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The missing students: A case study

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The Missing Students:

A Case Study

By

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DEDICATION

All glory to God who sent me on this journey in my life.

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to my mother and father, Barb and Dale Boyce, who raised me in a home full of love; and to my dear husband, Tom, and my children, Tom and Jim, their wives, Stephanie and Carrie; and to my granddaughter Kennedy. You have all brought me joy and happiness. Thank you for your love, support, and encouragement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my doctoral dissertation committee for their help throughout this research study. My doctoral committee changed over the years, and I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. James Barott who worked with me for many years on this project. My deepest appreciation goes to Dr. Ronald Flowers, the chairperson for my doctoral committee, for his guidance and support. His direction and suggestions for my writing led me to a deeper understanding and appreciation of this study. It was his knowledge and expertise which provided the assistance I needed to be able to finish my dissertation. I am extremely grateful.

Thank you to the Ionia Public Schools. My experiences as an educator within the district for the past 19 years provided me with invaluable information, insight, and training. This is a wonderful school district and a great community in which to live. I hope with the knowledge from my research we will continue on our route to become an even better school district. Thank you to all of those individuals who shared their stories, experiences, and information which allowed me to complete this research. I would also like to thank my colleagues who pushed me to complete this project. Thank you to Tom Batista, Maureen Meade, Jane Hummel, and Rachel Shattuck for reviewing my work and making suggestions. This was a lot of work for me over many, many years. Thank you to my husband, Tom, who had to put up with me spending weekends, nights, vacations, and most of my free time working on this research. There was a time when I had decided not to continue working on my dissertation. It was my sons, Tom and Jim, who told me I had to finish. Quitting was not an option. They encouraged me to complete this research and my finish my degree. Thank you for believing in your mom!

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research project looked at a large number of students who were missing from the high school. This was done in an effort to determine why students would leave school prior to graduation. This study examined why the students left and the factors within the schools which would allow this to occur. This contemporary problem led the researcher through the historical development of the community and the school district.

Culture, conflict, and institutional theories were used as a theoretical basis to explain what was observed. The researcher identified various cultures and subcultures within the educational system. The discoveries yielded important and significant distinctions between how elementary, middle school, and high schools approach cultural differences.

Implications for future research include investigation into the various ways schools adapt and accommodate for cultural differences in the school environment. Another avenue of further research may include identification of specific educational policies and practices in high schools which are inconsistent with the cultural needs of students.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of the Ionia Public Schools is "To educate all students in an environment that fosters their preparation as responsible citizens" (Ionia Public Schools Annual Report, 2005). As an educator, the key word for me was *all* children. There should be "No Child Left Behind" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). The purpose of schooling is not to educate some students and not others; I believe that every child is important and that each child matters. Yet, as a middle school principal and later as a high school principal, I was aware that each June, as that year's graduating class received their diplomas, there were students missing — students who had begun their educational experiences in Ionia Public Schools but who would not be graduating. As I investigated this problem, I became aware that the actual number of students who left our high school was staggering. Based on student count day enrollment records, which were maintained by Ionia Public Schools, the Ionia High School graduating classes of 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 experienced an average loss of nearly 28%. What had happened to these children? Why had these youngsters left Ionia Public Schools?

Initially, as a middle school principal, I thought that students were dropping out of school due to the difficulties they experienced in making a transition from the middle school into the high school. Then, as I became the high school principal, my concern grew as I realized that few were aware of the loss of students. Why did others not notice that students were missing? In my search for these students, I became aware that while we were required to keep records for 99 years for students who had graduated, there was little documentation at the high school regarding students who left or dropped out. Teachers, whose classes total 120 to 150 students per day, and counselors with case-loads

so large that they know few students well, were unaware of these *missing students*. The disappearance of a student here and there in the day-to-day routine of the high school drew little attention. While it was unacceptable if even one child dropped out, the cumulative pattern that I discovered, and which seemed to be hidden and unobserved, represented a tragic breach of our responsibility to fulfill our mission statement and educate *all* children. Finding out what happened to the *lost students* became the motivation for me to begin this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand why students left or dropped out of Ionia High School and why, while they were *lost*, they were not missed. What was it about these students and the way they experienced the Ionia Schools that made them leave and, just as important, made them invisible?

I always wanted to understand what had happened to the missing children, but after becoming the Superintendent of the Ionia Public Schools, it was even more important to me as I became responsible for each and every child in my district. The loss of enrollment has a financial impact on the district, as each lost child represents approximately $7,300 in state funding, but the cost to the child, his or her family, and the community is incalculable. I hoped that by understanding the experience of these students in the district, I would be able to create and modify educational programs, policies, procedures, and activities to provide for the educational needs of all the district's children.

As I searched for the missing students and explored the problem in more detail, I found that these students did not exist in isolation, but rather that the life choices these

students made came from within the broader context of the schools, the district, and the communities in which they lived and learned. Therefore, I sought to understand not only the missing students and their experiences, but also the context in which the lives of these students unfolded. What common factors could be found in the life stories of these missing students? How were the schools in the Ionia District organized and structured?

My exploration began with the assumption that this was a contemporary problem, and I was confined to understanding only what was happening inside the schools. However, I soon realized that this problem was rooted in the broader social structures of the communities in the district. Schools do not operate apart from their communities; rather, they reflect the values, beliefs, and normative structures that are embedded in the community. According to Meyer and Rowan (1983), institutional theory focuses upon maintaining established methods, rules, and norms within the establishment. These long-established guidelines regarding appropriate conduct led to determining what was acceptable in the community and in our schools. The social and cultural influences working from within and outside of those organizations supported endurance and effectiveness. It was suggested by Meyer and Rowan (1977) that these mechanisms were imaginary yet were integrated by the organizations to gain legitimacy, wealth, and survival. The rules, norms, and beliefs are the factors which drive the organization and influence its members. The structures, methods, and perceptions that become part of how things are done are either not subjected to inspection at all or are scrutinized and judged as fitting or appropriate (Jepperson, 1991). What were the behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that gained a rule-like status within the organization and (Meyer and Rowan, 1977) made them resistant to scrutiny and modification (Zucker, 1977)? Organizations

resist change and endure. The Ionia Public Schools as an institutional structure has endured since the time of the early settlers. Looking back at the culture within the community that formed the schools, I was able to understand what happened to the lost students and why they became missing.

Over time, the ways that communities organized and structured the relationships between various groups and individuals became institutionalized and reflected in social organizations such as schools. Therefore, I sought to understand not only the missing students and their experiences, but the context within which the schools and the lives of these students intersected. I examined how the Ionia Public Schools had been formed and connected to the history of the communities in the district. This would lead to an exploration of the cultural belief systems as they evolved in both the community and the district's schools.

Swift (2002) noted in a similar inquiry that research that focused on the culture, values, and assumptions that motivated participant groups provided an explanation of how communities develop. This study would seek to understand how the communities and the schools they established shaped the lives of the various groups within the district, specifically, the lives of past and more recent students who did not complete their schooling. Scott (2001) termed this *neo-institutional* research because it focuses upon the effects of cultural belief systems operating in the environment upon the formation of social organizations. Spindler (1955) addressed the importance of understanding culture and its relationship to schools.

> …The administrator…must not only have cultural awareness but must also understand the mechanics of cultural change, the idealistic meaning

of cultural values, and the social system of the school in the setting of the encompassing community….(p. 12)

While the purpose and focus of this study would be to understand why students left or dropped out of the Ionia Public Schools, to understand why these missing students remained invisible, they could not be viewed in isolation. Rather, these missing students would have to be examined in the larger organizational and institutional context that shaped their lives. A case-study of the development and formation of the communities and the schools would provide the framework within which to develop this understanding. Therefore, the following questions were used to guide my inquiry:

1- What was the nature of the development, evolution, and persistence of the various cultural groups in Ionia?
2- What role did each cultural group play in the development of schooling in Ionia?
3- What were the dominant cultural values, beliefs, and norms, and how are these reflected in the schools?
4- Who were the missing students and what was the nature of their cultural membership?
5- How did the culture of the community shape the nature of schooling and the way the missing students experienced schooling?

Background of the Study

The setting for this case-study was the Ionia Public Schools located in Ionia County, within the southwest section of the lower peninsula of Michigan. The city of

Ionia is geographically half-way between the cities of Grand Rapids and Lansing, approximately a 30-minute drive from each city. Samuel Dexter and his colony of 62 people settled in Ionia on May 28, 1833. The following year, the first school began**,** and the United States opened a land office in Ionia in 1836, which brought a large number of settlers from across the country. The primary industries were timber, followed by manufacturing, with the Grand River and a railroad as early modes of transporting goods and services. Currently, highways M-66 and M-21 intersect in the town of Ionia, making the community a viable route of transportation from both north to south and east to west. Ionia continues to provide business in the form of manufactured goods used in the automotive industry. In recent years, large, *big box* department and home improvement stores such as Wal-Mart, Meijer, Lowe's, and Menards have established themselves as a part of the community. The regional location of Ionia is shown in Figure 1.

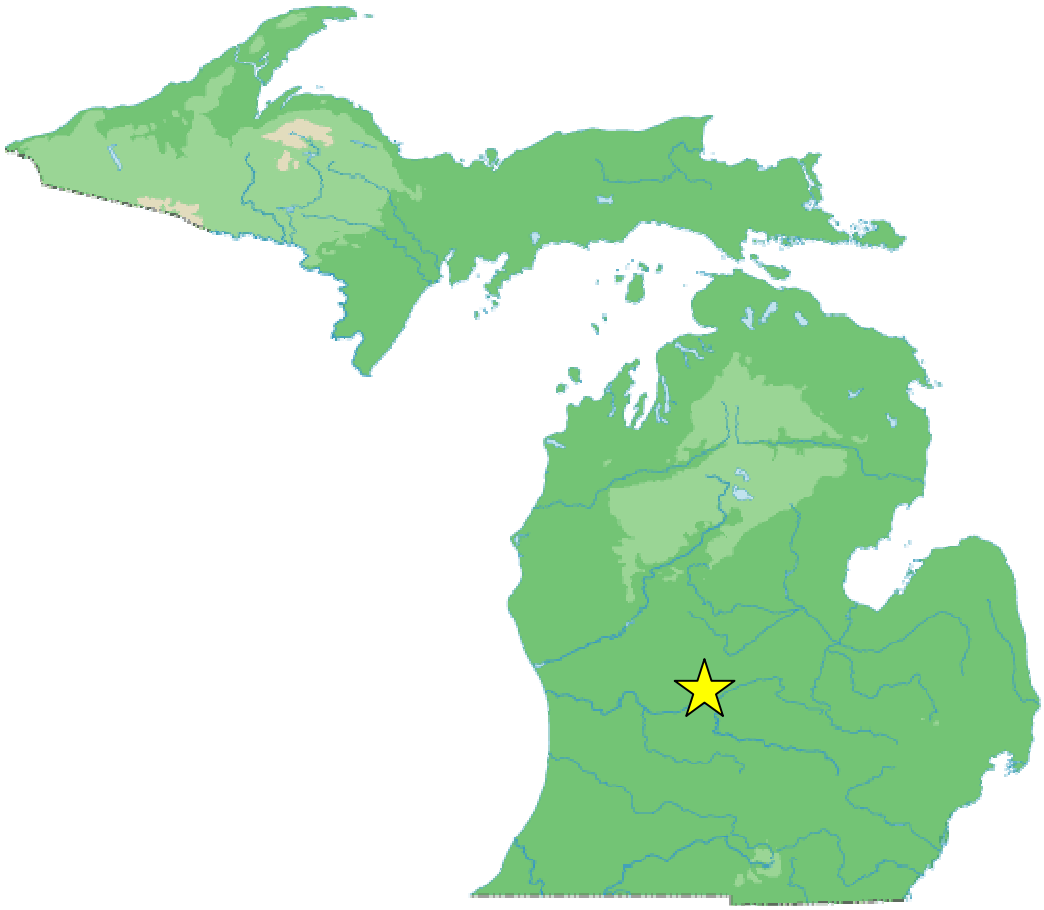

Figure 1: Regional Location of Ionia, Michigan

The communities of Lyons and Muir, located approximately 10 miles to the east of the city of Ionia, as well as the surrounding rural areas are also part of the Ionia Public Schools district. Some students from the community of Palo, which has its own K-8 school, may also attend Ionia High School. Uniquely, three of Michigan's one-room school districts operate K-8 programs in close proximity to the Ionia Public Schools district lines. Coon School *is* located south of the Ionia School District, while North LeValley School and Haynor School are geographically surrounded by the Ionia School District boundaries. The students from these districts may also attend Ionia High School.

Today, Ionia Schools have an annual enrollment of approximately 3,200 students. School districts in the state of Michigan are classified as A, B, C, or D based on the number of students enrolled in the high school. Ionia High School, a very large Class B school, ranks in the upper 25% of high schools in the State of Michigan.

The demographics of current Ionia Public Schools show that 98% are Caucasian, with 51% qualifying for the free and reduced lunch program. Students attending the five elementary schools whose families' income place them at the poverty level range from 42%-78%, and approximately 19% of the Pre K-12 student population are identified as eligible to receive special education services.

Significance of the Study

Of the most importance is that the results of this research have enhanced my growth as an educational leader. This research has provided the conceptual lens through which to understand the schools in my district and the communities in which they are embedded. Understanding this relationship has also provided the tools to understand the linkages between the values and cultures within the district's communities and the procedures, policies, and programs that have been enacted in the district. From a practical perspective, this research has provided not only the insight necessary to find our missing children, but also the conceptual framework within which to address the problems faced by these children.

The goal of educational research is to improve the abilities of school leaders to meet the needs of students, families, and the school community. Schools and communities are closely linked, with schools reflecting the values and cultures within communities. Thus, while the particulars of this case study may not be generalizable to

other districts and communities, the conceptual framework used in this study could provide an understanding of the relationships between school and community and improve educational leaders' abilities to define the nature of problems that they experience in their districts and potential solutions.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand what happened to the missing students in Ionia High School and to determine why they were gone but not missed. In order to answer this question, it was essential to understand the organizational formation and development of the Ionia Public Schools and the communities within which they were embedded. All schools have unique histories and identities and are a reflection of their environments. This case study sought to understand the organizational formation, persistence, and development of an educational system by examining how Ionia Public Schools developed over time and how this development shaped and influenced the lives of those students who had gone missing.

The research traditions and methodology used in the case study and a review of the relevant literature will be presented in Chapter 2. Findings of the case study will follow in Chapter 3, and the study will conclude in Chapter 4 with a summary of the findings, potential implications for educational leaders in the Ionia Public Schools, relevance of this study for other educational leaders, and suggestions for additional research.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH TRADITION AND DESIGN

Conceptually, this study sought to understand the missing students in the context of the social environment in which they lived. Appropriately, as will be discussed later in this chapter, culture formed a central framework for this study. Thus, the questions that guided this study focused on the relationship of the missing students to the formation, evolution, and persistence of the cultures found in Ionia.

1. What was the nature of the development, evolution, and persistence of the various cultural groups in Ionia?
2. What role did each cultural group play in the development of schooling in Ionia?
3. What were the dominant cultural values, beliefs, and norms, and how are these reflected in the schools?
4. Who were the missing students, and what was the nature of their cultural membership?
5. How did the culture of the community shape the nature of schooling and the way the missing students experienced schooling?

The purpose of this study was to understand why there were missing students. Rather than examine these students in isolation and try to discern how these students were somehow *defective*, this study explored their lives in the context of the organizational and institutional structures of schooling. As described by Spradley (1980), the institutional structures of a community, including schools, are cultural manifestations reflecting the values, beliefs, and normative systems of the various cultural groups that make up a community. A cultural lens provided a means for this study to investigate the

relationship of the student's *native* culture with the dominant culture in the community, which is reflected in its social institutions, and to determine the impact this relationship had on the educational experiences of the missing students. By understanding the cultural structures in which these students are embedded, and how these structures may be biased to the disadvantage of the missing students, I can, as an educational leader, be more thoughtful in my analysis and development of policies and practices. "Cultural understanding is desirable for all of us," wrote Schein (1993), "but it is essential if leaders are to lead" (p. 366). So, while this study will help me better understand what happened to the missing students in my district, the conceptual framework used in this study may also help me understand other phenomena and may also prove useful to other education leaders. This framework can provide another lens through which to examine issues and problems and generate new options and find solutions that make a difference.

Research Tradition

For research to be meaningful, the researcher needs to make explicit the perspective they will use in their study. In this case study of the Ionia Public Schools and its community, I followed the research traditions established by the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920s and 1930s in the early days of sociology. The historical background can be traced back to Germany in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The first works were of Marx (1859/1970), Weber (1906/1947) and Simmel (1922/1955). Marx's work had a tremendous effect on future sociologists. He was interested in the effect of economic exchange and how it created systems of domination within the various social classes. Weber's work studied the issues of capitalism and the rationalizations within society on a large scale. Simmel, of German Jewish descent, studied interactions and

actions of individuals believing that the work of sociology was to understand how people relate to one another (Ritzer, 1983). Simmel viewed social conflict as a method of explanation for social interaction and conflict as a concept by which society was organized.

Influenced by Simmel's work, Park (1925), a journalist by trade, became a leader of the Chicago School. Park was concerned with problems in urban areas and collected data from his own observations about the world around him. Mead (1934/1962), also from the University of Chicago, saw the significance of making observations and collecting data related to human observation involving actions, reactions, and various interactions among individuals and groups of people. From the collective works of Park (1925) and Simmel and Mead (1962), the basis for interpretivist sociology was developed.

The interpretive paradigm suggests that human experience is mediated by interpretation (Blumer, 1969). The understanding of reality is shaped by the socially constructed meanings of the participants. According to Becker (1988), the interpretivist tradition seeks to understand the way people make sense of the action of others. To understand the meanings that contribute to the creation of social reality, the process by which these meanings are constructed must be examined by the researcher. This tradition was seen by Blumer (1969) as a common sense approach to understanding people and the lives they live.

According to Ragin (1987), researchers who use quantitative methods use many cases and very few variables, whereas those using interpretive or qualitative methods focus on a few cases with many variables. The lives of the missing students and the social

context in which they experienced schooling had many variables that were multifaceted, intertwined, and difficult to quantify. Therefore, given that the intent of this study was to understand the socially constructed meanings held by the missing students and those responsible for creating the institutional structures of schooling, this research was more effectively served by using an interpretivist perspective.

Seeking to examine the lives of the missing students within what Geertz (1973) described as *webs of meanings* or cultural constructs, this study used an ethnographic approach. Ethnographic research, a derivative of the interpretivist paradigm, seeks to understand culture through an *emic* perspective or from an insider's point of view. The emphasis of this research tradition is to allow the meanings to *emerge* from the ethnographic encounter rather than imposing these externally. The foundation of ethnographic research is engagement in the field setting or place where the ethnography takes place. This is referred to as participant observation where the researcher both *participates* in the life of the setting and remains an *observer* in order to describe the setting. The purpose is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice. As a foundation, the ethnographer uses a culture frame of reference seeking to understand the meanings associated with the cultural structures observed. The focus is on the subjective actions and behavior of individuals as they engage in day-to-day activities (Geertz, 1973). Using an ethnographic approach enabled me to explicate the cultural constructs of the Ionia community as reflected in the educational policies and practices of the schools in order to understand the experiences and perspective of the missing students.

Conceptual Framework

Culture

Tylor first defined culture in the 1860s as the sum total of ideas, beliefs, values, material culture equipment, and non-material aspects which humans make as members of society (Bohannan, 1969). More recently, the definition has focused on the human capacity to encode and interpret their social experiences symbolically. Schein (1990) suggested that this interpretive process enables groups of people to develop social systems that shape internal and external group behavior. *Culture*, according to Schein, "is what a group learns over a period of time as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration" (p. 111). As an anthropological model, culture explains the hidden and complex aspects of social life. At its deepest level, culture can be described as "perceptions, language, and thought processes that a group comes to share," and is the "causal determinant of feelings, attitudes, espoused values, and overt behavior" (p. 111). In addition, culture acts as a mechanism of social stability by providing *automatic* patterns of social interaction such that social life can be made understandable and predictable. These cultural structures – patterns of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving – come to be viewed as valid forms of interaction by members of the community. These patterns not only come to be reflected in personal social interactions, but also become the framework for all organizational and institutional entities within a given community. In other words, in spite of the physical structures we create to house our organizations, they are social, not

physical, entities. Thus, organizations, such as schools, are about the structuring of social processes (Kelly, 1974).

Rarely, according to Appiah (1994), are communities culturally monolithic; rather, communities are composed of definable groups each with their own history, shared experiences and, therefore, their own culture. While we may speak of a common culture in a community, this is not true in the sense that everyone in the community actually holds the same beliefs and values, but in the sense that everyone knows what the beliefs and values are and that they are widely held. "Even in the 'simplest' societies," wrote Appiah, "there are different values and practices and beliefs and interests associated with different social groups" (p. 114). What is often presented as a coherent, unified culture is in actuality a reflection of the "common culture" of the dominant classes – the government and business and cultural elites" (p. 116). In fact, as Appiah argued, those subordinate to the dominant classes are often familiar with the beliefs, values, signs, and symbols of the "common culture" and that it "was not an effect but also an instrument of their domination" (p. 114). These divisions, Gabrenya (2003) explained, are often reflected in ethnic or racial groups, regional groups (city versus rural people), religious groups, gender, or social class.

While the nature of conflict and conflict theory will be discussed in more detail in the next section, it is important to note that culture is inextricable from conflict. The nature of a community's cultural structures can best be understood in terms of tensions or conflict between competing cultural groups. Mills (as cited in Knapp, 1994) wrote that social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources. Individuals and resources, in turn, are influenced by these structures. This

conflict is rooted in the desire of cultural groups to maintain and/or expand their position relative to others in order to control access to resources. More important, as it relates to culture, is that this control becomes embedded in the structural relations characteristic of a given social community. The *dominant culture*, though not coherent throughout the community, is positioned to control the authoritative allocation of values – the construction of culture – through the control of social institutions that dominant everyday life – religious, educational and governmental.

Consequently, those of the dominant culture come to define the nature of conflict, who can participate in conflict and in what way, and the social processes by which conflict is adjudicated. Conflict, itself, is a culturally defined concept affecting the way we name, frame, blame, and attempt to resolve conflict. The very acknowledgement that a conflict exists at all is a cultural question. In fact, the concept of a *common culture*, the notion of a universal set of beliefs, values, and practices shared and enacted by all social participants, is a social mechanism to de-legitimize competing cultural groups, as this common culture reflects, as has been described, the dominant culture (Appiah, 1994). This enables the dominant culture to label those *outside* the common culture as deviant or threats to the community.

Cultural groups, however, are not homogeneous entities, but are made up of individuals who have multiple cultural affiliations. Consequently, the nature of cultural is fluid with individuals and groups of individuals determining the degree to which they enact given cultural tenets based upon circumstances and perception. Workers, for example, who share a common *working class* culture, may act in unison as they perceive common values and beliefs, while disregarding potential conflicting cultural affiliations

(such as ethnicity, religion, or race). This is not to suggest that culture is understood by social participants as merely a utilitarian construct, but that culture is a complex matrix of social linkages, and that these multiple affiliations shape both inter-cultural conflict and intra-cultural conflict. As such, the formation of cultural structures is a dynamic process. Even that which may be defined as the dominant culture is fraught with fissures, which enables subordinate cultural groups to continue the struggle. Thus, as Schein (1990) described, cultural structures are not just about internal integration but about external adaptation. Consequently, cultural systems are also expressions of cultural strategies that may serve functionally for cultural groups to successfully navigate the cultural environment and effectively engage in cultural conflict (Gabrenya, 2003).

As described, communities are made up of diverse cultural groups. For the purpose of this study, social class was seen as a salient cultural group in understanding the nature of culture in Ionia. Sociologists have defined social class as a type of social stratification that organizes people in a hierarchy of levels based typically on educational attainment, occupational prestige, and/or wealth or income (Gabrenya, 2003). This study used the construct of wealth and income as the defining characteristic in identifying various cultural groups based on social class.

Just as individuals in different societies have different cultural structures, Gabrenya (2003) suggested that individuals in different social classes have different cultural systems. “Classes differ in values and beliefs about the right way to live, practice different variants of the same religion, have different political and social attitudes, and so on” (p. 6). Though they may share versions of the dominant culture’s belief structures, they have class-specific cultural systems that are passed to their children through

socialization and enculturation processes. From an ecological perspective, Gabrenya argued that these differences are a function of the fact that "different social classes face different situational contingencies because they participate in different parts of the economic system" (p. 6). In other words, they participate in different ecological niches in order to make a living and survive.

As discussed earlier, what is often perceived as the common culture is, in fact, a reflection of the cultural structures of those cultural groups – social classes – at the top of the economic hierarchy. Their thoughts, perceptions, values, goals, morals, and normative structures become embedded in the social institutions of the community such that they serve to perpetuate the existing social order. The cultural structures of the subordinate classes often come into conflict with the dominant cultural structures of the community. Because the dominant class/culture is able to control the nature and scope of conflict through the control of social institutions, these conflicts are often marginalized and organized in such a way that access to systems of conflict adjudication is limited.

It should be noted that the use of social class within the conceptual framework of this study presents some risk, as descriptions of class differences can be perceived as an indicator of relative worth. The use of concepts such as culture of poverty, underclass, and subordinate classes places this study in the center of the conflict in sociology over *difference vs. deficit* relative to ethnicity and poverty. In other words, are subordinate cultural groups held back by the cultural values, beliefs, and practices they hold, or are these variations in class culture to be seen as different, not good or bad? If one subscribes to the former, members of subordinate cultural groups need to be *fixed* before they can successfully participate in community life, whereas the latter suggests that it is the social

structures created by the dominant culture that must be altered before subordinate groups can equally participate in the community. This author would suggest that some of what is perceived as *deficit* cultural structures for subordinate cultural groups is, in fact, adaptive structures that have evolved to enable members of these social classes to survive within the social structures of the dominant culture. I would also argue that not all cultural differences are mere adaptive strategies. Rather, they reflect the unique life experiences and histories of each group and, therefore, should not be seen as right or wrong, good or bad, but as multifaceted and unique variations of culture.

"Culture perpetuates and reproduces itself, "explained Schein (1993), "through the socialization of new members entering the group" (p. 115). For societies and communities, new members are children. The socialization of children into the ways of doing, thinking, knowing, and believing of the group – its culture – provides for the stability and continued survival of the group (Flowers, 2006). Wolcott (1987) explained that children are socialized informally, non-formally, and formally. Informal learning is that which is unintentional and occurs through observation of, interaction with, and imitation of adults in the child's immediate social world. Often these are members of the child's family or family friends and associates. Nonformal socialization is intentional, that is, learning occurs through purposeful engagement. However, nonformal learning lacks the formality of setting and an organizational framework. A father teaching his son or daughter how to fish would be an example of nonformal learning. Formal socialization, on the other hand, is structured by the society or community and consists of a formal setting and an organizational framework of regulatory, normative, and cognitive-cultural structures including formal roles (teachers, students), goals, and

technology. Schools are but one of several formal organizations that are responsible for the socialization of a community's children. Formal schooling is therefore an agency of society with an institutional framework that connects it to the wider cultural structures of the community (Flowers, 2006).

As a social institution, schools are a product of the outcomes of the cultural conflicts within the community and come to reflect the cultural structures of the dominant culture. Thus, the answers to the questions posited by Stout, Tallerico, and Scribner (1994) come to be controlled by the dominant culture in such a way that schools are organized to reproduce the existing social structure.

> Who should go to school?
>
> What should be the purpose of schooling?
>
> What should children be taught (what knowledge is most worth knowing)?
>
> Who should decide issues of school direction and policy?
>
> Who should pay for schools? (p. 5)

Since the type and level of education a child receives is linked to his or her social status and rank in the social hierarchy as an adult, schools serve to reproduce the existing social stratification. According to Rowan (1982), schools are essential in establishing the rank or level of work for a student which "creates social status and assigns them to individuals" (p. 477). The dominant culture comes to rely upon schools to establish and perpetuate the existing social structure. "When a particular status groups controls education it can use that control to foster its own culture's values within the organization…the primary purpose of schools was to promote and teach a particular status culture" (Arpin, 2009, p. 46). Figure 2 depicts the dynamics of cultural conflict

surrounding the Ionia schools and community. Conflicts over who should be educated, the purpose of education, what children should be taught, and who should determine issues related to school structure and policy arose from cultural conflicts between competing groups.

Figure 2: Cultural Conflicts Between Competing Groups.

The age-based grade levels, yearly calendar, teacher certification, building principals, district superintendents, core curriculum, final exams, and graduation ceremonies are all organizational structures that mirror the deeper culture values of the dominant culture. "Thus, schooling is not merely a utilitarian means for private gratification, but also a ritualistic activity strongly controlled by highly institutionalized communal values" (Rowan, 1982, pp. 478-479). Schools remain highly stable organizations over time because of the elaborate rules and organizational structures – the

schools culture –which is but an extension of the dominant culture. It is in the intersection between the dominant culture, as reflected in the schools, and the cultural groups who lacked this social status that I began my search for the missing students. Lacking status and power, the value systems of these subordinate groups can be ignored and marginalized creating the potential for cultural conflict.

Conflict

While Weber (1947), like Marx (1859), was concerned with capitalism and its problems, Weber (1947) was more focused upon the nature of capitalism and the understanding of how and why it emerged and changed. Weber used sociology in seeking out a system of explanations as to why capitalism was found in Western Europe and not in other countries, like China and other parts of the world. Sociological theories were used by Weber to establish the basis for analyzing the economy as well as to identify the factors which influenced different factions of the society. Weber started by trying to find an explanation for economics, and in his search for answers, he turned to the discipline of sociology. There he found and appreciated the role that politics and religion play in economics. Weber, a professor of law and economics, distinguished between authority and power by defining power as any relationship within which one individual could force his or her will, in spite of any resistance from the subjected person. He believed authority existed when there was a certainty in the authenticity of that power.

One of Weber's (1947) major contributions to conflict theory was on social stratification. According to Weber's conflict theory, power was seen as having multi-dimensional characteristics, and the division of power was a stratification that goes

beyond economics to include class, group status, and political power. Conflict theory stated that individuals obtain their basic sense of identity from their status groups. The status groups were identity groups based upon shared values, economics, language, culture, opinions, preferences, ethnic group, social order, and more. Conflict existed in all societies because of the inequality of power that existed between these status groups. The constant battle over power, wealth, and prestige among the status groups within the society or organization constituted conflict theory.

The conflict perspective maintains that social order resulted from coercion or from the use of force. Conflict theory stressed the thought that some people dominate and others are dominated. As a conflict theorist, Weber (1947) viewed domination to be the result of relations of power. Weber identified three possible sources of domination related to economic power (class); social power, such as prestige (status); and political power or organization (party). Weber further suggested that economic power did not have to coincide with social or political power; he believed each could have its own agenda. Political power could lead to the other two, and the same could be said of social power (Weber, 1947).

Weber (1947) viewed a class as a set of people who occupy the same or similar economic condition; he recognized that there are many economic factors shaping the formation of a class of people. According to Weber, class differences resulted from control or lack of control. Weber initiated the concept of *party* as a category in the study of stratification. He stressed the importance of organization and political leadership in any conflict situation. One key ingredient in conflict was whether those who are dominated, or denied resources, believed that those who dominated them had the right to

do so. Weber called this *legitimacy.* According to Weber, conflict existed when legitimacy by the dominant sector had been lost.

Competition and conflict differ in that the struggle that takes place within a class is competition, whereas the struggle that occurred between different classes is conflict. Weber (1947) made a distinction between social class and status groups. He writes, "In contrast to classes, status groups are normally communities. Status referred to the social difference that social groups may have, based on socially defined honor or social prestige" (p. 927). Giddens (1993) wrote, "Possession of wealth normally tends to confer high status, but there are many exceptions" (p. 218).

Within a particular class, it was possible to find different status groups. What prestige they have depended on many things; it may be the size and source of their income, their education, political position within the community, or some other highly valued social characteristic. Any successful dominant class must become organized as a status group. The same point was made by Weber (1947). The essential feature of social inequality was power. Society was divided into those who have power, the oppressors, and those who do not, the oppressed (Heller, 1969). Weber (1947) noted that power did not necessarily flow from economic resources. The control of key economic resources is important, but other things have to be considered. While at times status as well as class groupings may conflict, at other times members may accept fairly stable patterns of subordination and super ordination. With this twofold classification of social stratification, Weber laid the groundwork for an understanding of pluralistic forms of social conflict in modern society; he helped to explain why only in rare cases are such societies polarized into the opposing camps of the "haves" and the "have nots" (Coser,

1977). Collins (1986), in summarizing the works of Weber, explained that Weber's general premises were that people pursued wealth, power, and prestige in all societies, which created conflict over these *goods.* People disliked being controlled and thus engaged in conflict to avoid being controlled. Violent force or intimidation was always a possible resource and, therefore, was always an aspect in conflict; it was also influenced by the numbers and types of people with whom individuals have contact. According to the credential society, contemporary education was the dominant institution used for the creation of social stratification; the central function of modern schools was to be the gatekeeper and to determine who goes to college and legitimize the inequality between classes.

Institutional Theory

While scholars from the fields of political science and economics have applied their unique perspectives to the study of organizations and institutions, this researcher found the use of the theoretical frameworks developed in the fields of sociology and anthropology most compatible with the use of culture as a conceptual lens. Sociologists and anthropologists define institutions as complex, integrated sets of social concepts and practices which are organized around the preservation of basic societal values. Sociologists typically describe five basic areas of life that constitute the fundamental social institutions:

1. In determining kinship – family
2. In providing for the legitimate use of power – government
3. In regulating the distribution of goods and resources – economy
4. In transmitting knowledge from one generation to the next – education

5. In regulating our relation to the supernatural – religion

(adapted from Giddens, 2009).

Researchers suggested that the social frameworks that constitute these social institutions are shaped by shared norms, values, knowledge, and beliefs. What is most important is that these shared social frameworks come to be objectified and seen as a reality that exists *out there*. Berger and Luckmann (as cited in Scott, 2001) defined the process by which these frameworks become "experienced as possessing a reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact" (p. 40) as institutionalization.

For Scott (2001), institutions are multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources. They tend to be transmitted across generations, to be maintained and reproduced.

As Giddens (1984) stated, "Institutions, by definition are the more enduring features of social life…giving 'solidity' [to social systems] across time and space." (p. 49). According to Scott (2001), institutions consist of three elements or pillars, which

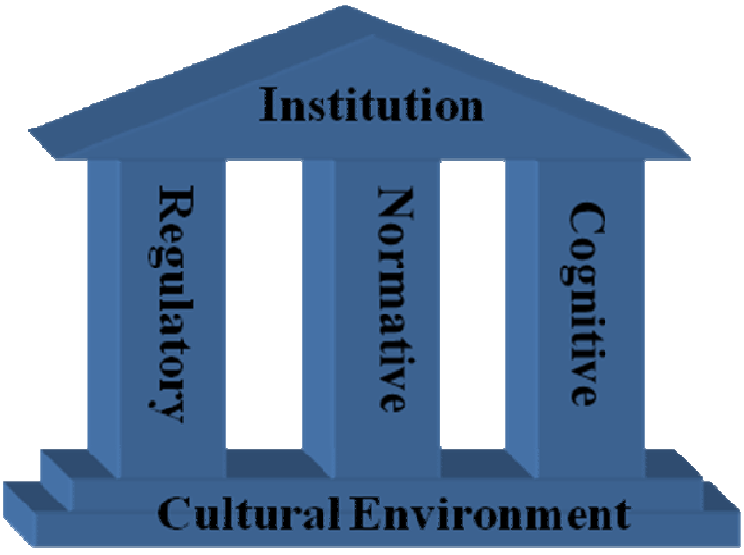

Figure 3: Institutional Pillars

form the foundation upon which all institutions are built. As shown in Figure 3, these pillars are regulative, normative, and cognitive-cultural.

These pillars do not operate independently but form a matrix of social constructs that "contribute in interdependent and mutually reinforcing ways" to create a powerful social framework (p. 51). Each pillar will be examined independently to provide analytical clarity.

The regulative pillar serves to regularize behavior through systems of rule-setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities (Scott, 2001). These systems may be informal processes such as folkways or highly formalized such as laws. The regulative processes can be described as the *rules of the game,* which include formal written rules as well as informal codes of conduct that shape acceptable behavior. In this way the regulative and normative pillars can be seen as mutually reinforcing frameworks.

According to Scott (2001), the normative pillar establishes social expectations or the appropriateness of behavior. The normative pillar is structured through values, norms, and roles. Values serve to define the rightness of behavior so that there are preferred or desirable ways for an individual to act given the nature of the social setting. Norms define legitimate modes of behavior as they relate to how the game is played (i.e., concepts of sportsmanship). Whereas in some cases norms and values are applicable to all social actors, roles are positionally-based values and norms that are connected to certain actors in specific social situations (i.e., principals dress and act in certain ways). So, while social roles may constrain behavior they also confer rights or legitimize acts that are

narrowly ascribed to certain actors. Institutionally, it is often but not always the case that some normative processes are codified though the development of regulative systems.

The cultural-cognitive pillar established the framework in which sense is made within the institution. The cultural-cognitive pillar is based upon a combination of both internal interpretation and external analysis of the social system. The cognitive-cultural pillar is best understood as a process of mediation or interpretation that takes place between external events and the internally ascribed meaning of those actions. What is critical is that these internal meanings systems are, in fact, seen as symbolic systems which the individual perceives as an objective reality existing external to the individual. These are the *taken for granted* assumptions that come to be *this is the way we do things around here*.

These institutional pillars create the framework within which the institution comes to be perceived as legitimate as the patterns of behavior are internalized and habitualized so as to create "a condition reflecting perceived consonance with relevant rules and laws, normative support, or alignment with cultural-cognitive frameworks" (Scott, 2001, p. 59). These are connected to the broader frameworks of the social system's culture. Legitimate organizations or institutions come to look, feel, smell, and act like the internal meaning constructs that have been socially constructed and come to be perceived as external realities.

Schools are an organizational system of rules, norms, and cultural structures within the institutional framework of education – social processes by which the knowledge and ways of living are transmitted to the next generation. Institutional theory made it possible to understand the structures of schooling in Ionia that have become

institutionalized processes. Institutional theory also provided an explanation for the relationship of the various cultural groups and the experiences their children had in school. This framework, in conjunction with the concepts of culture and conflict, gave this research the necessary lenses through which to examine the experiences of the missing students.

Unit of Analysis/Selection of the Research Site

This research was designed in a way to develop an understanding of the cultural reality within the Ionia Community and the Ionia Public Schools. From this perspective it would be possible to comprehend what happened to the missing students and, more important, learn why they became missing.

I knew that if there was a way that I could make a difference through research it would have to be where my heart was in the community of Ionia. Although I have also worked in six other school districts in two states over the past 30 years, I considered Ionia to be my *hometown*. Thus, the unit of analysis for this case study would be the Ionia community and its public schools.

Moral, Ethical, and Legal Implications

Research involving observations in this educational setting and in public settings or interview procedures placed the subjects at minimal risk, did not deal with sensitive aspects of the subjects' behavior, and did not include materials or settings likely to be embarrassing, upsetting, or intrusive to the subject. The subjects were not identified, and their confidentiality was protected by using a system of fictitious names assigned to each person. Existing data and documents used as sources were publicly available. The

information was recorded in a manner so that individual subjects could not be identified directly or indirectly.

I followed the protocol established with the approval of The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board of Eastern Michigan University regarding the use of human subjects for research purposes. This project was approved by the IRB committee at Eastern Michigan University as exempt. This study complied with the moral, ethical, and legal standards established by the Eastern Michigan University Institutional Review Board (See APPENDIX). An Informed Consent Form was used for research interviews which were initiated by the researcher. Individuals interviewed were given a copy of the written Informed Consent Form and could choose not to participate. Parents of any student who was a minor were required to give permission before the student could participate in any interviews. Although interviews were conducted, the majority of the relevant information for this research was gathered through personal observations. Likewise, in the course of my daily leadership role in the district, many conversations initiated by parents, students, and staff were also documented and relevant to this study.

In addition to the moral, ethical, and legal standards established by Eastern Michigan University, this research was conducted using the Code of Ethics of the American Educational Research Association. This code establishes a normative set of standards by which educational researchers should structure their research and professional behavior. These principles include:

1. Professional Competence
2. Integrity
3. Professional, Scientific, and Scholarly Responsibility

4. Respect for People's Rights, Dignity, and Diversity
5. Social Responsibility (AERA, Draft Code of Ethics, April, 2010).

Research Methodology

Self as Research Instrument

As a case study, this research was grounded in the theoretical framework developed by interpretivist sociologists and the research tradition of ethnography. This type of research begins and ends with interpretation. The meanings ascribed to participants are discovered by the researcher in an interpretive interplay between the researcher and the phenomena being studied. For that reason, as Wolcott (1992) described, as the researcher I am the research instrument. Therefore, it is incumbent upon me to make explicit my subjective self. As Eisner (1990) has suggested, in qualitative research we should not be concerned about attempting to be *objective;* rather, we should see the truths of our subjective self and understand how these contribute to who I am as a researcher. Glesne (1999) explained,

> You learn more about your own values, attitudes, beliefs, interests and needs. You learn that your subjectivity is the basis of the story that you are able to tell. It is the strength on which you build. It makes you who you are as a person and as a researcher, equipped with the perspective and insights that shape all you do as a researcher. (p. 109)

I have worked and lived in Ionia, Michigan for the past 19 years. My two sons attended and graduated from Ionia Public Schools. I was a member of a local church, Rotary, Business and Professional Women's organization, the Down Town Development Authority, and the Prison/Community Liaison Committee. While employed by Ionia

Public Schools, I have worked as an assistant principal, elementary principal, middle school principal, high school principal, and superintendent. I have known many of the individuals whom I observed for a number of years. The relationships that developed over the years have come from my interactions with individuals in the various roles that I have played within the school and community.

Unlike the ethnographer who goes to a new *village* to conduct studies, I performed my research in the community in which I have lived and worked. Although this gave me a great advantage in gathering data**,** I was also a member of the community I was observing. I did not risk *going native* as a consequence of becoming a participant observer; I was already a *local*. I had come to share many of the values and beliefs of the community. I cared about the residents of Ionia; this was my home. It was hard for me to believe that something from within the community could be doing harm to children. As a result, I initially found it difficult to be critical in my observations. I came to realize that sometimes it was hardest to see that which was right in front of me.

As a resident of Ionia, I was not just a passive recipient of the community's culture but was also an active participant in the day-to-day life of the community. Because of my engagement in the community I found it necessary to pay close attention to things that I had stopped noticing after 19 years. Trying to look with new eyes for greater specificity with a new perspective was difficult. My own prejudices about what I saw and heard had the potential to affect the research I conducted. I controlled this by discussing my observations and perceptions with many individuals, including my doctoral cohort. This was done in order to understand the observations from other viewpoints and perspectives. These discussions took place with educators, parents, and

community members. Their input was invaluable. It was not until I had an epiphany involving the cultural differences that I was able to step back from my own bias and view the realities of the community's social structures.

In addition to my perspective as a community member, I had developed a reputation of honesty, fairness, and caring over the years working in the school district. I had to make sure that, although this trust aided me in gathering data, I did not use this insider access unethically and that I respected individual privacy. Concomitantly, I had to be aware that as individuals became aware that I was undertaking this study, what they told me and/or allowed me to observe was not tainted by what they wanted me to know or see. Although I found many people who were willing to share their stories and tell me about the *good ole days*, I often had to filter this through their culture lens. I had to be aware of the fact that this was how they constructed the social world. Therefore, I had to look for the underlying meanings that shaped these stories.

So, while being an insider provided me many advantage in accessing data and making observations, as I undertook this study I had to constantly be checking myself to clarify what I was seeing and how my native status was shaping my interpretation. Discussing my findings with outsiders and keeping a journal of my interviews and observations helped me understand my subjective self.

Data Collection

The foundation of ethnographic research is that research be conducted in the day-to-day world in which it naturally occurs. Thus, I used the research technique referred to by ethnographers as participant observation. Over the course of this research I made extensive observations of students, teachers, staff, and administrators as they engaged in

the daily activities of the school. In addition to observations specific to the school setting, I gathered data from my observations of community members and students as they participated in activities outside school. These observations were carefully recorded, creating a detailed description of what I saw and heard.

In addition to observations, I gathered information through formal interviews and informal conversations with students, staff, parents, and community members. These interviews served to provide me the opportunity to examine specific elements of my observations that needed clarification and to understand the meanings ascribed to these activities by the participants.

In addition to observations and interviews, I gathered and examined artifacts within the school and community. These artifacts included attendance records, enrollment information, demographic data, student/parent handbooks, curriculum documents, board meeting minutes and policies, historical records, newspapers, and photographs. These were examined to create a contextual understanding of the information I had gathered from interviews and observations. These artifacts also helped me to understand the institutional and cultural structures as they were manifest in these documents and to see how the current state of affairs had emerged from the evolution of the institutional and cultural systems present in the community and the schools. Though much of the final analysis and interpretation would occur at the conclusion of my data gathering, analysis occurred while data were gathered in an iterative process that was both inductive and deductive and generative in nature. This allowed for an ongoing assessment of interpretations and understandings in order to test and evaluate the nature of the research. The process by which data were analyzed will be presented in the next section.

Data Analysis

To understand the data I had collected, it had to be organized so that regularities and patterns could be discovered. As Creswell (1998) described, the researcher is seeking to build a complex and holistic picture of the phenomena under investigation. I began my data analysis while I was still collecting data in order to determine the direction and focus of further data collection and to begin a speculative process regarding themes and categories. This was an iterative process that moved between data collection and data analysis so interpretations that were emerging could be evaluated relative to new data. As I collected data, I kept a journal to record my perceptions and early understandings as well as to understand how my own biases were interacting with the data I was collecting. In addition to a journal, I logged conversations, interviews, and observations organizing them into potential thematic categories.

Given that I was seeking to understand the interaction of categories of students within the context of the community and schools, I initially established broad categories. Data were analyzed by looking at students who became missing and students who graduated from Ionia Public Schools. I also observed a few individual students who fluctuated between being in school, out of school, and back in school. These broad groupings were further disaggregated by social class. Additional categories of setting, situational context, perspectives of students, activities engaged in by students, and strategies employed by students were developed and analyzed after data collection was completed. In addition to categories developed as they related to students, data were

organized relative to the school, the community, and the various structures encountered by students.

This process allowed me to create a matrix of student interaction with both the formal and informal structures of the school and community. In using these data analysis structures, I was able to identify patterns and themes and filter my emerging conceptual understandings through the conceptual framework of culture, conflict, and institutional structures. This conceptual framework created additional categories through which the information I had gathered and organized could be sorted and analyzed.

The final step in my analysis involved the structuring of the data as organized into appropriate categories, themes, and patterns into a thick and rich narrative that expressed the meaning as constructed by the missing students. As the narrative was developed, tentative conclusions emerged as the stories I had observed began to fit together to form a holistic presentation of the experiences of the missing students.

Objectivity, Reliability, and Validity

The purpose of this study was to determine what had happened to the missing students and why. To do this required the analysis and interpretation of observations and artifacts to produce a narrative that reflected the meanings held by the individuals who were the focus of this study. To determine if the conclusions drawn and the narrative created accurately portrayed the phenomena under investigation, validity and reliability were addressed.

Objectivity-Reliability

The objectivity or reliability of interpretivist/ethnographic research is built upon authenticity and trustworthiness. In essence, this is the ability of others to reach similar conclusions given the constructs of the study in question. To demonstrate the objectivity of the findings, the methods and procedures were made explicit, the conclusions were linked directly to supporting data, and, finally, the researcher's subjective-self was described and linked to the personal assumptions used in the interpretive process. Reliability or trustworthiness was demonstrated by aligning the research purpose with the research design, using multiple and verifiable data sources, and connecting the conclusions to the conceptual framework used in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

The work of Glesne (1999) and Creswell (1998) provided guidance and direction for this ethnographic research study. I addressed the issues of reliability using many of the verification procedures which were summarized by Glesne (1999):

1. "Prolonged engagement and persistent observation." The site selected was one that I had been a part of for the past 19 years. I would look deeply at the cultural experiences and check out feelings and ideas about what was observed.
2. "Triangulation." I would use multiple methods in the collection of data from various sources and records in order to establish validity. Many interviews would take place with a variety of factions of the culture, including community members, staff members, students, and identified *missing students* in an effort to establish *reality* from various vantage points.

3. “Peer review and debriefing.” I would meet with colleagues to discuss my work and seek their professional feedback.
4. “Negative case analysis.” I would interview students who successfully navigated high school rather than becoming *missing*.
5. “Clarification of researcher bias.” I would consciously identify my own opinions and bias in an effort to remain as neutral and objective as possible in this very subjective situation.
6. “Member checking.” I would share information, including restatement of my interpretation, with the research participants to assure the highest quality of accuracy in understanding and meaning.
7. “Rich, thick description.” The writing would include detailed and proper context in order to depict a vivid perspective of the observations for the reader.
8. “External audit.” The process of the research design would be evaluated by an outside source. This research design was discussed with my graduate cohort 1-2 times a month for a period of 2 years as a part of a doctoral research course. (p. 32)

Validity

Validity consists of internal and external validity. Internal validity involves the credibility or authenticity of research – the truth of the findings, while external validity is the applicability of the findings in other context – generalizability. In order to be found

internally valid, the findings must be seen as plausible. Others must accept the relationship between our facts and reasoning as valid. The narrative must be constructed such that the reader sees it as imaginable and can verify the truthfulness of the facts (Peshkin, 2000). To accomplish validity, I used multiple sources, looked for disconfirming evidence and alternative conclusions, developed internal coherence through the application of the conceptual framework, and presented a thick description of the findings (Glesne, 1999, Creswell, 1998, Geertz, 1973). External validity relates to the degree to which the findings are transferable. That is, are the findings generalizable to other settings? A single-site community-based research project could not necessarily be viewed as a sample of *Any School, U.S.A.* The descriptions of the community, subcultures, and associated organizing frameworks, in general, are only applicable to this case study. Although the findings of the study might be transferable to communities with similar backgrounds and circumstances, the generalizability of the specific findings are generally limited. However, analytical generalizability was accomplished and gained power by linking the study explicitly to a theoretical framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By uncovering and explicating the findings through the consistent application of a conceptual framework, the study demonstrated applicability or transferability of the conceptual framework to other communities and school systems.

The final component of external validity is worthiness. According to Eisenhart and Howe (1992), "Research might be well designed and conducted in a technical sense, but that alone was an insufficient criterion of worth. Valid studies must be worthwhile," referring to external value constraints or the "so what?" question (p. 660). The interest, support, and encouragement I received while pursuing this study led me to believe this

project was worthwhile. It bolstered my feeling that finding out who the missing students were, what happened to the missing students while they were in school, and where they went after leaving school was probably the most challenging yet energizing project that I had undertaken in my educational career. If schooling is to be for *all children,* then understanding how the cultural structures of schools are experienced by different children from different cultural groups is important not only for the children of Ionia, but also for children in schools across the country. The following chapter will tell the story of the missing students and describe the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 3: EDUCATION IN IONIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The early settlers of Ionia, Lyons, and Muir, shaped by the circumstances of the wilderness environment they settled, brought the cultural values of the communities they left behind. Linked to their Puritan heritage, they created social structures that reflected the hierarchical society they believed to be justified by scripture. Private property, social status, work ethic, and concepts of citizenship shaped the nature of the institutions they established in the backwoods of Michigan. Although most members of the community would share a common heritage and set of cultural values, the very nature of the social order they believed in created an ordering of peoples into sub-cultures on the basis of their socio-economic status, which was largely determined by the vocational tasks individuals performed. Each group, over time, would develop cultural structures that would reflect their life circumstances. Shaping the broader cultural values of the community, those of higher economic status would come to dominate the institutional structures established to sustain the community, including schools.

The schools in Ionia, like communities throughout the country, would be structured to transmit the cultural values of its community's leaders, those of wealth and status. Schools would be designed to recreate the existing social order. It would be seen as the natural order of things for schools to serve students from differing social status in different ways. The concept of *missing student* would have been foreign to these nineteenth century community and school leaders. It would not be until the turn of the century that compulsory attendance laws would be uniformly enforced, and even then, the desire of some students to *opt out* of schooling would not be seen as a necessarily

negative outcome. Over time, school and community leaders and the public in general have come to believe that it is in the individual's and community's interest to have student attend school for longer periods of time. With the complexity of our economy and the decline in vocations requiring semi- and unskilled labor, educating all children has come to be seen as more essential than ever. However, in spite of our desire to see all children complete a full 13 years of schooling, the structures of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries designed to order, sort, and select students based on their perceived future station in life still permeate the structures of the Ionia School District. Topics in this chapter include the formation of different sub-cultures within the Ionia School District, how the schools were structured to serve the various needs of these sub-cultures, and how these structures provided for the needs of some cultural groups but not all.

Culture

Many of the early settlers were entrepreneurs and business people who established the initial cultural parameters for the community of Ionia. These Puritan settlers traveled to Ionia and purchased land to build the town and recreate the social structures that they valued. They built the churches, schools, prisons, and poor houses to reproduce their culture in Ionia and the surrounding area. The property owners and individuals of wealth and status who were a part of the upper social class developed cultural structures that reflected their values. Individuals of wealth or status dominated the institutional structures they created. The educational system and the decisions regarding how students would be educated were determined primarily by this professional class. It was those individuals with status who tended to be in control and a part of the overriding culture in the schools and in the community. They would be joined

and supported by craftsman, semi-professionals, small business owners, and administrators who managed to make a comfortable living, lived in nice homes, and shared their cultural values and beliefs with those of more affluence.

The Ionia Schools were originally built by the affluent professionals and upper middle class families whose mission was to provide for the educational needs of their sons and daughters. The schools were structured to reproduce the dominant culture, and many professionals, entrepreneurs, and land owners wanted their children to be well educated. Most of the upper and upper middle class valued education as an essential part of society. For the most part, these families felt that access to higher education was the road to wealth, security, and a happy life. For their children, the public schools were to be the path to and preparation for advanced forms of education. They believed that those who did not advance in their schooling either did so because they were destined to their own place in the social order or were flawed either in character or intellect.

Along with the early settlers came the individuals who were farmers and skilled and semi-skilled laborers who worked in agriculture and the lumber mills. The factory and blue-collar workers supplied the work force for the businesses and manufacturers as the community grew. Eventually, prisons were also built, and the guards along with the laborers and farmers emerged, forming a working or lower middle class within the community.

In time, a group emerged of the working poor and those living in poverty as the community faced issues with aging immigrants and those who lost their ability to provide for their livelihood. Some individuals may have become poor when events occurred in their lives involving their tasks, and they were no longer able to sustain themselves due to

illness or physical disability. There were also individuals who were left without jobs or tasks for various reasons, such as when the mills in Muir burned down and were not rebuilt. Although some of the working poor and those living in poverty would migrate to the West in search of economic opportunities, many with limited resources would remain in the community and attempt to scratch out a meager existence and provide for their families. People who were poor and a part of the underclass in Ionia historically were subjected to a poor house and sent away. From the Ionia community's Puritan heritage, being poor would have been viewed as a character flaw. Those in poverty would have been blamed for their position and low socio-economic status, and the solution was to move these individuals into a poor house outside of town.

Thus, eventually, three distinct cultural groups or sub-cultures emerged, organized around the tasks they performed and their socio-economic and community status. Although each of these groups would share a set of common cultural values and beliefs derived from their common heritage, they each would develop cultural structures unique to their station in life. Although they were members of the larger Ionia community culture, as sub-cultures they would come to share distinguishing values and patterns of behavior.

Figure 4 graphically displays the relationship of the three sub-cultural groups within the community and characteristics which overlapped one another. The distinctions or differences between the three cultural groups were often blurred, and although the sub-cultures shared a number of the common characteristics within the different classes, they also tended to exhibit notable differences. The characteristics listed for each of the sub-cultures were developed and identified as an indicator for most of the individuals who

were from the professional and upper middle class, working and lower middle class, or the working poor and underclass within the community and the school. Characteristics of the various sub-cultures were generalizations, and although they apply to most, they should not be perceived to apply to every individual.

Figure 4 depicts the three subcultures which were and are still a part of the Ionia community and schools.

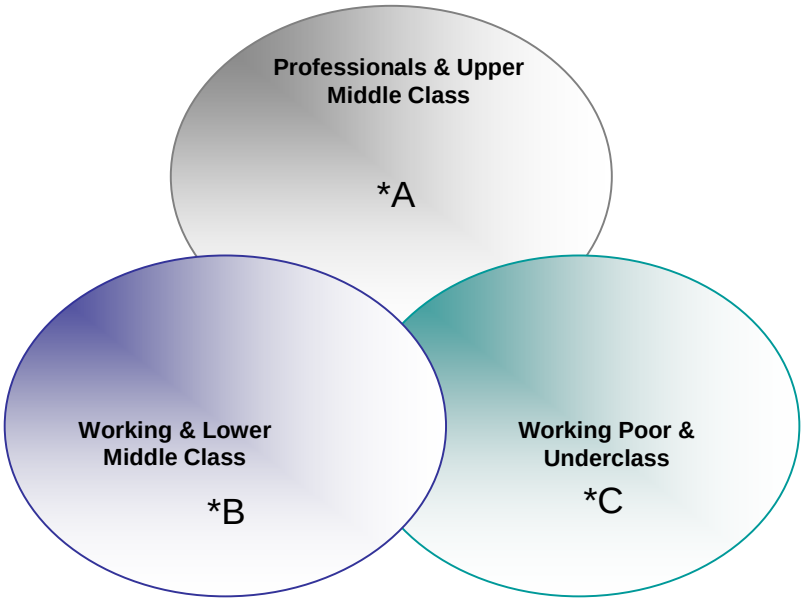

Figure 4: Sub-Cultures in the Ionia Community

The characteristics which were predominantly associated with each of the sub-cultures are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Characteristics of Sub-Cultures

A. Professionals & Upper Middle Class	*B. Working & Lower Middle Class*	*C. Working Poor & Underclass*
	Social Order	
High Socio-economic status	Middle Socio-economic status	Low Socio-economic status
	Education	
High School Graduate College Education	High School Graduate Some Post-secondary training	Few High School Graduates High School Dropouts
	Community Involvement	
Involved in politics Community leadership Power derived from status and leadership authority	Some involvement in politics Community participants Power derived from group participation	Limited political involvement Recipients of social services Limited power
	General Characteristics	
Secure, comfortable income, live well. Some large incomes -wealth, status, and prestige	Income provides for needs and modest lifestyle.	Tenuous connection to economy.
Professionals, business owners, upper management, some semi-professionals. Work-salaried. Non-union.	Skilled and semi-skilled labor, blue-collar, semi-professionals, lower management. Work- hourly, some salaried. Unionized	Low-paying jobs, semi-skilled and unskilled. Work- hourly, by the job
Significant benefits	Often have benefits	No benefits
Stable employment	Lay-offs more common	Frequently unemployed
Home ownership, large, upscale housing	Home ownership, modest homes; some renters	Substandard homes or apartments; renters
Very stable, economically mobile	Fairly stable	Transient. Often receive cash assistance from gov't.
Car ownership, recreational	Car ownership	Often did not own a car
Often two-parent families, 1-2 children	Often two-parent families, 2-3 children.	Single parent, multiple and extended family living environments. 3 or more children

Abundant resources for post K-12 education, institutions of prestige & status.	Modest resources for post K-12 education; public college, CC, trade school.	No resources for post K-12 education

As sub-cultures, these groups represent segments of the larger Ionia culture. Certainly, they share values and beliefs, as illustrated by the overlapping areas of the diagram, that connect these groups to larger cultural ideas related to country, region, community, faith, patriotism, and so on. Each, however, has developed their own versions of the larger culture's ideology. These sub-cultures differ in values and beliefs about the right way to live; they practice different versions of the same religion, have different political and social attitudes, and different lifestyles. These differences have evolved in the day-to-day context of the situations in which these groups have found themselves and have been passed down over generations within families and the community through the process of socialization and enculturation. The sub-cultures within the community of Ionia represent the shared knowledge, experience, beliefs, behaviors, traditions, values, attitudes, meanings, and generally accepted practices which were acquired by individuals of each group or class. The culture was purposely transmitted in the Ionia community through the educational systems from one generation to next.

The groups or sub-cultures were found to have generalized characteristics that they shared with the other members within the group. Again, not every individual in any one cultural group had all of these characteristics, but rather, many individuals within the cultural group shared these dynamic and similar tendencies. The three social classes or sub-cultural groups were determined to be closely aligned with individuals' socio-economic status. Lifestyle and finances were closely related and relevant in determining and predicting a student's school experience and academic success. Descriptions of each

of the cultures found within the Ionia Public Schools provides for a closer look at the student's educational experience from their culture lens or viewpoint. Students from the lower, middle, and upper class cultural groups all attended Ionia Public Schools but experienced the school in different ways.

Students who were poor were identified with a sub-culture that was primarily organized according to a low socio-economic status. Qualities or significant tendencies of students in this class included those who were qualified for free or reduced lunch and predominantly were from a single parent home. Students from the culture of poverty tended also to be transient and frequently moved from residence to residence. Often this poverty was generational, with two or more generations of families with limited financial resources. The tendency of this class was to focus their tasks upon survival and meet the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing. Some of the parents within this class were teenage parents who did not graduate from high school.

Students who were considered to be part of the working class were organized according to a middle class socio-economic status. Qualities or significant tendencies of students in this class included those with parents who were employed as hourly workers or small business owners. The parents were typically employees who may have had trade skills. The parents were actively engaged in tasks within the community such as prison guards and farmers. Individuals in this group tended also to be unionized. Most of the parents of the students from the working class culture had a high school education but did not attend college.

Students who were considered to be from affluent families, the upper middle class, or those with status in the community were organized according to an upper class

socio-economic status. Qualities or significant tendencies of students in this class included those with parents who were employed as salaried workers, entrepreneurs, or owners of their own businesses. The parents were typically employers or trained professionals. Parents were typically college graduates and well educated. Some examples of tasks engaged by members of the professional class would include doctors, lawyers, merchants, judges, and so on.

The sub-cultures shared some common basic assumptions with others. Yet another aspect that affects these groups is that each culture views the world from a unique vantage point, and it is often hard for one group to understand another group's point of view. Each of the three groups studied had their own sense of right and wrong, what was important and valued. They held very different perspectives on the use of their time, finances, expectation of work, and their future. The old saying *to each his own* was very accurate when it came to the various sub-cultures.

Each sub-culture valued family and cared deeply for their children. The poor families tended to have a large number of children, which helped to provide financially for the needs of the family. It was a case of *the more the merrier*, whereas the professional families tended to have a couple of children and spared no expense in their upbringing. The families from the sub-culture of the working class tended to be somewhere in between, with two to four children.

The sub-cultures were developed as a part of the community, and they have endured over time. The three groups have very different expectations when it comes to life in general. The sub-culture of poverty lived in the here and now. Conversely, the professional families were planning for tomorrow. None of the sub-culture's perspective

was considered to be a better view of the world but rather a different and unique perspective.

The original schools in Ionia were structured to provide for the education of the professionals and upper middle class. Schools began as private affairs funded by the parents of the students who attended. The common schools, which would require financial support of all members of the community, were designed to provide a basic, minimum education and ensure that all children were enculturated in the values extolled by the community's professional and upper middle class leaders. Schooling beyond the basic level was designed to prepare the children of the professional and upper middle class for advanced education so they could ascend to their appropriate station in life. The Ionia schools, whose mission had remained resolute over the years, opened the first elementary school in 1875. This began the process of educating students from all walks of life, but it wasn't until mandatory attendance was legislated that all of the sub-cultures were required to attend school beyond the minimums found necessary in the common schools. With mandatory attendance, the schools in Ionia were charged with providing education for students from all of the various sub-cultures. The previous sorting and selecting, which had been accomplished through the process of privatizing schooling beyond the common schools, would become a part of the structures of the expanding public schools. High schools and later junior high schools would be structured to prepare the children of professionals and the upper middle class so they could matriculate to advanced forms of education. With the student population expanding and compulsory attendance laws enacted, schools came to be structured to treat socio-economic cultural groups differently by the tracking process and the curricular emphasis developed in the

schools. Though obfuscated by the demands of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2001) and the mantra that all children can learn, these structures remain and create a cultural mismatch between students from the culture of poverty, the working poor and underclass, for whom schools were not designed. The student's formalized educational experience would begin at the elementary school at about the age of five.

Elementary School

Let the sorting begin. When students were sorted in the elementary schools, they primarily ended up grouped according to their socio-economic status or sub-cultural group. This process started when the students entered Ionia Public Schools in kindergarten, and they were immediately sorted or tracked into groups. A child who entered elementary school at 3 to 5 years of age was tested in the spring during a district wide, kindergarten *Round Up,* an annually scheduled district procedure where parents were encouraged to bring their toddler into the school administration building in order to be tested for *school readiness*. The process of sorting is shown in Figure 5. Teachers and school psychologists tested a young child's skills while his or her anxious parent sat in the nearby room and awaited the results. Once the testing was completed, the kindergarten teacher would speak with the parent about placement in kindergarten or the *kinderstart* program. If the testing indicated placement in special education, the school psychologist would confer with the parent and make the recommendation for either placement in the pre-primary impaired program or further testing. The initial placement of a child within the district was the beginning of the sorting and tracking process in Ionia Public Schools, which was consistent with their cultural group.

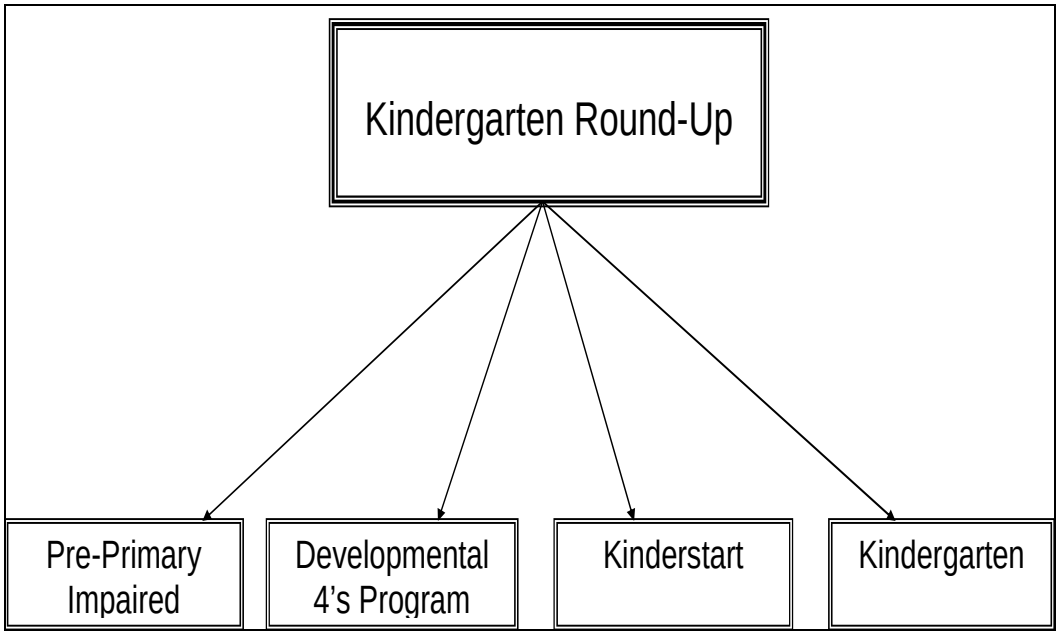

Figure 5: Kindergarten Round-Up Sorting

From kindergarten roundup, students would be recommended to be placed into a class for Developmental 4's, Kinderstart, Pre-Primary Impaired or Kindergarten. Students were grouped into one of these programs according to perceived *tested* or diagnosed ability. The developmental 4's program was for 4-year-olds who were considered to be below the expected aptitude or skills of their peers. Kinderstart was for students who were age-appropriate (5 years old) to enter kindergarten but who were determined through testing to be below the average aptitude or skills for their age group. Pre-Primary Impaired students were significantly delayed in their cognitive abilities and, through testing, were identified to qualify for special education services at age 3-5 years. Kindergarten was the foundation or commencement of the sorting procedure for the Ionia Public School District.

At the time that this study was conducted, there were five different elementary schools within the Ionia Public Schools District. Jefferson and Emerson Elementary were the oldest elementary schools, built in 1925, renovated in the late 1990s, and still maintained. These two buildings were located within the City of Ionia. Another of the elementary schools was originally a part of the Lyons/Muir School District until the 1960s when the Lyons High School was closed and consolidated with Ionia Public Schools. The school remaining from the Lyons/Muir School District became an Ionia Public Schools elementary school called Twin Rivers. It was the only school located within the Lyons/Muir area. Students attended Twin Rivers Elementary from K-fifth grades, then like all of the elementary schools, they joined together in one building at the middle school level. Boyce and Rather Elementary Schools were the last of the elementary schools to be constructed in the 1960s.

Although the five elementary schools had some differences, they were more similar than diverse, although most students walked to Jefferson and Emerson; conversely, most were bused to Twin Rivers, Boyce, and Rather. Each had a very high poverty rate, which varied each month but tended to range from approximately 48% to 73% on the basis of students who were eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. A high percentage of these students would be included among the missing students if they remained in Ionia until they reached high school age. This population of free and reduced lunch students in the elementary schools moved frequently.

All of the elementary schools in the Ionia Public Schools District had a structure in place that identified students who were considered to be academically below their peers. The term often used to describe these students was *Title I students*, those who were

achieving below average or in danger of failing in one or more core curriculum areas. Mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies were the academic areas that made up the core curriculum. It was the individual classroom teacher who ultimately decided who was eligible to receive Title I services.

Title I funds were provided to public schools by the federal government, and the amount of money provided to the district was based upon the poverty rate of the area. The building's allocation was dependent upon the percentage of students within each building who received free or reduced lunch. Title I services or programs made up a structure which separated and sorted students in Ionia Public Schools, and, significantly, most of the students who qualified for Title I services were from poor families and the sub-culture of poverty.

Title I services were evaluated and modified on a yearly basis. Each elementary school held a Title I planning meeting in the spring to determine how to best spend the Title I funds for the following year. The money was spent to support the students who were struggling in the core curriculum, and there were many guidelines which determined an appropriate use of Title I funds. The decisions and planning took place with the building staff and parents from that elementary. The money must follow the Title I student and must be used for an educational program, materials, instructional strategy, and so on, which had been proven through research to be effective. While the Title I plan was individual to each elementary building, most of the time the plans across the district were very similar.

Each year during the mid-to-late summer, Ionia Public School administrators waited for official notification of the Title I funding level for the upcoming school year,

and then a consolidated grant application for that specific amount of money was submitted to the government. This application included the programs or activities on which the district planned to use the funds. After the grant was submitted, it was then reviewed and the school district was notified if any changes were needed. Typically there were a few changes requested before the grant was approved. Generally, the grant was modified until approved, and the programs funded in the district have remained relatively similar from year to year.

Title I services included an elementary summer school program. The elementary summer school program was provided for Title I students and was offered for students completing grades K-fifth grades. Summer school ran 4-6 weeks, generally 4 days per week from 8:00 am until noon. Students were identified by their classroom teacher to attend summer school as an accommodation for additional support. The child's parent or guardian was sent a letter near the end of the school year which included an application for summer school. The summer school program was modified over the years but was primarily located at Emerson Elementary. Round-trip transportation was provided free to all students who attended summer school. There was no cost to the student or their family for the elementary summer school program, and each student received a free breakfast and a free lunch daily. This was very important for the children from poor families.

The curriculum used by the teachers during summer school was focused upon the areas of mathematics and English language arts. The summer school program provided a match for the needs of students and their families. Students who attended summer school were typically from poorer families. By providing transportation to and from school, a free breakfast, and a free lunch, the school had met all of the needs of the children and

eliminated all cultural barriers to student attendance. Therefore, elementary summer school was well attended because it provided the basic necessities for these children from poor families.

Title I services also provided an extended day program at the elementary level. The extended day program was offered 3 to 4 days a week for 1 hour after the end of the school day. Students received a snack or small meal during the extended day program and were provided transportation home at no cost. The emphasis for extended day instruction was on additional support for students with their homework assignments, and further support in the areas of mathematics and English language arts. Depending upon the Title I funding levels, the elementary schools had an extended day program for a year; some years there was limited support for a less structured organization of the program.

Title I services provided in the Ionia Public Schools traditionally included additional instructional support delivered to the student by a para-professional educator during the school day. This support was generally given in the classroom or close by in the hallway under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Grouping students in this way created a structure of tracking and organizing students within the elementary classrooms. Most of the district Title I money was spent on para-educators who worked with students and acted as teacher aides. These para-educators were not allowed to do classroom organizational tasks like bulletin boards, copying, or clerical tasks; their job was to provide support for the students who were identified as Title I.

Many discussions have taken place within the Ionia Public Schools regarding para-educators working to provide additional support with at-risk students. There has been resistance to the suggestions of hiring a Title I teacher to work with Title I students

in place of para-educators. How Title I dollars were spent came under the guidelines of building-based decisions, which were required under the Title I federal regulations. Because of the costs, the elementary schools' staff decided that they would prefer to have four or five para-educators working with the students in the building instead of one teacher.

In some elementary classrooms across the district, the para-pros worked with the non-Title I students and the teacher worked with the struggling students, but, more often than not, the struggling students were placed with the para-pro for additional support. The expected purpose of para-pro support was to provide help in addition to classroom instruction. This was not always the case. Figure 6 shows the K-5 structure for Title I accommodations.

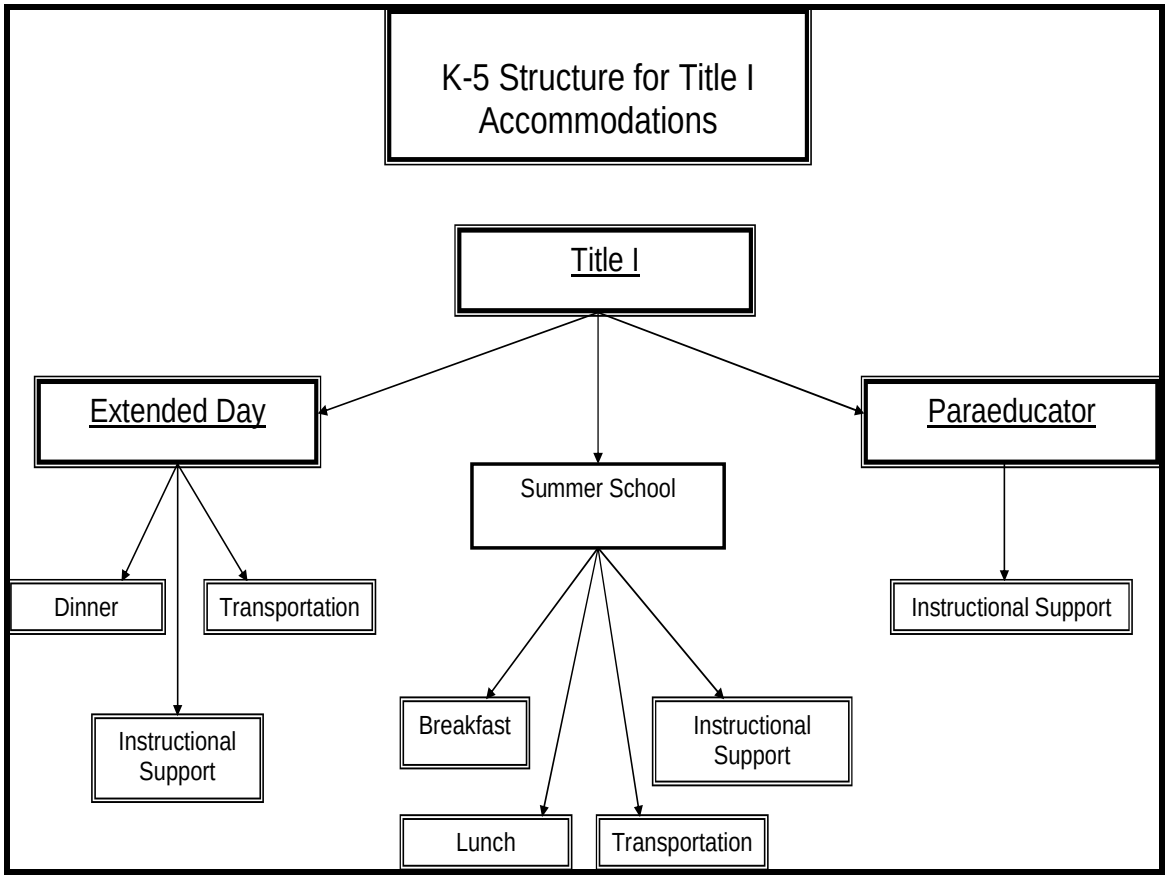

Figure 6: K-5 Title I Structure.

While many students from poor families qualified for Title I services, another organizational structure used in each of the elementary schools to sort students from the sub-culture of poverty was the Free and Reduced Lunch program. Each summer families received forms in the mail, which they were asked to complete to qualify to receive free or reduced lunches at school. A student who qualified would also receive a free or reduced breakfast at school at the start of each day. Monthly documentation was submitted to the federal government for the students who qualified for free or reduced meals, and the district was reimbursed for these meals. Most children from poor families in the elementary schools would turn in their form to qualify for free or reduced meals. At this point in their young lives they were unaware of the stigma associated with the

designation. As students got older they were less and less likely to turn in the paperwork to qualify for a free meal because they did not want to become labeled as the poor kid. Figure 7 shows the percentages of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch and those who paid full price for lunch at Ionia schools.

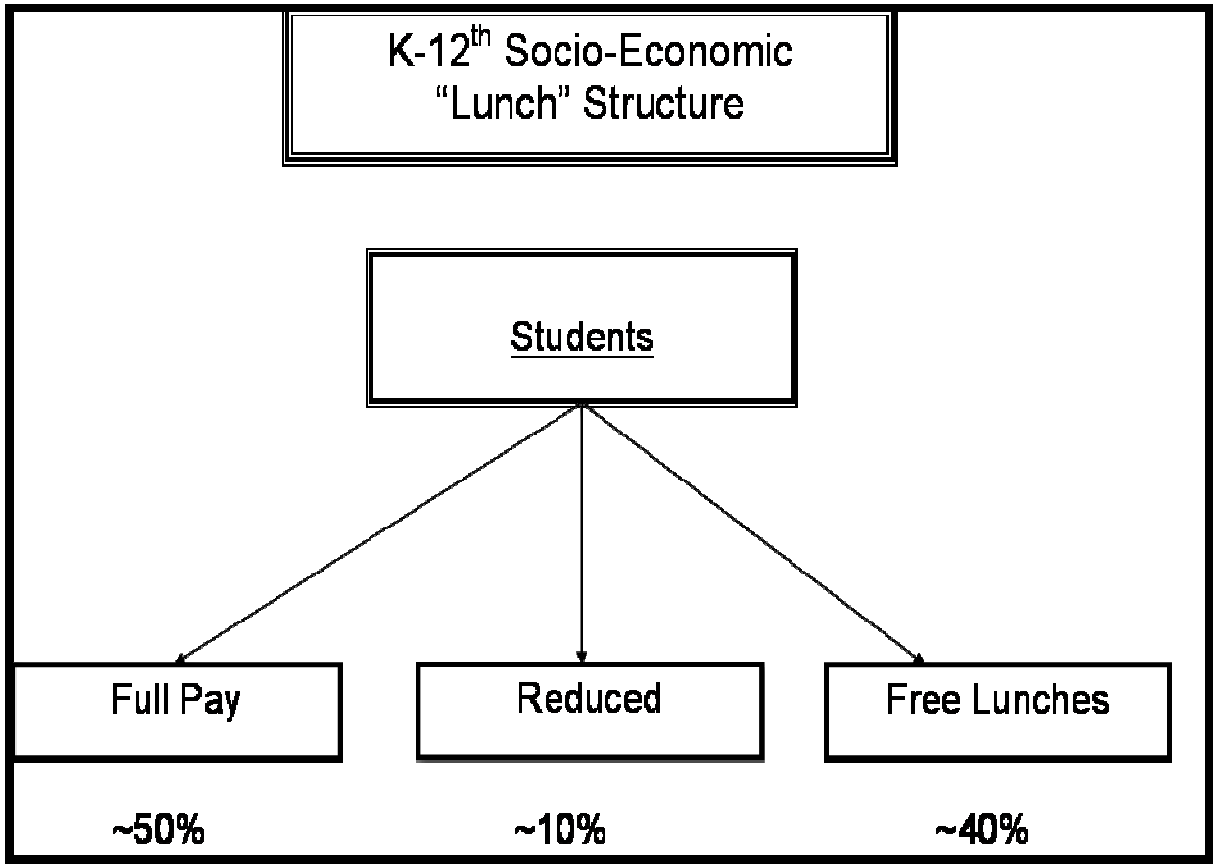

Figure 7: K-12 Socio-Economic Structure for the Lunch Program in Ionia Schools.

The district tried to keep information confidential about who was qualified to receive free and reduced meals, but some were aware of students who never paid for their meals. The lunch cards were the same for all students, and computerized cards were used to keep the information private. Frankly, there was no way to hide the fact that some

children were always handing out money in the lunch line, paying $2.00 a meal while others paid $ .40, and still others did not pay. Kids noticed who paid. This occurred regardless of how they tried to be discreet and maintain confidentiality.

Nurses were available in each elementary building. They provided free medical support for students on an emergency and non-emergency basis. Some students would be referred for free dental work by the nurses if the family did not have insurance and could not afford to see a dentist. Students in the elementary school would also receive free vision screening and fluoride treatments while in school. Many food baskets were provided to poor families by the school and church community. Each elementary school also had a clothing closet which contained all kinds of clothing, coats, boots, hats, gloves, and so on. All of this was provided to match the needs of students who were living in poverty.

Special education began in elementary school and provided another mechanism for sorting students in the early years. The purpose of special education was to provide support for students beginning at age 3 through the fifth grade. A child was identified as pre-primary impaired at 3 or 4 years of age. The pre-primary impaired program was for children who were considered to have significant delays in their learning as compared to their peers. Typically, a child was identified to be tested for special education during the screening for kindergarten round up.

Sorting students into various tracks made it easier for the teacher to provide instruction. The students with the most difficult learning challenges were sorted out of the general education classroom. Less than 10% of the special education students were from the professional or working cultural group, and 19.6% of the student body was identified

as special education. Seldom, if ever, did a child who was identified as a special education student lose his or her label. Most of the special education students were also a part of the culture of poverty, and 85-95% of the special education students qualified for free or reduced lunch. Removed from the general education curriculum, students were given instruction at a lower grade level and at a slower pace. How would they ever catch up to their peers? The answer was they would not. The following special education services were offered in the elementary schools:

Pre-primary impaired

Resource Room (support of general education curriculum)

Learning Disability (modified curriculum)

Speech and Language (therapy)

Social Work Services (testing/identification/counseling)

School Psychologist (testing/identification)

Occupational/Physical Therapy - OT/PT services (therapy)

Hearing Impaired services

Physically and Otherwise Health Impaired – POHI services

All of the elementary schools made significant accommodations to help students who were struggling. Whether the difficulties came from needing food, clothing, medical, or academic support, there were many programs that worked to level the playing field between students of affluence and students of poverty. The students who struggled often found that there was a mismatch that existed between the students' culture at home and the professional culture in the elementary school.

A mismatch between a student's culture and the culture of the school created conflict. One example of this mismatch occurred when a poor student was given a project to complete at home. The expectation of the teacher and the home were very different. The teacher would assume that (a) the student had a parent who would be available to help with the project, and (b) the student had the materials at home needed to complete the project. Conflict is created when the parent or student does not have the necessary resources.

Another example of a mismatch between a child from a poor family and the school would have happened when a request was sent home for the student to bring in money to pay for a classroom activity or a field trip. The lack of financial resources caused conflict between the home and the school. This mismatch was also observed when a teacher demanded that a student stay after school for additional support and the parent was required to arrange to pick up their child up later. If the parent could not afford the transportation to pick up his or her child, a conflict occurred.

Students who were truant, tardy, or had poor attendance were primarily from poor families. The children in elementary school were not held responsible for their own attendance in school. When truancy charges were filed, it was against the parent for failing to have their child in school. The parent was held responsible for getting his or her child to school.

Figure 8 outlines the relationship of the instructional programming for students in grades K-5, which includes special education, general education, and Title I services. Students from poor families would likely have received special education services or Title I services. Although students cannot be qualified for both special education and

Title I services, they can receive instruction in both general education and special education or general education and Title I.

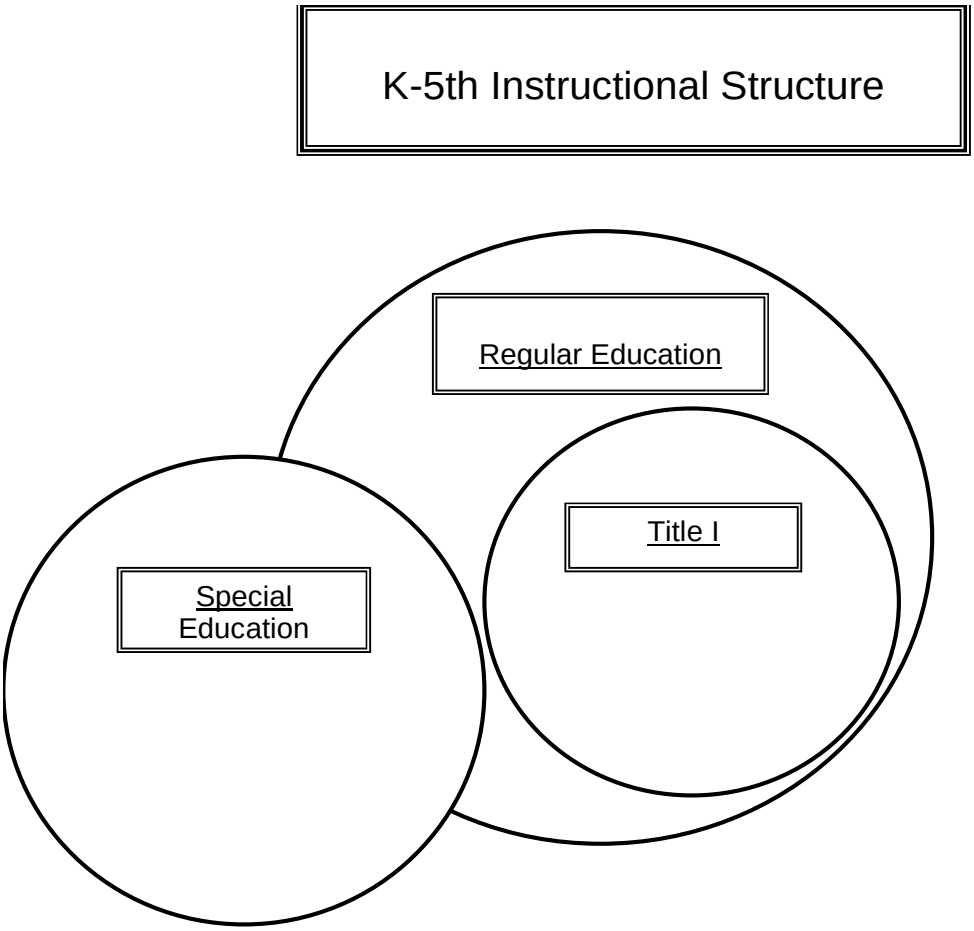

Figure 8:. K-5 Instructional Structure

The following list summarizes the additional programs or accommodations that were provided to students in to help them experience success within the elementary school. The elementary schools in Ionia Public Schools were primarily developed for students in grades K-fifth. These programs and services were available predominantly to the students from poor or working class families in an effort to meet their various needs.

Developmental 4's program

Kinderstart

Extended Day (with free meals and transportation provided)

Title I support

Summer School (with free meals and transportation provided)

Free/Reduced Lunch program

Nurses in each building

Eye Screening

Free Dental when needed

Food Baskets (some provided weekly)

Clothing/coats/boots etc. (when needed)

Working in Ionia as an elementary principal and also the principal of our Kindergarten Center, I made first hand observations regarding how the elementary culture provided programs to support poor students and their families. As the superintendent, I made observations within classrooms, programs, and events in all of our elementary buildings. It was amazing how each of our elementaries was unique and fashioned after the culture in the area of the community which it served.

The staff in the elementary schools were very aware that food, clothing, and shelter were not a given for students from poor families. For example, approximately 90 bags of food were distributed every weekend to families from Twin Rivers who were a part of the culture of poverty. The staff worked hard to support the children, and many of the district projects included collecting food for the soup kitchen or food pantry in town. Students in our elementary were encouraged, nurtured, and provided accommodations.

Taking care of the basic needs of the children allowed them to maintain health and attend school. Twin Rivers had one of the highest poverty rates in the school district. The community and the school reached out to support families who struggled financially.

Attending the five different elementary choir programs annually reminded me of the differences of the cultures within these schools. Although families from one school appeared to be well aware of the expectations (norms) of the teacher during the live performance, families from other schools were not. There were some performances where individuals went in and out during the performance, getting popcorn, and talking. These families were enjoying the event and having fun. Conversely, there were other performances where individuals remained in their seats, stepped out with crying babies, and waited until intermission to get refreshments. This indicated to me that many of the families from the schools with a very high free and reduced lunch population were not familiar or accustomed to the rules of etiquette for live performances. All of these cultural groups loved to see their children perform, but each audience behaved according to their cultural norms; not better or worse, but different.

Many additional programs were available to students in our district from grades K-5. The elementary school teachers offered tutoring and homework help for students as a part of an extended day program; staff members were trained in teaching techniques and interventions that accommodate various learning styles. This extra assistance supported and compensated for the needs of each child to help him or her be successful in school. This was done to try to make the students from the poorer families become more like the working class or professional class students. It was done to bridge the educational gap between the cultures.

Elementary teachers held *Child Study* meetings that reviewed student academic information and devised a plan for students who were behind in their course work. These child studies often included the parent or guardian of the child as a participant. Title I students were provided with many extended educational services in buildings serving K-5 students. Title I programs complemented the regular classroom instruction and provided more individualized support to help students who were falling behind in the core curriculum. Added learning time was provided for students to master the subject matter. These were necessary accommodations for many of those who entered our school from an impoverished educational environment. This was done to give them enough time to master the state-defined curriculum requirements. Children with fewer resources in their home often were behind academically. Students who were raised in poverty often did not have a rich learning environment with books and developmental toys at home. Children may have also have been lacking in health care and appropriate nutrition as they were growing up.

At the time that this study was conducted, the elementary school staff was very connected to the students in their classrooms. This helped to reduce the overall effect of the cultural background of the student. This was because the elementary schools were very student-centered, and each teacher had a single group of students for the entire school year. The teachers instruct the same 18-25 students in the core areas of mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies. By spending 25-30 hours a week with a small group of children, the teachers got to know their students extremely well, and they took great pride and ownership for each child's success in school. Observations of the interactions with students and their teachers indicated that most

elementary teachers love their students, and most elementary school students love their teachers. The culture of the elementary schools was very nurturing.

Where there was a mismatch in the culture between home and school, any disadvantage was often overcome by the powerful attention, compassion, and ownership by each teacher for each child's success in his or her classroom, like the elementary teacher who bought coats and boots for all of the poor students in her classroom so they could go outside in the winter for recess. Needy students in elementary school were given school supplies to take home from donations that were collected in the community. The examples of support were found in every elementary within the school district. By getting to know the students and their life stories, the teachers were better able to determine what met the students' needs.

Our elementary school programs were focused on the individual student and meeting the needs of each child. Coursework, curriculum, benchmarks, and state standards were all considered highly important, but nothing was more valued than the children in the classroom. It may sound trite, but from years of observation in the elementary school, children were foremost in grades K-5, and what was taught in the classroom became minor in comparison.

The elementary schools were very student-centered: kids first before curriculum. The teachers who instructed students in grade K-5 were connected and involved with their students and cared about all aspects of their students' lives. This allowed teachers to accommodate for the mismatches within the cultures and overcome differences that existed between the culture of school and the home. Teachers would know what was happening with their students outside of the school and work to support their students.

In cases where there was a conflict between the culture of the home and school culture in grades K-5, teachers and principals focused upon success for each child and worked within the parameters of the parent rules, norms, and values. The staff worked to find common ground and appreciated the differences between groups of families by finding ways to successfully support home and school, essentially by pulling together for the good of all.

Other examples of accommodations for cultural needs included a teacher asking for the authorization to provide transportation from another district. She knew the family was having car trouble, and with the parent's work schedule, driving the children to Ionia was very difficult. Their resident district did not provide a translator for the parents who did not speak English. Meetings were also scheduled with the bus drivers and the building principals to relay information regarding the student's home situation and ways to meet their needs.

The rate of success at each of the elementary schools was above state average on the MEAP test; this was a direct reflection of the additional support that students received in and out of the classroom. The staff worked very hard to provide a rich educational environment where there was a level playing field for all students regardless of their cultural background. When students were not keeping up in the elementary classrooms, a Child Study meeting was conducted to formulate an academic plan for the student. The child study often involved the implementation of specific instructional strategies with the student to help them catch up. Many of the students who continued to fall behind and struggle in school ended up being tested and qualifying for special education services. Within a typical school year there would be 20-25 Child Studies held in each of the five

elementary schools. Following the 100 or more child studies and subsequent testing, approximately 20 students were determined to be qualified for special education and other services. These students were sorted and organized out of the general education population and given extra support in the elementary school. In later years, many students who carried the label of special education would find that it was detrimental to their success in school.

Middle School

When the early settlers established formalized schools in the communities of Ionia, Lyons, and Muir, their first educational systems did not separate students into elementary, middle, and high schools. In its earliest configuration, the eighth grade was seen as a terminal point; students who sought to advance to high school or other academies were required to pass an eighth grade examination. The settlers brought expectations and values from their own view of the world, and they recreated schools that met their needs. The mission of education evolved to include every student, and school systems expanded to provide for the societal expectations. Development of elementary, middle school, and high school levels following enforcement of mandatory attendance laws reflected communities' solution about how to provide for the education of all. Students in the middle school or junior high were often seen as challenging and difficult. Separating middle school students and their behaviors from the children in the elementary schools was a way to isolate and segregate students who were going through puberty.

The middle school students in Ionia were also separated from the high school students because the high school was viewed as a place for scholarly studies, and there was no room for fun and games. The high school was where education counted, and

students were being prepared for college. The middle school was where students were somewhere in between their childhood and adulthood, where a middle school girl was described as a young lady who was crying because her boyfriend just broke up with her, while she stood holding a Beanie Baby. According to the cultural values of the broader community, the middle school was accepted as an appropriate educational venue for students in grades 6-8. This structure met the needs for those in the community of wealth and status who controlled the schools.

The middle school in Ionia was structured to continue the process, which was begun in the elementary schools, of transmitting the cultural values of the community to the children who were becoming adolescents. Community leaders in the school district who had financial resources and held leadership positions designed the middle school to recreate the existing social order. Schools were expected to educate students from the various social sub-cultures in different ways. The educational system was set up to organize, sort, and select students, separating them primarily according to their socio-economic status. The *missing student* would not be a part of the Ionia educational system until the twentieth century when the compulsory attendance laws were enforced. The hope was for students to graduate from high school.

The sub-cultures of poverty, working, and professional classes and the sorting and selecting practices became more and more defined in the middle school. With tracking structures engrained in the daily educational practices, the stage was set for the school district to lose students. While many students did not become one of the missing students in middle school, their behaviors indicated that they were beginning their exodus.

This section describes the way in which the middle school was organized, the different sub-cultures within the middle school, and how the structure served the various needs of the sub-cultures. Like the elementary schools, the structure of the middle school provided for some of the needs of the cultural groups, but not for all.

Ionia Middle School

When a student completed fifth grade in June, he or she entered into the Ionia Middle School the following fall. As assistant principal and principal of the Ionia Middle School, I observed that sixth grade and the transition into the middle school was an anxious time for parents and their children. This was the first time that students from various elementaries were together as a class. In an effort to alleviate some of the concerns, fifth graders came on a visitation to the sixth grade. Further, meetings were held between staff from the elementary and middle school to share important information about individual students that would help staff better meet the needs of students.

Some examples of information that was shared included whether a student had difficulty in reading comprehension or a disability that required specific accommodations or special education services. There were times when other more personal and sensitive information was shared. In the past, that may have included that the child was homeless, or a parent was in prison, or, sadly, even the death of a parent. This information helped the staff make accommodations for the cultural, social, and emotional needs of the child. It also helped them avoid making assumptions or statements that would have caused unexpected harm.

Working at the middle school, I observed that the staff had a special way of understanding that all students did not come from the same home environment. This gave

the teachers the ability to reach out and bridge the gap between cultures if it was interfering with the learning in the classroom. Staff understood that although consistency was important for students, what was fair was not always equal; and what was equal was not always fair. Students came from all three sub-cultures, and their needs varied according to their cultural group.

Most students completed the middle school program in 3 years. There was a rare occasion when a student was retained, but that was the exception and not the rule. Students who attended Ionia Public Schools did not become missing in the middle school years.

The middle school consisted of students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. Some sixth grade classrooms were structured to include students in both regular education and special education programs within the classroom setting. Special education resource room students were placed in these integrated classrooms, which allowed them more time in mainstreamed classes with the benefit and support of the resource room teacher. Special education students were primarily from poor families.

The physical organization of the middle schools within the building included the sixth grade regular education, special education, and at-risk students, which were all housed together in a separate wing on the second floor of the building. Classes were grouped into two sets of two classrooms with regular education and special education students in inclusion programs. Each set had three teachers: two general education teachers and one special education teacher. The three-teacher teams taught all of the students, and rarely did students notice or identify special education students apart from

others. These special education inclusion programs were a cross-section of both regular education and special education.

The sixth grade was divided into teaching teams. Students within the teams were divided into various structures. Some teams provided services to general education students and special education students, whereas other teams educated general education students and Title I students. Special education students and Title I students were not placed together in the same classrooms. Students who received special education in the form of resource room support spent most of their day in general education classes with additional instruction provided by a special education teacher.

Title I students were at-risk students and the majority of the Title I students were from poor families and a part of the sub-culture of poverty. Title I students were provided instruction in general education classrooms, through support given by para-educators in the sixth grade classroom. Title I students' placement in sixth grade was based upon an initial identification recommended by the students' fifth grade classroom teachers. The Title I students were separated into 6 out of 10 sixth grade classrooms; resource room students were separated into the remaining 4 classrooms. Title I students received para-educator support whereas special education resource room students received support from a special education teacher. The students from both the Title I group and special education group were primarily poor students who were academically behind their peers. These students qualified as at-risk and were considered Title I or were tested and found eligible for special education services.

Title I students were typically behind their peers in the areas of mathematics and/or English language arts; they were identified as achieving below average or were in

danger of failing in one or more core curriculum areas. The placement of a student into the sixth grade structure determined how the student began their middle school educational experience.

The middle school's Title I allocation was dependent upon census poverty rate and allocated to schools based upon the percentage of students who received free or reduced lunch. Title I services at the middle school continued to provide a structure that separated and sorted students into groups. This sorting of students at the middle school into Title I did not significantly close the achievement gap for students.

Title I services were determined on a yearly basis at a planning meeting held in the spring. The decisions and planning were very similar to the process described in the elementary schools. Likewise, the money followed the Title I student and was mandated to be used to provide an educational program or materials which were research based. Figure 9 shows the structure for sixth grade Title I accommodations.

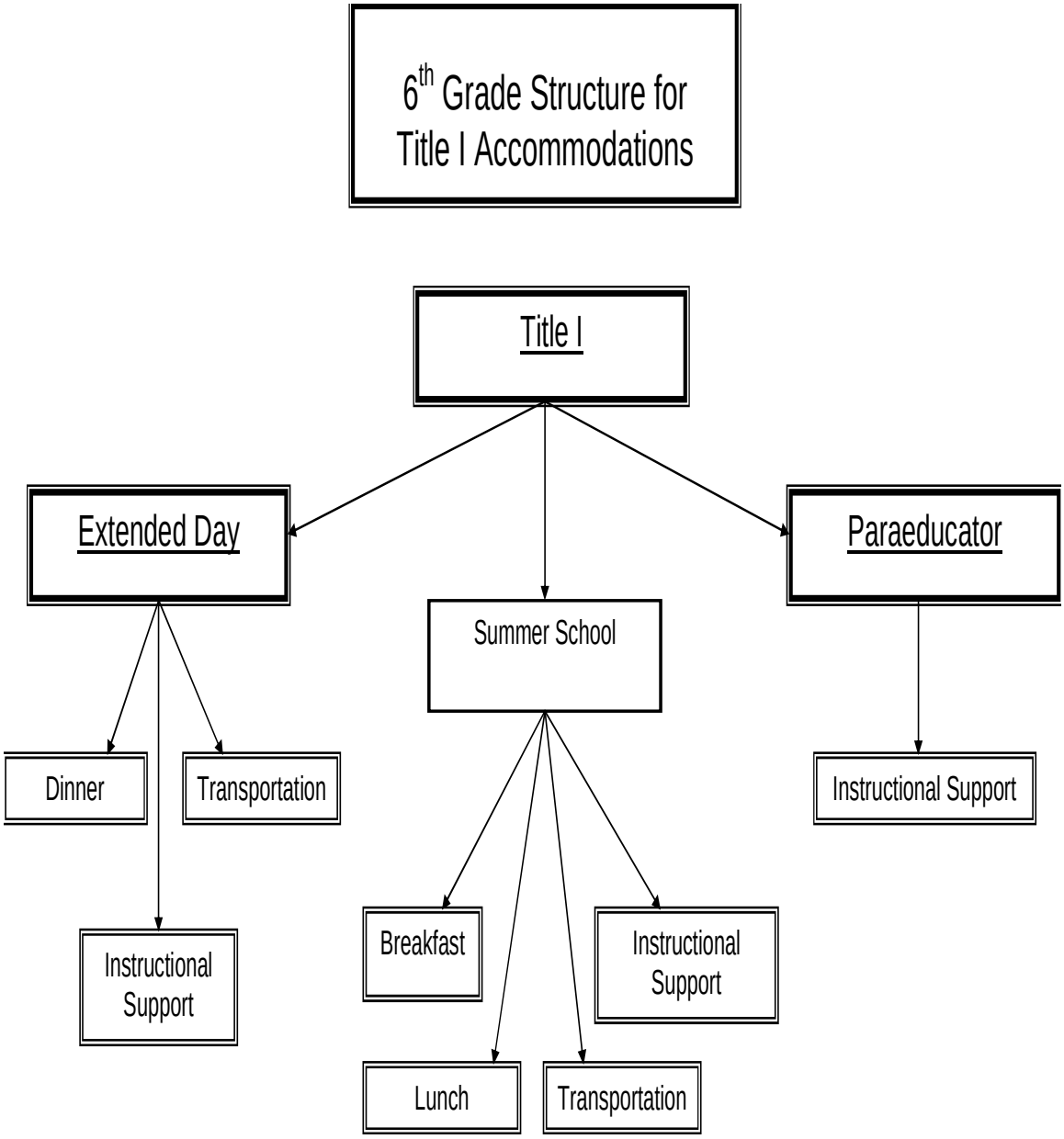

Figure 9: Sixth Grade Title I

Many sixth grade classrooms were structured to contain Title I students and general education students but no special education students. The students in these

classrooms were taught by a team of two teachers on the basis of recommendation of both the fifth grade teacher and the parent's request for placement. These classrooms contained a cross-section of the students, and care was given to balance the social and educational abilities of these students so that the classrooms contained a *good mix*.

Academic support was not available for seventh or eighth grade Title I students in the regular classrooms. Students were sorted out and placed in learning labs taught by a teacher to give students additional support. For students to be enrolled in a learning lab, they had to give up the opportunity to take an elective course. Students who were not in learning labs had the advantage of taking additional elective courses, which included band, art, choir, and so on.

Students in grades 6, 7, or 8 who qualified for Title I services were offered additional academic support in the form of an after-school tutoring program, which was held two to three days a week from approximately 2:30 pm until 4:00 pm. This homework club was free to all Title I students. Some teachers required certain students to attend the after school program to get caught up on homework. These students were primarily from the families of working poor or poor. By being required to stay after school for homework assistance, they would have been unable to participate in the extracurricular activities, which were also held after school. Typically, there were 20 students who remained after school for additional help. These students were also provided with a snack or light meal. This program was funded completely by Title I.

Title I also provided a summer school program for students in grades 6, 7, and 8. This program was available for Title I students who were identified as needing additional support prior to promotion to the seventh, eighth, or ninth grade. The curriculum in

summer school focused upon the core curriculum and particularly upon reading, writing, and mathematics at a low track level of basic skills. The program ran for approximately four weeks, four days per week and coincided with the elementary summer school program to share bussing. The summer school was held at Ionia Middle School, and students were given a free breakfast and free lunch along with transportation to and from the program on a daily basis.

With all of the accommodations for cultural differences, ironically, there was a very strict attendance policy for summer school. A student missing two days for any reason was dropped from the program. This rule was developed by the summer school teaching staff, who did not see how this was counterproductive to meeting the needs of the students. Many of the students were from poor families, and this attendance rule worked to regulate some students out of the summer school program. Working schedules and difficult family situations often made regular attendance a challenge.

In seventh and eighth grades, students were separated into two teams, the blue team and the white team, which were originally created to form the connectivity of a *school within a school*. Each team consisted of five teachers (four regular education and one special education) Each of the seventh and eighth grade teams had a special education teacher who assisted the general education teacher to make sure all appropriate accommodations were provided as written in each student's *individualized educational planning committee* (IEPC). Being a member of the teaching team, the special education teacher brought added support for all of the general education classes attended by the special education students to provide the *least restrictive environment* for all students.

The classrooms of the seventh and eighth grade teachers were grouped physically close to all other members of their teams, and students were assigned lockers located outside of their first team classroom. This, in essence, meant that a student's classes and locker were in close proximity. The middle school teams were powerful.

The sixth, seventh, and eighth grade individual teams met approximately every three to four weeks to conduct child studies and to discuss any concerns or problems. This child-find activity was very effective, especially because the groups of teachers shared the same students and were able to effectively to arrive at creative solutions to meet the individual needs of many students. As a result, several students did not fall through the cracks; teachers, counselors, and administrators had a significant impact on the educational success of the students because they looked at the same child and were enlightened by the variety of their collective perspectives.

Staff was also willing to make accommodations in line with the needs of their students. The students' needs were often based upon their socio-economic status. Staff was able to meet many of the needs of the students and their families. This meant that if a student was not getting to school, the administrator drove to the home and picked up the student. If the child needed a sleeping bag or boots to attend sixth grade camp, the staff *found* what the child needed. If the family could not afford money for an activity, the school provided a *scholarship* to allow the student to attend. The middle school staff was very aware of the individual student's life situation, which allowed the staff to have insight into what may have been a barrier to learning for the student. Many times the students needed financial support.

When there was a conflict for the student, their ability to be successful was limited. Various provisions helped many students to be more successful. An effort was made to provide for the social needs of the child as well as their academic needs. Figure 10 displays the seventh and eighth grade structure for Title I.

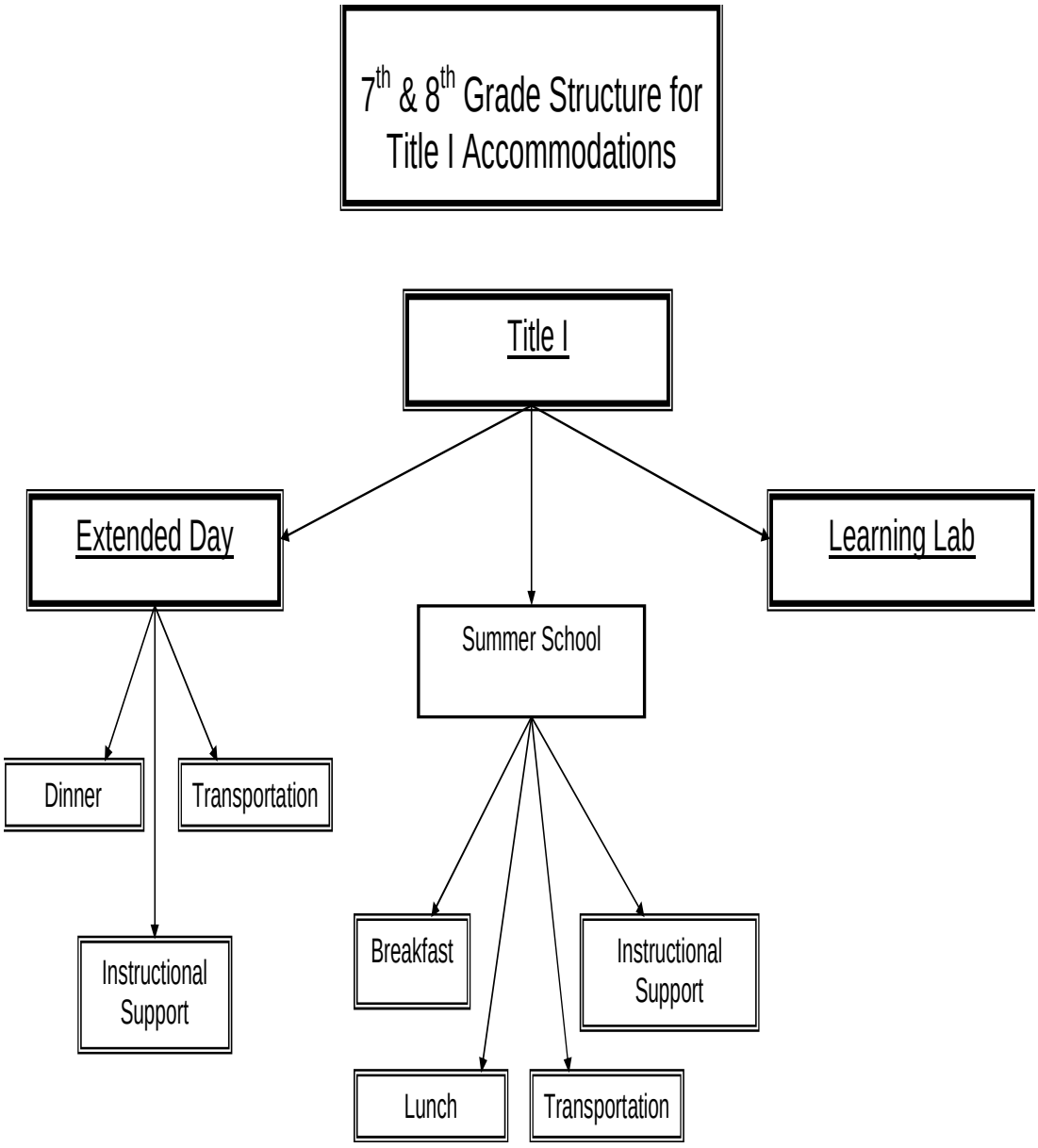

Figure 10: Title I Structure in Seventh and Eighth Grades

The middle school also had special education services provided for the emotionally impaired, learning disabled, mildly cognitively impaired, and moderately cognitively impaired students. Approximately 19% of the middle school was identified as special education, and 30% qualified for Title I services. The population of special education students in grades K-12 in Ionia Public Schools averaged 18-19%. A student identified as special education typically remained in special education from that day on until he or she graduated, aged out at 26 years, or dropped out. The special education label stuck for 95-98% of our identified students. The following is a list of special education programs and services offered at the middle school:

Resource Room (support of general education curriculum)

Learning Disability (modified curriculum)

Emotionally Impaired (modified curriculum/cognitive abilities)

Mildly Cognitively Impaired (modified curriculum)

Moderately Cognitively Impaired (modified curriculum)

Speech and Language (therapy)

Social Work Services (testing/identification/counseling)

School Psychologist (testing/identification)

Occupational/Physical Therapy – OT/PT services (therapy)

Hearing Impaired services

Physically and Otherwise Health Impaired – POHI services

Some students qualified for services initially while in the middle school. The middle school had a process for student referrals for special education. The child study

process provided the structure where the teacher met the special education case manager to discuss the student's progress and the teacher's concerns. From the child study there might have been a request for testing, which indicated whether a student qualified for special education. The school psychologist held a conference with the parent and made a recommendation at an Individual Education Planning Committee (IEPC). The initial placement of a child in special education could take place at any time, and many initial placements occurred during the middle school years.

Students who qualified for resource room support spent the majority of their day in regular education courses, whereas students in other special education categories spent the majority of their day in self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities. Resource room students received their mathematics and English instruction either in the special education classroom or in the lower tracked classes of mathematics and/or English language arts where they were instructed at a lower level of competency and at a slower pace.

The middle school special education program was inclusive, whereas at the high school many the special education students were excluded from general education classes. All students were integrated into some general education programs in the middle school. Depending upon the student's disability, he or she attended art, music, physical education, wood shop, or any other general education class. Some special education students were in all general education classes and others were in all special education classes. One student, who was not able to speak, was placed in a choir class. Although the student was unable to speak, the classroom instructor taught her to shake a noise-maker in time to the music. It was a wonderful experience for the student and for other students

in the classroom. This special education student loved music and was able to be in the choir class and participate. This was an example of how the middle school staff was very open to including special education students in any and all classes.

While I was working as the middle school principal, my job responsibilities included attending IEPC meetings annually for all special education students, approximately 100 special education meetings per year. The purpose during these meetings with the special education teachers, special education students, and their parents was to formulate an educational plan that would meet the needs of each student. It was very frustrating to meet with high school staff while putting together a high school special education plan for eighth grade students. Discussions with the middle school staff revealed that there was a conflict between the high school staff and middle school special education teachers, and the middle school staff had little power to influence the special education student's schedule.

The middle school was very student-centered with teams of teachers working with students, and each team had a special education teacher. The goal at the middle school was to provide for special education students in the least restrictive environment. This meant that many special education students remained with their peers in general education classes to the extent possible. Figures 11and 12 show the organization of middle school special education programming.

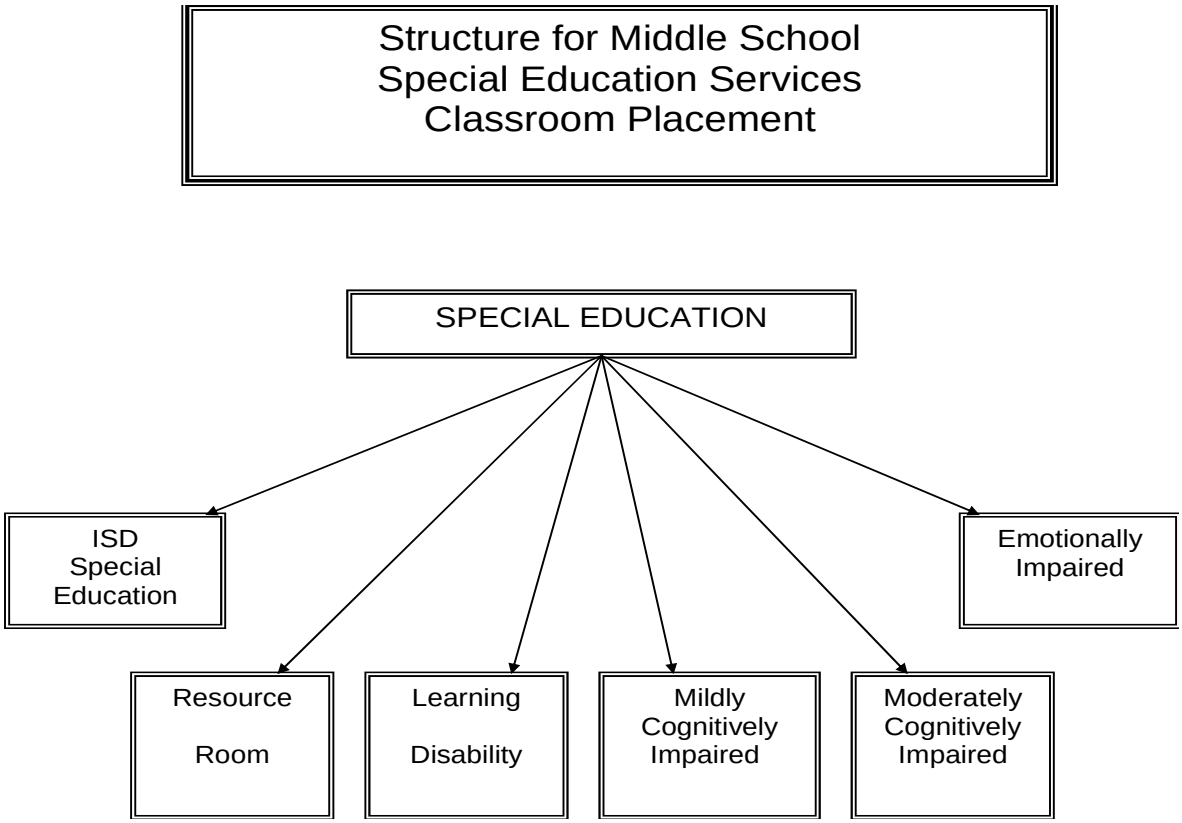

Figure 11: Middle School Special Education Structure.

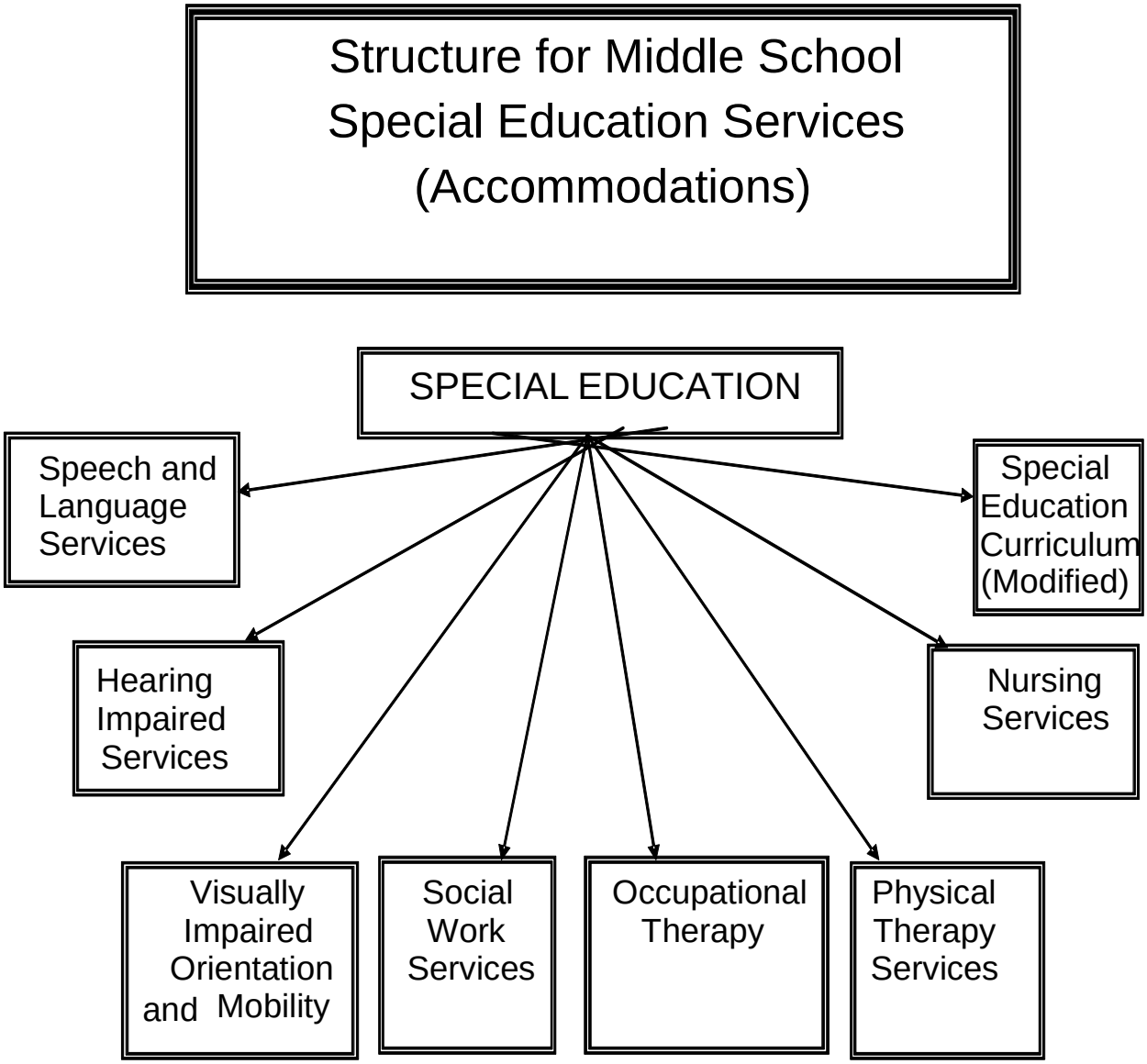

Figure 12: Special Education Accommodations.

Students experienced subject specific courses taught by content area teachers for the first time in seventh grade. A seventh or eighth grade student's schedule had seven different classes, including mathematics, English language arts, science, history, and elective classes, each approximately 45 minutes. Students were separated into classes on the basis of whether they were in regular education or special education. There was no longer a separation or support during the classroom instructional time for seventh or eighth grade Title I students.

Students in grade 7 regular education were further separated into high and low tracks for mathematics instruction, which acted as one of the sorting structures within the seventh grade general education classes. The high mathematics track placed students into pre-algebra, and the lower mathematics track placed students into general mathematics. Sorting and selecting of students into academic tracks inadvertently identified those who were expected to be in the college preparation curriculum in the high school and those who were organized out of the upper track.

Students in grade 8 regular education were also separated into ability tracks for mathematics instruction, which continued the sorting and selecting of students in the eighth grade general education classes. The highest mathematics track placed students into algebra, other students were placed into a middle track of pre-algebra, and the lowest mathematics track placed students into general mathematics. The poverty, working, and professional sub-cultures were separated into the general mathematics, pre-algebra, and algebra tracks, respectively.

Students in eighth grade regular education were also tracked and separated into high and low tracks for English language arts instruction; high-achieving English

students were placed into English 8, and the lower track placed students into a remedial program called LANGUAGE! These English courses, like mathematics, provided structures to separate, sort, and select students in the general education classes. Similar to what was done with mathematics, poor students were tracked into the remedial English course, and students from professional families, who were expected to attend college, were selected to be enrolled in the advanced English course. It was a common occurrence for a parent to request a change in their son or daughter's schedule if a child who was from the professional social class was not selected for the upper level English or mathematics courses. The expectation was for children from the upper class to attend college and to be in advanced coursework while attending the middle school.

Some students in the eighth grade were also sent to an alternative education program that was developed for and attended by only eighth grade students. Students who did not fit into the culture of the middle school were often recommended by the administration or the classroom teacher to be sent to alternative education. Students were forced to attend alternative education if they were struggling socially or academically or had a truancy issue.

Generally, eighth grade alternative education was seen by students and parents as a punishment and a last resort to keep a student in school. Rarely would parents choose to have their child attend that program. These students were sorted out of the middle school and were unlikely to return to the high school environment. The students who were organized out of the middle school and sent to the alternative education school were most often students from poor families. Over 95% of the students who attended alternative education were qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Students in both the seventh and eighth grades participated in extra-curricular sports and clubs at the middle school level. The Michigan High School Athletic Association regulations across the state began supervision of athletics in the seventh grade. Many students were involved in athletic programs. Typically, the track team had more than 60 students participating. Middle school athletics were inclusive versus exclusive. Students were rarely cut from any team, and everyone was allowed and encouraged to play. There were multiple teams for each sport to allow students access to the experience of being included as a part of a team. One year the middle school had over 20 cheerleaders on their squad.

The beginning of middle school was much like students experienced in the elementary school. In sixth grade, they had a primary teacher and received support during the school day for Title I and special education. Students were relatively isolated from the seventh and eighth grade programs, but on entering the seventh grade they encountered teachers who *specialized* in the area of their major or minor educational degree courses. Seventh graders also moved from class to class for the first time, changing seven times per day every 45 minutes. Students were no longer provided additional educational support by Title I in the classroom. Eighth grade structure was the same as seventh grade.

Title I in seventh and eighth grades included programming for learning labs, extended day, and summer school. Seventh and eighth grade students were provided similar special education classes and support; the difference was evident in the number of classes that were tracked. Tracking in grade 7 began in mathematics courses, and grade 8 added further tracks for mathematics and English language arts. By the time students

completed the eighth grade and scheduling for high school courses, they were required to have their mathematics and English teachers *sign off*, giving students permission to enroll in advanced classes in these curriculum areas. Certain students were selected to be in upper level classes on entering high school.

The middle school began sorting students before their first day in the sixth grade. The middle school acted as an instrument for continued cultural transmission during these adolescence years. The structure, rules, and practices were well established in the middle school to maintain the culture of the institution, which was in line with professional and working class cultural expectations, a very well established social order system. Students were soon to recognize the various groups and their membership. The sorting that started in elementary school continued and became more defined as students moved through middle school. Students were placed into ability groups for ease of instruction, and, it is important to note, with the very best of intentions. The rationale would be that if students were ability-grouped they could learn at the same level as their peers, and the instruction could be geared towards their capability.

Schools used ability grouping or tracking to help provide for the needs of students, without realizing the harm that this was doing in the long run. Students were placed into higher or lower groups based upon their perceived abilities, demonstrating that although schools stated *all students can learn*, tracking really indicated that educators believed all students can't learn at the same level. Tracking or ability grouping became more pronounced as the student advanced through middle school and the process continued to be a reward for students in the *higher* group and punishment for students in the *lower* group. Students were selected by their teacher to be placed in advanced courses

in the high school. Students who were sorted out of the college preparation track were grouped together in a lower track. Once this tracking occurred in the middle school, students were unlikely to move from the general education track into the college preparation track when they entered the high school. By the time students exited the middle school, they were separated into alternative education, special education, general education, and college preparation tracks along with their corresponding sub-culture. The Title I support for students did not continue to provide accommodations for students beyond the eighth grade. Figure 13 shows the educational structure for the eighth grade.

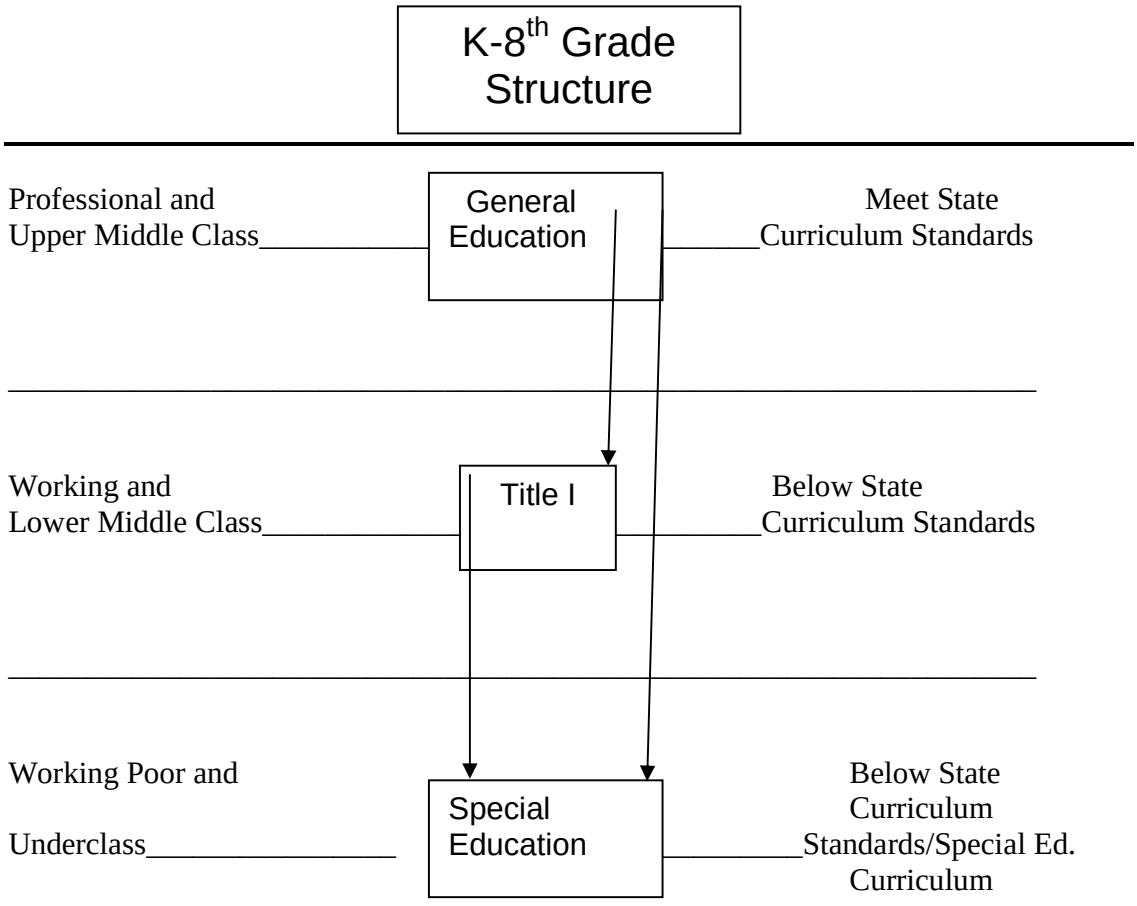

Figure 13: K-8 Structure

High School

The settlers of the communities that composed the Ionia Public School district created schools to perpetuate their cultural values. From their Puritan birthright, they shaped social structures, which continued to carry forward the social order of classes and status. The educational system in Ionia was established for children of individuals who held the upper hierarchical status within the community. Property ownership, social rank, education, and hard work were among the values held by the settlers, and these helped to establish the expectations of their educational institutions. Social order created a sorting of individuals into sub-cultures on the basis of socio-economic level. Each sub-culture group would come to identify with various cultural structures determined by their life experiences and the meaning which they made from their world.

The cultural values of the community were established by those who had high economic status and financial resources. These individuals came to dominate the various institutional structures in the community and established expectations for what was important enough to be sustained. They determined which institutions were valued and the manner in which they were to continue and endure, including the high school. The first high school in Ionia was the Union School established in 1868 because of the desire of community leaders to provide academic preparation for college. The Union School was a college preparatory high school that used state funds in order to provide a college preparatory program. Ionia's Union School was accredited by the University of Michigan, and graduates of the Union School in Ionia were automatically accepted to attend the University of Michigan.

A court case involving Union High Schools in Michigan was the Kalamazoo case of 1874. This law suit emerged out the claim that state funding was being used to fund high schools that only served the function of preparing a small segment of the population for college. The State Supreme Court eventually ruled that state funding of high schools was permissible. Over time, additional programs would be incorporated to accommodate the student for whom high schools were originally designed. This would include Vocational Education, Home Economics, Physical Education, and later, Alternative Education, and Special Education programs.

The high school continued to maintain the social order with the sub-cultures of poverty, working, and professional classes. These three sub-cultures have endured in the community and in the schools. It would be expected for the educational system to provide for students from the different sub-cultures with a varied curriculum or methods of instruction. The *missing students* were introduced as a contemporary issue because historically, mandatory attendance for all students was not required until after the end of the nineteenth century. Before compulsory attendance was enacted, children and their families would likely have chosen to use their time elsewhere; not everyone felt that education – *book learning* – was needed when their time could be used productively with physical activities like working on the farm.

The schooling in the Ionia Public Schools continued the structured process of sorting and ordering process to serve the needs of some sub-cultural groups of students in the high school and to select students who would continue on to college.

High School Contemporary

As students advanced through the Ionia educational system from elementary to middle school and on to high school, their connection and relationships with their teachers became less and less individualized. Elementary school was known for being student-centered, whereas the high school was viewed as subject-oriented. The elementary teachers had 20-28 students for five to six hours every day. Conversely, the high school and middle school teachers had 150 students a day for 55-70 minutes. By design, the middle school and high school teachers were less able to spend time with each student to build meaningful mentoring relationships. It came down to whether a teacher was teaching students or teaching subjects. High school teachers love their content, were socialized in college to be content area specialists, and often see themselves as an extension of the content area specialists under whom they were educated in college. The secondary teacher training was developed to reflect the structure that existed in higher education and was based on an in-depth study of a discipline. The organization of the high school curriculum and experience would come to parallel the university structure.

For decades in Ionia a large group of students from professional families in the community have entered the Ionia Public School District in the ninth grade. Many of these children attended parochial schools for grades K-8. Many of the professional parents of these students helped to set policy for the high school. The parochial schools have shaped the culture of the Ionia High School, and it is the high school, as an educational institution, that has been the primary focal point for the district. Also confirmed from observations in five other school districts, the emphasis of public education was based upon the success and accolades of the high school. Thus, it may be

generalized that across our state and our nation, communities and schools everywhere tended to look at the high school to weigh and assess the performance and successes of the school district.

Staff Culture

The experiences of a student in middle school may be diminished in importance by the high school teachers and their expectations, perhaps suggesting, "they didn't teach you." Some high school staff worked to minimize, ridicule, and down play the *fun* educational experiences that freshmen remember from their eighth grade year. Junior high or middle school was put down because it was in the high school that education really counted. When a high school teacher said, "You should have learned this in the middle school," what was a student to think? The high school staff tended to blame the middle school for a student's academic failure in the high school. A student, upset, returned to his middle school English teacher because of something the high school teacher said he should have learned in the middle school. The ninth grade student ended up dropping the high school class because of pre-requisite knowledge that no one had taught him. The high school teacher openly blamed the middle school for the student's lack of knowledge. The high school culture was very concerned that accommodations made for students would lower high academic standards and harm the integrity of the high school standards.

The academic struggles between the expectations at the high school and middle school were such that some teachers did not want freshmen in their classes. One teacher stated, "Freshmen are not ready and mature enough to learn …." In eighth grade, a

student who gets an A in algebra may or may not be recommended for geometry. How confusing for students and parents to have a student get an A in algebra in the middle school, and then for high school staff to recommend that the student repeat the algebra course in in high school with exactly the same text. What message is being sent? "Yes, the middle school taught you algebra, but the real teachers are at the high school, and this was where it really counts."

The middle school and high school were in conflict with each other. The middle school was more accepting of the differences which existed between the sub-cultures than the culture of the high school. There were competing values that did not complement each other. The high school looked at freshmen and did not accommodate their needs as young adolescents. The culture was rigid; "this is the way we do things around here." Frequently, the high school was not flexible and functioned in an extremely institutional and impersonal manner. Many of the high school staff felt the pressures and parental expectation to produce students who were well prepared for college. This was a tremendous responsibility. In protecting the high school as an institution, the staff tended to maintain a narrow view. It was essential to always follow the rules because they protected the essence and integrity of the institution, no matter what the cost.

Most of the high school teachers, while not necessarily sharing the same economic status of the professional and upper middle class in Ionia, did share in an identification of themselves as professionals. Due in large part to their preparation and socialization in their preparation programs, most saw themselves as subject area specialists, more closely connected to the professoriate with whom they identified. Therefore, the teacher's perspective on education and on life in general was consistent in

many ways with dominant professional sub-culture within the community. The teacher's cultural background was also aligned in the school and with those who had affluence in community leadership positions. The professional class was validated as the sub-culture in charge of making decisions regarding how the school would be structured. This in turn supported the teacher's view or expectation of the institution. The professional sub-culture in the high school was consistent with the beliefs, behaviors, traditions, values, attitudes, meanings, and generally accepted practices of the teaching staff. The institutional rules and dominant professional sub-culture made sense to the staff and they supported it because supported the basic value structures of the professional and upper middle class.

Missing Students

Students from the poverty, working, and professional sub-culture groups all were well defined and organized as they attended Ionia Public Schools. Figure 14 depicts the structure and organization of the Ionia High School student body.

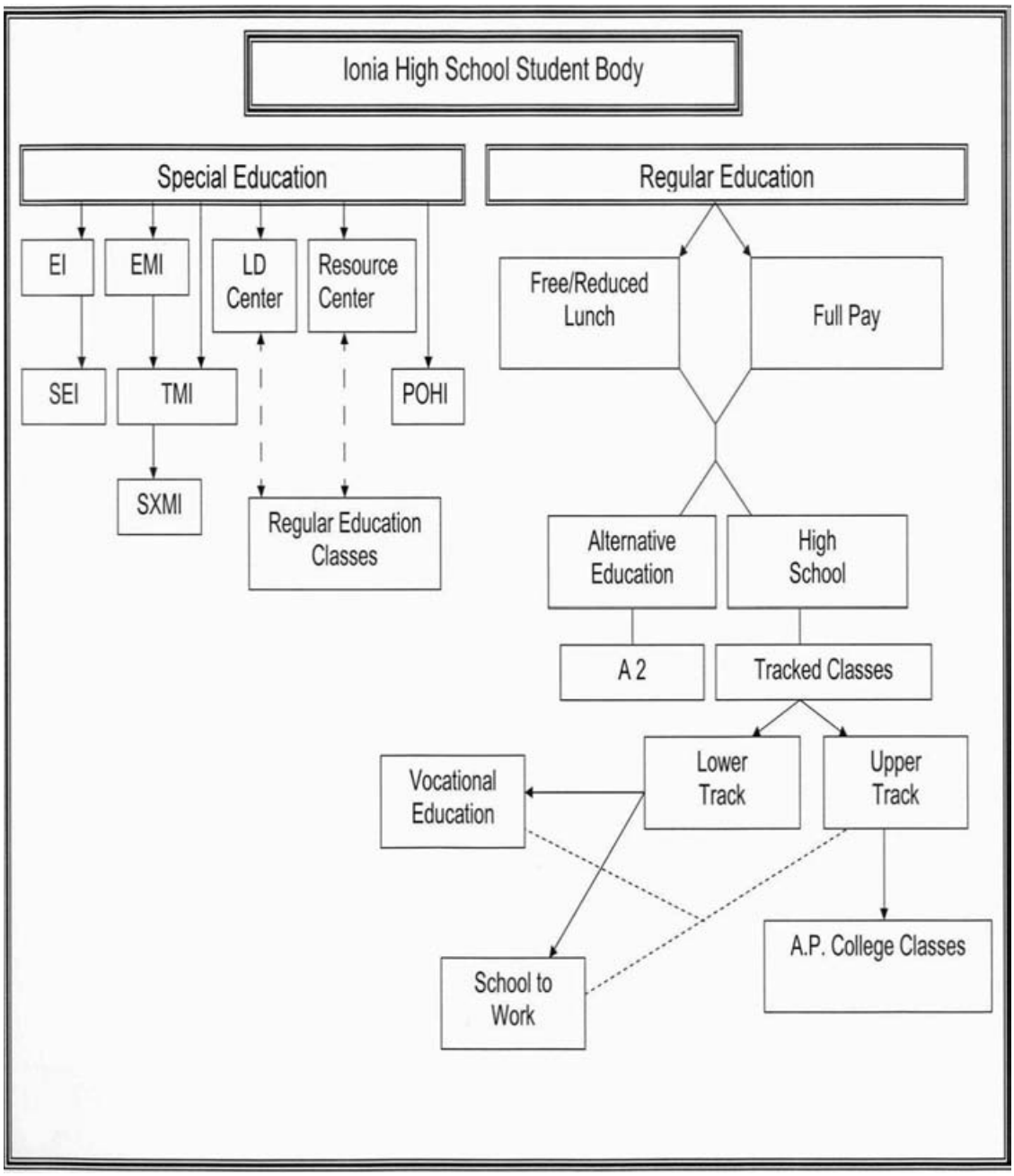

Figure 14: Ionia High School Structure

Curriculum

The student population of the Ionia High School includes three basic sub-cultural groups. Throughout the history of the school system, the curriculum has been structured

to accommodate the various cultural groups within the school. These three cultural groups were then separated into one of these five curriculum tracks or groups: (1) college prep/professional class, (2) general education/working class, (3) vocational education/working class and poverty class, (4) special education/working and poverty class, and (5) alternative education/poverty class.

College Prep Track

College preparation track was for students who intended to attend college after graduation. This curriculum was established for the professional class and primarily included honors course work, courses offered at Montcalm Community College, and advanced placement courses. These courses within the college preparation track provided a match with the culture of the students from the upper class. It provided for the needs of the students and the expectations of their affluent families. Students in the college preparation track also took some coursework in the areas of study within the general education curriculum where levels or tracks did not exist. The students who took advanced placement (AP) courses were eligible to take an examination in the spring to qualify for college-level credits.

The college prep track comprised students who *fit* well with the established high school culture. This culture expected students to engage in learning at a high academic level presented at a rigorous pace. This program often demanded a large quantity of homework and reading beyond the rigor of the daily class work. Most of the students from the professional class and upper middle class experienced a great deal of success within the Ionia Public Schools and were especially rewarded and celebrated. The students enrolled in the college preparation track were primarily from the professional

class in the community. These students and their families found value and importance in the structure that existed within the educational system. The students experienced a match between their culture at home and the culture in the school.

The staff related closely to this group of students because they reflected values shared by the faculty. The college prep group valued punctuality and academic success. They planned to be professionals and had much in common with the high school teaching staff. The college prep track earned rewards or recognition as the Student of the Month, membership in National Honor Society, Top Twenty status, Scholar Athlete honors, selection for the Faculty Service Award, and so on. The school newsletter, daily school announcements, school yearbook, and monthly school newsletter echo the accolades of these very successful scholars. School was, from the beginning, literally made for them.

These positive experiences of the school district were well received by the community. The community wanted a school district that reflected the values of professionals, socialized their children, and prepared them to work in professional careers after success in college. The high school supported a professional culture in the community, and the professional culture in the community supported the high school. This was evident with the number of individual community leaders as well as organizations in the community that offered students college scholarships.

The professional community also fought hard to protect all of the college prep courses. In the past when an advanced placement course was cancelled, many parents called to voice concern. They wanted their children to leave high school with as many college credits as possible; most of these parents were college graduates themselves. The

college prep and advanced placement courses provided a perfect match for the students in the college prep track.

Vocational Education and General Education Tracks

The students from the working and lower middle class were often tracked and took the majority of their classes in general education or vocational education. These students found a great deal of success at Ionia High School. Their rewards were not always as overt as the recognition of the college prep students, but these students graduated from high school, and some went on to community college or post-secondary training. The public ways that students from the working class culture were recognized included recognition for their work in the State MITES competition (wood working), FFA (Future Farmers of America), and also Heartland's Students of the Month (vocational education).

Students in the working class came from a culture that valued education, but many preferred hands-on *practical* information, job training or skills. They viewed education from their cultural perspective. Students from the working class culture were expected to graduate from high school, and many were expected to get a job. The majority of the students in the working class did not want to attend college. From their perspective, college was expensive and not really what most wanted to do. Parents were more likely to encourage their children to learn a trade and to go to work immediately out of school rather than encourage them to pursue traditional higher education. The goal was to graduate from high school and enter the *real world*. What they needed was a high

school diploma, along with skills and training, which would allow them to be employable.

Students from the working class valued punctuality and usually followed the school rules. Their home culture valued hard work and giving one's best effort. Students in this track may or may not have chosen to be involved in athletics. Many of them had jobs while they were in high school in order to afford a car and transportation costs. They were bright, competitive, and hardworking, but some quit athletics and clubs due to their jobs. Working and financial self-sufficiency was greatly valued. Their parents worked and appreciated a good work ethic as important in their culture. Examples of jobs held by individuals in the working class included farmers, small business owners, and prison guards.

There was conflict between the college prep students and the working class students. The students in the working class might even label the college prep students as *jocks* or *preps*. Much of this resulted from the recognition that the college prep students received and also from the frustration of students in the working class who had less money and fewer resources in their lives. People and friends were of great value to these students and their families. Some individuals from the working class considered the academics of schools to be less applicable for them. They considered some course work to have little connection with what they wanted in their lives, and relevance mattered.

Some students in the working class disliked school and couldn't wait to get out, whereas many others enjoyed their school experience and made lifetime friends. Many students in the vocational track became involved in programs and activities that supported the skilled vocational education classes. Examples of activities at Ionia High

School include the Heartland's vocational education programs, a 4-year woodshop program, which competes well at the state level, a nationally recognized Future Farmers of America program (FFA), and 4-H groups, which competed at the Ionia Free Fair.

The general education and vocational education curriculum provided for the needs of students from working and lower middle class families. Students representing the working class followed the general education curriculum and may have planned to attend a trade school or begin working at a job during high school or immediately after graduation. Their goal was to enter the working world in a timely manner or ASAP. The vocational education curriculum also provided for the needs of the middle class but was not available to students until the eleventh grade, when students were allowed to enroll in Heartland's Vocational and Technology program. The vocational student's career plans followed the same path as the general education student's, and the vocational student may plan to attend community college or trade school or begin an internship or job immediately after graduation.

Special Education Track

Some of the general education high school teachers were not open to having special education students in their classes, and, as a result, many special education students were organized out of the general education courses. There were also many high school special education teachers who believed that special education students were best served if they were isolated or separated into the special education track in the high school for a number of reasons. By scheduling special education students into only special education courses, the teachers created a captured audience for their classes. They created courses, which allowed them to sort and select their students. Another advantage

for sorting out the special education students was to address a conflict that existed with the general education high school teachers. Some of the high school teachers did not feel that they should have to be responsible for providing instruction for special education students. When a special education student was in a general education course, the general education teacher was responsible for providing accommodations in instruction to the individual student. Some of the general education teachers indicated that providing these accommodations was “not my job.” Some staff felt that these students should be taught that they won’t get accommodations out in the real world. There were some teachers at the high school who indicated that the accommodations reduced the integrity of their program and lowered the bar for academics. There were other teachers who felt that they did not have the skills to teach the special education students. A teacher stated, “I am not a special education teacher.” Actually, if these accommodations were written and placed within the Individual Educational Plan document, the teachers were legally responsible to provide them. Overall, the special education teacher wanted special education students, and the general education teacher did not. Another more altruistic motive for having special education students removed from the general education population and placed solely in special education classes was to *protect* the special education students from bullies.

In repeated IEPC meetings, discussions indicated that a ninth grade student would be in special education all day and “maybe in a year or two they would be able to take an elective class.” This was done to protect students because some general education teachers did not want to have special education students in their classes. As much as support was advocated toward having ninth grade students in at least one physical

education course, high school staff indicated that the student would not be safe in the locker room. When concern was voiced that this was viewed as a staff problem and not a student problem, the staff member spoke with the parent explaining that physical education class was not an option for the student. The high school staff was very territorial and did not play fair when it came to mixing special education and general education students together. They would speak with the parent and explain how it was in the child's best interest, when moving into the high school, to be placed in more hours of special education for support. Many of the teachers believed that this sorting of students out of the general education population would provide support and ultimately more success for the special education students. The conflict was resolved if the special education student was removed from the general education population.

Students in special education tended to be poor, with 85%-90% of the special education students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Mixing special education and general education groups together created conflict within the high school, so it was easier for the special education teachers to separate the special education students in the high school from the general population and place students primarily in special education courses. The special education track organized the students out and resolved the conflict by avoiding the situation.

A staff member who had a freshman son was asked her how her son liked being in high school. Her response was that he liked being in the high school because they "got rid of all of the knobs" that had been in his classes in the middle school. He meant that the special education students were no longer part of the culture that he was now experiencing as a freshman. The special education students were moved out.

The middle school special education programs were inclusive, integrating students into general courses, whereas at the high school the special education students were primarily excluded from general education classes. This was done in order to help the special education students be more successful by giving them more support and increasing the number of hours they are in special education. This started the process of exclusion.

Although the special education track was established to meet the educational needs of students with identified disabilities, it was also established to organize the special education students out of the mainstream of the high school. As at the middle school, the high school staff met with the students and parents on an annual basis at an IEPC meeting to develop and write an individualized plan for each special education student attending Ionia High School. There were more than 200 students (approximately 19%) with disabilities attending the high school.

The curriculum was modified for special education students so they could succeed in the special education classes. This also made it nearly impossible for them to pass the rigorous Michigan Merit Examination (MME). The state limited to 1% the total of special education students in any school who count as *passing* if they were to take an alternate assessment to the MME. The state regulation meant that 18% of Ionia's special education student population, despite the fact that many of them have not been exposed to the actual curriculum on which they were tested, were expected to take and pass the MME.

Special education students who had a severe cognitive disability did find success within the special education program at Ionia High School. This group of students remained in school until the age of 26. Students with a severe cognitive impairment were

not included in the designated *missing students* group. Rather, the special education students referenced as missing were students with low-average IQs who were typically enrolled in classrooms for students with learning disabilities or resource room classrooms.

The special education student population demonstrated various abilities. Many of these students have struggled with school since they started in kindergarten. Students who struggled in school viewed education differently, particularly because of their limited success while in school. The curriculum presented in the special education classrooms was considered appropriate for the student, but it ensured that the student had limited success in and outside of school.

When special education students entered Ionia High School, they were isolated into classrooms with special education teachers. Generally, those students were no longer integrated into the general education population, and this naturally brought feelings of separation and isolation. Special education students who received resource room instruction or instruction in a classroom for students with learning disabilities grouped with each other more and more, and sometimes they supported each other in making poor choices. Special education students experienced a great deal of conflict and frustration, and they did, at times, break the rules. Observations indicated that some students would rather to be seen as *tough* than *slow*. Most of the students who were involved in fights or major incidents that required hearings by the board of education were in special education.

The special education students were provided a modified, less rigorous curriculum throughout their K-8 experience and in the high school. The curriculum for

special education students was based upon their Individual Education Plan (IEP); traditionally, the curriculum had granted credits for a variety of specific courses not offered in the general education high school curriculum.

The relationships between the three sub-culture groups and their established physical boundaries within the school building were very distinct. There were about 40 special education students who, as a group, were observed standing in the front of the building every day. They stayed together and appeared to support each other. They had common social norms, showed acceptance of each other, and provided security. The majority of the student body in the high school entered through the same entrance. The special education students claimed this area and, at times, appeared to go out of their way to make it difficult and perhaps uncomfortable for others entering the building. They tended to be louder and to put on a show in the morning, yelling and chasing each other around until a support staff person was assigned to supervise this area, to provide feedback to the students, and help them socially to fit into the high school environment. The special education students weren't being *bad*, but their behavior was what would be found during outdoor or playground activities instead of at the entrance to a large high school.

A large majority (85%-95%) of the special education students were from working poor and underclass families, and they did not share the norms of the high school culture where the sub-culture of the professional class was dominant. Students who were members of other sub-cultures entering the building would avoid the special education students and rarely make conversation or eye contact. Benches were placed in the area, and some special education students took advantage of the seating. Other special

education students were reminded on a daily basis not to block the entrance, not to be loud or yell, and not to run in this area. From what was observed, the special education students, who either stood outside on the sidewalk or inside near the entrance, did not pick up on the social cues of other students, and, in fact, went out of their way to make their presence known. They definitely marked their territory at the high school, yet did not do this at the middle school for they had no reason to.

The special education students did not group together to secure a portion or area of the building at the middle school because they were not organized out of the mainstream. However, at the high school things were different. The high school students were organized and separated into regular education and special education classrooms. This was a big change for the special education students because they were included in the activities of the middle school and then sorted and excluded from the general population of students at the high school. Their solution to the conflict of being organized out or tracked into special education was to claim an area of the building where they could meet and support each other. Their actions indicated that there was safety in numbers.

A number of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch also gathered together each morning before school in the high school cafeteria, and many of the students who were a part of this group were also special education students. This group had been sorted out of the general population through the governmental act of providing *free food* to those in poverty. In real life there was no such thing as a *free lunch,* and these students pay dearly because their families can't afford to give them breakfast at home.

On the whole, the only students who would eat breakfast were those who got it for free. We continued to sort kids out. This area of the high school cafeteria ended up being supervised on a daily basis before school. This group was organized and volatile; they tended to be ready to fight. Poor, violent, and angry, this group functioned on a set of norms that were not consistent with the student code of conduct at the high school. Conflict existed between this group of students and students in other cultural groups. This group also had conflicts with the school's institutional rules. Students from the culture of poverty tended to align themselves together, and yet their need for survival would at times create conflict within their own group. They functioned under the premise of survival of the fittest and were extremely territorial, even abusive, towards each other. They were friends but did not always socially interact with each other in a positive manner. They were more likely to make fun of each other, say something rude about one another's boy- or girlfriend, laugh about clothing, or bring up whose family member was arrested and seen printed in the newspaper. Yet putting all of their disagreements aside, this group would band together and stick up for one another when approached by someone from outside of their sub-cultural group.

Alternative Education Track

A drop in student enrollment of 55 students in 2003 prompted a request to each building administrator, including alternative education, for information to see if there was a pattern of where students were going. The alternative education numbers were steady from year to year, and, typically, the same numbers of students were sent to this program from the high school. For example:

September 2002 enrollment was 89.24

September 2003 enrollment was 84.23

September 2004 enrollment was 82.77

Looking at these figures, it appeared that the enrollment at alternative education was stable. However, what these figures did not explain was how many of the 89 students from 2002 graduated, dropped out, transferred, or were still enrolled in 2003 and 2004. Conceivably, we may have lost many of these students in subsequent years if they were replaced by other students from the high school and middle school. If this was the case, then the middle school and high school student count would be reduced, making it appear that there had been a loss of students when, in fact, the loss to the district occurred at the alternative program. Analyzed, the data showed a huge exodus of students from the alternative education. The data indicated that, indeed, students were missing from the alternative education program, and, typically, only 12-20 students who started any one year remained in school for the entire year.

Very few of the students who were enrolled in alternative education program graduated from Ionia High School. Their lives were centered on survival, and education was difficult, often conflicting with their needs. In 2007, only eight students graduated from the alternative education program, and of the eight graduates, six were the first generation from their families to ever graduate from high school.

The alternative education students were sorted out of our high school, and many left before graduation, becoming missing students. The students at the alternative education program were in a separate facility, which physically removed them from daily interaction with the high school students. The alternative education track separated students from the mainstream of the high school in Ionia and isolated them two miles away in a building that was built for alternative education students in 2000. The

alternative education track was established in order to meet the educational needs of the high school by removing the students who created conflict within the facility.

The hope was that an alternative setting would also meet the educational needs of the students who did not find success within the Ionia High School. The alternative education students were primarily from poor families, and there was a mismatch between their cultural background and the culture of the high school. Over 90% of the alternative education students qualified for free or reduced lunch. These students outwardly demonstrated their conflict and dislike of the high school by skipping school and breaking the rules. The high school punished them repeatedly and organized them out of the building. In turn, these students had a very negative experience and wanted nothing to do with Ionia High School.

The alternative education students were taught using traditional methods in an alternative setting. This was primarily because the teachers at the alternative education program taught their classes in a manner similar to that of the faculty at the high school. The classroom instruction was a lecture style, which was similar to the high school. Some of the curriculum was the same as the high school, but it was not taught at the same rate or with the same intensity and expectations as in the *regular* high school. The curriculum was modified for alternative education students so they could succeed, which made it nearly impossible for them to effectively pass the rigorous Michigan Merit Examination (MME). Regardless of the fact that many of them were not exposed to the actual curriculum on which they were tested, they were expected to take and pass the MME. The alternative education program had not made adequate yearly progress or AYP for

three years. The district had been placed on notice by the state for lack of student success on the MME at alternative education.

The alternative education program had many rules similar to those at the Ionia High School. While the staff did allow some bending of some rules, they were also very strict and rigid with others. Many of the students enrolled in the alternative education program, which was for students aged 15-19, were also identified special education students, and as many as one in five (20%) were teen parents.

The students who attended alternative education were often kicked out for poor attendance, chronic tardiness, or discipline issues. There were instances when students came to school late, perhaps created a disruption, and were sent home. These students often rebelled against the punishments they were given for breaking the rules. From the phone calls received, the indications were that these students and their parent often believed the institutional rules in the alternative education program were not fair. To them, the actions of the school were inconsistent. From the student's viewpoint, it did not make sense that they made it to school after much difficulty at home and then were sent home. The question from the viewpoint of the student was, "Do you want me here or not"? The answer was evidently "not," because the student was sent away.

Students who attended alternative education were required to complete work from the start of a class to the end. That is, if a student failed a class he or she was required to repeat the course and all of the activities, projects, and so on, as if he or she had never been enrolled in the class. When a student failed at the alternative education program, he or she received no credit for any work previously completed. Education was not about

mastery; it was about compliance and course work; like time, it was viewed as linear. Many times students who lived within the culture of poverty did not see tasks as linear.

For example, if you painted only part of a room, you did not start over later as if you had never painted any of the room. Tasks were not linear, and yet completing a class at alternative education was linear, all or nothing.

A student who was attending the middle school became pregnant during the school year. As the building principal, I recommended that the student attend the Teen Age Parenting Program (TAPP), which was a part of the alternative education program. However, she was not allowed to attend because she was in seventh grade and, more significantly, because her brother was already in the alternative education program. The director of alternative education refused her admittance into the program.

The TAPP program focused upon developing parenting skills as well as child growth and development in addition to the counseling and guidance these young mothers needed as they were about to become parents. The young woman was denied access solely on the basis of arbitrary standards. Rule number one: Do no harm. Despite pleas and persistence she was not admitted into the program until she was having labor pains, and it was too late. Three years later, she was a 17-year-old mother, and she called for help to get back into school. She was told that she could not return. It was suggested to her that instead of attending alternative education she would be better off to get a job for a while, then if she was successful at holding down a job, she could reapply to the alternative education program. The alternative education program also sorted and selected students, organizing many out.

The cultural background of the alternative education students was not a match for the cultural expectations of the alternative education staff. The alternative high school was less about providing an alternative method of instruction and education than it was about providing the same instructional and educational experience as the high school at a slower pace. The alternative education students needed flexibility and a school that would provide for their needs. Seat time and homework were examples of areas that created conflict. As one of the teachers told me when discussing the strict attendance policy at alternative education, "We need to teach these students the importance of being on time so they can get a job." These policies, while teaching a lesson to students who failed to comply, alienated the very students most in need of support and understanding. How would they get a job if they did not graduate, or learn at all if they were removed from school for being late?

The attendance policy was based upon seat time and not academic achievement, which caused many students to be organized out of the alternative education program. Removing the student also resolved the conflict between the students and the staff. The cultural background of the staff and the cultural background of the students at alternative education did not allow for the differences. If the student's parent(s) were not employed or were eligible for special education themselves, their high school son or daughter was more likely to be in the special education or alternative education group.

High School

As shown in Figure 15, the high school students were organized according to tracks and also according to their level of financial resources. Many students who were poor were eligible to receive meals in the free or reduced lunch program. This structure

within the schools created another organizing structure which was used in all grades from K-12 (Also see Figure 7).

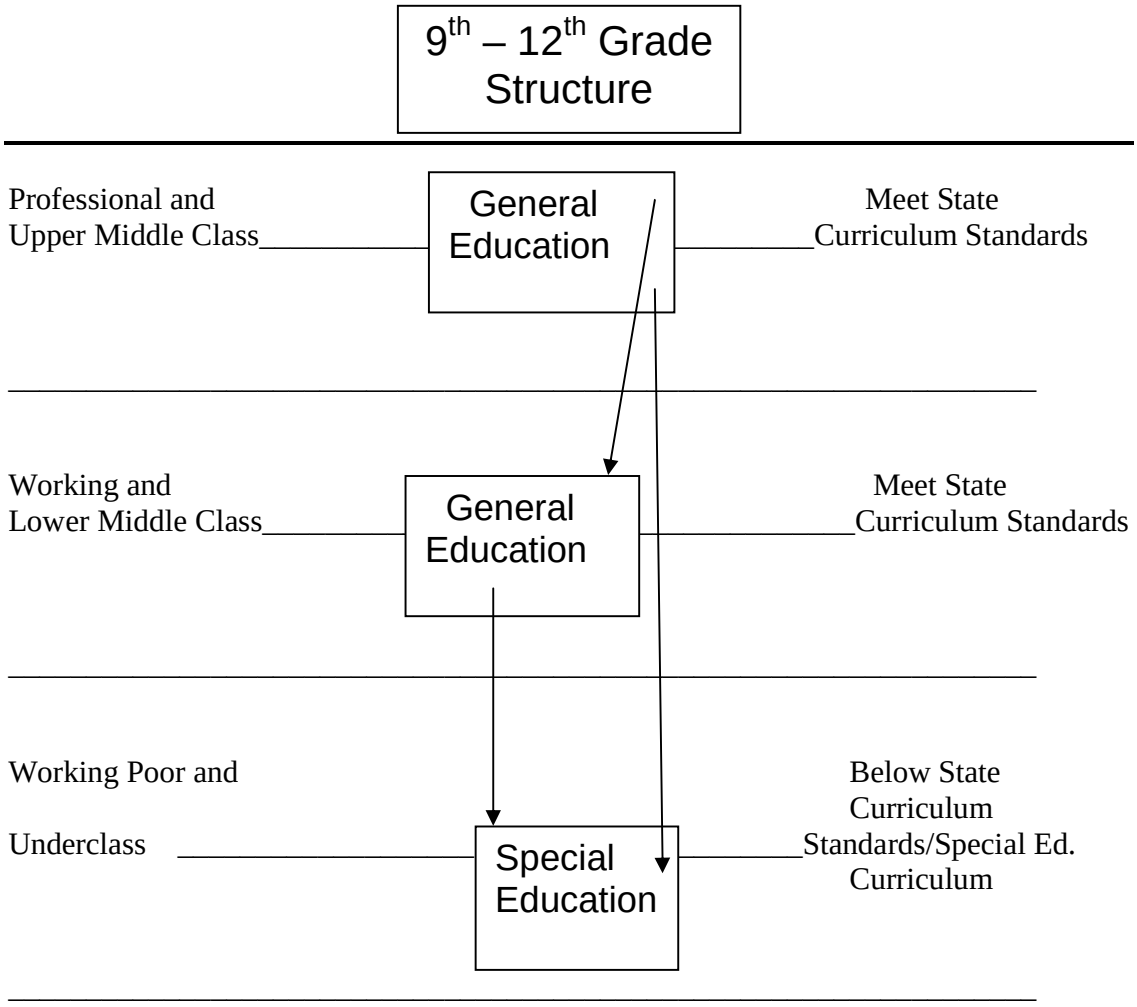

Figure 15: Ninth – Twelfth Grade Structure

Free or Reduced Lunch-High School

Most of the students who were organized into the Alternative Education Track or the Special Education Track were from poor families, and these students were also organized according to their free or reduced lunch status. Approximately 30%- 40% of the general education students were also eligible to receive subsidized lunches. As

students from poor families moved through the educational system from kindergarten to twelfth grade, they were less and less likely to be willing to turn in the necessary paperwork and be identified as eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. That explained the decline in the number of students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch as students got older. Many high school students would prefer not to eat rather than to be labeled or known for being the poor kid.

Rules

The school did not accept responsibility for student failure, and when students left they were the ones who made a poor choice. Students dropped out of school or left school to resolve the conflict they experienced in the school. Much of this conflict was amplified by the inflexible institutional rules imposed upon students. These rules were established to *fix* the students who did not follow the cultural norms of the high school, deter unacceptable behavior, and punish those who did not comply.

The rules were often enforced to discipline and either force compliance or exclude students by organizing them out of school. The guidelines or institutional rules for the alternative education program were very strict and structured in a manner that eliminated students from the educational institution. Often these rules were arbitrary and designed to promote compliance rather than learning. There were many examples where the rules worked to organize the students out of the alternative education program. An example was the rule in the student handbook regarding a student who had a baby. If a young lady had a baby, she was required to return to school and attend full-time within three weeks after childbirth. Another example where rules were inconsistent with needs of the students from the sub-culture of poverty was that staff would not accept late homework.

The high school had a rule that punished students who were absent from school. Further, if a student was absent because he or she was suspended, the student was not allowed to make up his or her work for credit. Many of the alternative education rules were the same as the high school rules. These rules reflected the norms and values of the professional class, but they were enforced at the alternative education program with poor students who clearly needed a true alternative form of education.

The rules in the high school were created to support the expectations of the dominant professional culture. The rules and norms of the high school were also created to punish the class whose culture was a mismatch to the valued culture.

Whereas the high school had rules, rules, and more rules, conversely, the middle school tended to have guidelines and be more flexible. Rituals were part of the institution. The high school culture established many rules that reinforced the educational system and the delivery of instruction. These institutional rules were set to perpetuate and protect the professional culture of Ionia High School.

The Ionia Public Schools and the professional culture within the Ionia community shared the following values: (a) being on time, (b) rigorous academics, (c) competition, and (d) following the rules established for the institution. When individuals broke the rules, the school had a very well established system of punishments called the *Student Code of Conduct*, which identified the reprimand or punishment given for each individual infraction.

The Student Code of Conduct was a system of punishments developed to maintain the institution and perpetuate the professional culture and socialization of our students according to the values of the upper and middle class. Usually, in school and in the

community, the two groups that composed the affluent and working class were interdependent, with each one complementing and reinforcing the other. There were also times when conflict existed between the professional class and the working class students.

One example shows how the high school rules were very black and white. A parent reported that when her son was a senior, the school nurse called her to get permission for the son to leave school. After talking with the parent, the nurse "sent him home" because he was ill. When the student returned to school the next day, he was summoned to the assistant principal's office and threatened with an in-school suspension because his mother did not call in his absence. The mother responded that the school sent him home and knew that he was ill. Now he was in the office in trouble because the mother did not call the school to excuse his absence for being ill? The rule was that parents must call in each and every time a student was absent, regardless of whether it made any sense. The school sent the young man home, and still required the parent to call the school to excuse the absence.

Another example involved the 10-day rule, which dictated that if a student was absent more than 10 days, he or she lost credit in the class regardless of the grade they earned. This was because the culture of the high school valued attendance and seat time. Students who missed too many days automatically failed regardless of their level of achievement. To further complicate the situation, students who were late too many times automatically received an unexcused absence, which was added to other unexcused days. The mismatch in cultural norms was evident when it came to missing days of school. The students who missed too many days were also likely to forget to have their parent write a

note or get the infamous doctor's note to excuse their absence. Game over. Observations and conversations with parents indicated that students and parents who were poor were afraid to appeal when more than 10 absences occurred. They knew they would have to face a committee of staff members who were well meaning yet very inflexible. To the staff members, the process was about punishment and teaching a lesson to the student who missed too many days. The staff made decisions through their cultural lenses, and there was no reason for students to miss 10 days of school. Students needed to be held accountable. The idea was *Tough Love*.

Many students were denied credit if they exceed 10 absences in any class during a semester. The only way to overcome the 10 absences rule was to submit a doctor's note for being absent. However, another example shows how rules were used to punish students. A student who qualified for free and reduced lunch explained that her mom could not afford to take her to a doctor, so the student brought in a note signed by her aunt who was a nurse. The absence note was not accepted by the high school teacher's attendance appeals committee, and the student lost credit in her classes.

In another example, a freshman missed more than 10 school days in two classes. Her mom had called in to excuse her from school. She missed some days for illness, cold, flu, and others to go with her family. She missed 13 days in two classes which meant that, according to school rules, she was not eligible to appeal. That started a downward spiral of events for the student. She was passing all of her classes in spite of her absences, but lost credit in the two classes where she missed too many days. Her family accepted this because they felt powerless to navigate the complex set of policies and procedures. She had been absent with her parents' permission, and it became painfully obvious that seat

time was very important to the school. It was one of the institutional rules. The student had passed all of her classes but was given failing grades and was on her way to being organized out. The chain of events illustrates how this happened. She was not able to take driver's education because her grade point average (GPA), dropped below a 2.0. She was not eligible to go out for athletics because her GPA dropped below a 2.0. She lost confidence in herself and hated high school. She refused to attend the high school and left school for a period of time. She finally agreed to attend the alternative school program. Her leaving the high school had everything to do with a freshman who was caught in the rules for rules' sake. Rules protect the institution and not the students.

Many of the rules were established to satisfy the needs of staff. For example, two students from the same family were not allowed to attend our alternative education program. The director's rule allowed teachers to decide whom they would accept in their alternative education classroom. If teachers had difficulty with the student's older brother or sister, they could refuse to accept a sibling in their class. Their reasoning was that they had had no success with the brother or sister and the sibling was just like them; and besides, the parents wouldn't support teachers before and wouldn't support the younger child either.

The high school culture was very inflexible, and the institutional rules were strictly enforced. The institutional rules in our high school perpetuated the high school culture, which supported the professional college track student and punished those who were not college prep students or students from the working class. Many of these rules negatively affected our missing students and helped to facilitate their leaving.

This is not to suggest that rules and structure are not important. Clearly, managing a large number of students in an educational setting requires a rational system of organization. Students are well served by being socialized to understand the normative structures that will shape much of their social interaction as adults. However, rules also serve to endorse a hidden curriculum that values compliance over understanding, rigidity over flexibility, and rigor over learning.

Time

There were differences in how the sub-cultures in Ionia used the concept of time. The cultural groups were divided by the way in which they applied time to their daily lives, and time was primarily viewed in two very different ways by the three sub-cultures.

For professionals, the upper middle class, and many in the working and lower middle class, time was viewed as a commodity. Being on time, completing tasks on time, organizing, and structuring time was important and understood as monochromatic. That is, one did things at a certain time; things were done one step at a time. Most families in these cultural groups tended to be task-oriented, and time-on-task was typically separate and distinct from the individual's social time. Accordingly, these individuals valued being on time and punctuality, completing tasks or jobs, and maintaining schedules. They often saw time as a linear function, with one thing occurring at a time. Time was to take precedence over everything else.

The professional and working class cultures in the high school viewed time as essential and believed success came to those who were prompt. The working class and professional class, for the most part, got up with an alarm clock, expected to eat lunch

around noon, dinner around six, and typically had a time designated as “bed time.” Their thought process and lives were laid out in a linear fashion planning for tomorrow. They lived according to a schedule.

Students from working poor or underclass families saw time differently, not better or worse, differently. This often came into conflict with the high school’s organizational structures, which were predicated on the culture views of time held by those who controlled the organization of schooling, the professionals and upper middle class. The perspective of time for the working poor or underclass families was more flexible when it came to the scheduling. Events occurred as they fit into the structure of the social relationships in which they lived. Many individuals who viewed time in this manner were able to integrate activities involving tasks with social activities. From this perspective of time, it was more important to keep relationships and provide for social needs than finishing tasks. This view of time was more holistic, in which many things may happen at once (University of Iowa, 2005). You got up when you awoke, you ate when you were hungry, you did things as the people, relationships, and circumstances shaped the day.

A teenager from a poor family was asked a question about time, “How long does it take you to get ready for school?” He didn’t know. He got up, got ready, and when he was ready, he left for school. Because time was not a linear concept, this student was likely to miss the bus. The school day, as we know it, with its inflexible schedule, wasn’t created for this student.

As Albert Einstein (1879-1955) remarked, “The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once.” Time did not have the same meaning for many poor families as it did for the other cultural groups. Many students who were poor did not wear

watches or own alarm clocks. In another discussion with a student who was often late to school regarding how long it took to get ready for school, the student could not identify a time table for getting ready for school. The student was unable to plan and use time backwards to get to school on time. The conversation went something like this: “You need to be at school by 7:35 am in order to give yourself 10 minutes to go to your locker or grab a donut in the cafeteria. It takes you 10 minutes to ride to school.” Then the big question was asked, “How long does it take you to get ready for school”? The high school student did not have a clue how long it took her to get ready for school. No wonder this particular student was often late for school. Her view of time was not consistent with how time was used in the school. She was not able to perceive taking the linear concept of time backwards to anticipate and predict how much time she would need to arrive at a specific time. Likewise, the school was not able to understand the student’s flexible holistic perception of time, and, ultimately, this cultural misunderstanding of time created conflict for the student.

The professional culture in the high school was the socio-economic class that dominated the educational system; this culture valued arriving on time. School starts at 7:45 a.m., and if students were more than 10 minutes late, they were counted absent for the full 70-minute class period. If students were tardy, they could be removed from class and assigned in-school suspension or given a detention. A group of high school staff members did not want to excuse any student for being tardy, regardless of why students were late. Their premise was that arriving on time was so important that there was no acceptable reason for being late for school. Being on time was valued by the staff at Ionia High School. Just as with other rules and procedures, this is not to suggest that rules

related to being on time and completing tasks on time should not be in place. It is indeed important that the concept of time that is inherently a part of the wider normative structure of society be taught. But the institution's lack of flexibility in understanding the cultural lens that often shaped the perception of time for students from the working poor or underclass families contributed to their alienation and eventual disappearance from school.

Homework

Homework affected children from the poverty, working, and professional cultures in very different ways. Because of how it impacted each sub-culture in the high school, homework was viewed by students from these cultural groups differently. Parents' view of homework ranged from good to bad on the basis of their cultural perspective. Most teachers at the high school planned, as a part of their lessons, to assign homework and expected their assignment to be completed and returned on time. If the homework was not completed by the student, consequences or punishments ensued from the classroom teacher.

Parents of students from the professional and upper middle class expected, even demanded, homework be given on a daily basis; further, they requested that homework be very rigorous. As an administrator at the high school, there were phone calls from professional class parents who complained if a teacher was not giving their son or daughter homework in a college preparation course. Parents complained if they did not see their child challenged by homework. There was an expectation on the part of the professionals that homework would prepare their child for higher education.

Many parents of students from the lower middle and working class in general supported their child doing homework but did not want a lot of homework that took too long to complete. If teachers in the general education curriculum gave too much homework, parents made phone calls requesting the amount of homework be reviewed and reduced. Their expectation was for child to do homework but not at the same frequency or duration as those in the professional class. Those from the working and lower middle class expected homework only to the extent that it could be shown to be relevant. They would not complain if their child avoided courses with large amounts of homework. Their expectation was often that their child would not attend college and homework would take up time that they might otherwise spend working after school. Many students who were a part of the working class held jobs after school, and homework may have interfered with their ability to maintain employment.

Consistent with the culture of the working class was the homework practices in the curriculum and instruction for vocational education. Vocational education provided hands-on learning experiences for many middle class students, and seldom did students in this educational environment need to take their assignments home as homework. Vocational education provided a match for the needs of the students from the working class culture by limiting the assignments required after school. School did not interfere with the needs of the students and families after hours. Likewise, vocational education provided the job training needed to enter the world of work. This was a match and consistent with the needs of the working class. Many middle class students wanted to have job training in order to prepare them for a career directly out of high school, and

vocational education provided students with skills and job training along with career and job placement.

For students from working poor and underclass families, homework was often very difficult for them to complete. The parents indicated that they dreaded the conflict that homework created, and many parents felt unequipped to support and explain the high school curriculum. It was pointed out that many parents struggled in school, and they felt "dumb" when they were unable to help their son or daughter with their homework. Some parents voiced their concern that school work needed to stay at school, and they valued the separation between home and school. Many times this home space or family time was infringed upon with homework. Completing homework on a daily basis took time away from the tasks involved with providing for the family needs. Frequently, children of high school age were needed to help meet the basic needs of the family. This may have included providing care for their siblings in place of completing homework. Teachers also sent class projects home to be completed, often with the parent's assistance. Many of these projects expected the families to have items already at home or required the parent to drive to the store in order to purchase items which the family could not afford. Homework was also often difficult for poor students due to the number of times families moved. Living in a household that was transient made it difficult to have "a place for everything and everything is its place." Assignments were often lost or misplaced.

Families from the different sub-cultures tended to view homework differently. For some it was an essential part of the educational process necessary to prepare their child for college, whereas others viewed homework as intrusive on their home life and believed that school should not carry over into the hours when a child was at home with their

family. In some cases, it was more important for their children to have a job or to help with household chores. Quite often parents felt unable to assist with homework, especially at the high school level. The playing field within the individual classrooms was reasonably level for all students while they were in school. Students in a classroom were afforded similar if not the same experiences and resources; conversely, homework acted as the great un-equalizer. The resources, expectations, and support in a student's home life, at times, made homework more difficult for the poor student.

A high school teacher related being very frustrated with a student who was not completing his or her homework. On questioning to determine more specifics, the teacher shared the student's story. The student went home daily and was responsible for the care of multiple younger siblings. The single parent left for work as soon as the oldest child got home from school and put him in charge of feeding and caring for the elementary age siblings. Once the high school student completed the family duties and got the elementary age children into bed, the student played video games instead of doing homework. The teacher wanted the parent to punish the high school student and not allow access to the video games. The teacher wanted the student to do the homework, and the parent wanted the high school student to provide the needed supervision for the family. The needs of the school were in conflict with the needs of the family. How could the parent punish the child when the child was being very responsible by providing care for younger siblings? Further discussion with the teacher indicated that the high school student was passing the course except for the failing grades on the missing homework. His grades on tests and quizzes showed mastery of the content. The teacher faced a dilemma between how the student was actually achieving, the teacher's classroom expectations, and the institutional

rules which were engrained into her instructional practices and cultural viewpoint. As a teacher, she expected every student to do homework every night. You always assign homework on a daily basis. That's just the way things were done. Now, here was a student who could show mastery of the material but was failing because he did not do his homework. The teacher asked what she should do. The teacher wanted the student to be responsible and do his homework. The question was how much more responsible could this young man be? He was going straight home from school and fixing dinner, helping out and caring for younger children in his family so his mom could work. Wow! How responsible of him. It was suggested to the teacher that she consider not grading the student down because of his homework and that she base his grade on the mastery of the tests and quizzes. She was very uncomfortable with the idea of not grading the homework because homework had always been a part of her grading practices. This grading practice was punishing a student because of his home life. Progress was made to provide for the mismatch between the cultural expectation of the school and the student when the teacher decided that she could change her grading practices in order to be able to base the student's grade upon his mastery within her classroom. Table 2 outlines the sub-cultures with the organization of curriculum, home-school relationship, and homework.

Table 2
Patterns of Sub-cultures with Curriculum, Home-School Connection, and Homework

Sub-culture	Curriculum	Relationships	Homework
Professional and Upper Middle Class	College Preparation	School-Home Connected	Rigorous Frequent
Working and Lower Middle Class	General Education Vocational Education	School-Home Connected	Moderate Occasional
Working Poor and Underclass	Alternative Education Special Education	School-Home Not Connected	Easy Rare

Extracurricular Activities

Many students in the professional and upper middle class were involved in athletics, extracurricular activities, clubs, and band. The students in this group found congruency between their values and the school. There was consistency between their cultural perception and the school's perception of what was important and valued. They were encouraged and celebrated for their academic, athletic, and extracurricular accomplishments.

The dominant culture of the high school was very competitive in both the classroom and on the field. Competition was valued in the community and in the high school culture. There were some athletes who took advantage of this status and considered themselves better than or above their peers. This caused conflict with some students.

If you were an athlete, you were much more likely to graduate, and it would be unlikely that you would have been found within the group of missing students. There was a positive correlation and direct relationship between a student athlete and their odds of graduation. Very few athletes drop out. Table 3 shows the involvement of sub-cultures in extra-curricular activities, orientation to time, and graduation expectations.

Table 3
Patterns of Sub-cultures with Orientation to Time, Extra-Curricular Activities, and Graduation

Class	Orientation to time	Extra-curricular activities involvement	Graduation from Ionia H.S.
Professional and Upper Middle Class	Linear	Frequent	Yes
Working and Lower Middle Class	Linear	Moderate	Yes
Working Poor and Underclass	Holistic	Infrequent	No

Few special education students or poor students were involved in athletics, and alternative education students were not allowed to participate in athletics. Even though the district had not implemented “pay to play,” athletics were expensive for the family.

The district attempted to provide for some of the needs of families by providing $5 physicals each spring, but other costs, including include athletic shoes and transportation to and from the practices and games, made it difficult for students to participate. Students who were poor seldom participated in athletics. It would have been difficult for many of their families to have their child away from the home and unavailable to assist their parent(s) if they were involved with athletics. At times, the student who was attending the middle school or high school was needed by the family to provide child care for their younger siblings or expected to get a job after school. Many students chose employment over athletics as a way to be more self-sufficient or to financially help their family. Students living in poverty, or students from working class families, who had participated in athletics in the middle school would often withdraw from activities in high school to work and afford a car, gas, and insurance. High school athletics tended to be for the professional class students whose parents could afford their participation.

Consequences

The hierarchical socio-economic structures that developed over time in the community of Ionia were reflected in the sub-cultures found in the Ionia public schools. It was the dominant socio-economic groups who controlled the establishment, arrangement, and organization of the social institutions found in the community. One very important social institution built in Ionia was the educational system. Schools were established and designed to reproduce the existing social order. The schools in Ionia and elsewhere were created in order to sort and select students into groups or classes in order to reproduce the existing social structure. The elementary, middle school, and high school each approached the diversity of the sub-cultures and the social order of students and

their families very differently. The Ionia Public Schools created many organizational structures which served the needs of some of the students who attend the school district, but not all. In the Ionia schools there was a system structured to sort, track, and select students into groups which was used primarily to provide and maintain the social order of the community.

The sorting of students within the Ionia Public Schools began early in the elementary schools when students were in grades K-5. The elementary school structure sorted students into general education, Title I, and special education. Over 50% of the students in the elementary were also sorted according to their eligibility to receive free or reduced lunch. Often during the elementary years, the students who were sorted out of the general education program were provided a variety of support services to accommodate for the gaps that existed in academic achievement. Students also received social supports, which were intended to meet children's basic needs. The supports were developed to help keep youngsters in school and provide for their appropriate socialization.

By the time students entered the middle school, the supportive structures of the school began to be eliminated. Students in the middle school continued to be sorted into the structures which were established in grades K-5. Most of the students who were sorted into general education, Title I, and special education in elementary school remained in the same group in the middle school. Again, a large percentage of the students in the middle school continued to be sorted according to their eligibility to receive free or reduced lunch. During the middle school years, some of the students who were sorted out of the general education were given support services to help them with their academics. Some of the adolescents who needed social support were given

additional help to allow them to be able to work on their academics. When basic needs were not met it was difficult for children to learn; it was hard for students to focus on reading, writing, math, and so on when they were hungry.

In the middle school, the accommodations and support structures began to be removed as students progressed from the sixth to seventh and eighth grades. Just as these supporting programs were being removed, the selection process had begun in earnest. When students reached seventh and eighth grades, the middle school structure began to select and place students into advanced mathematics and advanced English classes, which, for many, would determine their placement in the various tracks in the high school. Most students selected to be in the advanced courses in the middle school were also selected to be enrolled in the college preparation courses in the high school.

The students who entered the high school were sorted into general education, vocational education, special education, and alternative education tracks, or selected to be in the college prep track. By the time students entered the Ionia High School as freshmen, the supporting structures, which had been in place in the elementary and middle school, were all but gone. Again, a large percentage of the students in the high school were sorted according to their eligibility to receive free or reduced lunch, but there were many students who would not return the lunch form for fear that other students would find out that they were poor. Many of the students found themselves sorted or tracked into programs or curricular pathways which often reflected the student's status, rank, or position within the social order of the high school. Frequently, the students who were sorted into the lower tracks struggled with their academics in high school. Without the structures in place to provide support or accommodations for the academic and social

needs, some students from working poor or underclass families came to see a disconnect between themselves and cultural structures of school.

Though students were sorted in the Ionia schools beginning with their first encounter in the elementary grades, the cultural mismatch that would come to plague many students from working poor and underclass families would not become completely manifest until they had made their way through the Ionia school systems. As students moved from elementary school, to middle school, and finally to high school, the sorting that was intended to aid in providing the necessary support to bridge the cultural mismatch would systematically be removed. By the time students entered the latter stages of middle school, the structuring of schooling that was designed to promote the value systems of the professionals and upper middle class and, to a lesser degree, the cultural values of the working and lower middle class, came to be so alienating to the cultural structure of those from student in poverty, that leaving school became a more viable option than staying. The elementary school years meant sorting and supporting, the middle school continued sorting and tracking, and with the transition to high school came sorting and selecting. Table 4 shows the progression of sorting, tracking, and selecting.

Table 4
Ionia Schools' Progression of Sorting/Tracking/Selecting

Elementary School Sorting	Middle School Sorting/Tracking	High School Sorting/Tracking/Selecting
Free and Reduced Lunch	Free and Reduced Lunch	Free and Reduced Lunch
General Education	General Education	General Education
Title I	Title I	
Special Education	Special Education	Special Education
		Vocational Education
		Alternative Education
	Selecting	
	Advanced Math	Honors Courses
	Advanced English	Advanced Placement Courses
	Accommodations	
Title I Social Supports	Title I Social Supports	

Students who experienced a match between the culture of their home and community with the high school entered school and viewed it as a positive, supportive learning environment. If the culture of students entering high school was a match with the norms, values, rules, and tasks in their lives, they were integrated into the high school. The institutional rules made sense and the rituals were valued. Students whose background was validated and perpetuated within the culture of the school were extremely successful at Ionia High School. The high school existed to transmit the culture of those in power. The high school was, by design, set up to perpetuate or effect the cultural transmission of the next generation of professionals within our community.

Students who entered our high school and found the professional culture a mismatch with their home culture found the high school experience frustrating, fearful, and punitive. If a mismatch existed between the culture of the family and the culture of the school, it was very likely that an adversarial relationship between home and school existed or developed. There was conflict. The mismatch and conflict between the cultures caused these students to be organized out of the system. When the separation occurred, these students were likely to drop out to resolve the conflict between school, home, and, most important, the student.

Interviews with the missing students from our high school attempted to find out why they stopped attending school. They did not know why other than they did not like school and they left. Looking at their experiences and the punishments that the missing students endured over the years, it was no wonder they did not enjoy school and were happy to leave. School was a tremendous source of conflict for these students. Even worse, it created a conflict between the student's home life and school life. The educational system was viewed by the student and their family as punitive and discouraging. In the end, it failed to provide what the students needed, an educational system based upon their culture, their needs, and their values. They came to be the missing students, but not missed by those who remained in school and found congruence between their culture and that of the schools. Figure 16 shows student outcomes by groups, and Figure 17 shows outcomes for special education students.

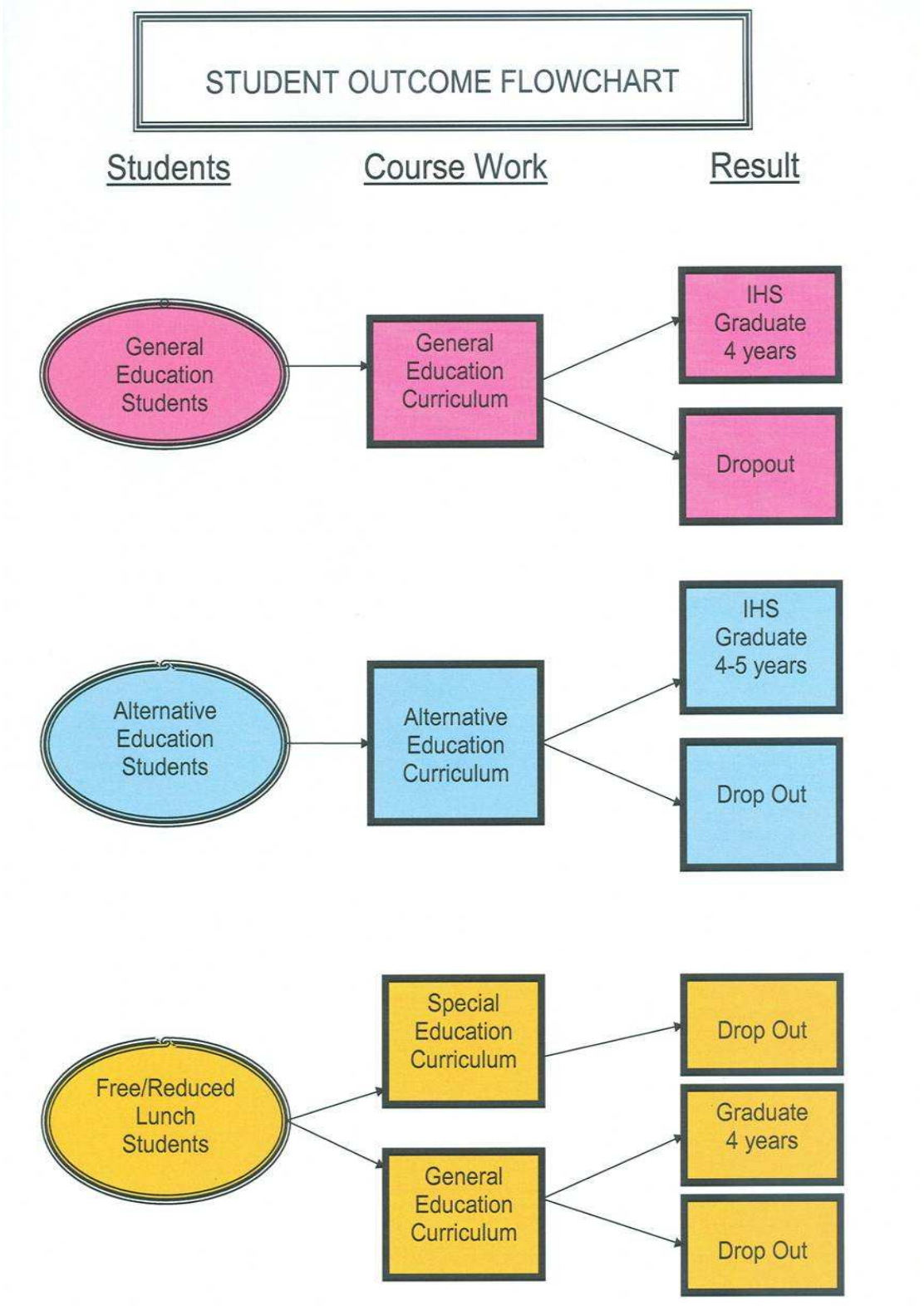

Figure 16: Student Outcomes

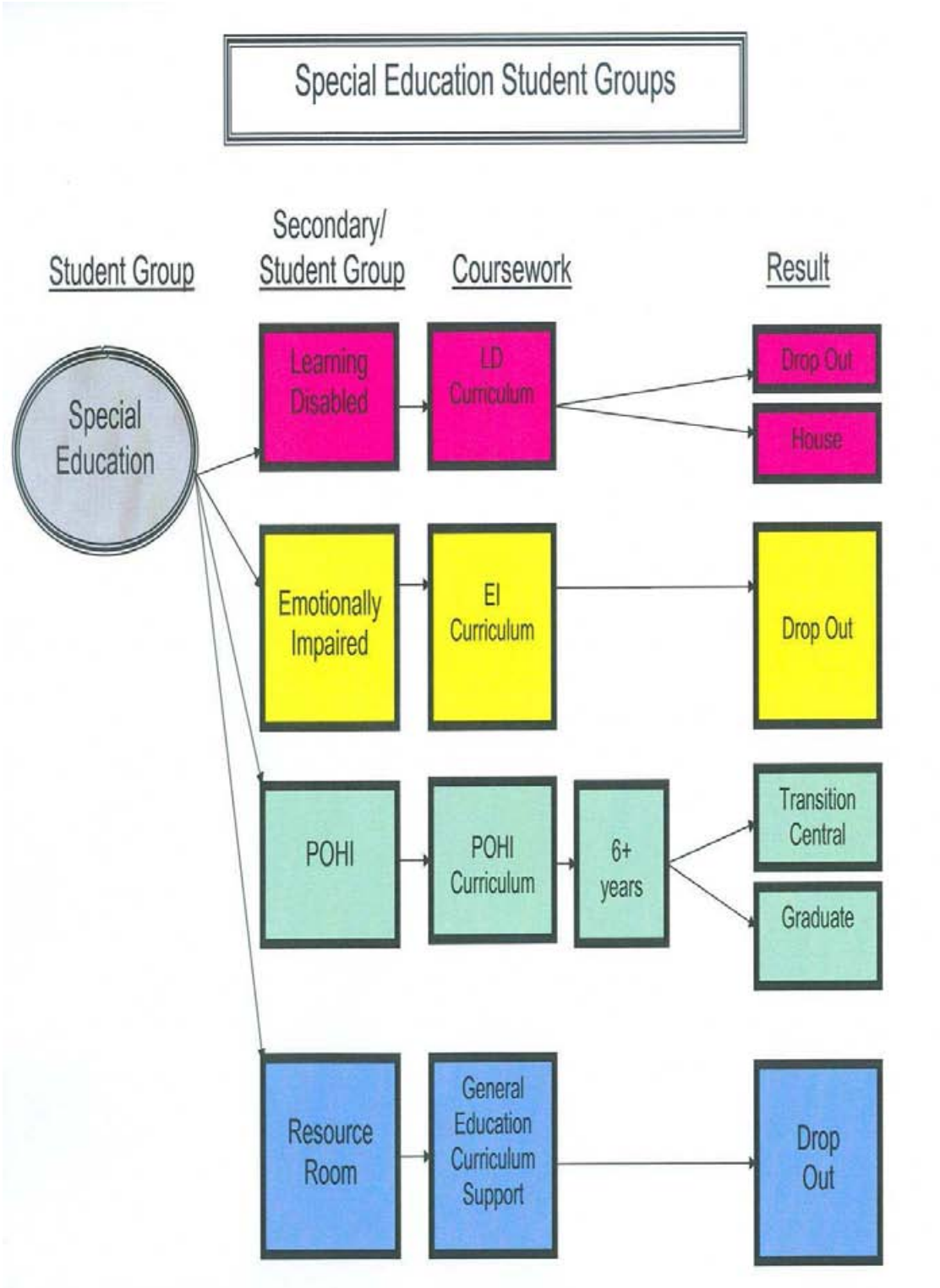

Figure 17: Special Education Outcomes

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY

The foundation for this study was my perceptions, first as a building level administrator and now as Superintendent of the Ionia Public School District, that each June students who had begun their educational journeys in elementary school had not completed that journey with a diploma and were missing. As I looked for these missing students, I found a staggering number of students who left school. Each of the graduating classes from 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 experienced an average loss of nearly 28%. This trend has continued to the present. From my perspective, this represented a tragic breach of our responsibility to fulfill our mission "to educate *all students* in an environment that fosters their preparation as responsible citizens" (Ionia Public Schools Annual Report, 2005).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine why Ionia High School students left or dropped out of the high school before graduating. Who were these missing students and what did they experience while attending the Ionia Public Schools that worked to facilitate their departure? Understanding what happened to the missing students was important to me as an educational leader, but as the Superintendent of the Ionia Public Schools, it was essential. Although the loss of even one student has a significant financial impact on the district, the cost to the young person, his family, the community, and society is immeasurable. The aim of this study was to comprehend what happened to the missing students in the school district in order to initiate changes and modifications in educational programs, policies, procedures, and structures, that would better provide for the needs of all children. Rather than examining these students and determining how they

failed, I sought to examine how the organization and structures of schooling failed these students.

Conceptual Framework

The organization and structure of schooling is designed for the transmission of the existing culture to the next generation. The determination of what knowledge, skills, and dispositions are organized into schools is a function of the values and beliefs of those cultural groups who establish and operate the schools; those with the power and status to control the organizational and operational processes. Communities are made up of diverse cultural groups or sub-cultures. While each group shares some general cultural structures, the sub-cultures reflect the life experiences and task orientations shared by members of each group. In this study, the characteristics of these cultural groups were observed through the values, beliefs, and normative structures that have developed over time and are deeply rooted in the community and visible in the Ionia Public Schools.

The Ionia Public Schools were established and have endured since the days of the earliest settlers. Looking historically at the evolution of the culture within the community provided the understanding of what happened to the lost children and why they became missing. How the social order became structured and developed through the interaction between various cultural groups within the community and schools was important in understanding how the missing students experienced schooling. Discerning the cultural structures reflected in the community's social organization, including schools, and examining how students from different cultural groups experienced schooling was important in gaining insight into how the schools' organizational structures serve some students but not all. The purpose of this study was to understand what happened to the

missing students, and to examine their educational experiences, along with the manner in which the schools and the students' lives were interconnected. To guide this research the following questions were developed:

1. What was the nature of the development, evolution, and persistence of the various cultural groups in Ionia?
2. What role did each cultural group play in the development of schooling in Ionia?
3. What were the dominant cultural values, beliefs, and norms and how are these reflected in the schools?
4. Who were the missing students and what was the nature of their cultural membership?
5. How did the culture of the community shape the nature of schooling and the way the missing students experienced schooling?

The conceptual framework used in this study was grounded in institutional theory, conflict theory, and cultural theory. Ultimately, cultural theory came to best explain what was observed in this research. Because this study sought to understand the socially constructed meanings of those investigated, an ethnographic approach, which is grounded in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, was used for the framework and design of this study. This was a longitudinal historical case study of the Ionia community and its schools.

Historical Development of the Community and the Structuring of Schools

Over time, various cultural groups have emerged and evolved in the community of Ionia. With the exception of the Native Americans who lived in this region for

centuries, these cultural groups immigrated to the Ionia area and brought the cultural heritage of the peoples they left behind. The cultures from the past contributed to the establishment of the contemporary culture which exists in the Ionia Public Schools. Although the past is not a determinant of the present or a predictor of the future, contemporary organizations, such as schools, do not arise de novo, but emerge from cultural elements inherited from the past.

The first inhabitants of the land that would become the communities of Ionia, Lyons, and Muir were the Native Americans. First the Prairie Indians and later the Algonquin tribes would call the land along the O-wash-to-nong (Grand River) home. The Algonquin worked and lived according to the values and expectations of others in their tribe. The culture of the Algonquin Indians had a great sense of honor and respect and a one-ness with the land. Status and prestige were not determined by the accumulation of property or wealth, but was derived from deeds and the wisdom of age. Private property would have been a foreign concept to these native peoples. Education was informal with all members of the tribe contributing as teachers.

By the early seventeenth century, French explorers made their way to Michigan and immediately recognized the wealth of the land. They found the native tribes to be generally hospitable, and the two cultures were able to coexist. Though a few French priests attempted to establish schools to educate the native children in the Christian ways of Europe, these attempts failed. Although the French sought to exploit the natural resources of the region, they did not attempt to recreate their society in the backwoods of Michigan. The French who lived in Michigan were rugged trappers and had little use for

the finery of French culture. Instead, they built relationships which were complementary and supportive of both cultures, allowing them to live together peacefully.

The French would remain in control of the Michigan wilderness for the next 100 years. Bloody conflicts between the French and English over dominance in the region would finally leave the English in control with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763. This control would be short-lived as the English would give way to the Americans with the fall of Fort Detroit in 1786. It would be the American colonists, who first left England to avoid the control of the king in religious matters and to reap the economic benefits offered by the new world, who would come to plant their culture in the wilderness of Michigan. Once the threat of the French and later the English was resolved, the colonists began to make their way westward. The first cultural conflict would emerge as the colonists brought their belief in property rights and continued their pursuit of land ownership by working to acquire land from the Indians, eventually forcing the Indians out of Lower Michigan.

As the Americans took control of the Michigan Territory at the beginning of the nineteenth century, few settlements existed except those along the southwestern shores of Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie. With the opening of the Erie Canal, the way was cleared for the settlement of Michigan. Men such as Samuel Dexter and Louis Campau, who had made their fortunes in the east, saw in the wilderness a land of opportunity for themselves and their investors. Moving into the lands of the Grand River Valley in 1830, they established trading posts to take advantage of the lucrative fur trade and bought large tracks of land to shape the foundation of permanent settlements. Following close behind them were the laborers and farmers who would till the land, fell the trees, and work in the

mills for the growing timber industry. It would be the culture of these founding families that would become the dominant culture in Ionia.

These first settlers were from western New England and New York. They brought their Puritan culture, a conceptualization of a natural ordering of society and a hierarchical structure shaped by their theology. It was this English patriarchal culture that was established in the new communities**.** They recreated what they valued, and therefore, organized and built churches, schools, and governmental institutions to transmit and protect their culture. In 1834, only four short years after their arrival, the first school was built. This was a private enterprise established by the leaders of the community to ensure that their children acquired the necessary academic skills so they could advance to their appropriate station in life. Because most parents could not afford to pay the rate-bill required for attendance after the nominal taxes used to support the school ran out, the vast majority of children in the community received only a modicum of schooling.

The Grand River provided a route to transport materials and goods by steam ships until they were replaced by railroads. The railroads and timber industry nurtured a thriving economy. Taverns, inns, and other businesses appeared as fast as they could be built. In addition to Ionia, the towns of Lyons and Muir were laid out at this time. Thousands were making their way to what was rapidly becoming a prominent Michigan community. By the late nineteenth century, the lumber and saw mills began to decline and were replaced by other forms of manufacturing and industry. Many businesses established and grew, and the community flourished.

A prosperous merchant and professional class emerged and became the leaders of the community. With the growth of industry and manufacturing, a large working class

joined those who labored on the farms that surrounded the community. Some who came to take advantage of the booming economy found themselves in hard times, as booms turned to bust with the economic cycles of growth and decline of various industries. Poorhouses and, later, prisons would be established to deal with the growing number of working poor and the impoverished.

The established institutions including the schools reflected the values and beliefs of those of wealth and status in the community. The grand homes, churches, businesses, and governmental buildings that replaced the wood and log structures of an earlier time were a testament to what was valued by the dominant culture, which reflected high social status and wealth in the Ionia community

From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, new populations made their way to Ionia. German and Irish immigrants joined the community, as waves of "foreigners" reached America. Schools continued to grow and flourish with common schooling provided to all children to ensure their proper acquisition of the appropriate community values. In Ionia, these values reflected the Protestant heritage of the dominant culture; obedience to authority, moral purity, hard work, self-control, social order (hierarchy), and material success. The business leaders and owners and the higher skilled laborers, who would become the professional and upper middle class within Ionia, controlled a vibrant community establishing a court house, post office, prison, poor house, an asylum, and schools.

A common school experience was supported for all children to thwart evil and ensure that every child was literate in order to read the bible and understand the laws of the land. But for some, education was more than this. For the few who could afford the

tuition beyond the common school experience, schooling was a path to advanced forms of education, which would ensure access to higher social status. As early as 1868, the Ionia Union School enrolled 600 students in its college preparatory program. The earliest high school in Ionia was structured to reflect the curriculum requirements of the state's universities and colleges. Formal institutional structures were in place to ensure the appropriate occupational trajectory for the students of affluence and status.

From the early twentieth century onward, the community of Ionia continued to grow and expand. For many, the auto industry and manufacturing, along with the prisons, were sources of employment and provided a livelihood for many families. Those within the professional and upper middle class continued to be the decision-makers and leaders in the community. Social institutions within the community continued to reflect this cultural group's beliefs, values, and normative standards.

Schools continued to expand with the addition of elementary schools, the growth of the high school, and the development of a middle school. New student populations entered the Ionia school system and remained for longer periods of time. Driving this expansion was the development and enforcement of mandatory attendance laws and a belief by those who ran the Ionia schools that a better educated labor force promoted economic prosperity and social order. Rather than alter the existing structure of the schools, especially the high school, which was still designed to prepare students for college, alternative curricular paths were developed, which served to separate students into stratified career paths or, as was discovered, out of school.

Contemporary Community Structures and the Structuring of Schools

Three distinct cultural groups emerged in the community of Ionia, hierarchically organized around the socio-economic status and task orientations of their members: professional and upper middle class, working and lower middle class, and the working poor and underclass. While each shared elements of the broader cultural matrix of the community, each developed unique behaviors, lifestyles, and worldviews distinct from the other sub-cultures within the community. They each developed different cultural strategies to deal with the circumstances of their lives. The essential conflict over who should be educated, the purpose of education, what children should be taught, and who should determine issues related to school structure and policy, arose from cultural conflicts between these competing groups. Figure 18 depicts the cultural dynamics at work in the development of Ionia schools.

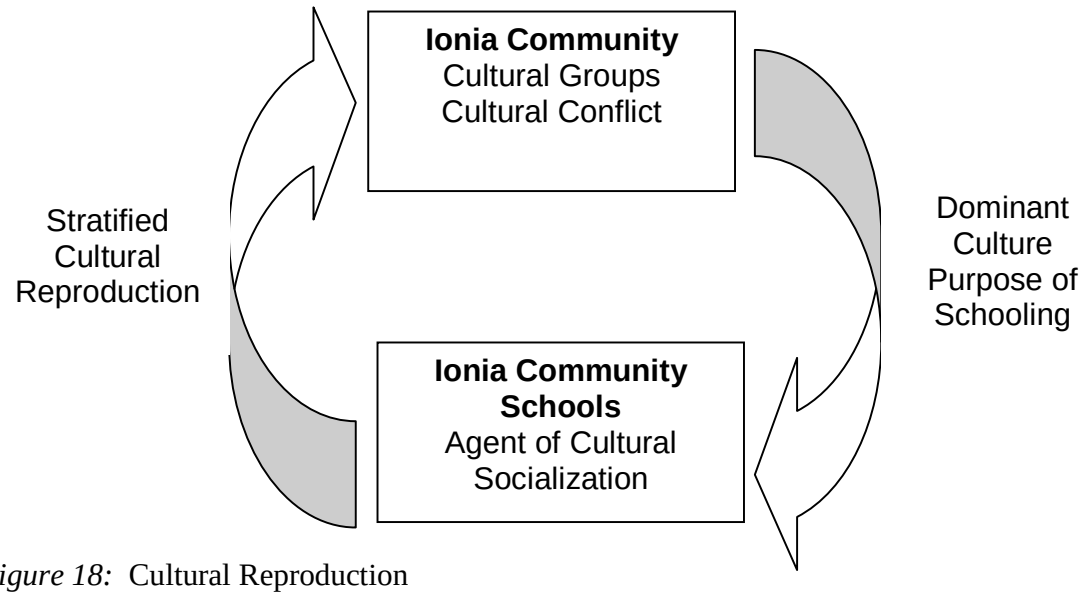

Figure 18: Cultural Reproduction

The dominant cultural group, members of the professional and upper middle class in Ionia, came to control the structures of social institutions and shape the very fabric of the broader social culture in the community, including the educational system. The organizational structures would come to reflect their desire to have their culture system transmitted to their children. The schools would be designed to provide their children with the type of environment and preparation necessary to reproduce their social status. Critical to this cultural assumption was the premise that the existing organizational structures of schooling that had served them well, as evidenced by their success, was good not only for their children, but also for all children.

However, with the continued growth of the schools in Ionia and the growing number of working class and poor students in attendance, this one-size-fits-all approach came to be seen as impractical. Working and lower class families began to demand that schooling, especially high school, not only serves the needs of those preparing to go to college, but provides an educational experience in line with their cultural values. Those of the dominant culture saw these additional students as a disruption of the purpose of schooling from their perspective and were willing to support limited alternative programming for these *other* children. While additions to the school's curricular and policy structures would be developed to address the addition of sub-ordinate cultural groups to the school system, these structures would serve to track students into stratified career paths and reproduce the existing social order. Though often well intended, policies designed to "meet children where they are" would, in fact, create a system for sorting and selecting students (a function that, in earlier times, had been accomplished by the fact that higher levels of schooling were accessible to those of wealth through privatization).

Today, the sorting of students begins in the elementary schools in grades K-5, the descendants of the common schools, which were to provide a common socialization experience for all children to ensure the stability of the existing social order. The additional supports and services, which have been developed to help keep children in school, have been reasonably successful at providing for the academic and social needs of students from each of the cultural groups during their elementary years. By the time students enter the middle school, however, these supportive structures begin to be eliminated, and the organizational structures that reflect the preparatory purpose of schooling for the professional and upper middle class comes to define the nature of schooling. When students enter high school, all forms of support used to ameliorate cultural differences in the elementary school are removed. The high school is organized to reflect the cultural values of the professionals and upper middle class and, to a lesser extent, with alternative curricular tracks, the working and lower middle class. The children of the working poor and underclass experience such an extreme culture dissonance between the culture of the high school and their cultural structures, they find navigating the structure of high school extremely difficult. This mismatch or cultural conflict becomes so difficult that, for many, staying in school is not a realistic alternative. Because this incongruence between the working poor and underclass and the school's dominant culture is viewed by many in the high school as a problem that resides within the missing children and "those" families, their existence becomes marginalized. Ergo, when students come up missing at the end of 13 years of schooling, they are not missed.

Implications and Limitations

The findings of this study reflect what I was able to observe in my school district. The cultural categories that I discovered and their relationship to the organizational structure of the Ionia Public Schools may not be the same in other districts. However, the conceptual framework that I used to construct my understanding of the "missing students" in the Ionia schools may serve other educational leaders well as they attempt to ensure that no child comes up missing.

Implications-As an Education Leader

The relationships between the community and the Ionia Public Schools with the various cultural groups were discovered as a result of conducting this research. The connection that existed between the various cultural groups and how they impacted the balance within the institution was based upon the controlling, overriding professional and working class cultures. It was important to gain understanding that where educational programming and policies were not supportive of the needs, beliefs, and values of a cultural group, a conflict existed. With this knowledge, better decisions could be made as an educational leader in the Ionia Public Schools. With the understanding acquired from this research, changes needed to be made. This research and the findings may be viewed as harsh or condemning. It was not intended to be. Understanding and identifying the problem of the missing students in our district was the first step toward any potential solutions.

As an educational leader who seeks to provide for the academic, social, and emotional welfare of all children, this research has allowed for a deeper understanding of the practices and policies that were counterproductive to student achievement. Decisions

in the past were made on the basis of what we knew at the time. Now that there is a deeper understanding of the cultural needs of our students, we can better serve those needs. This research has provided me the opportunity to "walk a mile in the shoes" of the missing students, and it is now my responsibility to work to create, change, modify, and transform the Ionia educational system to provide for all children. By understanding the cultural differences that exist and attempting to see the world from others' vantage points, my decision-making ability has been enhanced. Knowledge gained has allowed our district to begin the change process in some of our organizational structures within the school. The following are some examples of the changing structures.

Reduction in Special Education – Sorting

One dramatic change which has been instituted within the Ionia Public Schools is the implementation of a program entitled *Instructional Consultation Teams*. The purpose of the program is to identify students who are falling behind and work to determine instructional strategies that would help the students get back on grade level. This reduced the number of students being identified as *Learning Disabled*. The program targeted students primarily in grades K-1-2-3 and worked with teams of school professionals to set up individual plans based upon the students' needs. This program was research-based and was designed by the University of Maryland.

Before Instructional Consultation Teams (ICT), many students did not qualify as learning disabled until they reached grades 4-5-6 or 7. The reason was that even though students were behind in K-1-2 and so on, their tests did not show a large enough achievement/ability gap until they were older. The ideology behind this program was to get students caught up in the early years instead of waiting to identify them as learning

disabled in the older grades. Special Education was an endless cycle. Once a student was identified as special education, it was almost always permanent. Instructional Consultation Teams were developed to match student learning with improved classroom instruction to keep students up with their peers academically, which created fewer students who were identified as special education.

This solution was undertaken in one elementary school and successfully expanded to all elementary schools in Ionia Public Schools by 2008. The purpose behind this initiative was to reduce the number of students in special education and increase the amount of time students spent in general education. Students who remained in general education were typically more successful than those students who were identified as special education.

Accommodations for Elementary Students

The elementary schools had been struggling with enrollment in summer school. In taking a look at the problem, there was a mismatch between the program and the students who were being served. Most of the students were from the poverty class. With this information, the program had been held at Emerson Elementary, the school with the highest poverty rate within the district. At first glance this seemed a logical choice with Emerson being the elementary school with the largest free and reduced, at-risk student population. This meant that many students at Emerson came from the culture of poverty, and it made sense to offer a summer school program at Emerson. The summer school had some success but limited enrollment. “Build it and they will come”…they did not.

The solution? Location. Because we held the summer school at Emerson, students from the other buildings across the district were less likely to attend. By moving the

summer school less than one mile away to Jefferson, more families sent their children to summer school. Even though most of the students who attend summer school were from the culture of poverty, there were a large number of families who did not want their child to attend Emerson due to its reputation as a poor area of town. Students would attend Jefferson from Emerson and the other elementary schools in the district, but students from the other elementary schools were less likely to attend Emerson. Moving the elementary summer school to Jefferson drastically increased the student enrollment. What a difference one mile made. This program met the needs of the families who were in a culture of poverty, by providing free transportation, breakfast, lunch, and educational programming to students.

Transition from Middle School to High School

Letting it happen? We don't haze freshman here. Why some kids handled the transition and some did not? If you were looking for a reason to quit school, getting harassed and hazed was a just as good as any reason to leave. Students who were considering leaving school and who were made fun of could easily decide that they didn't need to put up with this. In some respects they felt the same way about the staff, believing that the staff was letting this happen to them.

High school administrators and teachers took measures to blend the mission of producing intelligent, capable, responsible members of society with the rising need to transition and support the young individuals who attended their classes. At Ionia High School, the following programs were implemented: Blue Crew, Teacher Gap Committee and Block Scheduling, and anti-bullying training for students and staff. These programs appeared to have a positive impact upon students. The high school provided these

accommodations which helped to support the mismatch between the cultural background of the students in poverty and the culture of the high school.

High School Summer School-Credit Recovery

Decisions regarding policies and programming were made to be consistent and provide a match between the needs of the school and the needs of the students and their families. If there was a mismatch between the cultures, difficulty and conflict occurred. For example, when planning the summer school, the needs of the students who were being served were taken into account. Ionia Public Schools used to charge $100 per class for a student to enroll in summer school. The thought was that the student had been given the opportunity during the year and they had failed. The cost of the summer school staff should be covered by the students. After all, they were the ones who failed. This philosophy seemed logical, and yet, few signed up for classes, and staff members were surprised by the lack in enrollment.

Looking at the students who should have been in these courses, it was no surprise that there were never enough students enrolled to offer more than one section of summer school classes. Students who lived in poverty were likely to struggle in school and were likely to need summer school to make up credits. However, these students from the culture of poverty were unlikely to be able to afford to pay $100 to take a class they had failed. We were charging the most to those who could least afford to pay, and then we were shocked when students did not take advantage of this opportunity to make up classes.

For our high school summer school program to be successful for credit recovery, we needed to be able to meet the needs of the students who were living in poverty. Once

the mismatch between the summer school program and the students we were targeting was identified, it was obvious that previous decisions made it impossible for students to be able to afford summer school. With this knowledge we made a change to match the cultural needs of the students.

First we offered summer school to high school students at a cost of $20 per student per class. If a student could not afford the $20, we offered some scholarships and asked them to provide three hours of community service as payment. The community service could be volunteering to help an elderly neighbor, or weeding flower gardens at the school. Somehow, most students came up with $20.

Second, location was critical. We offered summer school at the middle school. For many of the high school students who struggled, the middle school was the last place where they had a feeling of success. The middle school was also in the middle of town, and those students who were living in poverty were able to walk or ride the bus to the middle school.

Meeting the needs of students in poverty, the summer school program also provided a free breakfast and free lunch to all students who attended the high school summer school. The summer school program met all of the needs of the students and their families who were a part of the culture of poverty. Because there was a match between the needs of the students' culture and the program the school provided, the program was very successful.

The summer school program was a win-win-win for everyone. Most of the students were successful in summer school and received credit which helped them to stay at grade level. This was a big win. Students who fell behind in credits were more likely to

drop out or become one of the missing students. Because the student would stay in school, the district received money each year the student remained enrolled. The district profited financially: win number two. Finally, the students were fed, which was a win for them nutritionally and a savings for their family, the third win. The needs of many students from the culture of poverty were met with this program, and multiple sections (3) were offered because of the high demand.

These policy changes reflect my growing ability as an educational leader to see the structure of schooling through the lenses of the different sub-cultures who enter the Ionia School District and judge their efficacy. Rather than identifying the students as the "problem," I am now able to see how the structuring of school and its inherent cultural bias facilitates learning for some, but not for all students. Figure 19 is a summary depiction of the flow of students from culture groups through Ionia schools.

Future Research

In pursuing an understanding of the relationship between culture and the missing students, this study has asserted that students who do not share the cultural values of those who organize and shape the structure of schooling can experience a level of cultural dissonance strong enough to cause them to leave school before they graduate. As school systems throughout the country are becoming more culturally diverse, using culture and conflict theory to inform our decisions as educational leaders offers an opportunity to better comprehend how differences in cultural perspective shape the way students experience schooling. Future research should continue to examine the variety of cultural perspectives found in our schools and how these are or are not integrated into the educational setting. This may include analyzing the various ways schools successfully

adapt and accommodate for cultural differences and the barriers faced by students from various cultural groups. Current research in the area of policy analysis could include exploration of the cultural linkages and how these policy areas impact students from different cultural groups (i.e., attendance, grading, homework, funding).

Since the cultural conflicts over the nature of schooling are inherently political, the structures of interactions through which values are allocated in a society, it would be an advantage to examine how different cultural groups gain and retain the necessary power to shape the structure of schooling. Increasing our breadth and depth of understanding regarding the nature of culture and how it shapes the way students experience schooling will allow educational leaders to act in an informed and effective manner for all children.

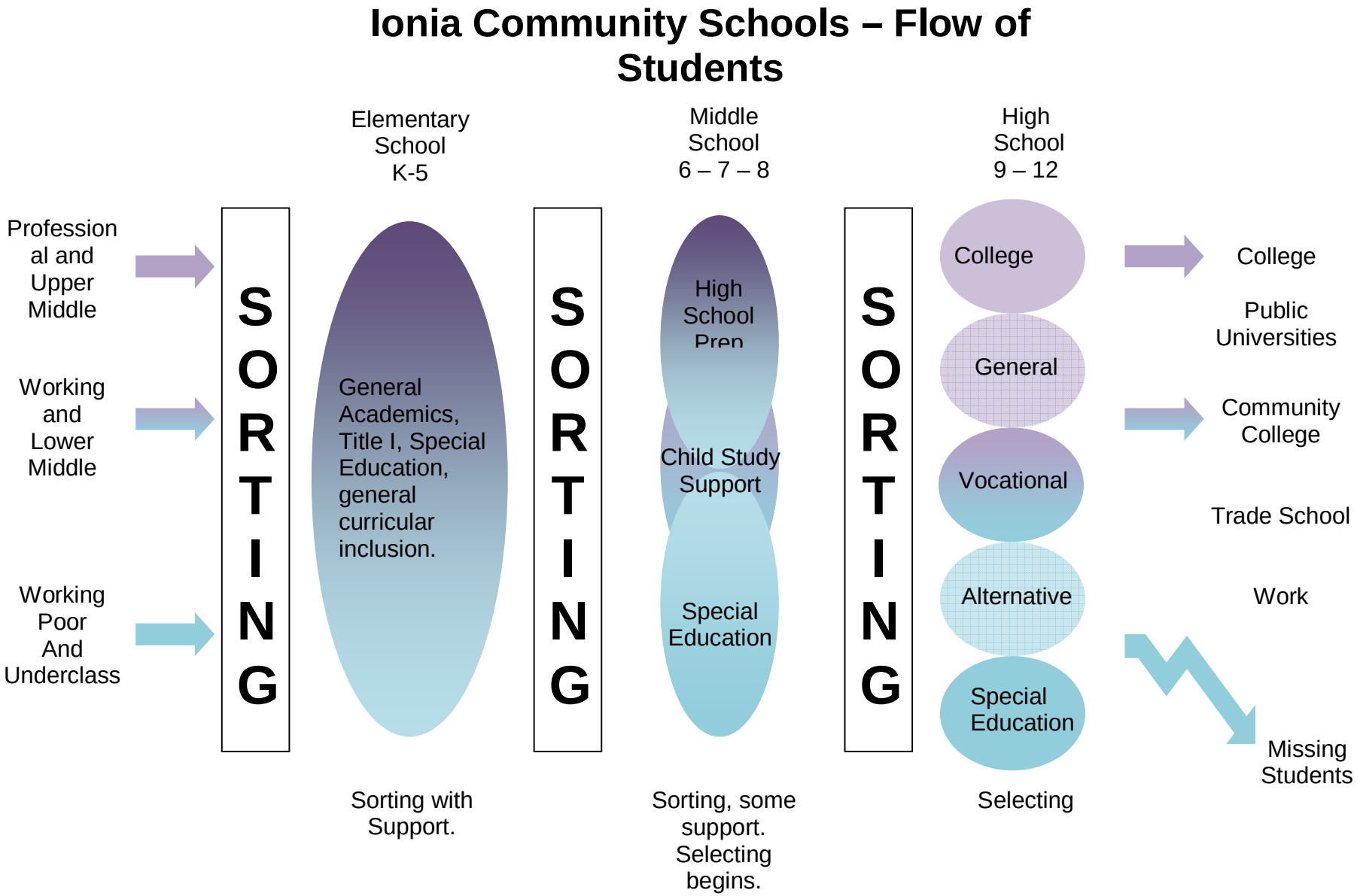

Figure 19: Flow of Students – a Summary

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APPENDIX

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

October 24, 2005

Ms. Patricia Batista
Department of Educational Leadership

RE: "*Getting rid of the knobs.*"

The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Eastern Michigan University has granted a renewal of the approval to your proposal: "Getting rid of the knobs".

After an additional review of your application, the IRB determined that the rights and welfare of the individual subjects involved in this research are carefully guarded. Additionally, the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate, and the individuals are not at a risk.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the IRB of any change in the protocol that might alter your research in any manner that differs from that upon which this approval is based. Reapproval of this project applies for one year from the date of this letter. If your data collection continues beyond the additional one-year period, you must apply for an additional, and final, renewal.

On behalf of the Human Subjects Committee, I wish you success in conducting your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature Removed]

Dr. Patrick Melia
Administrative Co-Chair
Human Subjects Committee

CC: Dr. Steve Pernecky, Faculty Co-Chair
Dr. James Barott

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