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Understanding the Impact of the Kalamazoo Promise from the Perspectives of Parents and Community Group Members

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UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF THE KALAMAZOO PROMISE FROM THE
PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY GROUP MEMBERS

by

Charles Pearson

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology
Advisor: Van E. Cooley, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 2009
The purpose of this study was to uncover the emerging views of parents and community group stakeholders in regards to The Kalamazoo Promise, and what they believed were the important issues that must be understood by implementers of The Promise in order to provide more effective implementation.

The Kalamazoo Promise is a full-tuition scholarship provided to all eligible graduates of the school district. The qualification criteria are simple, and all graduates attending at least the four years of high school are eligible.

A case study was conducted in one representative school in this midsized, urban district. A multiple-phase approach was chosen to discover emergent issues concerning The Kalamazoo Promise. Interviews were conducted of parents and community group members to gain insight into the issues they viewed as essential to universal attainment.

Results include the fact that many parents did not know the particular eligibility details of The Promise for their children. Parents also indicated that the school was the key place students found out about and were prepared to become Promise ready.

Community group findings included the importance community group members placed on parents accessing community supports. There was also concern that many parents
do not know what services were offered or were reluctant to acquire them. Economic factors did not receive the anticipated level of importance from either parent or community group interviews. Focus group interviews confirmed the findings of the individual interview phase for both groups. Also among the findings was the central role both groups placed on the school as the access point to The Kalamazoo Promise, and the need for each school to provide detailed information that the parents and community groups need.
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I would like to thank my doctoral chair, Dr. Van Cooley, for his support and critical review. This dissertation would not be possible without him. Dr. Janice Brown, who, as the leader of The Promise school district, was an inspiration to me and a sage advisor as this study progressed. Dr. Pat Reeves, who helped to hone the research topic and then gently guided me as the work progressed. Her keen insight helped me formulate my ideas.

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Finally, I dedicate this work to the children of Kalamazoo Public Schools and Milwood Elementary whose struggles are real, yet whose futures are brighter thanks to The Kalamazoo Promise. This work is dedicated with love to all the little people!

Charles Pearson
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background

This study was an in-depth examination of a unique economic, social, and educational experiment undertaken by a midsized, urban, Midwestern community. While the experiment named The Kalamazoo Promise marks new territory in a community development arena, it was the subject of much scrutiny as business, community, governmental, and educational leaders nationwide search for models to address low student achievement and post-secondary attainment.

Description of The Kalamazoo Promise

The Kalamazoo Promise was funded by private donors and was a concerted effort on behalf of school officials, local government, and the business community to address local economic development and to improve overall educational levels. The Kalamazoo Promise provided free post-secondary education to all students in an urbanized Midwestern city. Since the announcement in November 2005, the main economic barrier for obtaining a post-secondary education was removed by this program. According to documents describing The Kalamazoo Promise, families were rewarded for long-term residence within the school district. A student who entered the district in kindergarten and completed 12th grade would receive 100% of his/her tuition and fees. The sliding scale progresses downward to 65% tuition and fees for students entering into ninth grade. If a student left the district and then returned her/his tuition, reward was calculated from
the time of reenrollment. Students needed only reside within the district boundaries and graduate from one of the district’s high schools to qualify for the award (Kalamazoo Public Schools, 2007; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2007).

Promise recipients could apply and attend any two- or four-year public college in the State of Michigan. While enrolled in a post-secondary institution, students are required to maintain a 2.0 grade point average, enrolled in school full time, and complete their program within 10 years of high school graduation. Exceptions were made for interruptions due to military service. Tuition and fees were paid directly to the educational institution (Kalamazoo Public Schools, 2009).

The Kalamazoo Promise demonstrated some measurable results (Miller-Adams, 2006). The number of students in Kalamazoo Public Schools graduating and enrolling in college increased since The Promise began. In the year prior to The Promise, 2004-2005, district demographic data showed that fewer than 80% of graduates enrolled in college. The following year, 2005-2006, the first year of The Kalamazoo Promise, 90% of high school graduates enrolled in college (Kalamazoo Public Schools, 2007; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2007). In the Kalamazoo schools, there were 512 graduates from all three high schools in 2005-2006, and 609 graduates in 2006-2007 (2007; 2007). This was an increase of 93 students in one year reaching graduation (2007; 2007). Of those graduates, the number of African-American seniors who graduated jumped from 97 in 2005-2006, to 136 in 2006-2007 (2007; 2007).

The Kalamazoo Promise was a result of, and a factor in, the context of the larger community. There was a concentration of low socioeconomic and minorities in the urban center of the county. Low income and minorities comprised the majority of the school
districts population (Miller-Adams, 2006; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2007). The urban demographics of the local community revealed the population was 4.3% Hispanic while the county as a whole was 2.6% Hispanic. The city of Kalamazoo was over 20% African-American while the county was less than 10%. The poverty rate in the urban core was 24% and the county was 12% (2006; 2007).

In the recent past, the percentage of students within the public schools below the poverty level further increased due to a significant number of higher income families leaving the city for suburban schools or enrolling in private and charter schools within the city limits. This outflow from the urban center was termed white flight (Miller-Adams, 2006; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2007). The district’s African-American population was 47% and much higher than the state average of 20%. As stated, there was disproportionate poverty in the district (2007). The school district featured poverty levels of 61% while the statewide average was 35% (2007; Standard & Poor’s, 2006). These numbers were significant for many reasons. A low-income population not only stresses community resources, but also their economic, social, and educational needs often goes unmet because the resources simply do not exist (Education Trust, 2003, 2005, 2006).

Throughout the nation, 60% of all students who begin high school graduate. Only 50% of African-American students graduate. For African-American males, the numbers are lower with only 43% reaching graduation (Losen, Orfield, Swanson, & Wald, 2004). In contrast, in 2002 the local district graduated only 31% of its students while the state average was 78% (Miller-Adams, 2006; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2007). The white student graduation rate was 45% compared to the state average of 75% (2007). Twelve percent
of the district's African-American students and 22% of its Hispanic students graduated
(Standard & Poor's, 2006).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to uncover the emerging issues related to the role of parents in the success of The Kalamazoo Promise. To isolate pertinent issues for parents, this study uncovered the views and experiences of parents and community group stakeholders who work with parents concerning their involvement with and understanding of The Kalamazoo Promise. Ultimately, this study sought to illuminate important parental issues that may be important considerations for implementers of The Promise in order to provide more effective implementation. The implementers and the public needed a clearer picture of the complex issues that emerged for parents since its beginning. Implementers needed to understand and develop a deep understanding of how this initiative was responded to within the local community, especially by parents who play a critical role in how students understand and respond to the opportunities available to them through The Promise. Because The Kalamazoo Promise has been framed in terms related, first, to economic development, and later, educational, and social issues, this study seeks to understand further how all three areas relate specifically to the concerns and experiences of parents as they respond to The Kalamazoo Promise initiative.

The Problem that Focuses this Study

From its inception The Kalamazoo Promise has been monitored, analyzed, and evaluated by organizations, one of which was the W.E. Upjohn Institute (Eberts, 2007;
Miller-Adams, 2006). These evaluators were contracted to provide empirical measures and assessments primarily from an economic perspective. Additionally, a team of evaluation specialists from the Western Michigan University Evaluation Center and Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology (ELRT) received a U.S. Department of Education grant to study the broad effects of The Kalamazoo Promise. Both of these sources have collected and analyzed significant sources of, primarily, quantitative data including economic indicators such as the number of housing starts, total and disaggregated graduation rates, district enrollment, local economic indicators, and the assessed valuation for residential and commercial property (Eberts, 2007; Mack, 2008). The Western Michigan University (WMU) evaluation project has collected and analyzed extensive student data (achievement, demographics, engagement, graduation rates, aspirations, attitudes, goals, etc.) along with an examination of changes in teacher expectations for students. Additionally, the WMU project has used data collected from community groups to begin examining parental issues and concerns.

After examining available research reports, and consulting with some of the principal researchers (notably, Dr. Gary Miron of WMU), the researcher concluded that further investigation was needed of issues that may be pertinent to the role of parents in the success of The Promise. The researcher further concluded from some preliminary pre-study field test work that there might be hidden parental dimensions resulting from the initiation of The Kalamazoo Promise that may subvert its effectiveness if not understood and explicitly addressed. From the literature review for this study, the researcher determined that possible hidden issues for parents might include economic barriers confronting families as they struggled for increased levels of educational
attainment, social barriers that prevented families from focusing on the primacy of education for their children, and social and educational interventions that needed to be conceived. The researcher for this dissertation study considered these factors to have enough potential importance for parents to include them in the lens used in this study.

Research Questions

The research questions emerged directly from the key concepts that form the basis of this research. The questions resulted from: (a) the examination of other research related to The Kalamazoo Promise; (b) the pre-study field test document analysis and preliminary educator focus group results, which pointed to the need for further examination of parental issues; and (c) the literature review, which provided a framework for understanding some of the dominant economic, social, and educational themes that served as a lens for understanding pertinent issues for parents. Issues gleaned from the document analysis included: increases in housing starts, increases in the minority student high school graduation rates, and increases in the school district’s enrollment. However, many topics and issues remained on the periphery of the discussion surrounding The Kalamazoo Promise, especially related to the issues that impinge on the role parents play in the ultimate success of The Promise. The full study was an evolving one that included overlapping phases—each phase focusing on specific research questions:

1. PHASE I (Public Record Document Analysis)

What are the issues that have emerged in the public document record since the inception of The Kalamazoo Promise, with particular emphasis on
what the documents say in regards to parental and community involvement?

2. PHASES II and III (Parent and Community Agent Interviews and Focus Groups)

When emergent issues from Phase I were shared with key stakeholder focus groups charged with implementation of The Promise, what do they believe are the important issues that others must understand to facilitate full implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise?

3. PHASE II and III (Parent and Community Agent Interviews and Focus Groups)

From the perspective of: (a) the community, and (b) parents, what needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of The Kalamazoo Promise?

These questions sought to unearth hidden parental themes that, ultimately, affect those children historically underserved educationally (minorities and the low socioeconomic). In addition, the design of the questions was to illuminate the relative impact of The Kalamazoo Promise as an economic stimulus initiative, arguably its primary focus, on the educational parameters that were playing out in the documents as well as delineated by a sampling of people involved in the school.

Rationale for Study

The Kalamazoo Promise quickly gained national attention as a new community-based strategy for economic development and improvement in educational attainment for underserved populations (minority and low income). In the four years since the initial
public announcement of The Promise, there has been a flurry of state, national, and community-based efforts to replicate, or at least emulate the initiative resulting in a national collaboration and study. A more complete picture of the current conditions for implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise is needed to address issues that affected the economic, social, and educational aspects of how the community experiences and responded to the stimulus of The Kalamazoo Promise.

There was both a state and national need to understand the issues surrounding The Kalamazoo Promise and universal attainment because of the rapid growth of replication initiatives. The Promise began as an economic and social experiment whose major economic stimulus may drive future development throughout the region. Leaders may benefit from the knowledge of how Kalamazoo parents are responding to and experiencing The Kalamazoo Promise since they will be key stakeholders in any local, state, or broader initiative to remove economic barriers that currently face a significant portion of the population. Sixty-one percent (Standard & Poor's, 2006) of the urban population in the Kalamazoo district live in poverty, essentially isolated, and unable to access the social capital and economic power that a post-secondary education provides (Ajzen, Davis, Saunders, & Williams, 2002; Education Trust, 2003, 2005, & 2006; Losen, Orfield, Swanson, & Wald, 2004; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2007). The fact that parental issues could be significant factors in providing economic access to the middle class for students of poverty was a significant consideration in setting the purpose for conducting this investigation. This study had the potential to provide the nuance of the parental context that implementers may need for successful implementation of both The Kalamazoo Promise and other replication initiatives. The Kalamazoo Promise
implementers included leaders at all levels of economic, governmental, educational, and social institutions that could benefit from a specific, detailed, informational rich description of parental issues. Promise-related issues and information would be made more readily decodable by this study.

Methodology

The study was designed to uncover the views of parents and community group stakeholders that reveal insights into the pertinent parental issues related to The Kalamazoo Promise. Additionally, this study solicits what parent and community group stakeholders offered as the important issues that must be understood by implementers of The Promise in order to provide more effective implementation. To unveil parent and community group perspectives, a single case study approach was chosen. The researcher selected his own elementary school for study, as it was representative of the district at-large and provided access to a diverse cross-section of parents and community group providers. A pragmatic, emergent approach was selected to uncover parent and community group provider voices. To ensure that a full accounting of perspective was obtained, multiple phases were utilized in the research design. The three phases allowed for triangulation throughout the collection of public record data, interview data, and focus group data. Findings from each phase of the study and each data source were utilized to shape the next phase of the study and confirm the procedures and questions used to solicit parent and community group stakeholder perspectives. Data analysis was conducted through an inductive process that produced a recurring set of themes of what issues were important to the participants.
Definitions and Terms

**Attainment**—the terminal level of education achieved. The Kalamazoo Promise was designed to increase the number of students completing post-secondary programs, including two- and four-year college degrees (Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009).

**Document Analysis**—an intensive review of public documentation that resulted in a systematic discourse analysis and categorization (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003; Creswell, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Miles, 1994).

**Emergent Theme and Subtheme**—produced through a recursive process utilizing analysis of document discourse and interview transcripts. Rational categorization was utilized to quantify topic frequency. Themes and subthemes emerged from the discourse analysis that was considered important based on the frequency of occurrence (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

**Focus Group**—a group interview with 6-12 participants. Participants were chosen to participate because they were parents or community providers at the school. Focus groups for this study were utilized to provide affirmation of the individual interview results and reveal any newly emerging thematic factors (Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996).

**Individual Interviews**—individual interviews conducted with parents who had children in the school, and community group members who provided services directly or indirectly to the school under study. Individual interviews provided in-depth data from participants (Seidman, 2006).

**The Kalamazoo Promise**—a scholarship for all graduates of a midsized urban district. All students qualify based on length of residence in the district. Full tuition to
any state-funded, post-secondary college or program is provided to eligible students (Kalamazoo Public Schools, 2007).

**Stakeholder**—parents and community group members who have a child or provide services at the school under study (Stake, 2006).

**Universal Access**—all students who attend at least four years of high school and graduate from the district are eligible for a tuition scholarship from The Kalamazoo Promise. Many students face economic barriers to attainment and a program such as The Kalamazoo Promise removes many economic barriers (Miller-Adams, 2007).

**Limitations**

This study examined one elementary school in a middle-sized district. The fact that these elementary students were from 6-14 years from graduating from high school and accessing The Promise must be considered in light of the study findings. The relatively small size of the sample prevented wide generalization of the results. Case studies are not intended to be transferable unless a recursive multiple case model is utilized (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2004). That the focus group was at a minimal level was also a limitation (Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). Finally, the closeness of the researcher to the case provided a potential for bias and lack of rational analysis (Creswell, 2006).

**Chapter Summary**

Using a case study approach, a single school was examined to gather the perspectives of parents and community group members in regards to issues concerning The Kalamazoo Promise. The Kalamazoo Promise was explained as a full scholarship
for any graduate of the school district who meets a few simple standards. The Promise was designed as a universal access as well as economic stimulus initiative. The method of study was a multiphase, rationalistic approach to uncover emergent themes especially as seen by parents and community group members.

Organization of Study

Chapter II is comprised of a review of the literature to assist in better understanding the context of The Kalamazoo Promise. Chapter III includes an overview of the methodology followed for this study. Chapter IV presents the results of the multiphase study, and finally, Chapter V includes a summary, conclusion, and recommendations for additional research.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to uncover the emerging views of parents and community group stakeholders in regards to The Kalamazoo Promise and what they believed were the important issues that must be understood by implementers of The Promise in order to provide more effective implementation. The intent of The Kalamazoo Promise was to drive economic growth and improve student outcomes (Miller-Adams, 2007). The literature review examined a diverse set of factors that affect student post-secondary attainment. Due to the unique nature and context of The Kalamazoo Promise as an economic and attainment effort, there was limited study of such initiatives. What follows is an examination of the literature to provide a context for The Kalamazoo Promise. There is a large body of literature addressing student achievement and post-secondary attainment. The review of the literature will provide a look at many factors affecting attainment and is organized as follows: (a) how socioeconomic and racial factors affect achievement and contribute to the minority, non-minority achievement gap; (b) the impact of student characteristics and factors on attainment school and college persistence; (c) the dropout crisis, economic and social factors; (d) the achievement gap for underserved groups; and (e) the effect of financial aid on attainment. The final section includes a chapter summary.
There were gaps in the literature, especially due to the unique nature and context of The Kalamazoo Promise as an economic and attainment initiative. What follows is an in-depth examination of the literature for providing context for The Kalamazoo Promise.

Chapter Organization

The review of the literature is organized into a broad set of topics that contribute to K-12 attainment: (a) factors affecting attainment including the achievement gap experienced by minority and students of poverty; (b) documented impacts of schooling on attainment; (c) student factors including student attitudes and social capital; and (d) economic and social factors including the effects of grants and scholarships on student attainment with particular focus on the impacts on minority and students living in poverty.

Factors Affecting Attainment

The Achievement Gap

Since the inception of The Kalamazoo Promise in the fall of 2005, minority students within the school district had enrolled in college in greater numbers (Kalamazoo Gazette, 2008). Yet, the gap between white and middle class students and African-American and Latino students has persisted (Eberts, 2007; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2006). Since the advent of American education, there has been an achievement gap. The academic gap between white students and those of color, and middle class students and low-socioeconomic students, has continued with the differences often dramatic (Chang, 2001; The Education Trust, 2005).
The achievement gap was well documented. Nationally, urban poor and minority students, as a whole, graduated in numbers significantly lower than their white, suburban peers did (The Education Trust, 2008). Overall, disadvantaged students achieved at levels lower than the student body as a whole. They took less honor level and advanced placement courses as a result. Advanced level courses were not offered frequently in high-poverty/high-minority high schools (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Chang, 2001; Harris, 2005; The Education Trust, 2003). Nationally, white and Asian students attained 75% graduation rates while 50% of African-American students and 53% of Hispanic students graduated from high school (Hernandez & Nesman, 2004; Losen, Orfield, Swanson, & Wild, 2004).

For example, Florida served as a representative example demonstrating risk factors leading to low Hispanic attainment (Hernandez & Nesman, 2004; Losen, Orfield, Swanson, & Wild, 2004). Hispanic students made up approximately 20% of the population of Florida and represented 20% of all high school dropouts. Hispanic students comprised 28% of all truants and 20% of the expulsions from school (Bechtold, 2000; Harris, 2005; Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003). Minorities and students living in poverty, especially in urban areas, face challenges that cause them to drop out in far greater numbers than their white and middle class peers (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2003).

Local urban students’ achievement statistics closely mirrored the results of students across Michigan (The Education Trust, 2003 & 2008). Compared to students from Kalamazoo County, students from the Kalamazoo Public Schools ranked lowest on standardized testing measures such as the Michigan Education Assessment Program.
This was attributed to the concentration of poor and minority populations within the city of Kalamazoo (W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2007). Kalamazoo Public Schools achievement scores among student subgroups revealed a significant gap between low-income students, minorities, and non-minorities. Table 1 illustrates some of these differences.

Table 1

Results of Kalamazoo Public Schools 2008 8th Grade MEAP and 11th Grade Michigan Merit Exam by Percent Scoring in Two Highest Score Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>8th Grade White</th>
<th>8th Grade African American</th>
<th>State 8th Grade</th>
<th>11th Grade White</th>
<th>11th Grade African American</th>
<th>State 11th Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELA</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the results of local African-American students with their white peers showed that, with the exception of eighth-grade mathematics, more than twice the number of white students scored more proficiently (the highest category) on the exams. State of Michigan results for African-American students demonstrated that statewide the results were only incrementally better than the local districts results (MEAP, 2009; Standard & Poor’s, 2006). Locally, over 75% of African-American students did not reach the proficient level on the state exam (Michigan Department of Education, 2008).
Schooling Factors

Schooling factors such as teacher quality, staff interactions with students, and programming and policy demonstrated effects on attainment. Outcomes from five national research projects revealed the significant impact schooling factors had on attainment for traditionally underserved groups. Four of these studies specifically targeted African-American males (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). African-American male students who attended preschools that included parental education, coupled with rigorous math and language arts instruction, showed long-term increases in attainment (Belfield, et al., 2007). Another effective educational program placed early elementary children in smaller-sized classes with no more than 15 students per teacher (Belfield, et al., 2007). This effort improved all outcomes and especially for African-American males. A well-known class size reduction project, entitled Tennessee Project Star, included students from four years old to the end of third grade (Belfield, et al., 2007; Machin & Stevens, 2004). Tennessee Project Star students were monitored throughout their schooling and reported improved achievement for students even in secondary school (2004; 2007). Researchers found that there was a 6% increase in student scores in lower elementary classes when average per teacher student enrollment was reduced from 22-15 students (2007). Increasing teacher salaries was another short-term reform project that showed promising results with underserved populations. In this program, teacher salaries were increased under the assumption that more highly qualified candidates would be attracted to and eventually fill the teaching ranks (2007). Results showed positive increases in African-American male high school graduation rates. Improvements were directly correlated to well-prepared teachers who were paid a premium to work in the
classrooms being studied (Belfield, et al., 2007). Belfield, et al., (2007) quantified the positive effects of such reform efforts in terms of public cost. A public cost for interventions to end the cycle of low African-American male attainment included additional time (thus increased cost) to complete a college degree (2007). It was assumed that many disadvantaged students entered post-secondary programs with learning deficits (primarily caused by inadequate schooling) which required more time in college in order to compensate for a lack of preparation (2007). These were studies of the end-economic costs of improving minority student outcomes. Each of the five research-based programmatic interventions had specific and varying costs per new graduate. The lowest cost program, in current dollars, was small learning communities ($59,066), and the highest cost intervention was teacher salary initiative with a cost per student of $120, 238 (2007).

Further reforms had also shown promising results in terms of increased attainment. Common actions that have been taken by schools to close the achievement gap have included: (a) implementing a challenging, standards-based curriculum; (b) hiring highly qualified, experienced teachers; and (c) creating a socially nurturing learning culture with strong counseling support (Poliakoff, 2006). Christenson & Thurlow (2004) listed factors effective schools exhibited and included changing student behaviors through individual counseling, mentoring, and personalizing the school experience. Also shown to be highly effective are creating an environment with a strong academic focus that included individualized tutoring and directly addressing alterable student variables such as poor attendance, dropping out, and low grades (2006).
Preventing dropouts was effective when started very early in a student’s education with universal preschool education, smaller elementary class sizes, and high curricular standards that ensured every child was a fluent reader by the end of first grade (Allen, 2002). Given the fact that students in the United States attend college more than ever, historically, students from underrepresented groups (minority, urban, low income) do not attend at rates comparable to their white, middle class peers (Forster, 2006; Gelber, 2007; Louie, 2007). The rates for going to college were low for lower income and minority classes, which was due to a lack of preparation for college. The majority of high school graduates who were well prepared to attend college (middle class and white) attended, but those who were not adequately prepared (low income and minority) with pre-college course work did not attend college after high school (Louie, 2007). This indicated that schools were not doing the difficult work of preparing all students for equal access and eventual attainment (Forster, 2006; Louie, 2007).

Teacher factors have contributed to minority student disengagement and low levels of attainment (Auerbach, 2002). Highly qualified teachers met standards for certification. In Ohio, students from high-poverty districts had almost 20% fewer highly qualified teachers in their classrooms (The Education Trust, 2008). Students who had higher quality teachers achieved higher levels of college readiness (2008). High quality teachers were those who had a degree in the subject they taught and had more years in the profession. Students reported characteristics caused by low quality teachers included: (a) disarray in the classroom; (b) lack of a strong relationship with, and disconnection from, teachers who simply tell students to sit down and to shut up; (c) lack of feedback on assignments; (d) busy work; and (e) lack of proper counseling support (2008). Results
attributed to poor teacher quality, a particular problem in urban, rural and schools that
were more than 50% minority included more students choosing to be being placed in less
challenging classes because they were not academically prepared to succeed (2002).
Students who encountered low expectations from teachers, counselors, parents and/or
guardians took fewer advanced placement courses in high school (Ajzen, Davis,
Saunders, & Williams, 2002; Auerbach, 2002; Bennett, 2002; Cadriel, 2004). Schools
that had lower standards and challenged their minority students at lower levels compared
to their white counterparts found that minority students skipped class more frequently and
were much more likely to be involved with peers who were disinterested in school
(Auerbach, 2002; Bennett, 2002; Cadriel, 2004). All factors resulted in lower aspirations
and attainment (Ajzen, Davis, Saunders, & Williams, 2002; Bennett, 2002; Cadriel, 2004;
Chang, 2001; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004; Eide & Ronan, 2000; Simpson, 2004;
Sokatch, 2001).

The particular types of programs and school staff that students interacted with
were important factors in increased attainment (Sokatch, 2001). In most schools, the
school counseling department led efforts on behalf of the school to provide wider access
to college (2001). In many schools, counseling departments were understaffed and could
not spend the time necessary for first generation college students (2001). Students
without college educated parents in the home needed assistance to work through the
complicated college application process (Chang, 2005). Many urban schools lack highly
qualified college counseling professional staff and needed to be resourceful to fill staffing
gaps (Colyar, Corwin, Oliverez, & Venegas, 2004). They utilized peer counselors,
weekend parent training, and pairing college-attending students with rising high school
seniors (Chang, 2001; Colyar, et al., 2004; Contreras, 2005; Gutierrez, 2002). Reducing
class size, introducing universal preschool, and full-day kindergarten were all
documented actions schools took to increase positive student outcomes (2002). Improved
graduation outcomes were especially beneficial for minorities (American Education
Research Association 2003; Ajzen, Davis, Saunders, & Williams, 2002). African-
American students who had the social, informational, and structural supports in place in
the school reached increasingly high levels of attainment (2002). Mentoring high school
students proved to be successful and fit the model of increasing school and community-
based social and academic supports for students (Walker, 2007). For high school
students in particular, mentoring paired with assistance in completing the college
application process was especially beneficial (2007).

The way schools were restructured and the resultant impact on student outcomes
was another school-related factor. In the past, more effectively structured high schools
began positive attainment levels (Perkins-Gough, 2005). Effective high schools feature
small learning communities to increase social supports, increase curricular rigor,
standards-based course work, plentiful advanced courses, improved guidance support,
and retrieval and academic intervention programs to support students who are not making
progress in the general high school program (2005).

In a study of high school dropouts, Simpson (2004) found several factors that
students themselves identified as critical to their level of attainment. Students reported
that disengagement from schooling caused low aspirations and attainment levels
(Evergreen, Miron, & Spybrook, 2008; Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009; Simpson,
2004). Students living in inner-city schools with concentrations of poverty and minority
populations exhibited several factors that negatively affected their attainment: (a) poor school attendance; (b) lack of cultural connection to school; (c) lack of role models in the home or school; and (d) lack of opportunity for extracurricular activities (Evergreen, et al., 2008). Factors such as these contributed to students dropping out of high school (Evergreen, et al., 2008; Simpson, 2004).

For decades, dropping out of high school has also negatively affected student attainment (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). Recently, 22% of African-American males dropped out of high school nationally, while only 14% of whites dropped out. Thirty-three percent of African-Americans attained a high school degree and did not go on to college while 29% of whites stopped with just a high school diploma (2007). Nationally, an additional 24,000 African-American males per year would have to graduate to equal the white male graduation rate (2007). African-American males enrolled in college at lower rates. Forty-two percent of whites enrolled in college compared to only 32% of African-Americans (Belfield, et al., 2007). Students in disadvantaged groups or those that had special needs also had lower levels of achievement and attainment (2007). More positively, since the 1960s, the number of students in higher education had grown steadily, but the gap between students from disadvantaged groups and their higher income peers had grown (Machin & Stevens, 2004). Students from the upper echelons of income had benefited the most from increased access to higher education (2004).
Student Factors

Students are influenced by many social and educational factors (Harris, 2005). Characteristics of students, their families, and neighborhoods have been the subject of study. Research has examined student's attitudes toward schooling. Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists have studied oppositional culture theory (Harris, 2005; Sokatch, 2001). Oppositional culture theory, primarily focused upon African-American students, measured the level of educational motivation of individuals and found that their personal goals were not academic in nature (2005; 2007). Individual level behaviors of African-American youth, according to oppositional culture theory, included the "acting white" hypothesis, putting forth the low levels of school effort, and having high levels of school resistance (Lopez, 2005; Sokatch, 2005). Accordingly, it was held that minorities, and particularly African-American students, resisted school goals (Sokatch, 2005). Oppositional culture theory was believed to impact levels of post-secondary attainment gained by minority students.

Harris (2005) stated that oppositional culture theory does not merit significant credibility because he found that students often gain the aspiration to complete four years of college and earn graduate degrees. They had a more positive attitude toward being African-American, and believed more strongly in their abilities to inspire other African-Americans to higher achievement levels (Harris, 2005; Lopez, 1996; Sokatch, 2001). To overcome factors, such as a negative attitude toward schooling, the community in which a student resides may be a much greater positive force influencing level of attainment (Harris, 2005). The following quote highlighted the tendency of others to blame low-
attaining students for powerful social and economic forces in their schools and communities that occurred beyond themselves (Harris, A. L., 2005):

If education is presented as the path to success, dropping out can be viewed as individualistic, private, and pathological … or what happens to ‘bad students.’ The structures of our educational systems are protected, if you will, from critique. Discrimination and biases that permeate education and support our economy are painted over with the dropout lacquer, making ‘individual’ what are indeed structural problems (p. 270).

Human and social capital theories were discussed in the literature. It was theorized that those students found lacking such capital had lower attainment levels (Bechtold, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Harris, 2005; Nicotera & Wong, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2005). J. S. Coleman of the University of Chicago, E. Campbell of Vanderbilt, and W. J. Wilson were influential in creating and shaping the now commonplace theory of social and human capital (Coleman, 1988). Social and human capital were defined as the resources, mostly in the form of access to knowledgeable people, that one interacted with and had at his/her disposal (Bechtold, 2000). More specifically, capital included factors such as: (a) neighborhood attributes; (b) gender; (c) race; (d) socioeconomic status; and (e) whom an individual knows and relates to on a regular basis. This definition of human, social, and cultural capital represented a rationalist view of attainment resources available to individuals and had begun to shift toward a more individualistic and group dynamic (Bechtold, 2000; Coleman, 1988; Harris, 2005; Nicotera & Wong, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2005). Perna and Titus (2005) stated that African-American and Hispanic students were disadvantaged in terms of attainment because of low levels of economic and human
capital. An attribute of this lack of capital was that their parents were not college educated and could not provide adequate attainment resources (2005). These students also attended schools that lacked human and social capital, therefore compounding the negative factors influencing their attainment levels (2005). Lopez (1996) affirmed the value of social capital for both minority and white students on college attainment. Very specific inputs were suggested that raised student attainment levels (1996). These included homes where they spent significant time doing homework, and homes that fostered guided reading and writing activities (1996). These factors outweighed the importance of a student’s socioeconomic status (1996).

Dika (2003) noted that low levels of a student’s social capital could be mitigated by the presence of high levels of school engagement, post-secondary educational aspirations, and encouraging positive performance in school. For example, an environment in both school and the home that promoted attainment increased the amount of social capital (2003). Students had higher attainment outcomes when the school they attended promoted high engagement, challenged them, and held high educational aspirations for each individual (2003).

Standardized test scores such as the ACT and SAT were once measures of merit and opened doors to higher education (Louie, 2007). They now serve more as measures of the quality and prestige of colleges (2007). The existing inequalities in preparation for post-secondary schooling continued to prohibit attainment for vast numbers of minority and students from poverty (2007). Minority students’ families hold high aspirations for their children just as their non-minority peers do (Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009; Koyama, 2007). There is also increasing evidence that minority female high school
students experience college-going aspirations differently than males (Koyama, 2007). The study of gendered schooling experiences seems to indicate that many females from minority backgrounds negotiate schooling differently than was usually assumed, and must be understood in greater depth to increase female attainment (2007).

Minority students were influenced by the cultural context in which they were raised. Bechtold, (2000) found this at the societal level and formulated a theory on minority education. This theory, entitled “Ogbu’s Theory,” focused on categorizing two main types of minority groups in the United States (2000). One type was the “immigrant” population that came to this country voluntarily. An example of an immigrant group was Hispanic-Americans. Many immigrated from Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The other type of minority group was entitled the “caste-like” group that came to this country involuntarily, mostly through slavery (2000). Caste-like minorities are African-Americans. Caste-like minorities, according to this theory, may see “acting white” as threatening to one’s cultural identity (2000). Some as being focused on academics in school interpreted acting white. Immigrant minorities saw cultural differences as barriers to be overcome and had a somewhat more optimistic view of the future (2000). Understanding how various minority groups were assimilated into the larger culture may be important to understanding their reaction and performance in the education system (2000). The basic tenant of the larger view is, “…is that academic performance is strongly influenced by the student’s perception of the economic returns provided by educational achievement” (p. 21). The fault was not with fundamentally flawed students or schools (2000).
The value families placed on education was an important indicator of future educational attainment (Beegle, 2000; Bechtold, 2000; Bennett, 2002; Chang, 2001; Contreras, 2005; Ghazvini, 1996; Harris, 2005; Lopez, 1996; Perna & Titus, 2005). These authors found that the level of parental support for their children in school, the amount of college aspiration discussion that occurred in the home, and the level of community supports they obtained all increased attainment levels for their children. Alcayaga (2003) studied Latino families' perceptions of barriers to college. The results of this outlier study failed to affirm associations between parent aspirations and attainment (2003). This study appeared to be isolated as to its results. The literature suggested a strong association between parental practice in support of college attainment and eventual enrollment in post-secondary programs (Beegle, 2000; Bechtold, 2000; Bennett, 2002; Chang, 2001; Contreras, 2005; Ghazvini, 1996; Harris, 2005; Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009; Lopez, 1996; Perna & Titus, 2005).

**Economic and Social Factors**

Important economic factors attributed in the literature included the level of family income, access to family savings, and other outside resources to help pay for college (Flint, 1997; Long, 2007; Tilghman, 2007). School and community capital also had an impact on attainment. School and community capital included college access information and professional staff supports available to students. Also included in this discussion on the economics of attainment were the economic signs that were often referred to as leading and lagging economic indicators (Layton & Smith, 2007; Machin & Stevens, 2004).
Access to adequate socioeconomic resources affected whether or not a student accessed post-secondary opportunities (level of attainment) (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). Students who lived below the federal poverty level had fewer opportunities to move beyond high school (Checchi, 2003). Their lack of financial resources limited their opportunities to access post-secondary attainment. Students identified as urban minorities faced the highest economic barriers to attainment (Bennett, 2002; Beegle, 2000; Cadriel, 2004; Ginther, Haveman, & Wolfe, 2000). Students from middle class families had better access to college (Ginther, et al., 2000). Most of today's college freshman classes are comprised of students from families with median incomes, 60% higher than the national average. Recently, the biggest income gap between middle class income level families and the average income population in more than 35 years had occurred (Tilghman, 2007). More students were denied post-secondary enrollment due to their level of family income (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; Tilghman, 2007). A multinational secondary school study Checchi (2003) found that family income does indeed predict attainment outcomes. The study looked at financial data from 108 countries over an extended period. Students from low-income households were significantly less likely to complete secondary school, thus limiting their lifetime incomes (2003). The negative impact was especially pronounced for female children (2003). This study also revealed that income distribution might have a positive impact on access to secondary school (2003). In many countries, attainment of even a secondary school education was a challenge for much of the population (2003).

African-American males, more than any other minority group, experienced the unequal economic consequences that resulted from poor educational quality and low attainment levels. Public benefits to increased African-American male high school graduation rates included: (a) additional tax revenues; (b) much higher annual earnings; and (c) increased savings on health care (Belfield, et al., 2007). Each African-American male that graduated at age 20 contributed $167,000 to $200,000 to the economy, which amounted to an annual net savings of 3.98 billion dollars nationally (2007). This may have been a conservative estimate, as these figures did not take into account the personal and private consequences to individuals, their families, and their communities (2007). African-American males were largely excluded from the 1990’s boom era and were still being left out of the benefits of high school completion and post-secondary degree attainment (Belfield, et al., 2007; Education Trust, 2008).

The unequal funding at school districts had a negative impact on urban and poor school districts resulting in lower student attainment. The Education Trust (2006 and 2008) reported that funding in high-minority districts across the country was less than in low-minority districts (Arroyo, 2008). The average per-student difference was in excess of $1,200 a year. Over the course of a K-12 education, the funding gap amounted to $20,000 less educational funding for African-American students (2006; 2008). Evidence suggested that inequities in state and national sources of school district funding existed in urban districts that served primarily minority students (Gehring, 2002; Arroyo, 2008). Schools in large cities and rural areas were chronically under-funded (2008). To educate urban students fully it costs more (2006). More support that is socio-educational intensive was needed for students that attended urban schools. These needs include
literacy interventions, social programming, and medical and mental health service (The Education Trust, 2006; Arroyo, 2008). Agency supports (community services), both within and outside the school, were not available or were insufficient to meet the need (2006; 2008). An additional factor that inhibited the level of school funding was urban tax bases were shrinking, in some cases due to middle class white flight to the suburbs, and exurbs; there was diminishing availability of entry-level manufacturing and service jobs (Arroyo, 2007; Chang, 2001; The Education Trust, 2005).

When closely examining the discrepancy in funding level affects on Michigan students the home state of The Kalamazoo Promise, there continued to be a funding gap between high minority/poverty districts and low minority/poverty districts (The Education Trust, 2008). In the year 2000, high-poverty districts in Michigan received $682 less per pupil than low-poverty districts, and the gap grew to $759 in 2006 (2008). Due to policy decisions, the statewide funding gap was largely eliminated by 2006 (2008).

Financial aid availability and access affected attainment for many students. Increased college enrollment and increased levels of accessible financial aid were directly related (Checchi, 2003; Long, 2007; Tilghman, 2007). An example of the financial aid effect was that an average of 15% more middle-income students enrolled in college and 30% more low-income students enrolled in college than 20 years ago (Long, 2007). Princeton University implemented a no-loan policy in 2001 (Tilghman, 2007). The program eliminated the financial barriers, both perceived and real, which low-income families faced. The Princeton study revealed that underrepresented students did not even attempt to apply to a more prestigious school because they believed it was unaffordable.
Knowing they may face thousands of dollars of loan debt was a deterrent to enrollment in college (2007). Another factor that attributed to loans vs. grants/scholarships was that college graduates with high levels of loan debt took advantage of a much narrower range of graduate degree opportunities and eventual employment that may not meet their personal goals (Long, 2007; Tilghman, 2007).

Federal Pell Grants became popular in the 1970s and 1980s (Gelber, 2007; Long, 2007). Such grants had markedly raised college enrollment. Students from low-income households often did not pay much for their college education (Gelber, 2007; Long, 2007). While federal college funding increased access to college for underserved students, many failed to apply (2007). This may have been due to several factors, such as there may have been low program visibility for poor families, a complex application process, and a strict auditing process that limited access for low-income families (2007; 2007).

The Georgia Hope Scholarship shared some common characteristics with The Kalamazoo Promise (Gelber, 2007; Long, 2007). The Georgia Hope Scholarship paid the in-state public tuition of students with a B-average and above (2007; 2007). It had an important impact on middle- and high-income student enrollment and persistence. For each $1,000 increase in aid there was about a 3.9% increase in college attendance for middle and upper class students (2007; 2007). On the negative side, the Georgia Hope Scholarship widened the gap between white/high-income and minority/low-income student enrollment rates (2007; 2007). The main positive effect on underserved enrollment seems to have been on the choice of a college (Long, 2007). More underserved students selected chose four-year colleges over two-year community
colleges, and historically African-American colleges at a greater rate than they would have without the Georgia Hope Scholarship (2007).

Tax credits to pay college tuition, such as Hope Credits and Lifetime Learning Tax Credits, were enacted by the federal government in 1997 (Long, 2007). Opinions were mixed on how they affected access to college. Hope and Lifetime Learning Tax Credits had been utilized by families making between $30,000 and $75,000, and thus had the most impact on the middle class. Overall tax credits had done little to increase post-secondary attainment for most income levels (2007). The same 1997 federal legislation also created incentives for families to save for college tuition. Educational IRAs (529’s and Coverdell’s) provided advantages for families with high incomes. Those with the highest marginal tax rates benefited the most from sheltering their incomes in these accounts (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; Long, 2007).

Publicly available financial aid has been shown to alleviate unequal access to college, but only modestly (Long, 2007; Gelber, 2007). More financial aid in the form of grants (such as The Kalamazoo Promise) was needed to reduce inequality in access. The movement of government programs from college grants toward college loans has shown only a small negative effect on access to college (Long, 2007; Gelber, 2007). Access to college enrollment information was a documented factor that limited low-socioeconomic students from accessing the knowledge needed to enroll in college (Long, 2007).

There was evidence that financial aid, in the form of scholarships, actually acted as a penalty for families in the middle and higher income range (Long, 2007). These families could afford to save for college (2007). Studies in 1997, and more recently in 2004, revealed the positive effects federal scholarships had on a family’s financial
burden, and were ameliorated somewhat by a form of artificially high-education tax rate that effectively decreased the amount of scholarship dollars awarded (Long, 2007). For example, a family that saved $100,000 for college was penalized up to 10% over their marginal tax rate because of disincentives to having a large amount of household savings (2007). The sum of having $100,000 in savings could cost the family from $10,000 to $20,000 in eventual financial aid (2007).

Students from long-term, generational poverty were considered to be from the lowest level of our social system (Beegle, 2000). These students indicated common barriers to college attainment. Improvements needed to remove barriers to attainment for those living in poverty included: (a) schools that were sensitive to social class and issues around poverty; (b) facilitation of informal mentors at both the high school and college level; and (c) adults in the home and school who frequently articulated ties between higher income potential and obtaining a degree (Beegle, 2000; Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007).

Leading and lagging indicator principles could be widely applied to social change setting such as The Kalamazoo Promise. Economic indicators are statistical measures of the economy and take a macroeconomic perspective (Burkholder, 1980). Indicators illuminate business cycles and offer an assessment of the effect of economic stimulus due to initiatives such as The Kalamazoo Promise. Lagging economic indicators will most likely be important in the long-term analysis of The Kalamazoo Promise’s impact on the local economy. Lagging indicators are historic in nature and react slowly to economic changes (1980). Analysis of lagging indicators such as duration of unemployment, prime rates, and outstanding commercial debt may assist in painting a clearer impact analysis of
The Kalamazoo Promise (Layton & Smith, 2007; White, 2008). In the short term, leading economic indicators become important information sources in revealing a clearer picture of the impact in progress (White, 2008; Layton, & Smith, 2007). Leading academic indicators in economics tend to predict future economic activity. That is, when a population increases its educational levels, then historically, leading economic indicators trend toward economic growth (2008). Conversely, leading indicators turn downward just prior to a period of economic recession and conversely trend upward when the economy is expanding (Anonymous, 2007; Layton, & Smith, 2007; White, 2008).

Leading and lagging indicators were not frequently applied to social change and educational reform. The principles could be applied widely where there was evidence that observed incremental changes in unfolding conditions that could be positively associated with long-term achievement of desired outcomes (Anonymous, 2007; Layton, & Smith, 2007; White, 2008). An example of the application of the concept of leading indicators for social change was evidence of increased levels of prenatal care and child immunizations among high poverty populations (White, 2007). Both of these leading indicators had been positively associated with a broader long-term social outcome, i.e., improved overall community health (2007). Examples from educational reform literature included the rising trend in student (and teacher) attendance rates and declining trends in student discipline rates in general or targeted school populations (2007). Again, both of these leading indicating factors had been positively associated with increased student academic success rates, i.e., the lagging indicator (Anonymous, 2007; Layton, & Smith, 2007; White, 2008). A point of comparison for leading and lagging performance
indicators, and specifically relevant to The Kalamazoo Promise, was the logic model presented by researchers at Western Michigan University (Evergreen & Miron, 2007). Evergreen and Miron (2007) created a logic model listing short-term, intermediate and long-term outcomes of The Kalamazoo Promise. The short-term outcomes were akin to leading indicators. It included outcomes such as: (a) increased community supports for students; (b) increased student aspirations; (c) increased enrollment; and (d) increased parental involvement (2007). These short-term (leading indicators) outcomes had begun to be measured and showed positive results across outcomes (Cullen & Miron, 2008; Evergreen & Miron, 2008; Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2008). The long-term outcomes (lagging indicators) will take as many as five years to show reliably quantifiable trends (Evergreen & Miron, 2007). Long-term outcomes were: (a) increased options and access to colleges; (b) increased community vitality; and (c) increased economic development (2007).

Chapter Summary

The review of the literature was designed to provide a context for the study. The achievement gap between minority and majority peers was explored, including the unequal achievement of minority students at the district, state, and national levels. Factors schools play in the achievement gap were also reviewed. Following the achievement gap discussion was an examination of literature related to students and factors they bring to attainment. The role of student aspirations, families, and neighborhoods were discussed. Social and human capital was also explored. Finally,
economic factors affecting attainment was assessed, including the impact of financial aid and family income levels, and leading and lagging indicators.

Since the inception of The Kalamazoo Promise, minorities had enrolled in college in greater numbers (Kalamazoo Gazette, 2008). Yet, the gap between white and middle class students, and African-American, and Latino students persisted. Those who were not able to apply to college may have faced several inhibiting factors: inadequate schooling, under-trained or inexperienced teachers, lack of resources in their schools, neighborhood issues including lack of social capital, generational poverty, and more (Eberts, 2007; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2006). The gap in achievement had been studied widely and was well documented in the literature. A consensus emerged around many of the factors leading to the enduring achievement and attainment gap despite many attempts at intervention across the country (The Education Trust, 2005; Chang, 2001). Students who attended school in neighborhoods with high poverty levels enrolled in post-secondary programs at much lower rates than their middle class counterparts (Bennett, 2002; Beegle, 2000; Cadriel, 2004; Ginther, Haveman & Wolfe, 2000).

Closely tied to the achievement gap is the level of education students eventually attain. Many students face barriers to high achievement in pre-K-12 schools (Ginther, Haveman, & Wolfe, 2000). It was well documented that students who did not achieve at high enough levels in K-12 education did not complete post-secondary educational opportunities. For example, students who do not complete certain gatekeeper high school courses, such as three years of math and science, have lower levels of post-secondary attainment. Other attainment barriers included student disconnect from school personnel, and neighborhood and family issues. The goal of The Kalamazoo Promise was to raise
the economic level of the community through 100% post-secondary attainment for its students. The literature was not definitive on the impact of increased economic opportunity due to subsequent increases in educational level for disadvantaged groups of students (The Education Trust, 2005; Chang, 2001).

This study contributed to the literature about the K-12 achievement gap and issues that caused certain students to have low aspirations and achieve low levels of post-secondary attainment. Following is a review of the literature surrounding three main concepts that effectively view the context and issues surrounding The Kalamazoo Promise.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter Overview

The purpose of this study was to uncover the emerging views of parents and community group stakeholders in regards to The Kalamazoo Promise and what they believed were the important issues that must be understood by implementers of The Promise in order to provide more effective implementation. Due to the examination of The Kalamazoo Promise at a single school, a case study was determined to be the best methodological fit (Creswell, 2007). Stake and Yin, in Creswell (2007), claimed that case studies allow for theoretical elaboration and analytic generalization. Case studies are also very useful when the purpose of a study is to generate knowledge of the particular (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2006). A case study may provide a deep, rich, and thick description of the participant’s experiences, which might enhance the understanding of issues related to The Promise (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The use of multiple data sources provided a varied and plentiful foundation of information for examination (Stake, 2006). In this chapter, the methodology utilized in the case study of The Kalamazoo Promise at one large diverse elementary in the Kalamazoo Public School is presented. The school, demographically, was typical of the district’s schools, and therefore provided a valid case for examination (Yin, 2003).
The following quote explains why a case study was a good fit for this particular research:

"The essence of case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result…" (Schramm, 1971; Yin, 2003).

Finally, this research closely examined The Kalamazoo Promise from the perspective of parents and community group members at one of the schools served by The Promise. Parents and community service providers had not been closely studied at the time of this research. The study was intended to reveal what the two key stakeholder groups were experiencing, and to add to the database produced by other research (Evergreen & Miron, 2007).

**Design and Organization of the Study**

This study was preceded by a preliminary investigation and field test of prospective data collection methods for the full study in conjunction with the researcher’s graduate coursework in qualitative research methods. The tested data collection methods included: (a) a preliminary focus group of educators using a convenience sample from one district school; and (b) a limited analysis of news media and district public documents (i.e.: school board agendas and minutes, district informational documents, early research reports, legislative hearings, and print news media). The preliminary investigation provided the researcher with insights and understandings that he used to develop and adjust methodology for
the full study for this dissertation (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Additionally, the pre-study field test procedures and results assisted the researcher in solidifying a purpose for the study and identifying focused research questions. The educator focus group and smaller document review also allowed the researcher to gather experience with field research methods and add greater understanding of the emerging issues (Creswell, 2007). Field test data sources from the pre-study, parents emerged as a focus area for further attention as a key stakeholder group. In particular, the preliminary educator focus group dialogue identified the two themes of parental support and parental understanding. Accordingly, this study was designed to answer questions related to issues that might be pertinent to the role of parents in the success of The Promise.

Through the original field test pre-study, it became clear that a case study delves deeper into both the public document record in triangulation with data collected from directly through both parent focus groups and parent interviews. As a final measure to confirm the elements that would comprise the full triangulation for this case study, the researcher consulted with Dr. Gary Miron, who is the Principal Investigator for a U.S. Department of Education Evaluation grant to study The Kalamazoo Promise. After examining the focus of both Dr. Miron's studies and working papers, consulting with him, and reviewing the evaluation reports of the W.E. Upjohn Institute on The Promise, the researcher confirmed that there was a need to study the issues related to the role of parents in the success of The Kalamazoo Promise as a specific line of inquiry. In consulting with Kalamazoo district officials and examining the field test data collected from
public documents, the researcher confirmed that community groups could be a source of examining parental issues since community groups emerged as one of the primary sources of assistance to and support for parents relative to The Kalamazoo Promise.

From the experience gained in the pre-study, the researcher determined that all three data sources were necessary to meet the purpose of this study, i.e., to identify the pertinent issues related to the role of parents in the ultimate success of The Kalamazoo Promise. The study was thus designed to include phases in order to direct full attention to each source of data. Phase I of the study was a full document review of the public record. Phase I further illuminated essential and emergent themes. Phase II followed in sequence and consisted of interviews with individual parent and community group members. At this stage of the research the question was asked, “Would parent perspectives be similar or divergent from community group member perspectives?” Community group members were added to the interview phase to provide depth, fill small gaps existing in other research and to offer a comparison to parent perspectives (Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009; Stake, 2006). The individual interviews were followed by focus groups of both participant types to confirm, explain, and explore other issues as they emerged from the previous phases (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2006). The chapter is organized as follows: (a) research questions; (b) research design; (c) sample selection; (d) instrumentation; (e) analysis; (f) placement of researcher; (g) validity, reliability and delimitations of results; and (h) chapter summary.
Research Questions

The research questions were continually revised during the study and emerged directly from the key concepts that formed the basis of this research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The research questions resulted from the embedded nature of the researcher in the case, the preliminary document analysis, the preliminary educator focus group, and these factors yielded economic, social, and educational themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Because of this process, the emergent themes included increases in housing starts, increased minority student high school graduation rates, and increases in the school district’s enrollment, though many topics and issues remained on the periphery of the discussion surrounding The Kalamazoo Promise (2003). In particular, the essential and yet under-examined role of parents emerged as a theme. As evidenced here, the full study was an evolving, recursive one that included overlapping phases (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). The research questions:

1. PHASE I (Document Record Analysis resulting from a preliminary document analysis and educator focus group)

What are the issues that have emerged in the public document record since the inception of The Kalamazoo Promise with particular emphasis on what the documents say in regards to parental and community involvement?

2. PHASE II (Parent and Community Agent Interviews and Focus Groups)

When emergent issues from Phase I are shared with key stakeholder focus groups charged with implementation of The Promise, and what do they believe are the important issues that others must understand to facilitate full implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise?
3. PHASES I and II (Resulting from Phases I and II and utilized in Individual and Focus Group Interviews)

From the perspective of (a) the community, and (b) parents, what needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of The Kalamazoo Promise?

The research questions were designed to reveal the hidden themes that affected marginalized children who historically had been underserved educationally (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). It was also hoped that more information would emerge that would illuminate the relative impact of The Kalamazoo Promise as an economic stimulus initiative, arguably its primary focus, on the educational parameters that were playing out in the documents as well as delineated by a sampling of people involved in the school being studied (Creswell, 2003).

Research Design

A qualitative methodology was purposefully chosen due to the nature of the case to be studied. In order to uncover the recurrent underlying parental factors and themes surrounding The Kalamazoo Promise, a naturalistic, inductive approach was applied. In addition, a methodological and pragmatic perspective was used to serve the practical (versus theoretical) purpose of the study (Creswell, 2003 & 2007). In qualitative research, there is a tradition of taking a rigorous approach including the development of research questions, a systematic approach to data gathering, and rigorous synthesis of the results (2003). This study uses the combined elements of the pre-study field test work and the triangulated design for this study to achieve this methodological rigor.
Creswell (2007) viewed his own qualitative research methodology as leaning toward the scientific, post-positivistic paradigm. Marshall & Rossman (2006) and Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) stated that qualitative research, especially case study, which is a highly rigorous research method, was well suited for generating hypotheses (rather than confirming hypotheses) as well as: (a) directly investigating subjective experiences; (b) incorporating meaningful stories and producing measurable variables; (c) allowed for naturalistic observation rather than testing general laws; (d) worked well in studying diversity since there were no prior assumptions being tested; (e) used participants as expert informants; and (f) involved reflexivity which drew on the researchers subjectivity and values.

In this study, there was a systematic collection of data, analysis, and interpretation of the data in phases, and examination of the case from multiple perspectives (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). This was a disciplined design with characteristics of a well-conducted case study, namely an empirical design that investigated an event or program within its actual context (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, case studies are based on multiple sources of evidence that triangulate the data and converge on the results (2003). Not only was this research study grounded in a pragmatic frame, it was also influenced by the social context in which The Kalamazoo Promise was embedded. The pragmatic aspect of this study created an accurate, complete picture of how parent and community group stakeholders view and experience “what is” in the case of The Kalamazoo Promise (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003).

This research was also built on an advocacy agenda (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2003 & 2007; Schlossman, 2006; Yin, 2003). A primary motivation for
conducting this study was to advocate for those whose voices were commonly overlooked (Schlossman, 2006). Members of the community that live in poverty, or are labeled as a minority, are often left out of important economic, social, and educational reform initiatives (2006). Creswell (2003) terms the advocacy lens for research as participatory and this form of study is: (a) recursive and may assist in bringing change and action concerning injustices; (b) focused on helping the individual free themselves from media and other forms of bias and disadvantages due to unequal power; (c) emancipator in that it helps free people from irrational and unjust structures that limit self-determination; and (d) practical and collaborative since the study is done with the participant rather than to the participant (p. 11).

The researcher believed that a result of this study could be the documentation and public sharing of the viewpoints, the aspirations and the concerns held by those who are often underrepresented (in this case, parents) in community discourse and in institutions such as schools and businesses (2003). Through a careful reporting of the voices of those who are underrepresented, the leaders with real economic, social and educational power will have more information to make better decisions, and minorities and families living in poverty would be further empowered (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009; Schlossman, 2006).

The case study has a long and storied history with practitioners as famous as Freud does. Hamel and Dufour from the University of Chicago, during the 1920s and 1930s, utilized the case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Its roots are in anthropology and sociology, and current researchers have a large body of resource literature to guide their research (2007). The case study approach is frequently used in
the fields of law, psychology, political science, and medicine (2007). While a single case study is not representative of all case studies, the interactions and operational responses in its context are often found in other dissimilar cases and prove to become relevant to other cases (Stake, 2006). In this study, the school selected as the case for examination was representative of the school district as a whole; thus, the results of this case study are relevant to, at least, the scope of The Kalamazoo Promise as a distinct initiative and perhaps, to other similar initiatives within similar contexts.

Yin (2004) claimed that the case study method is best categorized along with other social science research methodologies and cannot be claimed to “replicate the scientific method” (p. xix) (2004). Yet a rigorous, well-conceived, and executed case study can most certainly be claimed to be emulating the principles of scientific research; i.e., starting with explicit research questions, using a research design to address these questions ... and referencing related research to aid in defining questions and drawing conclusions (p. xix). The case study is a humanistic method of research as opposed to a scientific method. The tradition of humanistic study has the benefit of prolonged immersion in the field or subject, and offers a rich and thick description of bringing to the front the particular in the place of the general (Creswell, 2003 & 2007; Keeves, 1998; Stake, 1994; Simons, 1996; Yin, 2004). Because the purpose of this study is anchored in both the social justice and advocacy realms, the humanistic nature of this case study design.

The Kalamazoo Promise was taking place in a complex context. Multiple facets needed to be examined including the economic, social, governmental, and educational contexts. A single embedded case study approach was utilized to analyze the complex
context of parental issues related to The Kalamazoo Promise (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). Case studies have also been shown to be effective in situations where the case was unusual or unique (Creswell, 2007). There are often significant embedded subunits that can be studied within the larger context of a case (Stake, 2006). These subunits provide opportunities for the study of cases within a case. Several subunit themes emerged from a preliminary document analysis and a preliminary site-based educator focus group interview conducted in the pre-study. This allowed for considering a more narrowly defined subunit as the focus of this design in complement with other studies and evaluation projects.

Yin (2003) suggested that a multiple-case design had the benefit of offering more data for analysis. The Kalamazoo Promise was clearly a single-bounded case of an unusual nature with no available closely similar cases with which to compare it (2003). This research design (case study with multiple data collection methods) offered a multidimensional view of The Kalamazoo Promise (Creswell, 2007). Studying The Kalamazoo Promise in great depth at one school site and looking at the embedded areas of economics, social systems, and educational factors provided multiple perspectives within the single case design (Stake, 2006). This produced richer results that provided perspective and pointed to areas in need of further study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

A Three-Phase Design

Phase I reviewed public documents regarding The Kalamazoo Promise and utilized a holistic analysis of records, print and broadcast media, school board records, and allowed for a detailed chronology and emerging themes that proved of significance
An instrumental case study approach was used because it provided a detailed look at the case itself and revealed a wide array of information. Phase II, the interview portion of the data gathering, confirmed and built upon what was learned from the preliminary phases of the study (Creswell, 2003; Yin, 2003).

To add to the completeness (richness and saturation) of the findings, individual parent, community, and focus group interviews were conducted as Phase II and III of the study (Creswell; 2007; Yin, 2003). Interviews provided an added dimension and validity to the document review, and interviews were important to the research results since there are commonly multiple realities for research participants (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). In addition, interviews were effective in more completely understanding how people thought and felt about issues (Shay-Schumm, et al., 1996). Further advantages of focus group interviews included the potential benefits of interaction between participants themselves and conversations that could potentially uncover unforeseen issues of importance (1996).

The researcher used document analysis followed by phenomenological interviews to respond to the research questions. The goal was to gain access to the voices of The Kalamazoo Promise participants from a cross-section of stakeholders (Casey & Krueger, 2000). Shay-Schumm, et al., (1996) defined the rationale for the interview and focus group and its place in a case study.

The focus group can also assist in determining key stakeholders’ reactions to proposed or existing programs (e.g., Elliott, 1989; Miller, 1987). ...obviously, these applications can occur before, during, or after
the implementation of the policy, program, or practice. Focus groups are particularly helpful for planning, for needs assessments, and for program evaluation.

Adding focus group data to the research base substantiated and/or uncovered issues and themes that the document analysis illuminated (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Shay-Schumm, et al., 1996). While there were not a definitive number of focus groups after a review of the literature, there are suggestions as to about how many offer valid data (2000; 1996). Ideally, focus groups should be conducted three or four times with each homogeneous grouping of subjects (1996). For the purposes of this study, each subgroup was sampled by individual interview as well as by focus group (Creswell, 2003). The purposes for focus group interviews were to confirm the individual interview findings and to uncover any newly emerging themes. These results were added to the findings of the document analysis for corroboration and synthesis effects (Yin, 2003).

Sample Selection

Document Sampling

Creswell (2007) suggested that there are six main types of data used in case studies. As applied to this study, document sources included public print records, archival records available from Internet sources, and direct observation. Marshall and Rossman (2006) observed that document review was an effective method for contextual information and documents made it relatively easy to manipulate and categorize data for analysis. Document collection and analysis encompassed Phase I of this study.
Documents and artifacts offered a detailed chronology, the intent of The Promise, and proved to be extensive in scope (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Document types included in the study were internal communications, newspaper stories, and news broadcasts from both local and national media outlets. Other sources of information were presented as the researcher looked more deeply into the public record (1981).

Use of Internet-based documents, including on-line access to newspaper articles and past television news broadcasts, were searched and recorded. Keyword searches using electronic search engines included descriptors such as: (a) The Kalamazoo Promise; (b) educational attainment; (c) persistence; (d) economic impact on achievement; (e) the achievement gap; and (f) free college education. Keyword searches provided a comprehensive collection of documents all relating to attainment and The Kalamazoo Promise. The documents, including digital media, were cataloged in chronological order by the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Newton & Rudestam, 2001). The researcher's document collection was combined with the document library being cataloged and housed in The College of Education at Western Michigan University (Evergreen & Miron, 2007). Publically available print and broadcast media were retrieved via the Internet from electronic cataloging systems and from websites. Accessing multiple sources of information provided a greater depth to the study (Creswell, 2007). The primary setting for data collection was through electronic sources.

**Participant Sampling**

The sampling procedures and participants chosen, considering who participated, were crucial to the validity and eventual outcome of the interviews (Shay-Schumm,
Sinagub & Vaughn, 1996). For the purposes of this study, a field test was completed to examine the interview process and refine the interview questions. Important considerations found in the educator interviews included the importance educators placed on parent involvement and understanding and their own lack of The Promise understanding. Theoretical saturation exemplified the standard of holding enough interviews and focus groups to tap out the source of data (Casey & Krueger, 2000). It was more important to this research study to examine a heterogeneous set of voices in detail, which added richness and nuance to the findings of the document analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Selection of individual and focus group participants was complex yet important to the results of the study (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). Systematic procedures for participant selection were followed and a purposive sampling model was utilized to ensure that a heterogeneous pool of The Kalamazoo Promise stakeholders was interviewed (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). To be considered a stakeholder required one to be a participant, in some manner, in The Kalamazoo Promise, and to have frequent interaction with the school (2002). Parent focus groups, building-level educators, and community social service providers were conducted (Shay-Schumm, et al., 1996).

Participants for the focus groups were, in many cases, strangers to each other and this added to the variety of responses concerning The Kalamazoo Promise experiences (1996). Up to 25 individual parent interview participants were sought and each focus group was intended to be comprised of 6-9 participants (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Barbour & Schostak, 2005). A group of more than ten does not allow adequate time for
each participant to be heard. The result was that over 35 parents, representative of the population at the school, were recruited with 22 of the participants finally interviewed. This provided a valid sampling of the parent population (2002).

Twenty community group participants were recruited and nine completed individual interviews. This represented a valid sample of key community providers for the school (2002). Focus group recruitment was somewhat difficult and many recruited participants did not attend all sessions as scheduled. A valid sample was eventually obtained, but a more robust showing would have yielded even more confirmation of the individual interview results (2002). Two parent focus groups were conducted with six participants each. Two community groups’ focus groups were held and each had four participants. In the case of both individual and focus groups, the sample was representative as defined by Barbour & Schostak (2005). They observed that the total number of participants is less important than the composition of the participant sample. Namely, is the sample relevant and representative to the study (2005)? In this study, a representative sample was obtained.

Participants were screened and categorized to meet one or more of the following criteria: (a) a parent at the school; (b) represent a subgroup of parents (i.e., married parent, single female parent, single male parent, minority, lived below the federal poverty level, not below the federal poverty level, grandparent raising grand children, blended family, highly involved at the school, not involved at the school); (c) a community group representative and provided community services to the school either directly or indirectly; and (d) had either short or long-term interaction with the school. Community
group participants were invited if they were a primary provider of services to students and families at the school (1996).

To ensure a purposeful sample that included participants who might not respond to a general invitation, a more personal approach was utilized. School staff, representing the researcher, personally invited parents and community group members with whom they had a relationship (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). As a result, the majority of participants selected had been socioeconomically marginalized in terms of being poor, a minority, and/or not having easy access to the school due to a lack of transportation (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Barbour & Schostak, 2005). Parents and community group participants that verbally agreed to participate were given information about the purpose of the study and the HSIRB information regarding the specific protections followed to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality.

**Interviewing**

To aid in wider participation, interviews were conducted in either the school or individual’s homes. In some cases, interviews were completed in the home to ease childcare and to avoid possible uncomfortable feelings brought about by being in the school (Creswell, 2007). When a parent needed transportation to the interview, it was provided (2007). Community group members were interviewed at the school except for two cases. One community group participant agreed only to a phone interview due to time constraints. Another chose to respond to the interview questions in writing and emailed the responses to the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).
Three interviewers were selected to conduct both the individual and focus group interviews. Two of the interviewers were selected for their interview experience with The Kalamazoo Promise evaluator at The College of Education at Western Michigan University, and one was chosen for the strong personal relationships he held with many of the school's underrepresented families. This mix of interviewers ensured both experienced interviewing skills and a comfortable experience for those participants who needed special assurances in the interview setting (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

With the exception of three home interviews, a written interview response, and a phone interview, the remainder of the interviews were conducted in offices or conference rooms in the school. Most participants demonstrated a level of comfort with the school setting, but were always offered a choice as to the location (Creswell, 2003; Schlossman, 2006). Offices and conference rooms were chosen to provide a level of privacy and to prevent interruptions since all the interviews at the school were conducted during school or during the after-school program. Participants were asked to read and sign an HSIRB approved consent form prior to being interviewed. Individual interviews were an average of 45 minutes in length with some lasting much longer. Focus group interviews were approximately one hour in length (Creswell, 2003). Carefully constructed research questions allowed for open-ended discussion, but ensured the discussions stayed on topic. Standard interviewing and focus group protocols were adhered to, including choosing a setting that was relaxed and pleasant, and opening with non-threatening questions and following up with more difficult questions as the groups felt more comfortable (Shay-Schumm, et al., 1996).
In some cases, during home and school-based interviews, family members were present. The informal setting put participants at ease during the interviews (Schlossman, 2006). Each participant, with HSIRB approval prior to the interviews, was offered a $25 gift card or cash for his/her participation. Some refused to take the token gift. Giving a token of appreciation was indicated as a standard interview practice by fellow graduate students and faculty at Western Michigan University, and seemed to be received well by most participants (Creswell, 2007; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). A light meal of pizza and dessert was offered for the focus group interviews as well as the token cash/gift card.

Each interview was digitally recorded and each electronic file was then transcribed by a professional transcriber (Creswell, 2007). An in-depth transcription process was utilized to capture true language and in some cases non-verbal cues (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Transcripts were prepared in a consistent way with moderator comments bolded, and participant comments included in printed transcripts, documented verbatim (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). Participants were given a code name; therefore, no names appeared in the written transcript, and any names shared in the recordings were given pseudonyms by the transcriber (1996). These steps were taken to ensure data, integrity, and participant confidentiality. The digital interviews and transcripts were stored in a secure setting that will be destroyed according to HSIRB protocols (Creswell, 2007).

Instrumentation

Specific research questions were written for each participant group (Foddy, 1993). The following section explains the process followed in designing and field-testing the
interview instruments (Appendix A). Interview questions were intended to draw out the actual experiences and behaviors of the participants (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Exposing unheard voices was a key purpose of this study. In terms of The Kalamazoo Promise and this study, there were unheard voices and they were parents and to a more limited extent community group members (Evergreen & Miron, 2008; Evergreen, Miron, & Spybrook, 2008; Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009). When interviewing marginalized persons, Schlossman (2006), Marshall & Rossman (2006), and Barbour & Schostak (2005) described the importance of perceived social power, social position, trust, and the meanings participants intended as important factors to consider when choosing interview settings, interview questions, and protocols. The contexts for the interviews were as important as the interviews themselves in terms of this research (2006; 2005).

In designing the interview questions, the researcher was responsive to the emerging themes from Phase I (document analysis) and the preliminary focus group results (Foddy, 1993; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). These antecedent factors were, in a sense, a field test that strongly influenced the construction of the questions. Foddy (1993) suggested that every word in an interview question is important and takes on multiple meanings according to factors, such as the relationship and the positioning of the interviewer to the participant, and the meanings the participant gives to them. Marshall & Rossman (2006) label loosely structured interview questions as “in-depth interviews” (p. 101). They best explain the structure used for this study: “...interviews are more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories. The researcher explores a few general topics to ... uncover ... participant views but ... respects how the
participant frames and structures the responses” (p. 101). The results of this study yielded hundreds of pages of transcribed participant responses. These interviews produced a rich, deep discussion of The Kalamazoo Promise from parents and community group members’ perspectives (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

The procedures for conducting individual and focus group interviews included creation of an interview protocol (Creswell, 2007). The protocol mapped the steps the interviewers took and ensured that important aspects of the process were consistent across interview sessions (2007; Shay-Schumm, et al., 1996). Carefully constructed interview questions allowed for open-ended discussion, but ensured the discussion stayed on topic (Foddy, 1993). Standard interviewing and focus group protocols were adhered to: (a) interviewing in a setting that was relaxed and pleasant; (b) opening with non-threatening questions; and (c) following up with more difficult questions as the groups felt more comfortable.

Questions were intended to probe participants on previously emergent themes and seek additional themes (Appendix A). Integral in the design was a brief script read to the participants that shared some of the preliminary findings of the study as well as established a common knowledge base for participants. This was a purposeful attempt to direct the interview toward an open dialogue in which the participants knew their views, and opinions were the main purpose of the interview (Creswell, 2007; Schlossman, 2006). Parental involvement questions were based on findings from the literature review and The Kalamazoo Promise evaluation studies done at The College of Education at Western Michigan University (Evergreen & Miron, 2007). Specific parental characteristics such as: (a) involvement in a child’s schooling; (b) the amount of college
talk in the home; (c) a methodical support of homework help in the home; (d) regular parent communication with the school; and (e) a safe, socially supportive neighborhood network and other factors were listed (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007).

Community group questions were based on: (a) learning the level of involvement each particular participant had with the district; (b) their motivations; (c) their knowledge level of communitywide services; (d) their perceptions of parental involvement; and (e) areas of community supports they saw as needing improvement. The Promise evaluation produced by the evaluator at The College of Education at Western Michigan University also provided model questions the evaluation researchers had recently used with students, teachers, and community group providers (Evergreen, & Miron, 2008; Evergreen, Spybrook, & Miron, 2008; Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2008). These questions served as models and had been extensively field tested and provided examples of plain, understandable word usage, and specificity (Foddy, 1993).

To ensure open-ended, focused interview sessions the questions were initially screened in several ways (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2003). Field-testing of the questions was an important step that produced easy-to-understand questions that the participants needed to be asked (Creswell, 2007; Schlossman, 2006; Yin, 2003). The field testing of the research questions consisted of: (a) comparing this study’s questions to the models provided by The College of Education questions as explained above; (b) multiple reviews and revisions of the questions by the director of The Promise evaluation project at The College of Education at Western Michigan University; (c) review and revision of questions by the interviewers who were familiar with The Promise research or issues of poverty and parental characteristics at the school

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under study; and (d) review of the questions and revisions by a social worker that worked at the school and by potential participants (community group providers and parents) who were not interviewed, but offered revisions and affirmations in the process of revision (2007; 2006).

As a final step, Phase III of the process of garnering parental and community group member views, focus groups were conducted whose purpose was to confirm and seek explanation for the individual interview and preceding document analysis findings (Yin, 2003) (Appendix A). The focus group questions were drawn from the individual interview questions, but the themes were narrowed due to the results of the individual interviews (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). The topics explored during focus group interviews were: (a) parental involvement levels; (b) access and knowledge of community supports available to participants; and (c) the degree to which particular students may be left out of accessing The Promise (attainment for minorities).

Analysis

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the views of parents and community group stakeholders, and what they shared were important issues for The Kalamazoo Promise. The analysis of Phases I, II, and III was systematic and intended to discover the emergent themes from public documents and transcripts of the interviews (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2007).

Document Analysis

The document analysis model utilized in Phase I of this study followed a combination of procedures suggested by Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), Creswell (2007),

The researcher, in order to follow a valid research design for this study, selected qualitative analysis methods from the researchers listed in the previous paragraph. A detailed description of the processing of qualitative data coding and analysis was presented by Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) and Huberman & Miles (1994). Specific portions of their coding methods were utilized for this study. The researcher also chose aspects of Auerbach & Silverstein's coding system to fill gaps in the coding procedure (2003). Some aspects of Huberman & Miles (1997) an extensive, nearly quantitative coding system served as a framework for this study, but not all aspects of their systems were followed as with Auerbach & Silverstein (2003), In the search for general statements about relationships and themes, a flexible system of data collection and analysis was followed (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The aforementioned research designs were combined with the general qualitative data analysis framework laid forth by Marshall & Rossman (2006) who listed the following phases of qualitative data analysis: (a) organization of the data; (b) immersion in the data; (c) generation of themes; (d) offering interpretations through analytic memoing; (e) searching for alternative meanings; and (f) writing the report. Case studies frequently use this type of methodology (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Harris, 2005;
Pierre, 2007; Yin, 2003). A holistic approach to analysis of the data ensured nuances, as well as overarching themes, were discovered and noted (Creswell, 2007). A systematic note-taking system was used to interpret and record data for each individual source of information (2007). In addition, a simple coding system was devised based on emerging themes. This form of categorical aggregation was suggested by Creswell as being effective in bringing to light key issues contained in the data. What resulted were a detailed chronology and a number of valid emerging themes (2007). A case study approach offered a detailed look at the case itself, which offered a multidimensional view of The Kalamazoo Promise (2007).

A Kalamazoo Promise document library was being housed at The College of Education at Western Michigan University (WMU) and those documents were crosschecked and added to by the researcher. Dr. Gary Miron, a Kalamazoo Promise evaluator for The College of Education at WMU, facilitated the categorization of the document record, lending his cataloging system and undergraduate and graduate student assistance in processing the documents. The researcher’s documents were added to those at WMU, and are housed in the office of Dr. Miron to aid in further research.

Emergent themes, including the importance of economic issues, the central role seen for the school, and the high aspirations held by all groups were surprisingly similar across the preliminary phases of the study from the pre-document sampling, the pilot school staff focus group, continuing through the Phase I full document analysis and the Phase II interview sequence. See Chapter IV for results of the study.
Interview Transcript Analysis

Phase II consisted of a series of individual parent and community group interviews, followed by focus groups. The focus group’s purpose was to follow the individual interviews and offer affirmation of themes and a deeper understanding of the emerging issues (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2003). In many ways, the coding method used to encode the interview transcripts was similar to methods used to process the document record. This methodology was supported by the fact that researchers often treat multiple sources of written discourse analysis identically (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). Sources of written documentation, for example, may originate from interview transcripts, books, newspapers, Internet articles, and electronic and printed journals (Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

The literature provided a systematic method for coding the interview transcripts. A system combining facets of several authors was followed. All interview data analysis was based on pattern identification (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2003). The analysis process began with the theme categories, which were determined by the previous phases of this study (Casey & Krueger, 2000). The document study produced a set of themes with economics emerging as the strongest. Casey & Krueger (2000) suggested a sorting approach they called the long-table method. While somewhat time-consuming, the long-table approach provided the researcher a comprehensive overview of the data and allowed for flexibility and emergence of unexpected results (2000).

A systematic tally of frequency of responses, specificity of comments, emotions attached to comments, and extensiveness of comments was utilized (2000).
Extensiveness of a subtheme or theme was important as it measured how many times different participants commented on a specific issue (2000). Glasser & Strauss (1987) and Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn (1996) suggested a particular data analysis procedure that is intended to reveal the big ideas. This coding system enabled the researcher to crosscheck the transcribed interviews for accuracy and prevent loss of detail that goes along with the transcribed text (Casey & Krueger 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1981). Strong, significant themes often emerged from this exercise (2000).

The researcher then utilized the themes obtained through this process and the themes became the major categories guiding the next phase (Shay-Shumm, et al., 1996). Next, the data is unitized and the researcher must ensure that only data that is heuristic in nature be included (1996). By heuristic, it was meant that if the unit of information (sentences, paragraphs, or phrases) did not further the goals of the study, it must be left out. Units were termed “salient points” for purposes of this study (Creswell, 2007). Unit size was determined by meaning; therefore, to be considered a unit, the words must have had meaning enough to stand-alone. Units (salient points) were recorded on a tally sheet that included frequent direct quotes from the participants (1996). The units were coded into theme categories as established at the start of the process and checked against themes that had emerged in the document analysis (2000; 1996). The categorized units were then sorted into subunits such as the long-table approach mentioned above (1996).

The researcher asked, “Did the preliminary themes match the themes that emerged from the sorting process?” The emergent themes informed the previous analysis results from the document record (Shay-Schumm, et al., 1996). The result was a list of
themes from the interview transcript record. See the results in Chapter IV for a full description.

**Integrating the Results Through Cross-Case Analysis**

Yin (2003) suggested that the results from a cross-case synthesis were more robust than holistically examining a single case. While this study employed only one case, the researcher applied the principal of cross-case analysis through a process of sorting and cross analysis between and across data sets replicating the constant comparative approach (2003). The results from the document analysis and focus groups were compared for common themes (2003). Ways in which the themes diverged were also examined (2003). To replicate cross-case synthesis, each predesigned portion (phase) of the study was treated individually, as if it were a separate case. Word tables were constructed utilizing the themes collected from the document and focus group analysis. A graphic organizer of the key themes was then laid out Shay-Schumm, et al., 1996; Yin, 2003). The following graphic organizer was based on the results of document analysis and preliminary focus group.

**Figure 1**

*A List of Emergent Themes from Document Analysis and Pre-Study Interview Record*
Commonalities across the study were easily noted as well as places where portions were dissimilar. Finally, general groups of ideas, and subgroups of ideas, emerged and lent themselves to evaluation and interpretation (Yin, 2003).

Placement of Researcher

Marshall & Rossman (2006) discussed the role of the researcher in qualitative studies. In the design of a qualitative research study, there are several factors to be considered that assist in producing usable results (2006). A consideration of the degree of engagement the researcher was involved with the participants. This was termed as participantness (p. 72) by Marshall & Rossman (2006). For this study, the researcher was engaged with the participants, aided in recruiting for interviews, was present in the school, but did not conduct the interviews personally (2006).

Revealedness is a measure of the clarity of the researcher’s role in a particular study (Patton, 2002). It was assumed for this study, and the fact that the researcher was known to varying degrees to the participants, that a level of removal from the interviews would provide an opportunity for more objective, valid data (2006). This was the consideration of how much participants understood they were participating in a study of The Kalamazoo Promise (2002). Participants were fully aware of the study and their role in it. Those recruited to participate were informed of the purpose of the study, and were then given a letter explaining their role and the option to opt out at any point in time. They were
then asked to sign an HSIRB consent form on the day of the interview that once again explained the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 2002).

The intensiveness and extensiveness of a study were additionally considered by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). These concepts were described as the researcher's level of personal involvement in the setting (the school) (2006). The researcher was an employee at the school and held a position of leadership. Participants knew the role of the researcher to varying levels and expressed a level of comfort in participating in a study of The Kalamazoo Promise (2006). It was made clear to the participants that their views were important to improving the implementation of The Promise and that anonymity would be preserved (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Schlossman, 2006). Finally, the researcher must consider access to participants and the setting for the case (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The researcher was known in the setting of the case (the school) and to the participants. Access to participants was improved since the researcher had a personal level of interaction and, to varying degrees, had a positive relationship with the participants (2006). It was noted that several parent participants were recruited because they had some level of conflict with school policy and personnel in the recent past. The researcher felt that including participants with potentially negative school views would add to the richness of the discussion (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Schlossman, 2006).
Validity and Reliability

Creswell (2007) and Newton & Rudestam (2001) synthesized much of the thinking on research design validity. The researcher found a good fit with their methodology and the parameters of this study. The three main domains of research evaluation criteria are discussed individually.

Internal Validity

A validity perspective similar to Creswell (2007) and Newton & Rudestam (2001) was applied. An attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings was made. A qualitative case provides a more substantial description than a quantitative approach, and the closeness of the observer to the case added to the internal validity of the study (2007). Creswell (2007) and Stake (2006) suggested that the researcher utilized at least two validation strategies to improve the findings. In this study, multiple validations were achieved through triangulation (2007; 2006). Triangulation of data sources was applied to corroborate multiple data sources including: (a) public documents including newspapers; (b) radio and television news broadcasts; (c) school district records; (d) scholarly reports; (e) evaluations; and (f) government proceedings (2007; 2006). Another form of validation was multiple interview data sources.

Interviews and focus groups of stakeholders were conducted to reflect on the accuracy of the themes and subthemes that were formulated through systematic document analysis and other forms of data collection (Stake, 2006). Qualitative studies, such as this research, a produced rich and thick description that allowed the reader to make decisions regarding transferability of findings (Creswell, 2007; Newton & Rudestam, 2001; Stake,
2006; Yin, 2003). A rich and thick description was a product of this research study and resulted from the extensive document database and interview transcripts, which provided the reader the detail needed to determine if the conclusions drawn by the researcher were valid (Creswell, 2007).

**External Validity**

Caution was used in forming generalizations based on this case study of only one elementary school and The Kalamazoo Promise (Newton & Rudestam, 2001; Toma, 2006). Marshall & Rossman (2006) utilized triangulation as was applied in this study to assure generalizability. Some researchers prefer to use the term *transferability* over generalizability when applied to qualitative research (Stake, 2006; Toma, 2006). In this study, multiple data sources ensured (though limited) transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Toma, 2006; Yin, 2003). Results may be transferred (compared) to similar cases to check for generalizability because this study had a valid research design and sufficient sampling was obtained and reported (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003).

Data generated from this study is rich and thick, which allows readers to decide if its results could be applied to similar cases (Creswell, 2007; Newton & Rudestam, 2001; Yin, 2003). An additional validity measure was as the study progressed, the emergent themes, research questions, and interview questions were modified to fit the results gathered during each phase of the process. This fits the qualitative tradition of building on the *truths* found as research progresses and adds to the external validity of the study (Creswell, 2007; Newton & Rudestam, 2001; Stake, 2006; Toma, 2006; Yin, 2003).
Reliability

This study had an adequate level of reliability (Yin, 2003). Stringent criteria for data gathering, warehousing, coding, and analysis were followed throughout the research process (Creswell, 2007; Newton & Rudestam, 2001; Toma, 2006; Yin, 2003). The researcher followed a systematic approach to data collection throughout the document analysis, interviews, and focus groups ensuring validity of the study (2001). All three forms of data collection (document analysis, individual interviews, and focus groups) achieved a form of triangulation and crosschecking of emergent themes and subthemes as stated in Creswell (2007) and Yin (2003). The reliability of the study was ensured by maintaining an accurate paper trail (Creswell, 2007; Newton & Rudestam, 2001).

Newton & Rudestam (2001) suggested maintaining an audit trail that another researcher could follow and obtain similar results. The specific data coding strategy was documented and maintained so they were available to future researchers (Newton & Rudestam, 2001; Yin, 2003).

Limitations and Delimitations

Delimitations of the Study

The research design of this case study confined it to one specific school that participated in The Kalamazoo Promise (Newton & Rudestam, 2001). This fact and the fact that parent participants were purposefully sampled to fit particular demographic groups and were not randomly sampled may have limited the transferability of the results (2001; Yin, 2003).
Limitations of the Study

The prime limitation of the study was the relatively small size of the focus groups (Barbour & Schostak, 2005; Newton & Rudestam, 2001). Many participants did not attend their scheduled interviews. This was a particular problem with the focus groups. Twenty participants were recruited, sent a follow-up reminder, yet only eight appeared the first round of focus groups. An additional parent and community group interview was promptly scheduled to increase the sample size. Key participants may have also been missed due to limiting parent interviews to 22 participants (one parent interview was conducted, but failed to be recorded so was not included) and community group members to only nine interviews (2001). Some focus group methodologists believe that to have an entirely valid focus group sampling one must hold up to three separate groups on one topic (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). For the purposes of this case study, the use of focus groups of key stakeholder groups added to the already rich results obtained from a rigorous document study. The researcher believes this effort yielded a sufficient level of completeness for analysis (Yin, 2003). It should also be noted that Auerbach & Silverstein (2003) and Huberman & Miles (1994) claim qualitative data models of analysis are systematic and explicit in their methodology and ensure validity of results. The researcher believed that this study met those standards.

Design limitations of this case study may also have occurred through a potential lack of completeness in the artifact search. In qualitative research it is desirable to search the data until the sources are exhausted and begin to be uncovered repeatedly (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). The sheer number of retrievable articles, broadcasts, and evaluation
documents was growing by the day. For the purposes of this paper, the scope of the document search was, by necessity, limited primarily by time in order to bring it to completion. The researcher believed that a valid document sample, while not entirely exhaustive in scope, was obtained (2007).

Chapter Summary

The case study methodological process utilized in this study is well documented and based on the experience of years of social science research (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). A multiphase approach was followed to achieve triangulation of the case. It began with a pre-study document analysis paired with a pre-study educator focus group. Phase I of the study was a more complete document analysis. Document analysis offered a true reflection of the voices that have appeared in various sources of media regarding The Kalamazoo Promise (Stake, 2006). In essence, document analysis gave a historical perspective to the case (2006). Interviews and focus groups offered an affirming function and different perspectives contrasted to the document research (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). Phases II and III were comprised of individual and focus group interviews to produce a rich description of parental and community group thinking concerning The Kalamazoo Promise (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This study was designed to uncover the issues that have emerged since the inception of The Kalamazoo Promise. Its purpose was to uncover the emerging views parents and community group stakeholders experienced concerning The Kalamazoo Promise and what they believed were the important issues that must be understood by implementers of The Promise in order to provide more effective implementation. In the first phase, the document record was analyzed. Phase I was intended to paint as complete a picture of public discourse surrounding The Kalamazoo Promise as possible. The researcher recognized that what had been recorded in public conversation might have omitted important parent and community group member voices. Phase II consisted of parent and community group interviews at one elementary school. Participants were interviewed in two different formats. Individual parents and community group members were interviewed individually and in focus groups. Transcripts of the individual interviews were examined to produce emerging themes. These themes were checked in focus groups (Phase III) of parents and community groups to confirm and explain the initial findings.

The Research Questions

The research questions formed the foundation of the study. Themes and subthemes emerged throughout all three phases of the study and each phase uncovered
themes that were confirmed in the next phase of the study. The research questions are shared here to assist the reader in understanding the purpose of the study and the results of each phase.

1. PHASE I (*Document Record Analysis* consisting of a preliminary focus group and the document analysis)

   What were the issues that emerged in the public document record since the inception of The Kalamazoo Promise with particular emphasis on what the documents said in regards to parental and community involvement?

2. PHASE II (Parent and Community Agent Interviews)

   When emergent issues from Phase I and II were shared with key stakeholder focus groups charged with implementation of The Promise?

   What did they believe were the important issues that others must understand to facilitate full implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise?

3. PHASE III (Focus Group Interviews—Resulting from Phases I and II and Utilized in Individual and Focus Group Interviews)

   From the perspective of (a) the community, and (b) parents, what must to be done to increase the effectiveness of The Kalamazoo Promise?

**Organization of Results**

The study was conducted in three phases each consisting of several components. Phase I examined the document record regarding The Kalamazoo Promise. Phase II consisted of interviews of community group and parent The Kalamazoo Promise participants. Phase III consisted of follow-up community group and parent focus group
interviews. To assist in understanding the results, each phase and its separate parts results were examined and reported separately and in the relative order as they had occurred.

Preliminary Pre-Study Focus Group

Introduction

To gather formative data and to assist in formulating the research questions in preparation for the more complete study, a preliminary focus group was conducted and consisted of teachers working at the school. The eventual research questions were not fully formulated when the preliminary focus group was conducted in 2008. Rather, the final research questions in large resulted in part from this pre-study. The focus group sample was a diverse cross-section of the staff. The participant group was purposefully selected (sampled). Members were a mixture of African-American and white teachers. There were eight participants and all were female. The length of experience working in the classroom varied from a newly graduated teaching intern to two participants nearing 40 years of service. The session was 1.5 hours in length and was held at the school.

There was one open-ended research question. The question was purposefully vague in order to discover the depth of knowledge and issues participants held concerning The Kalamazoo Promise. Participants were asked by the researcher, “As you think about The Kalamazoo Promise as a unique community initiative, what are the major issues you see as important?” From this question emerged a rich, in-depth conversation about students, parents, the school, community, and The Kalamazoo Promise. The results of this focus group brought to light what would later become a strong theme in the
study; teachers strongly felt parents and community supports played an essential role in eventual student attainment. As a further result, the preliminary focus group directed the researcher toward focusing on parental involvement and community support as major issues of concern for the participants. A summarization of this preliminary group is shared to present the voices of professional staff and what they were thinking and how they were feeling about The Kalamazoo Promise, as well as how it affected parents, community group involvement, and students.

Findings of Preliminary Focus Group Interviews

A transcript of the preliminary focus group was analyzed and salient points were tallied. The salient points fell into six emergent themes. The researcher set a standard for theme selection prior to coding the interview transcript. At least ten salient points supported a theme for purposes of the pre-study. Six themes met the criteria and were connected to the research questions. Themes were: (a) parental understanding; (b) parental support; (c) parental student expectations; (d) educator understanding; (e) economic impacts; and (f) economic, social, and educational context. Each of the six major thematic elements were examined separately to provide adequate detail and to highlight the key subthemes that emerged (Creswell, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Three of the themes were discussed here as they emerged as the primary concerns of the participants and were affirmed with the emergent themes in the preliminary document study.
Preliminary Theme 1—Parental Understanding

“This parent didn’t feel that their child was college material.” This quote typified the direction the interview took immediately after the interview began with this question, “As you think about The Kalamazoo Promise as a unique community initiative, what are the major issues you see as important?” This participant quote followed soon after.

“And you know, I have young ladies I grew up [with] … and men that I grew up with through school had horrible experiences and they consider school is where white people, (laughs) … are trying to find something wrong with you and they are not actually there to help you.”

The previous quotes revealed this participant educator viewed that many parents do not understand the implications of The Kalamazoo Promise. The Promise has a level of complexity that was yet to be understood. Parental understanding emerged as the most discussed theme among the participants. Participants agreed that most parents, especially those from poverty and/or ethnic background, did not understand the particulars concerning The Promise nor its actual scope. Another participant revealed the lack of understanding about the actual depth of commitment and altruism the donors of The Promise gave to the community. The participant stated, “…also some parents don’t believe that by the time their child reaches college age that it’s still going to be in effect. They just don’t buy it.”

According to a participant, some parents believe that something this significant must be a trap or an illusion. As in many urban schools, student mobility can be an issue. In this school, the population turned over as much as 40% in a given school year. Many parents, according to the interview participants, did not give much consideration in the
loss of The Promise’s importance when they chose to remove their children from the school district. For example, two participants stated, “...I’ve made comments to some of them. If you leave you jeopardize the opportunities ... The Promise for your child ... and they’re like, I don’t care my ... either they’re not going to college or there’s other scholarships.” In addition, “This is something down the line and what [they] are thinking is what I need right now. I’m not happy right now. So, I’m moving someplace else.”

The relative level of parental support emerged as a theme. While not discussed to the same extent as parental understanding, it came up at the beginning and again at the end of the interview session.

Preliminary Theme 2—Parental Support

Key viewpoints emerged around the topic of parental support.

Participant 1: Lack of parental support, I would say, we had parents say to their children in front of us, “You’re not going to college anyway. So, don’t put any ideas in his head ‘cause he isn’t going to college.”

Moderator: You heard people say that?

Participant: I was in court with a parent who said that.

Moderator: Really?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: So lack of parent support, I think, is a biggie.

This exchange occurred at the beginning of the hour-long focus group and was indicative of the belief of these educators that parents did not support their children’s
possible access to post-secondary education. Parental support took a slightly different course near the end of the focus group. Separate participants added to this theme by saying, “...it’s teaching values. You know you teach a child a value, be kind to others ... one day they internalize that value ... if the kid is really young (and the parents consistently have said) ... when you go to college ... eventually it's internalized. That’s not happening.”

Thematically similar, two participants revealed that they did not have much experience on college campuses when they were young. Both were raised near a campus, but they did not access the campus until they were almost college age. “I was on a college campus once before my first day of classes. Yah, you really have no idea what you’re walking into and it’s a big step for someone to just kinda jump into this new environment...” This form of parental support, while intangible, emerged as an important factor to the participants.

Preliminary Theme 3—Parental and Student Expectations

Three of the six thematic elements from the interviews concerned the role of parents and their children’s potential to attain a post-secondary education. Parent and student expectations recurred throughout the interview session. The topic came up distinctly on four separate occasions and by different participants. Whether a student had the ability or desire to go to post-secondary schooling came up first. Two participants shared the same view. One said, “...there are children that may be academically able to go through a four-year college that don’t want to, that they want to go into a profession that doesn’t...” And another shared, “...they [parents] may not want their kids to go [to
college], they may want them to be a firefighter ... a policeman ... they may think that oh, The Promise ... is not applicable to my child ... so I am not interested in it.”

The conversation on parental and student expectations took on the perspective that some students want instant gratification and by making money through illegal activities such as selling drugs. One participant shared from personal experience, “...they don’t have the financial means at home... mom’s not making money, they’re on welfare, I can’t get ... nice things, but I want it now. I’ve watched them. They’re buying tennis shoes, name brands; vehicles ... they’ll have five cars!” Other participants concurred, “Yeah, I mean their parents bring them up like that. Yeah, how many of our [at this school] kids have $70 and $80 tennis shoes?” The topic of student and parental expectations concluded with the statement, “…they need to be taught that it comes with time and effort (others heard to agree) ... time, effort, and hard work.”

The result of the preliminary focus group session revealed a wide range of themes and concerns on the part of the participants. Parents were the major topic of discussion. The educators interviewed were primarily the first generation from their families to attend college. These teachers believed parents did not fully understand the significance of college nor did they support their child’s success in school. They also felt that parents did not expect their children to attend college. Low parental aspirations in turn affected their children’s college aspirations.

The pre-study’s emergent themes added direction, focus, and closely with this study’s research direction, and addressed the research questions. The study’s purpose to uncover themes that were important to parent and community stakeholders were affirmed and enlarged due to this conversation with teachers at the school site.
Criteria for Theme Selection—Interview Transcripts

Themes continued to emerge from each phase of the research. To uncover themes, interview transcripts were coded and each unit (a sentence, phrase, or paragraph) that stood alone (had meaning) was tallied and recorded (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). These units were termed salient points (Creswell, 2007). In order to be considered a theme or subtheme a simple means test was applied. Issues that emerged that were shared by 70% or more of the participants were considered themes. Subthemes were considered 50%/69% of participants. In a few cases, themes were mentioned widely by participants, but did not meet the 50% threshold. Another means test was applied to the actual number of references (units/salient points) participants made to each theme. This form of data was also important in assessing the importance placed on certain Promise-related issues by participants (Casey & Krueger, 2000; Yin, 2003). The criteria for theme selection were not applied to the preliminary focus group transcript analysis. Conducting a preliminary focus group had the purpose of field-testing, interviewing, and transcript analysis techniques to use in the full study. A result was the richness of the discussion and the strength applied to the emergent themes by the interview participants.

The Research Questions

Phase III was the focus group portion of the study that served to confirm and explain the findings of Phase I and II. The researcher chose to gain interview and transcript analysis experience and conduct a preliminary pre-study focus group interview. The research questions were evolving at the time of the preliminary interview, and the
results yielded important thematic data that contributed to the emergence of parental understanding and parental involvement themes. In its final form, the preliminary focus group answered research questions one and two. Important information regarding what key stakeholders believed was important issues must be understood to aid in full implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise. Research questions one and two evolved into this form: when emergent issues from Phase I were shared with key stakeholder focus groups charged with implementation of The Promise, what do they believe are the important issues that others must understand to facilitate full implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise? In addition, from the perspective of the community and parents, what needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of The Kalamazoo Promise?

**Implications for Full Study**

The subject of parents and their prime importance emerged as the major topic from the preliminary focus group interview. The preliminary document analysis showed that participants also felt that economic issues and educational (school district/K-12) issues were of prime importance. The implications on the full study included the need to validate these emergent themes from the document record as well as through a full round of stakeholder interviews. The views and voices of important stakeholders groups such as students, parents, and community members would add depth and thick description to the results (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003).
Results of Document Analysis—Phase I

Introduction

The Kalamazoo Promise provided free college tuition to qualifying graduates of the school system. This research explored the important economic, educational, and social issues that emerged since The Promise's implementation. This research sought to discover and report the important issues being discussed in the public sphere that would better inform community and school leaders. This case study examined public artifacts related to The Kalamazoo Promise.

The Research Question

The research question for Phase I of the study asked: “What were the issues that emerged in the public document record since the inception of The Kalamazoo Promise, with particular emphasis on what the documents reported in regards to parental and community involvement?” The research question was fully addressed through the results of this study. The document record revealed key issues that were important to Kalamazoo Promise stakeholders. The issues of parents, an important theme found in Phase II of the study, were not as important in the document record. As the results illustrate, the discussion of the economic impacts and schooling factors were most discussed in the artifacts.
Criteria for Theme Selection—Document Analysis

Documents for analysis were gathered via web searches as well as purchases of hard copies of the local newspaper, *The Kalamazoo Gazette*. Approximately 800 artifacts were collected over several years and documents were collected by the researcher and combined with a significant collection housed at the Western Michigan University Evaluation Center and Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology. The WMU collection was part of The Kalamazoo Promise evaluation being led by researcher Dr. Gary Miron (Evergreen & Miron, 2009). The published documents that were resources throughout the research dated from when The Promise was announced to the public in November 2005 and continued until April 2009. Artifacts consisted primarily of newspaper accounts and other news reports as televised accounts from local and national news outlets. Other documents reviewed included: (a) web publications consisting of local economic and The Kalamazoo Promise analysis from the W.E. Upjohn Institute; (b) broadcasted radio reports; (c) the Kalamazoo Public Schools Promise website; (d) Kalamazoo Public Schools print documents; (e) Standard & Poor’s school data website; and (f) PowerPoint presentations from state and national conferences that provides documentation from the proceedings (January 17, 2007) of a Town Hall Meeting on Education and Michigan’s Economic Future.

Publicly accessible documents were easily retrievable and provided an extensive data set. There were more documents accessible with more effort, but to set a timeline for this research the window for examination was closed in March 2009. News coverage of The Promise had become less frequent and had leveled off somewhat in 2009, but there is still periodic coverage on a monthly basis. It is the researcher’s belief that the
800 documents reviewed provided a representative and effective sample of the public discourse concerning The Kalamazoo Promise. In several instances, as citations revealed, there was a snowballing effect in many of the articles, which led to a larger number of salient points (Patton, 1990).

All artifacts were reviewed three times and then coded as to type and topic. The themes and subthemes were highlighted and listed cumulatively (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2003, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2003). A systematic, recursive approach was used to discover emergent themes in the documentation. This was a process utilizing emergent intuitive analysis, and the essential topics were developed or co-constructed as the work proceeded. In essence, the key ideas emerged from the artifacts.

The same method utilized for the interview analysis was not applicable to the document study. Broad themes emerged as the documents were read, reread, and sorted. A document either fit or did not fit into a category. In some cases a new category emerged and it was added. Coding of the document record differed as to level of salient points necessary to compose a theme. Interview coding set a level of 50% /70% to be considered a theme/subtheme (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The salient points of the public documents were much more evenly dispersed than those from the interviews and the sample much larger than the interview database. For purposes of this study, a level of significance for public document salient points of 15% was assigned by the researcher. To be considered a theme, the total number of salient points assigned to a theme must have equaled 15% or greater of the total document record analyzed. The researcher felt that 125 of 830 total documents (15%) met a valid test of significance. For the document
record, to produce at least 125 salient points that was of significance and at a level to receive note (Creswell, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). A raw score of at least 100 salient points was reached by all five emergent document themes. Four of the five emergent themes met the threshold of 15% (125 salient points).

A preliminary pre-study document analysis was conducted as a field study during the summer of 2007. During the preliminary document analysis of 100 artifacts, the following preliminary list of themes emerged: Economic Issues; Educational Attainment and Universal Access; Social Issues, and Discussion beyond the Community. Each of these theme headings had salient points categorized and listed. In the preliminary document study: (a) economic issues were found more frequently within the artifacts and comprised of 22% of the total; (b) educational attainment and universal access was mentioned and comprised of 16% of the total; (c) social issues appeared 12%; and (d) discussion beyond the community composed 14% of the document record. The results of the analysis were added to the final document record and were included as part of the final results.

Results of Document Analysis—Overview

Using the same coding criteria as described previously, the full document study was conducted in March 2009 and 830 documents were analyzed. New, more descriptive theme subheadings were added to the emerging database, which included K-12 (schooling issues) and a nonrelated category. The nonrelated articles were school related, but off-topic as they did not address the research questions. In addition, articles were also filtered as to type of document. Systematically examining the context (type) of
document provided information on the sources of The Promise discourse, the forms it had taken, and the relative amounts of public discussion across document type. Four hundred eighty-four news reports, mostly from local and state newspapers, were the largest single source of these documents (60%). The next most frequent document type was commentary, usually found in newspapers, with a count of 191 (23%) documents. Seven percent of news articles contained tabular (statistical) information (55) and these were listed separately from news articles though they were usually embedded in the context of each article. It was viewed by the researcher that data, listed in tabular form, was important and offered somewhat more objective information for the public and therefore should to be noted.

Table 2 lists the total number of document references for each theme and the percent of the 830 total reviewed. The table was organized with documents that occurred most frequently at the top.

Table 2

*Document Record by Theme/Subtheme by Number of Documents and Percent of Total*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Theme</th>
<th>Total Number of Documents (830)</th>
<th>Percent of Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics/Urban/Core Issues</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12/Education/Achievement/School/Administration</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues/Community Involvement/Parental Involvement</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attainment/Universal Access/College/Overall Promise</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Beyond the Community</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>14 (subtheme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-related</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4 (subtheme)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of Document Type—Overview

The primary source of The Promise discourse was print news articles (see Table 2). News media reports occurred more than twice as often as the next common type, commentary. Commentary and news reports occurred more frequently through newspaper articles. The local newspaper, as might be predicted, was the primary source of The Promise discourse on all topics and types of documents. Other newspapers from across the country discussed The Promise, especially when Promise-like tuition programs were being considered locally. News stories were evenly divided between the topics of economics, attainment, social issues, K-12 internal topics, and frequent discussion across the country. It should be noted that document type was more easily assessed than topic. Within a particular article, more than one topic was discussed frequently and often cut across many facets of The Promise. An example of this was a document that discussed attainment issues, parental support, and programs the district was implementing.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Document</th>
<th>Total Number of Documents</th>
<th>Percent of Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation/Data</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School District/Board/ Administrative/Internal</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarly/Journal</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Related</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Document Theme Results

Introduction

To aid the reader, the complex themes of the document record were arranged with those occurring more frequently. Each theme was validated by a listing of salient points, which was gathered from the record. To become a theme, there must have been at least 125 references (15%) in the total documentation reviewed. The most frequent occurring theme was economic issues.

Economics and Urban Core Issues

The most frequently mentioned theme to emerge was the economics of The Promise with 197 (24%) of the documents, primarily in newspapers (see Table 3). Economic topics produced 22 separate salient points and most often mentioned are: (a) increased enrollment in the Kalamazoo Public School District (Mack, 2005, 2006a, 2006b); (b) the school district hiring more teachers (News 3, 2006); (c) more income diversity in the community (Renwick, 2007); (d) new emerging positive economic signs throughout the district and community (Brown, 2007; Mack, 2006); (e) the potential business-related power of an educated work force (Eberts, 2007; The New York Times, 2005; UPI, 2005); (f) the need for more community income diversity (W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2006); (g) the occurrence of local urban revitalization despite a poor state economy (Eberts, 2007; Mack, 2006; Schneider, 2006); (h) an 85 million dollar school bond passed in the district; (i) how community real estate market outpaced slow, statewide market (ABC News, 2006; Boudette, 2006; Higgins, 2007; Samilton, 2007); (j) ways the community was getting national recognition (Jones, 2007) and high rankings;
(k) the enrollment impact on surrounding public and private schools (Mack, 2006; Miller-Adams, 2007); (l) the condition of the community tax base (Erickcek, 2007); (m) the supply and demand side of employment for highly-educated workers (Bebow & Power, 2007; Bartik, 2007; Eberts, 2007; Erickcek, 2007; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2006); and (n) the unintended outcomes and risks of an incentive such as The Promise (Jones, 2007; Mack & Blade, 2005; Miller-Adams, 2007; Prichard, 2006; Robinson, 2006).

The more recent discussions focused on the negative impacts the declining state's economy was having on local businesses, employment rates, and families struggling economically.

K-12, Education, Schools, and Administration

Schooling and factors that centered on educational matters occurred frequently in the document record. This theme was eventually entitled Schooling or K-12 issues later in the study. Schooling-related documents made up 23% of the total record with 191 occurrences. Achievement statistics, comparisons to other school districts, and school board governance matters frequently appeared in newspapers and broadcast media. Examples of schooling documents included discussion of The Kalamazoo Promise and its impact on public and private school enrollments and comparing district to surrounding districts (Chourey, 2006; Huth, 2008; Mack, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008).

Programs offered in the schools to support social and educational efforts were reported (Excelsior, 2008; Acosta, 2008; Black, 2008; Esters, 2008; Mack, 2007, 2008a, 2008b). Extended day and enrichment programs such as summer school, preschool, and after-school programs were discussed (Black, 2008; Kalamazoo Gazette, 2008a, 2008b; Mack,
2008, 2009; Rao, 2007). Administrative and school board matters, such as redistricting school boundaries, school bond campaigns, The Kalamazoo Promise leadership, construction of new schools, and school board policy issues were frequent topics appearing in the record (Chourey, 2006; Jessup, 2008; Mack, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2009). Attainment issues and achievement statistics were also classified under the K-12 theme by the researcher if framed as a product of schooling (Mack, 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Martin, 2007). Student and faculty awards were reported by internal school district publications as well as by the public news media (Detroit News, 2007; Excelsior, 2008). Schooling remained a predominant theme with parents as well as a product of the focus groups in Phase II of the study.

Social Issues, Community Involvement, and Parental Involvement

Social issues were prominent in the document database. This was the third highest occurring theme with 157 documents comprising of 19% of the total record. There was a combination of concern for students living in poverty and a discussion of the positive aspects attributed to The Promise. There was also some discussion of the possibility of emerging social problems as well as challenges (Jones, 2007; Miller-Adams, 2007). Included among the discussion of concerns were articles that mentioned housing segregation that is embedded in the region as well as the urban core community. Segregation and unequal access were reported by: (a) both income and race factors (Jones, 2007); (b) new levels of white enrollment in the K-12 district (Brown, 2007); (c) the high rate of poverty concentrated within the city limits (Jessup, 2006); (d) the possibility of attracting a creative class to the city (Mack, 2006); (e) the structural
challenges that may occur (Miller-Adams, 2007); (f) the in and outward migration of residents to the city, county, the western portion of the state, and the population decline statewide (Miller-Adams, 2007; PR Newswire, 2006); (g) increased human and social capital (Eberts, 2007; Erickcek, 2007; Miller-Adams, 2007); (h) the ability to attract middle class families from the county as well as from across the country (Erickcek, 2007); and (i) altruism and improved community morale (Barr, 2007; Brown, 2007; Eberts, 2007; Miller-Adams, 2007; Moore, 2007). Parental involvement was an infrequent topic found in the document base. These document findings point out a need to add to the literature on parent and community involvement (Evergreen & Miron, 2007).

**Educational Attainment/Universal Access**

Educational attainment/universal access (to higher education) emerged as the fourth ranked theme in the document record. The topic of attainment occurred 134 times (16% of total document record). In terms of the criteria for theme identification of this study, educational attainment and universal access attained the standard of 15%.

As stated in the literature, founders of The Promise designed it to catalyze economic growth by lifting all students to a higher level of educational attainment (Erickcek, 2007; Jones, 2007; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2006). This was the concept of universal post-secondary education (Elliott, 2006). Subthemes found in the documents included: (a) universal access (The Kalamazoo Promise, 2007); (b) educational attainment (Erickcek, 2007); (c) increased expectations (CBS News, 2007; Eberts, 2007); (d) increased student retention and resultant graduation from K-12 (Our View, 2006,
2007; Miller-Adams, 2007); (e) increased educational assets for the community as well as individual students (Eberts, 2007; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2006); (f) increased community engagement (Mack, 2007); (g) needed support services (Miller-Adams, 2007a, 2007b); (h) the Cherry Commission (Bartik, 2007); (i) the dropout rate locally, as well as statewide (Jones, 2007); (j) African-American graduation rate soared (Brown, 2007; Mack, 2007); (k) getting students ready for college, and student persistence in college (Mack, 2007); (l) reduced class size in district high schools (Mack, 2007); (m) the highest poverty elementary schools; (n) higher attendance at summer school; (o) new, more rigorous high school academic requirements; and (p) mandatory summer school for first and eighth graders (Mack, 2007).

Discussion Beyond the Community

The lowest emergent subtheme of the document record discussion beyond the community was referred to 116 times (14%). This did not meet the standard of 15% of the record although it was considered a subtheme for the purposes of this study. Important salient points were recorded nonetheless. They were: (a) The Promise serving as a model for other communities (Bebow & Power, 2007; Higgins, 2007; Nixon, 2007; Renwick, 2007); (b) the potential for an increase in highly educated labor supply (Christian Century, 2006; Eberts, 2007; Goetz, 2006; Jones, 2007); (c) the creation of a possible Michigan Promise (Clay, 2007; Lessenberry, 2007); and (d) the creation of Promise-like programs in communities across the country (Abjul-Alim, 2006; Edgar, 2007; Elliott, 2006; Herald & Review, 2006; Jones, 2007; Miller-Adams, 2007).
Summary

Documents were reviewed and salient points were listed for each theme. Economic issues occurred most frequently in the collected document record. Following are the remaining theme elements in order of importance: (a) schooling factors; (b) educational attainment/universal access; (c) social issues; and (d) discussion beyond the community. Because of the full document study, educational (schooling) issues emerged nearly equal to economic factors. Attainment, retention in college, dropout rate issues, social supports, and community and parental involvement also emerged as important components of the public discussion.

Individual Parent Interviews—Phase II

Introduction

The interview phase of this study sought to unmask parent voices in regards to their children and The Kalamazoo Promise. Twenty-one parents were interviewed over the period of a month in March and April 2009. A purposeful sampling model was followed to ensure a representative cross-section of parents. To reach parents usually difficult to access, the interviewer used preliminary verbal invitations in the place of formal written formats. Interviewing times and setting accommodations were allowed. Several parents were interviewed in their homes or were provided transportation to and from school.
Participant Characteristics

A key purpose of this study was to give voice and gain information from parents who are traditionally underrepresented. The student body of the school was 45% African-American, approximately 10% Hispanic, with the remaining student mix comprised of White (<40%), Asian, and Native American students. Twenty-one individual parents were interviewed ($N = 21$). The group was a diverse sample of the school population. The sample was skewed toward participants of minority groups (63%; $n = 14$). A majority of participants represented those of color or living below the national poverty level. Forty-three percent of parent interview participants were African-American ($n = 9$), 33% White ($n = 7$), 19% Hispanic ($n = 4$) and .05% Native American ($n = 1$ participant). The common measure of poverty level for which a student qualifies for federal free/reduced price lunch assistance was based on family income. The school’s free/reduced level averaged 68%. The sample interviewed had a larger representation of those qualifying for free/reduced lunch (76%; $n = 16$). Twenty-four percent did not qualify for free/reduced lunch ($n = 5$).

Sixty-two percent of the participants were single heads of households, predominately mothers (13 participants). There were eight married participants (38% of the sample). Adding to the richness of the voices were many family configurations: (a) two single fathers; (b) a family led by grandparents raising their grand children; (c) two families led by parents living in the same home with several generations of children and grandchildren; (d) blended families (divorced and remarried with children); and (e) multiethnic couples. The sample selected for the interviews was representative and provided a depth of views required to produce useful results.
Where parents lived in the city was an important attribute to track. The investigation did not formally track the current school district housing patterns in which the neighborhood participants lived. Parents from across the city were interviewed with some living in middle class neighborhoods, several living in single-family homes, many were long-term renters, some had been homeless in the recent past, and some lived in subsidized housing. The school’s demographics typified most of the district’s schools because students attend school from every neighborhood and housing condition citywide. In the Kalamazoo district, parents have many choices regarding the school they send their children. School district transportation is accessible for most students. While city housing patterns (neighborhoods) remain segregated by income level, parental freedom to choose schools, along with still active federal desegregation court order, contributed to a diverse student population in this urban school district.

The Research Questions—Phase II

Phase II of the study sought to elicit parent and community group views of important Kalamazoo Promise factors affecting students. The voices of parents and community group members had not been well reported at the time of this research study. This study’s research question (Phase II) was fully addressed by participants in the interview process. Those results are shared in the following discussion.

The research question for Phase II: When emergent issues from Phase I were shared with key stakeholder focus groups, charged with implementation of The Promise, what do they believe are the important issues that others must understand to facilitate full implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise?
Criteria for Theme Selection

The interview transcripts yielded a rich array of parental and community group views. To organize and report this data the following set of standards were applied: (a) a theme was shared by 70% or more of the participants; (b) subthemes were shared by 50% to 69% of participants; and (c) those salient points not being mentioned by 50% did not meet the standard of this study. In several cases, themes were mentioned widely by participants, but did not meet the 50% threshold. Another means test was applied to the actual number of references (units/salient points) participants made of each theme. A tally was kept of each participant who stated a particular theme. The 70%/50% scale was also applied to participants stating a theme. This statistic demonstrated how broadly a topic was discussed by participants. This set of selection parameters was utilized for both interview types (individual interviews, focus groups).

Results of Individual Parent Interviews

There were two central questions guiding the interview phase of the research. The research questions asked, “What do parents believe are the important issues that others must understand to facilitate full implementation of The Promise?” Moreover, “What needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of The Kalamazoo Promise?” In response to the research questions and the emerging themes gleaned from the Phase I document analysis, interview questions were constructed. The questions were designed to elicit participant’s perceptions of The Promise and factors they see affecting themselves and their children (see Appendix A for interview questions).
In the final analysis, the full course of research produced seven themes that was a result of a complex mixture of key factors. The researcher’s experience as the administrator at the school-site under study provided a preliminary glimpse at what would become important issues for parents and community providers. Themes emerged \textit{a priori} from the literature review and the corresponding document analysis. Emergent themes coincided with, “The Impact of The Kalamazoo Promise on Student Attitudes, Goals and Aspirations: Working Paper #6” (Jones, Miron, & Young, 2009). This work, part of an ongoing evaluation of The Kalamazoo Promise, contracted with The College of Education at Western Michigan University and funded by the United States Department of Education, yielded important data, and confirmation of issues of student, parent, and educator aspirations.

The individual parent interviews produced the following seven themes (in order of importance): (a) parental involvement/support; (b) parental understanding; (c) poverty/social factors/neighborhoods; (d) school factors; (e) community supports; (f) economic factors; and (g) aspirations. Themes are discussed in detail in Figure 2.

\textbf{Figure 2}

\textit{Emergent Individual Parent Theme and Subtheme Definitions}

\textit{(not in order of importance)}

| Parental Involvement/Support | The level of parental support given to children. This included level of parenting skills, helping with homework, talking about school and college, getting the child to school regularly, and providing a safe and secure home life. |

97
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Understanding</td>
<td>The level of understanding parents had about the importance of schooling, even at the preschool/elementary level, how aware the parent was about what level of school achievement is necessary to attend college and how much the parent participates in the school. Understanding the particulars about The Promise, including the grade point requirements, residency requirements, what the scholarship covers and what it does not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty/Social Factors/</td>
<td>Ways that living in poverty or being middle class affected a child/family. Racial group, not speaking fluent English, and effects of neighborhood factors were included in this discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhoods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>Ways the schools were cited as affecting the level of student success. This included the school curriculum, teacher quality, school culture, student behaviors, school administrative support, perceptions of the school in the community, and school structures such as the length of the school day and school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Support</td>
<td>These included the level of community support in and outside of school for children and families. In addition, how aware parents were of community supports, how they accessed services if needed, and whether or not the correct services existed to serve best the needs of children and families. Also included here was the lack of accessible public transportation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Factor</td>
<td>Parents working a particular shift, losing a job, being unemployed or underemployed, moving to the community for a job. Moving to or remaining in Kalamazoo due at least in part to The Promise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>Parents and children committing to The Promise and having or not having post-secondary aspirations even at an early age.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 illustrated the importance parent participants gave to each theme. The total percent of salient points (responses) and percent of participants who stated each theme are shared.

Table 4

*Emergent Themes from Parent Interviews (N = 21)*

*(In order from most mentioned to least mentioned)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Salient Points (Responses) (Percent)</th>
<th>Participants Stating Theme (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Understanding</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Supports</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty/Social Factors</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Factors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research question one asked, “What do parents believe are the important issues that others must understand to facilitate full implementation of The Promise?” Figure 4 illustrates the important issues that emerged from the parent interviews. The research questions were intended to uncover parental views on the issues that would affect full implementation of The Promise. The inclusion of parents representing traditionally underrepresented populations added to the depth of the results. The following narrative
provides a rich and thick description of what parents said. Themes are listed in order of importance first illustrated with parent comments (voices).

**School Factors**

The most common emergent themes were school factors. School factors were shared 185 times about the school’s role in The Promise-related issues or solutions. Teachers were mentioned frequently and characterized as hard working, having the central role at the school, in children’s access to The Promise, and believed to be routinely overworked. Parents were asked if they had seen a change in the school, the administrator at the school, or the teachers. In regards to teachers, one parent stated, “...I would say yes because the teachers are... excited that each and every one of their students has the opportunity to go to college...” The topic of the curriculum was mentioned as a factor in student success. According to a parent:

...they need to work on the curriculum ... [In] middle school there is no advanced placement ... so the above average kids are not [challenged]. I think that is pretty common ... the teacher will teach to the lowest level ... so in a way it’s not fair.

Parents were asked if the way students act (behave) at school had changed since the inception of The Promise. The responses varied among participants with some saying yes, behavior was better, but some saying it was worse. This was shared by a parent:

...there are students who consistently have behavior problems ... whether it’s lack of home support, I think that they’re not getting the right services to address their particular issue[s], and I’d say it’s mainly the ones with the behavior
problems because they’ll be the ones that are suspended. They’ll be the ones that are out of class instead of in class, whether a time out … so I think that the services do not address those particular students to have them equipped to receive The Promise.

Parents shared strong feelings about their own children and particularly the behavioral issues they see other parents’ children experiencing. A sampling of comments included:

I kind of felt like … believe me my son he has issues in school, but I kind of felt like in the middle school there is a struggle. There is a group that’s kind of left out. You’re either one of the behavioral problems or you’re kind of one of those students that just excel … you’re one of the top students, and then you’ve got this whole conglomerate of average students that just kind of get—there’s no guidance. It was hard to keep track of what was going on with him there. There were safety issues there …

In addition, another parent’s view of the behavioral situation in the schools:

Well, that’s a tough question because there’s like cops in the schools so the behavior it’s all up to the kids. The school can’t change behavior. You can be there to correct it … it’s up to the kids really. High schools are pretty rough if you’ve got cops in them, you know. [Parent is employee of district, works in multiple district schools as part of job duties.]

In addition, attributing behavioral issues as a barrier to achievement:

To me it doesn’t matter if there was a Kalamazoo Promise or not. People are the way that they are, so it’s good that The Kalamazoo Promise is here, but I don’t
think it changes certain children’s behaviors, especially by me working at an elementary school, they’re not thinking about Kalamazoo Promise or college.

[Parent serves as a lunchroom supervisor.]

Some participants recognized some of the efforts being made by the schools to improve the behavioral climate:

…right now … PBS [positive behavior supports] … [We] just came into that [the school]. I think a positive behavior support that they have in effect right now is really good for them because it shows them how to do everything that they don’t know how to do [Behaviorally]…

Moreover, a parent who had concerns about the culture in the schools before she recently transferred her children from a district 100 miles north of Kalamazoo:

I know before The Promise was announced I heard many bad things about the school system. Parents were advised not to go to the Kalamazoo school system because if you want to get a good education for your kid, go to Mattawan. I’ve actually heard better things coming out of peoples’ mouths about the Kalamazoo school system since The Promise has been activated. I’ve heard the kids are actually caring more about the school. It was kind of the situation in [names community]—a big dropout rate. They didn’t care and a lot of crime. I get a feeling that it’s definitely been a good thing for these [Kalamazoo Public] schools.

Participants were asked if any particular students were being left out of the benefits of The Promise. They answered in ways that touched across the seven emergent themes. Some answered in regards to the school:
No, I don't think there are any students being left out or being served wrongly. I feel that Kalamazoo Public Schools, The Kalamazoo Promise, all the teachers, and staff, do whatever it is they can to make sure that every student's learning experience is comfortable, so I don't think any student is being left out.

Another shared what it will require of the schools:

I think the opportunity to learn is what it boils down to me, the opportunity to learn and you have students who if you're not in school ... what is it that you're learning? You're learning how to survive. You're learning how to, for lack of a better word, hustle ... to manipulate ... [And] to deceive. You're learning, but you're not learning things that are going to give you a better life. How do we get those kids to school? We look at engaging practices. We try to find that niche that's going to engage that student. That means that we have ... to tailor. We have ... to tailor curriculum to their particular needs ... tailor the education of our students to what engages them. That will be the hook, get them in with whatever the hook is. Those things take finances, they take time, they take constant assessment. [This parent works in another KPS school.]

Another respondent stated:

I don't think that the ... people who donated The Promise themselves are leaving students out, but students themselves are leaving themselves out. They're not giving their full potential and it's got a lot to do with parenting ... because if a parent doesn't care or doesn't praise their kids for the good things, then what is there to look forward to? Therefore, I believe that it's all about showing your kids that you care about them. Show them that they are doing good not only just
criticizing them for the bad things, but praising them for the good things that they do too because if they feel they not appreciated, I don’t think they going to put their best foot forward in doing anything in life ... that’s what it’s all about to me is taking step by step ... more than nine times out of ten it’s about the parent and the student. It’s not about the school. It’s about the student’s willingness to learn and ... the parent’s willingness ... to teach their student and want better for their kids.

Parents also shared how they believe that in many ways the school or the entire district has improved since The Promise was introduced:

...I think the work got harder. I think they send these kids home with a lot of work now. They make them read more and I don’t think that is a bad thing because it gets them ready for the real world. I do think the school system has changed. Kids have to read 40-60 minutes a day. We use to have to read 15 minutes. Oh it’s a big ... big change ... so I think the homework is getting harder and they are giving the kids more to do. Now in the first grade ... I don’t remember that type of work. I told my mama that it’s getting more aggressive, more challenging. I think the school system is changing for the better because it’s advancing ... children.

In addition, The Promise’s impact on families, as well as the schools:

I’ve seen a lot of change in a lot family because they have buckled down. You see a lot more families at the library with their kids. Many days wasn’t like that. You see kids going to the library. Kids and mothers reading and stuff. I think it has something to do with The Promise. ...it also has something to do with the
school system because if you don’t have good teachers and principals behind you to help you focus on what you need to because it ain’t just like a child and teacher. It’s like a whole community. It’s the mother and the father and the teachers and the principal. And if we all work as a team, our kids will progress further. You know what I’m saying?

School factors were a central theme from the parent interviews. It appeared, based on the high rate of response to school factors that parents see the schools as an essential component for students of all backgrounds to succeed.

Parental Involvement/Support

The central importance of parents becoming engaged and supportive of their children from birth through college emerged as a common belief. In one parent’s words:

…those that have no inclination about college. College is something that is more of a fantasy. The parents have not given them exposure. Schools may not have given them exposure to college. They’re really preparing them for the next grade as opposed to the next step, so I think those are students who are being left behind. Those who lack parent involvement … but I think if you have a student who doesn’t have any parent involvement, those students who aren’t coming to school, I think those are probably the ones who are getting the least of this [The Promise].

In general, parents mentioned the positive things they do to support their children in regards to being successful in school and becoming Promise ready. A typical response was:
...definitely parent involvement because if your child doesn’t feel like you care, then they’re not going to care, so you definitely need ... parental involvement. Even if they can’t make it to ... PTO ... at least you’re checking on their work and you’re making sure that they’re understanding concepts. People are busy. I get that, but there’s always time. Have them read to you while you’re cooking dinner ... definitely parent involvement [is very important]...

A second respondent indicated:

Parents need to come to school ... that their kids go to and monitor them. I’m not saying every day and I’m not saying spy on them, but just out of the blue just come up to the school and see what your child is doing. Talk to ... the teachers and the principal, but talk to an activity helper like myself or someone like you, [interviewer was named] someone who has to interact with the kids when they’re not in class. Therefore, they need to talk to more than just the teacher. They need to know every aspect of their child’s behavior in school.

Children’s behavior was listed by parents as a barrier to achievement at home and at school. The dropout issue was also shared by a parent as a parenting problem, and the risk factors for dropping out of school often begin to appear even in early elementary years:

...that’s making parents scared to discipline their own children that they had [at] birth and have taken care of ... parents are literally scared to discipline their own kids and then once a child knows [the parent is scared] then a child’s going to take advantage of that. Oh I know you can’t touch me so—and if you do, I’m going to
call the police on you and that's what makes kids defiant. That's what makes kids
don't want to listen to their parents no more…

Parental effectiveness and even the very young [teenagers] having children were
given as barriers for children's success. One example included:

[Parents should] …spend a lot more time with them instead of running in the
streets … like as soon as they get out of school, straight to homework. No TV,
less stuff, more reading … [I tried to get] my son … to do reading. It's a struggle,
but at least [I] make him do it. Pretty much, yeah, less kids [very young parents]
hanging out in the streets, street corners.”

Aspirations

The theme *aspirations* slowly coalesced throughout the study. First, the pre-study
educator focus groups and then in Phase I of the study, news documents referred
frequently to the hope, positive emotions (joy), increased opportunities, and success
stories of student graduating and qualifying for The Promise. Aspirations were noted in a
recently released Working Paper #6, from The College of Education at Western Michigan
University (Jones, Miron, & Young, 2009). This paper, reporting on the results of a
survey of Promise students, shared the prevalence of increased aspirations for Promise
aspirations as a combination of *inspiration* (emotions such as excitement and satisfaction)
and *ambition*, a student/parents focus on future goals (expectancies). Aspirations came
through strongly from the coding of the parental (and community group) interviews.
Participants certainly expressed both inspiration (positive emotion) and ambition (future goal orientation for theirs’ and others’ children) during many of the interviews. Aspirations were the second most mentioned theme with 158 codings from the 21 parental interviews. Examples of the inspirational views shared by participants:

It’s appreciated. For someone to know the impact that The Promise is going to have, it’s just outstanding. I went to college and I was from a low-socioeconomic home. I wasn’t expected to go to college. I wasn’t expected to graduate from college. I wasn’t expected to have a master’s … the expectations were not there for me because of where I came from. The impact that this could potentially have on the community as a whole is enormous … I just can’t envision how we could get … to these people [the donors] and impress it upon these people how important, how powerful The Promise really is … I think it’s great.

Another participant shared:

Yes, it changed it because we don’t have to worry about us being low income about having money for our kids to go to college so I think it has changed every person who is a low-income family who doesn’t have the money…

A thankful parent stated:

…if the kids decide to take advantage of it, I believe myself personally as a parent that The Promise has been quite good to everyone, especially those that didn’t know how they was going to go college at first and now they have a general idea. The Promise has helped them really make their own mind up, to let them know … you can do it like this and you can prosper from it. You can go in, you can choose what you want to do, how you want to do it, and The Promise is there in
the background to help push you and help you through it. It's a great scholarship program.

Parents of families facing specific challenges, poverty for example, shared how positive The Promise is:

[Interviewer] Has The Promise changed your family?

[Response] Oh yeah because it gives my son a better opportunity to go to college. It gives him something to look forward to. I'm a single parent and it would help and take a lot off me. It helps a lot. Like I said some things, we wouldn't have been able to pay for. Some things he wouldn't have been able to get.

In addition, another positive comment about The Promise and easing of the economic burden on families:

...a lot of parents. Even parents who are not low-income. Even parents who are middle class. That [The Promise] took a lot of burden [off families]. A lot of weight off they shoulders. Having to worry about how they going to send they kids off to college. Accepting the bad in life. Oh, I don't got the money to send my kids to college so my kid's not going to college. See, that motivates parents who want their kids to go to college to do better in school as far as academically and behavior because it all coincides with one another.

Another shared the fear of their children moving far away to college:

[Interviewer] Does Mary have any schools picked out? Or is she kind of waiting?

[Response] I think that she and Suzy were going to KVCC. They ain't leaving Kalamazoo.

[Interviewer] Why don't they want to leave Kalamazoo?
[Response] Scary. I don’t want [her] to leave my hometown.

In addition, a minority parent shared this:

...I’ve seen some African-American families who the financial burden was what was preventing them [from] even thinking about going to college. I’ve seen them get so excited and like we’re using it, and I’ve seen families pushing their kids. You’re going to get those grades, you’re going to do it.

A parent shared this about increased opportunity for minority students:

I know a lot of teenagers are relying on it [The Promise]. In addition, a lot of them are black too. So I said do you realize that there aren’t even that many black males that do graduate?"

Several participants indicated how even young children are talking about careers and college:

...they are hearing at a young age they’re going to college. I think when I was in school, I didn’t think about or it didn’t really get discussed until we started high school. So now in kindergarten my son was hearing that in his future there will be a college education.

Another indicated:

Well, [son]—he talks about being a police officer and I explained to him the only way he can become a police officer is if he go to college ... so, that’s his motivation to go to college. [Daughter] she want to be a doctor or teacher so—and she knows that she got to go to college for them so she talks about it a lot too.
Students and parents having to earn The Kalamazoo Promise emerged as a common salient point within the theme of aspirations. When asked if some students are being left out of opportunities The Promise offers, one replied:

I don’t think that the—not the people who donated The Promise themselves are leaving students out but students themselves are leaving themselves out. They’re not giving their full potential and it’s got a lot to do with parenting too because if a parent doesn’t care or doesn’t praise their kids for the good things, then what is there to look forward to?

Another referring to the effort and desire needed to attain college said:

…I believe that a student that really want things, especially dealing with The Promise, you have to be able to go after it. The Promise is there as another incentive for you, and if that incentive is there for you and you want to go after to get it, well you’re going to put forth that effort. You’re going to push everything else out of your way and you’re going to go forward and try to accomplish that. You should use it. It’s there for the taking.

A third respondent shared:

…I if you willing to learn and you willing to put forth that effort and to take The Promise and put it into perspective, you can make anything [of yourself] you want. You can do anything you want. Your heart become[s] an eagle. That’s what I tell a lot of kids, it’s up to you.

A salient point that emerged was the fact that not all students are intended to go on to a four-year college. One respondent shared:
Some people are meant to go to college and some people aren’t … I just want you to succeed in something. That is all that I ask. I don’t want them to be a welfare recipient all of their lives.

In regards to her special needs child and special needs students in general, one parent had this to share about The Kalamazoo Promise:

I would like to see The Kalamazoo Promise be more open to special ed children [going on to post-secondary opportunities] and to, if it’s not giving them a four-year degree at some college, giving them a place like MRC or building a school specifically for kids that have developmental delays, whether they’re hyperactive or whatever that’s going on with them, whatever it may be, that they can have one place that they can go to and feel safe…

Other respondents shared how it will take time for post-secondary aspirations to become a part of children’s thinking and an embedded part of the community culture:

Before you go to second grade, you’ve got to do well in first grade, that kind of thing. So I think by the time these kids are in middle school and high school, their whole thinking is how am I going to get there? How am I going to get to college? What do I got to do to get there? They’re starting to think that on their own rather than have an adult say you’ve got to do this, this, and this in order to get to college.

In addition, this was shared by another participant:

School was kind of hard for her but now she’s starting to grow up and adjust a little bit better so I’m hoping by the time we hit … eighth grade the mind set of I’m going to college is going to set [in] because I don’t [the child] have a choice.
The idea of college-going aspirations was shared through strong parental views about the opportunities offered by The Promise. Parents across demographic groups placed great importance on newfound hope and what The Promise could do for their children.

Parental Understanding

Parental understanding was a theme that was not predicted in the document pre-study, but emerged strongly first in the educator pre-study focus group. The small sampling of elementary teachers and larger sample of parents believed other parents do not fully understand The Promise and what it will take to achieve universal attainment. They shared that all parents need to fully understand what it will take to make children ready to go to college. Participants not only discussed their efforts to make their children successful and Promise eligible, but the additional parental behaviors that were holding other children back. The topic of knowing the factual requirements, such as specific residency and eligibility requirements, was a topic of concern by community group members and parents. There was also a fear many parents, especially those who live in poverty, do not know the full extent of the effort parents must expend in order for their children reach The Promise.

This was a typical parent response:

[Interviewer] As a parent, is there anything else you are thinking about The Promise that you’d like to share and I haven’t asked you about?
[Response] When they graduate, you know, how does it really work? Do they get grants or are they—I mean, is it going to be a full ride or do we have to pay? Those are questions I do got, questions that I haven’t gotten answered.

[Interviewer] So have you asked?

[Response] I haven’t asked, no. I just heard about it. Basically like all word of mouth. When they graduate, basically, they got a free ride to college, but I think there’s more to it than just a free ride. There’s always a catch.

[Interviewer] What do you think the catch would be?

[Response] I don’t know. Like say I think you’ve got to pay some money for college. There’s no such thing as a full ride, I don’t think. There’s always a catch. You’ve always got to pay for something.

[Interviewer] ...they’re withholding certain information?

[Response] They’ve been withholding information. They should let us know more about it instead of just saying, go to Kalamazoo schools and like you get to college. It should be more to it.

Several parents questioned not only what the requirements are to qualify, but also expressed a “this is too good to be true” attitude about the chances their child will actually qualify, or whether The Promise will still be in effect when their children graduate from high school. It is helpful to view these perceptions in light of families living in poverty. The fact that The Promise lacks comparability to programs in other communities may be contributing to misinformation on the part of parents. Other parents were more optimistic and better understood their role and are positive about the future for their children:
I don’t think there’s any students going to be forgetting about it. I think it depends on parents like me to pursue it. It’s just like I say we got the application for my kid. What are we going to do with it? Sit down at the table and just don’t worry about it or read it and what we don’t know, try to get information about it and see what we can fill this application right … so I think it depends on the parents. I don’t think nobody [is] being left behind … the kids that are graduating, how are we going to talk to them [?] … I think everybody qualifies for The Promise as far as I know … it depends on parents. If your child is left behind, it’s because—probably because of us [the parents], I think.

Many parents also discussed the fact that since their children were still in elementary or middle school, they were not yet thinking of The Promise very much. An active parent in the school, and who is college educated stated:

…it’s still seven years away for us to even take advantage of it, so as to how much money will be saved … I don’t have any idea. I have some idea, but I don’t know exactly because I haven’t researched any colleges or what it costs to go to college, so we’re just continuing to live our life and educate our kids as if we would have anyway. So really, there’s no difference [for my family] at this point…

Community Supports

Parental understanding of community supports was not universal among the participants, and for many, was very limited. Parents addressed issues of community services 94 times compared to 185 responses for school factors. Participants were asked
explicitly through an interview question if the level of community supports had changed since The Promise began. Many knew of services only if they had utilized them for their families, though many had not accessed any community services even once. Participants referred to school-based services like those coordinated by Kalamazoo Communities in Schools, or those that are church or community-based and accessible outside the school throughout the interviews. Even if they did not know many particulars about what supports existed in the community, parents believed community supports were very important. They stated the overall level of social, medical, mental health, and academic tutoring and mentoring support offered in this relatively small city was, at least, above average. Some parents did not know of the services currently in place for their families. An example included this exchange:

[Interviewer] Are you aware of any community services?

[Response] ...to be honest, not myself. I know there’s a few out there, but I never pay any attention or I never take advantage of those programs, services.

[Interviewer] Do you know of some parents that do? If you know of some services, would you—have you ever made ... recommendations to your friends or coworkers about where to go if they need this or that?

[Response] ...no because I don’t know. Like I said, I don’t know the names or where they have those services. I know there’s a few out there good ones but honestly I don’t know.

And another, when asked what services they were aware of, “I wouldn’t know about the services.”

Finally, another who did not know about what is available in the community suggested:
That’s a good question. I do not know that there are more services since The Promise, but I am aware that there are some services, but I’m not aware of the specifics but some that are trying to help students be college ready.

Parents who have knowledge of services named several, but no parent could list even a fraction of services currently accessible. Church-based providers were mentioned by several parents. Examples of what participants said:

Well, just myself, I mean, my kids are—I didn’t start getting into a lot of the different services until just now, so once you start you’ve got to start learning because don’t nobody like inform you of stuff. I mean, it’s so hard. Like right now I just got into a few programs just for my kids, like the after-school program [coordinated by Kalamazoo Communities in Schools] and the Y and the Boys and Girls Club. A lot of people don’t know that they’ll really help you until...

Commonly suggested was how positive it was for families to have so many services and community-based advocacy:

I think the community has become more involved. I really believe that it’s a lot different now than it was. They had a meeting Friday night about the youth violence at [names church]. They were talking about how we can stop the kids from being abusive and hurting people on the streets of Kalamazoo. It helps to come up with some kind of plan that is suppose[ed] to prevent that. Hopefully it works out.

Some barriers to services were given reference. Not only did several parents say they do not know what is available, but also issues of access and social isolation that come with living in poverty were shared. An example was shared that families
sometimes are reticent to invite the community into their lives, “maybe they’re just
scared to go to see and then, you know, really don’t know what [the community services
are] about…” This fear was also conveyed:

…I’m all for community services. As long as I have the support to back it up
because of the situation that I’ve been through personally, like with social
workers and different services. I’ve been quite leery about getting too involved
with people because you don’t know who to trust.

Another participant shared this concern:

…some people don’t want other people involved if they don’t have to come to
your house—if you don’t have to use their services more than likely people—
some people won’t … if it’s available for them they will use it. Some people is
just I guess pride or you know or their ego or something…

Limited access to usable public transportation was also shared:

…I know that the school—and I think this is real helpful is that for parents who
don’t have vehicles—that the school will come get them for their kids conferences
so they don’t have to miss out on that. I think that’s got a lot to do with parent
cooperation with their kid’s schools. If they don’t have any transportation to be
able to get to the kid’s schools, then it’s more than likely that they aren’t going to
be able to be involved in their child’s schooling—not because they don’t care
about them, it’s just that it’s impossible for them to be able to get back and forth
to school … they come get your students when they miss the bus and for
conferences…
This participant shared how she not only accesses services for her children, but also enables others in her neighborhood:

[Interviewer] Are there any services that you take advantage of that the community offers?

[Response] ...yes. I have even gone to Loaves and Fishes before. I mean, I got short [of money] and I needed groceries and the community has helped me out with that and I appreciated it ... and my kids are in the Big Brothers Big Sisters, which I thank you for that because you hooked me up with that. And I got the best [Big Sister]. [Child] was going on the fast lane and the girl she got [her Big Sister] is the best ... so she's a good influence on her ... yes. She slowed her stroll.

[Interviewer] Are there parents on the block—do you hear them using other services?

[Response] ...one lady needed help [to pay utility bill] on her Consumers. So I helped her and told her where to go.

[Interviewer] ...so did you refer her to the Salvation Army?

[Response] [Yes].

Another barrier shared was the lack of supports available outside of school hours for students. One grandmother who cares for her grandchildren shared this concern in her neighborhood:

...teenagers don’t have nothing to do. Kalamazoo doesn’t have enough to offer them. See, when I was young there was different things we could go to. We had different events. The colleges were always throwing something...
Community services such as mentoring and tutoring, especially when school-based, were mentioned by participants several times. The school in this study offers on-site mentoring and tutoring coordinated by Kalamazoo Communities in Schools and Kids Hope. Many of the mentors/tutors are church-based volunteers. Several participants shared their support for services such as Big Brother/Sisters and school-based academic tutors. These were seen by many parents as an asset that pairs their children one-on-one for help with their schoolwork. A sampling of comments included:

I do know that, for instance, my oldest daughter was struggling in math and Kalamazoo Communities in Schools was able to get her a tutor ... [and] in the after school program ... [Also] there's the Boys and Girls Club and there's a couple other different [community providers].

Another respondent:

I think we have to do a lot more mentoring ... that would stretch beyond the normal boundaries of mentoring. I think the mentoring would have to not just be a pizza party ... a day at the park, but some really powerful things like taking a child and consistently doing something with that child that's [related to] educational achievement ... where this child is seeing the other side of their responsibilities and character building that's way outside their norm ... I know mentoring because I am a mentor...

Parental participants freely shared the primacy they placed on community services. In reality, community supports have become increasingly available in the schools themselves and are commonly accessible to all in need. Child and family
advocacy has also grown since The Promise’s conception, and the schools and community advocates seem to find more ways to inform and connect families in need.

**Poverty/Social Factors/Neighborhoods**

Issues surrounding poverty, when discussed by participants, comprised longer periods of discussion and the examples given were extensive and compelling. In terms of the order of importance (frequency of mentions), poverty/social factors were near the bottom with only 9% of the responses, yet 100% of the participants offered their views on this topic. Many were facing barriers due to their own lack of schooling and income. Most families, despite highly difficult circumstances, fully aspired to The Promise much as a middle class participant might. An example given:

Well, I know being in the neighborhood where I’m from, I don’t think most of the parents even really care because most of the kids are always out and about and you can tell they don’t even go to school. … well, my sister, we live in that neighborhood and … her oldest kids they try. She tries to push them and tell them about their work a lot more because they have to get good grades to be able to get in and to keep them or else they’ll lose it [The Promise].

[Interviewer] How come you think that the parents don’t care or some parents don’t care?

[Response] It’s not they don’t care, it’s just hard for them to keep track of their kids if they’re working, and they just give up and just let them do whatever they do.
Another parent [middle class and college educated] expressed conditional hope:

> When you’re healthy and you’re [referred to a typical child] happy and your needs are met, you’re just going to excel, but when they’re not, you’re sick, you don’t feel good, you’re struggling with a situation at home, it amazes me, absolutely amazes me … kids are in such extreme difficult circumstances, I can’t believe they even learn. I mean it amazes me they even pass.

The parent interviews yielded numerous pages of examples of poverty/social issues families faced:

> …so, I tell them it’s not just that I don’t want them to struggle the way that I’m struggling I mean I’m a single parent of three, I’m 30 years old, and I’m going to school and it’s really stressful for me because I have to juggle so much and then still have to get my schoolwork done [parent is a college student] and I don’t want them to have to go through this. Get it while you’re young [a college education]. Get it done and over with. Get the career, not just the job the career that you want to have…

A lack of dependable, efficient public transportation was also shared as a barrier for many. Many parents, who live in poverty, cannot afford a car or taxis and must rely on the city bus system to take care of everyday tasks and to visit the school. It must be noted that the school where a student attends in this district had little correlation to the school’s official boundaries. Living close to the school, or often thought of as neighborhood schools, was not the norm for most families. This was a typical response parents shared concerning barriers surrounding transportation:
Yeah, transportation was an issue ... I would purchase bus tokens to get them [her children] to some of the programs that would help them [school and community-based services] but transportation was a big issue and the issue of transportation is bad out here. As far as the bus stopping ... so early in the evening ... a lot of single parents work third shift because they feel it’s much easier to get a babysitter to watch my kids while they’re asleep than for me to get a babysitter to watch the kids while they’re up or need to get them back and forth to school. You cannot really walk to nowhere here. The buses cut off in the evening time then on Sundays there’s no bus at all. I mean me coming from a big city, we had buses coming seven days a week. You can get a bus till two, three o’clock in the morning. Then they turn around and start right back up at five or six where you get here and it’s like okay, [In Kalamazoo] you better get that last bus. The bus is cut off at ten o’clock ... then you got to pay for a taxi. I need to get a ride to go to the places to get the assistance that I need because if they giving me food or clothing or household things—I got to carry this or transport this stuff and sitting down at the bus stop and waiting forever for the bus ... plus I may have my kids with me ... so yeah, transportation is an issue and that may discourage a lot of people [from participating in their children’s schooling].

Problems cited by parents included unsupervised adolescents with some neighborhoods full of chaotic street life, unengaged youth on the streets, and sometimes causing serious issues and even anarchy where they live. A parent shared, “…they jump you in crowds now. It’s like 30 kids on one kid … now they got to go get their whole family and come back and beat up one person.” Another stated that:
...well, on the negative aspect of this situation ... parents that aren’t encouraging their children ... that are partying with their children. They’re drinking, they’re smoking, and they’re allowing their kids to do that underage drinking and the drugs at their home or just chasing men, chasing women, making more and more babies where they really can’t focus on their kids.

Further examples of parenting and neighborhood issues faced by parents:

Well, I think because some parents got bad drug habits. Neglect. They don’t have no home training growing up so they don’t know how to train their kids. No, discipline, no respect, no morals, no values ... we didn’t have time to think about running over and beating somebody on a bike [when we were growing up]. That was the farthest thing [from our minds] ... they start using these drugs that made them ... I think that’s horrible that our community and our children is going down and doing the drugs. They taking harsher drugs... I think that’s just horrible that a 14 year old is on crack... Do you even know what that even do to your body? I talk to the kids in juvenile [parent works there] home all the time because half of you in here are on drugs. Do you all even know what it do to your bodies ...?

Hispanics are a steadily growing segment of the parent and student population at this school. Hispanic participants shared the fact that language barriers have caused issues with becoming a full partner in their child’s education. Hispanic parents noted that for themselves or their extended family the lack of access to interpreters has been problematic.

Examples of language issues were shared:
I think a lot of the Hispanics are nervous to go somewhere where they are not going to be able to be understood. I have a lot of his family [referring to her husband] ... I’ll help fill out papers and I’ll go with them [to school or community agencies] ... I’m just there to tell them this is what they need and this is what they need help with ... my son ... speaks both [Spanish and English] and he’s been going to the hospitals with [extend family members] ... when [family] are going to hospitals that speak a different language it is very scary and it is very scary for the Hispanic when they have to go ask someone for help and they don’t speak English ... my husband’s nephew—he got hurt and had hit his head and you know they had to call me at home [to interpret].

Students are also facing language barriers according to the same parent:

[A relative’s son] ...was almost three and he didn’t [speak] till he was like 15 months and they said because [he] was [in a home where] two languages [were] being spoken ... [My] nephew coming [to] first grade—they can’t understand the way he’s talking because he’s confused [about which language to speak]. He has parents at home speaking Spanish and he comes here and all the teachers speak English.

Overall, issues parents have faced appear complex, yet participants were for the most part upbeat and saw hope in solving issues of poverty. Poverty in any urban setting presents roadblocks and simply makes life more difficult for those facing it. Parents affirmed that poverty and urban issues are alive and present in Kalamazoo and the school system.
Economic Factors

Economic factors were mentioned by 67% of the participants, but this was the lowest rated topic of the seven emergent themes with only 2% of the responses referring to economic impacts of The Kalamazoo Promise. While the economics surrounding The Kalamazoo Promise was the most frequently occurring topic resulting from the Phase I document analysis, community group, and parent participants did attribute economics equal importance. Parent participants rarely or never mentioned economic factors, especially important themes found commonly in the document record such as growth in housing market, increasing district financial resources due to increased enrollment, growth in business and industries, and increased city and school district tax base.

The most frequently discussed economic factor was new families that moved or remained in the Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) because of The Kalamazoo Promise. Participants said either they had chosen to stay in KPS, moved here for The Promise, or knew other parents who chose to stay or moved here. Examples of such a discussion included, “I lived in Comstock but I moved to the other side of the hall [of the apartment building to be in the Kalamazoo Public Schools]—I’m going to keep my kids in KPS.” Another parent shared the discussion that occurred with family, friends, and colleagues:

Yes, family members as far away as California, they have called and asked me about The Promise. What is that, what is that about? Do your kids get the Promise? Yes. Really? Can my kids come and live with you? There’s a lot of conversation. I’ve entertained a lot of social conversation about The Promise and the impact that The Promise has, not only on our school system which has a very powerful impact on our school system, but the socioeconomic climate of this
entire area, the impact that it will have on retail sales, and these are just conversations between me and colleagues, me and friends, me and family...

This respondent shared a personal experience:

Yeah, we could’ve bought in Portage. We could’ve bought in Vicksburg, an outlying community, but we didn’t ... so it’s just a real—I just take it as what a blessing from God that we are here in this house, in this district, in this school system ... so I’m really thankful to the vision that, how do you say, the contributors maybe, the people that actually are putting the money into [The Promise]. I’m just very thankful to them. I think it was a very wise business move for Kalamazoo to keep people here and to grow their own businesses, but it’s going to so benefit the community...

Another said, “I think the Promise has just kind of cemented us here for one, we can see some changes and two, there is no question the financial part [of The Promise is a factor].”

Also, a parent who works as a supervisor at work:

I have people that work under me and they’re all excited that it came because some of them would not be able to have their kids go to school. They just don’t have the money to send kids to school... I have another supervisor that works with me—he’s got [student loans] that he owes still and he’s not making ends meet ... he owes a lot of money for college ... it’s very difficult so ... The Promise is very good especially to help young people nowadays to not live with that big loan over their heads to go to school.
Parents shared their views that the local and regional economy can't help, but benefit from more families moving into the school district. One shared:

I think it has changed not only the family but the community because it has drawn more people to the city of Kalamazoo, to Michigan period. A lot of people are coming here for The Promise because they can't afford to send their children to school, to college ... especially being in a recession right now where it's hard to find jobs and employment is the number one cause of why they won't be able to pay [for] college....

Another parent mentioned the economic opportunity she found with a new job:

Yes, it [The Promise] has because actually, before I got my job this week we were possibly looking to leave the state of Michigan because of lack of employment. We didn’t want to leave because of The Promise, and now I’m employed so we’re staying.

The economic factors parents shared were largely limited to the economic opportunities college gave to theirs and others' children and the positive impact The Promise was having on the regional economy, especially in regards to more employment opportunities. The fact that many parents talked of these economic factors signifies the importance parents placed on the economics of a potential college education and increased employment opportunities for themselves and their children.

Results of Community Group Interviews

Community group members were interviewed as a portion of Phase II of the study. Nine community group providers (N = 9) servicing the school site were
interviewed. The participants represented Kalamazoo Communities in Schools staff (two interviews), other providers that serve the school under the coordination of Kalamazoo Communities in Schools (five interviews) and community-based (church) providers (two interviews). It should also be mentioned that five of the community group participants worked directly with students or their families at the school. Four participants provided coordination of activities for others who serve the school directly. The remaining four participants offered a communitywide perspective, but do not work at this school. All participants worked with other schools or agencies and this provided them with broader comparisons of services and the participation available at other schools. The interview questions were constructed to draw out the specific views of community providers and were aligned with the research questions. Phase II interviews were also designed to elicit understanding of what community group providers feel are the key issues that may have an impact on full implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise (research question one). Research question two was integrated into the interview questions to elicit specific views on ways to increase the effectiveness of implementation of The Promise. Working Paper #2, Response from Community Groups (Evergreen & Miron, 2008) from the Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University also contributed to the formulation of the emerging themes and for the community interview questions. The findings reported in Working Paper #2 (2008) were comparable to those found in this case study.

Coding of community group transcripts produced almost identical theme responses when compared to the parental interviews. The emergent themes and subthemes fell along the similar lines. The degree of importance placed on each theme varied from the parent results. Listed by theme, the factor that was mentioned as most
important was community supports with 36% of responses (58 responses). The remaining themes were ranked: (a) aspirations at 16% (26 responses); (b) parental understanding at 15% (24 responses); and (c) parental involvement at 12% (20 responses). These three themes all were considered evenly by the participants. Three remaining themes: (a) poverty/social factors/neighborhoods at 9% of responses (14 responses); (b) school factors with 9% (15 responses); and (c) economics with 3% (five responses) were rated as less important when evaluated by number of references.

Table 5

*Themes that Emerged from Community Group Interviews (N = 9)*

*(In order from most mentioned to least mentioned)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Salient Points (Responses) (Percent)</th>
<th>Participants Stating Theme (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Supports</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Understanding</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty/Social Factors</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Factors</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The purpose of conducting community group members' interviews was to uncover community group member goals regarding The Promise and provide points of comparison to parental responses. The following is an analysis of participant responses.
Community Supports

Responses from community group interviews mentioned the work of community supports in raising the level of student attainment of The Promise. Fifty-eight responses regarding community services and community groups were coded. This was the most mentioned theme of the seven identified themes. The level of services in the community was shared by many participants:

However, I do think that Kalamazoo [the community] does an extraordinary job of providing services and offering support. As families learn that they can do that [access services], there's more advantage taken of those programs.

Another spoke of their own level and community service providers support for students since The Promise started:

...I have been more involved in my schools since the start of The Promise, partly because of increasing enrollment in the schools. I often use the opportunity of The Promise in my work with youth to increase their motivation and focus.

Community organizations within the city have really "stepped it up" in an effort to take advantage of The Promise.

Another respondent said:

Groups have been looking for things to be doing and are finding things that really fit into their niche. The woman who, [names community provider] [provides free] ... shoes, this year gave away over 1,000 and more, and more people are getting behind her [as] gives them out to K through 2 children who are [on] free or reduced lunch.
The important role The Kalamazoo Communities in Schools have played was mentioned by both parent participants and community members:

I think people don’t get involved unless they know what they can do. Communities in Schools does a lot of that connecting. It’s my impression they do a lot of that connecting. If there’s an organization that wants to provide a service, they [Kalamazoo Communities in Schools] can be the link to the schools and do that. I think if there’s a group or a business that wants to do something, they have to have a place to go to find out what the possibilities are.

In addition, more reference to Kalamazoo Communities in Schools:

Well, I think particularly Kalamazoo Communities in Schools which is, as you’re probably familiar, an organization that connects kids to services that help them stay in school and be successful in their education. I think that that as an organization has seen a great increase in terms of volunteer involvement, involvement from community leaders, and I think the KPS administration has done a good job of channeling interested volunteers to that organization as part of a broad way of reaching more at risk students and providing them with more support.

Moreover, this participant connected Kids Hope USA, a mentoring organization coordinated by Kalamazoo Communities in Schools, to the expansion of one-on-one services to students who are the most at-risk academically:

Yes, I have quite a few examples actually because, for example, with the mentoring program [Kids Hope USA] that we have through the church … I have 22 mentors that work with a child [at this school] for one hour once a week, and
that one mentor stays with that child and they’re committed to that child for a [whole] year, but all of my mentors have stayed with their same child through their elementary years [beyond the one year commitment].

This community group participant shared more detail concerning Kids Hope USA and its growth beyond The Kalamazoo Communities in Schools:

Since I’ve come on board here with Kids Hope USA and have promoted Kids Hope USA in the churches, out of the 40 schools in Kalamazoo County, 20 now have Kids Hope, and now two more are coming on board and we’re hoping two more … because it’s been … four or five programs a year that have come on board. My goal is to have every school in Kalamazoo covered by a Kids Hope program.

Community participants knew which services were provided, especially those members that were working in this school. Specific services that had been implemented since The Kalamazoo Promise began were listed (this was not an exhaustive listing):

The [Kalamazoo Public] library is offering all kinds of new things that reach out to all age groups … so that’s one thing I’m very much aware of, and I work with them on some of the things I do [in the school]. There are a number of other groups.

A second participant shared:

When The Promise first was implemented, churches stepped up to the plate. They started developing after-hour homework sessions in the churches, in the community centers. Quite a few churches who have things in place to help kids with their homework and to make sure that kids are perhaps getting whatever they
need to get in order to succeed in school. If they’re not getting it at home … [the] churches and community centers … have programs in place to assist kids. Like I know the Douglas Community Center, New Genesis Community Center, Christian Life Center Church, Mt. Zion Church … are a few of … churches who are doing things to help kids to try to excel.

A third responded noted:

Certainly the housing groups are working closely together to see what they can provide in the way of any kind of housing set up … we get extraordinary donations from companies. Stryker, a whole group of them [Stryker employees] … are mentoring and tutoring [students] and helping with our First Fridays as we go around and [get] college things we need for children. We’ve been very good when we put out a request … and we get a good response from the community.

Community providers also shared their concerns about the barriers to attainment that still exist for some students:

Families do not fully utilize available community resources. Often, mental health services, which are offered, are not taken advantage of. Programs such as Prevention Works, Boys and Girls Club, New Genesis, and Mt. Zion tutoring are often not utilized. Again, I feel the barriers to utilization of these services are related to the fact that families are focusing on needs in the first two tiers of Maslow’s hierarchy. However, some families are certainly taking advantage of community services, but there has not been a great influx in families as a result of The Promise.
Finally, a participant shared the more easily accessible mental health services offered on the school site:

I think that is something that—because we knew we were missing parents who wouldn’t take a child to the office [mental health provider’s office] who has emotional problems, so I think that’s an example of reaching out and pulling resources into the school. I know there have always been health sources in and out of the schools, but mental health I think is more in the schools now than it used to be [since The Promise began]…

The increased availability of community supports had grown since The Promise began in 2005, allowing students to have access to more of them than ever. Community group members were, for the most part, aware of what was available and that the level of services and awareness in the community was growing. Community group members were aware of the barriers to access that existed in the community.

Aspirations

Student and parent aspirations were the second most reported response given by community group participants. Twenty-six references to aspirations were made and only surpassed by community supports (58 responses) as a topic of discussion. The interview questions did not explicitly ask participants if student aspirations had changed since the inception of The Promise. Respondents repeatedly spoke of the increase in or lack of student or parent response to the opportunities that resulted from The Promise.

A community group member shared the increased hope brought about by The Promise:
Well, The Promise calls the Kalamazoo community, I think, to step up its game educationally and being involved in students’ lives, so it’s kind of like we, you know, whoever gifted us with The Promise were kind enough to do that, so we need to make sure that we do whatever we can so these kids can utilize what has been gifted to us.

In addition, this positive outlook on the impacts of The Promise:

…it’s having amazing impact and … more kids are staying in school and going onto college, and I … see a difference in general in the momentum since when it first was released and announce[d], but I’ve been excited to see our district put … resources behind it by adding Janice Brown to the staff [of The Promise office] and making it clear that we’re going to rally everybody that we can to be a part of this dream and to [make] it possible for all of our students.

In addition, an example of a student who was now aspiring to college due to community support:

[This early elementary student was not achieving and had poor school attendance]

…she repeated the grade, and now that she is being mentored, she has the fifth—she’s the fifth highest reader in her class, and her attendance is almost perfect.

My mentor has been taking her to church. The mom has been coming, too, but we are supporting her and loving her and caring for her. When she saw me in the church parking lot the other day … she said, when I grow up I’m going to WMU and I’m going to be a nurse. Therefore, here is a little child, a little second grader, who already has a vision for her life, and we [Kids Hope mentors] are encouraging her, supporting her...
There was a concern, as shared by some community members, that some students were being excluded from The Promise opportunity:

I think that there are pockets in the community that are [accessing The Promise] but I don’t think that the community as a whole has. [Parents focus on their own children to the exclusion of other’s children] I’m going to make sure that my kids take advantage of it, and I’m not necessarily worried about the other kids. I’m not saying that’s a bad thing because people worry about the people that they are directly connected with, but it’s not a good enough thing in terms of it takes a village to raise a child, and so we should all be pushing to make sure that all the kids take advantage of The Promise.

The fact that the lack of school success and the high school dropout rate continued to plague minority students was not lost on the minds of the community members who were interviewed:

Unfortunately … because we still have dropouts and … still have some students who are unmotivated. That’s unfortunate. Our wish [as a community] … would be that every single student in Kalamazoo Public Schools would benefit from The Promise … but we still have … the issues of dropout rate and those who don’t take advantage of it.

Another respondent shared:

I don’t think that anyone is left out [intentionally]. I think that among the African-American population in Kalamazoo … that more non-African-Americans are able to take advantage of it than African-Americans, and … Hispanic and
Latino students are not taking advantage ... and that’s evident by their dropout rate...

Community group participants freely shared their aspirations for students because of The Promise, but their listing of negative factors affecting students was a prominent issue that must be addressed by educators, families, and community service providers.

Parental Understanding

Parental understanding was a way of looking at levels of parental awareness, the attributes, and processes necessary for students to access The Promise. Parent understanding was highly rated by educators in the pre-study focus group and parental participants (125 responses), but less so by community group participants (24 responses). Community group members were not directly asked about parent understanding during the interviews, so it may be significant to state that the topic came up as frequently as it did with community group participants.

A participant shared this view of parental preparation, “…I think the parents know obviously about The Promise, but yet they don’t understand the steps that it takes to get the child to that Promise, to that goal line...” Another participant shared this view, “I think that a lot of families—there might be certain stigmas associated with certain community services and people might not have all the correct information to fully utilize those services…”

Parents commented more about the lack of knowledge on the particular requirements of The Promise, but one community member shared his/her own lack of knowledge about the requirements:
I think that they probably need to train their counselors [about The Promise], but as far as I know, the inner workings of The Promise is not so complicated that somebody needs to be trained on it. My assumption is that you have to be accepted to a college in Michigan and then whether it's a two-year or four-year college, I think it has to be a public school... the main thing is that you have to be accepted into a college and then you have to still fill out the financial aid forms. The inner workings of The Promise are not that much more complicated than the inner workings of trying to get a kid college ready anyway.

Community members shared their belief that it is the community's and school's responsibility to inform parents about community services and The Promise's requirements. The importance and the community's role in parental understanding, as seen by community group members, could possibly be summed up by this response:

...I think that community services are not pulling together to make sure how we can let the community aware of what we are doing. I think for families its lack of education of what is available within the community, but is not necessarily their fault. I think it's a community that needs to come together to make them aware. I know even like the local higher education facilities around here have stepped up their game in offering services for students and families, so I think a lot of it lies on the community as well to make sure that our parents and families are aware that these services are available.
Parental Involvement/Support

Parent involvement and support was discussed at a nearly equal rate to 20 references and was mentioned by eight of the nine participants. Community group members were asked if they noticed any changes in the level of parent support since The Promise began. Responses from the community group participants showed concern for the level of parent support. One noted:

We had several children whose parents are not supportive of them in the way that maybe the school thinks that they should be … they don’t make sure that their children are at school on time … or they don’t focus on helping their children with homework. The children bring the homework home, but it isn’t done … I think that’s the parent’s responsibility [to understand] … whatever is going on with their child…

Another stated, “…parental guidance makes a major difference and not just guidance, but involvement makes a major difference.”

This participant felt a lack of parental support:

…college readiness is a responsibility of the parent and KPS, and initially … I was saying is that I don’t believe that the parents are taking a good enough … stance to make sure that their kids are college ready … it takes the parents, it takes the school, and it takes the other people in the community to help raise our children, but it’s not KPS’s sole responsibility … it’s also the parents’ responsibility to make sure that their child is college ready.

Also reported was that more time is necessary as children and their parents become accustomed to the opportunity that The Promise presents to families:
Yes. I think that as parents begin to understand The Promise and become more comfortable with that idea ... especially the parents of the elementary school children as they realize what is ahead for them, I think we’re seeing more support from parents in backing up what their children are doing. Again, we have far too [few] parents who are not involved in what their children are doing and think the school is the babysitter and send them off, and we need to work on that. Parents need as much training and support as the kids do as to what The Promise can offer them...

The level of parental involvement was discussed by one respondent and was partially attributed to particular schools and their socioeconomic composition:

We certainly have had many parents involved in our program [Kids Hope USA] and, of course, our program is delivered in 13 different school districts ... Kalamazoo is just one of the districts ... we can usually identify the schools where we’ll have high parent involvement and others where we’ll depend more on teachers, or we’ll have to make a greater effort to recruit college students or whomever to be coaches for our students. I’m sure there are some parallels between socioeconomic background and other types of involvement within the school for other activities.

Poverty/Social Factors/Neighborhoods

This theme did not rate highly with community group participants. Community member participants only spoke of issues surrounding poverty 14 times. In contrast, they spoke of community supports 58 times. It is a fact, families that are traditionally
underserved by social and governmental opportunities are concentrated within the Kalamazoo Public Schools, and this case study focuses on a school that typifies this concentration of poverty. Community group's relative lack of direct reference to poverty issues may have indicated a lack of understanding of the role poverty played for families or an outcome caused by the design of the interview questions themselves. Nevertheless, community participants shared some important insights on ways issues of poverty may be suppressing student access to The Promise:

...the families who struggle with poverty and trying to survive in this economy, holding a regular job, having enough food. If these are the main concerns and worries, it's kind of hard to get involved in the life of your child. It's just life takes over...

In addition, more awareness on the effects of poverty on parents and support for their children:

Maybe they just have a lot, I guess, going on in their life. If they're busy with work and trying to take care of their kids, sometimes it's [The Promise] maybe not something that they think about all the time ... just trying to work multiple jobs to keep their family fed with a house so they have lots of busyness and continuing their education that they might get a better job so that they can provide for their family...

Students and parents living in poverty have high aspirations. This was revealed by a participant:

Some parents [living in poverty] have become more involved and focused on education since the implementation of The Promise because they see this as an
opportunity. I frequently hear parents reminding their children about the importance of The Promise, and they point out that college is now an option. Many of the children I talk to desire to go on to college and are aware of what The Promise is. Unfortunately, many children and families are trapped in poverty and dangerous neighborhoods, and these families find it hard to see into the future offered by The Promise.

These responses illustrate the fact that some community participants recognize some of the issues that serve as barriers to attainment.

School Factors

Community group participants referred 15 times to schooling as a factor. Only six spoke of ways the schools affected attainment of The Promise. The role of schools was not directly asked about during the interviews. Limitations to students attaining The Promise were discussed, but few participants moved in the direction of schooling. This comment occurred in relation to community services and parent levels of support:

In order for a community group to make sure all students take advantage of The Promise, I believe the key is starting to work with children at the elementary level. Programs still need to work harder to engage parents so that they fully support their children and schools in the quest to take advantage of The Promise. Another participant shared that the schools were currently doing as much as they could:

I don’t know what you can be doing anymore than what you’re already doing. It seems like schools are trying to do as much as they can to pull the children along, all these special services, special education programs.
The role of the school is crucial in raising student achievement and thus the attainment levels of all students. Community group members seemed to understand the school’s role yet referred more to the role of community groups in raising achievement and opportunity.

Economic Factors

Community providers stated economic factors the least of the seven themes found in the interviews, only sharing five examples. Since the designers of The Promise felt that economic factors were an important rationale for its conception and there was such a strong incidence coded in the document record, this theme serves to illuminate how little community group members and parents saw the nuances of economic impacts as resulting from The Kalamazoo Promise. It may be important to note that there was not a specific interview question regarding economic impacts. Yet, participants chose to speak of economics during the interviews.

Increases in school district enrollment and the overall economic health impacts on the community were shared by the community group participants. In addition, the improved image of the districts educational quality was a topic of discussion. A community group member stated:

I think it's a wonderful idea [The Promise], and I think it’s really changed the perception of Kalamazoo Public Schools because they certainly were losing enrollment and I think things were really kind of negative, negative perception, and now this is the place people want to be.
A second respondent shared:

Most of the schools are inner city and so people were moving to the suburbs… the outlying school districts… some people have chosen to put their children in the outlying districts because the perception, whether it was real or not, the perception was these schools are better, they have fewer behavioral problems … that was the perception. Therefore, now I think it’s changing … people are putting their children into the [Kalamazoo] schools.

In addition, about the potential to have a more educated population in the community a participant stated:

I guess if they [the community] look at the long run, the more students that take advantage of The Promise, it could better Kalamazoo as a whole because there’s more educated people that will [be in] the business world … the working world, and take what they’ve learned and just keep passing it down…

A community provider shared her/his personal experience about how The Promise attracted another family to the school district, “…when The Promise first came out, a coworker was making sure that the house they bought would be in the Kalamazoo area.”

Some community group members reported the sentiment that student enrollment growth has placed a strain on the communities and school districts resources … “I don’t believe that [the community] considered how the influx of people in Kalamazoo would impact the overburdened school system and the economy in the city.”

While economics were not the first thing on the minds of community providers this did not necessarily mean that economic impacts of The Kalamazoo Promise were
unimportant, rather may suggest a focus on what the community providers saw as the
more important work of serving families.

Results of Focus Group Interviews—Phase III

Focus group interviews were the final phase of research and were directly
grounded in the research questions that formed the basis of this study. Two parent and
two community member focus groups were conducted to: (a) confirm the findings of the
individual interviews; (b) to seek explanation of the individual interview findings; and (c)
to explore any newly emerging issues not covered during the individual interviews.

The Research Question—Phase III

The purpose of Phase III served to affirm the findings in Phases I and II. The
research question stated, “From the perspective of: (a) the community, and (b) parents,
what needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of The Kalamazoo Promise?” The
findings demonstrate that the purpose of Phase III was met.

Focus Group Sample

The total sample was comprised of two parent focus groups with four participants
each and two community groups with four participants each. \( N = 16 \). It must be noted
that each focus group was intended to have from 6-10 members in order to maximize the
number of voices included. In reality, getting participants to actually appear and be
interviewed was difficult. Invitations for each group had been confirmed with 8-10
participants. For each focus group only four participants appeared. Low participation
most likely affected the overall richness and depth of the results. The following analysis
The interview results were pooled and coded as four separate interview sessions. Participants were recruited and interviewed by the same interviewers. The parent group sample was somewhat less diverse, but nonetheless represented parent voices with a mix of socioeconomic and minority representatives. The community focus groups included nine participants who had not been interviewed individually. The parent group included one participant who had previously been interviewed individually for this study.

**Criteria for Selection as a Theme**

The results of the parent and community member focus groups were considered in their totality, as their purpose was to verify the themes uncovered in the previous two phases. Theme selection criteria were the same as utilized for the individual interview coding process. Salient points were identified and tallied. Total participant responses were recorded. There were 263 individual codings from the focus groups. A tally of each theme mentioned (stated) by the focus groups was also recorded. The same 50%/75% threshold was also applied. A theme was supported by 75% of the participants and a subtheme by 50%.

**Focus Group Results**

Focus group results confirmed the individual interview themes. Parent and community individual interview groups yielded remarkably similar themes and subthemes. The only exception was the rate of occurrence of themes between the individual and focus groups. No new issues came to the surface because of the focus
groups. The results were organized according to the seven emergent themes in the same fashion as the individual interview results.

Table 6

*Themes from Focus Group Interviews—Phase III (N = 21)*

*(In order from most mentioned to least mentioned)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Salient Points (Responses) (Percent)</th>
<th>Participants Stating Theme (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Supports</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Understanding</td>
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<td>Aspirations</td>
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<td>Parent Involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic Factors</td>
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<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty/Social Factors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the number of responses from the parent interviews, the combined focus groups discussed school factors (86 responses) more than any other topic. The next most frequent factor that emerged was community support (59 responses). The remaining themes were discussed at a reduced rate with similar results when comparing responses to economic factors. Economic factors were not frequently mentioned by group participants. Parents offered 39 responses, community group members offered five responses, and the focus groups only offered 16 responses. There was little emphasis on poverty issues (ten responses). This may have been due to the composition of the focus groups. The parent groups were less diverse than the individual interview pool of
participants. Only two focus group members represented families qualifying for free/reduced lunch, which was the measure of poverty for purposes of this study.

School Factors

School factors were the major topic of discussion in both the parent interviews and the focus groups. There was strong support for school factors and the role of schooling in student attainment. A rich discussion ensued in the focus groups with many suggestions as to ways the schools could raise achievement levels and overall quality of programming and instruction:

Yeah, I go back to something I said originally and I really … feel that the quality of education in the Kalamazoo Public Schools has to improve. [The district] does a great job with those kids that are already pre-programmed. I know there are kids out there that they’re going to succeed despite their teacher … [some students say to themselves] I’m going to do well, even if that teacher isn’t a very good teacher, but the kids that don’t have that programming [parental understanding] they’re going to fail. Therefore, I don’t know if it’s going to take better teachers, better teacher training, I really don’t know. If I knew I’d probably be making million dollars a year by going in and doing workshops … but the school system has to improve the educational programs so when the kids are there they are prepared to go on to college and succeed once they get into college.

In addition, this on the role of the school from another participant:

…I think it also is important that the schools improve what they provide. You know these three kids that dropped out they dropped out because they didn’t like
school ... there could be a lot of things that impacted that, but there’s got to be something in the school system that’s turned them off—that’s saying ... I really don’t like school. So, they would rather drop out and live a life that—oh I hate to think of the way their life is going to go—then continue on in school ... it’s ... important that ... parents are involved in the education [of their child] but I think the school has got to improve too.

Others stated that the schools are doing an adequate job and provide distinct advantages for students:

I think KPS overall does a good job. I mean, I’ve talked to enough parents of graduates that are very positive about KPS and that there is a lot to offer here that you’re not going to see or get in ... the outlying areas [neighboring school districts] and I believe they are getting more than an academic education [in KPS] because they’re having to learn how to deal with multiracial [students] ... you know, different races, different cultures, different beliefs ... the real demographic of what reality will give them [in the workplace] ... anybody is your coworker.

Focus group participants discussed how negative perceptions of the schools were wrong, but deeply held by many and the schools themselves were changing that idea. A typical response included:

...I’ve heard—stereotypes you know how there’s violence in the high schools. My dad would always joke around because we went to Portage Public Schools he always joked around that oh yeah Loy Norrix you got to carry a gun to keep yourself safe ... he always just talking about how it’s so violent and he was really concerned when I started putting my kids in Kalamazoo Public Schools. I’m like
dad I did the research [and] there’s a lot of stereotypes about Kalamazoo Public
Schools out there and I know that there’s been a lot of changes in recent years …
I went to Milwood Middle School as well and interviewed teachers there and just
really tried to make sure that I wasn’t putting my kids in a bad situation … I really
feel like this is a safe environment for my kids…

There was also discussion about ways the schools can teach students about what it
will take to achieve The Promise and aspirations after college:

I kind of wish that the curriculum was just a little bit more flexible where they
could include more occupational information for the kids and kind of help them to
see … be involved in different career type things. I know they have it now but
even more advanced, even more intense so that the kids can really … from a
young age … say … I really like this field and they get to really experience it.

In addition, about the districts focus on the necessary steps to reaching college beginning
in preschool:

I think you’ve got to start … in the classroom. I know Dr. Rice [the
Superintendent] has visited all the schools—elementary, middle school, high
school and talked about college and that right now even in kindergarten, first
grade, second grade … you’re preparing for that goal [college] and you need to do
well in this grade in order to move on to the next one—you know all [the way] up
to twelfth grade.

In addition, a parent of a special needs student had this positive viewpoint to share:

Because I’m new to the Kalamazoo schools, I came here with an attitude because
I was so used to the other school district and so my son’s needs … I thought were
taken care of ... at the other school ... I felt that the [new] school was not up to par but as time went on I beg to differ. I feel that the school has done an excellent job in helping me see things in a different light for my child [as] oppose[ed] to how they were doing things at the other school. Therefore, I think that the teachers ... he’s involved with made a big difference in his life. A positive difference in his life and I think that maybe he could go to college one day and I do credit it the school, the teachers, your help, everyone’s help who knows him. I’m quite sure everybody knows him and I feel that he’s grown a lot so the negative things that I’ve heard about this school and the Kalamazoo schools I can say I don’t believe all that anymore.

School factors were confirmed as an important issue by parents and to a lesser extent by community group participants. The level of importance parents and the focus groups gave to school factors was not confirmed by community group participants.

Community Support

The topic of community support was the most mentioned theme by community member focus groups (59 responses). Not surprisingly, it was also the most discussed with individual community member interview participants (58 responses) during Phase II of the study. When asked of their knowledge of existing community support, a small portion of the focus group participants knew little of community support: “I don’t know of really any. I mean, I really don’t ... know what’s out there ... I don’t even know where to go and look for it.” This type of response was limited, but matched what was also heard during individual parent interviews.
Others felt that Promise information and community supports were hard for parents to access:

[Interviewer] Some parents [in Phase II of the study] felt that The Promise information is hard to find. Do you agree with that and what are ways that you find out about Promise information?

[Participant] I look it up on-line yeah ... but we have a lot of families that don’t have access to Internet ... it would be neat ... if they had a booklet or something they could send home. And it had like general questions that a lot of the public would ask ... I think what’s hard too is that each building is responsible for keeping their own website current. You have the master district website then you link down at the building and ours hasn’t been updated ... they want to go to the building website and there’s nothing there and so they don’t know how to go further.

More commonly, participants in both individual and focus groups could name numerous services that are available and felt there is more support for students and families since The Kalamazoo Promise began:

Well, there’s the YMCA, Kalamazoo County Mental Health Services and the programs that they provide for children like assessments. There’s ASK for parents who need help with their emotionally difficult children. There are a lot of things. You have to dig for them though ... I have two children who have [names children’s conditions] so I’ve had to dig, dig, dig to find a lot of things that I can utilize, but once you dig they’re there. There are support groups. There’s a lot of stuff ... a lot of programs out there for kids that are free.
Community group members and parents identified churches and Kalamazoo Communities in Schools as essential service providers during the individual interviews and the same was true in the focus groups. This participant had personal experience with church-based community involvement:

I'm very involved in my church and I know that my church family center they have classes, after-school programs that kind of thing. There's quite a few churches in the community that have after school programs and it all has been sparked since The Promise … community organizations are getting very involved in trying to make sure … kids are getting what they need … to make it in school so they can part take of The Promise … groups have been sparked because of … The Promise…

This was shared by a respondent, “…religious groups that I'm aware of in the community have made efforts to prepare students for The Promise which they inform them or inform parents about The Promise.”

Another participant described some of the services offered by Kalamazoo Communities in Schools:

[Kalamazoo Communities in Schools] …provide after school program[s] and the Kalamazoo Promise is one of their focuses. They definitely bring it to the attention of the students and families about The Promise and the value of The Promise.

Results for focus groups confirmed community group findings of the individual interviews. Community supports are important in meeting the needs of students in the schools. The Promise will remain out of reach for many families if there is not more
information that is easily accessible about The Kalamazoo Promise and supporting community services to all community members.

Parental Understanding

Parental understanding ranked as the third and fourth most frequent theme, respectively, in both parent and community group interviews. Focus groups ranked parental understanding fourth based upon frequency of discussion. Parental understanding was affirmed as a theme because of the focus groups. There were no newly emergent themes or subthemes. A common focus group topic demonstrated the fact that community group participants and parents lack understanding of The Kalamazoo Promise. Concerns arose such as:

...you know what? It’s not a hundred percent free and I think that’s a big misconception that people say to me oh, your kids get to go to school for free and it’s like no they don’t. I still have to pay for part of it ... it’s not completely free ... it’s a big chunk [that’s paid for] which is great but ... telling them they have a free education is not correct. That’s a lie ... you don’t need to say it probably when you’re in kindergarten but as they start getting older and college is definitely [near] ... they got to understand it’s not a hundred percent free...

This was shared by a respondent:

...now that I have a child in middle school heading to high school, it’s now becoming an area that we need to research and know exactly how does this work. What is covered? What’s not covered? What are the requirements for you to get it, to keep it, you know, and there’s a piece in there if you do go in the military ...
I don’t know if they’re talking to high school parents about all that. I would hope they’re informed.

Parental understanding, like parent involvement, was not highly important in the view of the focus group participants, but the depth of the conversation by those sharing it confirms it as a key theme in understanding the issues surrounding full implementation of The Promise.

**Aspirations**

Parent and student aspirations were a main topic with individual parents (158 responses), but simply a middle of the pack theme with community group members (26 responses) and focus group participants (28 responses). Focus groups affirmed the fact that aspirations are an important factor affecting student attainment as all four focus groups produced aspiration responses. Focus group responses centered on the subtheme of the barriers to college, namely expectations and awareness of the benefits.

Expectations held by parents and the community was shared by several focus group participants:

…I feel like … with college that early exposure for … kids to see what college [is like] and to make them feel comfortable … it’s not some [thing] out of reach … like being a neurosurgeon if you go to college. It’s a very doable thing … a lot of … times … kids see college as an unreachable goal where … other kids have always been expected to go to college and that’s just what you do. You’re going to finish high school and you … go right on to college but … a lot of kids in KPS don’t have that expectation because … [you are forced] to have to get a job and
support yourself and ... support the family ... if college fits in there [that’s
good]...

A student who comes from a home with a parent who has a college degree has an
increased chance of attending college themselves.

Another focus group member shared this about expectations at home:

We knew we had to be in school [K-12] but she [the mother] didn’t tell us why.
You just going to school. You’re not going to be at home ... that’s a different
level from maybe the suburban parent is teaching their child that you go to
college. My mother didn’t instill ... that you go to college. [Participant grew up
in inner city Detroit.] We knew we had to finish high school and what happened
after that is whatever happened. I may have had a counselor or two that suggested
well maybe you should go to college because I did well in high school
considering but we weren’t’ raised in our household—[post-secondary] education
was not a priority.

Another participant shared that not all students aspire to attend a two or four-year college:

You bring up a different idea ... in that you think of ... college degrees that turn
out engineers ... attorneys and ... doctors. We don’t think of college education as
vocational, I mean, servicing jet liner engines and ... highly technical trained
jobs...

Participants shared the belief that aspirations are another important piece of the
puzzle on the path to universal student attainment. Looking back at responses of all
participants, the school and community were much more important factors in nurturing
student’s success in school and for attainment of a post-secondary degree/certificate.
Parental Involvement

Focus groups affirmed the findings of both parent and community group interviews by ranking parent involvement as important, but not the central issue in The Promise success for students. Most focus group participants discussed what may be holding some students back in terms of attainment and the importance of the parent’s role: For example, on the subject of working-class parents:

You know they’re never in the [school] building because they can’t be because they’re working … they’re working 12-hour shifts and they miss [being involved] and there’s no one here [at the school] … they would love to know … they care but they just don’t know [about what is going on with school].

This dialogue was in response to an interview question asking why some students may be left out of graduating from high school and attaining a college education. The respondent believed the school had a major role in sharing information on The Promise. This was the response:

Well … to use a Reagan term [it’s] trickle down [more] than trickle up. You can encourage the kids but I think it’s got to come from the parents down … I agree there needs to be more encouragement even if it’s just little infomercials about Michigan State or Central Michigan … kind of programs they offer that they can watch ten minutes [at school] … something like that. But trickle up is hard. How to get your parents excited [just] because the kids are?

A similar belief shared is the need for more school-based information and what it will take students to achieve The Promise:
I think the children are very aware of The Promise and I think that the school is doing a good job of making them aware but they need more support—parent support, moral support to be able to—because if parents don’t understand how to get their children ... to The Promise, it’s not going to happen.

Parental involvement, while not rated as highly important to focus group participants, was confirmed as a key issue in improving student attainment.

**Economic Factors**

Due to the low relative number of focus group responses (16), could the researcher assume that economic issues were not important to the implementation of The Promise? Both groups in Phase II of the study, parent and community group members, rated economics at the bottom of implementation factors (39 and five respectively). Economic salient points covered many topics and occurred much more frequently in the document analysis conducted in Phase I of this study. As a result of the interview portion of the study (Phase II and III), economics factors were much narrower and related to three salient points: (a) families moving into the school district; (b) families staying in the school district because of a more favorable view of school quality; and (c) the overall increase in positive growth in jobs, housing, and businesses being attracted to the community.

Focus group participants, as much as the individual interview participants, shared views such as how parents still choose to send their children to schools other than the KPS they were assigned to:
Yeah, I talk to my neighbor ... and ... the people at my church ... but yeah I rebuked them for not having their kids in [the Kalamazoo Public Schools]—they have them in Paramount [a charter school] or whatever. I’m like you guys should have them in Milwood you know?

In addition, another participant shared their concern about students who choose private/charter schools:

Okay. I am one of those people who grew up in Portage ... [then moved] I was in the Detroit area ... when The Promise came to be and we really seriously considered [moving here because] there was a job opportunity here for [the husband] but the Promise was the first thing that made us consider moving here ... the main reasons we moved here ... really the main reason was ... The Promise and I moved into an apartment complex on the west side of town ... then we moved to Milwood and I was so surprised. There are barely any kids in this area right here by Cork and Portage that go to Milwood Elementary or that even go to Kalamazoo schools. They’re like shipped off to Oakwood Academy or Santa Monica. They’re not even in The Kalamazoo Promise, but they’re three minutes away from The Kalamazoo Promise ... they don’t think it’s any big deal and I’m like free college is a big deal ... they’re just not even taking it seriously ... I just assumed that all the kids in the neighborhood would be Milwood Elementary students and none of them are ... but I was excited about that opportunity and I don’t think people see that vision. They just think well they’re [KPS schools] a little bit downtrodden and we don’t want our kids involved in that. No ... you need to step in and be active...
Participants still struggle with the negative perception of the local school district yet are also asking how economic opportunity can be increased in the community: Kalamazoo as a whole … look at it and say … what can we do? We’re offering The Kalamazoo Promise to the students. How can we get other people, other businesses here and their businesses can come and get a tax break … but their kids are entitled to The Promise. So, it’s just not our students but we look at the big picture and see if we can bring businesses to Kalamazoo because we talk about The Kalamazoo Promise … new businesses can be brought out here by advertisements. You know, tax breaks, laws or whatever we can do.

Focus group results confirmed the findings of the individual interviews for economic issues. Economics were not the main factor on the minds of the participants of the individual and focus group interviews.

Poverty/Social Factors/Neighborhoods

Poverty and neighborhood issues were discussed in depth during parent interviews (Phase II), but much less so in Phase III, the focus groups. Respondents shared the theme ten times, and participants who did speak about poverty did so with conviction. For example:

…hundreds of children who go without food. So, when a child does not have food and is not assured of shelter—the two basic survival [needs] and the need to belong—if those two elements are missing a child actually is not successful in school…

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This was shared and expresses some of the complexity brought by issues faced by families:

...when they [parents] don’t give them a good nutritional breakfast before they come to school. It’s like they’re negating even more of their responsibility. Many of the parents don’t have it, they just don’t have it [can’t afford food].

This was shared by another participant:

...a lot of times single moms especially—because there’s not another adult in the household to help them or to maybe even talk to in a time of crisis so you have to confide in your children and you say things to your children that will cause them to worry as well and they don’t need that ... those kind of things happen and a kid should be allowed to be a kid ... [they] come to school knowing that your about to be evicted from your home and the kids ... internalize that and ... try to think of ways that they can help ... they should be worrying about their spelling test on Friday and passing their math test but you got all this other stuff. [The child worries] We don’t have any food. Where we going to get food from? Where we going to [move]—my mom can’t pay her rent.

Issues faced by families who were living in dangerous neighborhoods were brought up by several respondents. Others discussed the possible differences in parental understanding about how to help a child succeed in school:

...it’s two different cultures. Like the kids that I work with—the way that you act out on the street—if you act the way they want you to act in school on the street, you’re going to get your ass beat. But if you act the way you act on the street in school you get kicked out of school. So, it’s this constant struggle ... between ...
kids trying to decide where I go [fit]. Do I want to make it in real life or do I want to make it in school life, which all these people are telling me I’m not going to make it in school anyway because I’m from the street so it’s like that difference in culture is a major problem of why the rich white people make it through school easily because that’s their culture. That’s just how it is and the other people fail.

This was shared from a community group member who works with families in poverty:

…parents are very aware of The Promise and they think it’s a great thing but there’s a disconnect … they don’t know how to get their child to attain [The] Promise. For example, simple things like maybe doing homework at night, not just letting their child stay home because they have an excuse or they don’t want to or take them out on their birthday for the whole day or—you know whatever comes along [but] school [is] secondary [to other issues] and they’re not making that a primary focus so [it] would be good if parents would step to the plate a little more.

Respondents did not feel that all the pieces necessary to raise attainment levels were in place.

Summary of Focus Group Results

The purpose of the focus groups phase of the study was to confirm and explain the responses from the individual parent and community group members’ interviews. Phase III was successful in explaining and confirming the results of the Phase I and II. The focus groups results may have been more robust if there had been more representative sampling of the schools parent population. The theme elements that
emerged from the focus groups in Phase III of the study were closely aligned with the individual interview results from Phase II of the study. Participants in all three groups' types believed that schooling, parenting attributes, and community supports were the most important factors affecting student success. They also believed that less important attainment factors were economic issues and the effects of poverty and neighborhood conditions. No new themes emerged from the focus groups.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Connection to Study Purpose

The views of parents and community group stakeholders and the issues they shared that were important to The Kalamazoo Promise, was the purpose of this study. An inductive process was utilized at each phase of the study. One hundred documents were studied along with and educator focus group to begin the study. Themes thus emerged throughout the entire process beginning with the review of literature, a preliminary document analysis, and continued through the individual and focus group interviews. The cyclical process produced seven themes that captured what parents and community group members viewed as the key issues surrounding The Promise.

Organization

Chapter V begins with the purpose of the study followed by: (a) a summarization of each chapter; (b) a final summary in regards to each research question; (c) implications and recommendations; and (d) limitations and recommendations for further study.

Review of Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to uncover the emerging views parents and community group stakeholders experienced concerning The Kalamazoo Promise, and
what they believed were the important issues that must be understood by implementers of The Promise in order to provide more effective implementation. The implementers and the public needed a clearer picture of the complex issues that emerged since its beginning. Implementers needed to develop a deep understanding of how this initiative is being understood and responded to within the local community. A deep understanding was especially important in terms of the social, economic, and educational issues this initiative could be stimulating. The study focused on the views and issues raised by parents and community group members. Their voices had not been recorded in a formal sense since implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise in November of 2005.

Chapter II, the literature review, focused on factors affecting K-12 attainment and college persistence. Literature on the persistent cycle of low attainment for students representing minority groups and factors affecting attainment were plentiful (American Education Research Association, 2003; Ajzen, Davis, Saunders, & Williams, 2002; Chang, 2001; The Education Trust, 2005). The body of literature concerning graduation rates, effects of poverty on educational attainment, and dropping out of high school, and The Kalamazoo Promise was extensive (Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009; Koyama, 2007). Literature topics that applied locally included issues of poverty, levels and impacts of parental involvement, and the role of schools in full implementation of The Promise (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). The literature had little to share on a universal scholarship, most likely due to the unique nature of The Promise (Gelber, 2007; Long, 2007). There were gaps in the research especially in regards to parents' views; the voices of Promise parents had not been recorded largely (Eberts, 2007; W.E. Upjohn Institute, 2006).
Ethnic and socioeconomic groups had been studied in detail (Bechtold, 2000; Coleman, 1966; Harris, 2005; Nicotera & Wong, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2005; Sokatch, 2001). The document artifacts pointed to the economic benefits of providing universal access to post-secondary education (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; Long, 2007). The literature supported that increased graduation rates, student persistence in college, and eventual higher income levels all coincide with post-secondary degrees and programs (Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; Tilghman, 2007). There was also evidence presented that scholarships and grants, especially from government sources, increased attainment (Checchi, 2003; Gelber, 2007; Long, 2007). The literature also showed that communities with systems in place to increase social and human capital have lower poverty rates, lower crime occurrences, and increased quality of life (Bechtold, 2000; Coleman, 1966; Harris, 2005; Nicotera & Wong, 2004; Perna & Titus, 2005).

Chapter III described a case study methodology that examined one elementary school within The Promise school district. The school typified the overall district demographically. An in-depth study was conducted using multiple sources of data to uncover fully the issues parents and community group participants saw as influencing implementation of The Promise (Creswell, 2004; Yin, 2003). Utilizing multiple data sources: (a) preliminary pre-study document analysis and staff focus group; (b) a public document study; (c) individual interviews; and (d) focus group interviews served to triangulate the data and provide a rich, thick set of results (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009; Schlossman, 2006). Inclusion of previously unheard voices was a primary purpose of this case analysis. Parent voices were sought and obtained during this study (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Schlossman,
2006). Coding and analysis of the document record and interview transcripts was rigorous, and produced an extensive database of supporting salient points and themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Phase I of the study produced themes that were then compared to themes that emerged from the literature review. The table below shows the progression of themes during the study and those that emerged, were dropped, or modified. Seven summative themes were produced at the completion of Phase II. The table below lists these from top to bottom with the most importance placed on those themes at the top of the table.

Table 7

Comparison of Emergent Themes from The Kalamazoo Promise Case Study

(Listed in order of importance determined by Total Number of Responses/percent of interview Salient Points beginning with most important to least important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Review Themes</th>
<th>Document Analysis Themes (Phase I)</th>
<th>Interview Themes (Phase II) Final Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic Factors</td>
<td>Schools/Achievement/Administration</td>
<td>School Factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Factors</td>
<td>Attainment/Universal Access/Promise Matters</td>
<td>Aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Factors</td>
<td>Social Issues Community/Parental Involvement</td>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic and Urban Issues</td>
<td>Community Supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion Beyond the Community</td>
<td>Parental Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Related</td>
<td>Poverty/Social Factors/Neighborhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic Factors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter IV details the results of each phase by listing the key themes produced in the literature review, document analysis, and combined results of the interviews were compared (Table 7). The thematic elements were refined at each step and produced a rich array of voices that will add to the literature and provide practical guidance to Promise implementers. The investigation resulted in seven summative thematic topics important to participants. Participants placed economic and socioeconomic impacts of The Promise near the bottom of issues, and put strong emphasis on the role of the school, level of parent involvement, family, and educator aspirations. High post-secondary attainment was clearly an embodiment of hope and aspirations of the participants that emerged from the document record, and even more strongly from parents and community group members. As Evergreen & Miron stated in Working Paper # 1, (p. 16) (2007), "The Kalamazoo Promise has the potential to serve as a model for reforming urban or struggling school districts.” The findings of this study substantiate that belief.

Findings Summarized by Research Question

Research Question One—*(PHASE I—Preliminary Focus Group and Document Analysis)*

What were the issues that emerged in the public document record since the inception of The Kalamazoo Promise with particular emphasis on what the documents said in regards to parental and community involvement?

Preliminary Focus Group

Parental understanding, support for students aspirations were the strongest themes to emerge from this panel of educators who worked at the school under examination. This emphasis on parents was further affirmed in the document portion of the study and
gained further support from the interview phase of the study. Educators, while not blaming parents for fully supporting children, certainly felt that many parents do not fully understand the responsibility they have in readying their children for attainment. Sokatch (2001) found that parental aspirations, as well as peer influences, were keys to whether or not high school seniors applied to college.

Document Study

The document analysis produced an extensive list of issues that the broader community saw as important to implementing The Promise. For example, in the document record the predominance of economic topics (Table 8) was in keeping with the primary purpose of The Promise, which was designed to bring economic prosperity to the community (the sixth theme, “non-related” was not shown).

Table 8

*Promise Themes in the Document Record by Order*

*(Listed as Total Number of Responses and percent of document Salient Points)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Themes</th>
<th>Number of Documents (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economics and Urban Issues</td>
<td>197 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools/Achievement/Administration</td>
<td>191 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues/Community and Parental Involvement</td>
<td>157 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attainment/Universal Access/Promise Matters</td>
<td>134 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Beyond the Community</td>
<td>116 (14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All five emergent themes in the document record received nearly equal coverage since inception of The Promise. The educational attainment, universal access, and social topics discussed showed a general concern for students of poverty, and what community supports will be implemented to ensure most, if not all, students will attend post-secondary institutions (attainment). The discussion beyond the community, which was occurring in state and national media, indicated interest in providing such tuition incentives in communities nationwide (Bartik, 2007; Eberts, 2007). National awareness of The Promise indicated the need for effective, community-based initiatives, such as The Kalamazoo Promise, were important interventions in raising families out of poverty, producing healthier, economically sound communities, and providing a way for the private sector to support students in public education (Eberts, 2007).

Research Question Two—(PHASE II—Parent and Community Agent Interviews)

When emergent issues from Phase I were shared with key stakeholder focus groups, charged with implementation of The Promise, what did they believe were the important issues that others must understand to facilitate full implementation of The Kalamazoo Promise?

Individual parent and community group interviews produced responses to the research questions. There was theme alignment across the Phase I document review and Phase II interviews. Seven summative themes emerged at the conclusion of the interview process. Interviews confirmed the document themes and their importance to parents and community groups. Economics were the predominant theme in the document record. Economics receded to the background by the conclusion of Phase II, the interview
process showing that schooling, parenting, and community group supports were of primary importance to parents and community group members.

Table 9

_Emergent Themes from Interviews—Parents and Community Groups Combined_

(Listed as Total Number of Responses and percent of interview Salient Points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Combined Interview Theme Totals (984 Total Salient Points)</th>
<th>Number of Responses (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Factors</td>
<td>200 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirations</td>
<td>184 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Involvement/Support</td>
<td>166 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Supports</td>
<td>152 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Understanding</td>
<td>149 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty/Social Factors/Neighborhoods</td>
<td>89 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Factors</td>
<td>44 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schooling factors emerged as the most important issue from the parent interviews (Table 9). Community groups placed little significance on schooling, rather focusing more on: (a) the level and type of community services for families; (b) parental involvement and understanding; and (c) student factors. Parents found schooling to be the most important issue in attainment and offered an extensive list of ways the schools are helping promote student success and ways they could continue to improve. Parents asked for more information about The Promise and discussed issues in ways that are
personal and face-to-face (meetings and workshops). Community group members felt that community service issues were of prime importance and suggested ways families are being served and ways in which services could be improved. Community group members shared the belief that at-risk families were not fully accessing what is already available. Participants offered few solutions to lack of parent support, beyond interacting with families in different ways (meetings, brochures, and workshops) to get the word out, as well as approaching each family individually.

Student and parent aspirations were highly ranked overall. Parents referred to aspirations (their own and their children’s) often. Community group participants did not rate aspirations for post-secondary opportunities as highly on the continuum. Parents felt that student aspirations have risen significantly since The Promise. The ongoing evaluation of student aspirations by The College of Education at Western Michigan University also found aspirations to be an important characteristic for students’ post-secondary success and corroborate the findings of this study (Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009). Jones, et al., (2009) found that students felt they, their peers, and their parents all had heightened expectations for school and for attaining a post-high school goal. The participants in this study shared the same viewpoint. Perhaps community groups did not speak of aspirations with frequency due to the fact that their focus was on the (somewhat daunting) practical, everyday needs of assisting families with social issues, mental health counseling, and food assistance.

K-12 schools and schooling were frequently the topic of discussion by parents, community group members, and focus group participants. Schools were the subject of news articles, frequent publication of critical commentary, achievement scores, school
board activity, and more. Schooling as a topic may not be surprising since the daily work of implementing the educational and social supports of The Promise were primarily a school function. There may also have been a lack of a clear leadership body responsible for coordination and implementation. In addition, the frequent inclusion of race, socioeconomics, and graduation rate issues possibly indicated that the community was aware of the social issues that affected the overall success of universal access to post-secondary education and Promise-induced increased expectations for the entire community (Mack, 2006, 2007). The document record demonstrated growth of parental involvement since inception of The Promise and the need to support parents, especially those who struggle with employment, economic, neighborhood, and other social issues. Parent understanding and parental support were strong threads that ran through the document record. It was widely recognized that families of successful students must display such key attributes as a focus on education in the home and caring for basic needs in order to be effective and successful in school and beyond. Community involvement was discussed on a limited basis, and was not covered nearly as often as social issues concerning poverty and urban core. The documents demonstrated the fact that the number and depth of services had grown since inception of The Promise. There was also concern expressed that some of the available services were not being offered to those most in need of them. Some felt it was due to a lack of communicating the services of The Promise to those in need. Parents had difficulty obtaining Promise information, as well as gaining knowledge of services that were available in the schools and community. Many had to search the Internet and the community diligently for information on services and information about The Promise itself. An important limitation for many families is
lack of Internet access at home. Lacking computers and high-speed Internet service limits access to schooling websites and homework help. This factor was a barrier to Promise information in and of itself.

Parenting issues did not occur with the frequency of discussion when compared to community supports or school factors. Yet, parenting was an important topic and produced rich dialogue concerning Promise issues. The issue of parent engagement with their children's schooling was named as key to future attainment. Parents listed ways they support their own children, and have seen other parents "step it up" to provide better home supports for their children. The lack of active parenting and many parental understanding of the parameters of The Promise were shared repeatedly. Community group members also placed parent support and understanding as an essential component. Overall community parent involvement had increased according to community group members. Community group members, who primarily worked with the most at-risk students and families (low-income or low-achievement risk factors), also listed concerns about parents not following through on services for their children or even knowing the services existed. A participant stated that not even being aware of the types and levels of available community services was common. This may have meant that services were not being utilized to the fullest, especially with families living in difficult circumstances and in need of available supports.

Issues of poverty and the social situations of families were referred to infrequently by parents, and only slightly more by community group members. Perhaps parents, while sharing vivid descriptions of the issues caused by poverty, focused on what was being done to assist students in overcoming barriers and being able to attain The Promise.
Every family’s needs and situations were different, but a lack of resources such as food, transportation, or money caused barriers to high student achievement and eventual K-12 graduation. Examples of barriers to attainment described by parents and the attributed effects of poverty: (a) unsafe places to live; (b) dangerous street life; (c) isolation due to lack of transportation; and (d) in some neighborhoods, violence, and aggression.

Economic factors were the main topic in the document study, but only occasionally referred to during interviews. The economic effects of The Promise had been well publicized in the public media and regional economic growth was a key consideration of the designers of The Promise. Interestingly, the economic impacts of growing school enrollment, a healthy (relative to the rest of the state) housing market, more job opportunities, and a commercially attractive community were not top on the list of important issues according to parents and community members. Study participants focused their economic observations on the fact that they knew families who moved to Kalamazoo to get The Promise and that, for many families, was an economic decision. Some shared that they had moved here themselves, or stayed in the district after considering leaving, despite having apprehensions about declining enrollments and poor perceptions of the schools. They claimed The Kalamazoo Promise changed their attitude toward the school district. Community group members rarely mentioned the economics of The Promise.

**Research Question Three— (To Confirm and Explain Phases I and II—Interviews and Focus Group Interviews)**

From the perspective of (a) the community, and (b) parents, what needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of The Kalamazoo Promise?
The results of Phase III served to support findings from Phases I and II. The focus groups were small, which may have affected their applicability. Yet, despite the small sample size, the transcripts provided many transcribed pages of confirmation and explanation of the themes as they had emerged in the previous phases of the study (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). Respondents confirmed the central roles parents and the school played in providing universal access to college. The belief was shared by participants that if parents were not college educated and held low expectations for their children, the same high dropout rate would continue without increased parental education and supports.

**Implications and Recommendations**

**Parents**

Parental involvement, inspirational support, and understanding of the steps toward attainment were a key finding of the study. Evergreen, Miron, & Spybrook, (2008) found that high school students currently held a high level of college-going aspirations. This study affirmed the same belief in the power of parents. Parent respondents saw the schools as central to student attainment. Participants saw the schools as the equalizer in terms of providing a standards-based education with high expectations. Parents are giving the schools the powerful platform to increase expectations and aspirations for all students as well as themselves. A step in the direction of clear, grade-by-grade academic and social expectations was the production of Strategic Planning Benchmarks that the district developed in 2008. The expectations list benchmarks that parents, community members, staff, and students from preschool through college, must reach to be successful
in attaining post-secondary opportunities. This is termed as creating a college-going culture by the current superintendent (Kalamazoo Public Schools website, 2009).

Many elementary parents lack enough Promise and college-going information to set realistic goals with their children beginning at an early age. This lack of knowledge at an actionable level comprises a dearth of Promise information and this void must be eliminated to increase attainment. A clearinghouse of Promise and college-going information must be delivered more reliably to parents and students from elementary to high school. Suggestions for increasing parental access to Promise information will be most effective if emanating from every school individually. Periodic parent workshops held in the schools and churches will reach more parents and students. Posters and literature racks in all schools and in the community will increase access. Media-based access will reach students through blogs, social network sites such as Facebook, and links to The Promise website.

It will be useful to build Promise information into the school curriculum. Students could attain more information about The Promise in computer labs, at school events, and in career education activities, and learn additional information about what is necessary for attaining a college degree. School personnel conversant in Promise-related information from preschool upward will be the most effective pipeline of Promise knowledge through parents and students. Above all, students must understand the powerful concept of hope that a college education will provide. Not only will they need to put forth consistent effort, but also they must set clear goals at each grade in order to become college-ready.
Schools and Community Groups

The document study and the interview phases of the study showed the importance participants placed on the schools' role in regards to universal attainment. The schools had a role to play in leading the efforts to improve the K-16 persistence of all its students. Efforts were recently put into place by the district to increase school effectiveness by: (a) providing improved preschool curriculum; (b) implementation of full-day kindergarten; (c) auditing the curriculum and district systems supports; (d) adopting higher math and science standards; and (e) increasing AP course taking in the high schools. All were intended to promote higher attainment levels for students (Beegle, 2000; Bechtold, 2000; Bennett, 2002; Chang, 2001; Contreras, 2005; Ghazvini, 1996; Harris, 2005; Lopez, 1996; Perna & Titus, 2005).

Community groups were a common topic of discussion in all three phases of the research. Community group participants particularly placed importance on the efforts of their own and other community group members in improving attainment outcomes for all students and especially those with increased risk factors (minorities and those living in poverty). Churches, as service providers, had been a major provider of student and family supports, and those interviewed believed that church groups could do more to stem the tide of low achievement and lack of attainment levels. Increasing the level of community-based services, raising parental awareness of those services, and actively reaching out to and actually recruiting parents to take advantage of social, economic and educational supports will be necessary to improve low attainment levels among the poor and minority populations of the school district.
First generation college-going students (the majority of those attending the subject school) lacked the benefit of living in a household with college-going knowledge. Questions students and non-college educated parents had about what is required to attend college went unanswered in many homes (Fond on, 2005; Jones, Kelaher-Young, & Miron, 2009). The schools must be the source of ongoing college attainment information at personal and practical levels for each student and parent.

Many students do not regularly interact with adults who have careers outside of education or service sectors of the economy. Career education must be embedded into the school curriculum. Ensuring that there is career-based written curriculum beginning in preschool and evolving into college visits and career internships in the high schools will increase attainment levels. Students can only aspire to what they know. College visits to local and statewide college campuses to attend athletic events, to see what college residence life is like and to see that many young people live away from home, will paint a clearer picture of what college-going feels like.

"One-stop shops" in the schools were described by one community member as a possible solution to increasing access to Promise information for parents and students. This might look like a Promise information warehouse much like the federal government websites and literature distribution warehouses. Such a data and literature warehouse might literally link Promise consumers to school district or other websites and offer media-based products, including interviews with Promise-sponsored college students, Promise parents, college counselors, and school administrators all offering Promise information. Linking to Facebook will increase the access level of students from middle school and high school.
Communications

Community group and especially parent respondents stated that many parents did not fully understand The Kalamazoo Promise. They said there was a lack of knowledge about the particular rules that were applicable to qualify. Many believed that The Promise would end soon and their children would not receive the scholarship benefit. The schools, once again, were perceived as the cure for this gap in understanding. Many respondents had specific recommendations, such as a Promise movie that could be shown to all students each year and brochures and lessons taught periodically that told students what was expected. A central clearinghouse, such as The Kalamazoo Promise office under the direction of Dr. Janice Brown, may be the agency that can provide the schools with the information that is not currently reaching students and parents.

The Kalamazoo Promise office served as an important source of parent Promise information, but the schools will have to become the primary resource providers indicated by parents and community group participants. Elementary schools were given the same weight as the high schools as sources of Promise information by the participants. The Promise office will serve as an active disseminator of accurate Promise information. Parents and students most frequently interface with the school district at their school and not at some centralized point such as The Promise office. Schools will have to become a ready source of such Promise information parents stated as lacking including: (a) the purpose and guidelines of The Promise, including the rate of scholarship for each grade level a student began to attend the schools; (b) the process of applying for The Promise when about to graduate high school; (c) what additional costs will be incurred in college, including fees, books, and board not covered by The Promise.
scholarship; (d) what coursework, level of writing skill, prerequisites, and student attributes are necessary to attend a four-year college; and (e) how to apply to college. This is a partial list of information parents and community group members listed as lacking wide dissemination during interviews. It represents the types of information not reaching Promise parents and their children. The elementary school staff interviewed for this study did not have a complete picture of The Promise—that will have to change. Schools will have to do more than simply provide a web address or literature rack. Teachers, school staffs, school support personnel, church-based mentors, and tutors will all have to learn the “facts” of The Promise and regularly share it with parents and students. The Kalamazoo Communities in Schools is an organization that had been coordinating increasing numbers of social and educational supports since the inception of The Promise for students and parents via the schools. Their staffs and volunteers will have to be trained on college-going expectations and Promise information so that they can also serve as a reliable information source for parents and students.

Attainment for Minority and Low Socioeconomic Students

The dropout problem that affected mainly minorities and students of poverty was preventing universal attainment in the district. The school district had begun to address issues that prevent full attainment (Mack, 2008). Important initiatives had begun and included funding quality preschool for every three- and four-year-old child, and continuing to improve the efforts to promote early literacy and full-day kindergarten. These efforts are documented in the literature and will have long-term impacts on attainment levels (Beegle, 2000; Belfield, Levin, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). In high
schools, small learning communities have shown promise in making the school a place that prevents dropping out and promotes higher standards and levels of attainment (American Education Research Association, 2003; Ajzen, Davis, Saunders, & Williams, 2002). While not a frequent response from participants in this study, the quality of instruction and curriculum must improve as they have been shown to increase student attainment (Beegle, 2000; Simpson, 2004). School quality is an especially important factor for students who have a higher incidence of dropping out (minority/living in poverty) (Checchi, 2003; Long, 2007). It will be important that the district continue to not only have clear benchmark expectations as currently being implemented, but will also to increase efforts to improve teacher (instructional) and curricular quality.

Marketing specific and targeted Promise and college-going information in neighborhoods with high poverty levels will yield increased attainment levels. Print advertisements, The Promise, career, and college nights in neighborhood churches, library branches, and community centers will provide needed information to parents and students. In many cases, college and Promise information is not getting to very many parents and students according to those interviewed in this study. The schools, through implementation of periodic Promise and college teaching, will also improve students of poverty to get the information they will need to set clear, ambitious goals to enable them to attend college.

Coordination and Implementation

Coordination of Promise efforts must be a priority. At the time of this study, there was not a coordinating body that could bring all implementation stakeholders to the
table. Such coordination would provide a macro vision as well as micro coordination, and channel scarce social and educational resources as provided by the schools, community providers, universities, and governmental agencies. Such a coordinating body could have a synergistic effect on implementation and reduce barriers to participation.

Elementary student mobility, especially within the district, contributed to lower attainment levels for students who lived in poverty. Mobility, as defined for this study, referred to families of students moving from one residence to another for any reason. The current mobility rate in the school was over 20% and caused disruption in services to students in the school and the community.

The school serving as the subject of this study had over 40 homeless students as defined by the 1987 Federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Act, identification guidelines. Homelessness is defined by this act as “any individual lacking a fixed; regular adequate nighttime residence” (MSNBC, 2009). The school utilized in this study found that homeless students were often an especially acute subgroup of mobile students who do not stay in the school long enough for services to be fully implemented and of sufficient duration to make a difference on improved outcomes. According to a homeless student researcher at Harvard University, homeless students were 50% more likely to drop out of high school than non-homeless peers (2009). Seeking solutions to the mobility issue will increase student attainment levels.

Interventions to reduce the impacts of mobility might include: (a) quick implementation of educational interventions for low achieving elementary students (within 72 hours); (b) establishing a close, personal connection with the family leader
(usually, but not always the mother) within two days of arriving at the school; and (c) providing supports for the family such as, food support, medical and mental health support, rides to and from school, to appointments in the community, and a place to work at school as they search for jobs and community resources. The school and the district will better serve mobile and often unstable families if the school’s internal data warehouse is robust, with access to student data such as achievement scores over time, attendance, and social supports data. Such a system would provide school personnel and community providers, such as social workers and representatives of community agencies, the information they need to put individualized supports into place. Such a system does not currently exist.

Limitations and Implications for Further Study

Searching Public Documents

Electronically available documents were the primary source of this study. While electronic documents were numerous and easily retrievable, they may not be an exhaustive source of The Kalamazoo Promise public documentation. This study indicated a need to conduct a deeper search via web-based, print-based, and primary print documentation. The limitations of this investigation did not allow for research into school board minutes, other district documentation, internal memos from Promise administrative offices, as well as many scholarly documents already produced on The Promise, especially the newest economic data produced by the W.E. Upjohn Institute concerning the poor Michigan economy. Further search of the print media, including newspaper articles and audio and video broadcasts, would also add to the richness of the
database, and allow for more applicability of the results. The time limits of this study restricted the number of documents that could be accessed. The Kalamazoo Promise document database grows exponentially almost weekly. Many documents were missed and further research can collect and assess those (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

Case Study

The results of this case study cannot be generalized. There may be comparative value and offer explanation and confirmation when compared to further research. This was a relatively small case with loose boundaries (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2003). A case comparing two or more Promise schools, or a Promise school and a non-Promise school, with similar demographics, may produce richer, thicker results, which could possibly have wider application.

Interviews

Parents and community members were selected purposefully based on the characteristics they possessed. Some parents were recruited more for convenience (after another parent had repeatedly cancelled) than for matching a specific characteristic, and this is also true for community group members. Further study might include a specific set of recruitment parameters to produce a more carefully representative sample. The focus group sample sizes were small (Shay-Schumm, Sinagub, & Vaughn, 1996). Better confirmation and explanation of the individual interview findings may result in further study if the sampling is at least three or four focus groups with 6-10 participants. Coding of the interviews could be even more systematic and peer coding would add to the accuracy. There were over 250 pages of interview transcripts, but only a select sampling
of parent and community member voices were quoted in this study. Further study might focus on what these and a wider group has to say about Promise issues, and include more voices for academic and public knowledge.

Qualitative Study and Coding

The literature on qualitative analysis provides examples of highly rigorous coding with reliability checks to increase accuracy (Creswell, 2007; Auerbach, 2002). Adding a survey component might add a quantitative perspective and add richness and depth to further study. The design of this study only allowed for 34 separate participants. The addition of a survey could broaden the data gathered from parents and add to the validity of the emergent themes. A good example of the use of interviews and surveys working together to provide a more complete picture was the evaluation of The Promise being led by Dr. G. Miron at Western Michigan University (Evergreen & Miron, 2007, 2008; Jones, Miron, & Young, 2009).

Recommendations for Further Research

The results of this study produced questions for further study: (a) there may be common problems faced by parents that could be addressed by educators and community groups; (b) what solutions would work in solving access to services for parents and students?; (c) what are the key interventions that must be put in place to dramatically reduce the high school dropout rate?; (d) are there actions schools can take to increase instructional effectiveness (a key factor in current low levels of student achievement)?; (e) are there actions the K-12 system can incorporate into its culture and practice to increase college retention rates for Promise students?; (f) does there need to be a Promise
Czar (central organizing body)? The Czar role might be a person or leadership team that coordinates and provides vision over the efforts to support all students reaching higher levels of attainment; and (g) what can Kalamazoo Promise academics and leaders learn from the growing number of Promise-like programs springing up across the country? The Promise provides a unique sampling that is ripe for further study.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Individual Interview Questions
Parent Involvement

Thank you for participating in this evaluation of The Kalamazoo Promise.

First, I want to review the purpose of the study and why we have asked you to participate in this interview. Then, I will go over the consent form briefly with you before we move onto the interview questions.

Being a Promise parent, we are asking for your input on the Kalamazoo Promise scholarship program. Our goal is to study the impact of the program on KPS students, teachers, administrators, and community. We plan to provide our findings to Kalamazoo Public Schools so they can validate, improve, or add supports and services to help ensure future students’ success in high school and college. As mentioned in the invitation letter, we plan on the interview taking approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

I will now go over the consent form. This form is required for all Western Michigan University research, and it is used to ensure that you understand why you have been invited to this interview today, your rights, and what we plan on doing with the data once we have completed the interviews. [Review consent form with informant. Ask them if they have any questions. Answer questions and then ask them to sign their name and date the form. Provide them with a copy of the form]

We hope you feel comfortable in providing your insights and ideas. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, please let me know. You can end the interview or refuse to answer any question at any time during the session. In addition, to ensure accuracy I will be tape recording and taking notes while you are speaking.

This evaluation is formative. That means we are focusing on collecting information and ideas from you and other parents that may help improve the chances for students to utilize The Promise. We recognize that improvement can always be made in the school, the district, and the larger community of Kalamazoo. Do you have any further questions before we get started?

1. How many students do you have in the Kalamazoo Public Schools?
   a. How many students do you have in other private or public school districts?
   b. What grades are they in and what schools do they attend?
   c. Did any or all of your children attend preschool of some sort?
2. Do you plan for all of them to all to take advantage of The Promise?
   a. Do your children plan to go to college? Did they plan to go to college before The Promise?
3. Has The Promise changed your family? If yes, please explain.

4. Do you discuss college more with your family since The Promise started? Explain examples

5. Do your children discuss college more since The Promise started?

6. Do you and your children take their schoolwork more seriously since The Promise began?
   a. Do they spend more time reading, doing homework? Please explain if you have noticed a change.

7. Have you noticed any changes in other families since the start of The Promise? Please explain.
   a. Have any of your children's friends talked about college or The Promise? What did they say?
   b. Do you think the way students act at school has changed? In what ways?
   c. Are other families children better behaved? Worse? Explain.
   d. Do you feel other parents are doing their fair share to support The Promise? Explain please.
   e. Are parents using more community services to help their child in school? Give some examples please.

8. Has the school changed since The Promise was announced? How, please explain.
   a. Have the teachers changed? Please explain.
   b. Are there more services for students since The Promise? Can you name a few?
   c. Has the principal changed since The Promise? Give some examples if you can please.
   d. Has the community been become more or less involved since The Promise began?
      Give some examples please.

9. Are there students who are not being well served (forgotten or being left out)? Who are they (no names please) and what do you think the problem is? How can it be fixed?

10. What changes need to be made that you want to tell the school, the superintendent, our community, or The Promise office about? (Should they be doing anything differently?)
    What would you tell them to change?
    a. academically?
    b. about behavior at school?
    c. about other things like health, counseling, mentoring, tutoring, use of technology?
    d. about what parents need to support their children?
    e. of the things, you just listed which is most important. Why?

11. As a parent is there anything else you are thinking about The Promise that you would like to share and I haven't asked you about?
This completes the interview. Do you have any follow-up questions or comments?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Remember, if you have any follow-up comments, concerns, or questions, please call the researcher Chuck Pearson at 269 760 9821. His contact information is also on the consent form. If you choose you can ask us to destroy the tape and notes from this interview at any time by simply calling, and your interview will not be included in the study.

Individual Interview Questions
Community Involvement

Interview Protocol
1. What is your official title?
   a. How long have you been in this position?
   b. What other community service positions have you held?
2. Have parents become more involved and focused on education since The Promise began? Give an example or two please.
3. Do families fully utilize the community services available? Explain why or why not.
4. Have community groups increased their support of students and families since The Promise began? Please list examples of new activities started since The Promise began.
5. In what ways have you personally been involved with students and/or families since The Promise began?
   a. In what ways has your organization been involved?
   b. Has your level of involvement increased since The Promise started? Please explain.
   c. Has your community organization increased its level of involvement? Please explain.
6. Do you think ALL students will benefit from The Promise? Please explain.
   a. Who is being left out? Who is benefiting the most?
b. If students are or will be left behind and not have the chance to take advantage of The Promise, can you give reasons why? Any other reasons?

7. What can community groups do to make sure all students can take advantage of The Promise? Please give several examples if you can.
   a. Who is responsible for implementing each one?
   b. What are important things community groups, parents and school leaders have not considered since The Promise began?
   c. Do you feel that the community is organized and focused on supporting all students as they go for The Promise? Explain please.
   d. Whom do you see or perceive Promise leaders to be? Are they taking enough responsibility for its successful implementation?

8. What other thoughts do you have about The Kalamazoo Promise that haven't been brought up?

WMU/ELRT/Pearson 5/09

Focus Group Interview Questions

**Parent Involvement**

We recently interviewed 20 individual Milwood parents. It was mentioned that some students are being left out of The Promise. That means they are not doing well enough in school to graduate and go to college. Other kids are doing very well in school.

1. **Do you have any ideas why some kids might be left behind, left out of The Promise?**

Some have said that not all parents take education or The Promise seriously enough.

2. **Do you agree with that and what are you seeing?**

Some of the parents think the schools are doing a good job educating children.

3. **Do you agree? Are there things the schools could do better to teach your children?**

There are many community services in place for kids.
4. How aware of these services are you? Can you name any? Are community partners doing enough of what's needed to support all kids in reaching The Promise? Again, are some kids missing out?
Some parents feel Promise information is hard to find.

5. Do you agree? What are ways you find out Promise information? Are there other ways Promise information could be better shared with parents and students?
The school system can always do a better job educating kids for The Promise.

6. Are there any ideas or concerns about The Promise you want to share before we end?

Thanks for being a part of this parent focus group.

Focus Group Interview Questions

Community Involvement

We recently held six individual community group interviews. Parental support was mentioned by community group members as being very important to helping children reach The Promise.

1. How would you describe parental support since The Promise began?
Some say that how well parents help their children get an education varies quite a bit.

2. Do you agree? Can you give examples of different levels of support for kids?
Those interviewed recently say they have seen some changes in community groups since The Promise began.

3. Do you see any changes in community groups? Describe some? Are there more services since The Promise?
Some children are at risk of failure and not reaching The Promise.
4. Can you suggest reasons why some students are at risk of failure and dropping out while others are doing well in school?

5. Do you have suggestions of specific things the schools, families, and community groups could do to help more at-risk kids succeed?

Community groups, the schools, social service providers, parents and government all provide services to kids in order for them to graduate and go to college.

6. Share any ideas you have about how to coordinate all these groups.

The Promise is a great opportunity for our school and community.

7. Are there any ideas or concerns you want to share about The Promise before we end?

Thanks for taking part in this Promise Community Group focus group.
APPENDIX B

Approval Letter

Date: April 2, 2009

To: Van Cooley, Principal Investigator
    Charles Pearson, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 09-04-01

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Understanding the Economic, Social, and Educational Impact of The Kalamazoo Promise” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: April 2, 2010