devaluing of the land around the Bonner property if the high school were to be placed there. Given the Lakewood site as an example, history showed the opposite would happen: not only would the property values

rise, but rather impressively over time. There was another concern that building the school would bring unwanted development to the area, inhabited by people who chose to live there because it was relatively undeveloped. Board members understood the concern, but felt the growth coming toward the area would change the nature of the neighborhood eventually, regardless of the addition of a high school. Since the school district owned the Bonner property, a school would almost assuredly go on the property at some point, so it was only a matter of time. The complaint about the lack of public input, which was also made at that June meeting, was only moderately considered by the board because at that point, they believed they were following the accepted precedent for selecting the site for a school.

As the summer wore on, the list of grievances the neighbor who led the citizen fight against putting the high school at the Bonner site became longer, more sophisticated, and laced with a tone of suspicion about the secrecy the district operated under in making their decision. Other citizens publicly added their concerns about the Bonner site and the credibility of the board of education who decided to put the new high school there. Board members watched as they were questioned in the media and on the blogs. The trust the public had placed in the school board seemed to be weakening. In a town where the school district had enjoyed an environment in which its decisions were accepted for being made with the best interest of Adler's students in mind, the change in tone was marked. It now appeared the private citizen was regarded as more credible than the elected board. This was a trend that seemed to be affecting all public offices at that time. The city council, the county commission, even the state legislature was under a greater amount of scrutiny than in the past.

Whether this was an undesirable state of affairs is one's own opinion. There were some consequences, beyond the reconsideration of the location for the high school. The decreased confidence of school board members and the reduced likelihood for them to be reelected are natural consequences of a deteriorated public trust, but the ability of the board to stand for issues important for students is also compromised. In this case, the demographic balance among the enrollments of the three high schools was not considered with the same priority, among the committee that made the site recommendation in the fall, as it had been by the school board in their deliberations in the winter and spring. It was a difficult topic to discuss, and the school board members were no longer able to bring it forward. They had been muted by the committee process and no longer held the political clout to be a part of the discussion. Lindsay encouraged some on the committee who had knowledge of the issues related to demographic balance to discuss them as important factors to be considered, but none did. In the end, this issue was only marginally considered by the citizen committee who recommended the Zachary Road property as the high school site. The committee was believed (by school board members) to have smart, conscientious, and earnest members who worked hard to make an informed decision, but school leaders felt the issue of demographic balance was missed.

The Superintendent Factor

The planning table, as described by Cervero & Wilson (1994, 2010, 2006), must include an understanding of who is at the table and what they bring, in terms of their political and social power, the interests they represent, and, simply put, who they are. Simplistically, this could be understood as the impact of personality and the relationship among personalities when viewing a collaborative process. Personality does shape this

relationship, but sometimes there are factors, which transcend personality, that place a person or a process in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or, in the case of APS's superintendent, it might have been she was in the right place at the wrong time.

A factor impacting this case is the influence of the relationship the superintendent had with the Adler community, and more specifically with other leaders in Adler. She recalled,

You know, things are never really, you know, simple...or totally--it's never totally about that situation. There were a number of things going on in other arenas. And I think I was a negative pull on this process. I think had someone else been able to do this, and I had been removed it could have been more positive...the process itself. Because there were other things going on politically with me and some other decision makers in the city, that I think, brought a negative aura to this whole process. I don't think that it was purely simple. The decisions were made about this. And I'll always think that was unfortunate. I think this could have worked--the decision making did not appear to me to be radically different from how we in Adler had made decisions before. But I think I was bringing some negative energy to that. Not personally, it just--it was what was going on. Yeah, that didn't help.

Dr. Green was brought to Adler to replace Dr. Kent Pearson. Adler had never had an African American, nor a female, superintendent. She was hired for her strong background in curriculum and instruction and a solid record of producing increased student achievement in other school districts as an assistant superintendent. Members of

the school board responsible for hiring her report she was the top candidate by a wide margin. She was polished and professional, and exactly what they were looking for.

There was a feeling by some Adler was ready to accept an African American superintendent, when APS hired Green:

She was a classy black woman that was articulate. Adler was into that sort of thing, we had a black president at the University, we had a black minister at Flagship United Methodist Church. I mean, it was kind of a thing of black leadership showing up at the right time. Everybody wanted her to succeed.

In the end, Green did not succeed. After her fifth year as superintendent, she retired abruptly under mounting pressure from the media and the community in August, right before the school year began. Whether race had anything to do with the acceptance level and eventual demise of Green's tenure as superintendent is not the focus of this dissertation, but it is a factor not lost on those involved in the decision making process for the location of the high school. Race did not seem to influence the high school site decision directly, but it may have had to do with the trust given the superintendent and the district through the case. One person interviewed shared an opinion on this issue:

Adler is a unique place. It is a wonderful place....it's a small town, and we in Adler think we are a little better than we are, and there's nothing wrong with that.... we think we're pretty liberal, and we are in here, but we are pretty conservative....So when Lois was brought in, I thought that we were going to be more ready for that and we were not. There were some people that...she didn't stand a chance, I'm sorry. Interestingly enough I think the country did better with

a black president than Adler did with a black superintendent. I don't mean to cut Adler down, but that was one of the underlying facts.

The public pressure on Green seemed to begin throughout the decision process for the high school site. There were undertones that the pressure began more privately prior to the summer of 2007. One factor several board members mentioned as forcing a, perhaps, premature decision on the high school location was a sense of urgency Dr. Green brought to the process. Some failed to understand why a June 2007 decision had to be made. One board member inquired about tabling the decision and was told the construction timetable would not allow a delay if the school was to be ready to open in August 2010. In the end, a delay in the building design happened when the board's decision was reconsidered by the open committee process in the fall. The architect indicated, at that time, the design phase could be postponed until November 2007, and still result in an on-time opening.

The apparently rushed timetable was perplexing to the leadership. The real estate consultant felt the pace at which he and Green had been working to secure properties for the district was unnecessarily pushed when it was announced the site decision would happen, abruptly, in June. Some board members recalled being surprised the decision was happening so quickly and indicated they wished they had more time. One board member believed Green knew her job was "on the line" and moving forward with the high school construction was a necessary action to help salvage her credibility in the community. Green said the accelerated timeline was in response to the 76% approval received by the public to the bond issue funding the high school project among other things. She believed that was a mandate to move forward with the construction, as soon as possible, as well as

the secondary reorganization planned to happen concurrent to the opening of the new high school.

Well you know, we had some strong positives. I mean when we ran that bond, and it passes by the highest margin ever, I think 76%. We'd never hit 76% before. We felt that that was a mandate to move forward, that we had community support; that people were willing for us to spend future tax dollars to make this happen.

Green was an outsider to the Adler community and the leadership establishment in town. She was being compared to other superintendents from the outside. None had ever been successful. Her public persona was not as politically savvy as most believed she needed to be in order to create inroads within the community.

...her style was different. She was not...go out there and hobnob with the public-- she was quite capable, but she might have been viewed as a little cold, a little distant, she didn't go to the Rotary and Chamber of Commerce stuff and, you know, pat people on the back. And she had her tight friends--good folks, but she didn't do it the way, I think, Adler wanted it done. When I say Adler, I mean some of the insiders.

This lack of being connected may have been compounded by the fact she was an African-American female. The perception among many of those interviewed was the “powerbrokers” in the community were predominantly white males. Green’s attempts to engage in community networks and those “in charge”, symbolically or otherwise, were not overly successful. Early in her tenure, she joined the Rotary Club and became a part of a few other community organizations and boards, but later quit participating in many of those groups. The data suggests she was unable to develop strong relationships with

those who could help her. Pearson suggested, “Lois didn't have [those] hard-core people in the community that she had cultivated to allow people to come to her aid”.

She was described by several as having a cold and reserved demeanor, though everyone interviewed believed that was not her true personality, this how she seemed in public situations. Green’s husband passed away in the midst of her time as superintendent, about a year before the decision making process for the location of the new high school. It was kept rather quiet and was not publicized. In hindsight, other district leaders believed the loss of her husband was a factor in her pulling away from some of her public commitments and perhaps contributed to the perception of her lack of warmth.

There was a perception her leadership style featured making a decision and not be open to opposing viewpoints. It is possible this tendency led to her lack of consideration, along with the board for some of the infrastructural concerns of the Bonner site. Looking more deeply into these issues might not have changed the decision, but having investigated further would have put board members in a more defensible position when complaints and questions came forward from the public.

Regardless of the issues pertinent to this case, there were those who believed Lois Green never stood a chance of having success as the superintendent of the Adler Public Schools. The race, gender, and being an outsider issues placed her at an immediate disadvantage in the community which could not be overcome by her significantly strong attributes as an instructional leader. The high school site decision making process may have only accentuated the areas of weakness in a way that accelerated her inevitable end. Others implied leadership issues not related to her race or gender became magnified

through the high school siting decision and it was only a matter of time before these flaws would lead to a shortened tenure. A combination of all these factors related to the superintendent's relationship to the community and those she directly led was a major contribution shaping the unique process used for selecting a site for Adler's new high school.

No such thing as an "objective other"

Just as the impact of personality contributes to the context of a decision making process, the relationship between decision makers and the community in a public process, like that of finding a site for the new high school, situates a decision making process within a system that affects the individuals involved in a way which may impact their approach to the decision. When the meetings are over, these people go home to their families who all live, work, school, and interact with the same community for which the decision was made. Influencing a decision making process can pose an emotional or social threat to someone sitting at the planning table.

A significant attribute of this case was the fact it was local. Every person involved was someone in or attached to the Adler community. Objectivity was not possible given everyone and everything was somehow connected through any number of relationships that made them an Adlerite. This connectedness carries an inherent risk to person and place when dealing with issues that might cause disagreement and the opportunity for gain or loss among fellow Adlerites. Lindsay pointed this out when he described the nature of the work he did for the district. Dr. Green described him as an "objective other" they could hire to work on the district's behalf. Given his position as a retired central

office administrator and 31-year resident of Adler, he saw himself as anything but an objective other:

See, I'm trying to put this the right way without--I was kind of hired to look at land, but not hired like an outside consultant. Because you hire an outside consultant to come in from like, Massachusetts. They come in--you just do it. You give the recommendation, and then you leave town. Then, as things go south, everybody can just go, "But that guy's gone, he got paid quite a bit of money and he's out." That's not what I was. They said, "Well we'll pay this," and I negotiated half of what I was offered. And, I did that because I thought, this is going to get in the paper and then everybody's going to go crazy. Then I had some of my good friends...who said, "Look, it doesn't matter, go ahead and take the big one because it doesn't matter if it's the big one or the half thing, you are still going to get nailed." I said, I'm still going to take [half of the offer]--I viewed my role as far different as somebody from the outside who you could just blame it on the consultant. I was just going to try to help find some properties.

The risk Lindsay took on with this project, for half of what was offered, was significant to his status as an Adlerite. He knew the consulting work would be different than if he were truly an outside consultant. Not only would he have more knowledge to do the job more thoroughly, but if things "went south", he would be there to take the blame as well. His advisors were right, Lindsay did "get nailed" when it came out in the press that he had been paid by the district to represent them in a property search. The decision was scrutinized for the secrecy in which it happened, but also for the amount he was paid, even though it was half of what he had been offered to do the job. This

information never made the newspaper. A real estate agent commented on the fee Lindsay was paid and called it “a bargain” compared to what he or other real estate professionals would charge for a similar service, but that one short paragraph in the middle of one of the many articles with Lindsay’s name in it was not enough to erase the scandalous implications attached to Lindsay’s involvement. Pearson said, “Brian wasn’t looking for anything to do, he just was asked to do that.” Lindsay agreed to help the school district in the community where he lived with his family for so many years.

The school board members were Adlerites as well. They entered public service in order to help maintain a great school district. The political minefield they found themselves within during the high school site decision process was not a comfortable position for anyone. Each board member interviewed remembered the process with disdain and exhibited a reluctant and sometimes negative affect when recalling the events of that summer. There is an emotionally discouraging response when a person finds themselves being criticized by the public in their own community. In short, the board members felt burned by the process. They felt they were doing the right thing by following the protocol established by those who came before them. Their predecessors helped to establish the solid reputation of the school district. Lindsay warned the board of the political danger they would likely encounter, based on the historical accounts of the Franklin and Lakewood site selections, but they were not prepared for the reality that came. Lindsay’s main point was no matter the decision they made, it will not be popular. He encouraged them to think of it as an investment they may not be around (in their current position) to see pay-off:

I told them the story about Franklin and Lakewood and I said, “So, you know if it happens and you select a site, get ready to steal up and have some things happen. People may lose jobs, but bottom line is, what will they think of you in five years? Will they think you're nuts? What will they think of you after 10 years? Well, maybe you weren't nuts? And in 15 years, they are going, ‘Hey those people did a good job.’”

Even with this prophetic warning, the members were discouraged by the way the process seemed to discredit them.

Summary

The decision making process for the location of Adler’s new high school featured two distinctly different processes, each culminating with distinct decision points. Constraining factors were a common thread weaving throughout the case. The comparison of the first, closed decision making process of the school board and the second, public, open committee process, leading to the recommendation of the final site selected makes this case unique and provides an example of one way a community can approach a decision. The political implications of the process in its entirety shed light on the dynamics of a local community and the complexity of leading within it.

The major concern of both the decisions were the infrastructural issues that accompany the addition a large comprehensive high school to any site, especially one a significant distance away from sufficient city and county services. The expertise to consider all such issues is lacking with most public officials. In the end, when a mixed committee came together to consider the question of location for the high school,

developing a greater understanding of the issues and implications of infrastructure had a strong impact on the final decision.

The closed decision making process the school board implemented to make the first decision proved costly for the school board and the superintendent. Responding to mounting criticism and changing conditions within the context of the case, the district reconsidered with a second, open process featuring a committee comprising of community representatives from several different interest areas. The second process proved to be more popular and featured a sense of greater objectivity and transparency the community was seeking.

The political environment surrounding the case highlighted a shifting landscape in which school district leaders were slow to adapt to a weakening position in the community due to a diminishing level of public trust. The influence of some vocal citizen opposition, the media, and the shaky relationship the superintendent had with other community leaders reduced the political stature of the school district and its leadership. These new realities forced them to relinquish the site selection decision to a designated committee and operate from a responsive position, rather than as the trusted leader they had been in the past.

5. DISCUSSION

The decision making process examined in this case provided the opportunity to view two distinct decision models and the accompanying contextual environment surrounding and connecting them. The advantages and disadvantages of the unique processes found within this case study may help the reader analyze similar situations in which a careful analysis of the situation, both inside and outside the decision at hand, will help design processes that have a better chance of success. In this section, five assertions are made about the historical case study as it is viewed through the conceptual lens on decision making defined by the researcher. Implications for leadership are addressed, followed by a short summary.

Lack of Forethought in Planning the Process

The ontological underpinnings of collaborative planning models highlight the influence of context, the experiences, knowledge, and beliefs of individuals involved, and human interactions on the reality of any given planning situation (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007). Each decision making endeavor is unique. In the case of the original decision making process APS used to choose the location for its new high school, careful attention to the contextual realities of the situation, in advance of considering a decision making process was absent. Basing their process on precedent alone indicated consideration of the contextual factors surrounding this decision was limited, therefore limiting the board of education's ability to respond and adapt to the unique challenges faced when their initial decision was made public.

At least two factors from this case might have altered the course of the first decision making process had they been addressed from a collaborative planning perspective. The first was recognizing the difference between the decision making process for locating a high school and that of locating any other kind of school. The advice on which the superintendent and the board based their processes came from a well respected former district administrator who had a great deal of history with the APS district. He had been a part of several different land acquisition and school site selection processes, but he had not been involved with the process that led to the siting of either of the other two high schools. The relative impact of the decision for a high school location as compared to that of any other school, especially when the additional high school will change the current configuration from two high schools to three, is much greater. This reality was not unknown to board members and the superintendent, but the lack of experience with a more analogous situation on which to base their decision caused them to default to a precedent which did not necessarily match the task at hand.

Graham & Healey (1999) discussed the differences in experiential units, like the example of a mile in one direction may yield a different experiential length as a mile in another direction. Similarly, the leadership defining the task of finding the site for a high school, given the context of the time, setting, etc. as the same as the experiences of prior school siting decisions in the APS implied all decisions about where to locate schools can be treated the same. From a collaborative planning viewpoint, this is not the case.

The second contextual feature that might have pointed to a different decision process was more political. The procedures APS used to acquire land and determine school locations in the past were led by the old guard. The former leadership had been in

the APS district for many years, well established in the community, and were males who had long standing relationships with other males in positions of leadership, formal or otherwise, in the community. By their own account, district leaders of the past stayed away from participatory decision making structures, choosing to make decisions and rely upon a high degree of public trust to garner acceptance and support.

The superintendent in this case had none of the attributes of the former leadership described above. She was relatively new to the community and very early in her relationship building efforts with influential people (though some implied her relationship building did not exhibit the effort necessary, even on short time). Her relationship with the board was also not developed to a point that allowed for open and collaborative decision making processes between the board and superintendent. This situational context was not considered carefully when applying precedent to the current process.

The democratic ideals of collaborative planning models created a perfect opportunity for the superintendent in this case to define new decision making processes which would have de-emphasized the lack of experience and influence in the community of her predecessors. Choosing to facilitate a consensus-seeking process (Graham & Healey, 1999; Healey, 1997; Wissink, 1995; Forester, 1996; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007) with the input of a more diverse representation of viewpoints would have strengthened her ability to garner support for the decision and deferred some of the blame she eventually took for what was characterized by some as a poor decision.

The result of the lack of careful forethought was taking process that, reportedly, had always worked and placed it in a context which only marginally matched the conditions on which the precedent had been used in the first place. The following

problems were caused: insufficient communication and resolution with the city and county leading to the lack of support and a politicized separation among the governmental subdivisions; a school board that realized after their decision is announced they might not have been as informed and careful in their deliberation as they thought; and a decline in public trust that rendered the superintendent and the board powerless going forward in the high school site decision making process and weakened in all other governance matters in the time after this process.

Heterogeneity of Knowledge in Collaborative Planning

Collaborative planning models call for harnessing all types of knowledge (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007), including tacit and what Kennedy (1982) referred to as working knowledge, which includes social science knowledge, as well as “the entire array of beliefs, assumptions, and experiences that influence the behavior of individuals at work” (pp. 1-2). Evidence is brought to decision making processes, not only by the process of evidence search (Honig & Coburn, 2007), but also through the knowledge and experiences of the individuals involved in the process (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Honig & Coburn, 2007; Kennedy, 1982, 1984). The many different sources and kinds of knowledge at play in a decision process is referred to, by the researcher, as heterogeneity of knowledge. Bringing many viewpoints to the table and peeling back the veil of power relationships opens the decision making process and allows each to know the rules of the game as it is played (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2006, 2010). On the surface, the APS decision process featured a closed, linear phase and an open, multifaceted phase. The extent to which each of these phases matches a conception

of each term, closed and open, and what could have happened in each of these processes in terms of a collaborative model is not simplistic.

In the first decision process, involving the school board and the superintendent, there was a lack of heterogeneity of knowledge. School board members came from different walks of life, which seems to imply heterogeneity of the group, but their expertise in the area of land acquisition by a public school and the issues inherent in a high school siting decision were all similar and very limited. Their source for acquiring new knowledge to inform their process was from only two sources, the real estate consultant and the superintendent. By her own admission, the superintendent believed there was a correct decision to be made. Having this bias, the information she provided the board throughout the process may not have been intentionally limited or unbalanced, but it was the opinion of the board members the information they received was somewhat skewed. Whether biases impacted the nature of knowledge shared by the superintendent is not a relevant as the fact the knowledge was not diverse, and did not increase the heterogeneity of knowledge found within the school board.

The closed process the board took to decide on the high school site could have exhibited collaborative planning features. The process might have stayed closed to the public and still collected the influence and expertise of a diverse group of viewpoints, had the leadership purposefully facilitated a process which sought to increase the heterogeneity of knowledge. An approach designed to harness a greater diversity of input might have led to same decision in the end, but it would have placed board members and the superintendent in a much more defensible position in response to public backlash.

The open process adhered more closely to collaborative planning tenants, especially in the area of including heterogeneity of knowledge. As homogenous as the representative viewpoints were in the first decision process, the superintendent made an extra effort to include diversity of representation on the committee she appointed to evaluate the proposed sites for the high school location. This committee process also included an open and public meeting protocol and committee members were fairly exposed in regards to the interests they were representing. The process was more consistent with collaborative planning, which seeks to have a degree of transparency with the participants so decisions can be made with as many viewpoints and interests known (Healey, 2004; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Sandercock, 1998; Innes & Booher (1999); Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2006, 2010).

The question still remains: were enough viewpoints represented, even in the open process? A factor given less attention than some school board members had hoped was the impact any school site location would have on the demographic balance among all three high schools. Locating the school somewhere in the east, with some who believed it should be north, was a given condition of the committee's work, defined for them by the fact all land proposals were in the east, northeast, or north. The implications on potential attendance area boundary lines given any of the sites would define much about the demographic distribution of the student enrollment at each of the high schools. No analysis of that factor was included in the committee's rather extensive review of factors. In the end, their decision might not have been different if the demographics issue had been added to the collection of factors addressed, but the committee process might have reflected a broader understanding if it had.

Evidence Use and Omission

The use of evidence by the school board during the first decision process was limited by the evidence provided to them from the superintendent. As discussed in the last section, evidence availability greatly reduced the school board members' ability to get an accurate picture of the evidence within the contextual reality of the situation. Evidence use is defined by search and incorporation (Honig & Coburn, 2007). School board members did not feel empowered to search for evidence on their own and the homogeneity of provided evidence gave a weak foundation on which to incorporate evidence into the process. The superintendent was given information from the real estate consultant and had some evidence through conversations with city and county leaders. Additional searches for evidence would have better informed her leadership of the process, as well as given her more information to provide the school board.

The fact the evidence on hand seemed to point to the Bonner property as the site for the new high school stunted the search for additional evidence. Based on the account from the real estate consultant, the superintendent may have had access to evidence that was not shared with the board. Whether the excluded evidence would have been enough to steer them away from the Bonner site is unknown, but it would have, again, placed board members in a more defensible position upon the release of their decision.

The second decision making process had a systematic approach to the search for and incorporation of evidence. Categories of evidence types were thoroughly analyzed by an outside entity and reported to the committee. When evidence seemed insufficient or unavailable, committee members took it upon themselves to search for or generate, based on individual expertise or conjecture, the needed information and share it with the rest of

the committee. The availability of evidence was extensive, and the incorporation process allowed for all stakeholders to interact with the evidence in the controlled context of the committee process. A greater representation of evidence was used by a more diverse representation of unique stakeholders in the committee decision making process.

The incorporation of the evidence the committee process had may not have included all the possible evidence available. The open process itself was fairly controlled and, perhaps, ignored some contextual issues and overemphasized others. For instance, the Bonner site had a disadvantage going into the committee process because of the public outcry against the school board's initial decision. The parameters outlined by the superintendent for the committee to consider, though extensive, did not include every parameter. The most glaring omission was the impact of each proposed site on future attendance area boundary lines for each of the three high schools. Ignoring this factor may have led the committee to a decision which compromised the possibility of creating an equitable situation from the standpoint of student enrollment demographic distribution.

The Importance of Public Trust to the Decision Process

The myriad of factors that exist in this case surrounding the decision making process to determine the site for Adler's new high school created a complex web of context within context. The politics and social dynamics of this case are fascinating, even without the two-decision feature. Careful examination of the case through the conceptual lens for decision making used by the researcher reveals the effects of not taking care to include diversity of representation in the decision making process and the effective use of evidence while attending to contextual realities in which the decision is situated.

In the end, was the impact of the complex situational context of this case necessary to lead to the actual decision: the physical piece of land on which the new high school was built? As long as available land was defined as land owned by someone willing to part with it so APS could build a high school on it, options were limited from the beginning, regardless of the way in which those options were discovered (whether through a real estate consultant approaching the land owner or the land owner coming to the district independently with a proposal). Among those limited options, the number actually viable for the building of a large comprehensive high school (as American Midwesterners conceive it, meaning a large building and sprawling campus, requiring a significantly large piece of land) was very few. Choosing among the extremely limited options might not have been quite as difficult as the process communicated.

The perspective of people in the know, even if extremely well-informed, can never represent all viewpoints. The process of representing minority viewpoints is an important component to the political process, and necessary condition of the collaborative planning model (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007). The act of bringing various viewpoints to the table creates a collective sense of having knowledge, even if not as extensive as some of the individuals among those at the table, which creates the ability to come to consensus among the group (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, 2006, 2010). If participants believe they can trust their viewpoint has been heard and considered, they are more likely to trust the decision process, even if it ends differently than they had hoped (Graham & Healey, 1999; Healey, 1997; Wissink, 1995; Forester, 1996).

To extrapolate this phenomenon of a process where all viewpoints are represented to a community decision process, where it is not possible to bring all stakeholders to the

table, but it is preferable to create a sense of consensus agreement among citizens, trust in the process and those involved in the process is a key component. This aspect of decision making for school site selection, as it had been done previously in Adler, made the old process seemingly effective and successful. The school district was well respected within the community and the district leadership had credibility with the citizens to make sound decisions to the benefit of the community as a whole. The need to be included in the process was not as great when citizens believed the leadership represented their needs. New leadership had not established sufficient trust with the community. As a result, community tolerance for not being included, meaning, having an opportunity to voice opinions in the presence of others and those responsible for decision making, was negatively impacted and decreased significantly.

It is possible the superintendent and the school board made a sound decision during their initial process. The Bonner property might have been the better choice when compared to the Zachary Road site. It might have been an equally good decision to choose either property, or, it is possible the Zachary Road property was the best choice. No matter how the two sites compare in terms of value to the district as the location of the new high school, taking on a decision making process that relied on a great deal of public trust in school district leadership to promote satisfaction among the patrons of the school district tainted the potential for the Bonner site. Not only was the site disadvantaged in the committee site evaluation process, but the school board and superintendent had lost all power to influence the decision making process by not realistically assessing the amount of clout they carried with the public prior to making their decision. Had they understood the political power of being local and established,

they would have structured the process in a different and more open way from the beginning, and perhaps the outcome might have gone differently.

In the End, More Care or Less Care Might Not Have Mattered

Brian Lindsay told the Board of Education the stories of those involved with both site selection processes for both Franklin and Lakewood High Schools. The superintendent at the time of the Franklin decision was fired. The superintendent in charge during the Lakewood decision barely kept his job, but school board members were not reelected afterwards. It was Lindsay's belief that making this decision was a political minefield for all district leadership, regardless of the process.

Was there any escape from an inevitable emotional public response to this decision? Would it have mattered if the board's process was more carefully planned and thoughtfully communicated? These questions will never be answered, but one must wonder if the nature of the decision itself doomed the process from the beginning. Little argument exists that the school board could have structured their decision making process in a different way, and this researcher suggests a process more consistent with collaborative planning would have been a more appropriate design. It is also evident that the miscues in the process and communication directly led to some of the problems resulting from the announcement of their decision.

One way to consider the impact of a more thoughtful process by the board would be to assume that a better process, the first time, would have led the board (whether through a committee process or otherwise) to the Zachary Road site from the beginning. What if the vocal neighbor had been located on Zachary Road and led the charge against that site? Many of the same reasons used as fodder against the Bonner site decision could

have been applied to the Zachary Road site: insufficient road infrastructure to the site, lack of sewer service to the property, the disruption of a relatively undeveloped area, and distance from the city. The necessary use of I-92 as an access road to any site was a major concern of district leaders for years prior to the site selection process. The Zachary Road site features a close proximity and inevitable use of I-92 for access for at least some of the future students of Shaw High School. This argument could have easily been used by opposition to the site.

The question is: Would the school board, having used a more thoughtful decision making process, have been in a better position to stand by their decision? It is probable a decision made with a more sound process would have held. This would have more than likely happened regardless of which site was chosen through a different first-time process. It is fairly rare that a superintendent and school board decision is so scrutinized that the school leaders change course and reconsider.

It is important to note the situation within this case study was only one of many political issues experienced between the superintendent and the community, though most came after the school site decision, and some would argue, partially resulting from the political fallout from it. The effects of an initial process more consistent with collaborative planning would have probably included no reconsideration process. The political ramifications might have still been realized. The superintendent might have only lasted one more year with the district, as happened in this case. School board members might still have not been reelected, though whether the site selection process was the cause or even the catalyst for those effects cannot be determined without a careful review of factors outside this case.

It might not have been possible to achieve a desirable end if the goal was finding the best site using the most politically sound process resulting with a completely satisfied community. Some situations are so emotionally charged that change in any way through any process is too difficult for a community, as a whole, to accept without exacting some sort of fallout. As Lindsay believed, there would be negative implications, which would probably personally affect those involved in the decision making process, in the short term. In the long term, the same people who suffered difficult circumstances, initially, may eventually be considered to have been visionary and wise.

Implications for Leadership Practice

In public decision making: process matters. Even when it doesn't matter, it matters. What matters? It matters to use a process that seeks to serve the good of the whole by either including a diverse stakeholder group or seeking the input of various viewpoints to inform the decision. Further, it matters that any process used is communicated in a way that people understand why and how a decision was made. A one-size-fits-all approach to decision making processes or a reliance on precedent to design deliberations can damage the process itself, the political capital of those involved, and the decision itself. Lessons learned from this case would suggest time taken at the beginning of any decision process to thoughtfully consider the process will increase the likelihood of a more effective and publically acceptable outcome.

Leaders must have an understanding of the context in which they work and a deep understanding of their own political power and the trust levels afforded them by their constituents. They must also have a sense of the same indicators of those with whom they work in order to design decision making processes that reflect an understanding of

context and builds the appropriate level of public acceptance for both the process and the decision. Getting stuck in a rut of, “We’ve always done it this way,” can create blind spots for leaders from which opposition or legitimate alternative explanations may be missed until it is too late. Knowing and adapting to the situation is a skill of leadership.

Summary

There are times when the decision outcome would be the same if made by an individual or a group behind closed doors in short periods of time, or made with the benefit of some sort of input gathering process. This case highlights the effects of using an initial decision making process which did not match the contextual environment. The decision itself was not the most important outcome in this case. Rather, the importance of considering the political and social dynamics of any given situation when designing a decision making process, and ensuring the process includes a variety of viewpoints, either at every step, or within aspects of evidence search, evidence incorporation, and synthesizing evidence and context toward a decision.

APPENDIX

A. Interview Questions

Interview will be open and informal, designed to provide detail for the detailed description of the case and to address the research questions:

How did school district leadership make decisions about the location of a new high school?

- 1) What factors influenced the decision making process?
- 2) How did they decide what evidence, or information, to use and not use?
- 3) How did administrators make sense of information and context during the decision making process?

Questions to Guide Discussion

1. What was your role in the decision making process for the location of Shaw High School?
2. How did the process begin? Who was involved?
3. What factors influenced the decision to place Shaw High School at the Berkley Road site?
4. How was it decided the initial location needed to be revisited?
5. What was the second decision making process like? Who was involved? How were they selected?
6. What factors influenced the decision to place Shaw High School at the Zachary Road site?

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