Eliminating Racism in Pinecreek?:

Civic Participation in Local Education Policy

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how community members within a segregated school district approached racial inequities. I conducted a nineteen-month-long ethnography using a critical Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to explore how members in a community activist group called Eliminate Racism interacted and worked with school district officials. My goal was to identify and examine how community members addressed racially inequitable policies and practices in the Midwestern city of Pinecreek (pseudonym) in the context of a school district that had undergone two school desegregation lawsuits. I conducted 32 interviews with 24 individuals, including teachers and school leaders, parents, and community members.

This study answers three research questions: (1) What strategies did the community activist group use to influence local education policy for addressing racism in the schools? (2) How did community participation influence local education policy? (3) What were the motivating factors for individuals' involvement in issues of local school segregation? To answer these questions, I used concepts from Critical Race Theory and Social Capital Theory. I employ Putnam's and Putnam and Campbell's *social capital*, Warren's *civic participation*, Bonilla-Silva's *color-blind racism*, Yosso's *community cultural wealth* and *religio-civics*. My analysis shows that the community group used the social capital and community cultural wealth of its members to create partnerships with district officials. Although Eliminate Racism did not meet its goals, it established itself as a legitimate organization within the community, successfully drawing together residents throughout the city to bring attention to racism in the schools.

The study's results encourage school and district leaders to constantly bring race to the forefront of their decision-making processes and to question how policy implementation affects minoritized students. This research also suggests that strategies from this community group can be adopted or avoided by other antiracist groups undertaking similar work. Finally, it provides an example of how to employ critical PAR methods into ethnography, as it notes the ways that researcher positionality and status can be leveraged by community groups to support the legitimacy of their mission and work.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family and the members of the Eliminate Racism team, who encouraged me to use my voice.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I began formulating the initial ideas for this dissertation study during my second year in the Educational Policy and Evaluation program at Arizona State University in 2016. During the Spring semester, I was enrolled in two different classes: *International Perspectives in Education Policy* and *Racial Theory*. The first class was led by my advisor, Dr. Gustavo Fischman, and one of the course requirements was to write a paper incorporating the theories we had studied in class. My research interests had, up until that point, been concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa. During a conversation with Gustavo about my trajectory in the Ph.D. program, he conversationally asked me about my hometown, Pinecreek (pseudonym), in the Midwest. I told him that in recent years, its reputation had greatly suffered, due in part to economic recessions as well as the years-long desegregation lawsuit that had plagued the city between 1989-2002. I informed him that both still haunted its residents.

Although I expressed to Gustavo that I had no interest in returning to this city to live, he was curious about Pinecreek. As I shared more with him, including how Pinecreek was regularly ranked as one of the most dangerous cities in the United States, he suggested that I use this site as the topic of the paper for his class. I returned to my hometown for a few days in February 2016 and began initial archival work. I studied the *Concerned Community Members* (pseudonym) desegregation lawsuit, in which the school district had been found guilty of intentionally segregating its students and mistreating people of color, and I dug into the local newspaper's articles covering the case.

As I explored the public library's local history room, and as I became increasingly interested in the inequalities of the city's public school district, a system that I did not have much prior experience with because I attended Catholic schools from kindergarten through twelfth grade, it became clear that there was a story to be told here. My own initial analysis of school statistics and student test scores and a spate of newspaper articles condemning the performance of the Pinecreek public schools revealed that the district was almost in the exact same position that it was thirty years ago when the *Concerned Community Members* lawsuit began: schools were segregated, there were discrepancies in standardized test scores between the two sides of the city, and resources in the school district were inequitably distributed.

It quickly became apparent that conducting a long-term qualitative study in a site where I could draw upon my own social and cultural capital would be beneficial. Growing up in Pinecreek, I had established connections with individuals throughout the city, and I had historical knowledge of the site that I would not have had if I had conducted this research elsewhere. My position as someone who had not attended the local public schools was an advantage, as it gave me a different perspective for understanding the context and history of this school system within the community as well as how Pinecreek residents viewed it. After promising myself that I would never live in Pinecreek again, I moved back in February 2018 and began an exploratory study about how community activism related to desegregation efforts within the Pinecreek Public School District.

The initial research I conducted and the literature I read emphasized the necessity for more research to be done about the relationships between how community activism

could reduce racism in school districts. As Kerr, Dyson, and Gallannaugh (2016) observed, "To date, assumptions made in the literature about the nature of school-community relations, and the opportunities, tensions and limitations inherent in these, have rarely been brought to the surface and made subject to scrutiny" (p. 266). Few studies go in depth into how community groups partner with and influence local education policy. Racism is often ignored in the community-district partnership literature, and Kohli, Pizarro, and Nevárez (2017) note that there is a severe lack of educational research in K-12 schools and districts. Their broad search found over 4,000 articles that dealt with race and racism, but they found that most of these "did not directly name and center an analysis of racism" (Kohli et al., 2017, p. 185). That is, addressing racism can often take a backseat to other problems in education. This study seeks to contribute to this area of research and center race and racism in an attempt to better understand how racism remains ever-present in one community's local public school district to the detriment of its students, teachers, and other educational stakeholders.

Within the first couple of weeks of my arrival, I came into contact with two key individuals who would not only end up becoming major contributors to this study, but who also were essential for me being welcomed as an educational researcher in the community activist group that I joined and studied. These individuals, Rev. David and Hannah, were highly involved in public education in Pinecreek, and they were concerned about the rampant racism in the school system. The two had only met a few months earlier, in November 2017, when they, their spouses—Helen and Walter—and nine other community members gathered in Hannah and Walter's home to discuss the possibility of bringing Pinecreek residents together to talk about race and racism in a safe environment.

Within weeks, Rev. David, Helen, Hannah, and Walter began leading race discussions at the Baptist church on Pinecreek's west side where David was pastor. They, along with other attendees of these early sessions, spent six weeks from November 2017 to February 2018 watching the movie *Hidden Colors: The Rules of Racism* together. After viewing a section of the movie each week, attendees discussed what they had just watched. They were encouraged to be open and honest about what they had just witnessed. Rev. David, Helen, Hannah, and Walter made efforts to ensure that the small groups were racially diverse in order to begin establishing relationships across racial lines.

While beginning to interact with those four individuals, I continued attending events around the city related to community activism and racism. I regularly noted during my time in the field that other race discussions were occurring around the city. People mentioned that this was due in part to the election of Donald Trump to the presidency and the ensuing political climate, which for many minoritized people, was synonymous with hostility and open racism. As such, religious leaders from a variety of faith groups had joined together in a workshop series entitled Faithful Desegregation, where congregations and other religious groups learned more about race and racism. This workshop series was designed primarily to target White people who wanted to learn more about race and racism in the United States, and almost all participants were White. This was the first event that I attended when I arrived in Pinecreek in March 2018, and it was there that I first met Hannah. While at Faithful Desegregation, I also learned about the events occurring at the Baptist church led by Rev. David, Helen, Hannah, and Walter, and I was invited to attend.

As I established myself as a researcher in the community, I worked to form and maintain relationships around Pinecreek. Therefore, I attended events all around the city, meeting residents from a range of neighborhoods and backgrounds. I found these events through word-of-mouth, local newspaper announcements, and the city website that published its weekly government meeting schedule. The more that I explored, the more I understood the importance of formulating deep relationships with key individuals. I intentionally worked to get to know Rev. David, Hannah, Helen, and Walter, who were now beginning to refer to their group as Eliminate Racism (ER). Not only did I attend every possible ER meeting, but I also regularly went to Hannah and Walter's house, where they hosted weekly potlucks where anyone was welcome. Due to their Bahá'í faith, a religion that teaches the importance of equality and unity of all people and has followers throughout the world, Hannah and Walter sought to unite individuals and create relationships between people of different races. They took their commitment to this seriously, to the extent that when they were out of town, which was rare, they left their house unlocked, and people could still come together for a meal. They had only canceled one of these dinners over the past twelve years, due to the extremely cold weather in the winter of 2019, where wind chills reached 60 degrees below zero.

At these dinners, I had opportunities to speak with and get to know people who were also involved in the ER group in a unique way. When dinner was over, Hannah would turn down the lights in the dining area, light some candles, and the group (usually between 12 and 15 people) would sit and listen to three songs—most of which were spiritual in nature and were sung by Bahá'í singers. After these moments of reflection, in which Hannah often told us that spiritual energy was essential for moving ER forward as

this type of difficult social justice work could not be done without God's help, the group would move from the dining room into the family room, where we discussed topics related to social justice, including educational opportunities, disparities in the criminal justice system, and environmental concerns. These discussions provided me with better insight into how community members felt about race and racism, and it also provided me with opportunities to have informal interactions with people about these topics.

These conversations and interactions around the city helped form the research questions for this dissertation study, leading me to analyze the overlapping concepts of race, education policy, religion, housing, community activism, and segregation. This study was timely for this particular community as student test scores had declined in recent years, overt racism was on the rise in the aftermath of Trump's election, and schools were increasingly resegregating along neighborhood lines.

Significance of the Study and Research Questions

In his study on the effects of federal housing policies, Richard Rothstein stated: "schools are more segregated today than they were forty years ago" (Rothstein, 2017b, p. 179). Unfortunately, Rothstein's claim did not spark much surprise. After the struggles and reforms emanating from *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Civil Rights Movement, many people accept that educational segregation is normal.

Researchers have explored this new norm of "resegregation" (e.g. De Voto & Wronowski, 2018); scholars have also noted the lack of studies centered on grassroots community groups' influence on education policy (Kerr et al., 2016). Prior research on school segregation has focused on how individuals with recognized authority in a community (i.e. superintendents) approach segregation (e.g. Frankenberg & Orfield,

2012), but there is a lack of research from the perspective of people whose voices are often ignored in their communities (Horsford, Sampson, & Forletta, 2013).

To understand how community members within a segregated school district approached racial inequities, I conducted a nineteen-month-long ethnography using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. My goal was to examine key dynamics associated with community members' participation for addressing racially inequitable policies and practices in Pinecreek in the context of a school district that had undergone two separate school desegregation lawsuits. I explored how community members interacted and worked with school district officials by analyzing the intersections of class, racial, and religious beliefs in relation to civic participation efforts in educational policy.

A majority of my nineteen months of fieldwork was spent participating in ER and its Education Action Team (EAT). The EAT was made up of a diverse group of about 25 residents from Pinecreek and its surrounding area. After attending weekly meetings with this team and the larger ER group, I had opportunities to immerse myself in its activities—including co-authoring its mission and goals, attending monthly steering committee meetings, and conducting academic research to address the goals the group established (e.g. finding best practices from other school districts around the country). Further, it was the group's wish that the team work *with* rather than *against* the Pinecreek School District to create meaningful relationships that crossed all areas of the community. My analysis of fieldnotes from participant observation, 32 semi-structured interviews with 24 educational stakeholders, analysis of approximately 500 pages of documents, the ER website, and general observations around Pinecreek, revealed that

religious and spiritual beliefs played an important role for members of the group, including their motivations for joining ER and how and why they carried out their social justice work in public spaces.

This study was driven by the following research questions: (1) What strategies did the community activist group use to influence local education policies aimed at addressing racism in the schools? (2) How did community participation influence local education policy? (3) What were the motivating factors for individuals' involvement in issues of local school segregation?

Historical Context of Pinecreek and Its Education System

Pinecreek has a population of approximately 150,000 residents. The population remained relatively stable between the 1970s and 2000s, though in recent years there has been a steady decrease ("Pinecreek population 2019," 2019), that mirrors state trends. Its major racial groups are White (approximately 65%), Black (approximately 20%), and Latinx (approximately 15%) ("Quick facts: Pinecreek city," 2019). The local public schools, however, do not reflect the racial demographics of the city. As of the 2019-2020 school year, 29% of students were White, 32% were African American, and 28% were Latinx.

This historically manufacturing city has faced a number of economic downturns, and in August 2016, *DailyMail.com* reported that the FBI had listed Pinecreek in its top five most dangerous cities in the United States with over 75 violent crimes per 10,000 residents (Parry, 2016). The rampant residential and school segregation in the city is represented both physically and symbolically by its muddy river, which geographically splits the community in two. On the city's west side, the population is more minoritized

and poor, and economic development has stagnated. The east side, on the other hand, is Whiter and wealthier and is often the site for new businesses and services. For example, the third hospital on the city's east side was recently completed in 2019, while the only hospital on the west side languishes. This is due in part to the new hospital's decision to remove the neonatal unit from the west side hospital and relocate it in the new east side hospital.

The disdain that people from both sides have for residents on the opposite side of the river is obvious, and it cuts across both race and class. At public and community meetings, such as city council meetings and election gatherings, the long-term enmity between east and west siders is palpable. My own observations suggested that west siders tended to air their grievances in more public arenas, while east siders showed their frustration in the privacy of their homes or in small group gatherings. While west siders often voiced that "they never get anything" and "everything goes to the east side," east siders could be heard complaining that "they are the ones paying for everything."

The physical division of the river and the minimal economic development on Pinecreek's west side are also reflected in the city's public school system. West side schools have historically received fewer educational resources than east side schools, and on average, students on the west side perform worse on state assessments in comparison to children in schools on the east side. Because of the evident inequalities of inputs and outcomes, community members have challenged the city's treatment of children on the west side in the form of two desegregation lawsuits. Although relatively few residents are aware of the first lawsuit that occurred in the 1970s, the second, which took place from

1989-1994 and led to court oversight until 2002, is frequently cited by Pinecreek residents when discussing the problems that the Pinecreek public schools face.

First Desegregation Lawsuit and Its Aftermaths

In Pinecreek's first desegregation lawsuit in the 1970s, a minority parent group argued that the Pinecreek school board had zoned schools in such a way as to separate the races (Cyplick, 2013). Even though the school district was not found guilty of not complying with the state's desegregation plans, it implemented busing during the process, and the plaintiffs eventually dropped the lawsuit due to high legal expenses. Children on the city's west side largely bore the burden of busing and desegregation efforts, while east side students rarely transferred to schools on the west side (Cyplick, 2013).

Throughout the 1970s, the school district faced budget constraints and implemented a variety of measures to save money. These different budget plans led to inequalities that disproportionately affected children of color and students of low socioeconomic status. For example, when the school district's budget problems peaked during the 1976-1977 academic year (Kolkey, 2009), the school board elected to cease all extracurricular activities, leading to unforeseen repercussions for the district. Athletes who had previously relied upon athletic scholarships were no longer scouted or recruited by colleges, leaving some of these students without the means to pay for or attain a higher education (Curry, 2009). Further, massive White flight to neighboring school districts and private schools occurred for those who could afford to move or pay school tuition (Kolkey, 2009). During this time, private Christian schools formed, which offered an escape from the public schools for a wealthy, mostly White student population living

within the Pinecreek School District's boundaries. By exiting the school system, these students took their capital with them, and schools became less diverse and their reputation for being high-quality centers of education rapidly dissipated in community members' minds (Kolkey, 2009). As these problems grew, inequalities within the school system became more publicly obvious.

Second Desegregation Lawsuit

Pinecreek School District's budget problems continued into the 1980s. A rustbelt city that had depended on its manufacturing industry, the economic recessions of the 1980s hit the community hard, decreasing the available funding for schools. During this time, the school district faced even tighter budget constraints than it did in the 1970s. In an ill-advised effort to save money in 1989, the school board introduced their money-saving strategy in a plan called *Brighter Tomorrow*. This proposal suggested the closure of ten public schools, six of which were located on Pinecreek's west side. These six schools served mostly Black and Latinx students (Kolkey, 2009). The proposal additionally recommended closing West High School—the only naturally integrated high school in the city. To meet the needs of west side parents whose children's schools would close, the plan further proposed the creation of three mega schools, meaning that over a thousand students would be lumped together in one building (Cyplick, 2013). Predictably, *Brighter Tomorrow* faced public backlash, much of which came from west side residents who primarily would be affected by the reorganization, as their children would be forced to transfer to overcrowded mega schools (Curry, 2009; Cyplick, 2013). Even with the public backlash, *Brighter Tomorrow* passed.

When the plan was finally accepted, a couple of notable things occurred. First, school board members were seen crying with joy when their plan passed after the intense backlash they had experienced; they were filmed celebrating their victory with cake (Curry, 2009). Second, the school board members were provided opportunities to speak with counselors to work through their emotions; west side parents whose children would be forced to switch schools due to the restructuring, however, were offered no such resources (Curry, 2009).

The passage of *Brighter Tomorrow* inspired west side community members to address the racial inequalities their children faced in the school district. As the group came together to air their grievances (Cyplick, 2013), and their popularity grew, they attracted the attention of the local newspaper, *The Pinecreek Register Star*. When asked by a reporter what the group was called, members reported that they did not have a name yet, but that they were "a group of concerned community members" (Curry, 2009), which later became their formal name and they launched the lawsuit that became known as *Concerned Community Members v. Pinecreek Board of Education*.

Concerned Community Members v. Pinecreek Board of Education

With school tracking specialist Dr. Jeanne Oakes as expert witness in the case, the school board's actions of using tracking to separate students by race were found to be unconstitutional. White students were overrepresented in college preparatory classes, while Black and Latinx students were placed in remedial classes, even if they performed better on the placement tests (*Concerned Community Members v. Pinecreek Board of Education*, 1994). Evidence in the case revealed how the school board had deliberately misused magnet schools: schools within schools formed, and White students received

higher qualities of education and different curricula than the "neighborhood kids" (*Concerned Community Members v. Pinecreek Board of Education*, 1994). Lastly, the school board was found guilty of providing unequal resources and infrastructure. East side schools were given new textbooks and carpeting, while the west side schools received the east side students' hand-me-down textbooks and the old carpeting ripped up from those schools (*Concerned Community Members v. Pinecreek Board of Education*, 1994).

The Pinecreek School District was placed under court-mandated desegregation orders beginning in 1994. Under the court order, every school was required to be racially balanced within 15 percentage points of the overall racial demographics of the district (Stephens & Vollmer, 2017). To meet these needs, the school district adopted a controlled choice plan, which was first put in place in the 1995-1996 school year. This plan divided the district into three attendance zones, and each student had 25 different elementary school options (Taylor & Alves, 1999). Although the federal magistrate ordered the school district be overseen by the courts until the 2005-2006 school year, the school board appealed, and court-ordered desegregation ended in 2002. As early as 2006, plans to end the controlled choice began, and it was finally eliminated in 2010 when the city returned to neighborhood zoning (Kolkey, 2009).

Court-Ordered Desegregation

Through the controlled choice plan, the school district had some success in racially balancing many of its schools. By August 2017, however, under neighborhood zoning, schools had resegregated to almost pre-lawsuit levels (Curry, 2017). As was unsurprising, these levels of segregation were associated with inequalities in academic

performance by students in the school. A recent report stated, “Students at the predominantly white schools fare far better on state tests measuring academic achievement. Students at the predominantly black and Hispanic schools have the lowest scores in the district, and in some cases, some of the lowest scores in the entire state” (Curry, 2017). More specifically, Curry (2017) explained that the data showed that only 7% of Black students attended the top ten public schools in the district, as measured by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exam standards, and the opposite was true for White students. Similar to Black students, only 8% of Latinx students attended top-performing schools (Curry, 2017), thus reversing the controlled choice success of distributing students from different racial/ethnic groups across the district’s schools.

Aftermath of the Second Lawsuit

After its early release from court-ordered desegregation, the school district dropped its system of controlled choice in favor of returning to a zoning system, which loosely resembled a neighborhood school attendance system where children attend schools close to their homes. While the superintendent argued that controlled choice did not work because certain west side schools were always chosen last (Superintendent, personal communication, August, 16, 2018), there were improvements in schools where students had previously performed at the bottom on state standardized tests (Curry, 2017). Close to a decade after returning to neighborhood zones, performance at schools on the west side has plummeted, and the schools have resegregated along racial lines, due in part to residential segregation.

Since 2010, with the elimination of controlled choice, only a limited amount of choice remains for the city's residents. These choice options either require additional steps, such as an application, or they are among some of the lowest performing schools in the district. For example, the current choices include: Gifted Academy, which requires a test; Creative and Performing Arts, requiring an audition; and a Montessori school, a STEAM academy, and a Spanish language immersion school, each of which requires an additional application to attend (Curry, 2017), three charter schools; or private schools that charge tuition. East side residents have largely been in support of residential zoning, while west side residents support expanding school choice, an unsurprising divide (Curry, 2017).

Eliminate Racism in Pinecreek and Faithful Desegregation

I returned to Pinecreek in February 2018 to conduct my initial fieldwork at a time when two different groups, though with crossover between its members, were in their nascent stages of working to learn about and fight racism. These two groups were called Faithful Desegregation and Eliminate Racism in Pinecreek. Religious leaders from local faith communities led these two groups, and they had different, though complementary intentions.

The first group, Faithful Desegregation, was led by two White pastors—one man from the Unitarian Universalist church on the east side, and one woman from a Congregational church, located on downtown's west side. Together, they led trainings designed to help White people learn about racism and White privilege, and they recruited participants from local churches. They intended to keep the trainings limited to approximately one hundred people so that attendees could share what they had learned

with their own faith communities. Trainings took place four times from January to April of 2018.

Meanwhile, the other group, ER had started in November of 2017. It was led by two couples: one African American Baptist couple—Rev. David and Helen—and one White Bahá'í couple—Hannah and Walter. Rev. David was the pastor of a Baptist Church, and Helen was a retired middle school teacher on the east side; Hannah was a retired principal from a school on the West side and Walter was a retired mental health specialist who taught classes at the local community college. This group was more racially diverse than Faithful Desegregation, and training sessions were held at the Baptist church on Pinecreek's west side. It was at the end of these training sessions that I joined this group.

As both groups were nearing the end of their "introduction to racism and White privilege" phase, and as there was much overlap between the two, the leaders of the groups began discussing how to work together. As the pastor at the Congregational church and one of the founders of Faithful Desegregation told me in an interview:

> … by nature, the Eliminating Racism group was a much more mixed group. You can't sit with a bunch of White people and decide what we're going to do about racism. That doesn't work. And so we then deferred the "what's next" steps to the Eliminating Racism and invited the people who had gone through our series to kind of get involved. I haven't looked back to see if that is actually happening, but it's there.

In April 2018, the groups came together for the first time in a planning session that addressed strategies for tackling racism in Pinecreek. During this session, we broke into

small brainstorming groups to discuss key areas where we thought race and racism needed to be addressed in the city. We then came back as an entire group of 54 people and voted on what we believed were the most pressing issues that Pinecreek faced in terms of racism: education, criminal justice, economic opportunities, and relationships. Once these four issues were decided upon, we formed action teams, and each person was instructed to join only one team. This was because the leaders of ER wanted committed and passionate members who were excited about their chosen area. Therefore, in April 2018, I joined the EAT and followed them until early October 2019.

Eliminate Racism in Pinecreek's Education Action Team

Since its inception, I participated in the EAT's activities. The team was made up of approximately 50 people, though a smaller core group (approximately 12-20 people) was regularly active. Other members attended events infrequently due to reasons such as inopportune meeting times and family obligations, and some individuals indicated that they could not be involved in everything but to call on them if they were needed for specific events and campaigns. The two leaders of the action team were (1) Anthony, a retired African American chemist who taught GED classes, and (2) Connie, a White, former city councilwoman with a Ph.D. in English who ran her own communications company. Although they were the official leaders, the group was highly influenced by Hannah, who acted as the team's consultant.

There were more White people than Black people in the group; however, most meetings were pretty evenly attended by Whites and Blacks. There was a noticeable absence of Latinx participants, particularly because the student population of the school district consisted of about one-third Whites, one-third Blacks, and one-third Latinx. Also

noticeable was the age of the group; many members were retired and in their 60s and 70s, while to my knowledge, there were no members under the age of 30 until Fall 2019. Hannah explained this could have been for a couple of reasons. One was that people employed by the school district may not have been willing to speak up about racism if they feared losing their jobs, and, relatedly, group members who were retired were never listened to when they worked for the school district, and this may have been the first time their voices were acknowledged.

Members of the EAT indicated that the *Concerned Community Members* lawsuit had a continued legacy in this city, and that much of the progress that was made when the district was under court-ordered desegregation had reversed. Therefore, the EAT was concerned with the rampant segregation and resegregation of the school system and the resulting inequities.

The first activity the group was tasked with was to create a mission statement. After weeks of deliberation, members agreed upon the following: *To be passionate advocates of equity-driven policies and practices in the Pinecreek Public Schools so that all students will be prepared for social and academic success.* After the initial difficulties of forming a mission, the group set three goals. Each were overseen by a subcommittee. These goals were: (1) *To increase to 20% People of Color (POC)—especially African American and Hispanic—in all levels of Pinecreek School District: administration, faculty, staff, and board members by the 2020-2021 school year. By the 2025-2026 school year, have percentages of African American and Hispanic administration, staff, and board members match the percentage of African American and Hispanic students within the system*; (2*) To ensure that Pinecreek School District resources—teachers,*

counselors, supplies, technology, etc.—are distributed equitably, based on the needs of students in the school and measured by the state required assessment data and the district discipline data. This goal shall be met by the 2020-2021 school year; (3) *Students of color (SOC)—especially African American and Hispanic—will be encouraged to enroll in and be enrolled in Honors and AP classes and will receive the support they need to be successful. By 2020-2021 school year, SOC enrollment will have increased by 25% within these advanced curricular programs; these students will have received a final grade of "C" or better*. Although I joined the third goal team, I witnessed regular overlap amongst the three subteams, especially when we held meetings with the school superintendent, school board members, and the city's mayor. The EAT, its subcommittees, and members of the steering committee officially met almost once a month to set goals, report on subcommittee progress, or receive feedback from the larger ER organization. Further, each member conducted research outside of meetings in their own time to meet each of the three goals.

Overview of the Dissertation

This first chapter gave a brief overview of the background of the study site's context. It provided information about the community activist group that sought to implement and influence the creation and maintenance of racially equitable policies throughout the city, and especially in its public school system. This study's purpose was to observe how the activist group was or was not able to partner with local school district officials to increase racial equity for students, teachers, and staff members of color in the district. I also sought to understand what motivated residents of Pinecreek to become involved in antiracism efforts, particularly in its local school district.

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of the literature related to social capital, community activism, religious belonging, and the relationship between race and space. Specifically, I provide examples of studies that have found the importance that social capital plays in civic participation efforts and the ways that it is used to shape and influence educational policy. I also explain the conceptual framework that I chose to understand the events that took place during my nineteen months of fieldwork following ER and the EAT. In Chapter 3, I explain the methods that I employed and the reasoning behind these choices. I also share how my position as a researcher influenced this study and the analysis of my findings.

Chapters 4 and 5 each describe the findings of my research questions that drove this study. In Chapter 4, I seek to answer my first two research questions, which asked how the community activist group formed relationships and partnerships with school district officials and whether or not the group shaped racially equitable district policies for students in the district.

Chapter 5 describes the motivations behind community members' participation in antiracist efforts. I show how racialized spaces influenced people to become motivated in community activism related to education policy. Many of the participants in the EAT had personal histories within the school district, whether as students, teachers, administrators, or parents of students in the district. Others who were not a part of the EAT had similar experiences within the district, much of which was shaped by race and racism. I show how the segregated city space and associated attitudes overlapped within the local school system. The racism that individuals faced influenced their continued work on issues of racism and motivated them to become involved in community activism.

In the second part of Chapter 5, I continue to answer the research question about what motivated members of ER and the EAT to participate in efforts for racial equity. As I noted throughout my field work, religion/spirituality and religious belonging was influential for individual members of ER, and it was important to the group as a whole as all meetings took place in religious places. I analyze how and when religious beliefs were wielded to shape the group and the efforts it made to work on issues of racial justice. I discuss how religion was spoken about, but the depth at which it was talked about remained surface level. This influenced how the group functioned and how individuals perceived the work of ER.

Finally, Chapter 6 describes the conclusions and implications of this study. I explain how this research has the potential to inform policymakers, school leaders, and other community activists who attempt to do similar racial justice work. I provide examples and suggestions for future research, and I explain why more studies that directly address racism in the public schools are necessary.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the literature related to school segregation and grassroots community activist movements. I specifically focused on studies that have used social capital as a means to explain civic participation, the relationship between social capital and school choice, the relationship between religion, spirituality, and civic participation, and the ideas of racialized spaces. Next, I describe the theoretical framework that I used to guide the study, explaining the rationale behind why Critical Race Theory and social capital theory explain how I understood the work that the community activist group, Eliminate Racism (ER), undertook. Finally, I discuss and reference the literature for the concepts that I used to analyze my study's findings, which included *social capital* (Putnam, 2000, 2015; Putnam & Campbell, 2010), *civic participation* (Warren, 2001, 2005), *color-blind racism* (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), and *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005). I also provide an explanation of the concept of *religio-civics* within the discussion of *civic participation*, which came from the field work in this study.

Relevant Literature

Results of Desegregation

School segregation was legally overturned through the two *Board vs. Brown of Education* Supreme Court cases (Warren, 1954), but there was no strict time limit put in place for school districts to follow. Instead, *Brown II* stated that desegregation should occur at "all deliberate speed" (Warren, 1954). The ambiguous language of the Supreme

Court's decision has been heavily critiqued in the years after (e.g. Aggarwal, 2015; Ladson-billings & Tate IV, 1995; Minow, 2010; Orfield, Bachmeier, James, & Eitle, 1997), and from the 1980s onward, the *Brown* decision has lost power (Orfield et al., 1997), in part due to subsequent Supreme Court decisions. Schools have largely resegregated along racial lines, spurred on by rampant neighborhood segregation (Massey & Denton, 1993; Reardon, Grewal, & Kalogrides, 2012), some of which was sponsored by the United States government (Rothstein, 2017b). However, residential segregation should not be used as the only scapegoat or the excuse for the failure of desegregation efforts. As Horsford (2011) notes, the history of racism in the United States and the wielding of it to maintain a racial hierarchy with Whites on top must also be acknowledged.

The resegregation of schools along racial lines has been accompanied by the inequitable distribution of resources, both physical and immaterial. These inequalities include differences in curriculum and the number of teaching materials (Darling-Hammond, 2019), as well as fewer years of experience of teachers. Further, scholars regularly note that the work toward desegregation does not simply mean that people of color want their children seated next to a White student in class (Horsford, 2011). Rather, the aim is to get resources distributed equitably, so that children of color receive equitable educational opportunities.

Schools with higher populations of students of color are often underfunded in comparison to Whiter school districts. As a recent study showed, schools made up of 75% more children of color receive $16 billion less *per year* throughout the United States than do school districts made up of 75% or more White children (*$23 Billion*, 2019).

Although integration was lauded by Whites as the solution to inequitable forms of education throughout the second half of the twentieth century, this strategy negatively affected Black communities who often bore the brunt of the desegregation efforts (Green & Gooden, 2014; Sampson, 2017). As Tillman (2004) notes, the unintended consequences of integration included the loss of Black teachers, many of whom lost their jobs when *Brown* was implemented. There was also the "loss of leadership as a cultural artifact in the Black community" in the form of school principals, and "a loss of the expertise of educators who were committed to the education of Black children" (Tillman, 2004, p. 294). Morris (2001) explains that whether or not integration occurred, African Americans would ultimately be negatively affected:

> African Americans never overwhelmingly believed that receiving education in an "integrated" school would resolve problems associated with inequitable education; they understood the precarious predicament by favoring one position over the other. If one pushed for Black children to attend schools with White children, the chances for Black children and their culture to be totally ignored in the curriculum and the ethos of the school were great. If reserved to attend predominantly Black schools, concerns remained about the lack of resources, lack of exposure to rigorous academic curricula, and lack of facilities. (p. 579)

As this quote displays, desegregation led to harmful effects for some children of color and their communities even while it was touted as being a panacea to the effects of segregation by many Whites.

Social Capital and Civic Participation in Education Policy

Researchers have used social capital to study the history and legacy of school segregation. Social capital, which is a resource based on social networks and relationships (Putnam, 2000; Warren, 2001), can be exchanged for economic goods or other opportunities (Bourdieu, 2008). As is noted in the literature, a person's ability to build social capital often depends on an already established reserve of social capital (Christens & Speer, 2015; Wood, 1997). Some scholars connect notions of civic participation, schools, and relationships and/or social capital. For example, Mediratta (2005) notes the importance of being able to mobilize a large network of people to take action within a community, and that partnerships between city and neighborhood leaders can create a structure of support "for transforming low expectations and poor teaching" as well as challenge local policies (p. 202). Similarly, Warren (2005) shares that relationships and collaboration in grassroots community organizing is essential. Participation in grassroots community groups can be adversarial and confrontational, or collaborative and relational, and collaboration can "offer the possibility of expanding the capacities of the school community while simultaneously holding promise for building a political constituency for urban school reform" (Warren, 2005, p. 38-39).

Working with a community activist group has the potential to provide parents and other educational stakeholders with options for becoming involved in their local school system and grant them access to policymakers (Warren, 2005). The work that community activist groups undertake can help strike a power balance between education institutions and community members, especially when they involve parents and students (Mediratta, Fruchter, & Lewis, 2002). Further, Warren (2005) explains how the cultures of local

communities are an asset that should be used as building blocks for a partnership between the schools and the families they serve. However, community activist groups targeting issues of social justice are warned to continuously reflect on the work that they are doing. Sampson (2017) explains that when social activists are not careful and do not consider the actions and subsequent consequences of their group, they may in fact injure the people that they are seeking to help. She says that it is important for community activists to "examine how their identities might inadvertently influence their goals of accomplishing equitable change in education" (Sampson, 2017, p. 73). It is necessary for people who are most affected by an issue to play a pivotal role in creating a solution to the problem (Christens & Speer, 2015) as this creates community member "buy-in" (Staples, 2012). By including community members most affected by the issue at hand, "the lived expertise and local knowledge that they bring to the problem-solving process usually result in better ideas and solutions" (Staples, 2012, p. 288), and issues of racism and poverty have been successfully tackled (Horsford & Sampson, 2014; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Participation from various constituencies in the community has the potential to "mobilize a base of supporters—instead of opponents" (Staples, 2012, p. 288), thereby utilizing relational forms of social capital built on trust and reciprocity. Even with this research, there is still only a limited amount of studies that addresses how community members come together in an attempt to influence racially equitable policies at the school district level, the focus of this study.

Joining and Sustaining Community Activist Groups

Scholars have noted how personal experiences often motivate individuals to become involved in community activism. This can include histories of enduring violence

and trauma (Talcott, 2014), "cultural race-related stress" (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015, p. 184), having an emotional commitment to the issue at hand (Goodwin, 1997; Jasper, 1998), or conceiving activism as a vocation or a calling (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

Research addressing the sustainability of community activists directly addressing education and racism is limited (Gorski, 2019; Gorski & Chen, 2015). Studies exist about the burnout of community activists who are committed to fighting for a specific cause, but many do not address race and racism directly. Only one study directly investigates the burnout of activists fighting for racial justice, citing how in-group dynamics are a leading cause for people of color to quit activist groups (Gorski, 2019).

Research that incorporates the voices of people of color about their involvement in community activism addresses how in-group racial dynamics can lead to feelings of isolation, dejection, and continued oppression, even when the group's purpose is for anti-racism (Gorski & Chen, 2015; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Other research approaches how racial diversity in leadership for activists fighting racism can act as a way for White members to rely on the leadership of people of color too much so that they do not take initiative to fight against racism (Jacobs & Taylor, 2011). This is an understudied field with a dearth of literature. Gorski's (2019) study did not address spirituality or religious belonging, a key aspect to ER's membership. Additional research that addresses these aspects within antiracism community groups and about what sustains them is essential, as it could help future groups function more effectively and for longer periods of time.

Religious Belonging, Spirituality, and Civic Participation

Unsurprisingly, scholars who have studied the relationship between religion/spirituality and civic participation have found different results on the role that

religious belonging plays for individuals' involvement in civic activities. While some have noted that belonging to a specific church—and specifically conservative White Protestant churches—often creates "closed" communities, and therefore promotes segregation and a lack of involvement (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Blanchard, 2007a), others have found that religious belonging has the potential to encourage people to volunteer more often and participate in church activities (Greeley, 1997) and that regular churchgoers are more likely to be civically engaged (Gibson, 2008; Putnam & Campbell, 2010).

Researchers note that the bonding ties created amongst individuals can create strong congregations, but that these congregations are often homogenous (Emerson & Smith, 2000; Wuthnow, 2002). The homogenous nature provides a way for members to turn inward and not participate with people outside their individual church communities, and this has been frequently noted with respect to conservative Protestant congregations (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Blanchard, 2007; Emerson & Smith, 2000; Mulder, 2015). With many different options for congregational belonging, individuals have the opportunity to choose a religious group that aligns not only with their religious beliefs, but with those that align with other beliefs as well, including political leaning. (Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Researchers have also suggested that this turn inward is due to market demands—to attract a congregation that continues donating to the church, religious leaders must keep their donor base satisfied and meet the needs of their niche market (Porter & Emerson, 2013). Others argue that religious belonging contributes to a racialized society (Mulder, 2015) in four different ways. Congregants can: "1) minimize and individualize the race problem, 2) assign blame to blacks themselves for racial

inequality, 3) obscure inequality as part of racial division, and 4) suggest unidimensional solutions to racial division" (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 170).

Putnam and Campbell's (2010) study about religion in America approaches race and racism. They explain that rather than leading, religious Americans have fallen behind secular-leaning Americans in terms of racially progressive attitudes. Although religion has been used to encourage equity and equality of different races in the United States, it has never changed the structure within which it operates. As Emerson and Smith (2000) claim:

> Over the centuries, religion was also at times used by white and black Christians to call for America to realize its ideals. Those ideals include equality and freedom. Freedom has come to be freedom from—freedom from oppression, freedom from discrimination, and freedom from each other. In sum, through the long, arduous struggle, where religion aided racial change, it has been unidirectional: like America itself, it has occasionally helped to free people, but has been unable to bring them together or overcome racialization. (p. 48)

Other scholars, however, recognize the potential that congregations have for creating bridging social capital, and that members of religious groups often are able to extend their social networks to access people with power (Wuthnow, 2002).

Relationships Between Race and Space

Understanding "racialized spaces and spatialized races" (Lipsitz, 2007) is useful for seeing how people are viewed and how they experience particular spaces. Scholars have written about physical space from a geographic perspective. Lipsitz (2011) and Rothstein (2017b) recognize that physical spaces in the U.S. are culturally created and

associated with specific races, and Bonam, Taylor, and Yantis (2017) conclude that "racialized physical space is a cultural product" (p. 2), an outcome of policies and practices.

An emerging field tying together space and race is in the field of psychology. Researchers note that people have mental images which position some spaces as White spaces, and others as African American spaces, etc. (Bonam et al., 2017). This has implications for policy making, especially when bias affects policymakers' actions and their decisions to allocate money to different projects (Bonam et al., 2017). Further, Black spaces are often viewed in deficit ways, frequently seen as "less than" White spaces and targets for negative stereotyping (Bonam, Bergsieker, & Eberhardt, 2016) In discussing how space relates to race, Bonam, Taylor, and Yantis (2017) explain that work in this field "… provides initial evidence that racialized physical space is a cultural product that does indeed shape how people imagine physical space" (p. 5).

Especially pertinent to this study is the way that spaces that are coded as White can inhibit teachers of color and their ability to feel successful in their work in their schools. When teachers of color are the only or one of a few minoritized teachers in their buildings, they are often treated and perceived differently than their White counterparts (Jay, 2009). They face feelings of hypervisibility and hyperinvisibility simultaneously, affecting their well-being in addition to their willingness to remain in their schools and in the teaching profession (Marcos Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). As Kohli, Pizarro, and Nevárez (2017) note, the literature is severely lacking in the area of how color-blindness is detrimental to how teachers of color experience the day to day racism, what Bonilla-Silva (2014) termed as the "new racism." The undercurrent of racism that people of color

experience in the schools contributes to what is termed as "racial battle fatigue" (RBF), contributing to the already dwindling number of teachers of color in American public schools (Marcos Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). This dissertation study, which uses color-blind racism as a concept to analyze how people experience race and racism in the community and its schools, helps to fill in missing areas in this understudied topic.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory acknowledges the interactions among race, racism, and power, and Critical Race scholars question the overall structure of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The theory was established in the 1970s after many of the gains from the Civil Rights Movement either stopped or reversed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Its theoretical origins stem from feminism and Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which were influenced by Marx (Ladson-Billings, 2009) through the view that the law was constructed for "the privileged" (Harris, 1994). CRT scholars are interested in examining society's oppressive structures, utilizing Gramsci's notion of hegemony (Ladson-Billings, 1998). To explain how CRT critiques the legal structure, Harris states, "CRT inherits from CLS a commitment to being 'critical,' which in this sense means also to be 'radical'-to locate problems not at the surface of doctrine but in the deep structure of American law and culture" (Harris, 1994, p. 743). This outgrowth from CLS occurred because early CRT researchers did not see CLS as giving enough consideration to race in analyzing the law (Crenshaw, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In her explanation of CRT in the law, Mari Matsuda (1991) explained that she defines it as a way to see how racism has played a role in the legal system in the United States and understanding this is "part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (p. 1331).

CRT scholars acknowledge that the law has often been written to protect White interests (Bell, 1995; Harris, 1993). According to some Critical Race scholars, this was not done accidentally, and oppressed groups were kept in marginalized positions (Bell, 1995), thus maintaining the racial structure in the United States with Whites at the top. To remedy the inequalities that marginalized groups have faced, CRT scholars work toward including the narratives of the oppressed so as to recognize their experiences (Bell, 1995). CRT is a structural theory. The theory prioritizes the ways that society is structured through a racial hierarchy. The theory is based on the premise that the United States, and particularly its legal system, was purposefully shaped through White supremacy, and the White structure remains in place, in great part due to its legal system.

Since its inception, CRT has faced criticism. The two most pertinent for this study, however, are the critiques that it (a) is too structurally dependent and (b) has no cogent or singular way of taking into account the mitigating role that class plays in relationship to race. As Omi and Winant (2009) explain, a theory that ignores the power and actions of individual agents has shortfalls. The authors levy this critique against Bonilla-Silva's (2014) concept of color-blind racism, which is part of this study's conceptual framework. Omi and Winant (2009) note that by ignoring individuals, such as anti-racists who seek to change the overall racial structure, the concept is too limiting. Further, other scholars recognize that in a society where both race *and* class play an important role, CRT has thus far been unable to adequately bridge this gap in a satisfactory way (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Tenets of color-blind racism. Critical Race scholars have incorporated the idea of color-blind racism into their studies of education and for understanding how public

institutions and the law are shaped. This concept is effective for making sense of the ways in which people of color have been stigmatized in the public school system in the United States. It is particularly useful since the *Brown v. Board of Education* court case and its ushering in of the modern Civil Rights Movement, which helped end legal segregation. Since then, it has been socially contemptible to be cast as outwardly racist; instead, people have resorted to more discrete forms of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This more subtle form of racism has not only been practiced by individuals on behalf of their own personal beliefs, but it has also operated at an institutional level, with laws and policies created that do not take into account differences among racial groups. This causes harm as it encourages the inequitable distribution of resources, and it works to reproduce the racialized social structure (Omi & Winant, 2014).

In this section, I give a background of how color-blind ideology has been studied by scholars. A majority of the discussion around this topic, however, is based upon Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's conceptualization of color-blind racism. I have chosen to focus on Bonilla-Silva's work for a variety of reasons. First, Bonilla-Silva coined the term color-blind racism, which helps us understand how education institutions have contributed to cultural, social, and racial inequalities amongst the student population. Secondly, Bonilla-Silva's four frames offer a useful framework for understanding how color-blind ideologies have been used to harm the students of Pinecreek and contribute to the recent rise in segregation within the schools since the school district was released from its court-ordered desegregation mandate.

Bonilla-Silva's theoretical background is based upon a Marxist philosophy, utilizing conflict theory, but he argues that rather than class interests, people work to

protect their racial positions. This is because he views society as a racial structure, which he defines as "*the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege*" (Bonilla-Silva, 2014, p. 9). To protect this White privilege, this dominant group protects its interests because there are benefits that accompany Whiteness within a hierarchical society based on race (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Bonilla-Silva's concept adheres to CRT's focus on structural determinism, and he views the role of agents within the structure as limited.

Social stratification based upon race is essential for color-blindness, its relationship to the law (Siegel, 2000), and how it contributes to dangerous assumptions. Within color-blind ideology, race is assumed to be a neutral concept (Lewis, 2003), and the long history of racial discrimination is ignored (Wells & Crain, 1997). Race as a neutral concept can be seen in the school structure and the way it reproduces social inequalities. When color-blindness goes unchallenged, and when Whites see themselves as individual actors who are entitled to their success (Lewis, 2003), inequalities are replicated.

Color-blind ideology has become difficult to challenge in the US judicial system as the Court ruled in 1973 in *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, CO, 413 U.S. 189* that "segregated schools that are not the result of intentional state discrimination are acceptable. Under this doctrine, schools are segregated not because of housing, labor, transportation, or educational policies but rather because they reflect the residential and schooling patterns of parents" (Scott & Quinn, 2014, p. 752). This ignores the history of state-sponsored segregated housing patterns, which introduced segregation into

neighborhoods that had never experienced it before through the form of public housing (Rothstein, 2017a).

Bonilla-Silva (2014) offers four frames for showing how people and institutions relate to and perpetuate color-blind racism: (1) naturalization; (2) minimization of racism; (3) cultural racism; and (4) abstract liberalism. I discuss each frame briefly and then show how they apply to Pinecreek's history and its current experiences with racism.

Bonilla-Silva's frame of *naturalization* shows how people can explain away race issues like segregation by seeing it as natural for groups to want to be and live near people who are like them. He further explains that this is a form of color-blind racism because it relies on a near-biological explanation of race and essentializes groups of people. Whites can excuse this type of behavior for themselves and think of it as nonracial because they see minoritized groups sticking with their own groups as well (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

The next frame, *minimization of racism*, is used to analyze how Whites ignore racial events or accept them as normal while chiding people of color for being too sensitive about race issues (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This view only recognizes explicit racism, ignoring the subtleties behind much of the more nuanced forms that have replaced the outward racism associated with the Jim Crow South (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). It also ignores the history of maltreatment, which influences the type of racism that negatively affects people of color today (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

The third frame of *cultural racism* tends to rely on stereotypes about groups of people, ignoring the individual and making sweeping statements about people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Comments people make may not appear to be outwardly racist, but

they are statements about different minority populations that reproduce the social status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). When individual agents make assumptions about a group that is lower on the racial hierarchy, they work to reproduce the structure, ignoring that many individual agents do not conform to what they assume about them within the structure.

Tyson (2006) remarks on how cultural racism often relieves school administrators from working toward solving structural problems and providing quality education for all students. Context matters for students, so when school administrators and teachers rely upon generalizations and stereotypes, these beliefs have harmful effects on individual students who do not conform to stereotypes. Tyson (2006) states, "Relying on these explanations permits school personnel to ignore their own role in creating and/or maintaining racist structures and to absolve themselves of any institutional responsibility for ongoing racial disparities" (p. 86). Additionally, students of color often have to overcome "historical, social, and cultural forces" (Hemmings, 2006, p. 109) that have worked against them in a school structure designed to meet the needs of a White middle class student (Castagno, 2013). When students of color succeed in this environment, this does not indicate that school administrators can take a color-blind approach and avoid working to provide better systems of support for the school's students of color (Hemmings, 2006).

In *abstract liberalism*, emphasis is placed on the ideas of individuality. People should have the freedom to make decisions best suited to their own interests, and laws should not force the creation of equitable opportunities (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). As White (2015) defines it, "Abstract liberalism is the appeal to liberal values on one hand, such as equal opportunity and freedom of markets through choice and competition, while on the

other hand simultaneously denying the ways in which those values fall short for people of Color in the legal, political, and economic institutional life of the country" (p. 126). The ideas of "choice" and "individualism" relate to the economic aspect of this frame, showing that race and class are linked to one another.

Within a color-blind view, the judgment of people is done by meritocratic criteria, so that a person's accomplishments are taken into account, ignoring other factors that make up their backgrounds (Siegel, 2000). The assumption is that race and merit are separated from individuals, and society has made it past the point of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1988). Coining the term "e-racing," Crenshaw (1997) argues that by eliminating race in favor of a color-blind view ignores history and does not, in fact, erase the deep racial history that individuals must encounter in US society.

Wells and Crain's (1997) findings provide a useful example of abstract liberalism. Whites in St. Louis disapproved of the imposition of school desegregation policies; White parents spoke about how much they valued having the choice to send their children to any school, even when it contributed to segregated schools. Interestingly, parents rejected being told they had to send their children to certain schools through desegregation orders, but they had not complained about this under Jim Crow laws when they were essentially forced to send their children to White only segregated schools (Wells & Crain, 1997). The ways parents talked about desegregation further exemplified abstract liberalism. Parents explained they would rather see city schools receive money to improve instead of having Black students coming to their White suburban schools. By saying this, parents were able to feel good about what they said because they wanted

Black parents to have better choices of schools, but they did not want Black students in "their" schools.

Related to the ideas of "individualism" and "choice" as noted above, the idea of morality plays an important role (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). This can be seen through White parental support of improving Black schools. Morality can assist in hiding the actual thoughts and feelings behind why Whites support choice options for their children. It can also be used to mask their beliefs through the ways they talk about the benefits of choice for helping students of color escape their poorly performing schools. When Whites can feel good about their "liberal" ideas and ignore history, they work to reproduce the social and racial hierarchy. Further, expressing support for improving minoritized schools could be well-intentioned, but it could also be motivated by not wanting "those kids" choosing to attend their White schools.

Disregarding the historical injustices that non-Whites have experienced under a White supremacist structure furthers inequalities and limits the opportunities of minoritized groups. Not taking into account histories of marginalized populations supports neoliberal ways of conceptualizing the role of the individual. When people are viewed simply as individuals absent of their history within a marginalized group, meritocracy becomes overly important (Siegel, 2000), a key component of color-blind ideology. People of color traditionally have not had the same opportunities that White people have had in terms of access to education and other economic resources. Placing blame on individual people for being "lazy" when they cannot get a job, the framing of abstract liberalism aids in understanding these types of statements and behaviors. Lewis (2004) states, "With their claims of color-blindness, whites are self-exonerated from any

blame for current racial inequalities, and thus people of color are blamed implicitly (explicitly) for their own conditions" (p. 636). Therefore, the conception of equal opportunities or individual choice ignores the historical context of people of color, which works against them.

Social Capital Theory

Putnam (2000) explains that "the core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value (p. 19)." He states:

> … social capital refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called civic virtue. The difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital. (Putnam, 2000, p. 19)

Warren (2005) expands upon Putnam's conception of social capital, stating, "Given whatever other resources people have, including money and expertise, when people have close ties and trust each other, they are better able to achieve collective ends" (p. 136).

Putnam's version of social capital is related to how it accrues in the community as a whole rather than how people gain more social capital on an individual level for their own economic benefit (Stepick & Rey, 2010). Putnam emphasizes the building of relationships and trust between people and the ways that this influences the civic participation of community members. As Putnam (2000) states, "Trustworthiness lubricates social life. Frequent interaction among a diverse set of people tends to produce

a norm of generalized reciprocity. Civic engagement and social capital entail mutual obligation and responsibility for action" (p. 21).

Within Putnam's theory of social capital lies different kinds of social capital: bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital refers to the in-group relationships people have with one another. Although this form of social capital is important, especially for the development of relationships and trust within organizations, such as in individual churches or religious groups, it can be too closed off and homogenous (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Putnam, Feldstein, Lewis, & Cohen, 2003; Schneider, 2007; Stepick & Rey, 2010; Wuthnow, 2002). Bridging social capital, however, is a form of social capital that spans different groups and is interorganizational (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2006; Putnam, 2000; Putnam et al., 2003; Schneider, 2009; Stepick & Rey, 2010; Wuthnow, 2002). This form of capital is often commended for being heterogenous and is an indicator of communities that are not as highly segregated as ones with more bonding social capital (Blanchard, 2007; Putnam et al., 2003). Further, "… bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity, whereas bonding social capital bolsters our narrower selves" (Putnam, 2000, p. 23).

Three major theorists—Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam—are often associated with social capital theory, and each one's conceptualization of social capital has strengths and weaknesses. The differences of each theorist's conception is notable and important to distinguish between, as are the pitfalls and critiques leveled against each.

Bourdieu. In Bourdieu's (2008) conception of capital theory, his four forms of capital—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic—can be translated, or *transubstantiated*, into economic capital. His view is that society is structured by social

class, and that there is a limited amount of power that individual agents have for rising within the class hierarchy. However, individual agents have the ability to exchange their different forms of capital into economic value. Even though scholars have incorporated race into their studies using Bourdieu (e.g. Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999), he is often critiqued for not accounting enough for race and for being site specific as he was writing about French society (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Morrow & Torres, 1995).

Coleman. Coleman's theorization of social capital highlights the importance that trust plays. He explains the intangibility of it, explaining that social capital "… exists in the *relations* among persons" (Coleman, 1988, pp. S100–S101), and "The function identified by the concept of 'social capital' is the value of these aspects of social structure to actors as resources that they can use to achieve their interests" (p. S101). Similar to Bourdieu, Coleman concentrates on relationships between individuals and the way singular actors can use the trust from these relationships as a resource (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Paxton, 1999, 2002; Tzanakis, 2013), whereas Putnam highlights the role of social capital within the community (Stepick & Rey, 2010). Although Coleman views social capital as a potential public good (Tzanakis, 2013), he has been criticized for not taking into account that not everyone starts at the same level of access to valuable networks (Portes, 1998).

Putnam. Although I explained Putnam's conception of social capital above, he has also been critiqued for its uses in research. For example, Tzankis (2013) notes how researchers have used Putnam's form of social capital to explain national levels of civic engagement, but that his version falls short, especially as many of the studies cited had

serious methodological issues, which did not adequately incorporate the specificities of Putnam's theory. Further, as Portes (2000) points out, "the transition of the concept from an individual asset to a community or national resource was never explicitly theorized" (p. 3). With this weakness in Putnam's theory, scholars such as Stepick and Rey (2010) have attempted to remedy this and "to develop a concept that avoids the communalistic pitfalls of his application of the term 'social capital'" (p. 191) These scholars were concerned with the ways that religious organizations can influence a person's *civic social capital* (CSC). These authors "do not conceive of social organizations, as having more or less CSC. Rather, social organizations are a potential site for the promotion and creation of CSC" (Stepick & Rey, 2010, p. 192).

Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory and Social Capital Theory can be incongruent, especially as CRT views race as the most salient structural bound in U.S. society, while social capital theory focuses on class hierarchy. Putnam's theory, however, is less concerned with class as he does not conceive social capital as narrowly as something that can be translated into economic goods but posits that social capital, and particularly bridging social capital, benefits the overall community. Even though there are difficulties in aligning the two theories, Yosso (2005) has approached capital theory through the lens of CRT by challenging how the cultural capital of Whites is often viewed as the norm and of the highest value. Using her example, I attempt to use her notion of *community cultural wealth* to bring in the importance of race within social capital.

To see how civic participation influences issues of racial inequities in the Pinecreek public school system, I incorporate concepts from social capital theory and

Critical Race Theory. Specifically, I employ Putnam's (2000, 2015) and Putnam and Campbell's (2010) *social capital*, Warren's (2001, 2005) *civic participation*, Bonilla-Silva's (2014) *color-blind racism*, Yosso's (2005) *community cultural wealth* and *religio-civics*. By bringing these five concepts together, I attempt to bridge the gap between social capital theory and Critical Race Theory. In the next section, I provide a background of each concept, and I explain the rationale behind my choice of adapting the concepts from particular theorists.

Social Capital, Civic Participation, and Religio-Civics

Putnam (2000) notes that schools with higher student populations from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often receive fewer resources from school districts, and "mobilizing the social capacities of the school is perhaps even more important to achieve educational goals" (p. 136). Social capital, which evidence suggests is reproduced in schools, is influenced by societal factors such as housing segregation (Lewis, 2003; Douglas Massey & Denton, 1993; Rothstein, 2017b). Furthermore, it is largely about establishing and maintaining relationships (Warren, 2005). Students who attend neighborhood, resource-poor schools face greater obstacles than students in schools with more economic resources (i.e. fewer educational opportunities and less experienced teachers). Because race plays an important role in determining where families decide to settle (Lewis, 2003), schools often reflect housing segregation patterns. This restricts individuals' social networks so that they do not overlap across race or class (Lewis, 2003; O'Connor et al., 2007). Students in poverty tend to have smaller social networks, with children of color particularly cut off from networks of individuals with more economic resources (Putnam, 2015) that could connect them to internships, employment, or

summer work opportunities (Wells & Crain, 1997). A wide social network can be a catalyst for gaining access to different schooling options and richer educational opportunities (O'Connor et al., 2007). As residential segregation keeps people apart beyond the school, it influences the social networks adults have and can extend into social life and community participation. This is not to say, however, that the social networks that students of color do have are not valuable. As I discuss later, Yosso (2005) emphasizes that Whites should not be viewed as the standard for determining the value of social capital and that communities of color possess valuable forms of capital.

Warren's conception of civic participation relies on Putnam's social capital to explain how individuals can work together with other community members toward social justice issues in education. He explains that social capital is not an answer to everything, but that it does help make use of assets that individual schools and neighborhoods contain (Warren, 2005). Warren marries the individual with institutions, sharing that when community members have access to and built relationships within institutions, such as schools, these relationships "provide the glue for these collaborations, both in the ways schools and community organizations form collaborations, and in how these partnerships strengthen relationships within school communities" (Warren, 2005, p. 137). Further, grassroots groups and other community organizations have a powerful political role. By working to build relationships with school leaders, community groups that collaborate "offer the possibility of expanding the capacities of the school community while simultaneously holding promise for building a political constituency for urban school reform (Warren, 2005, p. 139). Warren (2005) also notes that building social capital is important, but that "a broader solution requires creating the political capacity to address

issues of structural inequality, like the pernicious underfunding of urban school systems" (p. 137).

Religio-civics. I locate religio-civics within the larger concept of civic participation. This particular concept, which came from the field work for this study, highlights how religious belonging and spiritual beliefs have the potential to frame and motivate individuals' involvement in community activism efforts. As one study participant who coined the term defined it, "community activism is only as deep as your moral underpinnings." Individuals' motivations behind civic participation can be interpreted through this values-based concept, and it can also help explain to what level community members participate in social justice and antiracist actions. Secondly, appealing to people's religious belonging and belief systems can encourage them to become involved in social justice issues. By viewing religious individuals as the moral compass of a community, or by encouraging people to fight for racial equity through religious and spiritual values, community members can use these belief systems to call upon social justice action from others. However, this is not an all encompassing concept as not all people are religious or ascribe their community activism to religious teachings and faith. It recognizes that other forms of morality, or ethics, are an important driver for involvement in civic participation. In his work on ethics, Freire (1998) states:

> I am speaking of a universal human ethic, an ethic that is not afraid to condemn … the exploitation of labor and the manipulation that makes a rumor into truth and truth into a mere rumor. … The ethic with which I speak is that which feels itself betrayed and neglected by the hypocritical perversion of an elitist purity, an ethic affronted by racial, sexual, and class discrimination (p. 23).

The concept of religio-civics draws upon notions of morality and basic tenets of religious groups. In this study, it helps explain how the ER group operated. Even though the community group was not religious in itself, it drew its membership from religious groups to fight against racism in Pinecreek, and leaders aligned the work that the group performed along religious tenets, emphasizing the importance of unity and the necessity for God's assistance in fighting racism. Through connecting antiracism work to religious beliefs, community activists related specific religious teachings to antiracist work. These teachings included that everyone was human and therefore created by God; that unity was essential for humanity, and therefore racial segregation was an obstacle to God's will; and that the evils of racism did not allow for the true freedom of being fully human. Based on individuals' faith, God was essential for moving the group's work forward.

Color-Blind Racism

Bonilla-Silva's (2014) color-blind racism is a helpful analysis tool for observing how race functions in city spaces, within schools, between organizations, and between individual people. His four frames of *naturalization* (viewing the separation of races or "sticking to their own kind" as natural), *minimization of race* (refuting claims from people of color that events, policies, and actions are racist), *cultural racism* (dependence upon stereotypes of different races), and *abstract liberalism* (touting the freedom and choices of individuals as being removed from racist ideology) can be used to explain both the words and actions of individuals. These four frames provide ways to view racism when it is in coded forms, or there are instances of "racism without racists."

Color-blind racism gives a framework for understanding how to approach and challenge racism, and it is important for challenging the obstacles that people of color

face in racialized spaces, which can include community groups and schools. It works in tandem with community cultural wealth as a key form of color-blind racism includes deficit-oriented thinking. In communication with community cultural wealth, it not only points out hidden racism, but it can contribute to altering deficit thinking into more positive and productive ways of analyzing race and racism.

Community Cultural Wealth

Although social capital is a useful concept for understanding ways to overcome racially or economically isolated schools so that relationships between the education system and its surrounding community can be better understood (Warren, 2005), it has rightfully been critiqued as being limiting and, if applied irresponsibly, deficit-oriented. Therefore, Yosso's (2005) concept of *community cultural wealth* is useful for attending to the limitations of social capital as it has been applied in the past. Often, middle class Whites are seen as the standard, while communities of color are perceived as lacking something, which does not permit them to move up in society (Yosso, 2005). However, by moving away from "White, middle class culture as the standard" and focusing on the strengths and opportunities that communities of color possess, this redirects the conversation to highlight the assets of these communities (Yosso, 2005, p. 76), and it can be used to show how cross-community social justice groups work against a deficit-oriented framework.

Yosso (2005) explains that community cultural wealth is comprised of six different forms of capital. These are aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital. She states, "These various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of

community cultural wealth" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). In addition to social capital, particularly pertinent to this study and the work that ER and the EAT carried out were aspirational and resistant capital. Defining aspirational capital as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers," this form of capital was clearly exhibited through the actions and persistence of the teachers of color with whom I worked. The additional form—resistant capital—can take a transformative form, allows actors to use their cultural knowledge to challenge racism and racist structures (Pizarro, 1998; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999; Yosso, 2005).

Combining the Concepts

Together, the five concepts of social capital, civic participation, religio-civics, color-blind racism, and community cultural wealth can work in combination to understand the actions of ER and the EAT, as well as what motivated individuals to become involved in issues of racial equity in local education policy. As Warren (2005; 2001) has shown, social capital and civic participation go hand-in-hand to explain community activism and the abilities community groups can have in extending their networks and recruiting individuals to their particular causes. The EAT, which will be shown in the findings chapters, used the social capital of its members to recruit and maintain a diverse membership, and it also provided opportunities for the group to meet with and influence educational and city leaders. Further, social capital, civic participation, and religio-civics are lenses through which to understand how religiosity influenced people's participation in ER and the EAT and how commitment to a religious group was perceived to limit the involvement from certain religious leaders from around the city. As will be noted in Chapters 4 and 5, color-blind racism is used as a lens through

which to understand intergroup dynamics of the EAT as well as how this type of racism was an obstacle present throughout city and school spaces.

Even with ER's and the EAT's diverse membership, and even though members of different races in the group worked well together overall, there were moments when color-blind attitudes made the community activist group a disconcerting and difficult space for its Black members. For example, although ER was ostensibly focused on issues of race, two of its teams' mission statements did not even mention the word race or racism, instead using the phrase "all people" when addressing whose lives would be improved with the work ER was undertaking. And finally, overlaying each of these four concepts with community cultural wealth helps in making sense of how people of color's voices were listened to or not, and it helps show how using Whiteness as the benchmark is not only deficient, but it is dangerous. Community cultural wealth helps to highlight the ways that communities of color and their individual members have value, and that White Pinecreek residents have struggled to embrace this way of thinking by maintaining color-blind attitudes that are prevalent in the city and its schools.

Conclusion

Through this chapter, I reviewed the previous research that had been done on community activist groups undertaking work to address racially inequitable policies in local school districts. I provided a broad review of the literature that approached the overlap between religious belief/belonging and civic participation, investigated how race and space are interconnected, and the role that social capital plays in relation to civic participation, religion, and school choice.

I also showed how employing concepts from Critical Race Theory and Social Capital Theory help to explain the work of ER and the EAT. These theories aided in understanding the experiences that people of color had in the city of Pinecreek and its school district. By using the concepts of social capital, community participation, religio-civics, color-blind racism, and community cultural wealth, I built a conceptual framework that explain why ER and the EAT formed, how it functioned in the partnership it built with school district officials, why tensions between group members and people outside of the group occurred, how space and race contributed to individuals' choice to become involved in issues of racial equity, and how religiosity played a key role in the ways that individuals viewed the progress and work that the community activist group undertook. In the next chapter, I describe the methods that I used to carry out the research and the data analysis tools I employed to understand my research findings in this field site.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the community context under study, the qualitative methods I employed, the participants included, my positionality, and the study's limitations. To understand the process of building the relationship between the community activist group, Eliminate Racism (ER), and the local school district, as well as to delve into the reasoning behind individuals' motivations for becoming involved in community activism, I conducted an ethnography and employed participatory action research (PAR). These methods allowed me to build long-lasting relationships between participants and construct thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the site's context and actors within it based on my fieldnotes, participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. I also analyzed documents from public meetings, ER meetings, the ER website, local newspaper, the *Concerned Community Members* lawsuit, and archives from the library's local history room.

To establish trusting relationships with my informants, I was a participatory action researcher alongside the ER group from March 2018 to early October 2019. During this time, I attended 44 meetings with ER, and 39 other gatherings around the city to learn more about the site's context. Most of my time was dedicated to working with the community activist group, and specifically the Education Action Team (EAT), which was made up of approximately 25 individuals, twelve to fifteen of whom were regularly active. I also attended meetings with school district officials, including the superintendent, the chief officer of human resources, and another district administrator

who requested that her position remain anonymous. I regularly attended city council meetings and other convenings with the mayor of Pinecreek. Below is a table of the timeline of my dissertation study.

Table 1
Study Timeline

Research	Feb 2018-Jul 2018	Jul 2018	Aug 2018-Oct 2018	Nov 2018-Oct 2019	Nov 2019-Feb 2020	Mar 2020
Informal participant observation						
Received IRB approval						
Pilot study data collection						
Conduct semistructured interviews						
Data analysis/coding						
Write up results						
Member checks						
Defend dissertation						

I was an active participant in ER's three main types of meetings. First, I attended ER steering committee meetings—gatherings where everyone from the organization (and those outside of the organization who wanted to learn about it) was invited to attend. These monthly meetings brought together the leadership of all four action teams (Education, Economic Opportunities, Relationships, and Criminal Justice), who reported on the accomplishments of the previous month. These meetings usually lasted about an hour and a half, and sometimes took the form of potlucks. The second type of meeting

was with the (EAT), which usually occurred once a month for ninety minutes. However, depending on the projects the group was undertaking, meetings happened weekly and for longer periods of time. For example, to prepare for a presentation to the superintendent and his cabinet, extra meetings lasted up to three hours. Finally, I attended Goal 3 team meetings at least once a month. As EAT members were instructed to choose only one goal to work on, I regularly met with three White women, and we worked on researching ways to recruit and retain more children of color into Advanced Placement classes in the Pinecreek school district. Additional meetings with ER and the EAT included meetings with the superintendent and mayor, with the leadership of the teachers union, with other community activist groups such as Transform Pinecreek, and an event co-hosted by ER, the superintendent, and the mayor, which was attended by over one hundred community leaders of religious and minoritized groups.

In addition to meetings with ER and the EAT, I conducted semistructured interviews with participants and non-participants of the community activist group. I met with 24 individuals for a total of 32 interviews. These took place starting six months into my study and concluded at the beginning of October 2019. They happened at coffee shops, in interviewees' homes, and places of work. Each of these locations were chosen by the interviewees themselves to put them at ease. I used purposeful sampling, interviewing members of ER/EAT as well as snowball sampling to interview those outside of the group.

I continuously analyzed my data throughout the data collection process, which included over 400 pages of fieldnotes, jottings, and memos. Further, I gave my participants opportunities to review their transcripts to ensure that they accurately

reflected their thoughts and that they had expressed their opinions accurately. This process occurred toward the end of the dissertation study as I continued to code and write up the results. As this study provided me with ample amounts of data, I narrowed my focus, presentation, and analysis of the data to answer my three research questions. Before explaining the methodological choices I made and the reasoning behind them in the following sections, I first provide a brief background of the community under which I conducted this study to provide context.

Community Context

This nineteen-month-long ethnography took place in the Midwestern city of Pinecreek (pseudonym), which has approximately 150,000 residents. The city's population remained relatively stable between the 1970s and 2000s, but there has been a recent decline of about 3,000 people, aligning with overall state trends. Approximately 65% of residents are White, 20% are Black, and 15% are Latinx ("Quick facts: Pinecreek city," 2019). On the other hand, its public school district has about 30% White, 30% Black, and 30% Latinx students.

During the time of this study, all participants resided within the greater Pinecreek area, many of whom had lived there for at least one decade. Individuals were given pseudonyms to protect anonymity, and the city was also given a pseudonym. This pseudonym was also used when writing and citing from the local newspaper, the ER website and other city websites, the desegregation court cases, and any other potentially identifying sources that I referenced throughout the dissertation. Further, the lawsuit was given a pseudonym.

I chose to follow the ER community activist group during my initial pilot study, which lasted for approximately seven months. During this period, I explored events from around the city that related to race and racism. I attended City Council and their special committee meetings regularly, community conversations about political measures during election season, special addresses by the mayor, and presentations related to the school district. As my initial interest lay within the school desegregation court case, I specifically targeted events pertaining to race, including a session called Faithful Desegregation. It was through this event that I became aware of the newly-formed group, ER. While at Faithful Desegregation, in which an almost completely White audience attended, two participants explained that ER was more diverse. They informed me that the group had started meeting in November 2017, and they were watching a video called *Hidden Colors: The Rules of Racism* and discussing race and racism using the video as a guide. They invited me to their next session, which occurred two weeks later.

My first meeting with ER was the group's sixth. It was at this meeting that they had come to the conclusion that they no longer wanted to just talk about race and racism in the city, but they wanted to take action to address it. During the meeting, the group's leaders divided attendees into groups of five people, and together we brainstormed different sectors of the city that were in need of racial activism. After meeting in our small groups, everyone came together to vote, and the four decided-upon areas were education, criminal justice, economic opportunities, and relationships. I joined the Education Action Team (EAT), and with the members' knowledge about the intentions of my research, I was welcomed and supported.

The opportunity to spend a vast amount of time with ER helped me form and maintain new relationships with residents from around the community who were concerned about the state of race and racism in Pinecreek. Over the nineteen months of observations, I witnessed the comings and goings of individuals in the group, but I also witnessed a core group of dedicated volunteers who were committed to the EAT. Within the team, there were approximately twelve people who attended almost every event and meeting, and there were others that the team's leaders could call upon when they needed more people to show up to certain events.

Of the EAT's core group, I was by far the youngest until the final month of data collection, when three Latinx medical students joined the team. Most members were in their 60s and 70s, and they explained that they had time to volunteer in the community since they were retired. Some team members had been involved in community activism for a better portion of their lives, and a number were involved in the *Concerned Community Members* lawsuit in the 1990s. Individuals regularly spoke about their involvement in the lawsuit as well as the committees that emerged during the desegregation era, when the school district was found guilty of intentionally discriminating against children and teachers of color.

Not only did I work with the ER community activist group, and specifically the EAT, but I also thought it was important to gain a wider perspective about city events. Therefore, I spoke with people knowledgeable about the city and its history. This included two lawyers from the *Concerned Community Members* lawsuit—one from the plaintiff side, and one from the defendant side; one Black and one White; one woman and one man. I also interviewed the current superintendent of the schools and the mayor of

the city. Further, I spoke with religious leaders involved in issues of racial justice. I made this choice because religion and spirituality were concepts that were salient during events that I attended during my exploratory period of this study. My goal in speaking with religious leaders was to better understand the role that religious and spiritual beliefs had within ER and for people involved in social justice work. Religion and spirituality remained present throughout the entire study, and many people I spoke with connected these beliefs with their antiracism work in education.

One of the main goals throughout this study was to highlight and illuminate the voices of people within the community who have been ignored or silenced—which often were people of color. While this remained a driving motivator throughout the study, I became aware that this limited the scope and findings of this project. Therefore, because the ER team had formed such positive and collaborative relationships with the superintendent and mayor, I included them in my set of interviews so that I could gain their perspective on what it was like to work with ER—a community activist group that had continuously pushed on them for over a year to establish strategies to provide equitable opportunities for people of color within Pinecreek.

Although Pinecreek shared characteristics of other rustbelt cities in the midwestern United States, such as declining manufacturing economies and rampant residential segregation, the city was unique in negative and positive ways. Many of these distinctive qualities came out during conversations I had during my time of research. For example, multiple African American men shared with me that Pinecreek was the most racist place that they have ever lived. The undercurrent of racial oppression and subsequent denial from many White people that racism still existed was unlike anywhere

else they had lived and worked. This site was also unique in that it had undergone two separate desegregation lawsuits. Although the district was found guilty and was under court orders to desegregate from 1993-2002, the legacy of that lawsuit remained ambivalent at best in the minds of the city's residents. People still talked about how their property taxes increased and the values of their homes decreased as a result of the lawsuit. While some individuals highlighted the good things that resulted from court oversight of the school district, such as the building of three new elementary schools on the city's west side, the diversification of student populations in the schools, and the equitable distribution of goods and resources throughout the school system, there remained a high amount of distrust among Pinecreek's residents for each other and for school district administrators and teachers. This distrust was in part due to the methods used to carry out the lawsuit and the ensuing remedies as Pinecreek residents saw their money wasted. For example, the law firm hired by the school district to represent it came from a nearby major city, and it spent money to overnight materials through FedEx to the school board office, a destination only about seven blocks away. These documents could have easily been hand delivered at no cost to the taxpayers.

Ambivalence from both African Americans and Whites about the lawsuit was apparent. Although the lawsuit helped establish more equitable practices, and it set an example that something like this could happen again, court oversight also further divided the community. Due to this division and worsening conditions for marginalized populations in the city, the pall of a potential third lawsuit hung over city residents. Becasue many within the ER believed that a third lawsuit would divide the community more than it already was, group members attempted to work within the current structures

of the school system to rectify current inequities and provide children of color with better educational opportunities.

Methods Employed

Ethnography

My research questions were answered by conducting a nineteen-month ethnography, a method that encourages participation in formal and informal interactions with people, formation of deep relationships with others over a lengthy period of time, and the establishment of trust. Ethnographies rely on thick description, or in-depth knowledge about the site's context (Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 2009), and it is therefore necessary to spend significant time in the field with the group under study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Daily immersion assists the researcher in gaining micro-level understandings of how group members interact with one another, and it helps unearth the cultural meanings of these interactions (Creswell, 2013). Scholars indicate that ethnography incorporates analysis of many types of data, including participant observation, archival records, interviews, field notes, and audio recordings (Green, Skukauskaite, & Baker, 2012), each of which will be explained further in this section.

Scholars studying race have indicated the importance of adopting ethnography as a research method, explaining that employing this method can help the researcher investigate the intersection of race and education (Lewis, 2004; O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller, 2007). O'Connor, Lewis, & Mueller (2007) point out that the advantage of using ethnography to study race in education is its ability to show the "everydayness of racism," as examples can be found in mundane social interactions among people (p. 547).

This was certainly the case throughout my time in Pinecreek, where I witnessed racial abuses (Kendi, 2019) in informal settings and casual conversations with city residents.

Interviews

One-on-one semi-structured interviews. Interviews have been cited as an important and common component in ethnographic research (Creswell, 2013). They are helpful for gaining an understanding of otherwise unobservable thoughts, revealing how people make sense of the world around them (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) suggests that when approaching difficult topics, it is better to use one-on-one interviews rather than focus group interviews so that people feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and information. Using Merriam's rationale, I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews, because I covered sensitive topics such as racial and religious beliefs and personal experiences with racism. I also incorporated Spradley's (1979) techniques and suggestions of using informal conversation as a way to learn about topics of interest. In accordance with his suggestions, I regularly asked description questions as well as repetitive questions, which allowed the interviewee to expand upon their responses. This strategy elicited more information and clarified confusing or unclear answers for me. An additional strategy that I employed to put interviewees at ease was giving them the opportunity to choose the location of the interview. Therefore, I met and interviewed individuals in their homes, at churches, at coffee shops, at their offices, and at a restaurant.

I conducted 32 interviews with 24 individuals, lasting between 29 and 98 minutes. I interviewed three of the four founders of the ER group three times. The fourth, Helen, I only interviewed once (we had trouble finding a time to meet initially, and she was

experiencing health issues with lengthy hospital stays). During my pilot study, while I was still learning the best ways to approach interviews, I interviewed two other individuals twice. As my study progressed, and as I established relationships with the people who I hoped would be willing to speak with me, it became obvious that I could ask all of my questions within a single interview and follow up with interviewees for any lingering questions I had.

Table 2
Semi-structured Interview Participants

Participant		EAT/ER Member	District Employee (Past or present)	Black	White	Latinx	Mixed Race	# of inter-views
1	Hannah	x	x		x			3
2	Connie	x			x			2
3	Walter	x			x			3
4	David	x		x				3
5	Rachel	x			x			2
6	Samuel	x					x	1
7	Joy	x	x		x			1
8	Christine	x	x		x			1
9	Leigh	x			x			1
10	Ella	x	x	x				1
11	Emma	x				x		1
12	Helen	x	x	x				1
13	Luke	x			x			1
14	Rose	x	x	x				1
15	Jake		x		x			1
16	Anthony	x		x				1
17	Eric	x	x		x			1
18	Geoff				x			1
19	Delilah			x				1
20	Emily						x	1
21	Scott		x		x			1
22	Rob				x			1
23	Stephanie		x	x				1
24	Lucia	x		61		x		1

The table above outlines the background of each interviewee, with details including whether or not they were a member of the ER and/or EAT team, whether or not they had ever worked for the Pinecreek Public School District, their race, and the number of interviews that I conducted with them.

I conducted multiple interviews with the founders of ER because they were the most knowledgeable about the inner workings of the group. I hoped to capture a bird's eye view of how they thought the organization was doing as time passed. During my first interviews with the four founders, I asked them questions about their involvement in ER and their motivation behind starting the group. Second interviews asked them questions about their religious involvement and experiences in Pinecreek, and I also inquired about their ideas of what good and bad citizenship meant to them. Then, I had them describe people in the community who they saw as either a good citizen or a bad/nonideal citizen. Asking questions about citizenship and community participation was a proxy for asking about race and racism directly in order to help people feel more at ease. These questions were also meant to illuminate associations between notions of citizenship and race. Scholars note that conceptions of citizenship are often tied to race as it historically determined who could or could not be a citizen (Torres, 1998; Wallerstein, 2003). As I moved out of my pilot stage of this study, these questions were asked in single interview sessions. Further, I addressed race directly in subsequent interviews, asking individuals, "What do you think the state of race is currently in Pinecreek?" and asking them direct questions about the *Concerned Community Members* case and what its legacy was in the city.

Most of my interviews took place with members of ER, but I also interviewed the school superintendent, the Chief Human Resources Officer of the Pinecreek School District, a district administrator who requested her position remain anonymous, a current city council alderwoman who had represented the plaintiffs in the desegregation lawsuit, and one of the lawyers who represented the school district. Interviewing these individuals helped me answer my first research question of "How did community participation influence local education policy?" My interviews with people who shaped educational and city policy covered the ways that they viewed, worked with, and were influenced by local community groups and the larger Pinecreek community.

Two interviews were not audio recorded. The first unrecorded interview was with a current parent in the district, and we communicated via email. This woman, Emily, expressed that she would not be able to meet up in person but that she still wanted to contribute to the study. Therefore, she agreed to writing out her answers and emailing them to me. The other unrecorded interview was my third with Hannah because I had technology problems. As such, I took extensive notes during the interview and wrote down everything that I could recall.

Ethnography can be complicated, and ethnographers need to constantly reflect on their work and the people they interview. Although I studied group members participating in ER, I discovered that I was missing some perspectives for understanding issues surrounding race, education, and religion. Duneier (2011) suggests that researchers continually ask themselves two questions: First, "Are there people or perspectives or observations outside the sample whose existence is likely to have implications for the argument I am making?" (p. 9) and "Are there people or perspectives or phenomena

within the sample that, when brought before the jury, would feel they were caricatured in the service of the ethnographer's theory or line of argument?" (p. 9). Duneier suggests that it may be important to not only interview a convenience sample, but to also consider an "inconvenience sample" toward the middle or end of the ethnography when the researcher understands that there may be missing voices in the story (Duneier, 2011).

Taking Duneier's advice, I enlisted interviews with people from outside the group that would not have been easily accessible for me had I not spent significant time in the field. Therefore, towards the end of this study, I interviewed the mayor of Pinecreek and the Pinecreek School District superintendent. I also had the chance to interview two other individuals within the school district central administration building: the Chief Human Resources Officer and another administrator who worked closely with the superintendent. It was important for me to interview multiple individuals within the district's central office aside from the superintendent as this could give me a more well-rounded perspective about their perceptions of working with the ER community group. Both of these district employees attended multiple meetings held in collaboration with the EAT, and both were heavily involved in the work that ER was trying to accomplish on the district side.

Another interview toward the end of the study occurred with one of the attorneys from the law firm that represented the school district during the second desegregation lawsuit. This perspective was a valuable component to this study because he represented a different way of thinking about the origins of the lawsuit and its subsequent legacy in the community when compared to ER members. My final interview took place with a Latinx medical student. She was new to Pinecreek and new to ER. I hoped that by

speaking with her, should would offer the fresh perspective of someone who had not seen the group during its first year and a half of existence.

Interview technology. Interviews were recorded using an Echo pen. This tool allowed me to take handwritten notes while simultaneously recording each respondent's voice. Using this type of technology, rather than typing on a computer while the interviewer was speaking, provided a welcoming situation so that the interviewee I was talking with knew that I was listening and understood what they said. Recording the speaker's voices directly onto the pen allowed me to keep the conversation going and I did not necessarily need to take notes throughout the interview. Further, I noticed that many people were unfamiliar with the Echo pen, and explaining how it worked allowed me to start our conversations informally, easing people into the interview so that there was minimal discomfort.

I transcribed 27 of the 32 interviews using the online program, Temi. This resource was a good middle ground between complete self-transcription and hired transcription services. As Temi is computer generated, it only accurately transcribed about 80-90% of the recordings. As a result, I was very close to my data as I re-listened to the interviews and reviewed each transcript, making necessary adjustments sentence by sentence. Lastly, for three interviews, due to length and time restraints, I used Rev.com, which was a quicker and more accurate resource as it used human transcribers. The other two were unrecorded interviews.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Though not a method that I immediately chose to incorporate in the beginning of my pilot study, my decision to conduct critical participatory action research (PAR) was purposeful and an essential aspect of this dissertation research. While I explored the city of Pinecreek in the initial pilot study phase and became connected with the ER team in its nascent stages, it quickly became obvious that PAR was necessary for a number of reasons, including the mission and vision of the group, the types of meetings I attended, the topics the group hoped to address within the city, and the role that my presence played.

The presence of a researcher always alters the dynamics of a group, and it affects interactions between group members. As Ball (2006) states, "The researcher never can be the invisible fly on the wall, as sometimes is claimed, but is always inevitably a part of the scene" (p. 159). Researchers too frequently forget that their presence invariably affects what happens at the study's site (Ball, 2006).With these ideas in mind, I evaluated how to best carry out the ethnography as my presence, even if I had been a silent observer, affected all of the interactions that I observed.

As ER began meeting and set down a clear path for moving forward in its ideals of eradicating racism through the community, it became obvious that I would need to do more than simply watch and observe the group's actions. For one, I needed to gain the trust of ER members, many of whom were already distrustful individuals and skeptics of community groups fighting racism in the city. Many participants throughout my fieldwork expressed their doubts that any substantive changes in the school district would be made by ER's efforts based on the history of Pinecreek's educational and

governmental officials dealing with—or not—racism and delivering noteworthy or sustainable equity results. By participating in the group's discussions and voicing my opinions on strategies for working together and collaborating with the school district, I gained credibility not only as a researcher, but also as someone who was genuinely concerned about the work the team undertook and how it could influence Pinecreek's residents. The necessity for me to actively participate became especially clear during one of the earliest meetings with the EAT. The group had been struggling to develop a mission statement that satisfied everyone in the room. As we all needed to agree on the mission to move forward with our goals, it was important that my opinion and agreement was taken into account.

The amount that I participated was a tough balancing act, especially in the beginning months of my time with ER and the EAT. Firstly, I am a reserved individual who does not readily speak in public to offer my thoughts and ideas. One of my strengths is that I am a good listener, and I prefer to take things in before contributing my opinions. While this worked to my advantage throughout my fieldwork, Rev. David did call me out a couple of different times. He kindly explained to me that the group would benefit from me sharing my perspective more often. Further, with the amount of time I had spent with ER and the EAT, I had "earned the right" to be able to voice my opinion aloud more often.

As the mission and goals of the EAT and the greater ER team developed, it became clear that this was a group that was going to legitimately tackle social issues by taking specific and actionable steps. As Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014) state, "We reaffirm that the purpose of critical participatory action research is to change social

practices, including research practice itself, to make them more rational and reasonable, more productive and sustainable, and more just and inclusive" (p. 3). Because PAR is concerned with the voices of the people on the ground, Kemmis et al. (2014) state:

> Each of the approaches described in the literature of action research rejects conventional research approaches where an external expert enters a setting to record and represent what is happening. Two features are apparent: the recognition of the capacity of people living and working in particular settings to participate actively in all aspects of the research process; and the research conducted by participants is oriented to making improvements in practices and their settings by the participants themselves (p. 4).

The PAR method aims at changing practices, with both positive and negative effects in an effort to improve the lives of others (Kemmis et al., 2014).

PAR has received criticism for not being "objective" enough, with critics citing that the researcher is highly involved in the phenomenon under study. However, as scholars have regularly pointed out, no research is inherently objective, and scholars question the validity of findings made by researchers who claim objectivity (Ball, 2006). Others suggest that a researcher with a more clinical, non-investment approach will be unable to truly "*become* engaged participants alongside others in an action research initiative" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 9).

Researchers recognize the fluidity of PAR and that there is no perfect way of conducting research using this method. Further, with regard to critical PAR, Kemmis, Taggart, and Nixon (2014) state:

> we do not imagine it as a kind of research instrument that can be perfected so that

> it will give us exact or 'true' readings of states of affairs in the world. Instead, we think of it as a way of opening up space for dialogue and conversation about states of affairs in our world. We view critical participatory action research as a process for opening up communicative space—space for public discourse in public spheres (p. 28).

In this way, critical PAR is adaptable and looks different from one research project to the next. In fact, an underlying tenet of this method is the attempt at critically examining "what happens here" for a particular, single case, and it does not seek to generalize as it aims for deep understanding of the individual participants and phenomena under study (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 67).

Interestingly, in some instances, my presence as a participatory action researcher was used as a way to sell the legitimacy of ER. For example, at various meetings, Rev. David would introduce me, saying that ER was blessed to have a scholar working on his doctorate who was studying the group. He invoked the prestige of the title doctorate, and whenever he did this, people asked me about the work I was doing, wishing me good luck and expressing gratitude. Some of these people ended up joining ER and regularly asked me how my research was going.

As ER continues its work, and as I finished my time with them for this dissertation project, it was obvious that the group's members had mutual respect for each other. Each participant was seen as integral to carrying out the group's mission, which is an important aspect of critical PAR. The researcher is not above any individual in the group under study, and "participants are invited to join in the process of becoming the greatest experts in the world about how and why we do things *around here*—experts

about *our* understandings, *our* practices, and the conditions under which *we* work" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 70). Therefore, members of the EAT and ER in general often played key roles in researching how they understood the context within which they lived and worked.

Participant Observation

Overall, I spent nineteen months in the field as a participant observer, first conducting an exploratory pilot study, and then narrowing my focus to explicitly follow ER and its EAT. After attending several events around Pinecreek, including the Faithful Desegregation workshop at the Unitarian Universalist church where I first learned about ER in March 2018, I made my way to Pinecreek Baptist Church for the first of what would be many times. At this first meeting, I connected with Hannah and explained to her what I was studying. From there, I continued to attend ER, and subsequently, EAT meetings. I also began going to dinners at Hannah and Walter's house. As part of their involvement with the Bahá'í faith, they opened their home every Wednesday evening, even when they were out of town. Anyone interested in sharing a meal and learning about a topic which oftentimes pertained to race or other social justice issue was welcome. By showing up to events such as these where informal conversations took place, I started to get to know Pinecreek community members and was able to establish deeper relationships with them by sharing in meals and discussions with them.

Between March 2018 and October 2019, I attended EAT meetings, ER steering committee meetings, and other events supported by the group. These included meetings with the school district's superintendent and the city's mayor, alternative school tours, and a breakfast sponsored by ER, the superintendent, and the mayor where over one

hundred community leaders attended. It was necessary for me to not only attend events specifically held by ER, but I needed to have a better picture of the structures that ER operated and worked within. Therefore, I attended talks hosted by the city about local voting issues, City Council meetings, and public addresses by the mayor. It was also necessary for me to get to know the inner workings of the school district better. I also attended school board meetings, equity trainings where community members were invited to attend, student code of conduct community member meetings, and an alternative school tour that was open to the public. Attending these events helped me build connections and allowed me to interact with city and school district officials.

I used my field notes to help me understand and reflect upon how individuals interacted and worked with one another. These notes helped me see the tensions that existed, particularly between certain individuals in the ER group and the school district. Although there was a message of collaboration and working together, this was not always simple for people to navigate as individuals within the school district became defensive about being challenged by the community activist group, and members of ER would at times criticize the school district or make impossible demands of it (e.g. wanting district recruiters to give monetary incentives only to teachers of color). Both sides had strong opinions and ideas about what should be done, and there were often disconnects between the district and EAT, but part of this was because of the inadequate information that the EAT had at its disposal. At times, this scarcity of resources was due to the lack of follow through from the district when the EAT asked for more information about initiatives going on or data pertaining to the goals of the three different groups within the EAT. How the different groups did or did not collaborate will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Documents and Artifacts

Documentation. I analyzed documents created by or used at ER events or other relevant meetings, which included school board meetings, other community group meetings (i.e. the United Way's Middle School Summit), city council meetings, Sacred Path (the weekly dinner that brought together people from around the community to share a meal and discuss race), community meetings about the student discipline code, as well as perusing the school district's website. Although the focus was on documents created by ER, handouts and resources from other groups and events provided more context and painted a richer picture of Pinecreek.

Archival research. I conducted archival research using the library's local history reading room. While there, I found newspaper articles about the second desegregation case, *Concerned Community Members v. Pinecreek Board of Education*. I studied these resources to help me understand how the case was portrayed in the local media, especially as its legacy continued to play an important role and was regularly mentioned in the local newspaper.

Additionally, I read the court case proceedings from *Concerned Community Members*. Having an intricate understanding of this case was important for making sense of how and why Pinecreek's schools were resegregating and whether or not current policymakers, community members, and education and religious leaders were aware of this background, and what they subsequently did with this information.

Eliminate Racism website. In March 2019, the Relationship Action Team of ER developed a website to publicize the group and its actions more widely. The website included the mission and vision of the group, the goals of each of the four action teams,

and upcoming events. It also contained documents and videos produced by ER, including the EAT's report to the school district and the video recording of the August 2019 breakfast event. To understand how ER presented itself to the public, I analyzed the website, which was regularly updated to account for the group's continued work around the community.

Field notes and memos. Jottings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) were important for informing my fieldnotes as they allowed me to recall specific details from events where I was not comfortable taking extensive notes. In reviewing my fieldnotes, memos also contributed to answering my research questions as they provided me with initial analyses, especially as my impressions after interviews informed my thinking about the phenomena I was studying, such as how community members viewed ER and its work. Creswell (2013) describes memoing as a way in which "the researcher writes down ideas about the evolving theory throughout the process of open, axial, and selective coding" (p. 89). Memoing as I wrote field notes assisted me in making sense of the events I attended and the conversations I had, and I used Saldaña's (2016) strategy of memoing about personal dilemmas in the research as I encountered them.

The Consideration of Bias

Qualitative research will always be biased, but I took steps to eliminate potential sources of bias and account for representative responses. I drew upon strategies of researchers who have conducted ethnographic fieldwork, such as Akom (2003) and Lewis (2003) who specifically noted how they worked at not introducing bias into their data collection and subsequent analysis and how analyzing their data throughout the collection period was helpful. Akom noted that he embraced his own subjectivity by

monitoring himself systematically. This allowed him to scrutinize his "personal and professional growth and evolution in the research process" (Akom, 2003, p. 310). Part of this process included writing memos, which Lewis (2003) also did and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) encourage. This self-reflection and early analysis of the data was important for member checking, which was something that I incorporated in my own research. Member checking allowed participants to provide feedback to make sure their message was clear during the interviews (Lewis, 2003) Adopting this strategy allowed the interviewee to play a larger role in the research, and it gave them the chance to reflect upon what they said.

Coding

I employed Saldana's (2016) approach to coding the data that I collected during this study, going through multiple rounds of first cycle coding, which included attribute, sub-, simultaneous, descriptive, concept, values, and versus coding. In the first cycle, I did not have any pre-determined codes, and I did not limit myself to a certain number of codes. The reasoning behind this was that I wanted to ensure that I captured all of the ideas that I thought were important before I combined them into more general and non-redundant codes. Interviews and fieldnotes were coded with the help of NVivo, which assisted me in finding broad trends in the data. During the second round of coding, I incorporated Maxwell's (2013) and Saldaña's (2016) strategies, which encourage the researcher to translate individual codes from the first round into themes and patterns to find commonalities across the different data sources. After my first cycle of coding, I had the following top level codes:

Anecdotes and personal stories; citizenship; class and socioeconomics; community activism and related strategies; descriptions of the city; education system and schools; equity and equality; events and participation in the city; family; interpretation of the city and events; justice and discipline; lawsuit; memorable quotes; my personal impressions; race, racism, and race talk; relationships, trust, and communication; religion, faith, spirituality, and churches; research methods, barriers, happenings, and breakthroughs; residence; role in community; school choice; west side vs. east side; and who has power.

It was clear I created more codes than was necessary as some were redundant, which Saldaña (2016) warns against. As I continued coding, I combined certain codes—such as *events and participation in the city* and *interpretation of the city and events*. During my second round of coding, I narrowed my codes into three themes to make sense of my data and to answer my research question. These are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Themes Developed from Codes

Themes	**Descriptions**	**Example**
PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY	This reflects how people thought about their own roles within the community, why they joined community activist groups, and how they thought about equity and equality.	Rachel: The world is such a beautiful place when everybody can participate in it together, and we're just missing out. Like honestly, we are. We're just missing out when we are segregated away from each other. And so that is, it's just a huge passion of mine to see groups of people come together and I know that that means then like breaking down stereotypes and really, you know, there's a power that comes with racism that we have to stop.

VIEWS OF SPACE	This reflects how community members saw city and school spaces, geographical divisions, segregation, and the impact that particular places played in how community activists functioned.	Emma: I don't know who I would be if I had started in Pinecreek. I wouldn't be this person, because here it was fear, like insults, derogatory comments. It was just very uncomfortable.
FUNCTIONS OF RACE	This reflects the ways that community members spoke about and interpreted race, how they related it to education, and its relationship with justice and discipline.	Christine: And it's kind of hard to say I'm part of a racist society. And if look at the school and if there's only one black teacher in our school, we're a dominant White school. Probably implementing not consciously—there's a system in place.

Note. An additional theme of *researcher practices* also played an important role as it allowed me to reflect on how my own presence was used or interpreted, though this theme largely did not contribute to answering my research questions.

Fieldwork Rationale

This study emerged after completion of my comprehensive exams, where I focused on school choice and segregation, paying particular attention to how these concepts played out in the Pinecreek School District. In the first conception of the study, I had imagined that I would be following the work of another, and more well-known non-profit group, called Transform Pinecreek. This group's goal was to make Pinecreek a top 25 city by 2025. It had fourteen different focus areas, or "spokes," one of which was the Education Spoke that I had intended to follow.

When I arrived in Pinecreek, however, it soon became obvious that studying this group would not be fruitful. The Education Spoke was not particularly active at the time, the leadership was in transition, and there was not much attention given to racial dynamics in the school district. Attention to race was something that I viewed as

necessary given Pinecreek's history of two desegregation lawsuits and schools' current issues with resegregation to pre-lawsuit levels. As my exploratory phase of the study progressed, and as I became more familiar with events in the city, I chose to participate with ER. I was welcomed not only by the group's leaders, but also by many of its members, and this became the focus of my dissertation study.

During the pilot phase, which lasted from March 2018-October 2018, I analyzed my seven months of fieldnotes, which came from my time as a participant observer. I also conducted ten interviews with five ER members in my attempt to understand the role of civic participation, the relationship between individuals' religious beliefs and public education, and notions of citizenship. As interviews and fieldnotes indicated that there was a larger story to tell about the interactions between city residents and the local school district, I expanded the study until October 2019. The more time that I spent with the city's residents, and particularly with the ER community activist group, as well as my analysis of the work I had done, it was obvious that a longer term ethnographic study would be the best way for me to address the issues I wanted to understand. It was important to me to observe group dynamics over time, to see the ways ER worked with or against the school district, and to build trusting relationships with community members to gain a more complete picture of how the EAT interacted with the larger Pinecreek community.

Although the findings of this study should not be used to generalize to other contexts, especially as I argued that this was an important aspect of critical participatory action research, I do believe that there are some takeaways from the data I collected that could help other communities in similar circumstances. For example, there are practices

that other community groups might employ to help them gain the trust of the school district administration and work in collaborative and constructive ways to promote racially equitable policies. As Stake and Trumbell (1982) and later Potterton (2017) argue, research findings from one context might act as a catalyst for examining policies and practices in one's own lived experiences. As schools become more segregated, and as community activists grow more vocal under the current political context, people might consider what worked in other contexts with similar circumstances and reflect on what could apply to them.

The findings from this study can help educational stakeholders and researchers see how a community activist group that focused its attention on race and racism in one particular school district worked together. At times, the relationship was fraught, full of tense situations and interactions where groups did not see eye to eye. During other times, however, there were real examples of collaboration and attempts to work with and understand one another. Because I was involved in this community group for over a year and a half, and as I followed the accomplishments and pitfalls the EAT underwent, this research has the potential to provide a better understanding of the roles that community members could have in contributing to local educational policy as well as seeing the potential ways that district personnel react to community members' civic participation in issues of local education policy.

Limitations

This study has limitations. Throughout the research, I struggled to find young people who were involved in the community activist group. Although I did manage to interview some parents in the district, one of which was the superintendent himself, this

study would be strengthened by hearing from more current parents within the district. Further, as most of the members of ER were retired, my interactions with people tended to skew on the older side, with most people within the range of 60-70 years of age.

Another limitation could be my own participation within the community activist group itself. Although I believe that employing critical participatory action research provided me with many more advantages than disadvantages, district leadership understood that I was an active member of the community group. This knowledge could have influenced their responses to me during my interviews as well as in my informal interactions with them, especially when I asked them questions about their experiences with working with ER.

An additional limitation of this study is that my participants were largely African American or White. Although I did interview two Latinx female individuals, there was little Latinx participation in ER. Additionally, there was limited participation from other racial or ethnic groups in ER even though Pinecreek was a diverse city. A later study might strategically focus on gaining access to other marginalized communities within the city where individuals may not have felt comfortable or known about the opportunities to participate in ER.

Position as Researcher

As a White, male, highly educated individual, there was a particular set of obstacles that I faced as I conducted this study. The sensitive issues of race and segregation were uncomfortable for people to talk about at times, and I regularly reflected on this. I constantly reminded myself that people may not have wanted to speak about their racial or religious beliefs with me, and I worked to make people feel comfortable

talking with me. Therefore, I incorporated Lewis's (2003) advice and did not begin interviewing until I was six months into my study. This strategy provided me with time to develop relationships with people that I hoped to interview.

Growing up on the east side of Pinecreek, I had the privilege of attending Catholic schools for the entirety of my K-12 education. Along with this came the privilege of not having to pay attention to issues and events in the public school system. When I grew up in Pinecreek between 1988-2007, I was aware that there had been a desegregation lawsuit. I knew that the lawsuit had cost the city millions of dollars, and that property taxes were high because of it. This was the extent of my knowledge. Although I am unsure how much detail public school children knew about the *Concerned Community Members* lawsuit as it was happening, I was in a privileged position where my schools' statuses were not affected. I was not forced to switch schools for racial balance, and I never faced funding cuts that would affect my school or the activities in it.

Because I grew up in the city, and because I went to private schools, I had both insider and outsider status, which was both advantageous and disadvantageous. The knowledge that I had about the city and its history prior to beginning the study provided me with less of a learning curve as I dove into my participant observations and historical research. My familiarity with places, names, and events aided me in understanding what people talked about in formal and informal interactions. My outsider status as having never gone through the public schools also acted as an advantage at times because the everyday, mundane events were new to me.

My own views of race and segregation constantly influenced me as I grappled with conducting this ethnography. This was not necessarily a hindrance, but I constantly

found myself reflecting on my own beliefs so that I could keep an open mind and to learn new ideas from people with whom I agreed and disagreed. Remaining open to understanding the *why* behind each action in each context was helpful to me in approaching this research from a standpoint of understanding and questioning, rather than a standpoint of judgment and searching only for answers. I continually evaluated this standpoint when I was in the field, and I did this through reflecting upon and questioning my fieldnotes, conducting member checks, and carrying out follow-up interviews.

My position as a White, Catholic, cisgendered, heterosexual male obviously influenced how I saw the world and conducted this research. It also influenced how people in Pinecreek saw me as a researcher studying issues of racism and educational equity. As a White person researching issues of race and racism, I used Milner's (2007) advice to reflect upon my own stance, asking myself the following questions that he recommends:

> What is my racial and cultural heritage? How do I know? In what ways do my racial and cultural backgrounds influence how I experience the world, what I emphasize in my research, and how I evaluate and interpret others and their experiences? How do I know?
>
> How do I negotiate and balance my racial and cultural selves in society and in my research? How do I know? What do I believe about race and culture in society and education, and how do I attend to my own convictions and beliefs about race and culture in my research? Why? How do I know? What is the historical landscape of my racial and cultural identity and heritage? How do I know? What are and have been the contextual nuances and realities that help shape my racial

> and cultural ways of knowing, both past and present? How do I know? What racialized and cultural experiences have shaped my research decisions, practices, approaches, epistemologies, and agendas? (p. 395)

It was necessary for me to constantly reflect upon what I was seeing, attempt to understand the areas that I was blind to, and try to recognize how my positionality provided a limited, yet legitimate view of what I witnessed and reported during my time in the field. As a member of ER and the EAT, not simply for the purposes of conducting this research, but also because I was committed to the social justice activism that this group undertook, I remain engaged and concerned about working toward equity for the children and educators of Pinecreek.

CHAPTER 4

GROWING THE COMMUNITY-DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP

> Hannah thinks that the district is getting more serious because we are bringing attention to them and they know that we are keeping an eye on what they are doing. Hannah then said that Rev. David has been meeting with the superintendent for years and that nothing has really happened, but it seemed like now they were finally responding … Brian said, "Well, now the White people are asking the questions."
>
> -Excerpt from field notes, October 9, 2018.

The above exchange occurred during my eighth month of participating in Eliminate Racism (ER), and it provides a snapshot of how the Pinecreek School District administration has historically treated marginalized individuals. The excerpt is also indicative of the role that social capital and civic participation played in the relationships forged between ER and the local school district. Lastly, this field note reveals the underpinnings of how ER used these relationships with key stakeholders and incorporated relational and collaborative strategies to influence the school district to create racially equitable policies for its almost 30,000 students.

In this chapter, I present and analyze the actions and relationship between ER and the school district through the lens of how *social capital* (Putnam, 2000, 2015; Putnam & Campbell, 2010), *civic participation* (Warren, 2001, 2005), and *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005) were strategically used throughout ER's first year and a half of existence, often in combination with one another. This chapter answers the following research questions: (1) What strategies did the community activist group use to influence

local education policy for addressing racism in the schools?; (2) How did community participation influence local education policy?

I provide brief contextual descriptions about the formation of ER and its sub-team—the Education Action Team (EAT)—noting the struggles the group and sub-team experienced in its initial efforts at becoming cohesive and functional. This context is included to provide a richer understanding of why the EAT adopted its chosen strategies when interacting with school district leaders and other community members. Next, I give examples of how the EAT used tactics such as persistence, relationship building, and a drive for racial diversity in its own functioning to move its mission forward and to establish itself as a legitimate organization in the community. Specifically, I address the strategies it used to maintain its longevity, which included establishing SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based) goals, gaining non-profit status during its first year, delivering on its promises to the school district, collaborating with the district to build trust, and using clear communication to establish a trusting relationship with district administrators.

I note the doubts that both ER members and district administrators had for one another as they began their work together, the doubts and uncertainty for how the group should move forward, and how a return to its established process aided the EAT to continue its work with a committed group of volunteers. Lastly, I address the accomplishments and failures of the group in shaping and influencing local education policy to address racial equity in the local school district at the end of my nineteen months with them. By providing statistics from the school district, I show that overall numbers did not improve in terms of the percentage of teachers of color hired and

retained in the district. Finally, I discuss the perceptions that community members—both from activists and district administrators—had about ER and the EAT.

The Founding of Eliminate Racism and the Education Action Team

My extensive time within ER allowed me to see how it developed and the strategies it chose to incorporate as it established itself. Although ER's four founders—Rev. David, Helen, Hannah, and Walter—used traditional grassroots methods of community organizing (i.e. goal-oriented action teams, events task forces, media experts, etc.) (Staples, 2012), the process of founding and establishing the group was not smooth. Differing viewpoints among the four leaders for how to move forward with eliminating racism in Pinecreek led to disagreements. When I began interviewing ER's founders during my sixth month of fieldwork, I noted that not everybody was on the same page for how to propel the group's agenda forward. The differences in belief were especially clear between Rev. David and Walter. While Rev. David was a proponent of forming goals and then conducting research, Walter was very concerned about doing research and then choosing the goals. Rev. David originally came from the business world as an executive with AT&T and felt that it was important and necessary to set SMART goals from the outset, comparing ER to how businesses worked. As time progressed, and as I conducted my third interviews with the leaders during my fourteenth month with ER, however, the two men had not only come to a tentative agreement for how to progress, but they also respected each other as individuals with very different personalities. Rev. David even commented during an interview that a surprising aspect about ER in general was how much its members genuinely liked each other. He also noted the importance of having different personalities in the group, pointing out that both he and Hannah were pushers,

but that both of their spouses, Helen and Walter, were more reserved and wanted to make sure that everyone in the group was not feeling overworked and burned out. Rev. David explained the necessity of having these various perspectives in ER as he thought social activist groups required different personalities akin to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X to strike a balance.

Although the focus on process and strategy was the catalyst for disagreements amongst the four founders, detailed attention to the methods the EAT adopted played a key role during its nascent stages. When our team began the work of setting a mission and goals, the slow process ensured that the agreed-upon goals were specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based (SMART), an important factor in community organizing (Checkoway, 1995; Staples, 2012), and in Rev. David's approach, it made business sense. The focus, attention, and regular return to the established process remained crucial throughout my time with ER and the EAT. It was outlined in documents created by the group's leaders, in which they planned out due dates for tasks and divided up the responsibilities amongst the group's members to complete them. Then they were shared with the entire ER group. This clear communication between the leaders and the group's membership provided transparency. For an example of the process the EAT used, see Appendix A.

Even though the EAT's process for collaboratively forming a mission and developing SMART goals was meant to create buy-in and trust (Staples, 2012; Wood, 1997), it irritated members at times. During various meetings, my teammates expressed impatience with the slow progress of the work—feeling like they were not actually doing anything. They wanted to take immediate and direct action. The frustration with the slow

work was especially apparent during the EAT's first meeting when the members had to collaborate and agree upon the team's mission. At this meeting, everyone sat in a conference room huddled together around a table at Pinecreek Baptist Church. The meeting had already lasted over an hour, and all eight people—Beatrice, Hannah, Rachel, Christine, Luke, Leigh, Jean, and I—were attempting to write the mission statement. After countless times crossing out words and a lot of editing, the following exchange occurred, which I documented in my field notes:

> At one point, Rachel said, "Beatrice, why don't you just write it? We will be happy with whatever you put down." Beatrice said that she didn't want to do this, saying that having everyone contributing and participating in this mission statement formation would keep people coming and make them rally behind the mission because we all have to be on board. That response seemed to satisfy Rachel, who recognized that Beatrice was right.

By the end of that meeting, the group produced its initial mission statement, which was, "Collaborate with and hold accountable educational stakeholders in the Pinecreek Public School District to prepare all students for social and academic success." This new mission statement, however, remained unsatisfactory for some individuals, which became apparent after receiving feedback at the larger steering committee meeting approximately two weeks later.

At this meeting, EAT members presented the original mission statement, which faced scrutiny, especially from Rev. David. He critiqued it, saying that there was no "how" section of the statement. How would EAT members actually hold district leaders accountable for eliminating racism? What were the actual steps that we would take? Rev.

David also commented that the statement did not mention institutionalized racism in the system, and as that was ER's "business," this should be addressed in the statement.

Throughout this period where our group struggled to agree on the mission, two notable events occurred: Beatrice, who at the time was the only Black person on the EAT and was a speech language pathologist in the schools, resigned from the team. Second, Hannah worked on the mission statement on her own and received feedback on her revision from Rev. David. During our next EAT meeting, Hannah presented four updated versions, explaining that Rev. David supported the third option:

1. To collaborate with and hold accountable educational stakeholders in RPS 205 to prepare all students for social and academic success.
2. Eliminate Racism Education Action Team will reframe public debate to impact current policies and practices in order to eliminate institutional racism in the Pinecreek Public Schools.
3. Eliminate Racism Education Action Team will be fierce advocates of equity driven policies and practices in the Pinecreek Public Schools to ensure that all students will be prepared for social and academic success.
4. The mission of the Education Action Team is to prepare all students for social and academic success by being fierce advocates of equity driven policies and practices in the Pinecreek Public Schools to eliminate racial ethnic disparity.

After a long discussion, the group agreed to option number three, but voted to change the word "fierce" to "passionate." In this case, we saw Hannah, who already was one of ER's founders, stepping forward and taking charge, yet she also asked the group for feedback, helping establish that everyone's voice mattered—a key aspect in getting people to

continue being civically engaged (Staples, 2012). Eventually, after more discussion and deliberation, the mission of the EAT became, "To be passionate advocates of equity-driven policies and practices in the Pinecreek Public Schools so that all students will be prepared for social and academic success."

It became obvious that an agreed-upon mission was vital for the functioning of the EAT as it helped drive its members forward over my nineteen months with them. The mission was referred to often during our meetings, was written on most of the documents the group worked with, and it guided the actions of the team. Hannah often reminded the group of the phrase "passionate advocates," which assisted the EAT in setting its SMART goals, which were:

> (1) *To increase to 20% People of Color (POC)—especially African American and Hispanic—in all levels of Pinecreek School District: administration, faculty, staff, and board members by the 2020-2021 school year. By the 2025-2026 school year, have percentages of African American and Hispanic administration, staff, and board members match the percentage of African American and Hispanic students within the system*; (2) *To ensure that Pinecreek School District resources—teachers, counselors, supplies, technology, etc.—are distributed equitably, based on the needs of students in the school and measured by the state required assessment data and the district discipline data. This goal shall be met by the 2020-2021 school year*; (3) *Students of color (SOC)—especially African American and Hispanic—will be encouraged to enroll in and be enrolled in Honors and AP classes and will receive the support they need to be successful. By 2020-2021 school year, SOC enrollment will have increased by 25% within these*

advanced curricular programs; these students will have received a final grade of "C" or better.

Interestingly, the EAT's mission statement and its second goal did not mention race, but each of the three goals were concerned with a specific racial inequity in the district. The mission statement of the Economic Opportunities action team also did not mention race or racism, which led to a heated argument between Rev. David and Walter. This will be addressed in Chapter 5.

One significant characteristic of the three goals and mission of the EAT was that members were *advocates*—meaning that we were not supposed to do the work that the school district should have already been doing. When team members became fed up with the actions—or inactions—of the district, they suggested that the group "go into the schools and talk with kids" or "form tutoring groups" or other similar ideas. However, Hannah consistently reminded us that our job was to push on the district to do its job. This strategy was consistent with research suggesting that community organizers' responsibility was to build the power base for marginalized groups to become a part of the policymaking process, not to provide the services (Christens & Speer, 2015). Consistently returning to the mission of being "passionate advocates" reminded us that the main function of our group was to keep a watchful eye on the district.

This strategy of being watchful advocates was critical during this time as the district had just received an additional $8.3 million in state funding because it was considered a poor district. "They have the money. It is our job to push the district to use it in ways that benefit the neediest students," was Hannah's constant mantra. This strategy of sticking to the mission, goals, and keeping the district accountable likely contributed to

the longevity of the group as (1) members were not burnt out with extra work, and (2) it did not allow for newcomers to enter the group with their own agendas, an aspect that was frequently cited during my interviews and meetings with ER.

To divide up the work and to ensure that each goal received individualized attention, EAT members decided to form sub-teams. Each of us joined a sub-team that addressed one of the SMART goals, with the purpose of becoming experts in the research for our given goal. Goal 1's core members were Anthony, Esther, and Rose; Goal 2's core members were Hannah, David, and Joy; and Goal 3's core members were Connie, Leigh, Martha, and I. Others who partook in the EAT irregularly or who joined later helped out with whichever sub-team needed assistance or where they had expertise.

Even though we were working to eliminate racism in the schools, racism and racist attitudes did not escape our group. Team members were largely in agreement with the EAT's goals, but Janet, a White woman who did not remain on the EAT for long, disagreed with Goal 2. This goal was concerned with distributing resources equitably around the school district as well as reducing the racial disparities in student discipline. Janet informed Hannah during one EAT meeting that she had a grandchild who attended the high school on the east side of town that served the most affluent students in Pinecreek. If distributing resources equitably meant that her granddaughter's high school would receive less money, and therefore fewer educational opportunities in the years to come, then she did not agree with this goal. In this way, Janet displayed the advantages that accompanied her Whiteness, and she was unwilling to give these up at the expense of other students around the school district. Soon after, Janet dropped out of the group. She appeared to be an exception in the EAT with regards to her attitude as well as her

reasoning for quitting. When people stopped showing up to meetings, which was not often, they explained that they were too busy and there were too many meetings to attend.

Building a Community-District Partnership

ER and the EAT worked steadily over a year and a half to build relationships with people in leadership positions. This included the superintendent, his cabinet, school board members, and the mayor of Pinecreek. The relationships were tenuous at times, and doubt about "the other side" defined individuals' conceptions of the partnership between the community group and the school district. Many of these doubts from the community activists were based on their own experiences with racism in the school district, while doubt from the school district came in the form of mistrust over what the group's agenda really was. However, the EAT used specific strategies that were "proactive, focused, and persistent" to influence school district officials to create policies that were racially equitable for the students it served.

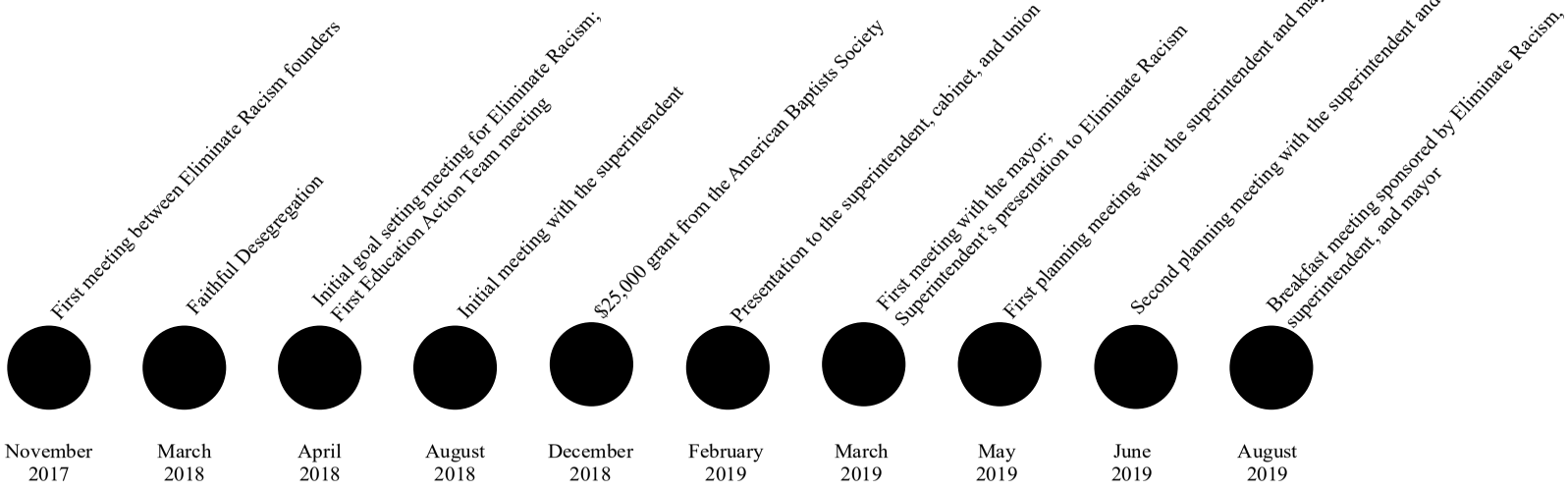

Figure 1. Timeline of Eliminate Racism events

Strategies for longevity

A strategic process. My interviews with EAT members and district administrators revealed that one effective strategy for creating a working partnership with the district was that the group not only delivered on its promises, but that it was not going to disappear. Part of this staying power can be attributed to the slow and steady work of laying out SMART goals, sticking to a delineated community organizing process, and remaining focused on our goals. When asked about the work of the EAT, my teammates shared similar feelings about the EAT's strength. For example, during my third interview with Rev. David, he stated:

> … short term, I think what it says to the public is … like Hannah said, we're not going away. So, it gives us legitimacy, and it also gives us a firm foundation. … This is not just a little grassroots, a little marching in the streets. This is clearly a movement that has already been established as an organization. It's an organism. It's growing, it's breathing, it's moving. It's made up of the diverse people.

Other members of the EAT shared similar sentiments, explaining that one of the biggest surprises for them was that the group still existed and that members had remained committed since the beginning. Individuals such as Hannah and Leigh shared their happy disbelief that ER was still moving forward with many committed Pinecreek residents supporting our cause. Because the literature about the sustainability of community activist groups focusing on race is scarce (Gorski, 2019; Gorski & Chen, 2015), and as research has shown how in-group dynamics lead people of color to quit community activist groups (Gorski & Chen, 2015; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011), this finding may provide insight into why activists remained committed to the cause. Firstly, it was regularly noted

that ER and the EAT's work held promise—something that was unique in Pinecreek. Black members shared how they had been involved in past movements for racial equity in education, and they "could not do this again" unless there was some hope that changes could be made within the school system. Further, and perhaps an underappreciated contributor as to why members of ER and the EAT worked well together was a rule that Hannah instituted from the beginning: no gossiping about other group members. Noting that she had been a part of groups and other environments where people tore each other apart, Hannah explained that if ER was going to be successful, it would need to stay focused on the goals rather than on petty disagreements between teammates. She had seen too many groups fail because of internal fighting. Hannah also followed through on this rule. When someone would begin speaking about another member of ER in a gossipy way, she would call them out and tell them it was not acceptable. We learned fairly quickly that this behavior was not tolerated, which led to goal-focused and efficient meetings. Although gossip was not absent one hundred percent of the time, it occurred at a minimal level.

Non-profit status. ER relied on unpaid volunteers, operating without funding until December 2018 (about one year in), when it won a $25,000 grant from the American Baptist Society. Interestingly, when Rev. David announced the news of the award at the December 2018 steering committee meeting, it was met with mixed reactions. While it was applauded, ER members were cautious about their enthusiasm, questioning how the money would be used. Some members said that they liked that the group had been entirely dependent on volunteers. Hannah warned everyone that money often brought out the worst in people, and we were not going to let that happen in ER.

Overall, the grant was not talked about often afterward. It would be mentioned from time to time in discussions about using it to bring in a national speaker to talk about racism, but other than that, the money was mostly used for office supplies. Perhaps its biggest contribution was that it allowed ER to become a 501c(3), which provided a symbol of legitimacy as ER moved forward—contributing to ER's longevity. Further, after my data collection phase, the group won two awards: the NAACP's Community Service Award, and the Community Leadership Award from a local race organization.

Establishing the relationship. The group's efforts were being recognized in the community, and this did not go unnoticed by district officials. When asked about what their experiences were like working with community groups, and specifically with the EAT, the superintendent, a White male, explained that the relationship had started out bumpy, with a lot of assumptions made about the school district and its efforts toward racial equity. The superintendent referred to the start of the relationship as "bumpy" due to the first meeting our team scheduled with him in August 2018 at Pinecreek Baptist Church—a meeting which Rev. David secured. EAT's leaders thought it would be important to develop relationships with major actors, which included the superintendent, to inform him about the work the group was undertaking so that there would be no surprises. This strategy also provided the superintendent with the opportunity to start a partnership with the EAT from the beginning. During that first meeting, EAT members, including Anthony, Hannah, Connie, and I, gave an initial presentation, explaining that over a series of meetings since April, we had decided to address three issues: hiring more people of color in the district, distributing resources equitably around the schools and addressing the racial disparities in student discipline, and recruiting and retaining students

of color in Advanced Placement classes. Having community members presenting to the superintendent aligned with Warren's (2001) research on the importance for developing leadership within the community, and it drew on different community members' areas of expertise to show the superintendent that to make improvements, he needed to listen to the voices of people of color, who gave insight into how the superintendent could be getting his message out by going into Black churches.

Unsurprisingly, the superintendent was defensive during that first meeting, explaining that the district was already working on the very issues EAT members were suggesting. The EAT, however, maintained that more work needed to be done to meet these goals. In this case, it mattered who was involved in ER and the EAT, and it was a prerequisite for gaining a meeting with the superintendent. Firstly, we had Rev. David who had already developed a long-lasting relationship with the superintendent, and he could use this social capital to gain a meeting and to help the group expand its own capital to benefit the community (Putnam, 2000; Tzanakis, 2013). Secondly, Hannah's participation gave the EAT legitimacy with regard to her educational expertise. She had not only worked in the district's central office, but she had also been a principal on the city's west side. Additionally, Hannah's son was a current principal at one of the high schools on the east side, and she had grandchildren in public schools around Pinecreek. Her knowledge about and vast experiences with the local schools helped leverage the group's position to speak on these issues.

Collaborating with the district to build trust. The strategy of keeping the superintendent abreast of what we were doing was two-fold, marking some notable aspects of our team. Firstly, the EAT established that we wanted to work *with* the

superintendent and the school district and not *against* it, reminiscent of Warren's (2001) work with how grassroots groups can wield their social capital to form partnerships between marginalized populations and people in powerful leadership positions within the community. In talking about his previous experiences working with the superintendent and public school system, Rev. David said:

> I've gone to the school board to challenge them at school board meetings, to challenge them on inequities I saw in the school system. … [I was] very confrontational with them, but I quickly found out that wasn't going to work. You have to establish a relationship with the superintendent, with school board members, and so we started going to lunch and currently the superintendent and I meet once a month at a coffee house …Talk about things he's working on in the school system and things I've asked him to work on and see where he is with that. And so far he says the right words, but it's still not been fruitful. I'm very disappointed. There haven't been any real outcomes yet, any marked outcomes.

Based on his past experiences with the superintendent, Rev. David had learned that the collaborative route was a different approach for the group to attempt. Second, by calling a meeting with the superintendent near the beginning of the group's work, EAT members started the relationship from a point of open communication, sharing that they intended to file a report of their findings first with the district and then to the Pinecreek community at large.

Scheduling a meeting with the superintendent revealed the power of social capital and community cultural wealth. As was noted earlier, Rev. David and Hannah's prior experiences allowed them to gain a meeting with the superintendent, one in which the

team was well prepared for based on Hannah's experiences in the district. Next, ER drew upon the cultural capital of its diverse membership and had people of color and White people presenting to the superintendent. This not only revealed how the group had been established across racial lines, but it showed that it valued the voices, expertise, and experiences of people of color who had experienced racism in the city and public schools. As Yosso (2005) states, "…[Critical Race Theory] in education refutes dominant ideology and White privilege while validating and centering the experiences of People of Color" (p. 74). Centering people of color's experiences and voices was important for members of the EAT as they had largely been ignored throughout their time in the school district.

That first meeting with the superintendent had implications for how our group subsequently carried out the work. It revealed the complicated dynamics among racism, the school district, and the city's history. These dynamics became clearer in the discussion that took place once the superintendent left the meeting. When members of the EAT remained behind to debrief, obvious differences in opinion occurred, revealing differences, mostly by race, of how community members perceived the superintendent. While many of the White individuals were impressed with the superintendent—though annoyed that he had hinted that the district was addressing the issues already and that we might want to consider different goals—others, and specifically the team's Black members, had serious doubts. Black individuals said such phrases as "I'll believe it when I see it" in reference to the equity changes the superintendent had proposed. Others lamented that they had been lied to so often by the school district over the years that the trust had been broken, and they were dubious based on a long history of undelivered

promises. These reactions were further magnified in team members' minds by their own experiences with and memories of the desegregation lawsuit that had occurred thirty years ago. At that time, the school district spent significant time and money denying that discrimination had even existed in the Pinecreek schools, though from the plaintiffs' testimonies and the ultimate guilty verdict against the board of education, the district and board of education had taken concrete actions to discriminate against African American and Latinx children.

Even though the superintendent suggested that we might consider changing our focus to other issues because his team was already working on the problems we presented, EAT leaders reminded everyone to stay the course and stick to the mission and goals we had all agreed upon—a return to the strategy of remaining goal-oriented and mission-driven. After that first meeting with the superintendent, the EAT spent the next five months conducting research on equity-driven practices that had been successfully incorporated in other school districts around the United States. Members also used data given to us from the district, including the number of teachers of color in each school, how the district allocated its money, and the number of students of color enrolled in and passing AP classes in comparison to White students. Leaders of each team also remained in constant contact with district officials, frequently emailing them for data to work with—some of which the district delivered late. For instance, we did not receive student discipline data for how many students had received out of school suspensions by race until after the EAT's report was finished. During this period focused on research, there was fairly consistent attendance of the same group of approximately thirteen members (five people of color and eight Whites) who remained committed to this equity-minded

work. Others showed up from time to time when they were available or were specifically requested to attend important events.

The deliberate strategy of building trust with school district leadership remained a central aspect within the group. The EAT had agreed that when the report was completed and it was time to present the findings, the superintendent and his cabinet would be the first audience, out of respect to the superintendent. Once that presentation was completed, we would share our findings with the community. Although members from the other ER action teams advised us to skip this step because "the superintendent ha[d] used up his chances" during his six-year tenure in the job, the EAT returned to its original process, deciding that the best course of action was to continue building a relationship with the superintendent and his administration. This was done specifically because the school district had eleven superintendents within the fourteen years after the desegregation lawsuit. As such, there had been a lot of turnover in the central office and inconsistent policy implementation. By trying to retain the current superintendent, the EAT thought there would be more consistency in addressing racism. Thus, by going behind the school administrators' backs and sharing our findings directly with the community would breach the tentative trust the group had built with the longest-serving superintendent the district had in years. Therefore, the EAT invited the superintendent and his cabinet to a presentation of its report in February 2019 at Pinecreek Baptist Church.

Twenty-seven people attended this meeting: 17 EAT/ER members, 5 district administrators, 2 school board members (including the president), and the president and vice president of the teachers union. During this two-hour session, the team presented the findings from our research, providing everyone with a thirty page report, and attendees

had opportunities to ask questions at the end. Rev. David explained the necessity of the EAT's work in Pinecreek, sharing that he was proud of all of the work the team had accomplished in its time together. He made it clear to everyone in the room that one of the strengths of the EAT was its perseverance and persistence when he said, "This team is not going away, and that's not a threat, that's a commitment."

Although the superintendent thanked us for the hard work and diligent research, he thought that the EAT was missing some vital data, and he would appreciate the opportunity to present to ER and share what the district was already doing with regard to some of the EAT's recommended strategies. The EAT agreed, but even the establishment of a second meeting was contentious. EAT members were angry that a second meeting was necessary, especially as some of their requests for data had been ignored. Rev. David was vocal about his dissatisfaction, saying that he did not understand the necessity for a second meeting when the team had already made their presentation based on the district's own data. Adamant, the superintendent responded that the group needed to hear about the work the district was doing, and his team would like the opportunity to present. Eventually, the EAT agreed, and a second meeting was set for two weeks later at Pinecreek Baptist Church.

The EAT's reluctant decision to meet for a second time was essential for establishing trust and continuing to build relationships with district officials. My two interviews with the superintendent and the chief human resources officer indicated how the EAT's willingness to listen changed their perception of the team. From that point, they regarded the EAT as partners rather than adversaries. The superintendent shared the following:

> I have found Eliminate Racism has been willing to listen. There was a bunch of conclusions that were jumped to with the initial research, and then we got more collaborative. I thought the turning point was when we had the series of meetings at Pinecreek [Baptist Church] and we listened and then we presented and Eliminate Racism—and then I felt like we level set. And then we really knew where we were in the work. We had to listen to where the community, this community group was perceiving our work. And then if the community group had to listen and say, "Oh, I guess in our research we really missed a bunch of stuff you're already doing." And then we kind of connected. And I said, "Okay, now I think we've set the level," and then, I think the first activity and delivering on connecting a larger community that … work was a really positive next step. So far I think those, the research and communication phase, and then the first meeting phase, I think we're off to a strong start.

By giving the district a chance to share its side, the EAT provided district administrators with the perception that this group was a partner with them moving forward. The strategy of listening to one another was key to the formation and continual building of this uncertain relationship.

In a similar way, the chief human resources officer, also a White male, discussed the importance of listening to one another and working together to form a relationship. He stated:

> I think the challenge that you see with school districts working with community groups is the community group's angle and the community group's own political wants and needs, and in determining how best to create that collaborative

> structure. So, in terms of Eliminate Racism, what's been nice is the ability to have meetings and open conversation about what the group's intent is. You know, kind of the back and forth, and the district listening and hearing that group, but also that group hearing the district. And making sure that it really is a partnership rather than combats. I think a really great kind of example of how both groups have really listened to each other to get to that common place was initially in one of our first meetings, it was mentioned that the Eliminate Racism group was going to go to the editorial board … just on their own views. I think we said that that doesn't create collaboration if you're going to go on your own. Because that doesn't mean you're working with us if you're going to do whatever you want regardless of what we say and what we give you. And so I think there was a great listening there, and they, [the] Eliminate Racism group said, you know, you're right.

Although this district administrator echoed the superintendent's opinion that listening to one another was essential for the partnership, another key aspect of what he shared was his focus on trust. This was evidenced when he shared that ER did not go to the local newspaper's editorial board with their report prior to talking with school district administrators.

After the second meeting with the superintendent, the four founders of ER were scheduled to meet with the local newspaper's editorial board to talk about the group, its mission and goals, and its activities. Hannah told us she had wanted to share the EAT's completed report with the board and go public with it in the newspaper. The other three founders advised her against this, however, saying that this could hurt the relationship

that the EAT had been building. In the end, Hannah agreed, deciding not to move forward with sharing the report with the editorial board at that time. In the eyes of district officials, this was a positive sign toward collaboration and trust, and a continued step of using relational techniques (Warren, 2005).

Trust through communication. Clear and open communication was a strategy that the EAT exercised not only to establish trust with key players and keep them apprised of the group's intentions, but also to put pressure on district leadership. For example, prior to the meeting with the superintendent and his cabinet in March 2019, EAT leaders informed him that the group had already scheduled a meeting with the city's mayor, where the findings from the report would be presented to him as well. As the city and schools were inextricably intertwined, and as the team's goals aligned with both the city and schools, the EAT thought it was important to inform the mayor of the work they were undertaking. This was not the first time that the founders of ER had been in communication with the mayor. In fact, Hannah and Walter had informed him very early on in the formation of ER about what they were doing. The founders of ER believed it was necessary that the city's leaders were aware of the group from the beginning so that there were no surprises along the way—or if there were surprises, they would be mitigated by the open communication style they had established.

This was a strength of the group that may not have been directly recognized by members of the EAT or other ER members, but my interview with the mayor revealed the value of this step. He spoke about his irritation with Pinecreek residents who would criticize him in public for something that he or his staff did wrong without giving him prior warning. He stated:

> I'm more, "let me know that you're not happy. I'll respect it. I may not agree, but I'll respect it." And then if you go public, I'm all good with it. As long as you let me know. I really don't like the people who [are linked to] my cell phone and just go public. Just call me. I may have done something [and] I didn't know it.

Thus, the mayor emphasized the importance of listening and communication in building a relationship where groups worked *with* one another rather than as adversaries. By incorporating this sort of collaborative social capital, ER and the EAT established credibility and the foundations for a partnership with the city's leadership.

Doubting the Relationship/Partnership

In line with Warren's (2005) research on civic participation, my teammates frequently used words and phrases such as "partnering with the key players," "building relationships," and "collaborating with" the school district. While there were instances of members agreeing that these efforts toward working together were occurring, there was constant doubt as to what the relationship realistically was. Members remained dubious about whether or not they could trust school district administrators and the board of education. These reactions came from many years of experience within the district, where EAT activists had either worked or attended school as students. The events that led to the two desegregation lawsuits, and the subsequent and long drawn out denial by district officials during the 1990s that they had discriminated against African Americans and Latinx remained fresh in the EAT members' minds. In fact, the system of segregation was so complete that the federal magistrate in the lawsuit wrote in his official court opinion: "The following opinion relates to the activities of a school district that has consistently and massively violated the dictates of *Brown v. Board of Education*. ... It is

the story of a school district that, at times, has committed such open acts of discrimination as to be cruel and committed others with such subtlety *as to raise discrimination to an art form*" (emphasis added) (*Concerned Community Members v. Pinecreek Board of Education*, 1993). Unsurprisingly, expressions of distrust from EAT members were frequently expresedt during individual interviews as well as during EAT meetings. Rev. David stated:

> I don't think it's going to be realistic for us to expect the school system to be our partner. I think they see us as their enemy. They are coming across as though they want to work with us. But I think when the rubber meets the road, when we start challenging some of the things that they're doing or not doing and beginning to hold them accountable, I believe we're going to see some pushbacks and some separation.

In the pastor's view, there was likely to be a lack of follow-through from district leaders. He doubted that any real change would occur within the structure of the public schools, which was largely controlled by Whites as they would be unwilling to give up their power, control, and access to resources. Another mixed race EAT member, Samuel, had some hope based on early dealings with the school district, though overall he was doubtful. He had grown up and attended schools in the Pinecreek School District during the time when the school district was sued. He shared that working with the school district through ER was going better than he had expected but that he had faced active discrimination against him when he was a student. He had witnessed how Whites in power had manipulated the system to benefit White students. He explained:

> What happened was the top kids from each school were getting there, but the kids who were already in the gifted program had an academic type test, which was like math, English, but then they had a separate part that had a high weight on the test scale that was called decision making. All those kids were pretested and told basically the answers on what would happen on the decision making, where us kids weren't. So even if my math score or English score was higher than the kid who was already in the gifted program, that decision making would put him above me. But that was a way in. It just so happened a lot of the kids who were already in the gifted program from the lottery and all the other stuff that they had were white students at the [top of the scale], a lot … were minorities didn't get in because we didn't have that decision making part. … Later on what happened was then after the lawsuit went through, they came back to a lot of us and asked us to come into the gifted program, but by that time we were kind of like, we don't really want to go now.

Stories like this are corroborated in the court proceedings. One of the reasons the Pinecreek public schools was found guilty was because it had prepared students at mostly White schools to perform better on placement tests. If students of color performed better, they were still placed in remedial classes while White students were given seats in college preparatory classes. Even with his negative experiences with the district, he explained how he hoped the positive working relationship that the EAT had established would continue. He stated:

> So, I'm hoping that continues you know … because getting into this, I wasn't sure how the school district would take any kind of, even though it's help, any kind of

> criticism ... People don't like being told you might be doing this the wrong—you might want to try this way. Or if it—or fixed in their ways, it's good to see that they're open to even having discussion.

Samuel's vision of hope aligns with one form of Yosso's (2005) conception of community cultural wealth. She explains that one aspect of this type of wealth includes aspirational capital, which "refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). Although hopeful about the growing yet shaky partnership, Samuel also criticized how district officials had responded to the strategies the EAT had recommended during its presentation. He stated:

> I was glad that we all got together and were able to communicate to them what they wanted, but when they wanted another meeting, my whole thing was that [we] were saying as far as even like we're talking about having more minority, African American, and even different minority teachers in the district, they were saying, "Oh we've got this—we've been working three years on this plan with Pinecreek University." And from my understanding, they've only had one African American actually going through the program. And it's nice to know what you're doing, but I'd like to see them come with us, come to another meeting and not with just what they're doing, but what your results are. And so everything needs to be results based. I want to know what your results are.

This skeptical outlook was prevalent throughout my work with ER. While relationships were developing and the EAT worked with district officials, there was always an undercurrent of disbelief and a perception that anything that the school district shared or claimed was disingenuous. During the final month of data collection, I had an interaction

with Hannah in which I mentioned how I had been reviewing all of the data I had collected and noted how much the EAT had done. She looked at me rather darkly and said, “But what has changed? I get worried when community groups like this pat themselves on the back for all that they did, but what has changed?” She then noted that she was looking forward to seeing the updated numbers for the 2019-2020 school year, especially with regard to the amount of people of color working within the district.

The data were not promising. Relationships may have improved, but overall, the data had not. While there was a higher percentage of African Americans working at the district administration level, the percentage of African American and Latinx teachers had fallen even more—a disappointing result. Notions of doubt were particularly attenuated in the forms of discipline data. Not only was it received late, but it was presented in ways that sparked more mistrust within the EAT for the school district.

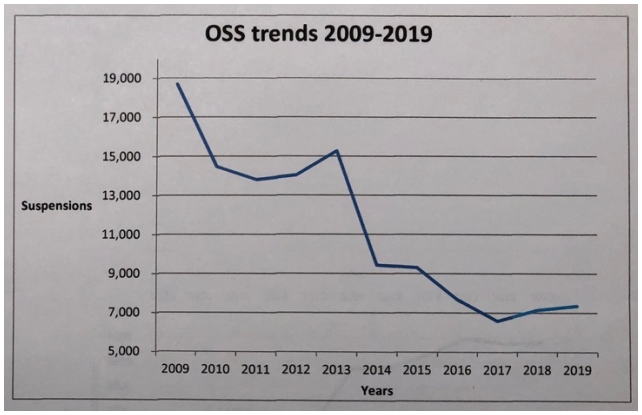

Figure 2. Out of school suspension trends for all races, 2009-2019

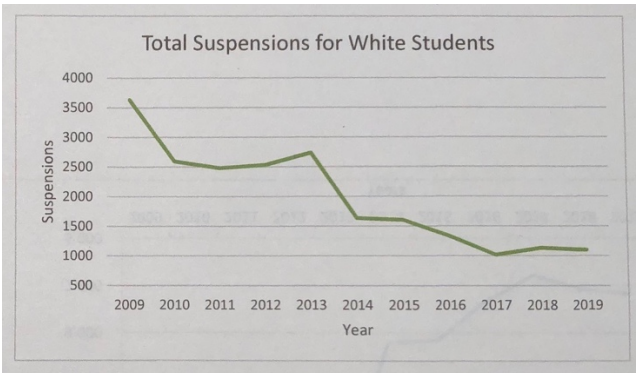

Figure 3. Out of school suspension trends for White students, 2009-2019

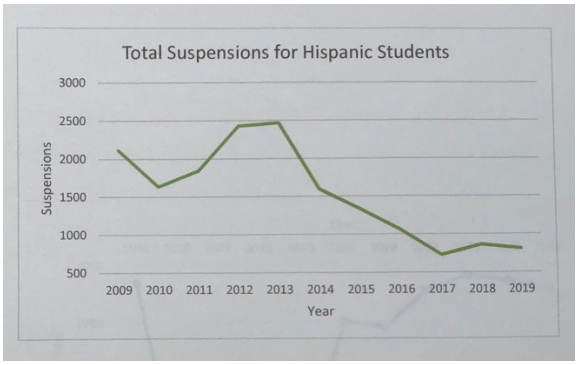

Figure 4. Out of school suspension trends for Hispanic students, 2009-2019

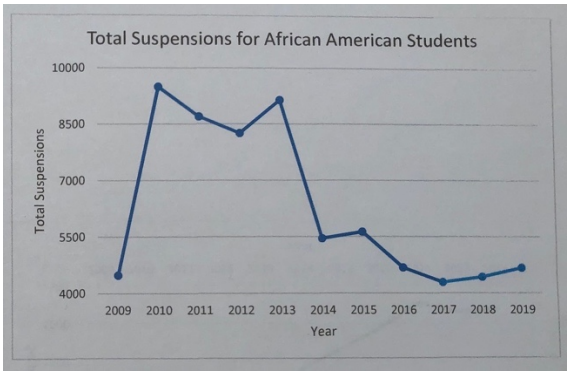

Figure 5. Out of school suspension trends for African American students, 2009-2019

The original student discipline data that the EAT received compared only White students versus all students of color. However, as racial disparities for African Americans were important for the EAT, we asked for the data to be disaggregated by race. As the data show, between 2009-2019, White and Latinx students received fewer out of school

suspensions than did African Americans. The number of White students receiving out of school suspensions decreased from 1,369 in 2009 and dropped to 585 in 2019. The number of Latinx students receiving suspensions dropped from 808 to 490. On the other hand, out of school suspensions for African American students increased from 1,965 in 2009 to 2,001 in 2019.

The district's presentation of the data was also noteworthy. While the graphs for White and Latinx students start at 500 and end at 4,000, the graph for African American students begins at 4,000 and ends at 10,000. This presentation of the data cast more doubt into EAT members' minds as they perceived the district as trying to hide the racial disparities that remained for African American students in comparison to White and Latinx students. To juxtapose how the district presented the data, members of the EAT made their own graph of data, pictured below.

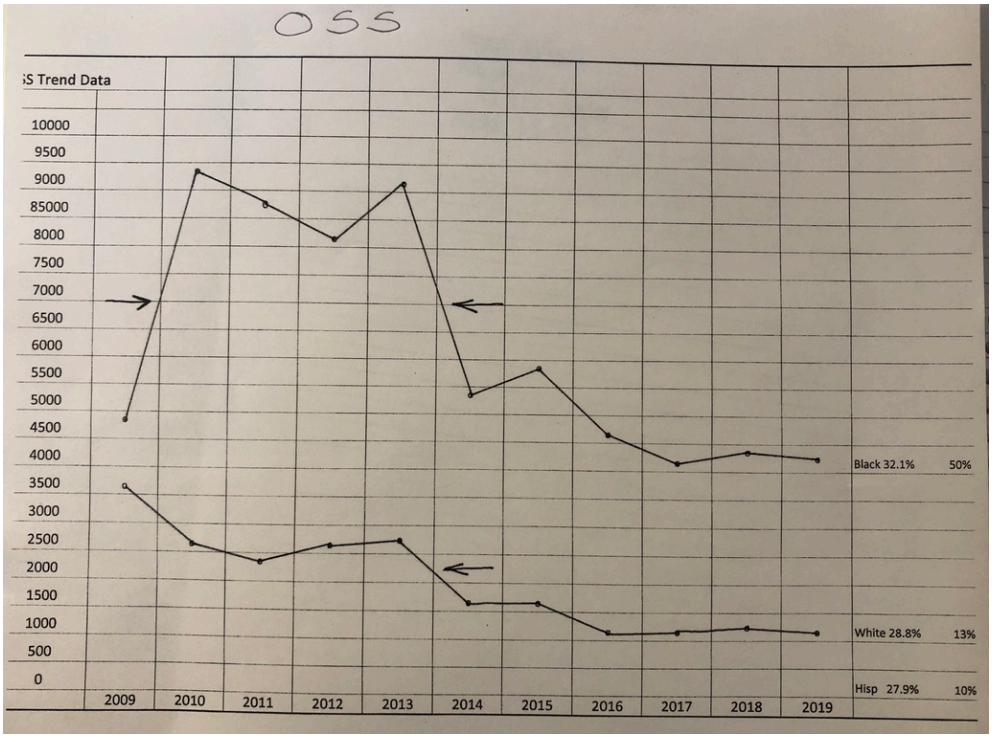

Figure 6. Out of school suspension trends disaggregated by race

Even with all of the doubts ER and the EAT had for the school system, it always maintained a very careful approach in dealing with the district. This was explained to me at various points throughout my time with the team. Members such as Hannah and Rev. David shared that past efforts for racial equity had failed. The reasons they gave included that they had been conflict-ridden and embroiled in nastiness, which eventually led to the downfall of groups who were challenging White-maintained structures. Although the EAT regularly said that if nothing was changing and if they were not being listened to by the school district then they would resort to less collaborative ways and go for a harsher approach, this did not happen. In part, this was due to the tenuous position of the superintendent. As the school district had undergone such high turnover of superintendents since the early 2000s, the EAT wanted to keep the current superintendent as they felt that getting rid of him would do more damage to the district than good.

Doubts about the relationship between the school district and ER existed from the district's perspective as well. Throughout my time with the EAT, I regularly attended events led by Stephanie, a district administrator. An African American woman who had grown up and had lived most of her life in Pinecreek, she often shared that she had an excellent experience in the Pinecreek public schools when she attended them in the 1970s. At that time, the district was well-known for providing its students with a rigorous college preparatory education.

As the EAT became more involved in the community and the school district, it began to scrutinize the racial disparities in disciplinary action, and the group met with Stephanie often to discuss these issues. Although the amount of overall students receiving out of school suspensions had dropped from 5,626 in 2009 to 3,402 in 2019, and separate

out of school suspension incidents had dropped from 18,690 to 7,355, the EAT was concerned that the number of African American suspensions had increased. The racial gap had not lessened, and the proportions between the races remained the same throughout the years of reduction.

Community meetings that Stephanie led or attended were often contentious, which was especially pronounced during meetings that ER scheduled with her. During our interview, I asked about what it was like to work with ER and the EAT, and she explained that the work to eliminate racism was not just a school district problem, but it was a global issue. City structures needed to be examined in our analysis. She said:

> Don't just start doing the blame game … like I said, I get very defensive when it comes to the school system as well as Pinecreek. I mean, I'm very protective of it as well, but I do believe that we're not growing at the level that we should because we're in the 21st century.

From my time with her, it was clear that Stephanie interpreted ER as a threat to the school district's and city's reputation. She acknowledged that Pinecreek was falling behind other cities and small towns in the United States, but she stood by the superintendent and was very protective of him. Although she did express appreciation that ER was doing work to fight racism, and she was pleased to learn that the group was not just tackling the school system but other areas in the city, Stephanie believed ER was not going after the issues of racism in a global way. She viewed the relationship as antagonistic and not as if ER was working *with* the district, especially as she accused the group of playing "the blame game." Her particular outlook was unsurprising to me,

however, based on the strained interactions the EAT had with her throughout my time in the group.

A Racially Diverse Community Activist Group

The ER organization and the EAT valued racial diversity, and it actively wielded its diversity to accomplish its goals. Although diversity in general was talked about, *racial* diversity was cited most often. What this usually meant, however, was that the EAT sought more African American representation. Although the Latinx population was also found to be discriminated against during the *Concerned Community Members* lawsuit, there was much less emphasis on this population. Only one Latinx woman, Emma, regularly participated on and off in the group from the beginning. It was only at the very end of my time there that three Latinx medical students started attending meetings. Obvious that Latinx participation was lacking, I brought this point up regularly in meetings and interviews. While there was some dissatisfaction with the lack of participation, Hannah said that she believed that the issues the group was attempting to address was "really an African American issue."

There were some efforts to recruit Latinx individuals to ER, and Hannah and Walter attempted to bring in more Latinx people through grassroots efforts. Emma invited Hannah and Walter to attend a Latino Coalition meeting and present to the group about ER. They did this, and they regularly attended Latino Coalition meetings to establish relationships with the Latinx community, but there was still little participation. When I inquired about this to Emma during our interview, she explained:

> For some people in the Latino community, and I think a lot of people feel the same way in that they're overstretched. So a lot of people that are coming to, for

> example, the Coalition of Latino leaders—they're doing 20 other things and they just cannot take one more. I mean if my schedule was not so busy I would be going to more … so that's one aspect. The other aspect is, and I heard that from a lot of people. Then there are groups who just do not feel accepte—they don't feel comfortable. I've invited some individuals to different things. They're just intimidated, you know, some of them even speak English, but their accent is so strong, that they just, I know people are taking speech therapy class to try to help them, but if they come after a certain age, and then they just, they struggle with it. And people are like, "What? What? What did you say?" And I know sometimes they get over it, but I do know a whole group of people that are really intimidated by it and don't feel—they really don't feel welcome. And then there are the groups that are working multiple jobs and cannot do it. They can't even … go to school/teacher meetings … I mean their … lives revolve around just meeting basic needs.

Emma shared some of the varying obstacles to more Latinx participation. The feeling of discomfort based on language ability and the perception that ER might be another space where individuals could feel embarrassed or intimidated revealed that prior experiences in Pinecreek made Latinx individuals feel unwelcome and belittled. Rather than seeing their knowledge of other languages as a form of capital, as Yosso (2005) includes as an aspect of community cultural wealth, Spanish speakers were made to feel unwelcome and not valued.

Perceptions of racial diversity. Racial diversity in the EAT was perceived differently by its members, and interviews showed that respondents wished that there

were more African Americans participating. In the beginning of the EAT's formation, it was especially notable that there was only one African American who attended, and she promptly quit the group after the first meeting. Although the reasoning was attributed to her being a school district employee—and participation in a group such as ER could be a dangerous endeavor given the history of the district's retaliatory and discriminatory practices—this was a significant event. It was after this that Hannah used her social network to recruit individuals to join. For the second meeting of the EAT, she had invited six new people, five of whom were African American or mixed race. Of those six new people, five remained very active and became a core part of the EAT's membership during my data collection period.

Throughout the fieldwork, however, there was a sense of unease about the racial diversity of the group. Leigh, a White woman, often confided in me that she was worried about not having enough racial diversity on the EAT, and that the Goal 3 team working toward racial equity in Advanced Placement classes was made up of four White people. Rev. David regularly told the group that it was okay that right now it was mainly White people working on these issues. He said that because African Americans in Pinecreek had been misled and lied to so many times by White people, many would be unwilling to join ER and the EAT. If the group stuck with the mission and showed their commitment to the causes and real gains started occurring, however, Rev. David thought there would be more participation from people of color.

This could lead to an interesting dilemma as the group moves forward. If it is mostly dominated by White people, the goals and action steps toward accomplishing them may become too far removed from the very people the group is attempting to help

(Christens & Speer, 2015), just as Sampson (2017) warned in her study of the League of Women Voters. On the other hand, if White group members quit, it sends another message that they are not truly committed to equity work when it becomes too difficult or too slow. As was noted in Jacobs and Taylor's (2011) study about trying to change the Cleveland Indians mascot, White people waited for Native Americans to take the lead too much, in that White people could feel good about participating in an anti-racist group but without taking the necessary risks to actually make changes.

There was also a sense of embarrassment from some people of color that I spoke with about White people doing the work. Although he regularly reassured ER that if we continued the work, people of color would come, Rev. David was uncomfortable that it was White people who were most involved in this type of work. He did, however, acknowledge the histories people had endured with racism. He stated:

> Like in Eliminating Racism, you would think that more Blacks would be here. More Latinos would be here. Well, oppressed people have a hard time owning up to the fact that they feel oppressed and if, when they do, they feel like they're going to suffer further persecution by speaking up.

Other people of color held similar views, uneasy that it was White people conducting and leading the equity work. This furthers the tension seen above as the group moves forward. It will need to strike a balance so that the goals remain solidly in what people of color need and want as well as continue to try and engage people of color in its work.

Presenting the group as racially diverse. As team meetings progressed, and as we met with educational stakeholders from around the city, Hannah often stated that "our strength is in our diversity." She would explain that if the EAT was made up entirely of

African Americans, it would be viewed as full of angry complainers, while if it were only Whites, it would be viewed as clueless. There was power in having a team of African Americans and Whites. Therefore, one requirement for the group was having at least one person of color and one White person at every event where the group attended or spoke. The group held true to this principle in most instances. Whenever there were opportunities for speakers, there was at least one African American speaker and one White speaker. Although it was never discussed, there was also representation of different genders in the speakers as well. No event that I attended had only women or only men speaking.

In one instance, however, the EAT had been invited to visit Pinecreek's alternative high school to go on a tour and meet with students. As student discipline and racial discrepancies were important concerns for the EAT to address, the team toured three alternative learning schools where students went for a variety of reasons, including issues such as truancy and the necessity for individualized learning needs. Only three people from the EAT attended the tour of the high school: Hannah, Leigh, and I—all White individuals. During our meeting with approximately 30 students, where the three of us talked about the purpose of ER and the EAT, the high schoolers were given the opportunity to ask us questions. One Black girl spoke up and asked, "Not to disrespect you or the work you are doing, but why aren't there any Black people here with you?"

Although Hannah shared with her that other members of the EAT had been invited and that she had expected them to be there, the student remained doubtful. Immediately following the meeting, Hannah shared her frustration with Leigh and me, saying, "This is why we have to always have a diverse group with us whenever we attend

an event. If we can't even present ourselves as diverse and model it ourselves, how do we expect the rest of the city to do it?" The difficulty with this strategy, however, was that it placed extra burdens on people of color as the EAT was approximately 60% White and 40% Black. This was obviously a point of contention for members such as Anthony, who showed up to almost every EAT and ER event. He had a job of his own—teaching GED classes—and he would become agitated when the burden of showing up was left to him. This was also confounded by his small team of three individuals who showed up to Goal 1 meetings. His team had a lot to do but only with limited membership. This was a tension as it straddles a fine line of deficit thinking (Yosso, 2005) and placing blame on people of color for not showing up (Lewis, 2004).

In-group racial tensions and racism. Although there were efforts to ensure that the EAT was racially diverse, there still were racial tensions that existed within the group itself. Although these were not evident in arguments and dialogue, there were times when White team members said and acted in ways that were offensive to Black teammates. For example, one White woman, Connie, explained how the rejuvenation of the city's downtown had improved and was a welcoming space for all to gather. This was met with immediate disagreement from Black individuals on the team, who argued that the city's downtown had only improved for some people, and that was mainly White people. Although there was an expansion of Black-owned businesses, people of color felt like they stuck out. In fact, Anthony told Connie to look around at the Friday evening market—a recent addition to the city's events lineup where there were food trucks and tents—and observe the Whiteness. Connie and I later discussed this, and she recognized Anthony's point and that she was still trying to learn.

Anthony would become irritated when Hannah singled him out and praised him for the equity work he did. He explained that he belonged to a Lutheran church, where there historically had been very few members of color. He knew that he was seen as the face of diversity, and he was part of different committees such as the social equity team. He did not want to be a representative for African Americans, and he did not like when Hannah would talk about the social justice work he had done. He stated that Black people are not a monolith, and he did not represent them. Further, he regularly told me that he was a controversial person, and he knew he was viewed by White people as "an angry Black man because of my tone of voice"(Personal communication, March 14, 2019). Therefore, he did not want his name brought up in certain settings because he did not want assumptions to be made and start off on negative footing.

There would be other comments from White members of the group that revealed privileged thinking. During one steering committee meeting, discussion focused on the ways that progress was not being made fast enough. Impatience was growing amongst members of the community group who had been doing work for about a year, and they were not seeing many changes and faced resistance from residents of Pinecreek. At this point, a White woman in in her seventies spoke up. She asked that the Black people in the group to please be patient as change would not happen quickly. This was immediately met with anger and disagreement. Other older Black members told her that they had been patient and that many of them had been working on improving the position of Black people for over fifty or sixty years. Comments such as these from White members are echoed in the literature about community group sustainability and how people of color must not only contend with the issues the group was advocating for, but also White

people who have not experienced life as a person of color in the United States (Gorski & Chen, 2015; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011).

Continuing the Work

After the tours of schools and invited presentations to community groups were completed, the EAT was suddenly left with no foreseeable action items to attend to, leading to some consternation from Hannah. She was discouraged that the group had not been invited to present their report anywhere else, and she was unsure of how to move forward.

The EAT's strategy of returning to the original goals and mission of being passionate advocates was a helpful guide for continuing the momentum of putting pressure on the school district to make racially equitable policies. As one of the original ideas of the group was to reach out to the community and alert them to racial inequities in the district, one of the leaders, Connie, a former member of city council, said that we needed to make efforts to reach out to the community. It was the persistent return to the principles of the group that helped push forward the agenda and procedures. As such, Connie contacted her friend in the League of Women Voters, who came to our meeting, and she invited the group to present to the League at a later date. By knowing how to get others interested in the topics we were addressing, the EAT used its social capital to spread its message and build relationships for the benefit of the community at large (Putnam, 2000).

During meetings throughout Spring 2019, the EAT became increasingly interested in holding the superintendent, his cabinet, and the school board accountable for the recommended strategies the team had provided earlier in the year (for a list of the

recommended strategies that EAT provided the school district, see Appendix B). The vision of the entire ER organization, "To make Pinecreek a place where everyone feels valued," was repeatedly cited. Therefore, the EAT used the relationships it had built and took active steps toward achieving its mission and vision by requesting a joint meeting with the superintendent and mayor in May 2019. With prior consultation with the mayor, the EAT recommended that ER, the city of Pinecreek, and the Pinecreek School District should co-host a breakfast event addressing issues of hiring and retaining people of color. Leaders from over one hundred marginalized and religious groups would be invited with the purpose of bringing them together in the same room for the first time to share ideas about recruitment and retention. As Christens and Speer (2015) state about community organizing, "people closest to the problem should be part of the solution to that problem" (p. 215).

Over two collaborative meetings, members of ER, the mayor, and members from the superintendent's team met to discuss the event's logistics. As Hannah reiterated to the mayor and superintendent, everyone in Pinecreek needed to feel valued. Further, building trust was a foundational concern as it had been lost for communities of color. Therefore, she urged the superintendent to start the event with a plea for help. Taking this approach would help him appear less defensive than if he focused on what he was already doing to address hiring and retaining people of color. By directly stating, "We need your help" and then asking, "What could [I] do to make African American teachers feel welcome," Hannah thought he would be restarting the relationship with communities of color on a positive note and showing that he valued the voices of people of color.

Leaders of ER wielded their wide social networks when planning the breakfast meeting and emphasized the importance of using their social capital. Firstly, Hannah advised that the invitation be sent directly from the mayor and superintendent to leaders of groups that had not been included in the past. A direct invitation from the two leaders would show that they were making personal efforts to value and listen to them. While ER designed the invitations, the mayor and superintendent each agreed to personally call and invite individuals that the EAT particularly wanted to attend the meeting. By capitalizing on the prestige that accompanied the titles of "mayor" and "superintendent," ER thought this would convince people to attend the breakfast.

Secondly, over many years, Hannah and Walter had compiled a list of leaders in the Pinecreek area. During meetings with the EAT, Hannah passed the list around, asking for more recommendations of community leaders to add. By the time the invitation was ready, ER had the contact information of 130 leaders of groups such as the NAACP, the Latino Leaders Coalition, the African American sororities and fraternities, and other social justice groups. In one final push to draw a bigger crowd, members of the EAT called individuals who had not RSVP'd by the due date. The initial number who had replied affirmatively was around 70. After the personal phone calls, 110 had agreed to attend.

Did Any of These Strategies Help Eliminate Racism?

With all of the strategies ER and the EAT incorporated during my time of fieldwork, I return to the research question of whether or not these strategies contributed to reducing racism and creating more equitable forms of education in the Pinecreek public school system. Although there are some measurable ways to address this,

unmeasurable ways, such as community members' perceptions and the changing mindsets related to race, are important to examine as well. As the evidence in this section shows, the EAT did not make much progress in terms of its more concrete goals such as increasing the representation of teachers of color. The number of teachers of color actually decreased. However, the team did make progress in forming a working relationship with district administrators, pushing for the hiring of a person of color for minority recruitment, and advocating for the equitable distribution of funding throughout the district's schools. Further, its relationship with the superintendent gave the team a seat at the table for helping form the district's five-year strategic plan. These successes and failures will be discussed further in this section.

Statistics of the District

Data from the 2018-2019 school year on employees of color in the district showed that there were 4.14% African American and 3.13% Latinx teachers. During the 2019-2020 school year, there were a reported 3.8% African American and 3.0% Latinx teachers—a slight decrease. However, the percentage of African American district administrators increased. African American administrators increased from 3.89% to 12.8%, while Latinx administrators decreased from 1.95% to 1.0%.

Table 4

Overall hiring totals: Pinecreek Public School district personnel stats 2018-2019 school year

Race	#	%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	0.10%
Asian	26	1.31%
Black or African American	82	4.14%
Hawaiian/other Pacific Island	2	0.10%
Hispanic or Latino	62	3.13%

Two or more Races	81	4.09%
White	1726	87.13%
Grand Total	1981	100%

Table 5

Demographic makeup of Pinecreek Public School District administration for the 2018-2019 school year

Race	#	%
White	232	90.3%
Black	10	3.89%
Hispanic/Latino	5	1.95%
Other	10	3.89%
Total	257	100%

Table 6

Demographic makeup of teachers in the Pinecreek Public School District by school for the 2018-2019 school year

School	**White**	**Black**	**Hispanic**	**Other**	**Total**
WSHS	90.4	4.4	1.8	3.5	114
ESHS	84.3	4.34	19.9	7.8	115
ESHS	85.7	0.9	5.4	8.0	112
ESHS	84.2	6.1	1.8	4.4	114
WSAHS	89.1	8.7	0.0	2.2	46
WS(SP)	47.2	0.0	33.3	19.4	36
ESES	88.5	3.9	0	7.7	26
ESES	92.9	3.6	0	3.6	28
ESES	81.0	4.8	0	14.3	21
ESES	86.5	5.4	0	8.1	37
ESES	86	14.3	0	0	7
WSES	90.9	4.5	4.5	0	22
WSES	84.6	7.7	7.7	7.7	13
ESMS	84.5	7	5.2	14.3	58
WSES	71.9	21.9	0	6.3	32
ESES	91.3	4.3	0	4.3	23
ESMS	98.3	1.7	0	0	60
ESES	87	8.7	0	4.3	23
ESES	87.5	0	4.2	8.3	24
WSES	84.2	10.5	5.26	0	19
WSMS	88.2	5.9	0	0	34
ESES	89.5	0	0	10.5	19
WSES	56.5	0	17.4	26.1	23
WSES	88	4	0	8	25
ESMS	90.9	2	0	5.5	55

ESES	88	4	0	8	25
WSES	95.8	0	0	4.2	24
ESSP (Montessori)	94.3	2.9	2.9	0	35
ESEC	91.3	4.4	0	4.35	24
ESES	91.7	0	0	8.33	24
WSMS	81.9	8.3	5.6	4.2	72
ESES	94.9	0	2.8	2.8	39
ESES	89.7	5.1	5.1	0	39
ESES	96.8	0	0	0	31
WSES	95	5	0	0	20
WSES (Gifted)	98	0	0	2	50
WSES	71	0	16.1	12.9	31
WSES	93	0	0	2	29
WSMS	89.6	9	1.5	0	67
ESES	79.4	0	2.9	17.6	34
WSES	88.9	0	0	11.1	9

Note: The first two initials are WS or ES, standing for west side or east side; the second two initials are ES, MS, or HS, standing for elementary school, middle school, or high school; the initials SP stands for special program, which could be a program that spans multiple levels of education

The statistical data show that there is a smaller percentage of teachers of color in the district for the 2019-2020 school year, but that the percentage of district administrators of color increased. The numbers themselves are not promising and are disappointing for the EAT. However, these numbers do not tell the complete story as the EAT's partnership with district leaders was influential in a number of ways.

Perceptions After a Year and a Half of the EAT's Work

One of the biggest criticisms from community members about the school district administration was its poor communication style. The EAT regularly witnessed this lack of communication during its attempts to procure data while team members wrote their report in Fall 2018. For example, when the Goal 3 team attempted to find the number of students of color in Advanced Placement courses, they rarely heard back from email requests for data. When school district administrators sent data, they oftentimes were not

the correct datasets, or they were provided in unclear ways so that the numbers were difficult to understand without significant time and study, and key questions went unanswered.

Although this happened frequently, there was an improvement in communication between the school district and the EAT in terms of addressing racial inequities. For example, one of the criticisms the school district faced from the EAT was the strategies it employed for recruiting people of color to work in Pinecreek. During the district's presentation to the EAT, administrators shared that they had attempted to go to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) around the country and had attended other one-off recruitment events. The EAT challenged and critiqued them in these attempts. When asked who the recruiters were, the chief human resources officer responded that they had been sending two White women. At this, members of ER expressed their disbelief, saying that this was a serious problem. An additional problem our team saw was the district's prioritization of resources for recruitment. Between 2015-2019, the district had spent $56,192 to recruit minority and bilingual teachers. It spent $52,585 of this budget to recruit bilingual teachers in Puerto Rico and Madrid, Spain. It only spent $2,707 at Historically Black Colleges and Universities between 2015-2019, meaning that it spent $541.40 per year. Additionally, the district leadership expressed surprise when the EAT suggested using the Black sororities' and fraternities' social networks to recruit teachers of color to Pinecreek. This suggested that district administrators had not sought out the voices of people of color and their assets, essentially ignoring their community cultural wealth.

In April 2019, two months after the original meeting with the superintendent and his cabinet, Hannah reached out to him for updates on what was occurring in the district. The superintendent replied with the following email:

> Thank you for checking back in. Based on our last meeting, I have some suggested next steps to make sure progress continues.
>
> Request for a follow up meeting:
>
> 1. [My assistant] will schedule a meeting that includes Eliminate Racism, the mayor's office and our communications/ HR leadership to discuss next steps in joint recruitment and outreach to the community organizations you suggested from the list.
>
> Update:
>
> 2. We have added a director level position to spearhead minority recruitment in the District. We would appreciate suggested people to add to the applicant pool.
>
> Request for Representation starting May 20, 2019
>
> 3. We have a community group that helps us lead the National Equity Project work that meets on May 20th. I have cc'd [the chief officer of human resources] for a point of contact. We would love representation from the Eliminate Racism group as part of our community team.
>
> Request for Representation, date TBD, during the 19-20 academic year and summer
>
> 4. We will be starting the 5 year strategic planning process with an RFP (Request for Proposal) in the Fall of 2019. Once a provider is Board approved, we would like representation from Eliminate Racism to serve in a community role to ensure

recommendations from the group are part of the conversation in our new 5 year plan.

While ER might not have been the only influence on these developments, it is notable that a new minority recruitment position at the director level was not created until after ER's pressure. It was also noteworthy that the EAT was asked to suggest possible candidates for this position, and members of the team sent back names for consideration. The district ultimately went in a different direction, but it did hire an African American woman as the new director of minority recruitment, and another African American woman had been hired in an assistant role to this position. Further, the EAT was informed that one of its suggested candidates was being considered for another position within the district where her qualifications were a better fit.

It was clear that the EAT had developed enough of a partnership with the school district administration because it was sought after for help. As the fifth item in the superintendent's email notes, the EAT had earned a seat at the table when it was asked to participate in the upcoming five-year strategic planning process. Although this committee had not been formed at the time of this writing, it is worth remarking that a group with the name of Eliminate Racism would be included in the district's plan for moving forward over the next five years. It remains to be seen, however, if this is in name only or if this will be a real attempt at inserting racial equity into the district's five-year plan.

Lastly, the EAT had successfully managed to bring together key players and get them to agree on how collaborating to address racism in Pinecreek at the city and the school district levels offered hope for improvement. As the first point in the email indicated, the superintendent was willing to partake in a breakfast meeting with the

mayor and ER, and the ER team had a plan for proceeding with the partnership (which was talked about earlier in this chapter).

During the breakfast, participants were placed in groups of eight and were asked to share their thoughts on the following three questions:

> (1) What can your organization do to encourage African-Americans and Latinos to apply for current vacancies in the: Pinecreek Public Schools' teaching and administrative staff; City of Pinecreek's police and fire departments; City of Pinecreek's variety of departments?
>
> (2) What suggestions do you have for long-term solutions to address the racial disparities in the work force, particularly in high paying or salaried jobs in our public schools and our City Government?
>
> (3) What can our community organizations do to support the African-American and Latino staff/residents in our community so they feel valued and happy and will want to make Pinecreek their life-long home?

Notetakers at each of the 17 tables wrote down the major themes of each speaker, and the participants I spoke with after the event were pleased that the district and the city were beginning to share their data publicly. Attendees expressed that they were hopeful about what was to come next, again reminiscent of Yosso's (2005) aspirational capital. Further, during the meeting itself, the mayor announced that he and the superintendent would like to convene again, but this time in the form of a town hall meeting so that participants had opportunities to ask questions directly to them. This was a pleasant surprise for the EAT, who interpreted it as a positive sign of the two leaders' willingness to push forward with addressing racial inequalities in Pinecreek.

After the event, our team scrutinized what had been shared by the 100+ participants, developing themes based on their answers. Interestingly, the participants' views of the city and school district mirrored many of the same goals that we were working on, giving us a form of triangulation to confirm that we were actually representing the interests of the community. This also helped to ensure that people closest to the problems were a part of the solution (Christens & Speer, 2015; Sampson, 2017). Overall, we agreed that the overarching theme of the day was that people of color did not feel welcomed or valued in the city of Pinecreek or its school district, which aligned perfectly with ER's vision of making everyone in Pinecreek feel valued. This idea of feeling valued in these larger physical and political spaces will be discussed in the following chapter.

Although the EAT may not have had the clear wins that it was searching for after its first year and a half of work, such as hiring a greater number of people of color within the district and increasing the number of students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses, it did help expand communication amongst the city's educational stakeholders and brought together individuals who had never been in the same room together. As participants in ER regularly noted during my time with them, eliminating racism was a slow process, and progress would not be obvious or immediate. Perhaps the EAT's biggest accomplishments and contributions to the community were its ability to open up communication between previously closed or nonexistent channels, to challenge the current racial status quo in the school system, and to bring awareness to the greater Pinecreek community about the racially inequitable structure that existed within the school district.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I addressed my first two research questions, which were: (1) What strategies did the community activist group use to influence local education policy for addressing racism in the schools? and (2) How did community participation influence local education policy? To answer these questions, I showed how ER and the EAT set out in its early stages to establish and follow a process and to set SMART goals to keep the team on track. I also discussed other strategies that contributed to the group's longevity, which included keeping meetings focused on the issues at hand, limiting gossip, constantly returning to its stated goals, and establishing itself as a legitimate organization in the community, partly due to its diverse membership, its non-profit status, and its leaders who had knowledge about the city's education system, and relationships with its major players.

I also presented how the EAT purposefully adopted strategies of collaboration when working with the school district and used relational techniques (Warren, 2005) to establish strong relationships with school district officials. As prior experiences suggested that a confrontational approach would lead to dead ends, the EAT made efforts to consistently back up their claims about inequalities in the district by using research evidence. Adopting these collaborative and relational strategies were thought to be best practices in order to influence and help create more racially equitable district policies. Further, one of the group's most important assets was its ability to bring members together across racial lines. By maintaining a fairly diverse membership where people of color's voices were listened to and acted upon, the EAT established itself as an influential and legitimate partner with the power to work with school and city leaders and ultimately

benefit the entire community. Using their vast social capital and drawing upon its community cultural wealth, this group of community activists managed to meet with and hold accountable individuals who were in powerful positions in the city and school district. Strategies that encouraged team members to consistently return to the mission and goals, as well as to remain advocates rather than becoming involved in side projects, contributed to the group's longevity and potentially prevented burnout. These strategies assisted in maintaining the team's partnership with the school district for over a year.

The EAT had mixed results in its work with the school district. In some ways, the group still faced internal struggles. After a year and a half, there was still limited diversity in the group in terms of race and age. Most of the group was made up of Black and White retirees, Latinx participation was severely limited, and other racial and ethnic groups were ultimately not represented. While efforts were made to rectify some of these limitations, there was not much progress on this by the time I ended my data collection. Participation from a younger group of participants, including students within the district, could have provided the team with the voices of the people that were being directly affected by education policy. A lack of parents with children currently in the district was also limiting for similar reasons. By having membership that was made up mostly of individuals who were financially well off enough to retire may have also contributed to blind spots in the group as residents from diverse economic perspectives could have provided a unique perspective that was absent from the EAT.

Although the EAT struggled at times to stick to its established process, which was apparent at the end of my data collection period with them, members made efforts to continue their work. Even after successfully establishing a partnership with the power

players, EAT teammates questioned whether or not the team should reduce the goals even further in an attempt to pressure the school district to double down on particular efforts to make it a more racially equitable district. To EAT members, they saw the superintendent as being concerned by racial inequities, but they did not think that he saw them as urgent to address.

The EAT experienced failures, but they also had some wins. Firstly, their persistent work brought together people who had never been in the room at the same time to discuss matters of racism. As Anthony shared with me, the February 2019 meeting where the superintendent, his cabinet, two school board members, the president and vice president of the teachers union, and community members attended was unprecedented. Additionally, when the EAT's watchful presence over district proceedings occurred, district leadership instituted a director level position of minority recruitment, hiring a Black woman for this position as well as another Black woman to assist in a part-time position. Through its oversight, the EAT also questioned the inequitable distribution of monetary resources in the district, and the school district changed its funding formula. Although the EAT could not take full credit for this funding change as the state had changed its funding laws, the EAT brought up specific concerns about how money was spent in this district, which had historically provided more funding for east side schools. As the superintendent explained in a meeting, in the 2020-2021 school year, the district's per pupil funding would be the closest to parity that it had ever experienced.

Even with the dubious views that the EAT had about the school district, it is continuing its slow and steady work, and the ER group may be growing. At the conclusion of the breakfast in August, ER leaders shared that almost thirty new people

had indicated their interest in joining. This indicates that ER's mission and goals resonate with leaders within the community and that Pinecreek needs to be a place where people of color feel, and truly are, valued.

The work of this community activist group displayed the interrelationship between social capital, civic participation, and community cultural wealth and the ways they contributed to the functioning of the group and the strategies it adopted in partnering with the school district. By using the social capital of the group's diverse membership, it spread its message to attract a membership that was made up of Blacks, Whites, and a limited number of Latinx. Further, by recognizing the cultural wealth that each member brought to the group, the EAT used the strengths of the different communities within Pinecreek to form relationships with the school district in an effort to provide more equitable learning opportunities for students of color.

CHAPTER 5

MOTIVATING FACTORS BEHIND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

> I've traveled all over the world and being here, it's almost like combat—being in combat. It's a daily combat. … I find [Pinecreek residents] combating negative thinking, entitlements, spirits, lack of commitment, and excuses. People from all walks of life.
>
> -Rev. David, 2018

Introduction

In this chapter, I address my third research question: What were the motivating factors for individuals' involvement in issues of local school segregation. Answers to this question were complex and rarely clear cut. Over my nineteen months of fieldwork, my interactions with people involved in Eliminate Racism (ER) as well as individuals who were not a part of the group frequently spoke with me about how the unwelcoming spaces throughout Pinecreek, which were characterized by both open hostility towards people of color or a constant undercurrent of racism, had shaped and driven their community activism. The feelings of not belonging motivated them to become social activists to promote racial equity in the city and its school district. Not only were past experiences in racialized spaces motivating, but so were individuals' religious and spiritual backgrounds. Inspired by the basic tenets of their religions, members of ER valued civic participation, and in some instances, they viewed it as a calling.

The following sections approach racialized spaces and their relationship with how people of color did or did not feel valued in the city and within ER. I found that spaces were often unwelcoming to people of color, fueled by rampant color-blind attitudes

throughout Pinecreek. As the city and its schools are interrelated and schools reflect the community, I provide contextual evidence of how color-blindness in the city's geography, its healthcare system, economic development, and law enforcement contributed to people of color feeling unwelcome and undervalued. Color-blind attitudes from the city were reflected in the public schools, and teachers and students of color were often targets of hostile attitudes from White co-workers.

Space also played an important role within ER, and I specifically address religious spaces. As religious spaces were locations for many of ER and the EAT's events, this shaped how the group functioned. Not only were religious spaces important, but religious belief systems and moral codes were important for the civic participation for members of ER and the EAT, playing a motivating factor for their participation. Religious belonging, although viewed positively in many instances throughout my fieldwork, was also the cause for division and further segregation, and it kept certain community members from joining the group.

Evidence for this research question not only came from interview questions that directly asked why individuals joined ER, but also through comments during various meetings with the school district superintendent, his cabinet, and the mayor; ER and Education Action Team (EAT) gatherings; and informal conversations with people throughout my time of data collection.

Racialized Spaces

I analyze how space was a mitigating factor in motivating community members to participate in issues of racial equity through Bonilla-Silva's (2014) concept of color-blind racism. This contemporary form of racism was particularly apparent throughout my time

in Pinecreek. As will be explained in the first half of this chapter, White Pinecreek residents were at times explicit and at other times unaware of their color-blind attitudes. Both of these forms of color-blindness contributed to the discomfort that people of color often felt throughout the city and its school district—as residents, students, employees, and parents. The role of space, and who was perceived as racially belonging or was welcome in each particular space in Pinecreek, was influential for how individuals participated in efforts to address city and school segregation. Racialized spaces and their relationship to power and control in the city were particularly noticeable, as the economic, racial, and religious spheres overlapped and led to competition, fear, and misunderstandings. In this section, I first discuss the need for people of color to feel valued in Pinecreek and its school system. Then I discuss city geography, noting how the different sides of the river—east and west—were important not only in city dynamics, but also in the ways it contributed to racialized spaces in the school district. I also show how political and racial belief systems entered the Pinecreek school district. I discuss how Bonilla-Silva's (2014) *minimization of race* and *denial of racism* were obstacles to people of color feeling welcome in the city and schools. I then examine how these belief systems and negative messages toward people of color shape the need for members of some minoritized groups to feel valued in the city and school district, a notable consistent theme throughout my data. Lastly, I address the tensions that exist in contested spaces among race, economics, and religion, and how each of these contributed to individuals' desire to work or eschew efforts at promoting racially equitable policies in the Pinecreek public schools and greater Pinecreek city.

The Need for People of Color to Feel Valued

Colorblindness in Eliminate Racism. The way people were treated in city and school spaces contributed to their involvement in issues of racial equity. This treatment was also important for ER in its vision statement, which was: Pinecreek is a community where everyone feels valued. This vision statement could be interpreted as color-blind because it does not mention race, which was the sole reason why ER was formed. The actions carried out by the group, however, would overall not be considered color-blind, though there certainly were instances of it. The name of the group itself, Eliminate Racism, was purposeful. As Hannah explained about the choice of the group's name, "if we can't name the word, how are we ever going to address it?" Although the name could have been a turnoff for some people to join, especially in a city where the minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) was rampant (and residents that I encountered would look momentarily shocked by the name Eliminate Racism when I explained what I was studying), it successfully brought together people from around the community who were concerned about the effects of racism throughout Pinecreek. The name helped separate this group from other community groups because every goal was aligned toward racial equity. During ER meetings, individuals would suggest combining efforts with other community groups that were doing similar work, but ER leaders said that many of these groups did not take on racism directly, and that was the purpose of this group. No other organization in Pinecreek was engaged in the same kinds of activities as ER.

But even ER's operations were not completely absent of color-blindness. During a steering committee meeting early on in the process of formation, Rev. David got into a heated argument with Walter, who was working on the mission statement for the

Economic Opportunities Action Team. Walter shared that the team's mission statement was: *To form relationships with stakeholders in our community to educate and advocate to achieve economic independence and a better quality of life for those in need*. Rev. David pushed back on this, stating that the mission statement did not mention race. Walter argued that they needed to help all people on the west side of Pinecreek, but Rev. David replied that the purpose of ER was to specifically address race. When the argument continued, Rev. David threw up his hands and said, "Okay, I've given my opinion." Research has noted how space is associated with particular races (George Lipsitz, 2011; Rothstein, 2017b), and based on my experiences in Pinecreek having grown up there, Pinecreek's southwest quadrant was viewed by many residents as minoritized, poor, and dangerous. As Bonam, Taylor, and Yantis (2017) argue, because "racialized physical space is a cultural product," (p. 2) it has political and economic ramifications because policymakers may be influenced by their own racial attitudes. This has the potential to lead to inequitable funding and resources to areas associated with Blackness. Ultimately, the Economics Opportunities Team's mission became: *To reduce economic discrimination and promote equitable opportunities through education, social action, and collaboration with governmental, public, and private organizations*. Again, the final statement never did directly mention race or racism. At subsequent steering committee meetings, race and racism were directly addressed by Walter and his team, but it often was addressed in terms of making improvements to the southwest quadrant of the city, which was coded as a space comprised of people of color.

Similarly, the EAT's mission statement did not address race or racism as the final statement was: *To be passionate advocates of equity-driven policies and practices in the*

Pinecreek Public Schools so that all students will be prepared for social and academic success. Interestingly, this statement did not cause the same concern from Rev. David or any other ER member during the steering committee meeting as the economic opportunities mission statement did. Two of the three goals of the EAT, however, directly mentioned African Americans and Latinx to ensure that racism was the main issue to be addressed by the team, but Goal 2 also did not explicitly mention race or racism.

Community member perceptions. The need to feel valued was not just something felt by community activists involved in ER, and although this was confirmed during many of my field work experiences, it became even clearer during the breakfast meeting that ER co-sponsored with the mayor and the superintendent. This gathering's purpose, which was spearheaded by the EAT, was to address the questions of how to hire more people of color within the city of Pinecreek and school district and what strategies could be adopted to retain them in their jobs and within the city. With over one hundred leaders participating from businesses, religious groups, and minoritized groups from around the community, attendees were assigned to one of seventeen different tables where ER members led small group discussions. ER notetakers wrote down ideas that participants had for each of the three questions, and the results were posted on ER's new website.

The EAT analyzed community members' responses, and Hannah organized them into themes. It became quite obvious that people of color from all around the community did not feel welcome in Pinecreek and that efforts to rectify these issues should be instituted. For example, suggestions included: "Different nationalities don't feel embraced. People want to feel that they are valued in all walks of life"; "Healing starts at

home with values and faith"; "current culture sensitivity is lacking"; "change culture"; "Everyone should feel included in the advancement of the city and everyone should get a tax charge that reflect to what he or she is making in general"; "Make students feel valued. Community values you!" These examples reflect just a small sample of how community members perceived the way that people of color felt within Pinecreek and its school system. They also hint at the idea that colorblind ideas were entrenched throughout the community, where differences in histories and backgrounds were ignored, a key aspect of Bonilla-Silva's (2014) conception of color-blind racism. For additional examples of what the community members shared, refer to Appendix C.

City Geography

Because ER's vision statement was that *Pinecreek is a community where everyone feels valued*, the group's four founders—Rev. David, Helen, Hannah, and Walter—emphasized from the beginning that the work of ER was to improve four aspects of the city: the education system, the criminal justice system, economic opportunities, and relationships. This would be done by focusing directly on marginalized populations, and particularly on Black residents. ER faced an uphill battle in its work to address racism in its four agreed-upon areas. Not only was the fight for racial equality a difficult endeavor, but the environment and attitudes of residents throughout Pinecreek made the work even tougher. Rev. David described the situation, saying, "Pinecreek is so racially polarized that people are afraid to get involved because they don't want to be persecuted or have to make any professional or personal sacrifices as a result of the environment and eliminate racism. So there's a silence about that" (Personal communication, October 2, 2018). Through this statement, Rev. David recognized how economics played an

important role in people's decision to fight racism, which Bonilla-Silva (2014) categorizes as abstract liberalism. When an individual will be negatively affected economically by disrupting racism, the racial hierarchy is perpetuated.

Even knowing that taking on these tasks would be arduous, ER's four founders viewed the goal of improving the city as necessary, in part due to the city's racially and economically segregated neighborhoods. The segregation of the city is obvious by the river that runs through it, which doubles as a physical and symbolic barrier, dividing the city between west vs. east; poor vs. rich; minoritized vs. White. The map below provides a visual representation of the racial division within Pinecreek.

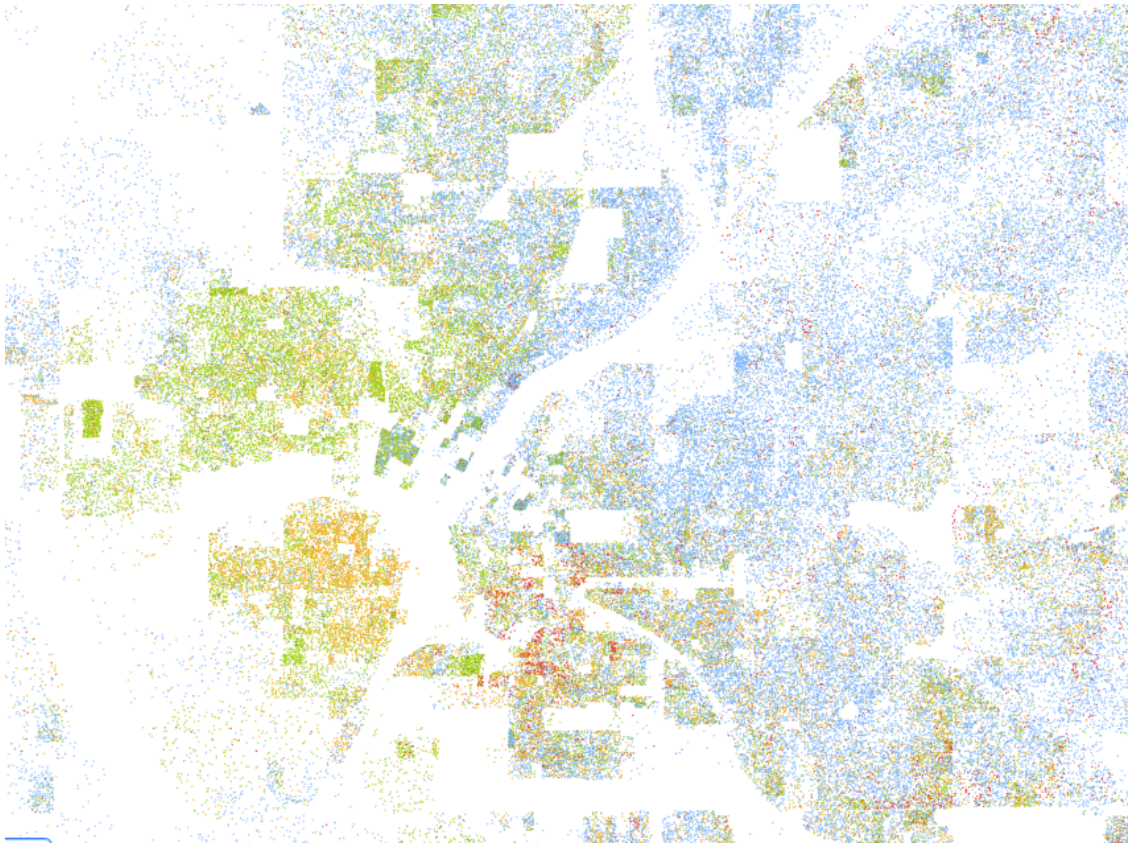

Figure 7. Racial dot map of Pinecreek using 2010 census data

In this map of Pinecreek, green dots represent African Americans, yellow dots represent Latinx, and Blue dots represent Whites. The white line roughly in the middle is the Pinecreek River, showing how this geographical feature divides the city by race.

West side vs. east side. The context of east versus west side dynamics is important for understanding educational spaces in the city. The education system is just one part of society, and schools are microcosms of the overall community. As such, events and attitudes from around the city are insightful for understanding how schools are racialized spaces, where people of color are oftentimes unwelcome and undervalued.

During ER and EAT meetings as well as in interviews, the underdevelopment of the west side was often brought up and accompanied by expressions of anger and dissatisfaction. A portion of the feelings that I observed was attributed to how much race and racism contributed to how west side residents were perceived. This is reminiscent of Bonam, Taylor, and Yantis's (2017) finding that space is associated with particular races. West siders felt that they were not treated as well as east siders by businesses, local government officials, and school district administrators; and people of color on the west side expressed how unwelcome they felt in the city. Although some of the actions and expressions may have appeared subtle, they sent a clear message to West siders, and particularly to those living in the southwest quadrant who were mostly African American and Latinx: they were feared, irrelevant, and unwanted.

For example, when the city decorated for the holidays in December 2018, an organization put up holiday lights and wreaths around Pinecreek's downtown. A heavy concentration of the decorations was on the east side of downtown where there were newer businesses and restaurants that had been thriving in recent years after many years

of stagnation. There were some holiday decorations on the west side as well, but they abruptly stopped at the state of the art county jail located near the border of the southwest and northwest side of town. Hannah, who was a White west side resident, viewed this as a clear message about what the city valued—law and order—and who was valuable enough to receive decorations—east siders and select west siders. In other words, White and wealthy people had value in the Pinecreek community, while poor and marginalized populations did not.

West side and east side dynamics had been tense for years. The city of Pinecreek was originally established on the west side, but as it developed, people began moving east. Throughout the years, economic development moved east, and local business developers ignored the west side. As the east side became Whiter and wealthier, and as the west side became more minoritized and socioeconomically low, disdain for "the other side" became palpable, with east siders complaining that west side residents did not contribute enough in taxes, and west siders angry about the lack of development and crumbling infrastructure. Although overall Pinecreek was not a wealthy city, with about a fourth of the population living below the poverty line, the wealth that was in the city was funneled into expanding businesses and infrastructure on the east side.

Healthcare. One recent event that displayed the racial dynamics of east side versus west side was the controversial decision to build a new hospital on the city's east side. Prior to these negotiations in 2014, there were three main hospitals in the city: Pinecreek Health on the west side, St. Mary on the east side, and Midtown Hospital, near downtown on the city's east side. An entrepreneur, and one of the highest paid hospital CEOs in the country whose salary in 2017 reached $8 million, entered the Pinecreek

hospital market in 2014. He wanted to build another hospital on the city's east side, near the interstate. Although the plan was ultimately confirmed, and the hospital was completed during my time in Pinecreek in the beginning of 2019, the series of events was contentious and bitter. For example, one African American woman, Delilah, who served as an alderwoman on the city's west side and who strongly disagreed with building the new hospital, was excluded from the discussion between the CEO and other African American leaders. When she was consulted after this meeting, the CEO called the councilwoman at her home one night and told her not to go against him. During our interview, Delilah explained:

> Because he told them that [if] they didn't go along with them, he would shut the hospital down. He told me that too. He said, if you challenge me on this—he called me at home one night—we've never, we never met. He called me at home. We talked pleasantly for a couple of minutes and he said, "I understand you filed a petition in opposition. You're going against us at the hearing." I said, "Well, I'm not against you, but I'm definitely against taking the trauma center out of the area that has the highest level of trauma in the entire city." And I named some of the other things and how they were going to drastically harm the African American community. He said, well, you're wrong about all of that. And I said, "Putting a trauma center within four minutes of another trauma center makes sense?" Because that's what we did. You got St. Mary here. You've got his [hospital] up here. Four minutes and ours is 17 minutes to get to.

Not only was the hospital built, but the trauma center in the west side hospital was downgraded from a Level I trauma center to a Level II by the state's Department of

Public Health. Pregnant mothers in the poorest quadrant of the city were forced to find transportation to a hospital that was almost twenty minutes away. The CEO and councilwoman's conversation did not end there, however, and she continued:

> He said, "Look, if you challenge me, if you go against me on this, I'll shut it down. I will shut it down." I said, "Go ahead, go ahead." And I said, "They're not going to let you shut it down." And he said, "Oh yeah?" He said, "Go look at [the nearby city]. We shut the hospital down in [the nearby city] ..." I said, "Well, shame on them and shame on you. So go ahead." I said, "I'd rather have it shut down than have a second rate, second class hospital that will be Medicare, Medicaid, and minorities." That's what the hospital will be. And I said, "I'm sorry, before I give people that level of care, I'd [rather] that you just shut it down."

The second rate service that Delilah predicted the west side community would receive in healthcare sent the same clear message that African Americans and other minoritized groups were not valuable assets to the city, and that economics were more important than marginalized people's lives. Once again, this focus on economics and ignoring equity is a form of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Policies were created without taking into account differences between groups, which in this case, includes the difficulty for many residents on the Southwest side to access transportation to a new hospital that was almost twenty minutes away. This form of abstract liberalism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) prioritizes the individual's self-interest—in this case, the CEO's—and it is an example of how resources and services continue to be inequitably distributed without taking into account history or policies that have undermined the well-being of particular races (Omi & Winant, 2014). When questioned by the local newspaper in 2019 about this, however,

the hospital's CEO—who was born in Pinecreek—explained that the highest level of care would be maintained in the west side hospital, and the spokesperson for Pinecreek Health insisted that the hospital was there to stay on the west side (Green, 2019).

Throughout the building process and after the hospital was complete, debates in the newspaper promoted the differing views. The newspaper's editorial board took the side of building the new hospital, calling out Delilah for her delay tactics and claiming that by not voting for the new Pinecreek Health building, the city would miss out on many economic opportunities. The new hospital hired more than 1,500 people to construct and design the building, and the hospital's health system created 735 health care jobs throughout the area of Pinecreek (Sweeny, 2019). This was also the largest building project the city had seen, with a cost of approximately $500 million. As the newspaper saw it, Pinecreek had a long history of not capitalizing on many economic opportunities, and this was one chance to remedy that (The Editorial Board, 2016).

Other Pinecreek residents, however, were skeptical from the outset of the decision to build the new hospital on the east side. As one White doctor who lived on the west side indicated in an editorial in the local newspaper in the summer of 2019, he believed the hospital's CEO had every intention of closing the west side hospital and that building the new hospital was simply an economic move. He wrote:

> To be clear, the whole point of moving Pinecreek Health to the east side was to improve payor mix and profitability. The east side was not a health care desert and did not need an additional hospital. The degree of profitability that Pinecreek Health desires is certainly challenged by having two campuses in a city the size of Pinecreek competing with both Midtown Hospital and St. Mary. (Klazura, 2019)

The sole focus on economics without attention to the fact that it would be largely people of color who would be negatively affected by the loss of services on the west side aligns with Bonilla-Silva's (2014) concept of color-blind racism. His concept, once again, notes how laws and policies are often formed that do not take into account the differences and needs between different racial groups, so that an inequitable distribution of resources among the races results (Omi & Winant, 2014).

Economic development. Growing up in Pinecreek, it had always been obvious to me that there were vast differences in economic development between the east and west sides of the river. As was seen in the hospital debate, it was clear that the importance of economic success often outweighed racial interests in Pinecreek. Reminiscent of prior research on racialized spaces (e.g. Bonam et al., 2017; Lipsitz, 2007), money and economic development accompanied people's perceptions that west side residents were not as valuable as residents on the east side. There were only a few mainstream business chains on the southwest side, including a McDonald's, an Aldi grocery store, payday advance operations, and a La Chiquita supermarket. Apart from these, the southwest quadrant in particular had largely been ignored by business developers. Further, when development or improvements *did* happen on the west side, Delilah explained that they were expected to be grateful. She stated:

> We have to fight and beg and scratch to get initiatives going. And now they basically—and this is both, all the mayors that we've had, when we talk about what's not being done in Southwest Pinecreek, "Delilah, you telling me nothing's being done with South Main and West State Street." And I said, "Hell, they were falling apart, you paved the damn street. What do you want me t— what am I

> supposed to do?" Yes, they did. They tore down some of the houses and they got rid of the blight. That's the gateway into the city. They want us to be grateful that they have done what should've been done.

The particular road and area that she spoke about being repaired was one of the main entrances to the city from the highway. Therefore, it was not surprising to me that the city would want to improve it when trying to attract visitors to the area because it led directly to entertainment venues and upscale restaurants. But there were still houses on that street with large red X's painted over the front doors, indicating that they were to be torn down because they were condemned properties.

Even the process of tearing down blighted homes did not occur quickly. Early in my study, I attended a community meeting at the public library on the southwest side of town hosted by the newspaper's editorial board. Although the intent of the meeting was to find positive things happening on the west side, it quickly turned into a venting session. One community member lamented that the X's that had been painted on the doors in her neighborhood had not only been there for three years, but also that they were driving down property values. Again, inaction or direct action against the west side sent messages to its residents that they did not belong. And if it was not clear enough through their second class treatment, then putting a giant red X on their doors painted the obvious meaning.

Law enforcement. Stories of unwelcome did not only occur on the west side, but they were also frequent for African Americans who lived on the east side. They, along with other people of color, were on the receiving end of race-based comments, odd looks, and interactions with the police that indicated they had invaded a White space. Ella, a

retired African American teacher from the Pinecreek School District and current substitute school administrator, shared a story about her son. When he was sixteen, he and some friends had gotten a flat tire in their own neighborhood, and the following occurred:

> I may have told you this story about [my son] and then when they were in high school and just beginning their license. Their friend got a flat tire right over here where you go to East Side Elementary School … and they saw somebody look out the door, so they thought, oh good. They're going to come out and help us. Nope. Here comes the police. Now they're about 16 or so. And [my son] still, talks about this. The first question out of the police's mouth was, what are you guys doing over here? Two out of the four or five were just, "We live on Blythewood and Decatur, and AJ lives on Haven." He still at 30 has never forgotten that that was the first thing out of their mouths: "what are you doing over here?" "I LIVE OVER HERE!" … And the police came, like I said, few more things. We weren't home, but they got the other parents that live close by. And when she arrives the police officer goes, "Oh, hi Ms. Bailey, how you doing? Do you know these guys?" "Well, there's my son." Now all of sudden everything was okay ... was cool …"Hi, Ms. Bailey, how you doi-" Oh, so your skepticism about can we really get [racism] eliminated when those things are ingrained.

Through this story, Ella explained how her son and his friends were unwelcome in a neighborhood that had been coded as a White space, even though they lived only a few streets away. They did not belong, and White neighbors viewed them as a threat to the neighborhood—so much so that law enforcement needed to be alerted. Ella's story

displays another theme of Bonilla-Silva's (2014) color-blind racism, that of cultural racism. In this frame, stereotypes about particular racial groups are used, believed in, and acted upon. In this case, four Black boys were "dangerous," and even though they had a flat tire, lived in the neighborhood, and had every right to be there, White neighbors called the police.

Limited Resources

Competition over available resources and space in Pinecreek influenced residents' attitudes about how to deal with segregation. Rev. David attributed this to racism, explaining that with Pinecreek's manufacturing history, White people had controlled the resources. As the city's economy fell and manufacturing all but disappeared, the loss of power and control over resources became a fear. He stated:

> But maybe the root of this competition is the spirit of control, spirit of fear that if I let you know what I know and get access to what I have, there's a scarcity of resources in this city. I don't want you to end up taking something that I believe is rightfully mine. It's like there's a lot of millionaires in the city, but you wouldn't know it. The money is so quiet, it's tucked away, you know what I'm saying?

This spirit of control and who had longer histories of oppression also made for competitive attitudes between marginalized communities in Pinecreek. During two interviews, one with Delilah and one with the White mayor, I heard two different sides to a proposed policy the Pinecreek City Council was considering.

The Mayor hoped to adopt a welcoming ordinance, which in the mayor's mind, was a way to show new residents of Pinecreek that they were welcome in the city. As the debate over this proposed welcoming ordinance took place during President Trump's

incarceration of immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico border, Delilah saw this proposal as being a fad and directed only at immigrants. She stated:

> Everybody wants to deal with immigration now. Immigration is the flavor of the month. And I think people are like, "Blacks have been whining for decades. We don't want to deal with that. Let's get with immigration." I think it makes people, instead of saying you're going to deal with racism, it's much more des reguer to talk about immigration because Trump is a jerk and he's attacking immigrants so you can look like Captain America saving everybody.

Through addressing immigrants and immigration during the Trump presidency, in which both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton received 46.5% of the vote from the county's residents ("Pinecreek," 2019), Delilah felt that a welcoming ordinance was not directed at the African American community. Based on the city's poor treatment of African Americans, she was asking, "A welcoming ordinance for whom?" In her view, this was another form of color-blindness, and specifically abstract liberalism where White people could feel good about their involvement in issues of racism while ignoring the history of past racialized policies (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), and it was a way to overlook the African American community in Pinecreek, which she saw as long neglected.

The mayor, on the other hand, did not see the welcoming ordinance in this way. In our interview, he explained his interaction with Delilah: "She literally told me, why are you trying to help the new flavor of the day when you guys haven't helped my people? I'm like, 'welcoming for everyone. It's not just Latinos, everyone.'"

The disagreement between Delilah and the mayor was perhaps unsurprising given Rev. David's previous analysis that the "spirit of control" and "spirit of fear" within

Pinecreek was prevalent. Further, as the recession of 2008 hit the city hard and its manufacturing industry never fully recovered, access to jobs and money was competitive. And within a city where about 20 percent of its residents lived in poverty (approximately 15% White; 40% Black; 20% Latino) ("Pinecreek," 2019) this could have contributed to the feeling that there was not enough resources for everyone to be successful and that Black community members remained the most disproportionately affected by the recession and its aftermaths.

Color-blind Attitudes in the School District

I described the events in previous the section to give a snapshot of racialized spaces and the perceptions that people of color had about their treatment throughout the city. Although these events did not directly address education and education policy, they provide a backdrop for understanding how race in Pinecreek functions. This larger picture of the community is important for understanding public schools and education policy in the city. As was noted earlier, schools are microcosms that reflect society's inequalities (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Wells & Crain, 1997; Yosso, 2006)—sites that mirror the communities in which they belong. Therefore, in the next section, I describe how the color-blind attitudes that were noted above through stories about geography, healthcare, and police interaction reflect how schools in Pinecreek were racialized spaces where color-blind attitudes affected and continue to influence the students, parents, teachers, and staff within them.

There was a strong perspective in Pinecreek on the part of White people that racism was: (1) nonexistent; (2) something from the past; or (3) something that existed but not everything that people of color claimed to be racist actually was. For example,

during a children's book writers' group that I was a part of during my time in Pinecreek, a retired White teacher asked me about what I meant when I said I studied "resegregation." When I shared that schools in Pinecreek were once again racially separated, she explained to me how this was a positive thing. Framing her language through a lens of equity, she stated that by separating "those kids" from the White students, there would be more opportunities to provide "them" with more resources in a concentrated way. For the children of "those parents who don't" or "those parents who won't" help their children, the school district could fill in the gap, but it would be better if it was done through segregation. Bonilla-Silva (2014) explains the viewpoint of this retired White teacher through abstract liberalism, where White people can feel good about saying they believe in equity and providing resources for students in need, but that they ultimately reproduce racism by supporting segregation so that Black kids will not enter White schools (Wells & Crain, 1997). In another example, Rev. David shared the color-blindness that he regularly encountered:

> … if you put a gun to their head and tell them to admit that there's racism, they'll say it's just a figment of your imagination. Because to admit that—what they would have to admit to the system that they put in place, institutional system, to continue to oppress, not just Black and White, Black and Latino, but even poor Whites. Because there was a market that worked for them.

It was not uncommon for me to hear during my fieldwork, "I know that there was racism, but don't you think people attribute everything to race too much?" and other similar sentiments related to the minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). I also frequently heard White people make comments such as these followed by microagressions, or as

Kendi (2019) prefers to call them, "racial abuses," as well as other more outwardly racist statements, though they did not recognize them as such. In one instance, during my interview with a lawyer who represented the school district during the *Concerned Community Members* desegregation case, he claimed that the school district leaders and board of education he had worked with wanted to help all children and that they were not working in racist ways. He said, "There's not a discriminatory bone in any of their bodies on the current board or any of the administrators that I deal with" (Personal communication, August 6, 2019). After the interview was over and the two of us were chatting before I left, the topic of private schools and race came up, specifically about the Catholic high school in town that I had attended when I grew up in Pinecreek. I told him that there were very few students of color in my class, to which he responded with, "And the ones that were there were probably the ones causing the problems." He then continued the conversation as if nothing he had said was out of the ordinary or racist. Again, this statement is consistent with Bonilla-Silva's (2014) frame of cultural racism, ascribing disorderly behavior to children of color.

City leaders and the chief of police also expressed sentiments consistent with the minimization of race and color-blindness occurred within the city leaders as well, such as with the chief of police. During my interview with Helen, one of the four founders of ER and the consultant for ER's Criminal Justice Action Team, she explained the shock she experienced when the team had met with the deputy police chief. She said:

> We had our deputy chief in our meeting, and I thought he had to be joking, he said he didn't see racism … First, I thought he was joking. Then I thought I didn't hear him. And then I looked around the room at the faces and I thought, oh no, I

really did hear him. He said that with a straight face. And I'm thinking, what? How do you not see it?

When White leadership in the city, and especially leaders in the criminal justice system claimed that racism did not exist, it made the city space an even more dangerous and unwelcoming place for people of color who felt either invisible or ultra-visible. With color-blind beliefs entrenched in the people with institutional power behind them, people of color believed that their unique set of needs and issues were not being met or addressed. From their perspective, it was rather futile to expect any marked change in Pinecreek in terms of racially equitable policies and practices in schools.

When a structure, such as the public school system, is designed to meet the needs of White, middle class children, Whites in power maintain the advantages that come along with their leadership. As Castagno (2013) points out, it is unsurprising that powerful Whites would work to maintain a system that advantages them. Working to change the structure to advantage people of color can lead to Whites not maintaining control or having access to as many resources, which makes it an issue that is not urgent to address for those in power.

Relationship between color-blindness and economics. The relationship between race and class within the school district was frequently acknowledged by the people I encountered, which at times led to the emphasis on socioeconomics and a minimization of race and racism. Dynamics of the city's racial and class systems played out in the school district, and the tax base of students' families contributed to how Pinecreek residents viewed the segregated city. For example, in an interview with one of the

lawyers who represented the school district during the *Concerned Community Members* desegregation lawsuit, he stated:

> But the segregation of the Pinecreek schools was not caused by the school district. It simply wasn't … It was caused by the development of the east side, the homes rising and unfortunately that led to a racial a-diversity of the city along economic grounds. Those that could did move to the east side. Those who were less fortunate and didn't have those economic resources were left behind. It wasn't because the school district carved out zones or changed boundary lines between schools or whatever to in fact cause the segregation. It was economic factors outside the control of the school district.

The view that this lawyer had about the lawsuit and its relationship with race and economics was a fairly typical one that I encountered throughout my time in Pinecreek. But this view is color-blind when observing how the legal system was applied to the school district and thinking about who had the ability to move to Whiter and wealthier parts of Pinecreek. Race is assumed to be a neutral concept (Lewis, 2003) within the ideology of color-blindness, and the long history of racial discrimination is ignored (Wells & Crain, 1997). By treating race as neutral— sharing that less fortunate students remained behind through no fault of the school district—the context behind why certain parents had the ability to move east remains unquestioned. When color-blind attitudes such as these go unchallenged, inequities have the potential, and often are, reproduced. Bonilla-Silva (2014) directly addresses this point in his abstract liberalism frame when he states:

> Another example is regarding each person as an "individual" with "choices" and using this liberal principle as a justification for whites having the right of choosing to live in segregated neighborhoods or sending their children to segregated schools. This claim requires ignoring the multiple institutional and state-sponsored practices behind segregation and being unconcerned about these practices' negative consequences for minorities. (p. 76)

By not challenging the reasoning behind why segregationist policies and patterns remain, the root of the problem remains (Scott & Quinn, 2014).

One mixed race parent shared her frustration with the high amount of White flight that had occurred in Pinecreek. She saw the Pinecreek situation as comparable to, but worse than other Midwestern cities because of the methods that people used to change schools. She stated:

> …White flight in Pinecreek is no different than in [other cities]. But instead of moving to a suburb, many just keep moving east, which I think is almost worse, because it's still Pinecreek. Decisions, like the school district resetting neighborhood schools, is catering to those with money. Businesses keep opening on the east side, while the west side is basically left to waste. Even the public aid office moved to the east side, leaving the people who need it most needing to find transportation to get there.

Unfortunately, the schools on the west side have poor reputations, and people move away to avoid them if possible. The local newspaper regularly reports on the low performance of west side schools on state standardized tests, and recently, Curry (2018) shared that

schools in the southwest quadrant have been rated as some of the lowest performing schools in the state.

Schools as sites of color-blindness. The attitudes that accompanied color-blind racism and racial abuses were prevalent within the schools themselves. Ella explained that when her sons were admitted into the creative and performing arts (CAPA) program, a specialized academy in the public schools that required a student audition, a White teacher asked her if she wanted to know if her sons were accepted because the district had to admit more students of color. She shared the following:

> When you work in a building … for the CAPA program auditions, when one of the people ask you and you work alongside them, "Don't you want to know whether your son got in the first time or when they made us go back and look at increasing our numbers." And I very, very—without any malice in my heart said, "I don't care which way he got in. I want him to have the opportunity to be in, and they're making sure that happens." So. And I meant that. I never asked them whether he got in the first time or when they made him— "Well don't you want to know?" "No. Doesn't matter." But do you see the privileged thinking to think that was okay to ask me that? His mother who works right in the building with you.

This example shows the White woman's belief that it was not offensive to ask this question to her co-worker. It also blurs the lines between two of Bonilla-Silva's (2014) frames of color-blind racism: abstract liberalism and minimization of racism because they express her doubt that her Black co-worker's son could have made it into the CAPA program without the help of a policy that targeted equitable opportunities. It also hints at the minimization of racism with the very notion that the White woman believed it was

acceptable to ask this question. She does not recognize her own privilege, minimizing race in this instance.

Deficit views of the west side. African American individuals that I spoke with throughout my study pointed out the negative message that children on the west side received from the school district: they could not succeed. Rose, a retired Black teacher who taught at various west side schools during her career, shared that when schools were doing well on the west side, their successes were regularly obstructed. When she was a science teacher at a west side middle school, it was outperforming schools on the east side. Parents from the east side wanted to put their children into her school on the west. Rose stated:

> … we were getting quote "too popular" because we were taking away from other areas ... I'll put it that way because we had started drawing people from the east side of town. And during that time, this was like 1972, some people were not very comfortable with those kids coming to the west side of town. So it was surprising that after a few years, we were told our building was not safe. That it was an older building, that they were going to close the building down. And we were very concerned. The people in the neighborhood were concerned. We had meetings, some of everything. And strange enough, the building—here it is 2019—the building is still there as a school, but the building was closed. They ended up making it an elementary school. So they changed the toilets in our building … added some lower ones in with the regular ones. Did some new sinks. … And because the people in the neighborhood complained so much, later they had an honors program in the building for the elementary, which still did not solve the

> problem because on the southwest side of Pinecreek, that was the only middle school. So, they close the only middle school, which sent a message: you can't go past sixth grade in this quadrant of the city. So that was a problem.

Rose explained that these events occurred in 1972, which is significant because it took place around the time of the first desegregation lawsuit in the district, which began in 1970. Although the district was not found guilty during that lawsuit because the plaintiffs ran out of resources to pay the legal fees, it made it unsurprising that the school district was later found guilty for actively discriminating against people of color in its second desegregation lawsuit. Further, Rose's story revealed that residents in west side schools, and particularly those in the southwest quadrant, were sent the message that they were not valuable.

This feeling of being unwelcome within the school district was reiterated during my interview with the city councilwoman, Delilah, who participated in the *Concerned Community Members* case on the plaintiff side. She stated that when schools on the city's west side were performing well after the desegregation lawsuit, there would be efforts to stop it. She said:

> Then the Affirmative Action thing started to dry up a little bit, but part of the reason it started to dry up is we had all these lawsuits, and Black kids started taking honors classes and doing all of those things. So they were getting into college, and we had a high [rate]. We had some of the best schools … Our kids were doing fantastic. When [one superintendent] came in, they killed the program. We could teach little Black kids to read, we could teach little poor Black kids to read, but when they came in, they killed the program and said that they were

> cheating. So, the message is, that if Black students do achieve, they're cheating to do it.

The story of changing the reading program was not only covered in the local newspaper, but it made it into the *New York Times* as well. The phonics program in question was Direct Instruction—a controversial program known for its focus on rote memorization and giving teachers little room for creativity in their classrooms. Students' scores had improved at the school in Pinecreek that was using it, and parents were angry when the superintendent took it away, which they saw as an attempt to keep students on the west side from succeeding (Freedman, 2005).

Criminalization of Black and Latinx boys. One of Delilah's roles was to incorporate the remedies from the court case into the public schools to ensure that they were being carried out with fidelity across the school district. She noted that this was the ugliest time in the process. Throughout our interview, it became emotional for her as she shared what she had been tasked to do during the 1990s. Black and Latinx students in East side schools also faced discrimination during this time. She shared:

> We criminalized African American and Latino, mostly boys', adolescent behavior. And it became criminal to dress a certain way. You'll hear about some of those Black boys were put up for expulsion. They would build these dossiers on them based on what they wore. And if they wore certain colors then they were again, these dossiers, they were affiliated with the gang even though they may have had no gang affiliation at all. Baby Blue, yes. It was a color of the Gangster Disciples, but it was also Michael Jordan's North Carolina. And people would have Jordan across their back but still attribute them with Gangster Disciple. Latino boys—I

> think it was red and black. So even if that were your school colors, seriously, if it was your school colors, there was a group once they call the East Side Middle School six, this is after post lawsuit, but the boys had on throwback jerseys. Two of them were the old Negro baseball leagues, and they said they were acting funny because they came in a different door of the cafeteria. But there were six of them, and they dragged these boys from the cafeteria into conference rooms and stuff and interrogated them about which gang they were with. When you looked at the shirts they had on, the six were not even dressed alike. One was wearing East Side Middle School colors, but they were all accused of being part of the gang. And they swore this action that they took was because they were concerned about the boys and that they wanted to make sure that they were okay and following the right path. They brought the police in and everything.

Through this story, Delilah noted how Black and Latino boys were criminalized during the early 1990s. Again, Black and Latinx boys were treated as if they did not belong in East Side Middle School, and school leaders assumed the worst about them based on appearances and outfits, even when it was their school's colors. Again, cultural racism led to stereotypes (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), and in this case, Black and Latinx boys were treated as if they were dangerous criminals. When I asked what happened to the students, Delilah replied:

> They dropped it. Left the boys alone, after they'd taken them out of class for the better part of a day. Traumatized them and helped them develop a nice hatred for the police. … But the way that they treated them, the boys said they were like in their faces. The guy said, he said he was literally putting spit in my face.

This narrative provides an example of how school administrators and the police often assumed the worst about children of color, and it also made clear how the district's disciplinary system resembled the penal system. Hannah often complained about this, sharing that the student code of conduct was very harsh with little attention paid to restorative justice practices. She also noted it was very unwelcoming to parents. Additionally, Stephanie, a district administrator the EAT frequently met with, used terms such as offering students a "plea deal" when they faced expulsion. In fact, the EAT began focusing more of its attention on the racial disparities in discipline in the district. Black boys faced the highest amounts of school suspensions, and even though the overall amount of expulsions had dropped dramatically throughout the past eleven years, the gap between races remained, as was discussed in Chapter 4. (To see a visual representation of racial disparity trends, refer to Chapter 4.)

Teachers' and staff of color's perceptions. Students of color were not the only ones who felt unwelcome within their schools. Teachers and staff also did. My time in the field included hearing stories about how Black teachers were often sent "those kids" because the White teachers could not handle their behavior. Black teachers were tired of being seen as the spokesperson for all Black people. Ella stated:

> I got sick of hearing in the teacher's lounge, "Well, I don't know how to work with this Black child," and "I don't know how to do this with this child." How long would I have kept my job if I said, "I don't know how I'm going to work with these little White children that don't look like me." See that's part of it. I always could flip that the other way and not that I don't want you to say, "Oooh, I don't

see color." Yes, you do. You see my face. And don't dismiss that, but treat me fairly. Treat me fairly.

The district had a history of not hiring teachers of color. This was one of the eleven areas for which the district was sued, and found guilty of, during its desegregation lawsuit. When the lawsuit began, teachers of color hovered at 4% (Roszkowski, n.d.). The remedies of the lawsuit determined that the Pinecreek Public School District needed "to achieve a faculty of at least 13.5% minority teachers in each grade configuration (elementary, middle and high schools) as soon as practicable" (Mahoney, 1996, p. 138) Yet, "As soon as practicable" is ambiguous, similar to *Brown's* "at all deliberate speed" for desegregating schools. As of the 2019-2020 school year, teachers were 3.8% African American, 3.0% Latinx, 87.6% White, and 5.6% N/A. Comparing this statistic to the share of children of color in the district, which currently stands at around 66%, this number is extremely low.

As noted in Chapter 4, there were four schools without teachers who identified solely as African American, and sixteen schools without any teachers who identified solely as Hispanic. Rose, the retired high school science teacher that I spoke with, had been the only Black teacher in the science department during her twenty-year tenure. Although she loved her position at the west side high school, she regularly experienced situations that maintained her as "the other." She had a Master's degree, had earned the Golden Apple award (the highest honor for a teacher in the district), had taught science at summer camps at a nearby major research institution, and instructed courses at the local community college.

Despite all of Rose's qualifications, accomplishments, and vast experience, she was never permitted to teach past the biology level at her high school, while other teachers with fewer qualifications rose past her. She spoke about how she made the best of the situation, using what Yosso (2005) refers to as aspirational capital: Rose saw that she had been able to reach kids that might not have otherwise been successful in school, but she attributed her treatment to racism. Additionally, there was one year when Rose had to travel back and forth between a west side school and an east side school every day during her lunch break without additional compensation. She did not know any of the teachers at the east side school, and she explained how unwelcome she felt as one of two Black teachers. She summarized that year of experience in the following story:

> And I felt so strange when I was at [the east side high school] because I thought I wasn't wanted there. There was one other Black teacher there and he was a PE teacher and a coach. And because I did have to carry my lunch with me because there wasn't enough time to even go to the cafeteria and I didn't know the teachers there anyway. And what hurt me the most was normally when you go in a teacher's lounge, what you do is you see some people there with their groups. That's fine. So you tend to go to the table where there are the least people, and you try not to sit where there are people next to you because you don't want to interfere with this group that might be talking. And I found out the table that I sit at was … like two or three men used to sit on this end. So I would go to this end. That way and not interfering with them. … One of the gentlemen would get up, he had a paper bag that he would consistently use. I remember the paper bag. He would get up fold that paper bag up, put it in his pocket and the bag would have

> grease stains on it. And I'm looking at it, and he would leave the table. …. And I thought about it. I say—because I'm into nutrition. So here I am with my Tupperware. I'm bringing this balanced meal to eat. You have a brown bag that you have to recycle because you're using it over and over again and you're going to look down on me. And I never really knew his name. I didn't really know what he taught, but I was thinking to myself, you're going to treat me like that and I might be making more money than you. But I never said anything. I would just sit. And the other people, they got used to me and sometimes they would say, "Well how's, how's your day?" I said, "Oh it's fine." We talk about the weather or whatever. Eventually he started coming back in, but he would not socialize with me. Would not socialize with me. So I was in a building where very few people said anything to me. I could go to a staff meeting, I would just find me a seat away from the group because I didn't want to take a seat that somebody else might be used to sitting in at the staff meeting. So I would sort of just play invisible 'cause I was treated invisible. So I played invisible, but I got paid just like everybody else.

For Rose, and for other African American retired teachers that I spoke with, schools were spaces rife with isolation and hostility due to racism and being the only or one of a limited number of teachers of color in their buildings. They expressed the loneliness they experienced at school and the ways they were viewed as "invisible," as Rose shared or almost visibly invisible. Pizarro and Kohli (2018) note in their research how frequent the feeling of hyper invisibility or visibility is and how it wears on people of color. Rose's

example, among others, corroborates this, revealing how racialized school spaces contribute to feelings of dejection and stress.

During one of ER's meetings with the superintendent and mayor, Helen, who was a retired teacher from a mostly White middle school on the city's east side, informed the two leaders that when they were recruiting Black teachers to Pinecreek, they needed to be honest with them about the hostile environment that they were entering. The sheer fact of the leadership's recognition that there were race problems and inequalities in the schools would indicate that they were aware of the issues. New teachers of color entering the district wanted and needed this upfront acknowledgment from district leadership, which would help them know they were not entering a completely color-blind district.

Thus far, I have provided examples of how experiences in racialized spaces in the city and the school district were contributing factors for individuals' involvement in addressing issues of racism in Pinecreek. By showing the relationship of color-blindness in the city and in the schools, I showed how personal experiences were important for understanding why members of ER and the EAT were involved in antiracist efforts. As Hannah informed me during a conversation, retired teachers of color saw it as a way to give back. Now that they were retired, this was the first time that they could speak out about issues of racism without the fear of losing their jobs.

Religious Beliefs, Belonging, and Space

Experiences with racism were not the only reasons why activists became involved in issues of racial equity. As I suggested throughout the past chapters, much of ER's work took place and was related to religion and religious belonging. Religious leaders were involved in ER and the EAT, and meetings took place in religious spaces. These

included many of the meetings with school district officials. Further, religious and moral beliefs and spirituality were salient throughout the study, and they were a key element of and shaped members' civic participation.

The undercurrent of religion was present throughout my nineteen months of fieldwork, which often left me unsure of the role that religion, morality, and spirituality played in ER and the EAT. Interviews and antiracism events were often riddled with religious talk and actions, and the physical spaces where most of ER's events occurred were religious in nature. Religious, moral, and spiritual beliefs were important for individuals' general civic participation, and specifically in their engagements in addressing racial inequalities. For example, the small but extremely active Bahá'í community in Pinecreek had members attend many of the events that I observed and participated in throughout my field work. They were a part of all of the book discussions, ER meetings, and discussions about race around the city. Both Hannah and Walter explained to me that Bahá'ís in the United States were taught that racism was the greatest evil facing the country, and as adherents of the religion, they were called upon to fight racial injustices. They also informed me that since the election of Donald Trump, the House of Wisdom—the organizational body of Bahá'ís in the United States—had been sending out more calls to action to members to fight racism in their places of residence.

Not only were varying religious belief systems important for bringing people together for common goals of fighting racism, but they also kept people apart as rivalries between individual churches and religions and their respective leaders appeared. In this section, I offer evidence about the relationships that religious, moral, and spiritual beliefs had on participants' perceptions of racial inequities in the education system. I discuss

how these relationships influenced people's involvement in ER and shaped their views on how to best become involved in issues related racism. Then, I show how religion, morality, and spirituality played a role in the physical spaces where ER met and conducted its meetings.

The relationship between religion and community participation has a long history, and it has been researched by Warren (2001) and Wood & Warren (2002), who studied how congregations become involved in social action. Although individuals spoke about their own congregations or religious groups, participants in this study came from many different congregations, and there were not many systematic efforts on the part of congregations to become involved in the ER group. Rather, ER participants viewed their churches and religious centers as spaces where information could be passed along, and ER members were sometimes in the nascent stages of being liaisons between their home churches, temples, or religious centers and ER.

The location of ER at Pinecreek Baptist Church was significant. The congregation had a reputation in Pinecreek as being on the forefront of racial issues, and it had a very highly educated congregation, many of whom were retired education professionals. Historically, the pastors at Pinecreek Baptist Church led the fight against racism, and this was no different with Rev. David, who was involved in many racial equity initiatives around the city. He added notoriety to the church because he had served as the pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta—the same church where Martin Luther King, Jr. served. Almost all major meetings for ER and the EAT took place at Pinecreek Baptist Church, while a few occurred at the Bahá'í Center on the east side of town.

Choosing religious spaces for meetings was important for a variety of reasons. For some people, meeting in religious spaces made it obvious that intentions of peace and goodwill were paramount, and it was reminiscent of the Civil Rights Movement. There were negative perceptions of these spaces as well because they were categorized as segregated, and they highlighted the power struggles that members of ER observed between religious leaders within the community. For example, Hannah would quote to me the oft-heard saying that "Sunday morning at 10:00 is the most segregated hour of the week," indicating that religious service attendance was highly divided by race. Even so, religious spaces played an important role—for good or bad—in influencing how ER functioned, how its members carried out their work, and who had decided not to join the group.

Using Religious Space to Eliminate Racism

In this section, I explain how religious spaces played a role ER and the EAT's functioning. Then, in the following section, I transition from the role of religious spaces to discuss how religious, moral, and spiritual beliefs were foundational for understanding who joined ER and who did not.

Meeting in religious spaces. As was noted in Chapter 4, when the EAT had completed the report of its findings in February 2019, its leaders invited the superintendent, his cabinet, school board members, and president and vice president of the teachers union to a presentation at Pinecreek Baptist Church—the unofficial headquarters of the community activist group. Two weeks later, the presentation by the school district to the EAT also took place at the church, which the superintendent had requested. This act displayed that the district was willing to meet the community in its

"home," signifying the intermingling of the public school system, religion, and civic participation all working in an effort to address race and racism. These two meetings were followed by another between the EAT, Stephanie (a school administrator), and the three school leaders of the alternative programs in the Pinecreek School District, again at the church.

Religious space also played a role during EAT's interactions with the mayor. Toward the end of my time of data collection, the EAT met with the superintendent and mayor at City Hall to plan the breakfast to address the hiring and retention of people of color within the city and school district. As we planned the logistics of the breakfast event, the mayor requested that we host the event at a church. When we all looked at him in surprise, he expressed that meeting at a church or other religious space would be symbolic to the attendees who may feel less inclined to lambast both him and the superintendent. Because this event was to be a working meeting, he thought that being yelled at would be counterproductive. After considering this request, the planners ultimately decided to have the breakfast at one of the rare west side upscale conference centers that served food. This decision was purposeful as it showed that the invited guests were valued and valuable—following ER's vision statement. The mayor's request to meet in a space associated with a religious institution, however, was notable.

(In)Visible Religion and Spirituality

During my time in Pinecreek, the undercurrent of religion was always present, simultaneously visible and invisible. As was noted in the first half of this chapter, religious spaces played an important and influential role for ER and the EAT, their members, and residents of Pinecreek. But religion, morality, and spirituality went beyond

spatial dynamics. Pinecreek residents often spoke about their faith, lack of faith, religious belonging, moral values, and spiritual beliefs, but these remarks were usually only surface level. Rather, religion, morality, and spirituality were often mentioned in passing as an important aspect of their individual lives and a motivating factor behind their civic participation.

In this section, I lay out the relationship between religion, morality, and spirituality with community participation in racial equity in education. I present how community members spoke about religion and how they interpreted the relationship between religion and race in Pinecreek. First, I present the ways that the Pinecreek residents I encountered perceived the city's religious leaders' role in working toward racial equity in the city and local education system. Because this did not fully explain the underlying role of faith in Pinecreek and ER, I next explain how faith and morality shaped the racial justice work that ER and the EAT undertook. I found that religio-civics, a concept that came from my interview with Delilah, a non-religious African American alderwoman, underlay the actions and motivations of many Pinecreek community activists. As Delilah made clear, she was not a religious person herself, and she struggled to understand Black Christian faith, seeing it as the religion of the masters. Delilah did, however, emphasize the necessity of morality, and that society could not properly function without it. In our interview, she explained her definition of *religio-civics*, stating that "community activism is only as deep as your moral underpinnings." Together with Warren's civic participation—which was developed using Putnam's social capital—I use religio-civics to explain how religious beliefs and moral values were motivating factors in Pinecreek residents' participation in their fight against racism.

Religion in Pinecreek Daily Life

In the Pinecreek area there are 16 Catholic parishes; 149 Evangelical Protestant, 70 mainline Protestant, and 18 Black Protestant congregations; three Orthodox congregations; one Jewish synagogue; one Bahá'í Center; and one mosque ("Pinecreek," 2019). Even with this many religious institutions throughout the city, my conversations with religious leaders indicated that religious participation in Pinecreek has followed the national trend of fewer individuals participating and contributing to their places of worship. Religious leaders that I spoke with noted the challenges they faced in a society where church membership/attendance continues to decrease (Brenner, 2016). The decline in religious participation led to difficulties for religious leaders in maintaining their membership and raising enough funding to remain operational. Only 42% of millennials attend church, and they are less likely to claim membership to specific religious institutions in comparison to prior generations, such as the Baby Boomers (Jones, 2019). This lack of participation contributes to shrinking budgets.

Race, religion, and economics. While money grows scarce, and as religious groups struggle to attract new members, a number of religious groups have worked to maintain their niche memberships in an attempt keep the members that they do have (Dougherty & Mulder, 2009). Now that maintaining membership and an active donor source has become essential, religious leaders must consider which messages and issues of social justice to address publicly, and which ones to sideline. As I witnessed during conversations with religious leaders and religious adherents in Pinecreek, this sometimes led to issues of racism being pushed aside and ignored. For example, one African American member of the EAT, Anthony, shared with me that he had attended a mostly

White, historically Swedish church since 1996. Throughout his more than twenty-year membership, there had been about ten other Black members. He explained that although he had a positive relationship with his pastor, addressing racism was a contentious issue at his church. He saw that his pastor continued catering to his current congregation: elderly, White, Swedish Lutherans.

Anthony attributed the lack of attention to racial justice issues as an attempt to keep the current church membership happy, and therefore maintain a stable base of generous donors. When Anthony brought up ways that the church could invest in projects to address race and racism through church-based social justice action, he was told that there was not enough funding. However, when other initiatives were proposed, the church managed to locate wealthy benefactors to fund them. Anthony's perception that religious leaders could, and should, be working together to address racism in Pinecreek and its schools was echoed during interviews, public city meetings, and ER and EAT meetings by many individuals that I worked with.

Perceptions of the roles of religious leaders. Community members habitually spoke about the role that religious leaders should have in Pinecreek. This was not only apparent through direct questions to interviewees, but it also came up naturally during many meetings that I attended around the city. During ER meetings, it was obvious that community activists did not think religious leaders were doing enough to fight for equity or to be involved in Pinecreek outside of their own congregational/institutional work.

Church and state. Interviews with ER members provided pointed responses about how religious leaders should be involved in the local school system and that churches should consider partnering with individual schools. Further, the mayor criticized the

city's religious leaders during multiple public addresses that I attended. Even though individuals wanted more participation from churches and have them partner with the schools, interviewees also made it clear that the separation between church and state was necessary to maintain. In activists' minds, churches should be providing resources to neighborhood schools to provide needy children with the appropriate supplies or tutoring.

My time with the city's mayor made it clear that he viewed religious leaders as instrumental to the city's health. In his state of the city address in May 2018, the mayor chastised religious leaders for not doing enough in the city, stating that one of his goals when he was campaigning was eliciting more active involvement from the religious community. Since he had taken office in May 2017, however, he remained disappointed by the lack of activism from religious leaders. He announced that religious leaders were the moral compass of the city, and they were failing in this job. The mayor's disappointment with religious leaders did not disappear after his state of the city address. Echoing his sentiments at a meeting seven months later when he met with the city's religious leaders in December 2018, he again critiqued the leaders in attendance, which was a mixed group of races and religions. He stated that since he had taken office only a year and a half earlier, he had attended 28 funerals due to shootings and murders in Pinecreek. In that time, he had received only one phone call from a religious leader about these events. The mayor said that by not showing up and not calling attention to the shootings and other evils taking place in the city, it showed that they were okay with the violence. He said, "You are our moral compass, and if you are silent, you're okay with it." A number of the religious leaders responded that they would contact the mayor in the future. After making these points, the mayor proceeded with his meeting, the purpose of

which was to give religious leaders the opportunity to provide feedback to him about what he could be doing better in his elected position. In this example, the mayor showed how to appeal to individuals' moral values in an effort to get more civic participation from religious leaders. As was shown above with churches partnering with local schools, the mayor brought the church and the state together in an effort to improve the city's climate.

Religious participation in antiracism. Other individuals that I interacted with expected more from religious leaders as well. During ER steering committee meetings, both Black and White people expressed anger with the lack of work religious leaders were doing around the city. They saw them as making excuses for not being involved in racial equity work. During one steering committee meeting in February 2019, a discussion about this took place. Johnny, an African American member of the Criminal Justice Action Team, shared that if ER wanted to approach religious leaders to request their participation, this work should not fall solely on Rev. David. Therefore, Johnny took on some of this responsibility and had met with the African American religious leaders to speak with them about ER. Many of these leaders claimed they had never received any information about the group. When Johnny returned to ER, he explained that he did not think that this was true, and Rev. David confirmed this as he had given that same group of ministers information about ER in the past, but that many had decided not to join.

As the discussion continued, the general consensus in the room was that religious leaders wanted to maintain their power, thus inhibiting their willingness to join. In fact, Rev. David shared that his mixed reputation in the city could be a hindrance to recruiting new members because if other African American religious leaders saw him as the leader

of ER, they would be unwilling to join, either because they disagreed with him or because they saw him as a threat to their own power in the city. He expressed this during an interview:

> [Religious leaders] just kind of protect their own little turf. And when they see me doing things in this community, because I really am a leader, across racial, class, and cultural life, there's a spirit of jealousy, competition, and they bash me—they'll say to my face, "You spend too much time with White people. We never see you." They'll say, Rev. David is an Uncle Tom. The Whites here on the other hand say, even the White pastors, "He gets, involved too much in politics. He needs to take care of his own in church." I'll get anonymous emails saying, "You should find a job for your members and stay out of politics and the school system," [and] "You're just a Baptist preacher. What do you know about that anyway?" Well, I came out of corporate America. … So even without having been in politics, I understand how things work and when people have been oppressed and to say something about it.

Throughout the study, Rev. David often shared similar frustrations, especially related to how other religious leaders in the city refused to join ER. He noted how there was too much of an attitude of needing to protect their own congregations, and that there was a spirit of competition among them. Rev. Luke, the White pastor at the Unitarian Universalist church, echoed Rev. David's idea that the ministers in Pinecreek were extremely divided, sharing that, "Everybody's kind of king of their own castles and a lot of them have second jobs, or ministry is their second job."

Although Rev. David mentioned White evangelical leaders' attitudes, discussions about how other White religious leaders could be or should be involved in antiracist efforts was largely absent. It was almost expected that African Americans should be involved in ER while White leaders either were not expected to be involved, or there was no hope of them contributing to this type of racial equity work. This places blame on communities of color, an aspect that color-blind racism and Critical Race Theory note should be avoided (Lewis, 2004). By ignoring White religious leaders' role, African Americans were blamed for the continued separation and segregation within the Pinecreek community, leaving White leaders with no responsibility to get involved.

Though rare, when White religious leaders were brought up in discussions, it was usually about (1) how White Evangelical leaders refused to be a part of racial equity work, or (2) how specific individuals—Rachel and Luke—made efforts to build relationships across races, working specifically within their majority-White, mainline Protestant congregations. Although other White religious leaders were mentioned, this occurred infrequently. Most of the concentration and worries about racism and segregation were left to Black religious leaders to solve.

Even without outward expressions of religion, morality, and spirituality, the role of religion sparked interest in ER. For example, when speaking about how to get more religious leaders to join in the work of ER, I noted the following in my fieldnotes:

> Then Walter said that we should invite ministers and faith leaders to one of our meetings because "religion has a role in Eliminate Racism. It has a very strong role." Then we could ask them, "Are you doing anything already?" so that we could support what they are already doing within their own communities.

This view of the role of religion perhaps came from the idea that (1) religious leaders act as important social connectors to the community and have an essential role in giving their congregations information about the Pinecreek community, and (2) the personal belief that without God and spiritual power, ER would not successfully carry out anti-racism work. Additionally, as the mayor noted, religious leaders were the "moral compass" of the community. Without their strong involvement in civic participation, they were failing in their responsibilities as civic and religious leaders.

Intellect versus the heart. My interviews with Pinecreek community members showed how equity in education, religion, and morality were tied together. Religious and moral belief systems shaped how individuals viewed the racial inequities that plagued the local school district. In one interview with Luke, a White Unitarian Universalist religious leader, he explained his involvement with the racial equity efforts in the public schools through the following example:

> … the church has historically been really involved in public education and nationally as well as, I mean Horace Mann was a Universalist, who founded public education because he believed that everybody was important … everyone deserves an education. Not just some. So that's kind of our core. We have a lot of teachers, a lot of retired teachers, union officials so ... and I had a passion for it, and it seemed like the big issue, you know? Connecting it to the question around racial justice. So it wasn't just a question of how to make our schools better, but how do we make sure that the schools are working for students who have historically been disadvantaged by the school system design. So that led me to get involved in a whole host of things …

Although individuals in ER frequently cited religious beliefs as contributing factors for their involvement in antiracism efforts, it sometimes stopped at the intellectual level, to the consternation of people of color. Hannah recognized this and told White people in the group that racism was a matter of the heart. Racism would not be beaten if individuals did not form personal relationships and connections with one another across the races. It was necessary for White people and people of color to care about each other in personal ways—thus segregation was unsustainable if we were ever going to make any progress toward racial equality.

The intellect versus the heart led to tensions between individuals in Pinecreek. For example, Delilah confided in me that Luke and another White man had intellectualized race and racism in an interaction with her which angered her. She stated:

> I feel like there's this group of kind of self-righteous White pastors who have kind of come in, and they change the narrative about what discrimination is. They intellectualize it. The reason when [they] said there's this *Empowering Women, Eliminating Racism*, that's their focus. The two prong in that, that's what their programming is about—that's what they do. They kind of intellectualized. They come in and they're defining and they're having all these descriptions and these categories and I'm looking around and there's this room full of White people and intellectuals that are going to—It's almost sanitizing racism and making it almost like a study as opposed to something that people live. You know, a man gets dragged to his death behind a car. You don't categorize that—the type of racism. That doesn't get you anywhere. So. But it does seem like sometimes they have, and again, when there's that [leadership] vacuum, somebody's going to step into it.

> So I can't blame them for that. But I know we were working, Luke and I were working on the equity group with the school district on this committee, and he came in one day and they've—some study, and he put together a list of agenda items and one of them was, "and we must have the very difficult, very difficult but necessary discussion about racism between the Hispanic and Black communities." And I thought, “Who the hell are you to tell us about—?” And I said, “Where do you even get that from?” He said, "there's an issue." I said, “Yeah, there's Black gangs and Latino gangs all the time, but who said—" and there was a survey they did with Latino teachers and teachers in the bilingual program about how they felt and because they didn't differentiate with how they felt with White teachers versus Black teachers, he extrapolated that and said that means there's an issue with th—so it's like we need to tell Black people that they need to clean up their act …

Through this disagreement, ideas of education, racism, religion, civic engagement, and color-blindness are intermingled. In this instance, a White religious leader’s participation in antiracism was viewed negatively. Delilah perceived Luke’s comments as deficit oriented, which Yosso (2005) points out as being one of the most prevalent forms of racism. By intellectualizing tragedies and categorizing them as a specific type of racism, it dehumanized racism in Delilah’s opinion.

Participation from people of color. The hope that more people of color would join the work of eliminating racism extended beyond religious leaders, and this topic regularly entered discussions amongst ER and EAT members. In discussing the limited participation from people of color in ER and the EAT, this was either noted with anxiety

by Whites, or was critiqued by other people of color. For example, White members such as Leigh regularly worried that our Goal 3 sub-team of the EAT was made up four White people. I found myself struggling with this as well, recalling Sampson's (2017) and Christens and Speer's (2015) call for having people closest to the issues participating in goal setting and activist work. As Sampson (2017) notes, it is essential that the efforts of community activists, and particularly White activists involved in issues of race, do not cause harm to the people they attempted to impact. There were frequent instances of White people wishing that there were more people of color participating, but as the EAT was roughly 40% African American and 60% White, there was actually an overrepresentation of African Americans when looking at Pinecreek demographics, which was a little over twenty percent African American ("Pinecreek population 2019," 2019).

As was noted in Chapter 4, a number of people of color expressed shame and embarrassment about the lack of participation from other people of color. When Rev. David spoke about the members of the Baptist church he pastored, he shared that it had been almost impossible to recruit his congregants to the ER initiative. He noted that historically, the members of his church were extremely well educated, held positions within the Pinecreek school district, and had always advocated for having a pastor whose social justice activism was public and well-known throughout the city. Rather than participating themselves, however, Rev. David said that the members of his church seemed to value the notoriety of an activist pastor while they preferred supporting from the sidelines. This bothered Rev. David, and he informed them that he needed their active involvement in issues of racism around the city.

Although disturbed by the unwillingness of people of color to engage in issues surrounding racial equity, community members recognized that Pinecreek's historical legacy with racism lingered over the city. Rev. David was disappointed by his own church members' lack of involvement, but he noted that the White activists needed to stay the course and continue the work. If people of color observed committed Whites who were willing to be derided and attacked for their antiracism efforts, and if they began winning small victories, more people of color, and particularly African Americans, might be more open to joining ER's efforts. Rev. David's lack of success at recruiting people from his own church indicates that while religious belonging may have been a motivating factor for some people to join ER, and using the religious grapevine was a strategy ER relied upon for recruitment, other factors such as prior experiences with racism and distrust were more important factors for other community members, contributing to their decision not to join. He regularly encouraged ER members to continue the work, stating that leading by example would begin to build trust, and that this might change African Americans' minds to join.

Religious and Spiritual Beliefs in ER

As I highlighted, religious participation was important for how ER strategized and recruited new members. It also revealed the perceptions that community members had for the lack of work religious leaders did in the community. They were seen as having the potential to catalyze the participation of members from their particular religious institutions, using these religious social networks and their social capital for the benefit of the community, which Putnam (2000) views as an important aspect of social capital. But once members joined ER, religion and religious/spiritual beliefs were at times

contentious and led to divergences in how much of a role they should play in the group's functioning. Although it did not lead to any outward or obvious tension that would be noticeable to ER's general membership, there were disagreements between Rev. David and Hannah, though they were not accompanied by animosity.

Spiritual energy and rituals. Religion and spiritual energy were a part of ER from the time that I started my work with the group. Not all members of ER were religious, but they described the value of spirituality and the belief that spiritual energy outside of religion was important, both in and outside of their work with ER. In fact, one non-religious member of the EAT, Lucia, shared, "You need something bigger than you to believe in, to keep going sometimes, or you just thank whoever, whatever god or goddess you believe in for the blessings that you get everyday…" (Personal communication, October 3, 2019).

The four founders all had very active faith lives. Rev. David was the pastor of a Baptist church on the city's west side, and in my interactions with him, he talked about how God had led him to this position. In his view, it was God who helped with ER's work and its longevity. Helen, Rev. David's wife, also shared how it was God who guided the work of ER, and she explained that most of her community involvement was religious in nature, such as how she was a member of the ministers' wives group. The other two founders, Hannah and Walter, were active Bahá'ís, and part of their faith's mission was to work on issues of race. They often spoke about how the Bahá'í faith taught them that racism was the biggest problem facing American society, and that since the election of President Trump, they received even more literature from the national Bahá'í organization—The House of Wisdom—urging Bahá'í's throughout the country to

fight for racial justice. Hannah and Walter took this call to religious civic participation very seriously, and their faith guided their actions and the speech they used while participating in ER. As one of the main tenets of the Bahá'í faith was unity, Hannah and Walter each spoke about how racism, and especially racial inequity in the school system, was used to divide and segregate—to the detriment of humanity.

Because of the constant religious presence, it was a driving topic as I continued this study. Most ER/EAT members I spoke with shared that they had found the group through their churches or temple. Further, at the end of my first meeting with ER, the leaders acknowledged the importance of spiritual energy. They enacted this by encouraging everyone to hold hands, form a circle, and sing songs together. As the ER founders noted, the work of ER could not be done alone, and Hannah regularly stated that it would take spiritual energy and God's help to do this racial justice work. Racism was not a matter of the intellect, but it was a matter of changing hearts. By stating it this way, Hannah did not call upon her separate Bahá'í faith, but rather, she saw spiritual energy as a unifying factor among all people and religions.

These types of singing rituals, however, did not become a staple of the ER group, even though religion and the power of God were often mentioned. Hannah told me that she saw so much importance in this, but that Rev. David did not want to bring religion into the group too much. He thought it would drive people away because of the differences between all of the members' religions. Hannah disagreed, stating that she and Walter held the most different belief system in the group as Bahá'ís, and they would not mind incorporating spiritual rituals into regular meetings.

Religious and spiritual rituals all but disappeared from ER over the next eighteen months. At the very end of my nineteen months, however, it suddenly reappeared during a steering committee meeting. Aspects of this were not entirely surprising to me as Rev. David had asked me a few months earlier what could be improved about ER. I had shared with him that one thing that I thought was missing was that even though the group preached about creating relationships across racial lines and that we were doing desegregation work, our own meetings were rather cold and did not encourage people to get to know one another. It was almost as if each of the four action teams had created their own forms of bonding social capital, rather than bridging social capital, which is important for integrated communities (Blanchard, 2007; Putnam et al., 2003). Members of each action team sat next to other people on their teams, or they chose seats near someone else that they already knew. There was no time for members to get to know one another outside of the official business aspect of the meetings. One religious leader, a White man, led a relationship building exercise. During this activity, we participated in a version of "speed dating" and formed two circles, speaking with a partner about a particular personal question for a couple of minutes. This activity provided members with opportunities to meet other ER members that they did not know.

What *did* surprise me, however, was that after completing this activity, spirituality re-entered. We were instructed to form a line and place our right hands on the person's left shoulder in front of us. Then we were to close our eyes and sing a prayer while walking in a circle. Finally, with our hands still on the shoulder of the person in front of us, we repeated a mantra about doing the spiritual work of fighting racism. Again, this was a spiritual energy that connected all people and various religions. It was not tied to

one specific belief system, something which Hannah made very clear throughout my time with the group.

Religio-Civics

My time in the field brought me in contact with not only religious leaders, but with city government leaders as well. Although religion was less pronounced, interviews with residents outside of ER revealed how others viewed and conceived of the role of religion and morality in civic participation and antiracism efforts. This was especially notable during my interview with Delilah, an African American city councilwoman. During our conversation, we discussed the relationship between civic participation and religious beliefs. When I asked her about the role that religion and religious leaders had in Pinecreek, she stated:

> … there's an undercurrent[of religion] that has to do with it. And even though I have my feelings about faith and Black faith, like what it's based on, I believe that faith and morality, if they don't underlie your community, you're in real trouble. I don't mean the fake faith, you know where people, you know, "God built this country kind of thing," I'm talking about the real faith that says there's a floor, and we will not let anyone or anything fall below that floor in this community. And that's what I think Transform Pinecreek is about. We haven't found it yet. We haven't defined it, but I think it's going to take people like them with some of the—I call it religious ... religious civics …

As she indicates, ideas surrounding religion and spirituality were associated with notions of morality, which were oftentimes related to ideas of community participation. Religion

helped define a moral floor for what was and what was not acceptable within society. It also provided motivation for becoming involved in racial equity work.

Religion as a motivator. One current White Pinecreek public school teacher, Christine, saw her Bahá'í faith as inherent to her civic participation in antiracism efforts. She stated:

> Some of the things that we're working on across the world is how to build community and how to go from a[n] understanding of who we are as spiritual beings and not as material beings, and how we operate in this world should be based on the spiritual being. We know that other countries do community … better than what we do. So, part of the scope of the work is racism, like how to eliminate that because Bahá'u'lláh's social [teaching] is that all men are one … racism being one of the worst things in our country, right? It impacts everything.

Through this example, Christine shows that her motivation to eliminate racism is connected to her spirituality and the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Her religious belonging, and the teachings of her faith that instructed her about the evils of racism, framed her community involvement. Others from different faiths shared similar sentiments. For example, Emma, a Latinx, Catholic lawyer in town who visited the U.S.-Mexico border multiple times throughout 2018-2019 to help immigrants gain asylum, stated that the Gospel's message of "To whom much is given, much is expected" was her "driving force."

Helen, one of the four founders of ER stated how religion and churches were key to not only her involvement, but that they should be integral for civic participation. She said:

> … churches are not called just to meet. They are called to, and I heard this one time and it almost made me cry, the churches should be so active for good in the communities that if the church went out of business, the church would be missed. It should not be, it shouldn't be the people in the community just riding by and seeing the church. They should see the members of that church and the congregation as community activists and community advocates and as resources for themselves. They should not be hiding behind these walls.

Echoing other respondents, Helen shared how religious groups needed to be activists. Similar to how the mayor called religious leaders the moral compass of the city, Helen expands upon this by bringing the responsibility to the general membership of religious institutions as well.

The importance of religion may have been unique to this group. For many involved in ER, they saw their individual faith lives as a driving force for antiracism efforts, and they saw it as a way to encourage those who belonged to specific faiths to become involved in civic participation. As has been seen, many community members thought that religious leaders should be moral leaders because of their faith. Although different forms of morality exist, and being religious does not necessarily equate to morality, religious belonging sent a public message to community members that they should be acting in certain ways and advocating for racial justice and other human rights issues.

Religious ambivalence. For some individuals, religion played an ambivalent role. Delilah, the city alderwoman I interviewed, had spent years conducting racial equity work during the second desegregation lawsuit. She explained how her lack of belonging

to a specific church damaged how she was viewed by other community members, inhibiting her ability to accomplish social justice wins. She felt that she was unable to accomplish the goals that she wanted to in terms of fighting against racism and segregation because she did not attend a particular Black church. She stated:

> And I remember once we were in a room and someone said, "And Sister Delilah, where is your home church?" And I said, "I don't have one. I don't attend." And he said, "So you just attend everywhere?" I said, "No, I don't attend at all." "And might we ask why?" And I said, "I'll tell you as much as I'm going to tell you, but I view that as no different than—what were the three things you're supposed to—sex, politics, and religion were off subject." And everybody kinda chuckled a little bit. I said, "So I'm gonna put it over there with sex and politics." But I just said, "I've never been sure about the source of Black religion. When we were in Africa, we didn't believe in this God. We [didn't] believe in this Bible. We adopted the religion of our captors, and I've never understood how any group could do that. How do you adapt the religion of your captors? Jettison your own faith? I understood they made you do it. They forced you to do it, but why do you just accept it now?" And that's still true today. I just never have figured that out. But they say I so offended people when I made that comment and challenged their authority. One gentleman told me I challenged their existence. And I didn't. I just said, "This is the way I feel—" that they couldn't support me and *Concerned Community Members*. So, I had to work mostly with grassroots.

In this example, Delilah's lack of church membership delegitimized her ability to successfully implement the remedies from a lawsuit based on racism. It was almost as if

she could not be “placed” or understood by the church leaders who did not see the standpoint from which she came. Her lack of belonging to a particular church made her feel that she could not be supported. She continued her story, describing that her main concern was doing what was good for the children in the schools. Unsure of how to make any substantial racial equity progress, she said:

> And finally, a[n] amazing woman was a counselor in the Pinecreek schools. She told me, “You'll never be able to do what you're trying to do.” She said, “First because you're a woman, and second because you're not affiliated with any church in Pinecreek. And until you are …" But I wasn't going to do that. I wasn't going to affiliate with the church just to do it. She said, “You won't be able to accomplish what you want to accomplish.” So, I felt that I got good wins on an individual basis, but as a city we never gleaned all the benefits that we should have. A lot of people are going to tell you that *Concerned Community Members* accomplished nothing except getting some buildings built.

Delilah’s example illuminates the complicated dynamics involved in working towards racial equity in Pinecreek. Her story shows the essential role that faith and church membership played in Pinecreek’s Black community, tying together notions of race, gender roles, religion, education, and civic participation. This story also alludes to how Delilah perceived civic participation—religious beliefs act as a moral guide for what society agrees upon is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of how people are treated. Again, however, religion does not equate to morality, and religious influence may have been unique to Pinecreek’s antiracism efforts.

Delilah's story highlights the obstacles that an activist of color, and specifically, an African American woman, faces in a city that has been splintered along racial, geographical, religious, and socioeconomic lines. Even though her work to implement the remedies from the desegregation lawsuit was extensive, Delilah never believed that her efforts amounted to any sort of wins for the community as a whole. Rather, because of her lack of church affiliation and her positionality as an African American and a woman, she was unable to gain the support that she needed to provide better educational opportunities for African American children who had been discriminated against in the school system. In Delilah's estimation, the city could have gleaned many more benefits, and African Americans in Pinecreek could have had greater successes, leading to better education and economic outcomes. Delilah's thoughts about this echoed other community activists' views about the accomplishments of the lawsuit. They saw that while there had been some notable wins, such as the building of three new state of the art schools on the city's west side, these strides had not been sustainable. This was clear when studying recent data, which indicated that the district had returned to pre-lawsuit levels in areas such as low amounts of teachers of color and high levels of racial segregation in many of the district's schools.

Delilah's dilemma of her inability can be explained through social capital and in-group and out-group dynamics. As scholars recognize (e.g. Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 2002) having trust within particular groups, and specifically within particular religious sects, can provide support for individuals. It can also provide access to a network of other people within the group, and together they can contribute to making social change. As Delilah did not belong to one church, she was considered an outsider and had not yet

earned the trust of those within the church-based social networks. Her unwillingness to do so allowed her to stick to her own principles, but it inhibited her ability to form bonds with congregational members.

As was clear from the Delilah's narrative, she struggled with a Black faith with origins in slavery and White supremacy. Even in her personal struggle with faith, however, she noted the importance of the values and moral teachings that came from religious conviction. She did not believe that society could be healthy without these teachings when she said, "Your civic strength is only gonna go as far as your religious underpinnings" to explain this. She continued:

> Because you can't have the morality that you need to have a strong civic platform for growth. It's gotta start with that. That's where corporations have gone wrong. There's no faith in business, and that's why I think anything goes, and you have people who will cheat and destroy the economy—crash the housing market because it's all about greed. Anything that spirals out of control—religion keeps things from spiraling out of control. It puts some parameters on it. Anything else that spirals out is going to get into immorality. It's going to get into the seven original sins, and that's where things could go wrong. So I think Transform Pinecreek with the faith community and the civic leadership, they all depend on those religious underpinnings.

While Delilah was not a member of ER, she instead talked about her experiences with Transform Pinecreek, another community activist group in the city that had been formed after Pinecreek made the list of "most miserable cities in the United States." The group's mission was to "make Pinecreek a top 25 city by 2025." Similar to ER, Transform

Pinecreek had an undercurrent of religion. This organization had more religious leaders involved than did ER, and the group had been in existence since 2013 Although this activist group was started by a local business, religion and faith played a similar (in)visible role as it did in ER.

Religion for morality. Delilah was not the only one to hold the beliefs about religion's role in keeping society functional. Other individuals saw that church membership was key to keeping people in society acting morally. This was made plain in the political context of Donald Trump's presidency. Anthony stated:

> And mega churches, I don't think, do the job that they should do as far as one-on-one personal growth. So I think the church has a big role. I think the ecumenical role is huge. And I think, and forgive me for saying this, with President Trump being in office and them allowing the degradation of Christian ethics and policies makes church even less. That's right. I think that if the church doesn't hold you accountable for the sins that you make, then who will do that?

Hannah similarly agreed that churches and spiritual beliefs were key to the health of society, and she specifically tied them to racial equity work. She explained:

> And it's that spirit that I think is absolutely critical. We're not going to do anything without it. We're not going to accomplish without that spiritual energy. And I think you can get that in lots of different ways. People involved have that spiritual connection. They bring it with them. And maybe that's, you know, I would love to see the churches all get much more involved in addressing this issue because we need that, we need that kind of support. So I'm hoping that when

we start talking and giving presentations, we can give presentations to church groups. And see if we can get support.

Each of the above three examples shows how religion and civic participation were linked, and each respondent saw the impossibility of society functioning without the moral underpinnings of religion and spirituality. The moral beliefs that community members held ensured that society remained stable.

Even with Rev. David's discomfort with bringing specific religious beliefs into ER's operations, he also indicated that it was a moral obligation for religious groups to be involved in fighting against racism. He shared his experiences and dissatisfaction with religious groups and the lack of activism from certain Christian congregations from around Pinecreek. For example, he wondered aloud to me after one of our interviews where the Catholic church was and why issues of racism were not approached. Because Catholicism was the largest individual religious group within Pinecreek, Rev. David saw their disengagement as a negative sign. He specifically asked me this question because he knew that I was a practicing Catholic myself, and my dad was the head of Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Pinecreek. I reflected upon this question, and I shared with my dad what Rev. David had said—with his permission. My dad agreed that there had been minimal public work on this, and within months, the Catholic newspaper featured an article that put a spin on the typical argument about the Catholic Church's teaching on "the right to life." While this issue typically centers around abortion, this article centered upon the negative effects that racism had upon people and how it inhibited people of color's right to life.

Importance for educational equity. The presence of religion and spirituality seemed to motivate members of ER and the EAT to join the group and conduct their work. I regularly witnessed Hannah say that if we put aside the many differences of our specific religions and returned to the main tenets of all of the religions, or our moral codes and values, there would be much more peace and unity—one reason why she and her husband Walter had decided to become Bahá'ís. Other EAT members repeated similar attitudes. For example, Connie stated, "… but stepping back from the specific theology of religion to more, how do you, what does it mean to be a faithful member of the world? That could be helpful I think." Through this statement, Connie echoed Delilah and Hannah's ideas that returning to the origins and most basic tenets of religion required individuals to question the world surrounding them, undergirding how they worked on issues of equity within the local schools.

As has been shown, members of ER and the EAT were influenced by their religious beliefs, with some believing that racial equity in the city and its schools would be impossible to achieve without the help of God. Further, churches were regularly suggested as sites to not only gain new members for the group, but it was seen as a place where they could reach students to help them to do better in schools and receive a better education.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the role that space (i.e. city, schools, and religious spaces) and the histories associated with particular spaces, played in motivating individuals to engage in issues of segregation and racism in Pinecreek. I showed how west side versus east side dynamics regularly influenced how individuals viewed race and racism, and I

provided evidence that revealed how different spaces in the city, and people in them, sent messages to marginalized groups and individuals that they were unwelcome nor valued residents of Pinecreek. Although not always explicitly stated during my interviews about what motivated them to become involved in ER, residents' vast experiences with and feelings of not being valued in their community influenced their decision to address racism in Pinecreek. Overall, space as a cultural product acted as a mitigating factor in how community members thought about racism, why they became involved in activism for racially just education policies, and where discussions about race and racism took place.

I also presented how racial attitudes, oftentimes associated with east versus west dynamics, operated within Pinecreek's public schools. Teachers of color found the schools to be isolating and hostile spaces where they were the only or one of only a few staff members of color. Part of the feelings of isolation came from the city's prevalent color-blind attitudes, in which White people said or did racist things, and people of color's wants and needs frequently went unmet.

Race, religion, and politics often overlapped with one another in expected and unexpected ways in Pinecreek residents' discourse and actions. At times, these three concepts interacted to divide Pinecreek residents so that they kept people apart, inhibiting them from becoming involved in issues of antiracism. This was true when attempting to understand the perceptions of why ER could not attract members from congregations around the city; religious leaders were largely perceived as keeping to their own four walls—only serving the members of their own religious organizations.

In this chapter, I also showed how religious spaces contributed to individuals' community participation to address issues of racial equality and segregation. The fieldwork I conducted often took place in religious spaces, which sent both subtle and obvious messages to community members that religion, morality, and spirituality were important for the operation and ongoing work of eliminating racism.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Returning to my hometown to conduct an ethnographic dissertation study was an unexpected and rewarding experience. It allowed me to see the city from a new perspective, to challenge my own perceptions, and it introduced me to a caring group of activists who were willing to do the slow but necessary work of challenging racism, racist structures, and the people who benefited from them. In coming home, I became even more acutely aware that there was something not "normal" about how I had experienced my early life in the city. Having the opportunities to speak with community activists, former teachers and school leaders, current district administration, and educational stakeholders throughout Pinecreek gave me powerful insight into the ways community members rationalized racism and how they fought for racial equity for children in the public schools.

My introduction to Eliminate Racism (ER) through its four leaders—Rev. David, Helen, Hannah, and Walter—helped me establish myself as a researcher quickly. Although I was unsure exactly how the study would unfold in the beginning, it was clear to me that the members of ER were going to do more than just talk about racism in Pinecreek. Even with its shaky beginnings, there was a unique spark to this group that indicated to me that the group was unlikely to implode or dissipate immediately, and that they might, in fact, make some real strides in antiracism efforts. Within months, ER had already managed to connect with and push on people with institutionalized power (largely Whites) in Pinecreek to make substantive racially equitable changes. When

changes were not made quickly enough, the four founders and the growing team used their extensive social networks and social capital to alert the community about Pinecreek's continued insidious racism.

My time in the field not only provided me with opportunities to observe ER and the Education Action Team's (EAT) progress, but it also gave me time to build lasting relationships with individuals based on trust. My choice to wait to conduct interviews until my sixth month of field work was purposeful. I hoped to demonstrate to the team that I was not just a researcher, but I was someone who was genuinely invested in and concerned about issues of racial equity in my hometown's public schools. And, as the Pinecreek school district continued to receive negative attention for its poor performance on state standardized tests in the local media, and as the city continued to be rated as one of the most miserable cities in the United States to live in—and one of the worst for people of color—I understood that this was not only a research site ripe for study, but it was a place where my in-depth research could have an impact on the very people that I was working with and with whom I had developed friendships.

In this concluding chapter, I give an overview of the findings from my study. I also discuss how my study contributes to the literature on grassroots community groups' efforts in working to influence local policy, to the general field of race research in education, and to the ethnography and critical participatory action research literature. My concluding chapter also addresses the study's implications, and specifically implications for policymaking, for community groups, and for research. Because I conducted a participatory action research ethnography, my presence in the field was always influential in one way or another, and I share why researcher positionality matters and why research

such as this should be mobilized and given to the people who can use it in their own work.

Summary of the Findings

The time I spent in Pinecreek, and particularly within ER and the EAT, highlighted the real and positive influence that antiracist activists can have within their communities and school systems. The slow and steady work, while oftentimes frustrating when it felt like nothing was moving forward or being accomplished, did pay off. Throughout my time, community activists vented to me that they felt like nothing was changing, and they questioned whether or not their efforts were really worth all of the work and energy they were putting into the meetings they attended, the research they conducted, and the presentations they gave. As my findings showed, there were many disappointing results, especially when strictly looking at the numbers. In Chapter 4, I explained that even after pressuring the district to hire more teachers of color and to examine the racial disparities in student discipline, the numbers did not improve. In fact, they worsened. The percentage of African American teachers declined, albeit only slightly, and the number of African American students receiving out of school suspensions was on the rise while White and Latinx student suspensions steadily decreased. Even with these disappointments, especially as these were the specific goals that the EAT was working on, there were glimmers of hope. For instance, district leaders were willing to open up communication with community members in a school district that had previously denied the existence of racism, a director level position was created for minority recruitment, and a Black woman was hired for this position along with a Black woman assistant. Community members and district administrators were working

together collaboratively, employing the relational form of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Warren, 2005), and groups of people from around the city who had never gathered together or listened to one another were finally coming together for the first time to try and tackle racism and racist city structures in Pinecreek. It was perhaps these small, yet steady steps forward that kept ER and EAT members coming back to meetings. Even though my teammates constantly questioned the effects of what they were doing, and even at times viewed their efforts negatively, they persisted. This persistence harkens back to Yosso's (2005) aspirational capital. Even with the barriers and obstacles in front of the community activists, and particularly the activists of color who had fought these same battles again and again since the Civil Rights Movement, they continued to fight.

The relationships that I built and the trust that I established with my teammates gave me insight into people's private fears and insecurities. They shared with me deeply personal, and at times, emotional experiences they had endured while attending school or working within the Pinecreek school district. People cried during interviews with me as they recalled their treatment by teachers and school staff, sharing how out of place and unwanted they felt in racialized spaces. And yet, their stories included messages of resilience and hope, both aspects of community cultural wealth. When treated unfairly, such as Rose's experiences of not being allowed to teach advanced science courses at her school, she reframed her view, noting that she was able to connect with kids who may have been forgotten or left behind by other teachers who did not see their potential. She fondly recalled how her classroom was a space of comfort, and students who were not even in her class at the time found solace in hanging out there. For Black teachers that I spoke with, such as Rose, Helen, and Marilyn, who faced the effects of color-blind

racism every day, they were forced to endure simultaneous hyper visibility and invisibility (Marcos Pizarro & Kohli, 2018), which made for difficult experiences as White staff members viewed them with disdain or treated them as if they were invisible.

Finally, one aspect that I did not foresee playing an ever-present role in my study was religion, morality, and spirituality. It was integral to the relationships that were built, the proceedings of ER and the EAT, and personal religious and moral beliefs were motivational for community members' antiracist initiatives. For some, it was even a type of calling, especially for members of the Bahá'í faith. By relating notions of equity and racial justice to religion, individuals such as Hannah, Walter, and Christine, felt connected to one another and to all of humanity, claiming that the work of racial justice would be impossible without spiritual energy and God's help.

Moving Forward

Findings from this study contribute to a better understanding of the relationships between antiracist community activist groups and school districts. It offers additional ideas for more research to be conducted in a number of areas, including how community activist groups address the tensions that form when working with district leadership to address issues of racism in local school districts. It also offers insight into the ways that racialized and religious spaces play a role in antiracist efforts. This study contributes to the research in this area, and it attempts to highlight the voices and perspectives of people of color (Delpit, 2006; Jay, 2009; Michie, 2007), though I in no way intend to "speak for" people of color as a White, male researcher.

As prior research has noted about the intricacies of school and community relationships is limited, more studies that approach the conflicts as well as the limits of

these relationships are important (Kerr et al., 2016). My experiences with and observations of ER and the EAT provide strategies that other groups could incorporate, and my research notes pitfalls that can occur when addressing racism in a school district with a long history of discriminating against people of color. Understanding how and when grassroots can make changes is helpful, and as Mediratta (2005) asked in his study, "Which strategies lead to which kinds of schooling changes, and under what conditions is school reform organizing most successful?" (p. 203). This research provides some answers to this question by showing how ER may have encouraged the district to make slow yet steady efforts to prioritize racial equity and better learning opportunities for its students.

While I conducted my fieldwork, I wanted to better understand how the two groups—ER and the school district—viewed one another as they worked together. As Kerr, Dyson, and Gallannaugh (2016) noted, the literature lacks research about the relationship building and ensuing tensions that occur between school districts and community members. By examining how community members and school district officials saw one another, I was able to give examples of some of the tensions and misunderstandings that developed during the growing partnership. These differences in viewpoints were especially clear when the partners did not see eye to eye with each other about which issues should be prioritized. This was noticeable in the very nature of the community activist group. Because the group focused almost all of its attention on race, I noticed that school district officials often became frustrated, claiming that they could not only be focused on race because this was just one factor among many, such as socioeconomic status, family life, and children's experiences with trauma. This tension

led to misunderstandings between the two sides as they attempted to collaborate with one another.

As I noted in my first chapter, although there are many studies in education that approach race and racism, proportional to the rest of educational literature, it remains small. Kohli, Pizarro, and Nevárez (2017) note that even though thousands of articles on race and racism exist, there are still a limited number that bring race to the forefront of analysis, and racism often takes a backseat to other issues in education. Oftentimes, when racism is addressed in research, the voices of people of color who are most affected by the insidious, day-to-day racism are often ignored (Delpit, 2006; Jay, 2009; Michie, 2007), a gap which I attempted to fill in this study. My fieldwork and analysis offer a unique perspective, demonstrating how color-blind racism contributes to making city and educational spaces unwelcoming for people of color.

When confronted with color-blind attitudes, the teachers of color that I worked with perceived that they were not valued or understood in their schools. This was particularly apparent when they were the only or one of a few faculty members of color in their schools. Listening to their experiences and reporting on them are necessary for understanding the current shortage of teachers of color in the education profession. As the teacher shortage in the United States rises (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016), the experiences of teachers of color I spoke with provides evidence that it is necessary to improve the work environment for teachers of color. As there has been a steady decline of Black teachers since 1990 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), schools of education as well as district and building administrators could use this

study to understand the importance of making their school spaces welcoming places for teachers of color so that their knowledge and expertise are valued.

This research began as an exploratory study, one where I regularly questioned and negotiated how to decipher which methods would be the most appropriate for answering my research questions. As I landed on an ethnography that used critical participatory action research, I showed the potential for blending ethnography with Participatory Action Research (PAR). Using critical PAR as part of the larger methodology was a battle that I constantly fought with myself as I contended with balancing how involved I became as an activist researcher. As I explained in Chapter 3, research on critical PAR and ethnography note the impossibility of the researcher ever being an objective bystander. Biases and prior experiences always shape how the researcher sees the world (Ball, 2006). The literature is minimal, however, on how the two methods are blended together and written about, but as I was conducting research alongside the community activist group during this ethnography, I experimented in drawing ethnography and critical PAR together. By bringing these two methods together, I provide insight and strategies for other researchers who could conduct similar studies in the future and refine their uses when combined. By showing the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating these methods into a single research study, future researchers can develop potentially stronger studies by intertwining these two methods.

This study has implications for policy, practice, and research. My findings are important for educational policy as it shows the necessity of introducing race into every conversation and decision about education. It also has implications for practice by showing how community activist groups can establish collaborative working

relationships with district administrators. Lastly, this study can be used as a starting point for future research about understanding the relationships between school districts and their surrounding communities.

The education system resides within the larger societal structure, which includes housing, an important contextual aspect of this study. With rampant residential segregation, particularly in the Midwest where this study took place, schools will likely not be the panacea for reducing all social inequalities. Research (e.g. Carter, 2005; Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999; Lewis, 2003) has demonstrated time and time again that schools reproduce social inequalities and a societal structural change is necessary for legitimately eliminating racism. As this is unlikely in the near future, or ever, schools and their leaders should make every effort possible to alleviate racial inequities through a number of measures, which are not impossible, and the beginnings of which I witnessed as I concluded my work with ER and the EAT.

Firstly, bringing racial equity to the forefront of every school decision is necessary. As my teammates constantly modeled, race was the central issue in every discussion about educational equity. When school district leadership attempted to share the improvements the schools were making, EAT leaders always asked how minoritized students would be affected. Because African American student performance in the Pinecreek school district was in the most need of help in terms of test scores and disparate rates of discipline, the EAT always asked how African Americans' needs were being met with any new initiative that the district adopted.

Continuing to examine how schools are spaces of color-blindness that are hostile and unwelcoming for people of color is also crucial for scholars to examine. The minimal

work done in this area indicates that even though teachers of color are in positions of relative power and lead their students, they still face issues of racism, often daily (Marcos Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). This is particularly poignant for those teaching in mostly White schools or with mostly White staffs, making it difficult for them to remain in their schools and in the teaching profession in general (Marcos Pizarro & Kohli, 2018). More studies that showcase how schools can be healthy and safe places are necessary if school and community leaders want to attract more teachers of color to their communities. By making efforts to not only hire more teachers of color, but also to retain them, teaching could be a more attractive profession. As one study (Gershenson, Hart, Lindsay, & Papageorge, 2017) indicates, when disadvantaged Black males between the third and fifth grades have at least one Black teacher, they are 39% less likely to drop out of high school, and they are also more likely to attend college. Thus, hiring and retaining more teachers of color, especially in a district with a large share of Black students living in poverty, is essential for improving racially equitable educational opportunities.

Grassroots groups looking to improve racial equity for students in local schools might consider studying the strategies that did and did not work when the EAT partnered with district leaders. As the EAT demonstrated, the work it did was slow, difficult, and oftentimes frustrating. However, some strategies that were effective for the EAT included: no gossiping; establishing a purposeful communication strategy with district leaders to (1) keep them aware of the group's work and (2) to consistently remind them that it was holding district leaders accountable; enacting a collaborative and relational approach to build a partnership based on trust and respect (Warren, 2005); following a process that kept the group on task to meet its agreed-upon deadlines; listening to school

administrators' concerns; not going to the larger community without all of the information first; and valuing each member's community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). These strategies were helpful for the work in the Pinecreek school district, but there were also weaknesses and pitfalls of the group that future groups may avoid. These included: not incorporating race in its mission statement; making impossible demands of the school district that would have led to lawsuits (i.e. suggesting recruiting teachers of color by giving them more money); making presentations to the school district that did not invite interaction and discussion; not making more of an effort to attract individuals outside of religious groups, current parents, low socioeconomic status individuals, and younger participants; and instances of color-blind racism within the group itself.

Future research could focus more on what worked and what did not for recruiting and retaining new members to grassroots groups. As my time in Pinecreek indicated, religion and religious belonging was an important motivator for recruiting new members through the idea of religio-civics. Many teammates heard about ER through their churches and religious leaders. However, this did not appear to be a strategy that extended beyond a member or two of each congregation that had representatives. Additional research could examine the ways that individuals perceive how their particular religious group views social justice work, which might provide a better understanding of why certain religious groups had more participants than others. For example, Bahá'ís were very vocal about how their religious teachings encouraged their involvement in issues of racial equity in the United States. Although a small portion of the population in Pinecreek, Bahá'ís were some of the most active members throughout my time with ER and the EAT, especially because Bahá'ís in the United States were taught that racism was

the greatest problem facing humanity and unity. Exploring how religious teachings differ and whether it is the religion itself or the individual moral beliefs of each person that inspires antiracist involvement will be important for understanding how religious leaders can or cannot mobilize their congregations to be civically engaged. It will also be important to continue examining how moral underpinnings, or ethical beliefs about humanity, influence antiracist work. Continued study can help to better understand when moral beliefs are or are not connected to specific religious teachings.

The meetings that I attended with ER regularly had religious undertones. However, dependency on the religious "grapevine" might be a limiting factor for gaining a diverse membership. ER and the EAT was mostly made up of an older population, with most members over the age of 65. As millennials have been shown that they do not belong to specific congregations and not attend church regularly (Jones, 2019), drawing from a religious well for new members severely limits who will join groups like ER. Further, with the age of the group, many did not know how to use or had limited use of technology. I heard from younger people that they would have liked to know more about ER through social media. While the group did develop a website in March 2019, prior knowledge of ER's existence was necessary to even stumble upon the website for more information. By expanding its social media reach, ER may have had more potential to reach out to younger people who may have been inclined to become involved but lacked easy access to information about it.

Religious, moral, and spiritual beliefs were a key aspect of this group, and it helped delineate the type of members who joined the group as well as where we would meet. This, however, may be unique to this particular community group. As members of

ER and the EAT frequently cited their religious beliefs as being key to the work of the group, and some explicitly invoked the power that God had in moving the mission of the group forward, this may not be necessary for other community groups doing similar work. However, the moral beliefs that tied the group together may have contributed to its successes and longevity. As was noted throughout the study, the founders of the group were deeply religious, and they connected their work to the power of God. In Hannah and Walter's case, they cited the specific teachings of their Bahá'í faith, emphasizing the humanity of each person and the importance of unity. The words they used and the actions they exhibited contributed to how ER and the EAT functioned. By limiting gossip, unity developed. Through emphasizing each person's humanness, they fought against racism. By connecting these specific religious beliefs to actions within the group, community members from different religious or non-religious backgrounds had opportunities to work within their own moral commitments to work in antiracist ways.

One issue that was highlighted during my time with the EAT was the lack of access to educational research. While research about best practices in education are constantly being published, many educational stakeholders have limited access to it. For example, when each of the EAT goal sub-teams were conducting research on best practices, community members had difficulty accessing scholarly research because of paywalls to academic journals. There is a major disconnect between scholars and the communities that they say they serve, but researchers can connect scholarship to potential users (Fischman & Tefera, 2014). As a participatory action researcher, I was constantly working with the people in an effort to improve the school district and create equitable opportunities. I had opportunities to share my initial findings, and I was regularly asked

for my opinions for how the group could improve based on the research I had been doing. Further, I was invited to share my findings in various venues once the dissertation study had been completed. In this way, I was able to help bridge the gap between scholars and community stakeholders.

As definitions of educational leadership expand, this study reveals how community members who are educational stakeholders can play an integral part in their local school systems. More research should be done in this area to see how community activists see themselves as educational leaders as well as how community members outside of activist groups perceive the actions, motivations, and leadership of these groups within the education system.

Additional research should be done about intergroup racial dynamics of working in a community activist group. Although my research approached this, it would be powerful to hear the voices of people of color within community activist groups to understand how they feel about working in racially mixed groups on issues of racial equity. Tensions within the EAT existed, but this was not a major focus of the study. Understanding how people of color perceived White members of the group's motivations, as well as attempting to understand how and why people of color choose to continue working on these issues alongside White people could be helpful for community activists to understand when and why individuals quit groups such as ER and the EAT.

My role as a doctoral researcher did not go unnoticed. As I was working alongside EAT members, I frequently explained my project and why I was doing it. My teammates were very familiar with the project, and many people in the larger ER group had a similar amount of familiarity. Although I knew that I would shape the group and

contribute to its goals and interpersonal dynamics through my participatory action research (PAR) method, my status as a researcher was exerted in ways to help the community group in ways that I did not foresee.

Although I did get accustomed to having my work and title leveraged at impromptu times, I was surprised when this tactic was used again at the breakfast meeting with the superintendent, mayor, and community leaders. Rev. David, who was the MC of the day's event, gave a short speech to address the work of ER. He shared that the efforts that ER was making was the first he had witnessed since he had moved to the city fourteen years ago. There was real momentum in what the group was accomplishing and the work it was doing for the city and its residents. He shared how he had spoken with many Pinecreek residents who were skeptical of what we were doing, and he agreed that they should be dubious based on the past inequities that marginalized communities had experienced. Rev. David stated, however, that this time was different. There were real resources supporting the work of ER. Firstly, the group had received a $25,000 grant from the American Baptist Society in March 2019 and had subsequently become a 501c(3). Secondly, he turned to me and had me stand up. Pointing to me, he told the attendees that ER had a Ph.D. student who was writing his dissertation about the group, and his announcement was met with applause. Finally, he explained that because ER had so many resources this time around, there was real reason to hope that the city and school district would make progress in addressing racism. The symbolic capital of not only working on my doctorate, but also being a White male researcher certainly played an influential role. This was reminiscent of my initial meeting with Rev. David in March 2018. At that point, he told me that given my race and gender, I would be in a much more

privileged position to write and speak about racism and racial segregation in Pinecreek and its schools than he could ever be. Therefore, he instructed me to "not mess this up."

Lessons Learned for Pinecreek

Because I learned so much from spending time in Pinecreek and getting to know some of its residents, it is my hope that my research can be useful to the very people that can apply it. First, White leaders throughout the city, including city government officials, school district administrators, business owners, and religious leaders have the ability to bring issues of race and racism to the forefront. Although these conversations may be difficult to have, especially in a place like Pinecreek where color-blind attitudes are prevalent and people tend to lower their voices or even whisper when race and racism are brought up, leaders have the ability to create equitable opportunities as well as to recognize how racialized spaces make people of color feel undervalued and unwelcome. By taking active steps to learn more about race and racism, and to use examples from the ER group to facilitate these tough discussions, city leadership can open up and encourage dialogue across a community that is closed off and segregated.

My time in Pinecreek also showed that it would be valuable for district employees, such as principals, teachers, and central office workers to listen to employees of color within the school district. In a district where teachers of color feel uneasy and fearful about expressing the problems with racism that they face daily, district leadership or teacher union leadership may want to conduct anonymous surveys that ask questions directly related to the racial climate of the district. Further, as teachers of color leave at high rates, conducting exit interviews and then using the answers and incorporating them into recruitment and retention strategies has the potential to improve the climate of school

spaces. If suggestions for surveys and interviews are heeded, district leaders need to follow through and ensure that they are valuing the thoughts, perspectives, and expertise of professionals of color by making real changes in their recruitment and retention efforts.

Finally, my inside view of ER and the EAT gave me insight into the ways the group can continue its work and improve. First, when new members join the group, they should be made aware of what the group does and what it stands for. New members sometimes shared that they were confused in the beginning. This could be remedied by assigning another member within the action team to provide a short, mini-orientation in a setting that makes people feel comfortable asking questions. Second, recruitment of new members should be strategized. As I witnessed throughout my time, members skewed to the older side, with most teammates in their sixties and seventies. Although there is value in having members with many years of experience in the district and the community, there is value in having younger people, including parents, involved in this group. Having a diversity in age may help bring new perspectives, and it could bring new skills to the group, including technological skills. This expertise in technology could include social media skills, which could both reach a younger crowd of potential participants, but it could also communicate to residents from around the city about the work of ER.

ER and the EAT were on a continued track of improvement. As I checked in frequently with the group after my data collection period had finished, I witnessed their continued struggles and perseverance for continuing the work. Our group had learned that there is value in having a plan for moving forward, and therefore, the EAT as well as the other three action teams had decided to re-strategize and delineate a careful process to

follow as it entered its second full year of work. Continuing to plan out and abide by a process is important for the group's work moving forward as it lets members reflect on their past work as well as be able to shape how the group will move forward in the future. Using this strategy of valuing all members' opinions is a promising practice, and it should continue to be implemented by ER and the EAT as it created buy-in from its members, who have stuck with the group since its inception, even amongst all of the feelings of frustration and anger that many had at times.

Final Remarks

My time in the field provided me with countless opportunities to observe how the efforts of a small group of people who are passionate about antiracism have the potential to positively influence hundreds of people in their community. Not only did this group of people establish communication and dialogue with individuals from around the city who had often been ignored or silenced, but it made progress in changing policies and practices within the Pinecreek public schools. Even though the EAT faced roadblocks and resistance, which caused anger, frustration, and distrust, the team's resilience and perseverance led to wins, such as the hiring of more administrators of color, equitable distribution of resources around the schools, and a seat at the table in helping to develop the district's five-year plan. It also spread its message and became a legitimate organization that was recognized throughout the community. Even with the setbacks the team experienced, it used its community cultural wealth to continue its fight so that students of color in the district would be given better and more equitable learning opportunities.

Returning to my hometown to conduct a research study on race and racism in the public schools was an important lesson for me. It helped me to question everything—even the mundane—and to remain open to the possibilities that present themselves in the forms of exploring the unknown, meeting new people, and having faith that good can happen when people passionately advocate for their fellow community members. The continued efforts that my teammates, and now friends, made toward improving their community shows promise within the Pinecreek School District. This is a group that will continue fighting for equity by working with and challenging people in power who are unwilling to make sacrifices and urgent changes. By advocating for students of color, the EAT is in a strong position to oversee the school district as it attempts to make teachers, administrators, students, and parents of color feel more welcome and valued in the community. As ER and the EAT continues to put pressure on district leadership, and as the partnership develops, this community group's efforts can provide an example to other similar communities on how to improve the education system in ways that are done with care, passion, and persistence.

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APPENDIX A

EDUCATION ACTION TEAM PROCESS

Eliminate Racism Action Team Process

Vision: Pinecreek is a community where everyone feels valued.
Mission: Eliminate Racism in Pinecreek.

Action Team: Eliminate Racism-Education Action Team

Mission: To be passionate advocates of equity-driven policies and practices in the Pinecreek Public Schools so that all students will be prepared for social and academic success.

Goal #1: To increase to 20% People of Color (POC)--especially African-American and Hispanic--in all levels of Pinecreek Public Schools: administration, faculty, staff, and board members by the 2020-2021 school year. By the 2025-2026 school year, have percentages of African-American and Hispanic administration, staff, and board members match the percentage of African-American and Hispanic students within the system.

Tactics (Action Steps)	Deadline	Who will do this?
Action step 1: Gather relevant data to be used for a report 1. Meet with PINECREEK PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT HR personnel to gather relevant data. Collect HR statistics and chart them; Compile historic and current statistics of POC within Pinecreek Public Schools. 2. Compile statistics for individual school staffing on all levels: elementary, middle, and high school. 3. Compare Pinecreek Public Schools employee stats with City of Pinecreek employee stats. 4. Develop understanding of Pinecreek Public School District's recruitment policies and practices for POC: Determine what US colleges and universities are in current Pinecreek Public Schools recruitment pipeline, particularly for faculty Determine what additional US colleges and universities should be added to pipeline: a. Schools have historically high numbers of POC education majors b. Schools that should be added to the current Pinecreek Public Schools pipeline to offer greater assurance of higher success of POC Determine what incentives are offered during the hiring process 5. Study national best practice success stories and suggest new ways to increase POC within Pinecreek Public Schools.	10/18/18	
Action step 2: Write and issue report on findings: A Report of Minority Hiring Practices Within Pinecreek Public Schools: The Need to Include More POC and How to Meet This Need	11/15/18	

Action step 3: The Committee will present the report to Pinecreek Public School staff, administration, and board, and to the Pinecreek community and lead discussions of its findings and recommendations.	Report shared with district admin: 12/18. Report shared with board: shortly after 12/18 presentation Report shared with community Mid-January-September 2019	Action Team Presentation Feb 22, 2019
Action Step 4: Review data to chart progress and report back to community	10/1/19-1/1/21	

Goal 2: To ensure that Pinecreek Public Schools policies and resources – teachers, counselors, supplies, technology, etc – are distributed equitably, based on the needs of students in the school and measured by the state required assessment data and the district discipline data. This goal shall be met by the 2020-2021 school year.

Tactics (Action Steps)	Deadline	Who will do this?
Action step 1: 1. Survey current resource distribution. 2. Determine how individual school resource budgets are currently created. 3. Determine how distribution decisions are currently made. 4. Interview staff, students, and parents in terms of resource needs. 5. Research "best practices" used nationally for resource distribution.	10/18/18	
Action step 2: Write and issue a report: Student Resources Available within Pinecreek Public Schools and How to Ensure that Resource Distribution is Equitable and Based on Student Needs.	11/15/18	
Action step 3: The committee will present the report to Pinecreek Public Schools staff and administration and to the community and lead discussions of its findings and recommendations.	Mid-January through mid-April 2019.	Action Team Presentation Feb 22, 2019

Action step 4: Review data to chart progress and report back to the community.	9/1/19	

Goal 3: Students of Color (SOC) – especially African-American and Hispanic – will be encouraged to enroll in and be enrolled in Honors and AP classes and will receive the support they need to be successful. By 2020-2021 school year, SOC enrollment will have increased by 25% within these advanced curricular programs; these students will have received a final grade of "C" or better.

Tactics (Action Steps)	Deadline	Who will do this?
Action step 1: 1. Historical racial demographics of Honors and AP classes will be collected/program. 2. Procedures for recruitment and enrollment in these advanced curricular programs within Pinecreek Public Schools will be studied. 3. National "best practices" for successful SOC recruitment into advanced curricular programs will be studied. 4. Examples of "best practices" for SOC support programs within advanced curricular programs will be studied.	10/18/18	
Action step 2: Committee will write and issue a report: Racial Demographics of Pinecreek Public Schools Advanced Curricular Programs, Including Honors and AP, and How to Achieve Equity, Including Necessary Programs of Support to Promote Student Success	11/15/18	
Action step 3: The committee will present the report to Pinecreek Public Schools staff and administration and to parents and the community and lead discussions of its findings and recommendations.	Mid-January through mid-April 2019.	Action Team Presentation Feb 22, 2019
Action step 4: Annual review of data to chart progress and report back to the community.	9/1/19	

APPENDIX B

EDUCATION ACTION TEAM'S RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR THE PINECREEK SCHOOL DISTRICT

Call to Eliminate Racism in Pinecreek

Vision: Pinecreek is a community where everyone feels valued. Mission: Eliminate Racism in Pinecreek

Eliminate Racism Education Action Team Mission: To be passionate advocates of equity-driven policies and practices in the Pinecreek Public Schools so that all students will be prepared for social and academic success.

Eliminate Racism Education Action Teams Recommendations to Pinecreek Public Schools 2019

Goal 1: To increase to 20% People of Color - especially African-American and Hispanic - in all levels of Pinecreek Public Schools: administration, faculty, staff, and board members by the 2020-2021 school year. By the 2025-2026 school year, have percentages of African- American and Hispanic administration, staff, and board members match the percentage of African- American and Hispanic students within the system.

Recommended Strategies:

1. Develop a proactive, focused and persistent Pinecreek Public Schools recruitment and retention policy for People of Color, including necessary incentives/needs, housing, mentoring, 11 month contracts and appropriate liaisons with other people of color, teachers, administration and community leaders. This policy must be personal as well as web and social- media based. Establish Pinecreek as a desirable place to live and teach for African-American and Hispanic teachers. Develop a social/emotional support system for teachers of color.
2. Expand all available Grow Your Own/Pathway Programs, forming an elementary, middle school and high school mentoring/training program for students, especially African-American and Latino, who express interest in becoming teachers. Paraprofessionals or other non-certified staff of color already working in the district and recommended by their administrator should be prime candidates for scholarships, internships and paid student teaching experience. A cohort for parents of color could also be developed.
3. RPS Human Resources Department works closely with the National Equity Project to develop a recruiting and support strategy including preparation for the states required teachers' exam. Re-develop the Diversity Council and include recruiting and support strategies of people of color as part of their mission.
4. Develop and execute a Teachers' Union Agreement that addresses the overwhelming need to increase the percentages of People of Color across Pinecreek Public Schools.
5. Recognize an immediate need for persistence in developing strong relationships with local and regional colleges and universities, and HBCUs (Historical Black Colleges and Universities) and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) with "connectors" who can assist PINECREEK PUBLIC SCHOOLS in locating and

recruiting People of Color, most especially as teachers and administrative staff. This should include paid internships and scholarships.
6. Form relationships/partnerships with local service organizations and churches who have primarily people of color as their membership. Develop a social/emotional support system for teachers of color. Establish Pinecreek as a desirable place to live and teach for African-Americans and Hispanic teachers.

Goal 2: To ensure that Pinecreek Public Schools policies and resources, including teachers, counselors, supplies, and technology, are equitable, based on the needs of students in the school and measured by the state required assessment data and the district discipline data. This goal shall be met by 2020-2021 school year.

Recommended Strategies:

1. Develop a new Funding Formula for RPS that targets lowest performing students and include grant $$ in the formula.
2. Implement Community Schools based on the specific needs of each of our lowest-performing schools
3. Put more financial resources into multi-classroom leaders.
4. Conduct an internal Equity Audit to inform financial/policy decisions.
5. The Discipline code and the culture of the school focus reflects positive behavior interventions and support, social/emotional strategies and restorative justice policies and resources that provide ways for students to learn to become contributing members of our community. The community should create advocacy groups to support children and parents who need assistance.
6. Create a trauma-sensitive school improvement initiative. Provide more social/emotional support to students through counselors and social workers and behavior specialists.
7. Provide a sufficient amount of job-embedded professional development in implicit/unintentional bias, positive behavior interventions and support, social and emotional learning strategies, and restorative justice practices for administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and other staff members in order that we address the challenges of equity facing public education in Pinecreek.

Goal 3: Students of Color– especially African-American and Hispanic – will be encouraged to enroll in and be enrolled AP (Advanced Placement) classes and will receive the support they need to be academically successful. By 2020-2021 school year, Students Of Color enrollment will have increased by 25% within these advanced curricular programs; these students will have received a final grade of “C” or better.

Recommended Strategies:

1. There must be a district-wide Students of Color AP recruitment strategy.
2. There must be a district-wide strategy for helping parents of Students of Color understand the benefits of AP classes for their children.

3. There must be a district-wide AP teacher recruitment strategy that establishes criteria for teachers most likely to succeed in AP classes with a diverse student population, most importantly including Students of Color. This strategy should identify teachers who are culturally-sensitive and have strong relationship-building skills and then support these teachers through a variety of methods, including professional development opportunities.
4. There must be a district-wide AP support strategy for Students of Color that acknowledges and meets the unique constraints the students face, including academic and socio-economic.
5. Pinecreek Public Schools will develop community-based involvement/support for Students of Color AP enrollment.

APPENDIX C

COMMUNITY MEMBER SUGGESTIONS FROM THE ELIMINATE RACISM BREAKFAST MEETING

Question 1: Short-term Solutions: What can your organization do to encourage African-Americans and Latinos to apply for current vacancies in the:

- Pinecreek Public Schools' teaching and administrative staff
- City of Pinecreek's Police and Fire departments
- City of Pinecreek's variety of Departments

Career Information/Communication

- Work with persons already aboard
- Organizations attend all minority community events as hand out to new EEs
- Need to know where to get information, where jobs are available, interpersonal part that needs to be addressed.
- Make known what is available. What benefits are available. Educate each other.
- Better pay/benefits
- Make info known on continuing basis- Especially to youth- Encourage applying.
- Educate early about process and policies
- Keep Contact Info
- Communicate. How do they get on lists to know about job opportunities in a timely manner to circulate applications?
- Let people know about career opportunities. (Good to know that the Fire Department has a 45-day window for hiring).
- Important to be able to relate to future applicants what jobs are available that could be viable to them.
- Must be intentional about how the job is obtained and provide assistance with interviewing skills, etc.
- Info on how.
- Focus on hiring practices
- Use same strategies to hire whites to hire minorities.
- Keep communication open
- Be honest
- Knowledge is power! Recruit in businesses where advancement is limited.
- As a community, carry the message
- Post job vacancies as they receive them at the different churches etc.

Social Media

- Bridge the information gap. Most people of color don't use the old means of communication. TV news, newspaper and radio never get to certain groups of people.
- More marketing, social media
- Get word out on Social apps
- Ads in newspapers/social media to inform
- Churches can publish and promote activities on Facebook page and at church.

School Issues

- Principals: who they know makes it hard for outside to get in to be hired.
- Pinecreek Public School District working NABSF is an asset- Starts with Schools.
- No Child left behind-disservice. Children passed on without meeting educational mastery.
- Migratory nature of citizens in SE and SW side (Change schools when you move.)
- Why wasn't data shared about teacher and students Pinecreek Public School District climate and environment?
- Lack of Pinecreek Public School District data limits ability to successfully create a solution to problem City Issues
- Help expungement with seminars around city for young people
- Host an expungement seminar with an expert
- Modify testing timeframes for police/fire

Question 2: Long-Term Solutions: What suggestions do you have for long-term solutions to address the racial disparities in the work force, particularly in high paying or salaried jobs in our public schools and our City Government?

- Career Education/Create a Pipeline Grow Your Own
- Organize a Black Teachers group to talk to children to encourage career in teaching
- Grow your own idea, think about development, grow your own programs
- Successive planning. Hire people already doing the job. Just don't look outside
- On websites: grow your own type program: PU Pathways.
- Commitment from the people that hold the jobs to hire African Americans. HR Incentives
- Increase resident offer programs. Expand to education and fire-fighters
- Don't always need lots of certifications. Embrace talents of people
- Admit that racial disparities exist. Disparities are real. Put more money for relocating here to address racial disparities.
- Stop using tokenism/people and position
- Give incentives

Elementary

- Students do not see a single teacher that looks like them which discourages motivation to attend college.
- Start to talk to children earlier about teaching careers
- Children need to learn more about getting an education.
- Help students view the future. Begin as young as possible
- Give youth tools they need.
- Strategy of teachers to tell kids
- Environmental experiences outside of education, broaden minds
- Dept to attend group meetings. Going down to children's level

- Vote: change approach to hiring in Pinecreek School District. Get word out to younger students
- Early mentoring of kids. High School too late.
- If children should be involved to see adults handling problems.
- Engage students in elementary and as early as pre-school
- Involve kids early
- Do children/students need tutors, meals?

Middle School

- Expose students to many careers on the middle school level.
- Make students aware of what is available to student by using job camps, internships, internet, 1-day work.
- Career education in middle school
- Give youth tools they need.
- In school job fair in middle school and high school

High School

- Introduce students to high paying jobs that are available out of high school/high school classes. Ex: construction, skill trades
- Take students to the job site. Ex: construction- Discuss: requirements, pay, job
- Make sure counselors are not discouraging Black/Hispanic students
- Greater exposure to people in higher paying jobs
- Night-time career fairs with parents
- Partner with Pinecreek School District to encourage High School grads to consider Education
- Scholarships for college
- Give youth tools they need.
- Right people offering youth guidance-trusted administrators address mistakes and methods to progress
- Job Fairs at High Schools
- Guidance counselors high school preparing for future
- Encourage minority students to broaden the scope of the careers they consider.
- Start early with education for information-high school/college about jobs
- Address the racial disparities in school graduations
- Open the door to Students of Color that are interested in politics, medicine, teaching, social services by going to the site.
- Why were Pinecreek School District students not invited to this event?
- Promote at the high school levels
- STEM advocates mentoring students in high school exposing monetary benefits
- Advise students by highlighting pathways to accomplishing education career days

Partnerships College

- Community college partners with Pinecreek School District & City of Pinecreek
- Partner with Pinecreek University
- Developing partnerships with universities to get into the classroom
- HBCU: Go where students are-Be aggressive
- Adult Ed: Make students aware of training & career opportunities
- Wider Tutoring program for social workers, marketing, job training, family stress
- Help students seek employment in Pinecreek School District and city
- Better city transportation (To get to College)

Internships

- (Internships) Many youths have been enticed to move to other big city and so there should be more encouragement to the young folks by providing an easy minimum wage opportunities that can be motivation them to develop their city.
- Paid summer internship: Must include People of Color
- Provide paid "clinical experience" i.e. paid internship

Mentor

- Mentor young boys in the community. Problem-getting trust of mothers
- Mentoring with Best Intentions regarding all issues-job struggles, housing, drug, discrimination, mental issues, food, & shelter sacrifices.
- Make connections with students
- Focus on young people to enter the work force. If they show interest, encourage them
- Role models-eliminate discouragement with building relationship, earlier in life/
- Professional volunteers to answer questions from potential candidates regarding a chosen career choice path. Ex: citywide listings
- Minority professionals return to neighborhoods
- Make sure they "see" others like them in the profession
- Get out and learn and encourage our children.
- Invite people in those careers to speak and model the target careers

Business

- Company adopt a school/class/student. Use government and company funds
- Administrators and businesses must take risks for People of Color
- Invite AA & Latino to serve on Boards and Committees- Young people included
- What about local businesses and industry, corporations? What can we do to encourage them to hire more minorities?
- It would be interesting to know the demographics of all the hospitals.
- What about local businesses and industry, corporations? What can we do to encourage them to hire more minorities?
- It would be interesting to know the demographics of all the hospitals.

Retired Teachers

• Make use of retired teachers to encourage those current teachers

Churches

- Get word out with job fairs-churches
- Sponsor events-example: gospel event present there
- Encourage people to attend Sunday School for children-start at children's level.
- Encourage Churches to stay in the loop—more encouraging
- Get the word out to the community (i.e. churches etc. and make connections and relationships early)
- HR, mayor, church engaging in discussion with community.
- Churches should go into the neighborhoods to welcome those who arrive. Let them feel welcome
- Pastors on board
- Coalitions of organizations and churches.
- Organizations and churches need to reach out to diversity.
- Isaiah Development tries to Eliminate Racism.

Latino Community/Newcomers

- In the Latino community, have a meeting with their neighborhood. Outreach to organizations about issues.
- Women's group bring in speakers to the Latino community
- More assistance education-inform about GED's language education

City & School Collaborate

- Both the city and the school district can help by insisting that the companies they do business with be making the genuine efforts to attract, grow, recruit, retain, and promote underrepresented minorities
- Offer community support. i.e. events to bring in minorities collecting donations for staff.

City Issues

- Need community organizers
- Minority Organization Coalition. Work together. Min. ward 7, 13, and SE
- Get alderman involved.
- Go door to door if necessary. Organized canvassing
- Get millennials involved
- Communicate with politicians
- Build up the westside aggressively.
- Hold City accountable

School Issues Curriculum

- Curriculum Culturally responsive pedagogy
- Teach employable skills
- Curriculum that's relevant and meaningful to poor people and people of color

Parenting

- Consistent parent outreach to develop plans of higher education with students in high school. My parents had no clue what to do and how and when etc. Everything falls on a 15-year-old kid.
- In school: Parental involvement
- Instill value of education
- Family education: reach families
- Pre-Head Start
- Reach out to and connect with families and teach soft skills
- More parent conference training.
- Wrap around services

City and School Issues Trauma

- Generation Trauma recoup past parents
- Social work
- DCFS: social workers for kids and families without the threat of DCFS
- Boots on the ground. More social workers and counseling. Tutoring services sponsored by the city or non-profits that work directly with teachers.

Crime Issue

- Do case by case review of people who have committed crimes. For "ex-cusable crimes" hire.
- Reference: Hiring people with felony convictions

Areas to Improve Social Life

- Pinecreek doesn't offer lifestyle activities that encourage diverse community
- Not just minority organizations but all community organizations need to communicate their events.

Welcoming

- Community Fair for schools and city to welcome new hires.
- Reach out to newcomers and welcome them. Create a welcome program.
- Plan welcome events in neighborhood groups. Get to know them on a first name basis.

- If we reach out, we will find that we have more in common than that which separates.
- Establish NEIGHBORHOOD WELCOMING GROUPS.
- Open our homes for meals, small gatherings
- Invite them to our organization

Improve Pinecreek's Reputation

- Pinecreek can and should be an example metropolitan area.
- Encourage people to dream big.
- Getting people to say we need to love our community to keep people to stay.
- Pinecreek is boring! Need more activities for young adults. Westside communities need to pleasant place to live in
- Positive people in the community
- Need to be careful about what we say to others and ourselves in talking about our city. Stop negative comments. Speak positive things.
- Ways to be proud of being here.
- What or why African American come and stay in Pinecreek: Present Pinecreek reputation and culture does not impress people to come and remain
- Safety Issues
- Housing is affordable in Pinecreek.

Build Relationships

- Friendships should be formed in our daily lives. Interactions and all will follow. Positivity and love should be spread with people from the Organizations and the community will look upon them as a role model. Therefore, the minority will gain respect in the society and our city will flourish.
- Come together more
- Increase hope
- Look at what the needs are and not generalize
- Everyone has different needs. Important to build relationships to find out.
- Let kindness be your motivating factor
- It will be hard to attract and retain talent when Pinecreek consistently finds itself on the top of the worst places to live for African Americans; many of the people who were raised here and live here struggle to say what's great about the area and are developing exit strategies. Change that reality, change that mindset, and change the outcome.

Need to Feel Valued

- City must make "a place" in Pinecreek for minorities
- Take a chance on People of Color
- Different nationalities don't feel embraced. People want to feel that they are valued in all walks of life
- Racial disparities and racism is a condition stemming from the heart

- Healing starts at home with values and faith
- Continued support
- Hope, Faith, God
- Credentials for higher paying jobs
- The best paid people in the school board should be the teachers because the amount of work they are doing is immeasurable and that makes them so outstanding in the company or organization
- Respect each other's cultures
- Develop personal relationships
- Use Christian values in appreciating each person
- Don't come to the table with pre-conceived notions/prejudices
- WDI---Pinecreek Housing : African Americans don't feel they are qualified.
- If we each make effort to reach each other on personal level. Music, entertainment, everyone's values.
- Communication important. Show respect
- Job satisfaction. Value education for its own sake.
- Current culture sensitivity is lacking.
- Movement for westside. Keep moving East, disappointing to see the disparity of the eastside vs westside. No mall for young adult.
- Change culture
- Give serious consideration to people with disabilities. Perhaps they need encouraged.
- Everyone should feel included in the advancement of the city and everyone should get a balanced tax charge that reflect to what he or she is making in general.
- Recognition of teachers should be introduced in our city. If they do a good job then there is no argument of why they shouldn't get recognition. Mostly African American and Spanish communities since they are the minorities.
- Deal with the whole person-include emotional, spiritual, social
- Celebrating through the ARTS
- Get the ideas of young people and act on them
- Not exposed to these types of jobs. Didn't have a good relationship with police or teachers to want to do that kind of work.
- Make students feel valued. Community values you!

Need Confidence

- Change perception-feel you won't get job when you apply
- Not sure because of racism
- Self-efficacy
- These people who are unable to go to college need to be recognized because they are also able to do great things in the community. Not everyone is the same.
- Experienced disappointment and sadness of qualified applicants not hired by police & fire.
- There should be more communication/feedback why they didn't get the job.
- Help youth overcome the fears they have of pursuing dream careers.

- Give youth experiences seeing people of role models in positions of leadership.

Diversity Training

- Address that racism does exist
- City and district need to work out plan, encourage higher training/development
- Diversity teams in workplace
- Talk about racism
- Accept that Racism is the core problem.
- Oneness for humanity and safe places to communicate with each other in community. How do we raise that up for people to see?
- Respect: if I say it is racism, it is
- As a community, diversity, value, culture, bias training

Human Resource Dept

- At my job I see the white employees being groomed and helped to develop skills so they can move up and get a promotion but no one seems to do that for People of Color.
- Soft skills training: typing and time management
- Typing on gaps on soft skill on applications. We will train
- Teachers: eliminate the ed TPA

$$$$

- Resources so that monetary issues do not prevent future endeavors
- Need to keep up with labor market as far as salaries in the area.
- Equitable living conditions.
- Increase salaries. Increase incentives.
- The city should look upon lowering the property taxes because not everyone can afford it. Mostly African American and Latino communities.

Communication

- Create a social media position. The position would run constant ads and study the analysts to target certain audiences. Sub-categories should include a feedback improvement page, diversity page, job posting, social services etc. They should connect parents and students and public to proper services. Give people the option to text back and forth with schools. Most don't check email
- Community with diversity proper building communication. Different outlet for everyone.
- Mean what you say: Lack of communication
- Bring info to outside groups
- Continuing outreach is ongoing
- Be honest; manipulation of data, numbers, and language rarely goes unnoticed
- Need to share concerns to all; not just a small group

Question 3: Retention Solutions: What can our community organizations do to support the African American and Latino staff/residents in our community so they feel valued and happy and will want to make Pinecreek their life-long home?

Welcoming

- When minority hired, current employees need to be welcoming. Training on welcoming diverse work force.
- Have receptions & celebrate new people when they come into town to welcome them.
- Welcome committee

Promotions/Opportunities

- Make sure positions are available to meet the requirements to layer to move up into job positions.
- Teachers should get a better working positions so that they will not be demotivated and stay on the run to look for another better job. This also applies to all kinds of jobs in the City of Pinecreek.
- Give more opportunities
- Find better jobs for all throughout city—for both members of all family
- Retention is important. Doesn't work here. People see opportunities other businesses offer that Pinecreek doesn't.

Racism

- Prevent racial battle fatigue-only one in the room or group
- Get to core issues-Obstacles that appear to cause battle fatigue
- Subtle discrimination: need watchdog not paid by organizations i.e. city, school district
- Fear of Retaliation: people withhold criticism of place of employment
- No one indispensable-need to complain to have solutions.
- Judge minorities in high paying jobs like they did not fairly earn.
- Racism on people having high paying jobs.
- Enforcing rules only on minorities, not general workforce.
- Watch dog society with hands on help. Silent racism of current employees. Minorities don't complain about treatment for fear of retaliation.
- Have outside group able to talk to employees on treatment.
- Black people in professional positions keep quiet about inequity.
- Helpful for teaching staff to reflect demographics of the student

Support

- Providing a mentorship and making the entire staff aware of what's happening so the issues are on people's minds
- Mentoring needed due to discrimination

- Provide support and give ideas of how to handle situations
- Mentor Mentor/Mentee-same ethnic background will ...Keep talking about this.
- Be honest in city to address real problems. Targeted mentorship
- Must retain and support advancement for People of Color
- Mentors when in profession
- Person to go to community. Need help getting qualified mentoring program
- Constantly continue the conversation to keep program alive to work. People need to feel valued.
- Mentoring Group
- Develop structured approach for addressing needs of new hires on ongoing basis until they are engraved into community.
- Culture & Climate Supportive
- People need to know that there are people are going through what you're going through.
- Encourage participation
- Pinecreek as a community does not welcome or support the culture chain

Culture of the Organization

- Trickle down from CEO
- Company values
- History of company and people in company
- Company values its employees.

Evaluations

- Have expectations in writing and have signed.
- Multiple people to evaluate person
- Prevent having to be mandated for correction or forced.

Youth

- Work to encourage youth to stay in Pinecreek
- Young people need to know reason for staying here

Social Issues

- City can organize social events for Black and Hispanic culture in citywide events. •Events need to be not just "white" centered.
- Ways to make a life in Pinecreek-Not Chicago
- Education plays a big part and relationship
- Aware of city events of weekends • Fun Activities for youth
- Diverse activities
- Be happy outside of work
- Organize events for all generations o connect= app for what's happening • "Green Book" where you can to see things—dating scene

- Where can you find things to do!
- Communication to people
- Cultural events for minorities
  Organizations need to set up calendar of events. All churches -Community events calendar

Human Resources

- Check how happy the current African American Teachers are in Pinecreek School District
- Build in a way to monitor level of satisfaction of new hires. Establish trust so they be honest.
- Retention is a greater problem. Pinecreek Public School has had numerous African American administrators and teachers.
- Exit interviews with young people to get at key issues and ways to resolve.

General Ideas/Thoughts

- Why was the event planned and held under white leadership?
- Community Activism needs to be viewed separately from employment.
- Lead by example
- Stop current process and actions to Eliminate Racism.
- Continue positive conversations about these issues.
- Add more time to next gathering (2 1⁄2 hours)
- Send out questions ahead of time to give people time to think
- This kind of dialogue should continue so people can give their suggestions. This is essential.
- Doing this event more often
- Ongoing invitation to keep doing this
- It will take more than a single event to make significant changes.
- Stop doing what is being done
- Current system is working
- Starting and continuing plans

APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions:

Demographic
How long have you lived in Pinecreek?

Please describe your involvement in the city of Pinecreek.

Community involvement
Please describe your involvement in any community groups in Pinecreek.

What motivated you to take part in these groups?

1. In your mind, what have these groups accomplished?
2. What types of people have been involved in these groups?

Could you talk specifically about Eliminate Racism?

What are Eliminate Racism's strengths? What are areas of growth?

What do you think the group has accomplished thus far?
Why do you think this?

Has there been anything surprising about the group?

Do you have any theories or ideas about why the Latino/Latinx population is not involved?

Education
Could you please describe your background with the local schools, if you have any?

I have heard mixed reports on the *Concerned Community Members* case. Many people that I've talked to have said it was necessary, but they are unsure of the outcomes (including the high tax rate). What is your take on the *Concerned Community Members* case and its subsequent results? What role does it play today?

Religious organizations
Please describe your background and involvement with religious institutions in the city, if you have any.

What do you see as the city's religious leaders' role within the larger Pinecreek community? What about in its education system? In your opinion, what do you think these leaders' roles should be?

Broadly
What do you see as your own role within the community?

What do you see as the state of race in Pinecreek?

Ideas of Citizenship

Could you please describe an ideal citizen? What type of person is it? What activities do they participate in?

Can you provide me with a community member in Pinecreek who you see as being an ideal/good citizen? Do you know them personally?

What are the qualities of a "bad" citizen? Have you known anyone who you think of as being a "bad" citizen? Can you describe them? Why do you view them as "bad?"

Would you describe yourself as a "good" or "bad" citizen?

Could you describe what you see as a "good" community group? What are the qualities of a "good" group?

Can you tell me about a "bad" community group? What are the qualities of a "bad" group?

Follow-up questions

Is there anything else you would like to say about your involvement in this group and its interaction with the Pinecreek community? Is there a question I should have asked you but didn't?

Is there anyone else that you know who you would recommend that I speak with?

APPENDIX E

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

EXEMPTION GRANTED

Gustavo Fischman
Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - Tempe
480/965-5225
fischman@asu.edu

Dear Gustavo Fischman:

On 7/30/2018 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Educational and Religious Choices: Religious Beliefs and School Resegregation
Investigator:	Gustavo Fischman
IRB ID:	STUDY00008400
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• Winn_IRB_SocialBehavioral.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • IRB Recruitment Email.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Consent Form Draft.pdf, Category: Consent Form; • IRB Interview questions.pdf, Category: Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions);

The IRB determined that the protocol is considered exempt pursuant to Federal Regulations 45CFR46 (2) Tests, surveys, interviews, or observation on 7/30/2018.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Sincerely,
IRB Administrator

cc: Kevin Winn
Kevin Winn