EXPLORING SUPPORT FOR THE EXTRACURRICULUM IN A TIME OF FISCAL CONSTRAINT AND STANDARDS-BASED REFORM:
A CASE STUDY OF ONE PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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by
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Abstract

Although much has been researched and written about the value of extracurricular programs in U.S. public schools, few studies have addressed the combined effect that school reform initiatives, including myriad standardized tests, accountability measures, and massive financial crisis which have become more commonplace during periods of economic recession, have had on the extracurriculum. This study sought to document what has happened to extracurricular programs during such periods.

In this research, the case study method was chosen to address this topic. A typical school district in Pennsylvania characterized by an average pupil population, reasonable expenditures per pupil, and mixed results in both curricular and extracurricular affairs was selected for examination. The study sought to identify and explain what was happening to student activities, co-curricular programs such as band, choir, and vocational education, and organized scholastic athletic programs during an unprecedented era of reform. Further, the study identified processes being used by school officials to evaluate the value assigned to and support for these programs and documented those involved in the decision-making process. Finally, the study also addressed whether or not the final actions of the school district were supported by the school community and if the stakeholders of the school district were given a voice in the decision-making process.

The study concluded that while a formal process was devised and used by the district in evaluating its expenses and trimming a $1 million-plus deficit in the operating budget, the agreed-upon model was of limited practical use during the period of actual budget reductions. More importantly, the study argued that while many school districts choose to limit extracurricular programs as a cost-saving measure, the practice is both counterintuitive and counterproductive.

Several poignant examples of program reductions and eliminations from within the district are juxtaposed with the available literature on extracurricular programs. Important narratives taken from interview data reveal significant insights into the decision-making process and roles of key decision-makers. The findings suggest that influential leaders and key school administrators are the most important figures in the decision-making process; community members expect them to identify and provide the best possible solutions for the district.

This study’s final conclusion, which is that a system of schooling void of extra- and co-curricular programs holds a narrow view of modern education, provides the foundation for the implications of the findings and for suggestions for further research.
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Financial struggles and accountability were nothing new to Pennsylvania’s public schools when the latest round of reform began in the fall of 2010. When the 2011 state budget was announced, however, many schools found themselves facing multi-million-dollar operating deficits for the first time. In contrast to previous financial reforms, this crisis actually decreased the amount of state funding each school district was allocated. Public educators have remained firm in their resolve to continue providing a quality education to students at an affordable cost to tax payers, but the pressure to perform well by standardized testing measurements combined with what has been described as the most massive financial crisis ever to hit public schools has left many students, parents, and school officials wondering how the money to maintain valued traditions and extracurricular activities for students is going to be generated in these uncertain economic times.

A review of the literature suggests that extracurricular activities are in danger of losing what little support remains for them despite a growing body of scholarly research that demonstrates a positive correlation among student involvement with the extracurriculum, adolescent growth and development, and academic achievement. A case study of impacts on one particular Pennsylvania school district may lead scholars and practitioners to reevaluate how and why extracurricular programs are losing support. Further, the investigation of the decision-making process for extracurricular subjects can refocus the motivation of educational decision-makers and explore who is involved in
extracurricular decision-making and whether their voice is given an authentic representation.

**An Overview of the Study**

Pennsylvania’s standardized testing requirements, including the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and the more recent Keystone Examinations, have required school districts across the state to strategically align their curriculum design and instructional objectives with state standards and accountability measurements. This process has required school district personnel, school officials, parents, and students to work collaboratively to achieve high results. As the benchmarks for test results have been ratcheted higher, more time and more money have been invested into achieving better results. Students are receiving remedial instruction in small-group and one-on-one settings. Schools are hiring PSSA coaches in math and English to push students who are hovering just “below proficient” across the academic goal line and put another notch into the “proficient” column. Reallocating time or money from one area to the next means taking away support for one program and placing more emphasis on another.

Such has been the case with the accountability movement and academic programs. Subjects and activities that are not tested are relinquishing support for the subjects that are tested. The available literature suggests that despite positive outcomes associated with extracurricular participation (Broh, 2002; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Guest & Schneider, 2003; Holland & Andre, 1987; Mahoney, 2000; Marsh, 1989; McNeal, Jr., 1995, 1998; Murtaugh, 1988; Rehberg & Schafer, 1968; Snyder & Spreitzer, 2003), time and money are increasingly
being channeled away from school athletics and music programs, school clubs, elective courses, and the like, due to mounting pressure to perform well on standardized assessments.

The effects of years of school reform and public accountability on extracurricular programs has been profound but the financial crisis facing school districts at the time of this study threatened to make even greater changes to the extracurricular landscape overnight.

A review of the relevant literature uncovered previous investigations that revealed beneficial student outcomes associated with participation in extracurricular activities. Their efforts involved a mixture of national data sets and longitudinal studies to document the effect of student participation on grade point average, SAT scores, adolescent growth and development, drop-out rates, and personally destructive behavior such as drug and alcohol use and sexual activity (Broh, 2002; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Guest & Schneider, 2003; Holland & Andre, 1987; Mahoney, 2000; Marsh, 1989; McNeal, Jr., 1995, 1998; Murtaugh, 1988; Rehberg & Schafer, 1968; Snyder & Spreitzer, 2003). Those studies supported what Waller claimed in 1932: “Unquestionably, [student] activities contribute much to make the schools livable and are more effective than any other feature of the school in the molding of personality” (p. 119).

Despite the available research, school officials have begun to reduce extracurricular programming budgets, trim from their staffing needs, and reevaluate
everything from how many games the baseball team plays in a season to whether the band can share a ride with a neighboring district to the big game. As one administrative participant was quoted as saying in this study, “everything is now on the table”. If reports from states like New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Texas and Florida, where a similar shift in school funding has already taken place, are accurate, the setbacks experienced by these programs are only just beginning.

This case study was initiated as a “critical case” that sought to investigate how the extracurriculum had been affected by increased benchmarks on standardized tests and financial crisis in one Pennsylvania school. A qualitative research design enabled the principal investigator to observe and interact with school officials, administrators, faculty members, community members, parents, and students through school board meetings, structured interviews, and a school priority model (Appendix A) designed for the study.

This study used grounded theory and inductive analysis techniques proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Patton (1990), and Lincoln and Guba (1995) to record a narrative that could be applied to many communities throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

**Statement of the Problem**

Americans have grappled with the quality of public education for many years. Publications and reports from *A Nation at Risk*, through legislation such as *Goals 2000* and *No Child Left Behind*, have led the American public to the perception that public schools are failing to provide students with an adequate education. The recent push for rigorous testing of students has alerted school officials that the age of accountability, as
measured by standardized testing, is well underway. A simultaneous call for fiscal reform has complicated school reform initiatives and halted support for the extracurriculum—a term used throughout the available literature and this study to refer to program offerings that are not mandatory and typically occur after school hours (e.g., athletics) or during elective periods (e.g., band and choir, journalism)—as schools scramble to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), avoid administrative takeovers, and limit the effect of mounting support for school voucher programs.

One result of the multifaceted era of educational reform has been the increasingly limited support for extracurricular programs. From music to sports, art and cheerleading, the first item on the chopping block during financial constraints and standards-based reform seems to be the extracurriculum despite the fact that it typically accounts for less than 5% of a school district’s budget.

While some taxpayers and politicians propose that extracurricular programs drain financial resources from academic purposes, supporters argue that student activities provide students with a sense of self-worth, increase self-esteem, and teach valuable life lessons that result in higher achievement in the classroom, lower instances of dropout and self-destructive social behavior, and an increased connection to the school culture.

The notion that extracurricular activities have a crossover effect in the classroom is not new. Professor of education and noted scholar Willard Waller was convinced of the impact that extracurriculars had on school activity when in 1932 he wrote: “There are men who insist that they learned the most important lessons of life upon the football field.
They learned to struggle there and to hold on, and they learned to respect the rights of others and to play according to the rules” (Waller, 1932, p. 114). It is still true that for those very reasons scholars assert that extracurricular programs have a dramatic effect on students. In recent years, the effect of participation on at-risk populations has been a source of interest (Broh, 2002; Brown & Evans, 2002; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Mahoney, 2000; Marsh, 1992; McNeal, 1995) which has given rise to the argument that cutting activities from the extracurriculum has, or will soon, distance students from the school culture and associated curricular objectives of the district. “It’s a catch-22,” noted a school district administrator who participated in this research.

You want to follow your heart and do what is best for kids and you want to expose them to all these things that are going to enrich their lives […] by the same token, as a principal, you have to be concerned that if we don’t make these scores that we’re going to be in trouble and get a bad report card and the community is going to think we’re not doing a good job.

Opponents of extracurricular programs argue that the cost of providing students with these activities has dramatically risen to the point where tax dollars can no longer support coaching stipends, equipment and facilities management, or the high cost of transportation of students to games and performances. Referencing the simultaneous rising costs of meeting the academic needs of students and comparative statistics to international studies, school officials, educational reformists, and taxpayers rarely voice their opposition to the extracurriculum, but they do place a greater emphasis on academics, particularly in subjects that are most frequently tested (e.g., mathematics, English, science) and/or channel the limited resources of a public school budget away from nonacademic endeavors. In tough economic times, the decision to raise local
revenue is not always possible, but the effect that lost support is having on the extracurriculum is nonetheless real.

The debate as a whole needs first to address the aim of public education in America. While some believe that the purpose of school is to impart formal knowledge that will service students as they pursue post-secondary education or careers, others espouse the education of the “whole child” and view their activity at school—including the extracurriculum—as a microcosm of society. To that end, some view students’ participation in extracurricular activities as a learning process in itself. Others see the benefit of the extracurriculum only for the benefit that it provides to curricular coursework. In fact, although early forms of scholastic sports were viewed primarily as a means for boys to release their energies in positive ways that would simultaneously served to strengthen the bond between student and school, scholars later realized that it served organizational needs of school organizations (Bidwell, 1965; Waller, 1932). John Dewey referenced this distinction:

> Sometimes, perhaps, play games and constructive occupations are resorted to only for those reasons [diversion], with emphasis upon relief from the tedium and strain of ‘regular’ school work. There is no reason, however, for using them merely as an agreeable diversion” (Dewey, 1913, p. 228 in Burnett, 2000, p. 2).

Prior to the publication of A Nation at Risk (reference), there may have been a general level of caution that extracurricular activities had stolen student interests’ away from the classroom but it was not until the recent standardized testing push that the problem came to the fore. While research has not suggested that the extracurriculum
offers formal knowledge to students that can replace class recitations, many studies have attempted to summarize the benefits of student participation in response to mounting pressure to cut nonessential activities from a school’s budget. The most commonly researched effect of the extracurriculum has been its effect on grade point average and academic achievement. Other studies have investigated its effect on self-esteem, dropouts, drug and alcohol use, post-secondary achievement, and career orientation. A complete review of the benefits associated with the extracurriculum is offered in chapter two.

Despite the noted benefits of extracurricular participation, several public policies have limited student participation and student access to extra and co-curricular activities. No pass/No play legislation and the emergence user fees, known as pay-to-play programs, used to subsidized ailing financial support from school and state budgets are two of which that have created hardships for some students who would otherwise choose to participate in organized school activities, clubs and sporting teams and thereby reap the aforementioned rewards. This is a noted departure from days past when the coach may have monitored student grades instead of the school or state legislation and the booster clubs would have been able to raise the necessary funds to keep programs afloat with a bake sale.

To compound the philosophical debate surrounding public education, the economic recession that began to sweep the country in the fall of 2008 significantly limited resources provided to the local school district. The lasting impact of the economic downturn has begun to take a noticeable toll in state education budgets. Despite
community support and students’ commitment to participate in the extracurriculum, school officials are often forced to consider program suspension and/or total elimination in an effort to either balance their budget or achieve state assessment objectives.

States including Florida, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and Texas have all made sweeping adjustments to the extracurriculum at the local level in order to keep schools in session, teachers in the classroom, and students performing well on standardized tests. In each case, changes to the extracurriculum have provided a portion of the fiscal resources necessary to support core curricula and the business of educating students. Other states are finding that they may have escaped the first round of financial hardships but now look to neighboring states for guidance as they too have fallen victim to the recession and increasingly limited state funding.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has just begun to feel the combined effect of increased requirements for state-wide academic assessments and financial reform that has created deep cuts in education funding. The election of a fiscally conservative governor in the fall of 2010 who ran on a platform that included a promise to reign control over the state’s ailing budget and provide students in failing schools with a voucher program aimed at eliminating geographic inequalities in the state’s educational system has primed educators and reformists for a debate over what stays and what goes. Caught in the middle are school officials and administrators whose job it is to ensure the education of students first but also to lead their school communities through an increasingly political landscape with regard to education.
Every attempt may be made in some localities to prevent extracurricular programs from bearing the brunt of cutbacks. In many instances, however, the extracurriculum is being stripped of vital resources necessary to keep it afloat. What has yet to be identified and investigated is who is behind those decisions and what their motivating factors are in support of cost-cutting recommendations.

It is now time to investigate what is happening in our public schools with respect to extracurricular programming. A review of the available literature on extracurricular programming has yielded a wealth of information on the benefits of the extracurriculum and how schools have begun to compensate for economic shortfalls. What has yet to be explored is how schools are dealing with the unprecedented one-two punch of academic reform and the massive fiscal reform that has swept the nation and who gets a “say” in the decision-making process. For these reasons, case study research is a valuable tool in highlighting what is happening in our schools and the motivations behind changes in public school policy—this was certainly the case at the time of the study described here.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of what happened to extracurricular programs in one particular Pennsylvanian school district when the combined effect of standards-based reform efforts and a reduction in financial support from state education funding forced the district to reevaluate every line of and program in its operational budget. Data were also collected on the motivations and decision-making process followed by and with school officials and community members, in order to more fully understand the phenomenon.
Data were then compared to the research participants’ school priority models (Appendix A) and data collected through interviews with school officials, community members, taxpayers, parents, and students in order to determine whether the community’s voice had been heard during the decision-making process. If the decision was made based on apparent community consensus, the researcher looked for a connection between administrative decision-making and community input. If, however, a disparity came to light, the researcher sought an alternative explanation for the resulting action.

Methods and models utilized by the school in examining the 2011–12 budget were also explored and explained.

The specific research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What reductions were made to extracurricular programs at the Keensville¹ School District when the combined effect of standards-based reform efforts and a significant reduction in state appropriations in educational funding forced schools and communities to reevaluate curricular and extracurricular offerings?

2. What process was used to evaluate programs and determine the source of cost-saving measures?

3. Who was involved in the decision-making process (e.g., taxpayers, parents, student participants)?

4. Did the community agree with the final decisions made; if the community did not agree, what were the explanations for any disparities between the community’s voice and the final outcome?

¹ The name “Keensville School District” is a pseudonym. All identifiers have been removed in order to protect the participating school district’s anonymity.
Methodology

In order to investigate the research questions, the study utilized a triangulated method of data collection that included interviews, participant observation, and a school priority model (Appendix A). Data were analyzed using grounded theory methods which were intended to reveal themes indigenous to the sample school district and apply concepts derived from the literature review.

Data were collected over a three-month period during the summer of 2011. Multiple rounds of interviews were conducted with school employees, including teachers, department heads, building-level administrators and central office administrators. Interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix C). Coaches, parents, and students were also interviewed at length using a separate interview protocol (Appendix D). The concluding exercise of each interview was development by each individual of a school priority model (Appendix A). Only participants who were interviewed completed a priority model.

Public documents, including school board meeting minutes, meeting summaries, news articles, school newsletters, and publically circulated brochures and handouts, were also collected and treated as data. Data were simultaneously collected and analyzed. Once themes had been developed for the purposes of coding, additional correspondence was initiated to supplement the interview data.

A full explanation of the study’s methodology is offered in chapter three.
Need for the Study

This case study was necessary because of the possibility that standards-based reform initiatives and budget crisis will cause many school districts to consider reducing their support for extracurricular programs in order to resolve part of the school reform puzzle. A review of the relevant literature revealed little record of how programs lose support, funding, or both; we do not know if these decisions are made for personal or professional reasons, solely based on economic factors, or something completely unique to that particular circumstance. There is relatively little data on whether school board resolutions accurately reflect the wishes of the school community, taxpayers, and business leaders, despite the knowledge that school policies and offerings can have an effect on local residence and commerce (Hu, 2010; Staples, 2009).

Case study research is necessary to understand the impact of reform initiatives on curricular and extracurricular programming for students. To date, scholarly research on the extracurriculum has primarily focused on the benefits of student participation and done so using national data sets from the 1980s. Much of the scholarly debate that takes place today is based on data that are now three decades old.

This case study research not only provided examples of what has been reported as a reduction in support for extracurricular programs but illustrated the ethical conundrum that has faced school officials in recent years with regard to shrinking budgets, increased academic demands, and stricter community scrutiny. It highlighted who was involved in the decision-making process and to what extent their opinions influenced the final outcomes associated with extracurriculum support. Further, it illustrated how school
personnel, extracurricular advisors, taxpayers, parents, and students viewed local school priorities and how reform initiatives were handled with respect to extracurricular programming.

While school districts across the nation have faced similar complications due to state funding, assessments, and community support, and the demise of program after program has been documented in numerous states, no connection has yet been made to the field of decision-making. Thus, not only are programs disappearing at an alarming rate but no data are available to understand how or why. The time to understand these decisions has never been as critical for the future of public education. The method for doing so is case study research. This study was an attempt to explore the divide between what is intended through policy making and what is happening in our schools. Without this research school officials and community members alike are destined to accept arbitrary actions and question the relationship between school and community. At worst this study highlighted inadequacies in the relationship between school and community or the precarious situation that presents itself to decision makers across the Commonwealth. At best it served as a model that can be improved upon in future years to serve the needs of students, community members, and school officials when standards-based reform and financial constraints threaten valued extracurricular programming in public schools.

**Limitations of the Study**

Case study research carries with it certain limitations that can be perceived as weaknesses in a study’s design with regard to the selection of a case study site, type and amount of data collected, methods and instruments used to collect data, and analysis of
the data itself. The researcher acknowledged several of these limitations throughout the course of this and subsequent chapters.

The first limitation was the selection of a research site—in this case, it was one at which the principal investigator was employed at the time of the study. The researcher acknowledges that the selection of the school may be judged by some as a design flaw that could render this study’s data and conclusions less valid than would have been the case with a randomly sampled district. The researcher contends, however, that the established professional relationships within the district allowed for more effective and efficient collection of rich data and analysis, as reported in chapters four and five. Additionally, the school selected also met several criteria, listed in chapter three. The size of the Keensville high school was about 750 students—a medium-sized district in Pennsylvania. The expenditures per pupil were listed at just under $9,000 where the national average was just under $10,000. The school had moderate success on state-wide testing exams and had demonstrated a commitment to extra- and co-curricular programs that had traditionally benefited from the financial support of the school district. Therefore, the Keensville School District was an appropriate district in which to engage in critical case study research.

The instruments and methodology used to collect and analyze data reflected the researcher’s interests. Any research that uses the single-researcher design is criticized for having inherent biases not only in the analysis phase but also with regard to data collection. This limitation could raise serious questions about the reliability of the data. The researcher recognized that other instruments, such as surveys, questionnaires, and/or
different interview strategies and questions, could have yielded different results. For the purpose of this study these were sufficient, however; in the final chapter the researcher encourages further investigation into the topic and the use of different data collection techniques and multiple investigators.

Finally, the duration of the study and the relatively small number of participants could call into question the validity of the results. While these factors were given consideration during the study’s conception, it was determined that the phenomenon to be investigated would develop rapidly. A sincere effort was made to include all key decision-makers and stakeholders, though not all who were invited to participate in the study ultimately made the time to be interviewed. The principal investigator’s five-year relationship with the school community may compensate for the deficiency of longevity to some extent though it is acknowledged that a longer time frame and more participants may have been preferable were it not for limited time and resources that ultimately affect even the best of educational research.
Chapter 2
An Introduction to a Review of the Relevant Literature

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, entitled *A Nation at Risk* (reference), sent shockwaves through school districts and educational communities around the country. For the first time since the “Space Race,” the U.S. public was put on notice that the youth in our country were falling behind those in other countries and that public schools in America were not matching up in the global scheme of education by some international comparisons (Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). *Goals 2000* (reference) again stressed the importance of setting higher standards in public education and working toward a more effective and efficient means of educating students by reporting low performance levels, particularly in the fields of science and mathematics, and setting new standards for students, teachers, administrators and school officials.

More recently, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) again refocused the collective energy of educators towards providing more than a basic education. The move toward performance-based testing has channeled schools’ limited resources toward several distinct objectives associated with the core curricula—subjects that are not only mandatory for graduation but commonly tested as individual and school district performance indicators.

Simultaneously, schools were hit with a massive financial crisis that required
operating budgets to be dramatically reduced in a short timeframe. Almost overnight public schools found themselves facing multi-million dollar deficits with no way to raise enough revenue to continue business as usual.

According to the literature, this led some school districts and scholars to suggest that budget reductions should be accomplished by prioritizing budget items according to the mission of schools. The concentric circle model (Appendix D), for instance, is one method used by schools and scholars to systematically address deficits while remaining conscious of looming standardized testing requirements. The danger of the model, however, is that it is not representative of a holistic view of learning nor is it responsive to a growing body of research which suggests that participation in extracurricular activities actually promotes positive social behavior, academic prowess, and health adolescent behavior.

The attention that has been given to required curricular subjects such as mathematics, English, and the sciences has fueled a growing debate over funding both at the state and local levels. Increasing pressure from state and federal agencies to ensure that students perform well on high stakes testing regimes has limited remaining resources for fine arts programs, high school athletics, student activities, and the like. Unable to sustain the financial resources necessary to provide students with the proper facilities, instructional staffing for sporting events, or the transportation and equipment necessary for school music programs, communities are often forced to consider what is essential to the process of schooling and what is to be otherwise labeled frivolous and therefore nonessential. As Holland and Andre (1987) noted, this debate is based on the value
positions within school communities. Schools are forced to choose an *academic* or *developmental* curricular preference. In response, many schools develop academic tracks for students, general education tracks, and vocational tracks.

To students or alumni of a public school who have participated in co- and extra-curricular activities, the realization that the existence of these activities and athletics is being threatened is startling and cause for great concern. Many adults fondly recall their days on the athletic fields and/or the performance stage and attribute a portion of who they have become in their adult life to their membership with an athletic team or performance ensemble in high school. As Waller, author of *The Sociology of Teaching* (1932), once wrote, “There are men who insist that they learned the most important lessons of life upon the football field. They learned to struggle there and to hold on, and they learned to respect the rights of others and to pay according to the rules” (p. 114). Echoing Waller’s thoughts, a growing body of research suggests that participation in the extracurriculum during the high school years is predictive of higher grade point averages, lower instances of high school dropout, higher college aspirations, a greater sense of satisfaction with career opportunities and eventual job placement, and fewer instances of self-destructive and criminal behavior (Broh, 2002; Brown & Evans, 2002; Chase et al., 1987; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Guest & Schneider, 2003; Haensly et al., 1985; Holland & Andre, 1987; Mahoney, 2000; Marsh, 1989; McNeal, Jr., 1995, 1998; Murtaugh, 1988; Rehberg & Schafer, 1968; Snyder & Spreitzer, 2003).

The combined analysis of relevant literature and anecdotal evidence suggests that
while some view the extracurriculum as a distraction to the educational process (Coleman, 1961; Marsh, 1988), others view it as an essential component of a well-rounded education (Holland & Andre, 1987). Although there seems to be no easy solutions to the ongoing ideological debate surrounding the improvement of schooling in the U.S., there is some consensus on the need for and benefits of the extracurriculum. A review of scholarly activity on the topic of extracurricular participation is therefore warranted.

**The Benefits of Extracurricular Participation**

The benefits of the extracurriculum have been well documented throughout the better part of the 20th century. Most notably, both theory and practice suggest that students who participate in school sports or activities such as band, drama, student government, high school athletics, and newspaper, report higher levels of self-esteem, higher levels of motivation, lower drop-out rates, and higher grade point averages than their non-participant peers (Broh, 2002; Brown & Evans, 2002; Chase et al., 1987; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Guest & Schneider, 2003; Haensly et al., 1985; Holland & Andre, 1987; Mahoney, 2000; Marsh, 1989; McNeal, Jr., 1995, 1998; Murtaugh, 1988; Rehberg & Schafer, 1968; Snyder & Spreitzer, 2003). All of these benefits have also been associated with greater success at the post-secondary education level, with regard to career opportunities and eventual satisfaction in the job market. While the available research voices a mixture of support and skepticism toward the extracurriculum, scholars have uncovered mediating factors that may also explain positive correlation data to academic achievement that cannot be ignored when reporting their findings. Although those factors are discussed in detail within a
subsequent portion of this chapter, it is nonetheless important to note their existence when summarizing findings.

The most commonly cited benefit of student participation in extracurricular activities is its effect on academic performance. Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Broh (2002) found a positive correlation between participation and academic achievement, particularly in the subjects of mathematics and English, even after controlling for students’ background characteristics. Similarly, Holland and Andre (1987) reported “somewhat higher grade point averages” (p. 441) in athletic participants compared to non-athletes, and Landers, Feltz, Obermeier, and Brouse (1978) reported higher SAT scores in males who participated in both athletic and service activities when compared to less involved students.

Hanks and Eckland’s study (1976) used the 1970 Explorations in Equality of Opportunity survey, which included a targeted sample of more than 4,000 high school students, to investigate the academic and social consequences of participation in the extracurriculum during the formative years. Their results yielded no indication that participation in high school athletics was detrimental to academic performance or achievement (Hanks & Eckland, 1976, p. 284). In fact, the direct effect of participation in the extracurriculum was stronger than any other predictor of academic achievement compared to preexisting data from the same sample set (Ibid., p. 285).

Holland and Andre (1987) reported that participation in activities for which the school community valued led to an increased self-concept and self-esteem (Holland &
Andre, 1987, p. 439). Their research further concluded that the effect of participation was greatest in small schools versus large schools, more amongst boys than girls, and more amongst first-string athletes versus second-string athletes (Ibid., pp. 439–440). These findings suggest that students who are exposed to high-quality programs will experience a greater sense of self-worth and self-esteem than those participating in low quality or unsuccessful programs. The authors hypothesized that a carry-over effect occurred from success on the athletic field to success in the classroom.

The key to a quality extracurricular program and the associated positive outcomes for students, as Eccles and Templeton (2002) outlined, has to do with several inherent elements in the extracurriculum. First, there must be developmentally appropriate activities that are supervised by caring and qualified adults. The example given by the authors is the Big Brothers/Big Sisters campaign (p. 164) but similar qualities exist within activities that are even more common throughout public high schools. The connections made by students with both their peers and a mentor figure, be that a coach or advisor, creates a sense of belonging for the student and deeply engrained ties to the school setting that are often absent from curricular offerings due to the length and nature of the teacher-student relationship in a typical forty-minute class that meets for one academic year. Further, through their participation as athletes or musicians, students begin to experience success and formulate their sense of self and worth based on how those closest to them view their participation. In essence, this becomes much like the self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby the more success the student expects of his or herself, the greater the likelihood that he or she will obtain that success.
Nowhere was this theory more evident than in Eccles, Stone, and Hunt’s 2003 study in which students were asked to label themselves based on characters from the 1985 movie *The Breakfast Club*—a pop culture film about stereotypical high school students who were forced to acknowledge their similarities and differences during a Saturday morning detention. Not surprisingly, students who labeled themselves as a “criminal” after the movie’s portrayal of such a character were more likely to engage in socially destructive behavior and drop out of school before graduation (Eccles et al., 2003). Criminals were also less likely to be involved in structured social activities and extracurricular programs.

Students who viewed themselves as “brains” were most likely to have higher grade point averages and fewer instances of drug and alcohol use. Students who labeled themselves as “jocks” and “princesses” were also more likely to have higher grade point averages, a greater social network and pattern of academically oriented friends, and higher levels of self-esteem. It should be noted that “jocks” and “princesses” had mixed results on such data as underage drinking and drug use. Nonetheless, “brains,” “jocks,” and “princesses” had the lowest reported rate of dropping out of high school before graduation and exhibited a greater connection to the school culture, whereas “criminals” reported a feeling of detachment from school life which in many cases led to terminating their studies before earning a diploma (pp. 878–879).

These results are illustrative of a more generalizable trend that suggests participation in the extracurriculum is correlated with higher academic aspirations and higher academic performance (Feldman & Matjesko, 2005; Haensly et al., 1985). While
these studies have attempted to shed some light on the validity of these assertions, most authors agree that the self-selective nature of extracurricular participation and accompanying moderating factors do in part account for the marginal academic gains for participants as compared to their peers.

*Social Benefits of Student Participation and the “Leading Crowd” Theory*

The debate over educational objectives in secondary schooling is succinctly summarized in Holland and Andre’s (1987) article, “Extracurricular activities in secondary school: What is known, what needs to be known?” The authors argued that any discussion on the comprehensive objectives of public schooling must begin with an analysis of educational values. In their opinion, “value positions about schools have either an *academic* or *developmental* perspective. The academic perspective focuses on intellectual competence and stresses the purpose of schools is the *pursuit of academic excellence and transmission of formal knowledge*” [emphasis added] (Holland & Andre, 1987, p. 438). Further, this perspective discredits the educational value of the extracurriculum, thereby positing its worth as primarily recreational. In contrast, “the developmental position is more equalitarian, stressing that the development of all individuals must be considered in planning a school program” (Ibid.). From this view, the nonacademic program “can be as important as academic programs in facilitating the development of the individual” (Ibid.).

Bidwell (1965) similarly discussed schools as organizations within three basic assumptions that supplement the ideas of Holland and Andre. According to Bidwell, schools are client-serving. “From this assumption, it follows that the central goal of any
school system is to prepare students for adult status, by training them in the knowledge and skills, and by indoctrinating them in the moral orientations, which adult roles require” (Bidwell, 1965, p. 973). This issue is more fully addressed later in this and subsequent chapters. Next, he observed that schools believed in a fundamental difference between teacher and student—mainly that teachers elected to engage in educational pursuits as a profession while students were required to attend school based on their age and social norms. This becomes particularly important in Bidwell’s third assumption—that school systems are bureaucratic by nature. Students naturally feel that their place within the organization is at the bottom of the system and that their collective voice is not well represented. The result is a sort of in-fighting between students and teachers, which is necessary to understand and control in order for schooling to take place. Admittedly, Bidwell conceded, the struggle of students to gain voice is not likely to end and perhaps holds some merit.

Bidwell (1965) reasoned that the teacher then has two motives because of this organizational imbalance. “One is to raise and focus on classroom activities student motives; the other is to control and discipline the classroom group so as to provide an orderly environment for learning” (Bidwell, 1965, p. 979). In contrast, the students are required to attend public school and may or may not be ready for academic pursuits. It follows that their efforts may not be consumed with either of the aforementioned teacher motives. In fact, studies conducted by Cook (1945), Gordon (1957), and Coleman (1961) all suggest that peer status, as evaluated by students, and subsequent motives of students are not driven by academic pursuits but by activities centered around the student society.
While these scholars acknowledged that the student society includes non-participants, each postulated that student activities, sports, and clubs are at the very center of student life and that the leaders of activities are clubs, which are the most influential leaders of the student society. Waller (1932) further believed that a hierarchy exists even within extracurricular programs from the same school.

The variety of activities is almost endless, for each of the activities […] has many subdivisions; these subdivisions are sometimes arranged in something of a hierarchy as in athletics, where the greatest distinction attaches to football, a little less to basketball, less yet to baseball and track (Waller, 1932, p. 112).

Bidwell (1965) referenced these studies and summarized characteristics that elevated peer status in boys, such as athletic prowess and dating success, and girls, such as good looks, clothing, and extracurricular activity (Bidwell, 1965, p. 983). Interestingly, academic success was least likely to affect what Gordon (1957) called the “dominant orientations” of adolescents. On the other hand, “extracurricular activities contributed most, to general social status” (Bidwell, 1965, p. 981).

Status is not always individualistic and does not have to be divisive by nature. For example, Waller (1932) observed the “we-feeling” that students experience as a member of the student society. Activities, he believed, give students something to rally behind and a starting point to develop school culture and tradition. As a result, traditions and expectations are passed down to younger generations—evidenced by school fight songs, chants, and/or dress codes and expectations.

Waller (1932) believed that activities and the extracurriculum served the school in
three distinct ways which ultimately return to traditions and expectations. First, “it drains off [students’] surplus energies and leaves them less inclined to get into mischief. […] In so far as [activities] have been evolved by the faculty, they have been intended as means of control, as outlets for adolescent energies or substitutes for tabooed activities” (Waller, 1932, pp. 112–115). He believed this was the most attractive means of assigning value to the extracurriculum for faculty members who may be otherwise inclined to reject the benefit of such programs.

The second purpose of the extracurriculum, according to Waller, was the ability of adults to redirect the attention of young men and women away from undesirable behavior and instead channel their thoughts and actions toward something more socially pleasing. The third purpose was to unite the school and its students. “It is perhaps as a means of unifying the entire school group that athletics seems most useful from the sociological perspective” (Waller, 1932, p. 115). Tension both within schools (e.g., students versus teachers) and between schools can be relieved via extracurricular participation and, to a smaller extent, observation.

Combined, these three observations serve the school and its faculties in a variety of ways, but it is the fourth justification that may carry the most weight in modern society. The extracurriculum, according to Waller, “is a powerful machine which is organized to whip all students into line for the support of athletic teams, and adroit school administrators learn to use it for the dissemination of other attitudes favorable to the faculty and the faculty police” (Bidwell, 1932, p. 116). Indeed, the extracurriculum should serve a higher purpose than stripping students of vigor and taking up time in their
personal schedules—something a treadmill and longer school days could accomplish just as easily. Activities pass on traditions, expectations, and morality, which have been developed and adapted through many generations. Those traditions are passed down both formally, through coaches and advisors, and informally, through older students.

Thus, a commonly proposed social benefit of extracurricular involvement is engagement in and amongst a group of peers who are highly motivated, goal-oriented, similarly inclined to take their studies seriously, and well-supported by the school faculty, their parents, and their parents’ social networks. Orientation in this so-called “leading crowd” (Broh, 2002; Coleman, 1961; Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Feldman & Matjesko, 2005; Holland & Andre, 1987) has advantages for adolescents both within the school community and beyond. By associating themselves with students who are more likely to attend class, understand the importance of studying and receiving good grades, more likely to have motivation to attend school beyond the secondary level (Broh, 2002), and less likely to engage in risky self-destructive behavior (Eccles, Stone & Hunt, 2003), these students create their own “social capital in the form of extended supportive networks of friends and adults” (Feldman & Matjasko, 2000, p. 162).

The result of their association with the leading crowd is two-fold. Their attitudes toward learning and the associated expectation to perform in the class is reinforced by their peer groups. In a 2002 study, Broh reported that “increases in social capital attributed to sports participation help students improve their grades more than their test scores” (p. 81). Although these results were not universally applicable to all extracurricular activities (intramurals, cheerleading, band, etc.), most showed positive
academic and social influences, after controlling for mediating factors, when compared to non-participant peers.

Academic success that is linked to the extracurriculum is consistent with the work of Gordon (1957), although notable differences exist. Gordon found that student participants, by virtue of proximity to teachers, were able to better gauge teacher expectations. “But paradoxically, the student subculture and the existence of the extracurriculum redefined the meaning of academic success” (Bidwell, 1965, p. 982). Therefore, higher grade point averages and classroom achievement were not necessarily associated with mastery of subject material. Higher grades, especially on subjective forms of assessment, may therefore have been the result of teacher bias or student knowledge of the teacher’s expectations.

While many benefits have been and will be discussed regarding the formal interactions of teacher and students, additional benefits of student participation are found in the informal structure and down-time of these activities. Not only are students encouraged or required (Burnett, 2001; Felt, 1986; Flygare, 1985; Slater, 1988) to earn passing marks, but their conversations with peers reveal to the individual how they compare to others in their class. Eccles (2003) asserted that “adolescents who play on the same teams or work together on projects or performances are likely to spend considerable amounts of ‘down-time’ together, developing new friendships; sharing experiences; discussing values, goals, and aspirations; and co-constructing activity-based peer cultures and identities“ (p. 875). In this sense, there is a constant monitoring of personal academic performance that serves as a type of formative evaluation. These expectations can propel
a student’s performance and inspire them to step up to the academic plate. They represent a means of motivation that is not easily duplicated in the traditional classroom.

Another social benefit to the extracurriculum and the leading crowd is non-familial relationships with adults. Coaches, mentors, directors, and parents of teammates can provide feedback and timely advice when adolescent ears otherwise close off to their parental figures. Eccles, Barber, Stone and Hunt (2003) reported finding evidence which suggested that participants “develop better mental health, motivation, and values in sports programs that emphasize skill acquisition and mastery motivation” (p. 882). It is speculated that even informal conversations with such parents of a peer group can have a dramatic effect on student self-esteem and goal-setting (Chase, Jacobs, & Meredith, 1987; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Holland & Andre, 1987; Matjasko, 2005; Marsh, 1992; Murtaugh, 1988). As Coleman (1961) asserted, “going out for football is related to being a member of the various elites more than any other variable in this study. […] There is a tendency toward control by the higher-educated, more middle-class students in the school” (p. 131).

Rehberg and Shafer (1968) applied the leading crowd theory to include minorities and at-risk students with respect to college aspirations.

A less disposed boy, namely one from the working class, however is less likely to associate with middle-class college-oriented friends. But, if a working-class or another less disposed boy participates in sports, and especially is he is successful in such participation, then he is more likely than comparable non-athletes to enter the leading crowd or at least to associate with college-oriented students, thereby becoming exposed to college-attending norms (p. 734).
Similar conclusions can be drawn for students who are less academically focused, students who are considering dropping out before graduation, and students who are engaged in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use.

In these extracurricular activities students are often casual observers in the decision-making process. They are similarly asked to manage their personal time and organizational commitments. In high school athletics, band, and student activities, they are held accountable for their actions and made aware of their responsibility to a team or group. Those same characteristics do not always hold true in the traditional classroom. More importantly, coaches, advisors, and mentors, have an opportunity to form healthy relationships with students because of the time involved in rehearsal, practice, travel, and performance. Once that relationship has been established and a mutual respect has been formed, non-familial adults have the ability to motivate and inspire students to perform at their best.

Broh (2002) suggested that the more interaction there is between adults and students, the more opportunity there is for students to gather information that can be used to support the learning process—both in the acquisition of social skills and formal knowledge. Through both formal and informal observations, students formulate their opinions about what it means to lead a successful career and lead a meaningful life at an early age.

Hanks and Eckland (1976) suggested that participation in the extracurriculum correlates highly with higher educational aspirations even after controlling for
socioeconomic status, standardized test scores, and grades. Students who are exposed to successful, caring adults are more likely to begin formulating their opinions about productive adult choices than are their non-participant peers (Eccles & Templeton, 2002; Eccles et al., 2003; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Holland & Andre, 1987; Marsh, 1992). From their observations, students begin a backward design of sorts, creating a preferred career path that mimics adults whom they respect. This phenomenon correlates with research available in the field of educational ethics and decision-making, and with what some scholars refer to as a “critical incident” (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007). For youth, involvement in the extracurriculum often leads to more of these defining moments and greater opportunities to see themselves as successful and productive members of society. Informal guidance throughout that process is often provided, sometimes unknowingly, by authority figures in the student’s life, including coaches, directors, and cooperating teachers.

**Increased Engagement and Higher Self-Esteem**

To date, research has focused on the relationship between extracurricular activities and higher self-esteem and student engagement. When investigating high school dropout rates, McNeal (1995) asked why students would choose part-time or full-time employment outside of the school setting as opposed to completing their degree program. He proposed that “dropouts rationally choose work over school for many competing reasons, including a desire to obtain the status of adult roles and a perceived necessity to seek employment because of financial burdens” (McNeal, 1995, p. 69). When the hours of employment and the immediate or perceived need to earn money or
status outweighs the eventual prospect of earning a secondary degree, students make the conscious decision to terminate their studies and join the workforce full-time.

The extracurriculum challenges students in a manner that is similar to part-time employment in structure; however, the structure of the extracurriculum typically unites the student with the school rather than pulling them away from it, for several reasons. First, time spent on regimented activities often requires students to remain in school for more hours than they would during a typical school day. As discussed earlier in this chapter, their interactions with adults in this setting often creates greater allegiances to the school and its personnel as well as a greater sense of pride in the school overall. Extracurricular activities do not often allow students the time to seek general employment or social activities that may otherwise divert their attention from the school culture, thereby giving them the adult-like roles of responsibility and importance while simultaneously strengthening their ties to the school. Participants are asked to manage their time, work with diverse populations, set goals and work toward achieving them, and in some cases, act as managers and leaders of small group assignments. As Marks (1977) suggested, time and energy are not necessarily finite resources. “Abundant energy is ‘found’ for anything to which we are committed, and we often feel more energetic after having done it” (Marks, 1977, p. 927). For students who are actively engaged in extracurricular activities, time spent in formalized athletic and performance-based activities does not create a diversion from reality. Instead, it gives them a greater appreciation for the context and environment within which they operate on a daily basis. This finding is consistent with Hanks and Eckland (1976), who suggested that:
Rather than diverting students, i.e. either their time or the their interests, from academic pursuits, participation in most extracurricular programs clearly encourages students compliance and it does so in a variety of ways... Given the fact that educational attainment, particularly going to college, is a major precondition to occupational prestige and status, participation in the extracurricular program is then another important stepping stone in the more general socioeconomic achievement process (p. 292).

Snyder and Spreitzer (1990) suggested several important determinants of increased engagement and motivation for athletic participants:

1.) If one is participating in sport there may be an increased interest in the school, including academic activities;
2.) To maintain athletic eligibility the athlete is motivated to perform at a higher academic level;
3.) Athletic success may lead to a heightened sense of self-worth that spills over into academic achievement;
4.) Coaches, teachers, and parents take a personal interest in athletes, including their classroom performance;
5.) Athletic participation may lead to membership in the elite peer groups and an orientation toward academic success; and
6.) The athlete may have the hope or expectation of participating in athletics in college (Hanks & Eckland, 1976, p. 391)

Their last point, that of hope and expectations, is as relevant for students at the time of participation as it is for future endeavors. This, too, is a self-fulfilling notion that is associated with success on the athletic field or in the performance hall. Students who associate themselves with success seek opportunities to replicate that feeling of fulfillment, be it in the classroom or in other activities and planning their futures.

Murtaugh (1988) suggested that students who participate in the extracurriculum have higher standards for themselves and their futures. He found that although many
participants expect to have success in their extracurricular field or activity in the future, they also had considered what he called more “realistic” expectations. Forty-two percent of the students in his study had “a career on the horizon” (p. 388) compared to slightly fewer of the regular education population and less than one-third of the special education population.

**A Reduction in Destructive Behavior**

To this point, this chapter has addressed the positive outcomes associated with the extracurriculum—greater academic expectations and higher achievement, various social benefits, and increased self-esteem. A significant body of research also exists on what extracurricular participants are less likely to do during the high school years. They are less likely to drop out of school. They are less likely to use or abuse alcohol and illegal substances. They are less likely to engage in premature and risky sexual behavior. They are less likely to exhibit socially destructive behavior. Such research suggests that practitioners should be as acutely aware of what student participants are not as likely to do as they are of what they are likely to do.

The extracurriculum has a unique ability to draw students into the school community and therefore reinforce more desirable behavior and personal attributes. Several important studies have addressed the effect of student-to-school connectedness (Broh, 2002; Brown & Evans, 2002; Mahoney, 2000; Marsh, 1992) and the aforementioned benefits. In addition to looking at general education students and student bodies as a whole, those works have also addressed the positive effect of such activities in reference to their effect with at-risk and minority populations. Brown and Evans’
(2003) work, for example, added ethnicity as a moderating variable to school connectedness. They hypothesized that the existing structural and societal factors of public schooling create what they called “push and pull effects” (Brown & Evan, 2003) on students.

Push effects are those factors located within the school environment that negatively impact a student and result in their rejections of the school experience. Pull effects recognize that school is only one segment of the student’s social arena. Other factors such as cultural expectations, parental influences, employment, and intimate relationships may affect school attachment and school success or failure (Brown & Evans, 2003, p. 53).

Such effects have a direct impact on student retention and dropout rates. Brown and Evans suggest that extracurricular participation may be one way of encouraging cultural diversity and an increased sense of communication within the school for at-risk students and their families. The extracurricular activity therefore serves to increase the pull effects and in doing so decreases the push effects that alienate students. They concluded that such participation should be a high priority, particularly for urban school districts (Brown & Evans, 2003, p. 54) in their efforts to increase expectations and set high academic and social standards for all students where dropout rates and school-to-family connectedness are lowest.

Several studies have noted lower dropout rates associated with extracurricular participation (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005); however, one of the most comprehensive works was that of McNeal’s (1995). Not only did his research concur with earlier studies on the likelihood of student participants completing their secondary education, he also
controlled for factors such as race, socioeconomic status, age, parent’s marital status, student’s employment status, grades and academic track. He found that students with higher expectations and higher levels of self-esteem were more likely to remain in secondary education. Students in minority groups were less likely than their White counterparts to drop out. Students employed, even on a part-time basis, were more likely to drop out. Interestingly, he also separated athletic participation from other activities, including fine arts. “The other statistically significant finding is that participation in the fine arts leads to an expected decrease of .167 units in the log-odds of dropping out; that is students who participated in the fine arts were an estimated 1.2 times less likely to drop out than were non-participants, when all else was held constant (McNeal, 1995, p. 69). Interestingly, Feldman and Matjasko seemed to have misinterpreted McNeal’s results in their 2005 article. Mistakenly, they reported that McNeal’s research “found that only sports participation was related to a lower probability of school dropout” (p. 182). While McNeal’s findings on multiple-participation were not as favorable for fine arts (p. 70) as his multiple-participation model, he nonetheless reported that the prototypical person’s likelihood of dropping out is still lower than a non-participant.

Mahoney (2000) agreed with conclusions offered from the earlier work of McNeal (1995). His work suggested that participation in just one extracurricular activity could be the difference between dropping out and graduation for at-risk students. In contrast, however, he did not associate school connectedness with the lower likelihood of dropping out. Instead, he proposed that the student’s personal relationships with their peers and adult figures such as coaches, directors, or mentors, caused them to choose to
stay in school. His argument supports the need for more research in this field and the notion that participation alone is not the key to creating better school connectedness and lower instances of drop-outs. The quality of the student experience in these programs and their sense of responsibility to and belonging in the school community has yet to be addressed in any formal study.

Many studies have investigated dropout rates and retention associated with extracurricular participation while others have more broadly looked at anti-social and self-destructive behavior that may in fact lead to dropping out. Behaviors that are considered to be unbecoming of youth have been cited in various research efforts as alcohol, tobacco, and drug use, increased or premature sexual activity, or criminal mischief and arrest. Mahoney (2000), for instance, considered broadly that the majority of participants in his study were more likely to graduate and less likely to be arrested as young adults (p. 509). Further, he found “significantly lower rates of adjustment problems” amongst both male and female participants when compared to non-participants (Mahoney, 2000, p. 512).

Feldman and Matjasko (2005) presented an inconclusive picture of extracurricular participation. First, they suggested that programs such as athletics and fine arts may do well to inform participants about socially acceptable practices and in so doing promote developmentally appropriate behavior from adolescent youth. An alternate view, and one that is quite contradictory to the leading crowd theory, argues that student participants are thrust into a peer group that may expose them prematurely to substance use and sexual activity. Although their report is inconclusive with regard to the positive or negative
effects of participation on these indicators, they do report that several studies involving participation in church groups, and athletic and nonathletic events involving one to four hours of participation per week, were “significantly less likely to use drugs or smoke cigarettes” (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005, p. 184). The exception that they noted to this generalization is Borden’s 2001 study which found that participation was actually the impetus for substance use. The authors concluded that more research is needed involving mediating factors and peer characteristics.

Perhaps the most interesting research to date was the aforementioned Eccles, Barber, Stone and Hunt (2003) study in which they asked participants to identify themselves with one of the characters from the 1985 film *The Breakfast Club*. Each student was then asked to associate their social characteristics as a princess, a jock, a brain, a basket-case, or a criminal. Fewer than 5% of the respondents omitted this question and were unable to identify with any of the categories. Not surprisingly, those identifying with a princess persona were most likely to be involved in performing arts and school-based activities such as student government or cheerleading. “Jocks” were most likely to be participants in football, basketball, and track. “Criminals” and “basket-cases” were most likely to be uninvolved in extracurricular activities.

Their research concluded that while “brains” had the highest overall GPA, princesses and jocks followed closely. “Criminals” had the lowest educational outcomes and the highest rate of alcohol consumption. The authors supplemented their findings with earlier work by Larson (1994), who found that 70% of criminals in this study dropped out of school. Eckert (1989) also found that “criminals” and “basket-cases” had
the lowest attachment to the school community (p. 878). More interestingly, the authors noted that students who associated themselves with one group over another tended to have close relationships with other students who also related to the same categories, thus supporting Coleman’s (1961) conclusion that peer groups can exert positive or negative influences on childhood aspirations and expectations.

**Restructuring the Extracurriculum**

Many of the positive outcomes associated with extracurriculum have been well documented and new research continues to draw even stronger connections between participation and achievement both on and off the athletic field and stage, yet extra- and co-curricular programs have experienced a significant reduction in the amount and type of support provided to them, due mainly to academic reform efforts and financial crises in education. Faced with a call for greater instructional accountability and increased fiscal responsibility, school districts are more often than not being asked to do more with less. To compound that challenge, the expectation of what schools can do with their increasingly finite resources has never been more unrealistic.

Proper funding must now be secured not only for the instruction of state-required curricula, but also for honors and advanced placement courses that make students more appealing to colleges and universities. The cost of additional course offerings further draws from a school’s operating budget that is largely consumed by teacher salaries and benefits as well as physical plant management and technology services.

The same can be said of high school athletics, student activities, and many other extracurricular programs that previously had not been financially exhausting to maintain.
for districts. The high cost of keeping up athletic fields, providing transportation to events, games, and competitions, and providing proper training equipment and facilities has forced schools to charge students for their participation. User fees have historically been met with concern about the “free and public” nature of the educational programs offered by schools. Most participants have faced the unfortunate reality, however, that absent their private contributions, these programs may be drastically reduced or terminated.

In many states, the emergence of pay-to-play programs, combined with no pass/no play policies and massive financial deficits in educational budgets, mark the beginning of the end for organized student extracurricular activities. In each case, a review of the available literature has revealed clues about why these decisions are seen as necessary, yet this comes as little relief to the thousands of students who remain silenced in the concert hall and sidelined on the playing field.

**The Emergence of Pay-to-Play Policies to Support the Extracurriculum**

While modern research underscores the value of extracurricular participation and its role in developing productive and healthy members of society, others contend that secondary education should prepare students for academic study alone, arguing that any program or activity that subverts students’ attention from academic study is frivolous, not to mention costly. Moreover, research involving extracurricular programs sometimes overemphasizes its potential value (Brown, 1988; McMillen, 1991; Taylor & Chiogioji, 1988). The standardized testing movement in education has enabled the debate about the need for certain subject matters to flourish. Subjects such as mathematics, history and the
hard sciences have always enjoyed the relative prestige of “core curricula” status, a prestige heightened by state testing requirements, while agricultural programs, fine arts, and vocational subjects have been labeled “elective” and therefore sometimes viewed as nonessential components of a school’s program of study. Some scholars have argued that athletic programs are every bit as important to a child’s development as the core curriculum, although these programs rank a distant third or worse when stacked against academic performance and fiscal reform.

In many states, the No Child Left Behind Act has given rise to a debate about state and federal funding of public schools. Now more than ever, schools have been forced to balance their budgets with additional restrictions and mandates. For some, standardization had been a double-edged sword. Music education, for example, is listed as a core curriculum subject although states generally require music education only throughout the elementary levels. Music instruction can also be provided by classroom teachers rather than certified music educators, leading to the reality that funding for music ensembles such as band, choir, or orchestra—activities that have been applauded by scholars as leading to some of the most beneficial outcomes for secondary students—are still the first to be cut if and when school districts are faced with financial crises.

To compensate, many bands, choirs, student activities, and high school sports teams impose a user fee to maintain equipment, purchase supplies, provide coaching stipends, and generate funding necessary to transport students to and from events. User fees, often referred to as pay-to-play programs, require students to provide necessary financial support, materials, and/or equipment in order to participate in the activity or
belong to the sponsoring group (i.e., booster club). User fees have historically meant minimal financial contributions in the amount of $5–10. In recent years, however, the cost has skyrocketed, costing participants well in the hundreds of dollars. The legality of user fees have seldom been challenged, either because participants understand the necessity of the charges or, some argue, out of fear of consequences resulting from noncompliance that could include limited playing time, not receiving a starting position or leading role, or simply experiencing a social stigma among peers. Thus, the question of the legality of user fees looms.

A 1984 decision by the Supreme Court of California stated, “This court recognizes school districts do indeed operate under difficult financial constraints. However, financial hardship is no defense to a violation of the free school clause” (Hartzell, 1984). Regardless, many extra- and co-curricular programs have begun to charge students for their participation in activities that meet both during and after school hours as more school board members and administrators are presented with no-win choices: cut the number of extra- and co-curricular programs, limit the scope and quality of each type of program, or impose pay-to-play fees.

Although some scholars have suggested alternative measures that have included a more traditional return to intramural athletics and limiting travel for teams and programs (Hoff & Mitchell, 2007), which would reduce the financial burden of these programs, the most commonly applied solution to financial shortfalls has been a pay-to-play system which requires students to pay anywhere from $15 on the low side to $300 on the high side to participate in activities (Hoff & Mitchell, 2007; Mitchell & Hoff, 2006; Pay to
play, 2004; People for Education, 2010; Tyrone Band Boosters, 2010; School in today’s economy, 2010). Participant-generated revenue shifts the financial stress of providing qualified coaches and advisors with a competitive stipend, transportation costs, and equipment maintenance, away from the local taxpayer toward those who are directly benefiting from the services.

A 2007 study by Hoff and Mitchell reported that in 2004, “34 states had at least some schools charging fees for extracurricular participation” (p. 28). That was before the economic downturn, however, leading one to suspect that pay-to-play programs are more prevalent now than they were in 2004. A 2009 survey conducted by the Michigan High School Athletic Association, for instance, not only reported a 14% decrease in participation within schools that assessed a user fee for athletic programs (Michigan High School Athletic Association, 2010) but also highlighted the necessity of imposing user fees in recent years. Of the 475 school districts that responded to their survey, 7% reported that 2009 was the first time that their school district implemented a user fee. In total, 221 districts (47%) were collecting a user fee from participants. As pay-to-play programs have become more commonplace, so too have the instances in which the implementation of even marginal fees has begun to limit student access to valuable extracurricular programs.

To combat the potential negative effect on participation for impoverished students and families with multiple student participants, some schools offer scholarships or waivers for participation fees and/or set limits to the contribution expected of students participating in more than one activity or families with more than one student involved in
the extracurriculum (Addonizio, 2000; Hoff & Mitchell, 2007; Mitchell & Hoff, 2006; Rausch, 2006). While waivers do afford some students the opportunity to participate without high costs and financial burden, most who have investigated the effect of these fees generally agree that waivers do not properly offset the negative effects of pay-to-play fees.

As the financial commitment for student participants has grown, the academic expectations of students have also risen. The next section offers a review of pass-to-play policies that have been implemented at the state and local levels. **Pass-to-Play**

Further evidence of waning support for the extracurriculum is the academic restraints placed on activities by No Pass/No Play policies. As the call for accountability has become more pronounced, many schools have begun composing formal policies and procedures that would accomplish the same goal but require supervision by faculty and staff members. In the modern era of accountability, states have taken legislative action to ensure student grades are adequate before the student is deemed eligible to participate.

In 2001, Burnett reported on four states that had set specific state-wide academic standards for student athletes. Nineteen others followed by implementing less strict but equally demanding academic guidelines (Burnett, 2001, p. 1). The number of states setting higher standards for extracurricular participants has no doubt flourished since 2001 and the standardized testing movement associated with No Child Left Behind, though at the time of this study no conclusive evidence on a definitive number of states.

The purpose of these policies is no doubt to ensure that students are mindful of
reality. Regardless of any personal opinions or philosophical differences, sporting events, band concerts, and student activities are not the primary aim of public education as envisioned by our creators. Most coaches would agree that these activities are a means to an end, often teaching work ethic, self-discipline, and time-management skills, all while improving self-esteem and building a connection to the school for social, emotional, and academic purposes. Students must graduate for their skills to be expressed and valued in a competitive society. This renewed focus on academic achievement has had both positive and negative outcomes. As Slater (1988) suggested: “With intensified attention on academic achievement, it is inevitable that nonacademic components of public education are being de-emphasized” (p. 151). The result, according to Slater, is “the current movement toward evaluating student academic achievement prior to granting eligibility for participation in extracurricular and co-curricular activities” (p. 152). No pass/no play policies are a further indication that diminished support for the extracurricular is not limited to financial matters. In Texas, the state supreme court supported the purely academic pursuits of a district that had deemphasized the extracurriculum, noting that “we find the rule rationally related to the legitimate state interest in providing a quality education to Texas’ public school students” (Flygare, 1985).

Certain scholars have argued that these programs are the basis, in part, for some students’ motivation to remain in school. Their counter-argument to higher standards and increased pressure to perform in the classroom is that some students will do just enough to remain eligible for athletics. If their grades drop below an acceptable level, no pass/no
play legislation theorizes that they will use the time away from the practice field and competition sites to better their academic standing. The unfortunate reality in many cases, however, is that at-risk students will use that unstructured time to further separate themselves from the school culture by engaging in socially or self-destructive practices that actually lessen their likelihood of performing better in the classroom, rather than correcting their academic deficiencies. Burnett (2001) succinctly characterized the predicament for at-risk students:

Jamar is a typical young, black male in his community. His mother is dependent upon government assistance, he has no knowledge of his father and he received virtually no parental guidance or involvement. […] Like most of the children in his neighborhood, he dreams of escaping his hapless environment, unfortunately his grades are unlikely to gain him admittance into college. […] Yesterday, the principal informed Jamar he would not be part of the basketball team because he failed Algebra II. Jamar never returns to school (Burnett, 2001, p. 1).

Removal of Jamar’s motivation to attend classes did not have the intended “reality check” consequence inherent in no pass/no play policies—instead, it further reinforced to him, like many other students, that he is not a high academic achiever. Upon removal from the basketball team, Jamar gave up on his studies—not because he was not capable but because he did not have the guidance necessary to correct what had gone wrong. Now his basketball coach and the principal will never have the chance to help Jamar escape his neighborhood because he is no longer a student at his school and is now unable to receive their guidance and tutelage.

In light of the demands of our educational system, the need for these policies may
in fact be real. These policies are not very supportive, however, to the extracurriculum or to at-risk students like Jamar who may not excel in the classroom but nonetheless learn valuable lessons through their participation in extracurricular activities. As summarized by Burnett (2001), “simply put, denying a student the opportunity to participate in athletics is denying the student and invaluable educational opportunity” (p. 5). Although a 1986 survey in the state of California suggested that student athletes increased their academic efforts as a result of no pass/no play legislation, the same survey indicated that students planned to take less challenging coursework in the future in order to remain eligible for athletic events (Felt, 1986). Faculty members were asked if they believed that students would continue to work harder to remain eligible—they said that while this was possible, students might also avoid curricular choices that had the potential to jeopardize their extracurricular eligibility. These results are consistent with Coleman’s (1961) assertion that in many ways peer groups have established cultural norms for teenagers that upend and thwart well-intentioned policies conceived by school officials and legislatures.

By limiting caring adults’ access to students like Jamar, no pass/no play policies have effectively served as another strike against support for the extracurriculum.

Program Elimination & Consolidation

Across the nation students, parents, and taxpayers are at odds over the extracurriculum as school districts have begun to eliminate or consolidate programs. Garcia (2009) reported that, “From Hawaii to Rhode Island, school systems are trimming compensation for coaches, eliminating transportation, adding or increasing athletic fees
for students, holding fundraising drives, cutting back on night games to save electricity costs and dropping some sports and related events altogether” (p. ). In Ohio, Grove City High School now closes its doors to operation one hour after classes dismiss (Staples, 2009). This means no sports, no clubs, no band, no cheerleaders, and not even a student council. In Grove City, all extracurricular activities have been canceled in the wake of an ongoing debate over property taxes and a voluntary levy to keep the district afloat during tough economic times—a debate that now pits neighbor against neighbor and has had a dramatic effect on property sales in the area.

In a 2009 interview, Mike Myers, a senior football player for the Grove City Greyhounds, summarized the feeling that he and his classmates were experiencing early in the school year: “Every day feels like a Tuesday,” he said, adding that Fridays, the night when the town would normally converge on the high school football stadium to cheer on their beloved “Dawgs,” did not mean much anymore (Staples, 2009).

In West Orange, New Jersey, hundreds of students walked out of class to protest budget cuts that had led the school to drastically limit its music, art, drama and athletic programs, eliminating teaching positions, and canceling many student activities in addition to extracurricular cuts (Hu, 2010). In nearby Montclair, New Jersey, students gathered before school, chanting “No more budget cuts” in protest of the school’s decision to release several teachers and cut back on the extracurriculum to compensate for financial shortfalls. Many New Jersey districts have had to reduce the number of athletic teams, eliminate freshman and junior varsity programs, cut back on the number of coaches, and limit travel and competition schedules for extracurricular programs in
order for their doors to remain open to the business of educating students.

New York has also seen its share of extracurricular cutbacks due to budget concerns. An Associated Press article from December 21, 2010, reported that the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA) would again reduce the maximum number of games for several sports for the third consecutive year (Rathbun, 2010). The 2011 season would mark the beginning of an eight-game football schedule—the shortest season for football programs in New York under NYSPHSAA’s governance. Softball, baseball, and basketball teams in New York would also be playing anywhere from two to four fewer games that year due to the economic climate. This was the third consecutive year that NYSPHSAA reduced the number of games for some athletic event schedules.

Dr. William Miller, superintendent of the Tyrone Area School District in Tyrone, Pennsylvania, said that school cutbacks are the result of questions relating to state funding. “There are serious questions as to how the state will subsidize school districts,” he said in an interview with a local newspaper (Clegg, 2010). According to Miller, the 2011–12 school year will include the “most critical financial crisis [school districts in Pennsylvania] have ever faced,” during his thirty-plus years as a superintendent at Tyrone. In a follow-up address to the Tyrone community Miller cited Penn State professor of education Dr. William Hartman’s characterization of the uncertainty ahead. “We are entering a new era of fiscal reality that will encompass significant reductions in state funding. We are living in unprecedented economic times that will greatly impact our school operations—and we must invest limited/declining available resources in ways that
maximize student learning” (Miller, 2010). At the forefront of budget cuts for the district are athletics and extra-curricular activities, though program elimination may be avoided if parents and students are able to raise the necessary funds to continue operations.

Not unlike Tyrone, booster clubs across the nation have come to the aid of athletic directors, music teachers, and school boards alike, all willing to generate the necessary funding to keep their programs alive. In Hopatcong, New Jersey, for instance, parents began a massive fundraising campaign and created a volunteer supervisory schedule for practices when the district decided it had no choice but to end the Hopatcong Marching Band’s participation in away football games and competitive performances. Not only was the school’s only remaining instrumental music teacher asked to volunteer his time in order to keep the band marching forward, but the parents themselves were asked to volunteer time to supervise students during rehearsal because the band had no assistant director, no percussion instructor, and no color guard or majorette teacher available to supplement learning (Kuty, 2010).

In Hull, Massachusetts, athletic director Jim Quatromoni and a core group of athletic boosters have raised nearly one-half million dollars in two years to keep the athletic programs alive in their district after two consecutive years of budget cuts that spelled the end of the extracurriculum for students. “I thought it would be one year,” Quatromoni said. “We’ll do this and people will come to their senses” (Quatromoni, quoted in King, 2010). In fact, the fundraising campaign may have gone a little too well. On May 17, 2010, the voters again struck down a budget that would have restored half of the extracurriculum’s financial support to the district. While taxpayers “support” athletics
and activities like band and drama, they prefer to have private donations fund those
deleavors, not their tax dollars. Many assumed that if the necessary aid could be raised
through private donations in one year, this could occur continuously.

Eliminating programs has universally been employed as a last resort by public
schools in Florida, Texas, New York, Ohio, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Other cost-
cutting moves have included sharing transportation between junior varsity and varsity
sports, carpooling with neighboring districts that are going in the same direction to
events, eliminating junior high school sports, reducing the number of coaching and
advisor positions, reducing the maximum number of games/event per season, eliminating
athletic directors and fine arts supervisors, making some activities intramural, making
other activities noncompetitive and thereby reducing the need to travel, and initiating or
raising the cost of user fees.

For now, the general level of support for high school athletics and activities has
inspired parents and community members to fight for what they believe are worthwhile
programs. As many note, they believe that their energies will not be needed once local
and state budgets are resolved. Many district administrators are not holding their breath
for that to happen in any near future, however. Steven Timko, an athletic director in New
Jersey, concluded, “In my 34 years of athletic administration, I’ve never seen it be this
serious,” in a recent interview (Timko, as quoted in Procida & Previti, 2010). Across the
state boarder at least one other administrator agreed. “We’re facing tough economic times
across the board,” said Dr. William Miller, Tyrone Area School District, Pennsylvania.
“There’s a lot more to come” (Miller, as quoted in Clegg, 2010).
Faced with increasingly finite financial resources, school boards and administrators have had to channel their monies toward achieving the rigorous academic demands associated with achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is considered a leading indicator of school success under NCLB. A general reduction in funding from state budgets has further stressed budgets for the extracurriculum (Garcia, 2010; Hu, 2010; Kuty, 2010; Smith, 2010). Some districts and schools have responded by placing more emphasis on private funding (Addonizio, 2000; Banas, 1987; Brunner & Imazeki, 2003; Downes & Steinman, 2007; People for Education, 2010; Schools in Today’s Economy, 2010; Shulleeta, 2010) while others have begun cutting valued programs from their offerings. The emergence of pay-to-play programs and No Pass/No Play legislation are two further indications of fundamental reductions in extracurricular activities.

No longer can students maintain unsatisfactory academic eligibility standards and remain active on the athletic field. Grade point averages of student athletes and student performers are being highly scrutinized by state and local requirements. No longer are a plethora of extracurricular programs draining annual budgets from curricular objectives. Instead, these monies are being channeled toward students who are falling behind academically through remedial programs and additional core curricula offerings. While the premise of this reduction in support for the extracurriculum seems plausible in theory, the reality is that extra- and co-curricular programs directly service the curricular needs of public education. Any reduction in support for these programs immediately results in a noticeable difference in their quality. While the long-term effects of these cuts on the
The curriculum itself remain to be seen, studies indicate that cutting athletics and music programs alone can lead to lower property value for homeowners, the demise of rural and suburban downtown economies, and vicious campaigns both for and against voluntary tax levies aimed at saving school sports and activities (Hu, 2010; Staples, 2009).

These outcomes are due to the fact that a population of students exists who remain active within the school culture because of extra and co-curricular programs. Therefore, in channeling reform efforts toward academics and away from valued extracurricular activities, policy makers may in fact be distancing students’ involvement in and motivation for academic pursuits. In other words, years from now we may realize that by reducing our support for the extracurriculum, we are leaving more students behind than previously thought.

Although research has offered a convincing body of data which suggest that the extracurriculum does offer benefits, support for these programs is waning while the passion for programs in art and music is not. As Laura Anzalone (2010), member of the Pennsylvania State University Chorus, wrote:

People need music as much as I do. That’s why we need to support it. Make sure the schools know you appreciate the music programs. Show your support by attending the local high school’s production of *Annie*. See the Penn State Choir sing before you head off to the football game. You’ll be reminded of the beauty and power of the human voice (2010).

While many would agree with Laura’s passionate support for music programs in public schools, budgetary constraints and hard economic times have created a troubling reality
for the extracurriculum. Forced to largely fund their own way, programs like choir, band, art, student activities, and athletics, are in desperate need of help. As costs continue to rise for transportation, equipment, practice facilities and more, these programs face difficult decisions about providing a quality experience to students with smaller budgets than in years past. Sadly, neighborhood bake sales and 50/50 raffles can no longer provide the necessary financial support to ensure the health and vitality of an aging extracurriculum. Although there is currently little research on how these programs are responding to the recent financial crisis facing state governments and the reform initiatives that have led to standardized testing regimes, schools and districts have begun to develop extracurricular program support practices in response to mounting concerns over program eliminations and reduced support.

**Privatized Funding**

Property taxes in Vermont, as in most states, were traditionally a significant part of a local community’s contributions to the school district’s budget—that is, until 1997 when the state Supreme Court ruled that property taxes were creating unjust and unequal educational opportunities for students (*Brigham v. State*, 1997). Equity was the primary issue when the Equal Educational Opportunity Act, better known as Act 60, changed school funding in Vermont.

Act 60 was Vermont’s first attempt to relieve undue stress for taxpayers and improve conditions for all students regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographic location within the state boundaries.

Under Act 60, localities were allowed to choose spending levels in excess
of the foundation level. To weaken the link between property wealth and spending in excess of the foundation level, the act established a power equalization scheme that insured that localities with the same nominal tax rates would have the same levels of education spending” (Downes & Steinman, 2007, p. 5).

The effect was a “sharing pool” which lowered townships’ ability to raise revenues with financial support from communities that have a greater tax base. This of course met with strong criticism and led to Act 68—a revised version of Act 60 without the incentives for local communities to make voluntary contributions to local districts.

Act 60 forced communities to consider the entire school budget in the same manner faced by many extracurricular programs for many years and that continue today. Once a state budget falls on hard financial times, often the first programs to register financial setbacks are the extracurricular. This is due in part to the high costs associated with running high school sports and activities and also because they are regarded as mandatory to student education. Yet, as discussed in chapter five, the problem with this approach is the limited savings derived from extracurricular programs in comparison to those for instructional costs and operational needs.

Recognizing that upward of 80% of a school district’s budget is consumed by teacher and administrator salaries and benefits, some schools examine budget cuts using a concentric circle diagram (Appendix D). With this type of diagram, schools and community members can identify and establish what is mandatory, what is preferred, and what is expendable with regard to budgetary dollars. For the purposes of this study the associated categories developed using Hartman’s model included state-required curricula
associated with standardized testing (i.e., PSSA), other required courses not tested on state standardized tests, and elective courses. Using Hartman’s concentric circles, one is able to place the educational mission of the district at the very center—which includes teachers and students. Expanding outward, the diagram illustrates the need for instructional support, school-based operations support, district-level instructional support, district-level operations support, and finally “other programs” such as athletics and extracurricular activities (Ammerman, 2010; Clegg, 2010; Hartman, 2010; Miller, 2010). While these circles are not necessarily consumed from the outside in, there is a clear understanding that the extracurriculum is a nonessential component of the school district’s budget—in fact, even elective courses offered during the school day are not safe from elimination.

Not surprisingly, when shortfalls do lead to the reduction or elimination of sports, music, etc., what typically follows is a boom in the creation of Local Educational Foundations (LEF), Parent Teachers Associations (PTA), booster clubs, and cooperate sponsorships aimed at holding off terminal cuts to the extracurriculum. Private funds solicited by parents, volunteers, and even paid staff of LEFs, PTAs and the like, have been reported to pay for everything from instruction and curriculum, to building renovations and student scholarships.

In Washington, private funding sources and donations have helped support a new math and science curriculum as well as new turf athletic fields (Shulleeta, 2010). In Chicago, the local board of education took unprecedented measures in 1987 when it asked the General Assembly to make private donations to finance construction projects
and remodel aging facilities (Banas, 1987). And if Ontario’s system of school funding is any indication of future endeavors, the pleas for such contributions will not cease. There, alternative sources of revenue are being spent on field trips, sports, art and music, classroom supplies and textbooks, playground equipment, and physical plant needs (People for Education, 2010).

Alternate means of revenue are now being drawn from a variety of resources for public education. In addition to voluntary contributions from private donors, Addonizio (2000) suggested that nontraditional forms of revenue are being drawn from enterprise activity and cooperative activity. Enterprise activity is the “sale or leasing of services and facilities” (Addonizio, 2000, p. 70). Cooperative activity is a method of sharing resources and functions with another organization in order to lower costs. Along with school districts, local nonprofit organizations, and LEFs are increasingly creating these opportunities for revenue.

Portions of school buildings, event facilities, and even entire vacant lots are being leased to private tenants in order to supplement school revenue. Vending machines and signage rights have also become common forms of enterprising schools. In much the same way that professional sporting arenas and stadiums have come to be known as “Gillette Stadium” or “Pepsi Arena,” districts are now cashing in on marketable opportunities found on their own school premises. Cooperate America is now vying for vending machines and food service stations near school cafeterias, gymnasiums, and athletic fields. These timely efforts have increased funds in the school district budget when no other form of revenue was on the horizon.
In Muscatine, Iowa, Superintendent of Schools John Fields created a win-win cooperative opportunity for students known locally as Project Enrichment. The project, still in use today, utilizes the resources of the school district, a local nonprofit group called the Stanley Foundation, and a nearby community college to provide students with financial assistance for field trips, create opportunities for exchange students, host a guest lecture series, sporting events, and more (Drum, 1980).

The available literature pertaining to private funding in schools dates back to the 1960s, suggesting both that this is not a recent phenomenon and that the need for alternative resources will not quickly dissolve. “What is relatively new is the larger scope of fundraising and the items that are being purchased” (Brunner & Imazeki, 2003, p. 1). Whereas private funding has always been sought for the extracurriculum, these resources are now being used interchangeably for academic needs and to support the arts, sporting events, and student activities. Some authors have suggested that although the extracurriculum will continue to face financial pressure from a new “fiscal reality” facing many school business administrators (Clegg, 2010; Hartman, 2010), the same tactics used to finance and keep valued extracurricular activities afloat will soon be tapped for curricular purposes (Hoff & Mitchell, 2007; Hu, 2010; Miller, 2010; Staples, 2009).

Charged with shrinking budgets, it is now clear that administrators and school officials will need to view any source of alternative revenue as a potential “program saver.” Funding for the extracurriculum is every bit as tight as funding for academic subjects; alternative sources of revenue cannot be bad for the business of educating students.
Conclusion

The decision to impose user fees and collect private dollars is certainly not an optimal one for school boards and administrators. The fact remains, however, that when there is insufficient revenue for all items, both curricular and extracurricular, in a district’s budget, two options exist: raise the necessary private funds to compensate for any shortfalls or eliminate items from the budget. The latter decision is one that most districts try to avoid at all costs although a few have been forced to wade into those waters.

While there is continuing concern that students will become disenchanted with school or drop out because their motivation to attend school may have been predicated on their participation in sports, band, or cheerleading, some also fear that budget cuts will soon bleed into advanced placement classes and honors curricula. Others worry that quality teachers will leave their districts for better opportunities in coaching and in communities better able to support the school system on every level. Some believe that limited school opportunities will affect families’ decisions to locate in their communities.

“The quality of education is going to go through the floor,” Chas McCutcheon said of the South-Western school system which governs Grove City High School in Ohio and its extracurriculum. As the booster president for nearby Central Crossing High School explained, districts with limited curricular offerings and limited or nonexistent extracurricular activities are not attractive to families. “Who would buy your house?” booster president for the Central Crossing High School said. “Who would want to move here? No one with kids.”
Indeed, according to some estimates reductions in the extracurriculum in New York State, particularly scholastic sports, will save as much as $10 million (Smith, 2010). Others estimate that the savings could add up to as much as $2 billion (King, 2010; Rathbun, 2010).

As more and more students seek ways to fill time previously occupied by practices and rehearsals and more communities are left with unlit stadiums in which communal gatherings used to be held, concert halls are silent and stages are dark, school communities are left to wonder what has happened to their valued extracurricular programming and what say, if any, they have in the matter.
Chapter 3
Methodology

The purpose of this case study research was to explore the combined effect that school reform efforts, which were largely driven by standardized testing results, and school financial reform initiatives, which were fueled by a national recession in the U.S. economy, had on extracurricular programming in one Pennsylvania school district. This study also sought to investigate the decision-making process relating to support for the extracurriculum in one school district and determine whether taxpayers, parents, and students had a voice in extracurricular resolutions. Whether or not community input was involved in the decision-making process, this study examined the motivations of educational decision-makers as they worked through a turbulent time for public school extracurricular activities.

A review of the available literature offered a wealth of information pertaining to the value of student participation in extra- and co-curricular programs. Additional information was collected for the literature review that pertained to the level of support given to extra- and co-curricular programs, with a particular emphasis on how both economic and theoretical support had changed since the inception of the rigorous testing and accountability movement that began nearly three decades ago. As a point of reference, the national publication *A Nation at Risk* (1983) served as a benchmark for the beginning of the accountability movement, though the No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation dictated much of the standardized testing initiatives commonly associated with
the accountability movement today. Methods identified and implemented by schools and extracurricular programs in an attempt to compensate for deficiencies in support were also reviewed. A majority of those remedial methods had financial implications.

The unique characteristics of each of Pennsylvania’s schools, their extracurricular programs, and the value and priority assigned to each extracurricular activity by students, teachers, school officials, and community members, made the prospect of producing comprehensive results using quantitative methods improbable. Further, a comprehensive “state of extracurricular programs” became quite evident through the literature review. Therefore, the qualitative design described in this chapter was employed to investigate the phenomenon which began to unfold in the fall of 2010.

A Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative research design was selected due to the nature of the research questions and purpose of the study. In order to formulate an understanding of the effect of school reform efforts combined with sweeping changes to school funding, case study research emerged as a logical choice for investigating and exploring a phenomenon very much at the forefront of educational decision-making at the time of the study. A qualitative design was also implemented to assess the personal and professional motives that had begun to inform educational decisions about extracurricular programming and to formally explore the extent of community support and influence in the decision-making process.

The available literature indicated that support for extracurricular programs up to the time of this study had been waning (Hoff & Mitchell, 2007; Kelley, 1985; Michigan
High School Athletic Association, 2010; Mitchell & Hoff, 2006; Paulson, 1970; Pay to play, 2004; People for Education, 2010; School in today's economy, 2010) and that theoretical and financial support for extracurricular activities was not likely to improve in the immediate future. What had yet to be addressed in any authentic manner was why the extracurriculum had been the first target in reform initiatives, how individual programs were tapped for reductions and eliminations despite their noted benefits, and whose influence mattered most in the decision-making process. A more quantitative design may have documented the number of programs that had been reduced or the percentage of funding that had been cut from budgets but it would not have explored those issues that mattered most—from within the school organization. In order to understand how decisions related to extracurricular activities were impacting students, communities, and school morale, case study research was needed.

This case study was initiated as a critical case—one that was not generalizable in the sense that all school districts would face the same circumstances and/or choose the same outcomes, or that public reactions would be the same, but an example of what could happen at any given school district. The study utilized grounded theory, naturalistic inquiry, and inductive analysis to learn more about the current motivations of school officials and the decision-making process in schools that have extracurricular programming. As the end of the No Child Left Behind legislation draws near and the full scale of the state budget crisis becomes known, the theories and hypotheses in this study can be further explained and perhaps empirically tested in future endeavors.
Background on Theoretical Considerations

In designing this study, the researcher considered both naturalistic inquiry methods, which are intended to study phenomena as events unfold naturally, and inductive analysis procedures that could later reveal themes, categories, and interrelationships, without preconceived theories about motivations or actions. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested, this approach to research allows the findings to become grounded in specific contexts stemming from real-world developments.

This design of this study required extensive background knowledge of the place and culture in which the school was situated. Moreover, it required knowledge of the school prior to the height of the standards-based deadline set forth by NCLB and the financial crunch created by a proposed state budget that was significantly less supportive of K–12 public education than in past years. As Patton (1990) wrote, “the mandate to go into the field—into the real program world—and get close to the situation in order increase understanding of programs in their naturally occurring complexity involves the studies commitment to actively enter the world of interacting individuals” (p. 47).

In this instance, the researcher had sufficient experience in the community and school that were the focal locations of the research. In fact, he had been employed as a teacher of a co-curricular subject for a period of four years prior to the commencement of the study. The researcher was also the advisor of a prominent extracurricular activity in the school district and a supervisor of non-PSSA required courses in the middle and high school buildings. While the exact role of the researcher is addressed later in this chapter, it is noted here, too, to suggest that the requirement to go into the field—where
individuals were interacting—had been fulfilled. It is also deliberately mentioned to highlight the fact that while the researcher had prior knowledge of the school and its decision-makers, the events included in this study were designed to be analyzed as they unfolded. As such, specific steps were taken to ensure that the phenomena were explored from the ground up—including the genesis of the study, which utilized participant observation of public exercises in school decision-making.

Although the researcher sought clearly defined methods of data collection and theory-building strategies for this study, the research questions and phenomenon itself begged for flexibility. Because the phenomenon was quite new to schools, there was no definitive way to tell how the events and decisions would unfold and no way to know how long they would take to become evident in advance of the data collection phase. This suggestion to ensure flexibility in the design of naturalistic research has been more fully developed by Patton (1990), who wrote, “As an innovation or program change is implemented, it frequently unfolds in a manner quite different from what was planned or conceptualized in a proposal” (p. 53). Lincoln and Guba (1985) further clarified the need for flexibility in naturalistic design.

What these considerations add up to is that the design of a naturalistic inquiry (whether research, evaluation, or policy analysis) cannot be given in advance; it must emerge, develop, unfold … The call for an emergent design by naturalists is not simply an effort on their part to get around the “hard thinking” that is supposed to precede an inquiry; the desire to permit events to unfold is not merely a way of rationalizing what is at bottom “sloppy inquiry.” The design specifications of the conventional paradigm form a procrustean bed of such a nature as to make it impossible for the naturalist to lie in it—not only uncomfortably, but at all (Lincoln & Guba, 1995, p. 225).
Without question, the most challenging component of this study for the researcher was to allow events to unfold naturally and not manage the collection of data through pre-determined methods with known decision-makers from the school district and extracurricular advisors.

Conversely, the timeframe of the study was one element that could be determined in advance of the study. In order to report on the phenomenon, a timeframe that involved two months of observations, interviews, and analyses was established and data collection was designed to occur in a variety of settings during that period. There was no way to tell whether the phenomenon would completely develop in that time but timely decisions facing the district must have been made prior to the opening of school in fall 2011 and the school must have passed an operating budget that would include extracurricular programs during the summer of 2011. In so much as the purpose of the present study was to explain the event, potential motivating factors, community’s influence, and outcomes of the decision-making process, the timeframe was intentionally limited so as to not allow further inquiry or reflection to obstruct the results of this study. At the conclusion of the study the researcher was satisfied that participants were able to reflect on the choices made by the school district for the following year. An emerging theme suggested, however, that the future would not be as bright and that further inquiry in subsequent years could yield different results even within the school district involved in this study.

In his book on qualitative research methods, Patton (1990) argued that “the essential properties of a system are lost when [they] are taken apart” (p. 79). The intent of
this study was to examine the school district’s decision-making process and the motivations behind final outcomes assigned to the extracurriculum, as well as to investigate the level of authentic influence that students, parents, and community members had on final outcomes as a whole, without destructing the essential parts. The final actions taken by school officials were ultimately judged to be systemic, despite the possibility that they may have been informed by a particularly charismatic or persuasive individual within the school system or community. Opinions and themes that emerged from interviews with students, parents, and community members were therefore addressed as a collective, although a consensus was not achieved in answers to questions.

In summary, the study considered systems theory, in which the entire organization is examined through a hermeneutic approach that focuses on individuals, yet respects each participant’s role as a part of the entire phenomenon. The unit of analysis for the present study was the singular case (i.e., the school district). Having prior knowledge of school systems, the challenges facing the chosen school district, and the current political challenges facing public education, the researcher was cautious not to allow that knowledge to affect data collected for the purposes of this study. That knowledge was used in analyzing resulting actions, however. Appropriately, Kneller’s (1984) four principles for hermeneutic inquiry provided a framework for the study beyond the principles of naturalistic inquiry and grounded theory.

1.) Understanding a human act or product, and hence all learning, is like interpreting a text.
2.) All interpretation occurs within a tradition.
3.) Interpretation involves [the principal investigator] opening himself to a
text (or its analogue) and questioning it.

4.) The [principal investigator] must interpret a text in the light of his situation (Kneller, 1984, p. 68).

Selection of the School District

A critical case in case study research is defined as a case that leads the reviewer to the conclusion that “if it happens there, it can happen anywhere” (Patton, 1990, p. 174). Since the purpose of this case study was to explain what had happened in one particular Pennsylvania school district in the sense that the study could become a critical case for other districts, a typical school district in the midst of experiencing the combined effects of school reform and financial crisis was preferred. As a result, the school selected for this study had both high- and low-achieving students, in an ordinary community, with average expenditures per pupil, and a predictable mixture of successful and underperforming extracurricular programs.

The school chosen represented a “typical” school district, given the aforementioned criteria, as measured by the researcher. The term “typical” or “average” was not used in this research as a substitute for a mathematical mean. Instead, these terms were used interchangeably to indicate that the school district chosen was not unaffected by either of the abovementioned reform initiatives, though it could be argued that it fared better than others.

Beyond basic school characteristics, the desire to investigate this phenomenon as it unfolded also limited the number of school districts eligible for selection. In fact, the method used to select a school district is given more attention in chapter four since the
need for access to the district became as important to the research as the criteria listed above. For example, the wish to include participant-observation in the research design required the school district, its officials, and community members to be willing to host the researcher and make themselves available for interactions with him during the timeframe specified. While several school districts in the surrounding community possessed similar characteristics and demographics, one particular school district was selected because it met all of the criteria and was willing to allow the researcher to conduct all three methods of research during a turbulent time in public schools. As previously mentioned, it was also the only school district for which the researcher could properly gauge the effects of the changing characteristics of the extracurriculum and access the nuances of decisions that affected extracurricular activities.

Access to school officials, taxpayers, parents, and students was also necessary within the short timeframe that followed the passing of school budgets for the 2011–12 academic year. The Keensville Area School District was the only school able and willing to offer this level of access under the predetermined conditions of the study. While some scholars may criticize the researcher’s decision to utilize the school district within which he was employed, they also must acknowledge that the research could potentially benefit from this level of access to information and authentic participation. As the study unfolded, that hypothesis became more clearly evident. Not only were participants willing to share information with the researcher but the quality of their reflections were only possible through a collegial relationship that had evolved over more time than would have been possible in a typical case study.
Selection of the Interview Participants

The use of grounded theory as a theoretical design for investigating this phenomenon in a systemic manner made it necessary to identify and select interview participants not only through their employment or position within the school community but also through participant observation and documented involvement or supervision of extracurricular programs at Keensville. Using the principles of naturalistic inquiry, a school administrator, for example, was not asked to participate in this study because they were an appointed school official. However, they were invited to participate in the research if they had some responsibility for or involvement with an extracurricular program that was the focus of the study. Current school board meetings and meeting summaries from previous meetings were used to generate a list of potential interview participants—that is, a complete list of Keensville school officials, administrators, and faculty members. Potential participants could decide whether or not they wished to be interviewed. Three central office administrators were interviewed in two separate rounds—one of these individuals continued to informally provide valuable data about the school district’s financial picture to the very end of the study. Two additional building-level administrators were interviewed twice, including a preliminary round and a primary structured interview, along with four members of the Keensville high school faculty who had served as advisors to an extracurricular club or activity or coached an athletic team at the school.

Community members, parents, coaches and advisors were invited to participate in the study on the premise they had a vested interest in and current knowledge of the
school’s extracurricular programming and school budget struggles. Six parents and two community members volunteered to participate in the research after being contacted by the principal investigator. Student participants were also invited to participate in the research on a voluntary basis—these individuals were identified by coaches, through the researcher’s observations, or based on the individual’s demonstrated achievement within a certain activity. In total, seven students were interviewed.

Following similar guidelines, not all Keensville school board members were included in this research. Rather, those individuals who were invited to participate had demonstrated direct involvement in or supervision of the extracurriculum at Keensville. Consequently, three school board members completed the interview process.

In addition to in-depth interviews, all participants were requested to complete an individualized school priority model (Appendix A)\(^2\) as a component of the interview protocol in order to create a triangulated method of data collection, further document the participant’s decision-making process, and more fully understand their perspective using a visual medium. Only participants who were previously selected for interviews and had consented to the interview process were asked to complete a school priority model. Data collected through a participant’s priority model were not included in the data set unless the participant had also been interviewed.

The study’s research questions and naturalistic design necessitated that data be

\(^2\) Specific data collection techniques for the interviews and priority model are addressed in subsequent sections of this chapter.
collected as the phenomenon unfolded and that it be concluded within a logical timeframe—the passing of a school budget for the 2011–12 school year, which indicated the present level of support for the extracurriculum as compared to past years. Every attempt was made to include key decision-makers and key participants in the study, though not all stakeholders were ultimately able to contribute equally. Data were recorded until sufficient understanding of the phenomenon was met or a final determination to support or not to support a program was achieved, regardless of which participants agreed to take part in the study. While that may be viewed as a potential flaw in the design of this study it is equally important to note that given these unprecedented measures of school reform, a “solution” to each research question was not the primary objective. Rather, this study was designed to explore what happened, how the school and community perceived the phenomenon, and if the collective voice of the community was considered in the final outcome. Unresolved issues were expected. As such, they were documented and noted as a starting point for subsequent investigations and further research.  

**Preliminary Measures**

While the researcher has been an active participant in and observer of the extracurriculum at Keensville, data collection for this research formally began in the late spring and early summer of 2011. Permission to engage in research with human subjects was initiated in May 2011, through the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at the Pennsylvania State University, prior to recruiting participants and conducting interviews.

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3 Suggestions for further research are given considerable attention in the final chapter.
4 Refer to the “The Role of the Researcher” section of this chapter.
Publicly available archival data, including minutes from previous Keensville school board meetings, board meeting summaries, and the school district’s quarterly publication to parents and community members were reviewed during the IRB submission process for the purposes of forming theory and identifying indigenous languages and themes that had already developed and adopted through public discourse. A list of potential participants for the research was also generated during that timeframe. Permission to use the Keensville school district for the purposes of case study research was initiated in May 2011 and subsequently approved by school administration.

Data collection instruments, including interview protocols (Appendices B, C) and the school priority model (Appendix A) were administered to volunteer colleagues who were familiar with the researcher but not employed or otherwise involved with the Keensville Area School District, before primary data collection began. This preliminary step was included in order for the researcher to gain experience conducting interviews and administering the school priority model and to review the validity of each line of questioning used in the interview protocol. Further, this step allowed the researcher to gain valuable experience interviewing participants and ensured that the process of recording, transcribing, and coding data during the actual study would be more successful than it would have been otherwise. Most notably, including a preliminary research phase in the study design proved useful to the researcher as a method of identify potential flaws in the interview protocol and school priority model. Corrections were made before data

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5 Data collected during the preliminary phase of the study were not used in the actual study.
Primary Data Collection

Primary data collection procedures were conducted during the summer months of 2011, with the majority of research completed during July and August. The timeframe was selected in order to investigate the research questions during the period in which events and decisions would naturally unfold and the process was still fresh in the minds of stakeholders. Decisions about the extracurriculum and/or school budget that were made prior to the end of the 2010–11 school year would not have been informed by sufficient information to forecast the future direction of the school’s extracurricular programs. Data collected after the start of the 2011–12 school could have been contaminated by personal or professional reflections and/or political pressures from the outcomes of deliberations over the 2011–12 school budget that occurred during the summer months. The study’s timeframe therefore allowed for authentic and timely observations of the phenomenon as it occurred, not before or after.

The principal investigator was aware that employing qualitative methods could cloud results for some members of the academic community. The designer of the study included multiple sources of data in order to validate and confirm results. Yin (2009) discussed the rationale for incorporating multiple sources of evidence into the case study approach as necessary for qualitative research and an advantage of the case study method. “A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence. … The need to use multiple sources of evidence far exceeds that in other research methods, such as experiments, surveys, or histories” (Yin, 2009, p. 115).
In accordance with these principles, data were collected in a triangulated manner in order to increase the validity of the study and provide a rich foundation for analysis. The study was designed to utilize archival records, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and the school priority model, which was designed specifically for the purpose of this study (Appendix A).

Participant Observation

For the purposes of this case study, the term “participant observation” was used to indicate observation and discussion of the decision-making process that had occurred in a public forum or context. As public exercises in decision-making for school districts take place through school board meetings, the researcher attended a series of board meetings from April–August 2011. After the first meeting, he became aware that although school board meetings are reserved for official voting and public feedback, the board’s work session meetings, which typically are convened one week prior to the public meetings, were a rich source of potential decision-making data. Though public access is not restricted at the work sessions, permission was sought to attend the sessions, thereby doubling the number of meetings and amount of data to be collected.  

The Keensville school district’s 2011–12 school budget needed to be discussed in great detail and reviewed for a period of 30 days before it could be voted on by school board members. Discussions and potential solutions involving the extracurriculum and the school’s 2011–12 budget had already begun prior to preliminary data collection.

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6 One executive school board meeting was held during the month of July. Permission was sought to attend this special meeting; it was not granted. School officials would not comment on the topic or agenda for the meeting.
Although study results could have been diminished given these circumstances, participants were able to gain a greater understanding of the entire process and perhaps anticipate problems yet to come. Data collected were therefore rich in details regarding the appropriate amount of reflection on and understanding of how the process had unfolded to the final outcome. Most participants had already begun deliberations on the potential future impacts of subsequent budgets and the overall financial crisis, and of increased accountability on standardized testing (e.g., PSSA, Keystone Exams), for the extracurricular programs and elective courses at Keensville.

In addition to investigating the phenomenon through structured interviews, attending school board meetings and work sessions expanded the list of potential interview participants that the design required, which eventually included school officials, parents, school and community stakeholders, advisors and coaches, and district employees. While the study design did not contain a prescribed method of data collection for these meetings beyond taking field notes, it is important to note that the meetings themselves, more specifically the content discussed and the manner in which it was conveyed, became a beneficial source of data itself, creating a foundation from which questions were asked during the interview process and providing context for the interview data during analysis.

**School Board Meeting Summaries**

School board meeting summaries and meeting minutes were available for public consumption through the school superintendent’s office and were specifically requested through school personnel for the purposes of the study. Only those minutes from past
meetings dating back to December 2009 were collected. For the purposes of this study, this date represented the beginning of the budget process for the 2010–2011 school year—a complete year before the financial crunch began to take hold in public schools in Pennsylvania. Although the study was specifically designed to investigate the combined effect of the financial crisis and the standardized testing movement, the inclusion of meeting summaries dating back to the beginning of the NCLB legislation would have been too cumbersome for one investigator to explore, especially with regard to the effects of the financial crisis. Additionally, the literature review had already provided rich data on the topic of testing as it related to school reform, and its effect on the extracurriculum. Therefore, the December 2009 date was valid in the researcher’s opinion.

Those documents were reviewed for themes and actions that had informed, altered, or supported the extracurricular landscape and budget crisis that the school district faced during primary data collection. Summaries from the twelve-plus months leading up to the primary data collection informed the researcher about discussions and deliberations that took place during the observation of meetings that occurred during primary data collection. Specifically, summaries provided insights into the state of the extracurriculum and school budget prior to the financial crisis that began in the fall of 2010. Meeting summaries also reinforced information on the significant resources allocated toward PSSA-required coursework and the testing process itself.

Interviews

In-depth interviews with twelve school officials, including school board members, teachers and school administrators, six parents of extracurricular participants, two
community members, and seven student participants were the study’s primary source of data. The interviews were designed as open-ended interviews with in-depth questioning strategies so as to investigate the phenomenon, “the facts of [the] matter as well as [the respondents] opinions about events” (Yin, 2009, p. 107). The interview protocols (Appendices B, C) were derived from discussions at school board meetings, topics relating to the school district’s budget, as well as the extracurriculum in its former, present, and future states. Questions about the personal and professional motivations of participants were adapted from the field of ethical decision-making.

**School Priority Model**

The school priority model (Appendix A) developed for this study was experimental in nature and relatively simple in its design. The purpose of the model was to encourage participants to visualize their preferred appropriation of support for various programs and to document their priorities using visual graphics supported by basic interview questions. The model asked which level of priority the respondent would assign to the schools’ basic expenses, including instructional staff, instructional support staff, administrative staff, physical plant, PSSA required courses, non-PSSA required courses, and electives/extracurricular programming, under the condition that funds available to the school board and school officials were finite and must meet the basic requirements of the Pennsylvania State respondents’ percentages. It was explained that the model was limited in nature and not intended to represent an actual school budget. Participants were specifically asked to document their preferred allocations regardless of knowledge of the actually percentages used by the Keensville Area School District.
After the respondents had represented their priorities for the school using a pie graph, a specific indicator of each category was provided to participants rather than the more broadly defined categories. For example, the respondent may have assigned “PSSA required courses” as the overwhelming priority. The researcher then provided a list of indicators which included “new math textbooks” as an indicator of that priority. The respondent was asked to align his/her priorities with appropriate indicators. For each response, a brief explanation was sought from the respondent to determine why they had chosen that particular indicator for a particular category.

Indicators and categories were left intentionally broad so as to allow the respondent to have the greatest amount of flexibility and interpretation and also to facilitate, using the same model, for school officials, parents, and students.

**Recording the Data**

All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy of the field notes. After each interview, the researcher listened to the audio recording and in conjunction with field notes created a transcript of the interview. The generated transcripts were reviewed several times during data collection and data analysis. The recordings and transcripts were then used to provide context to the data, identify themes, and later code the data. Data were continuously analyzed, even during the primary data collection phase, which led to follow-up interviews and slight alterations in the interview protocol. The transcripts and audio recordings also served as a database and timeline for the study.

Archival records were organized chronologically and subsequently analyzed for emergent themes and categories that would support the interview process and review of
the data. Although those documents are publicly available from the school district, they were ultimately treated as research and coded as supplemental data for the purposes of the study.

**Analysis of Data**

Returning to suggestions for data analysis from methodologist Michael Patton (1990), the design of the study required an inductive approach. “Inductive analysis,” wrote Patton, “means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis. The analyst [then] looks for natural variation in the data” (Patton, 1990, p. 390). The use of an inductive approach to analysis required the researcher to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than assigning themes from past research and personal experiences or the relevant literature.

The data analysis took place in two phases. The first phase focused entirely on data collected during the personal interviews; only interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings of the interviews were used to identify emergent themes during the initial phase of analysis. Data collected from school priority models were not examined until the initial analysis of a critical mass of interview data had been completed.

During the first phase, data from the interviews were coded and analyzed as the researcher read, transcribed, and reflected on the responses given by participants during the interviews, using both indigenous concepts—those derived from common terminology and phrases used by interview participants—and sensitizing concepts—those that closely matched emergent themes from the literature review. Events were analyzed
first in chronological order so as to present a logical and coherent sequence of events for the case study narrative. Once the events had been reported in sequential order, key events were more fully explored and unpacked in order of importance and their bearing on the final outcome. The identification and analysis of key events led back to the analysis of the participant’s school priority models as a secondary source of data.

Subsequently, school priority models were analyzed for personal and professional motivating factors, values, and preferences, using frameworks developed in ethical decision-making research and themes that had developed in the analysis of interview data. The ethics of care, critique, justice, profession, and best interests of the student served as a foundation for this analytic phase (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Stefkovich, 2006). These lenses became particularly useful when examining discrepancies between data collected during interviews and the participant’s self-reported school priorities. Ethical decision-making literature also provided a context for the analysis of the final outcomes with regard to the proposed state of the extracurriculum at Keensville Area School District for the 2011–12 school year.

In each phase of the data analysis, raw data were used to create the final case study narrative. Often data were collected, analyzed for themes, and clarified during subsequent interviews or personal communications. Every attempt was made to report the data as holistically as possible, thereby allowing readers of the final case study the ability to understand the unique circumstances and contextual factors that had created and further explained the phenomenon, despite knowing that each school district is unique and its community faces its own set of challenges and circumstances. The final narrative
is therefore not offered as a generalizable outcome for all schools. Rather, it is provided
to suggest, as critical cases (Patton, 1990) should, that if it happened in Keensville, it
could happen anywhere.
Chapter 4
An Introduction to the Community and School

The community of Keensville is keenly aware of its storied past and equally committed to ensuring its vitality in the future despite an uncertain economic future. Rich traditions and historical events continue to inform the school and community in its modern-day activities and decision-making. Those traditions have been passed down from generation to generation through formal recitations at church, in school, and at community gatherings. For decades Keensville families had not been separated over time by states, or even townships, but rather blocks or miles at most, which had previously served to keep the younger generations abreast of the community ethic. A majority of Keensville residents had long-standing relationships with neighbors, family, and friends who had grown up in the area and now resided in the borough. Generations of families had grown up in Keensville or nearby municipalities. For many years a prevailing sense of “how we do things” had been grounded in local traditions, both real and imagined, and was evident in most every aspect of community life. Only recently has that begun to change.

The following description of the town’s past is therefore offered not as a purely historical review or anecdotal nicety, but as a testament to Keensville’s character and a description of the people who live there and remained at the time of this study. These results were based on participant observation, detailed interviews with community members and school employees, and archival research. The data, presented here in the
form of a narrative, not only informed the decision-making process at the Keensville Area School District, but also explained some of the motivations of school officials, community members, parents, and students alike. This information is included here to provide the reader with background information and context for the ensuing study results.

**Keensville**

Keensville is a mid-sized rural community. The borough itself was established when settlers began to flock to the area now known as Keensville after more preferential lands nearby succumbed to a devastating flood in the late 1840s. Situated comfortably between a mix of well-populated areas and natural waterways, the town was geographically desirable during the years of industrial revolution and railroad expansion. Keensville seemed destined to develop into a bustling hub of activity for townspeople and passers-by alike.

In the early years, residents made their living through lumber and coal mining which later led to industrialized mills. Collectively, the mills provided more than adequate opportunities for locals to work and provide for their families. As railroads began to make the area more accessible and goods could be readily passed through the borough’s limits, a genuine sense of community pride was firmly established in the up-and-coming community. Roadways were soon paved which raised the standard of living and made transportation even easier. Schools began to emerge. Commerce picked up in the downtown area and the town’s population began to boom. In 1860, the U.S. Census recorded a total population of 741 residents. By 1870, that number had swelled to more than 1,800.
By the early 1910s, the town had begun to establish itself as a major player in emerging Pennsylvania commerce. Trolleys and trains with daily service connected Keensville to most major economic regions of the state. With business picking up, local leadership turned its attention to providing residents with entertainment—a tactic they also believed would attract more families to the borough. Athletic parks and theatres were built to provide local citizens with opportunities to participate in and enjoy sporting events and dramatic productions. Interest boomed so rapidly that the town’s first attempt at a local theatre was quickly demolished and soon rebuilt to accommodate larger crowds than had been anticipated in the first building. Around the same time, Keensville also established several local professional sporting teams that competed in various buildings around town, including a local armory building and a YMCA, which was donated by the Pennsylvania Railroad, and recreation parks funded by local entrepreneurs. From the town’s early years to the present day, Keensville has used corporate sponsorship to support a wide range of activities, including sports and entertainment.

Although recreation and leisure were becoming more important to residents, the church remained at the heart of community life. With many denominations building grand cathedrals within the borough, some of which are still occupied today, constituents made the area’s premier investments in music—church organs—although the community’s support for musical entertainment would not truly flourish for several more years when Keensville would also become known for its patriotic parade celebrations complete with the area’s premier boys marching band.

By the late 1920s, the area was quite attractive to laborers and businessmen alike.
Families began to move to the area in pursuit of the American Dream and enjoyment of the bustling community lifestyle. Accordingly, the demand for public education had reached a new peak. The local school district was forced to expand—its classrooms could no longer accommodate the number of students seeking an education. To meet the needs of the new decade, new junior and senior high school buildings were constructed. The town’s local historian recalled vividly the period: “Had times continued to be prosperous, the debt [from the construction of the buildings] would have been paid off without difficulty.”

Economic times would change, however, and Keensville was not exempted from the great economic depression that swept the country in the early 1930s. Most activities in town, including professional and club sports and theater shows, came to a halt during World War I and struggled to recover in subsequent years. Even public school recitations were terminated as the town’s sons were called off to war or to occupy positions in the industrial mills. While some communities never recovered from the tough economic times, Keensville emerged from the Depression eager to rebuild.

After the Depression, local commerce centered on several distinct service factories and mills. Despite predictions that Keensville would continue playing a major role in the area’s recovering economy, the potential for area development had apparently been lessened during the economic disaster. Mills began moving to more profitable locations with less rigid environmental restrictions. Military service became an attractive option for many of the town’s sons and accounted, at least in part, for the slowing of the

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7 The citation for the author’s words has been intentionally removed from the final manuscript to protect
population boom and the first exodus of families from the area. Those who remained were often rewarded more for their experience in the workplace than their education. Schooling, like so many other activities, had taken a back seat to work as a matter of practicality. It was not until the 1940s that a complete high school education truly became a necessity for the town’s youth.

In 1961 a new high school building was opened at its present location. According to a retired faculty member, there was a lot of talk around town about the new school’s indoor swimming pool, a 1,000-plus seat auditorium, metal and wood working shops that were state-of-the-art and in better condition than any mechanic or metal fabricator’s facility in town, and ground facilities primed for future expansion despite a slowly declining enrollment. Nonetheless, the $4 million high school facility proved to be a great source of community pride; that it was paid off in fewer than ten years only added to the town’s shared delight.

Indeed, it was fortunate that the tab for the new building was paid down as the 1960s drew to a close in Keensville. About the same time, both of the town’s major industries again reduced the size of their workforces, this time cutting nearly 1,000 jobs from the area. As a result, the economic underpinning of the town bottomed out and along with it went the tax base that had been so supportive of the local public school and its relatively aggressive expansion.

It would take ten to fifteen years for the full economic effect of the closing and downsizing of mills to take hold of the downtown area and residential neighborhoods but the identity of the town of Keensville and the participants in this study.
residents recall the 1980s and early 1990s as a period of time that saw “outsiders” moving to town and families with firm Keensville ties uprooted and scrambling to find work. Families who did remain took jobs in industries twenty and thirty miles outside of town. The result, recalled a Keensville faculty member, was a weakened link between the school and community: “By the time dad got home from working a full day there was little time to spend at the school--of course that was before [the highway] made the commute as easy as it is now.”

A final blow to Keensville’s economy and community spirit was dealt in 1997 when a major financial crisis struck the Keensville Area School District. An investment deal gone bad nearly cost the district $23 million in taxpayer money. Teachers were alerted that they might not receive paychecks as scheduled; the district might not be able to afford other contractual obligations. Positions were collapsed over a two-year period and any program not viewed as an absolute necessity was highly scrutinized by the business office and superintendent.

Compounding the district’s financial woes was the then underway construction of a new elementary school and middle school that would merge the district’s five buildings into a single-campus, two-building, K–12 facility that also included renovations to the aging high school building. When asked how the financial crisis of the 1990s compared to today’s state-wide call for school finance reform, faculty members at Keensville said it paled in comparison. As one middle school faculty member recalled, “That was nothing.”

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8 The actual quote referenced the highway number and thus has been intentionally removed since it represented a potential identifying demarcation.
The financial crisis that struck the school district in the 1990s was significant to the town’s history because, as one respondent claimed, “It just furthered the town’s belief that there was nothing we could do” in relation to the downturn that had a firm grasp on the borough.

Today, although the town of Keensville and the school district remain a safe community in which children are raised and educated, the sense of community spirit and loyalty to neighbors has certainly been diminished. Where there used to be camaraderie between families and neighborhoods, there is now competition. “Everyone is fighting for their piece of the pie,” said a school district retiree. “That includes the various departments at school and that is sad.”

Indeed, much of the town’s history has been intertwined with the development of the school district—the evolution of one has had a direct and measurable effect on the other. While railroad executives and industrial engineers once dominated the residential landscape, the most prominent position in town now may well be that of a school teacher or administrator. Even the local hospital is not viewed favorably by residents; most well-respected jobs lay well outside of the borough limits—perhaps furthering the suggested divide between community and school. There was a time in Keensville’s past when the local ministry earned a salary which was double that of the school superintendent. Those figures have now been inverted and, with it, perhaps a shift in how the town conducts its business and views its economic vitality.
Keensville Area School District

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Keensville’s schooling took place in three single-room school houses; at that time the school’s facilities "were regarded as both modern and adequate" for the needs of the students."9 In 1914, the school began to offer two curricular options that today would be equivalent to an "academic track" and a "vocational track." Academic students studied classical literature and mathematics and generally did not associate with vocational students who were referred to as "commercials"—a term derived from their chosen "commercial" course of studies. Recitations for commercial education students took place simultaneously in the classroom and in the agricultural fields. It would take until 1911 for an official high school building to be constructed that could house both the academic and the agricultural students together. Even then, most parents who made a living farming were reluctant to send their children to school full-time, wondering how classroom teachers would prepare students for life as a farmer from inside a classroom.

Despite the demand for education and the establishment of a new high school, a matching junior high school building was not built until the late 1920s. One advantage of the new buildings was the ability to offer extracurricular activities to school-aged students. Such activities could not be offered until the establishment of the high school building, which boasted an impressive auditorium and ample room for athletic endeavors. Prior to that time the school had employed a musical supervisor but his responsibilities primarily included the direction of choral activities at Keensville, which took place in the same classrooms that students received instruction on classical subjects. Once the new
high school was opened, the auditorium became a cornerstone of student life and musical activities were no exception. The school’s choir was often involved in daily chapel exercises and school-wide gatherings that took place in the second-floor auditorium.

No athletic activity was recorded at Keensville High until the mid-1910s—well after the school and its students had demonstrated a keen interest in and support for a debate team and oratorical contests. Around the same time, the high school community, at the request of the principal, privately raised funds to invest in a concert grand piano. That the school would seek donations to make possible such an acquisition speaks volumes of the community support for the arts and education even during the extracurriculum’s infancy at Keensville High School. In fact, the instrument was such a source of pride for the school that it was meticulously maintained throughout the years and remains in service today—nearly a century later. The instrument is still a source of school pride, though it had to be rebuilt in the early 1980s after it was improperly transported and stored at the football stadium the evening before commencement exercises and subsequently suffered damage from the nearly quarter-mile venture and driving rains that broke out the night before graduation.

In the 1930s, few official sporting clubs and extracurricular activities enjoyed official sponsorship from the school but those that were formed enjoyed full support from both the school and the community. “What extracurricular activities there were, were the result of the special interest and enthusiasm of certain teachers. Co-curricular activities did not exist. Like today, no credit was given for extracurricular clubs and none were

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9 Quote is from the town’s historian.
carried on during the school day” (Wolfgang, 1950, p. 51). Nonetheless, dramatic productions and musical instruction began to thrive with the establishment of a glee club. A school band would later be added in the late 1930s under the direction of a vocational teacher—not a certified or licensed music instructor—as well as formal music recitations in the elementary grades. Scholastic baseball, track, and basketball teams also began to compete with local schools. With the establishment of such teams came the formation of the school’s first cheerleading squad. Membership on the squad was highly coveted in the early days. Some reports suggest that hundreds of girls would try out for a total of eight positions (Merryman, 2010). A girls’ basketball team, which was added to the list of student activities in 1916, was the only athletic option for female students. Even the high school band did not accept female members at the time. Football was added later after some debate among townspeople about whether the sport was too rough on children; a community football stadium was erected in 1933, made possible by the private donation of a single female alumna.

Like the extracurriculum at Keensville, the number of the school’s vocational offerings had also boomed in the 1940s and 1950s. School consolidation had become increasingly necessary as the local economy and residential development began to pick up and many families relocated from remote areas outside the borough to a more centralized locale. As the new building and additions were made to match the demand for formal schooling, plans were developed to accommodate the needs of local commerce and trade as well as student interests. A machine and wood shop, along with a full-scale automotive classroom, was constructed, although the popular agricultural program still
dominated the co-curricular landscape. These valued co-curricular programs further strengthened the school’s investment in “commercial education” and grounded school exercises in practical training. By the late 1950s, Keensville graduates were finding ample employment with commercial education degrees. The divide between academic track students and vocational students had all but disappeared throughout the years as students began to require training in many of the same courses—some have suggested that the extracurriculum served to unite students in both programs and to heal old wounds associated with the divide between “classical” students and “commercials.” Participation in the extracurriculum, as Waller suggested in *The sociology of teaching* (1932), resulted in a certain *esprit de corps* for Keensville students and community members alike, and thus negated any feelings of animosity between student groups.

More recent events at Keensville have suggested that a mix of good and bad fortune has continued to affect the school district and its extracurricular offerings. Solid leadership and timely changes to the school’s curricular objectives have ensured the school district’s ability to avoid consolidation with nearby districts. New facilities have become a source of pride among the students, school officials, and taxpayers, and their support has been rewarded with a school district that is meeting, and at times, beating the odds. Since 2002, students’ performance on state standardized testing evaluation has been at or above the state average, but in 2010–2011 the high school and elementary school missed the mark for the first time, receiving a “Warning” label from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. At the time of the study, the middle school building had never failed to meet required benchmarks.
There had also been no shortage of notable extracurricular achievements. The community’s support of the basketball and football teams has yielded several state championship appearances—capped twice by state championship victories. Early indications that the performing arts have been a valued part of community affairs and educational offerings have also gained the school great visibility. The school’s choir and band programs are regarded as being among the area’s best, and the school’s dramatic productions continue to be a source of community pride. In fact, veteran members of the faculty anxiously recall a period in the mid-1980s when the school’s music department was said to have “run the school,” the same sentiments annually applied during a winning football or basketball season—an indication that while there is support for extra- and co-curricular offerings, the priority is nonetheless scholastic achievement and preparing students for prosperous careers.

As mentioned early in this chapter, a firm understanding of Keensville’s past proved beneficial when analyzing the study’s data. The final two chapters focus on the study’s present-day data, which were collected in personal interviews and participant’s school priority models, as well as documents provided by participants during the course of the interviews.
Chapter 5
Study Results

The modern-day version of the Keensville Area School District has adapted well to the 21st century considering that the borough’s economic development never reached its once projected glory. Its public school system represents a typical mid-sized rural school district in Pennsylvania. The enrollment in high school grades 9–12 has consistently been between 600 and 650 pupils in recent years, while overall the student population has averaged around 1,800 students in grades K–12, having been officially reported as 1,802 pupils in 2009–2010. The amount expended per pupil was demonstrated relative to the size of the community, its tax base, and the population of the school district. The expenditure per pupil was reported to be just under $9,000 in each of the past three academic school years, though it crept slightly higher than that level for the first time during the 2010–2011 school year—the same year that the state average was nearly $14,000. The increased expenditure per pupil for 2010–2011 was also reflected by several neighboring districts.

Keensville Area High School has recorded a mix of satisfactory and above-average achievements on standardized testing—scores that had kept the middle and high school buildings off the NCLB’s “Schools in Need of Improvement” list until recently. Most school administrators and faculty members were optimistic about the education provided to students but cautious about standardized results in coming years as the bar for success was about to be ratcheted to unprecedented levels.
for instance, had the highest level of performance in Pennsylvania on eleventh-grade PSSA writing exams in 2009 but was added to the “Warning” list for not achieving academic performance indicators for the subgroup “economically disadvantaged students” in mathematics in 2011. Mixed results and conflicting report cards like these are consistent with a general trend feared by educators across the Commonwealth.

As an additional indicator of performance, high school students typically recorded average results on the SATs, while three to five stand-outs were annually recognized at school board meetings for scores of 1800 or higher. One measure of achievement with which most school officials and parents were concerned, however, was the school’s graduation rate, which had been competitive with other schools in the area at 85.28% in 2009–2010, but was lower than the state average of 89% for the same academic year.

Elective courses at Keensville High remained a welcome relief from the rigor of state-mandated coursework. Students enjoyed a well-developed culinary program, several distinct yet integrated vocational training curricula, a human and health services training program, and, of course, musical activities, including band and choir. The automotive shop and metal working curricula had been eliminated from in-house instruction but continued to be offered at a nearby vocational school. Keensville’s affiliation with local vocational training schools had in fact increased the number of opportunities for students, although it had removed them from the school setting for a significant portion of the school day and all but eliminated the option of diversifying their co-curricular courses. A metal fabrication student, for instance, would not have time in his or her schedule for art or music due to the time spent traveling twenty miles to-and-from the training facility.
Three of the school administrators surveyed for this study also suggested that in the near future the culinary program and what remained of a wood shop would also be moved to alternate facilities as a cost-saving measure. The parent respondents were not in favor of this move, suggesting that it would require students to “specialize” in one interest rather than participate in many activities and courses of study and all but eliminate the feel of a comprehensive high school in Keensville.

Extracurricular offerings at Keensville were based on the size and geographic location of the district and had been recently expanded to include a girls’ volleyball team, boys’ tennis, as well as boys’ and girls’ soccer teams. Nearly all respondents acknowledged a hierarchy in the extracurriculum at Keensville. “At the top, you’ve got your football and your basketball,” noted the school’s athletic director. “I would put the band as a ‘level two’ just because of their recent success,” a parent contributed. “The show choir is now a ‘level three,’” she said. “It used to be higher but my daughter is almost embarrassed to be in it now,” referencing a change in direction and leadership that had occurred just before this study was undertaken.

The extracurricular hierarchy was fueled by two factors, according to respondents—number of student participants and demonstrated achievements. The crowning extracurricular achievements of Keensville Area High School were a highly successful football program that boasted a state championship team and runner-up finishes. Basketball and wrestling had each enjoyed periods of success and failure though the town seemed to support their endeavors unconditionally, not unlike the football program. However, dwindling numbers in the wrestling program had led school
administrators and school board members to eliminate an assistant coaching position from the team. All five administrators interviewed suggested that student participation and the actual number of students benefiting from the program had been the determining factor in decisions about program consolidation. “Much of what we do is driven by participation,” noted the school district business administrator. “I want to know how many students are benefiting from a program.” While the superintendent articulated a common theme—that a population of students attend school in order to participate in activities—he also echoed the business administrator’s sentiments. “We’ve got kids who would probably quit school or would not maintain their academic standards [without participation].” Still, he asked, “what is the end product [of student participation]?"

The performing and visual arts had also exhibited a similar track record of demonstrated success combined with years in which the programs failed to meet the expectations of the community and students. Such downturns in fine arts and athletics were indicative of short-term staff or faculty attrition. Maintaining consistent instructional staffing had been notably difficult and may have been as attributable to the number of districts in the area and the availability of positions for advisors and coaches as it was to the school community’s dissatisfaction with mediocre results. Turnover, and therefore inconsistent results, was more common in less popular sports like tennis, volleyball, and soccer and extracurricular performing arts programs like dance, baton, color guard and cheerleading. Resignations and retirements had an enormous impact on activities and elective courses according to the school’s director of curriculum and instruction. Here, she offered a glimpse not only into the decision-making process and
how it was often driven by the superintendent’s direction but also hinted that the perception of the school community was considered in the process.

When we have teachers or coaches resign or retire, normally the first question that comes from the corner office [supt.] is, “do we need to replace them?” So then the principals go back and evaluate whether or not we can pick up those responsibilities [with existing staff]. Sometimes I think that people who are not replaced, there is a perception that what they were doing must not be important and that is not the case. It’s just that we have a responsibility to determine whether or not we need a full-time person to do that or whether what they were doing could be done different. I know that the principals don’t usually make those decisions alone. They often talk to the person that’s leaving or the chair of that department. ... Those kinds of decisions aren’t usually put out there for community feedback.

Another central office administrator echoed the belief about the necessary balance between required expenses and where she would like to see the district allocate its resources: “I would prefer to support the arts and athletics because it provides all those positives. I think we’re being forced to look at where we have to spend the money versus where we would like to spend the money. We’d like to be able to provide it all.”

The Keensville Faculty

The teachers at Keensville Area High School had a diverse and rich set of skills and experiences to offer students. Not unlike many neighboring districts, financial matters had forced the school to hire teachers with fewer years’ experience in order to reduce the high cost of faculty salaries and benefits. Nonetheless, Keensville High had its share of veteran staff mixed with novice teachers. Several teachers had recently retired or were near retirement at the time of the study, having served over thirty years. Of those teachers, four were in charge of extra- and co-curricular subjects that required a
significant commitment of their time after school hours. Two of the thirty-plus year
veterans were teachers of PSSA-required subjects—one was a physical education teacher
and the last was the teacher and supervisor of the culinary arts program. The high school
choral director recently retired, having served 35 years in the position.

In contrast, Keensville High also had its share of first-year teachers and transfer
teachers who were new to the district. The recent economic climate and financial crisis
meant that retirees who had taught PSSA-required courses were replaced while the
positions of elective and co-curricular teachers were collapsed or the programs for which
they had been responsible were terminated. The desire to produce an efficient and
economical system of education was a common theme developed from the central
administrative office, though faculty often spoke of concerns related to being too
concerned with the financial “bottom line” while acknowledging the reality that lay
before decision-makers. “I’d like to see all programs retained. The pot is just smaller,”
noted one faculty member. When asked how budget cuts were being handled and if they
had any input in the decision-making process, three of the teachers who participated in
the interview process agreed that they had no choice and that their opinion may have only
been heard after the decision had already been made. “The principals just went around
and made cuts,” one teacher said. “The [decisions] that we are involved in I feel like
maybe it was just a tough decision for someone to make. ... There is an open door, open
email policy, but I feel like because of this crisis decisions are skipped a few levels and
just made here, or way over here, and it’s directive,” added a faculty member.

There was a consensus among teachers that this was not “business as usual” at
Keensville. In the past there had been dialogue about program cuts and additions but, according to one administrator, the financial crisis was weighing more heavily on the decision-making process than the accountability movement. The reason for that, she said, was the immediacy of financial crunch.

“This is the first time that we have ever seen a reduction in funding,” said the school’s business administrator, adding that there had been years in which school districts in Pennsylvania utilized the “hold harmless” clause to avoid a reduction in financial support from the state. “We typically see a two percent increase in funding. This is a significant shift,” she added. Two of the three central office administrators noted that the accountability movement and testing had been around longer and the school had had more time to prepare for the changes in daily operations and instruction. They believed that the financial crisis was therefore much more of a concern to extracurricular programs than was standardized testing. Similarly, parents interviewed generally agreed that while they had heard rumblings about their students having a hard time getting out of class for a game or going to music lessons, they believed that the financial crunch was threatening to eliminate extracurricular programs altogether. The director of curriculum and instruction offered the lone dissent on the matter, suggesting that the financial crisis was still “young” and that it had the potential to change over time. She also thought that the superintendent and the business administrator were financially savvy and would be able to balance the budget for the foreseeable future, though she agreed that the longer financial reform loomed and the deeper the cuts, “something would have to give.”

Teachers maintained that their support for the extracurriculum was high, noting
social benefits, the expectations of athletes and other participants to retain high academic standards, and the potential for leadership or career aspirations that can result from a student being on a team or involved with a club. A prevailing theme, however, was that mounting pressure to make the grade was having an effect on teachers’ tolerance for students’ absences due to extracurricular commitments. “Teachers like their class time. When they don’t have it, or they are told they aren’t going to have it, they get really mad,” said a teacher of a PSSA-required subject, noting that a colleague had documented all the lost instructional time in the previous year due to interruptions, activities, and early dismissals.

Likewise, co-curricular teachers were concerned that they would no longer be able to use pull-out methods to teach students, especially in the area of music lessons. The problem facing music lessons in schools was not new to the field of public school music education (Abril & Gault, 2008; Hash, 2004); it had just begun to touch Keensville, however. Here, the director of curriculum and instruction summarized the effect of PSSA pressure on classroom teachers and the problems for student schedules.

As the standards and performance indicators continue to rise, we are under a lot of pressure to do what we can to get as many students proficient as we can. Sometimes that means that a student who isn’t proficient in math has to take a math remediation class or something like that that takes up a space where they may otherwise had an elective in their schedule. Generally speaking, students don’t like to do that! Those elective courses, most of the time, are things that they want to take and we know that so many times when a student isn’t doing well in a subject, they don’t like that subject. So if you’re telling a student, “you’re not doing well in math,” or “you need to get your math skills honed a little bit for the PSSA,” they probably don’t like math that much anyway and so, it’s difficult. … Yet, we are under this pressure to perform and so, we continue to do that.
When students were asked if they believed they were having a harder time being excused from class for extra- or co-curricular activities, the students generally agreed that certain courses, particularly science and mathematics, seemed to be more difficult than in previous years. One student said the foreign language teacher had refused to let him leave class for any purpose. “Teachers are cracking down,” offered the student, “but if you do your work they’ll let you out.” Other students agreed that it had more to do with their relationship with the teacher than the specific subject that they taught. “If the teacher likes you, they’ll let you go without even looking at the pass. If the teacher doesn’t like you, they’ll scour the pass” presumably looking for a reason not to allow the student to leave. Students also believed, however, that student athletes and musicians had taken advantage of a relaxed disciplinary code for extracurricular participants and that they had observed other teammates forging passes or using extracurricular activities to avoid classroom lectures and even examinations. They thought that their inability to leave class for music lessons or sporting events may have had just as much to do with rogue athletes as it did with increased pressure to perform in the classroom.

During the course of the study, the high school Dean of Students, a building-level administrator in charge of student discipline, was reassigned to the elementary school. The former dean was said to have cultivated a casual atmosphere in the building which favored students more so than teachers. Teachers believed that student participants and student athletes were allowed to “run the school” and that discipline was scheduled at the convenience of the student, not based on the proximity of the infraction. One teacher
explained that student athletes were allowed to reschedule after-school detentions or negotiate for Saturday morning detentions in order to avoid missing after-school practices or games.

The full-time dean’s position was replaced by the high school band director who also possessed an administrative certificate. The newly appointed dean was asked to continue the direction of two ensembles which met during the school day and the extracurricular instrumental programs, including the competitive marching band. His other teaching responsibilities were shifted and collapsed throughout the department, resulting in the loss of one full-time teaching position in the fine arts department and several periods of instrumental section instruction, though no programs were technically cut from the course of study. As a cost-saving measure the move aligned nicely with the concentric circle model. Though it seemed an obvious economic solution to many, the move simultaneously cut from both the innermost circle—the teacher and the student in the classroom—and the outermost circle—“nonessential” instruction in instrumental music. Whether this was a calculated move on the part of district officials or merely a matter of convenience is addressed in chapter six.

When asked if he thought that the school was following the concentric circle model (Appendix D) for staffing reductions, the high school principal cited the reassignment of the dean’s position and collapsing of the music position as well as other reductions that appeared contradictory to the model. “We’ve done some things like eliminating the middle school principal position which wouldn’t have happened [if the school followed the model]. We’ve talked about the concentric circle model but I don’t
know that we’ve followed it very closely.”

While the concentric circle model and the theory behind its use are further developed later in this chapter, it is important to note here that in addition to staffing reductions and collapsing positions, the principal’s thoughts seemed to indicate alternate motivations behind certain personnel moves. Money was a motivating factor discussed at length with each interviewee; most thought that collapsing positions, including the dean and a high school music teacher, would ultimately be a disservice to the school and the students, although participants admitted that there may not have been a better option considering the $1.7 million shortfall that had to be resolved before the opening session.

Teachers also believed that the difference in philosophy on building management and student discipline between the central office and building administration may have factored into the decision to replace the dean and force change at the high school building. Whatever the motivation, most believed it would be nearly impossible for the new dean to carry out both his instructional duties and administrative supervision of students.

The faculty had a varied collection of thoughts on extracurricular programs. A majority acknowledged the value of the extracurriculum. They particularly emphasized the need for students to have something productive to do with their time after school in order to stay out of trouble. That was especially true when a teacher thought a student’s home life was less than desirable. “Without sports, you would see a lot more of these kids downtown with nothing to do and probably with a baby stroller in tow,” recalled a
physical education teacher. Others thought that participation led to greater expectations in
the classroom and a better rapport with their teachers. “You can tell when kids aren’t ‘in
season,’ in a sport. Their grades go down,” regarded a veteran teacher of a PSSA-
required subject. He later added, “That is the main value of sports, as far as I am
concerned. Take away sports and the kids just won’t care anymore in terms of their
academics.” Other teachers had a positive impression of certain activities while
criticizing other programs for lack of discipline or instilling a false sense of priorities in
student participants. Football was the most commonly targeted extracurricular activity—a
respondent from each group, from school officials to parents and students, believed this
sport received too much emphasis at the school.

The perception of student participants and the activity were often directly tied to
the coach’s expectations of the athlete on and off the field. For instance, if the students
were viewed as respectful and courteous, teachers would often add “Mrs. Shersen [the
coach] would not have it any other way.” If the students lacked focus in the classroom or
scored poorly on tests they would add, “That is how Mr. McNally runs his program.”

The Keensville School Leadership and Administrative Team
The Keensville Area High School administrative team is interwoven with central
administration staff. The district does not have an assistant superintendent; rather, a
director of curriculum and instruction serves grades K–12. She and the elementary
principal (K–4) also serve as co-principal of the middle grades (5–8) as a result of a
retirement of a long-time middle school principal and the school district’s need to cut
costs when opportunities arose.
The district also reported that the decision not to replace the middle school principal was related to declining student enrollment. The attention to student enrollment was also evident in extracurricular activities. A major theme communicated by school administrators was that resources were allocated both to curricular and extracurricular activities when the numbers made this feasible. Five of the administrators referenced “numbers” throughout their interviews. Both the superintendent and the business administrator stated that program eliminations and collapsing positions were almost always the result of the number of students benefiting from a particular program or class. That theme could be interpreted either as financially motivated or based on a concern for student interests.

Along with the director of curriculum and instruction, the superintendent and the district’s business manager were highly involved in not only supervising the high school activities but also the daily operations of the high school building. The superintendent’s tenure had lasted well over the average number of years of service for a tenured superintendent in Pennsylvania.10 Time and experience had determined that the superintendent preferred to be involved in educational matters at the building level. Teachers and fellow administrators described his perspective as “business-like.” Some viewed this business-like attitude favorably while others thought that the primary focus of the district should be student learning and not a “bottom line.” While an interview with the superintendent did reveal a concern for the financial outlook of the district and a

10 The exact number of years of service has been left absent intentionally.
concern for paying down the school’s debt, most of his comments reflected a genuine concern for student learning and what he referenced as the creation of “opportunities” for students. One of the district’s most important responsibilities, according to the superintendent, was to open up new opportunities for the students. He viewed extracurricular activities favorably from this perspective, adding that student participation in sports and music often led students to college aspirations, especially among those who might not have otherwise have had the opportunity. Seeming to echo themes from the literature review he also thought that some students chose their careers based on their interactions with coaches and mentors, particularly in co-curricular subjects in the vocational wing, the music department, and other elective classrooms.

Regardless of the motivation in his decision-making, the superintendent’s influence was a reoccurring theme in discussions about the decision-making process and his devotion to the school and its mission were not questioned. “He lives and breathes to run this school,” noted one teacher. “I’ll get phone calls from him at 7:30am on a Sunday morning. Sometimes he leaves several messages because my voicemail will cut him off,” noted the high school principal. “No decision, recommendation, is put in front of the board that hasn’t been thought out,” commented a central office administrator. That the term “decision” preceded the corrected “recommendation” here speaks volumes of how closely the school board follows the recommendations of the superintendent. This theme is more fully discussed later in this chapter.

Like the superintendent, the business administrator was a long-time district employee who was equally devoted to her position. She shared similar views with the
superintendent and appeared to be one of his closest advisors. That the superintendent respected her position and knowledge of school finance was particularly important during the period of recession and school budget crisis. Although the superintendent made final recommendations to the board regarding which positions to collapse and to replace or not replace retired staff and faculty members, unquestionably some of those ideas were developed in her office as a direct result of the district’s financial obligations.

While her philosophy of education was no doubt influenced by her knowledge of the school’s budget situation and the enormity of the financial crisis that faced the school, especially in comparison to the aforementioned $24 million crisis, she remained student-centered in many of her responses. While student participation and numbers pervaded two of the interviews conducted with her, she also acknowledged the importance of student activities to participants and to the community and administration. She thought that students at the school benefited socially, academically, and motivationally from sports and activities and believed that a large part of the community’s identity centered around Keensville’s athletic program. Moreover, she mentioned that school sports were the only issue that the community rallied around at school board meetings: “I’ve always said that the board could spend hours discussing an athletic issue, [but take] fifteen minutes to approve a $22 million budget. I think the community drives a lot of that.”

In addition to the superintendent and the business administrator, the high school administrative team also included a school psychologist, a transportation manager, two human resource secretaries and a director of buildings and grounds. Of these six administrative staff, who were shared, the superintendent and the business administrator
were the most actively involved administrators at the high school, followed closely by the director of buildings and grounds. Participants attributed the presence and influence of the director of buildings and grounds to the superintendent’s and school board’s focus on the upkeep of buildings and regular maintenance. Teachers and staff alike shared the belief that the school district’s buildings and grounds were not only a source of pride for the school’s administrators and board but also for the community. After years of consolidating buildings and constructing new school houses, the details of which were described in chapter four, the community had arrived at a single-campus facility that served the needs of the students and the community extremely well. Although several custodial members believed certain parts of the building were in disrepair, their thoughts were not indicative of the overall perception of teachers, students, or parents. In fact, a majority of the interviewees concurred that the buildings and grounds were meticulously maintained. Some concurred with the priority assigned by the district to upkeep while others commented that if financial matters worsened, the school should consider reducing the amount spent on maintenance rather than reducing the number of teachers or extracurricular programs.

At the conclusion of the study, parents, students, and teachers acknowledged the school’s plans for several construction projects during the summer months. Several people felt strongly that the construction projects were frivolous and were cutting into an already ailing budget. They were concerned that instructional components of the school day were being negatively affected by the financial crisis, while the maintenance of buildings and grounds continued to be a priority. School officials believed that the
projects were necessary to ensure student safety and maintain the grounds. That theme was also present in the local schools, where the consolidation of buildings was a topic of discussion and construction projects had already been delayed beyond their logical timeframe. As a result of the financial crisis, schools were beginning to wonder if they should invoke cost-saving measures at their multiple-campus sites or begin to consolidate into more centralized schools. While this discussion had dominated the educational landscape in Pennsylvania for years, it seemed that schools were now being forced into those decisions at the time of the study. Keensville, of course, had already consolidated into a single-campus location and the wounds associated with that maneuver had long since healed. The superintendent noted that the consolidation that had caused so much unhappiness earlier made it possible for conversations relating to school budget matters not to be more contentious at the time of the study.

Building-level administration at Keensville had not enjoyed the same track record of extended service nor had many of the principals or deans hired at the school been graduates or residents of the Keensville. However, the athletic director was both a graduate of Keensville and a resident. He had been employed as the athletic director for nearly eight years at the time of the study. As noted, he was a trusted adviser to the superintendent on athletic matters. The high school principal, on the other hand, had been hired five years prior to the study. His appointment as principal of Keensville high school was his first principalship although he had served a neighboring district for seven years as an assistant principal. He did not live in the town of Keensville and had not been previously employed by the district prior to his appointment as high school principal. His
relationship with the superintendent was positive at first but became increasingly antagonistic, particularly in the two school years that directly preceded the study. His style of leadership was, in his opinion, democratic. He preferred to afford the faculty their desired level of autonomy and foster a climate of mutual respect with the student body. That perspective, while not directly opposed to the business-like climate espoused by the superintendent and the school board, did at times cause animosity between the two groups and strain the professional climate in the building.

At the time of the study, teachers had begun to note the deteriorating relationship between the central office administration and the principal. “They don’t like each other,” noted a middle school faculty member. “That’s plain to see,” she added. The urgency of financial reform and the accountability movement only added to the pressure on both sides. The weakened relationship between the building administration and the superintendent, combined with the mounting pressure to perform well on standardized indicators like the PSSA series of tests and Keystone exams, affected the decision-making process relating to both curricular programming and extracurricular activities. The building principal was not listed as a major player in the decision-making process by any of the respondents. Although one teacher suggested that teachers should follow the “chain of command,” most participants ignored the principal’s role in any decision related to budget reductions, program eliminations, or even curricular matters. His role was viewed by respondents as a “middle man,” or someone who took orders from the central office and communicated them to staff, not someone who made policy decisions.

Accordingly, much of the influence on extracurricular activity decisions was
believed to stem from the business-like decisions made by the central administration. The high school principal was aware of problems and understood the curricular focus of the high school but did not play a major role in decisions about faculty positions, coaching or activity advisement staffing, or transportation and scheduling. Some of those decisions were left to the athletic director, based on the needs of the athletic programs, while others were made in light of financial needs as measured by the central office administration.

When asked to detail the “chain of command” in the decision-making process, both hypothetically and/or experientially, most respondents from students to parents, faculty to administration, thought that decisions began with student interests and needs. Those interests and needs were examined by central office administrators and reassigned to the athletic director or department chair in charge of certain programs; after that, parents and/or faculty and community support were gauged. Once recommendations were approved by the central office they were presented to the school board. Parents and students did not feel that the school board would listen to their opinions at school board meetings or work sessions, noting that by the time a decision had gotten to that level, the board members had already made a determination on a course of action.

It therefore became necessary to concentrate the analysis of the decision-making process on the central office and those administrators. The building principal at Keensville was judged to be a daily operations manager who was not required to be overly concerned with decisions on extracurricular activities. Coaching staffs and advisors provided a practical analysis of what budget reductions meant at the ground level, while central office administrators explained how reductions would affect the
The high school principal was keenly aware, however, of how decisions relating to extracurricular programming at the high school would affect student involvement and the overall building climate. He was concerned, at the time of the study, about the outcomes of reductions in fine arts and athletics. He articulated the difficult decisions that faced the district and noted the perceived necessity of allocating resources where they were more needed, though he did not agree that it was always centered around student growth and development.

Philosophically I am more interested in students receiving a liberal education where they are getting art and music and literature [...] by the same token, as a principal, you have to be concerned that if we don’t make these scores that we’re going to be in trouble and get a bad report card and the community is going to think we’re not doing a good job and ultimately the principal could get fired, I suppose. You want to follow your heart and do what’s best for kids and you want to exposed them to all these things that are going to enrich their lives [...] it’s really a difficult situation, a “catch 22.”

He later admitted that he believed the current round of PSSA testing and the pending Keystone examinations, combined with the financial crisis, would take a drastic toll on extracurricular programs. “Everyone wants to support them,” he said, “but over time I think they are going to take some hits.”

The Keensville School Board of Education

The Keensville Area School Board of Education was composed of seven males and two females. A number of the board members had invested a significant number of years into their current position on the board. The longest tenure for a board member who was serving the board at the time of the study was twenty-seven years. One member had
recently completed her first year on the board. Of the remaining seven members, the shortest tenure was eight years. The average term of service for a Keensville school board member at the time of the study was just over two complete terms at nearly fourteen years of service. Most of the members had careers outside of the Keensville borough. One board member owned a local shop down town; another board member was a clergyman. Three board members were retired, one from United States Armed Services.

Seven of the board members shared a responsibility to report school business back to the board during monthly work sessions and school board meetings. Their responsibilities were distributed as chairmen of seven distinct committees to which all board members belonged. In some instances, members of the public, school employees, and/or administrators also belonged to the committees. Extracurricular matters were typically handled by the chair of the student activities committee, although there was some crossover between the financial committee chair, the physical plant and operations committee chair, the public and student relations committee chair, and the human resources committee chair.

While all members voiced their support for the extracurriculum, along with the coaches and financial means necessary to support student activities, several of the board members were more often present at school functions than others. Four of the nine board members were often seen in the “front row” of musical presentations, including annual concerts, the school’s spring musical, and special events. All but two of the members were regulars at major sporting events for the school, including weekly football games in the fall and important basketball games during the winter that were held against rival
school districts. Some of the board members even volunteered in concession booths or ticket sales at the games. Their attendance suggested a heightened awareness of the school’s extracurricular activity and perhaps accounted for their support for the activities themselves.

All board members lived in the borough of Keensville and had either graduated from Keensville Area High School themselves or had family members pass through its halls. Two of the board members had children who were enrolled in school at Keensville during the course of this study, one board member had a child recently graduate and three others had children who had previously graduated from the school. Several of the board members had children or relatives who were athletes and/or musicians at Keensville. One board member’s adult son had previously served as a co-curricular teacher and extracurricular advisor at the high school and middle school. Another board member’s adult child was serving at the elementary school as a music teacher at the time of the study.

As the study unfolded, it became apparent that five of the board members were staunch supporters of the extracurriculum. Although the other four members often praised student activities, their support certainly had a financial limit. Those members were proud of the district’s extracurricular accomplishments and keenly aware of the need for student activities in Keensville, but they often stated a fear of getting “carried away” by extracurricular matters. Their view of Keensville’s extracurricular programming was more practical than passionate and in times of financial need the extracurriculum was not high on their list of priorities. That theme became particularly evident at board meetings
and work sessions as the community brought concerns pertaining to the health and vitality of various extracurricular programs before the board.

Three board members were particularly helpful during the course of the study, having volunteered their time for an interview. The first reported back to the board as the chairman of the student activities committee. He was well aware of the extracurricular offerings provided to Keensville students and expressed gratitude to coaches, advisors, and volunteers for providing those opportunities to the students. He believed in the value of funding extracurricular programs but acknowledged that programs with some classroom tie-in would be given priority in the coming years. He felt that sports were important to student morale and the connection between school and community, but he regretted that more parents were not equally committed to curricular issues, noting that the majority of complaints that he fielded as a board member had nothing to do with the academic goals of the school.

While he believed that the accountability movement had merit, he also thought that PSSA testing was causing problems for teachers and students and felt that the goal of 100% proficiency was unrealistic.

The school board president was also interviewed for this study. A long-time veteran of the school board, he was able to provide data relevant to both the past and present state of the board’s decision-making process. The board president was supportive of and realistic about the value and need for the extracurriculum. He was cautiously optimistic about the district’s ability to deal with financial hardships and believed the
current crisis would have an effect on all programs at the school but would not eliminate them altogether.

The final member chosen for an interview was included because, as a noticeable figure in the Keensville community and a veteran member of the school board, he had often been vocal about student participation and activity. He believed that music, art, and vocational programs were the most important extra- and co-curricular offerings and felt that students often form occupational goals and career objectives based on their experiences in student activities. Like his fellow board members, he believed that the board was being forced to create a budget and a learning environment that was not as favorable to students as he would have liked to see.

All three board members believed that the school had benefited from strong leadership and savvy spending habits. Each referenced more turbulent times in the district’s past when speaking about the magnitude of the current financial crisis. They felt that the superintendent and the business administrator were capable administrators who should receive credit for seeing that Keensville schools fared better than most amidst the current wave of reform initiatives—both academically and financially.

While board members agreed that the concentric circle model had been a useful tool in generating possible reductions in the 2011–12 budget, they each believed that future use of the model depended on how much had to be cut from the following year’s finances. One member noted that the size and type of changes to public education that had been necessary in light of the governor’s decreased allocations to public schools
would not be possible using the concentric circle model. “We’re going to have to change something,” he noted. “You can’t just cut from the outside. We have to look at the inner circle, maybe to reduce some classroom support. Our teachers are already pretty thin,” he added.

With regard to the purpose of the extracurriculum at Keensville, board members believed the real value was teaching students life lessons that they could carry with them after graduation. “They teach team teamwork, responsibility, and camaraderie” said the student activities chair. Others agreed, mentioning that the town had particularly benefited from a winning football team that had drawn the community even closer. One board member referenced a door decorating contest going on at the time of the study in which the community was demonstrating its support for the upcoming football season. The winner was to receive a cash prize of $1,000.

Board members believed that they had adequately supported extracurricular programs over the years but cautioned that the number of activities available to students was draining the school’s limited resources for extracurricular purposes. Each expressed deep regret that the future of activities with declining participation was in doubt and agreed that future decisions would be based on student interest as demonstrated by number of participants and a cost/benefit analysis of the district’s investment in coaching, equipment, and transportation compared to the number of students supported.

The board’s responses were well-aligned with board policy and the expectations of the community and the current state of district affairs.
Extracurricular Programs at Keensville

The purpose of the extracurriculum at Keensville, according to the district policy manual, is to afford students the opportunity to participate in learning experiences which “are more appropriately conducted outside the regular curricular program of the schools” (Keensville Board Policy, 2004). Further, in its statement of policy on extracurricular activities, the Keensville Area School District specifically recognizes its responsibility to provide students with the proper facilities, equipment, and personnel necessary to conduct school-sponsored extra- and co-curricular activities. It stops short of implying that extracurricular activities should be provided to the student at no cost. In fact, a section of the policy on extracurricular activities specifically addresses pay-to-play options: “Participating students may assume all or part of the costs for participation in such activities. … The board shall be informed and must approve the establishment of eligibility standards before they are operable.” As academic standards are outlined in a separate section of the extracurricular policy, one should interpret the “eligibility standards” as a financial precondition of participation, which has been referred to as a “user fee” or pay-to-play program throughout this study.

Keensville high school students have a full menu of extracurricular options at their disposal. In 2010, thirty-five extra- and co-curricular clubs and activities were officially recognized and sponsored in part or whole by the board. Twenty of those activities were sports teams. The athletic budget comprised 1.8% of the school’s nearly $22 million budget. Including all student activities, music, clubs, and sports, less than 5% of the school budget was apportioned to extracurricular services. The proportion of expenses for the extracurriculum relative to the overall budget is addressed in the
discussion of study results in this chapter, as well as in the final chapter.

Activities at Keensville ranged from language clubs and student government to culinary arts and music ensembles. Some activities, like music, newspaper, and culinary arts, were directly tied to elective courses that met during the school day. Instruction for those programs therefore took place before, during, and after school hours making them both co-curricular and extracurricular activities—other programs, like baton, library club, and ski club, met solely outside of school time. Programs that were co-curricular enjoyed the benefit of financial support from the school. Some resources, equipment, and supplies were shared between in-school classes and an after-school club with a similar purpose or interest (e.g., science club, band). Programs defined as entirely extracurricular typically required a greater financial commitment from participants, although the advisor’s or coach’s stipend may have been provided by the school district. The school’s athletic director did not believe that the cost associated with school sports had increased significantly during his tenure. He did believe, however, that parents were investing more in their children’s participation, including providing funds for equipment and coaching during the off-season. He reported parents spending upward of $2,000 on the students’ participation in travel clubs or clinics. In his opinion, many parents felt that their son or daughter possessed athletic talent that would increase their likelihood of playing the sport at the collegiate level.

The athletic department received support for twenty scholastic teams in 2010. Boys’ athletics included basketball, baseball, wrestling, football, tennis, cross-country, track and field, golf, swimming and soccer. The girls’ teams included basketball, tennis,
cross country, track and field, golf, soccer, softball, cheerleading, swimming, and volleyball. Most athletic teams had a varsity and junior varsity team. Occasionally, players were shared between the junior varsity and varsity squads. Some teams, like football, basketball, wrestling, and softball, had separate 7th-, 8th-, and 9th-grade teams which fed into the high school programs, while others had a combined junior high school team for grades seven and eight. The most popular school sports were football, basketball and wrestling for the boys, and soccer, cheerleading, and volleyball for the girls.

Nearly all respondents claimed that there was a hierarchy of activities at Keensville which, in many instances, was tied to perceived funding levels. Football, for instance, was reported to be a “sacred cow” at the school and in the community. Some parents and students believed that the football team drained school resources and resented the fact. Others simply qualified their statements claiming that the only team not to be hit by the financial recession would be the football team. When asked to describe the hierarchy of activities at Keensville, most, if not all respondents, placed football at the top. Some struggled to place any other activity into a “tier one” or “top level” activity. Tier two consisted of basketball, wrestling for some, baseball, and cheerleading, followed by band, choir, the school musical and special interest groups like mock trial and student government. Parents thought that the tiers were determined by the number of participants in the activity while the students believed the tiers were driven by success and achievement.

The final tier, according to a majority of respondents, was comprised of clubs and less crowd-friendly sporting events like speech team, boys and girls tennis, golf, and
swimming. Most attributed the low status of those clubs and sporting events to the low number of spectators. Interestingly, most of the activities listed in “tier three” focused on individual achievements rather than a team. Keensville had stand-out golfers and a successful speech team—two activities that students agreed were tier three groups despite the noted success of the programs. When asked to clarify these claims, a student group believed that other activities were more visible and therefore more attention was directed toward them. They also felt that if their accomplishments continued to create a record of success, those groups would be elevated to tier two status as measured by student support and financial support from the district.

Sporting teams at Keensville unified the school community and gave students something to look forward to on game day. Whether a student was an athlete, a participant in cheerleading or the band, or just a spectator, student respondents referenced the camaraderie and school spirit that athletic events fostered. That was particularly true, according to the students, when the teams were playing nearby rivals or made the playoffs. “When [the band] went to Atlantic Coast Championships we had a send-off performance and half the town came out to see us play. It really shows how big of an impact things like that have on the community,” commented a member of the school’s marching band. “When they go out and see their football team win or they go out and hear that their band did good it gives [the community members] a sense of pride in their hometown; it gives them something to be proud of,” added another student.

One student thought that Keensville’s bad reputation was at least righted in part by its extracurricular achievements. “People just know about the drugs and the bad stuff.
When people say Keensville is a craphole, we can say, ‘yeah, but look at what we do. Look at the good stuff; don’t just look at that’.”

Football was the best-attended sporting event, followed by basketball and wrestling. Girls sports were not as well attended as the boys’ events unless the girls team made it to the playoff season or had a notable achievement such as a winning streak or playoff berth. That was particularly evident during a girls basketball season around the time of the study when crowds were larger than expected during a playoff run that was capped by a district championship.

That girls sports were not as well attended as the boys’ events may be indicative of the types of sport played or the facility in which the event was held. Boys sporting events considered to be popular were typically held in the high school gymnasium and the 7,000-plus seat football stadium, while popular girls events were held at the middle school gymnasium and less crowd-friendly venues like the tennis courts and natatorium.

The smaller crowds at girls’ events and less popular boys’ teams may also have been caused by the students’ perception of the team’s success in past seasons. While the football team averaged eleven wins over each of the past six seasons and rarely missed an appearance in the district championship game, eight other sports combined for a win/loss record of 41–88. Two girls’ teams failed to post a single victory in 2010, and another team lost eighteen games compared to one victory. Several boys’ teams had also lost more games than they had won and they too experienced smaller crowds at games. Results had not been tied to financial support by respondents although several stated that
if times were to continue to be rough, the school should eliminate less popular and less successful teams. Moreover, some parents thought that the recent addition of unsuccessful teams had drained financial resources away from other activities.

Several parent respondents expressed a belief that the school might be offering too many athletic options to students.

While no sport or activity offered at Keensville at the time of the study would ordinarily be considered frivolous for a public secondary school, the diversity of extra- and co-curricular offerings at Keensville was slightly more ambitious than at other schools in areas of similar size and demographics, perhaps supporting the parents’ perception that too many activities were being funded by the school. Indeed, many school officials warned that the number of extracurricular offerings would soon become problematic if the financial crisis were to continue over the next several years.

Student activities were not atypical when compared to sports on level of achievement and recognition. Student activity achievements were less quantifiable, though notable accomplishments tended to point toward successful years whereas the absence of notable achievements typically went hand-in-hand with lower morale and lowers student participation. The marching band, for instance, had recorded three consecutive championship seasons at the time of the study and the Keensville high school jazz ensemble had recently earned the school’s first east coast championship for an instrumental ensemble in 2011. The school’s spring musical was recognized by a judging panel as the area’s best high school production in 2008 but failed to receive any awards.
for its 2011 production. The mock trial team, another competitive favorite among students, also received local accolades at competitions in 2009. In the subsequent two years, more students signed up for mock trial competition, but the larger team failed to follow its own success. Student participants feared that the program would lose funding in the coming years if it failed to be successful. An interview with the superintendent revealed that he was and continued to be the chief supporter of the mock trial team regardless of its competitive results. “I brought that here. I started that!” he stated. In that case, student opportunity and the potential for students to choose a career path in law outweighed both numbers and costs, although the superintendent’s thoughts may be swayed by future financial conundrums.

The Keensville baton and dance teams had each held east coast championship banners within the three years that preceded the study. Students from those programs said that their success was a welcomed sign of vitality considering that the teams had not performed well in the years before the current instructional staff had been appointed at Keensville. The speech team has delivered countless recitations at school events which were noted by school officials as a source of pride, in addition to having received favorable local evaluations at speech competitions.

Other clubs, such as the ski club, Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), yearbook club, and newspaper, were non-competitive and well-liked by students. Those clubs were referenced by students and parents as “tier three” activities, and most if not all of the costs associated with running the programs were covered by students. School officials did not see those clubs as a drain on the school’s budget.
School Reform at Keensville

The Keensville Area School District was experiencing the same one-two punch of school reform and financial constraint as all districts in Pennsylvania at the time of the study. Many of the symptoms of reform were the same or comparable to the results found in the literature review in chapter two. The phrase, “Do more with less,” was a common mantra used among Keensville faculty, administration, and school board members alike. The phrase accurately described the predicament that Pennsylvania schools were in at the time of the study. Although the standard for excellence in academics and extracurricular activities and athletics were still well-defined, and the expectations of the state board of education were never clearer, the means by which the school was being supported were being increasingly called into question.

The problem, according to the school’s business administrator, had been directly caused by diminished state funding for public education and compounded by the governor’s support for voucher programs that were draining valuable tax dollars from the school budget. “This is the first time that we have ever seen a reduction in funding,” she noted, adding that schools in Pennsylvania typically receive a 2% increase per year while reaffirming that in her time as an administrator, they never had to deal with a decrease in funding. There had been years, she noted, that funding level was the same as the previous year’s, but schools had been able to use the financial “hold harmless” clause to ensure that reductions in financial support did not occur.

Not only had the level of financial support been reduced for the Keensville Area School District in 2011–12, but a change in tax legislation further limited Pennsylvania
school districts’ ability to raise local revenue. According to the school’s business administrator, “There used to be seven exceptions that [school districts] could use to raise local taxes in accordance with Act 1. There are now three.” Several school officials stated that those two factors were at the heart of a “significant shift” in how school business would be conducted in the near future. The crisis had reached such a peak at the time of the study that the superintendent of schools and the business administrator had published a four-part series in the local newspaper, detailing what the loss of state support meant for the school district. In addition, each of the school’s quarterly publications dating back to the fall of 2010 referenced a new “fiscal reality” for school districts in Pennsylvania. Those articles were intended to make the community aware of the magnitude of the situation and the school district’s decision to use a concentric circle model (Appendix D) as a basis for budget reductions. Many parents who were interviewed for the study recalled the series of articles and the concentric circle model.

The concentric circle model places the teacher and the classroom at the heart of the mission of the school. Accordingly, the model gives the impression that classroom activities should be reserved for the final stage of reductions and therefore receive the most support both in theory and practice. Moving outward, support at the building level is given slightly less priority than support at the district level. The final circle represents “other activities.” In an article addressing the fiscal crisis, the superintendent of schools at Keensville interpreted, like most practitioners and scholars, the final circle as specifically including “music, athletics, and extracurricular programs.” Coincidentally those programs are not part of statewide testing.
During the course of data collection, the superintendent clarified that the district was not and would not seek to accomplish reductions from the outside of the circle inward. Instead, he proposed that the district would “continue to look for opportunities that present themselves” and defended the concentric circle model as a “legitimate procedure to evaluate everything.” The concentric circle model, as the district had interpreted it, afforded the administrative team and the school board a method of establishing values and priorities. “Through this process,” wrote the superintendent, “the District is charged to critically evaluate and effect change from the outside working in—working toward the primary educational mission of the [Keensville] School District.”

The 2011–12 Keensville budget represented a $1.7 million reduction in expenses from 2010–2011. Approximately $500,000 of that shortfall was due to the state budget while the remaining amount represented increases in contractual obligations. To compensate, the district cut the supply budget by $150,000, a move that the school’s director of curriculum and instruction said the school was not immediately concerned about: “What I’ve noticed [in the past] is that teachers have the supplies they need. If they needed one ream of paper they ordered five because they had the money to do it [in the past].” That stockpile, along with the 50% reduction in supplies, was what the district counted on to get it through the 2011–12 school year. Other moves included cutting over $100,000 from the technology budget, instituting fees for student parking and the faculty’s use of appliances in their classrooms and offices, and nearly eliminating every new textbook adoption that had been previously scheduled for 2011–12.

The district also proposed raising local revenue through tax dollars to the tune of
$260,500, according to the district’s quarterly publication, stressing to the community that the era of fiscal reform was “not a one-year phenomenon but [an ongoing] challenge to ‘do more with less.’”

The athletic budget was not spared from cuts and was accordingly reduced by appropriately 10–12%. Exact figures for the overall athletic budget were unavailable at the time of the study due to estimated ticket sales revenues from new ticket prices at sporting events which were aimed at generating more revenue for athletic teams than in past years. The raised ticket prices could also limit some families’ access to these events, leading to lower than anticipated revenue. Accordingly, exact figures were not available until the following year.

It should be noted, however, that the process followed in reducing the athletic budget was not directly tied to the same process used in decision-making about curricular reductions. According to teachers, department chairs, and the building administration, curricular reductions were prescribed by the central office. A 50% reduction was requested of each department in the 2011–12 school budget period. “Everyone’s budget went [down] by fifty percent, so that was a pretty big change there,” commented the principal, adding that faculty were not involved in that decision. He recalled that the exact numbers were briefly discussed at an administrative team meeting but the final decision to cut the budget in half was made at the central office.

On the other hand, the athletic director reported a $400,000 budget for the school’s twenty varsity and junior varsity teams. That figure also included the middle
school athletic teams. Cuts to the athletic budget were estimated between $35,000 and $50,000 depending on ticket sales from the coming season. Those expenses would be reduced by eliminating 15% of the equipment budget from each sport. The athletic director echoed the central administration’s observation of teachers’ use of their budget, when noting that not all coaches had used their equipment allotment in past seasons. He did not think that the reduction in equipment budgets would negatively affect sporting teams in that season but was less optimistic about future seasons should the equipment budget remain level. Although no athletic teams were cut in 2011–12, he thought that the elimination of sporting teams would be the only way to handle future budget reductions if the financial crisis continued into subsequent school years.

In contrast to the process used to reduce budgets for curricular programs, in which the principal was not greatly involved, the athletic director recalled being significantly involved in the decision-making process. When asked to describe the process used to earmark reductions for the athletic teams, the athletic director suggested that it began at the central office level. “They came to me,” he said, “and asked where I thought we could save some money.” After presenting the central office with an initial report on possible cuts, he added that additional suggestions were made by the school’s “hierarchy”: “Increasing ticket sales [prices] is not something that I originally recommended. I took the hierarchy’s recommendation and presented it to the school board.” When asked if the building principal was aware of the dialogue initiated regarding the athletic budget, the athletic director noted that he “tried to keep the principal in the loop.” Both scenarios supported several administrators’ claims that the decision-making process was heavily
influenced by the school superintendent, but the athletic budget seemed to be more influenced by the athletic director than did the curricular cuts by the school principal.

The cost-saving measure most commonly recommended by the athletic director and the central office administration was the elimination of portions of a team’s transportation budget. Booster clubs were therefore asked to pick up additional busing expenses across the board. Other teams received less support from the school for tournament entry fees. Additionally, coaching stipends were indefinitely frozen at their present levels and the athletic department lost a total of four paid coaching positions. Those vacancies were expected to be filled by additional volunteer staff. An assistant football coach was added to the books for 2011–12, however, at the cost of nearly $4,500. That move suggested some truth to the extracurricular hierarchy.

Additional measures that had not been enacted yet but remained “on the table” according to school administration and the athletic director, and recommendations that were pending from the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association (PIAA) included reducing the number of games for most, if not all, sports, eliminating certain junior varsity and junior high school sports, and sharing transportation with neighboring districts to tournaments and close-by competitions.

Any decision related to the extracurriculum and Keensville sports in particular were highly scrutinized before being recommended to the school board for consideration. “I’ve often said that we could cancel English classes and there would never be a comment from parents, but if you tamper with any of those, sports, music, any of those,
people really take it personally,” offered the principal. The director of curriculum and instruction concurred, stating “the decision to eliminate some [extracurricular] programs would be counterproductive to the accountability movement,” adding that “there are a lot of intangibles that students gain from extracurricular activities. Obviously there is the social aspect of them. Learning responsibilities and deadlines. … Time management and those kinds of skills come from students participating in extracurricular activities.” School board members agreed that the decision to reduce funding or support for various programs had been difficult—while Keensville had fared better than some school districts, decisions faced in the future were going to be even more difficult.

All school officials were quick to note that no programs had been cut in the 2011–12 school year. Some programs had been asked to pick up additional expenses while others had in fact lost paid advisors or even teaching positions. As previously mentioned, at least one sport had actually added to its staff. In contrast, the music department lost one full-time instructional position when the high school band director’s position and the dean of students positions were collapsed. While no programs were cut and all musical activities were still offered to the students, instrumental lessons that took place during the school day were reduced from three periods of availability to one period of availability. During the one period in which the dean of students might be available for lessons, high school discipline and administrative responsibilities took precedence over musical instruction, which relegated the instructional component of the combined position to a secondary role and limited student access to individual instruction. The move saved the district one full-time salary and benefits and was viewed by some administrators as a
necessary example of reevaluating the district’s needs.

Another teacher who was interviewed for the study reported that his extracurricular stipend had been eliminated and the program that he supervised was in jeopardy of being eliminated. The participant specifically asked that the name of the program not be mentioned in the study, but agreed that it could be referenced as an example of how “tier three” programs were being systematically cut. He reported that at least eighty students took advantage of the extracurricular activity which he supervised but it was a lesser-known program that some felt could be absorbed into existing activities. He cautioned that his position was twelve months, whereas some other programs were seasonal. “I’ve been here on Christmas Day before,” he noted. “If the kids want to be here, I’m here.” He further believed that reducing opportunities for students in his program would almost certainly mean that students would have more free time to engage in undesirable activity “downtown.”

Facing a deficit of $1,708,248, school officials may have had no other option than to cut from tier three programs or look for opportunities to consolidate rather than continuing business as usual, and the concentric circle model indicated that nonessential activities would bear the brunt of budget reductions. All four school officials who were interviewed prior to the round of primary interviews noted their concern about continuing financial crises in the coming years. The playful “do more with less” mantra was drained from their responses when asked what the future held should financial support not improve. “A reduced supply or equipment budget is okay for one year, but it’s not sustainable for several years,” noted the school’s business administrator. Similarly,
another administrator said that although the school had collapsed positions and trimmed what little it could from the budget, additional cuts would mean eliminating programs and instructional positions both from the curricular program of studies and the school’s extracurricular offerings. “We’ll have to look at everything, which is hard because that means a cultural change for everyone,” noted one member of the central office personnel.

The financial woes of the district were further complicated by the aforementioned standardized reform objectives. One administrator said, “it makes sense to push for standardization.” The problem, she noted, is that not all districts in Pennsylvania are able to provide equally to students and that decision makers at the state level have yet to fully realize what is desirable and what is obtainable. Another school official agreed, adding that “Standardization sets the same expectations for everybody. That is a good opportunity for students.”

The current wave of curriculum reform has been fueled not only by standardized testing, according to school officials, but also by what are known as “common core standards” for core curricula which are being looked at nationally. At present, “we have a mile-wide, inch-deep system. Common core standards are the reverse,” noted the director of curriculum and instruction.

When asked how standardized testing and performance indicators were affecting extracurricular programs, school officials lamented that high school students were affected the most. “We find ourselves pulling kids from co-curricular and elective courses [for remedial purposes],” said the building principal. “We try to stay away from
lower and middle grades,” added the director of curriculum and instruction, “but once students go to the high school, there is only so much time in the day.” She added that the effect of pulling students out of elective courses for remedial support was a paradigm shift from how elective courses ran when she went to school at Keensville, noting that the situation was a double-edged sword—the student was required to pass certain state tests as a graduation requirement, but their passion and motivation for coming to school may in fact lie with the elective coursework from which they were being pulled.

Seeming to agree with the school’s administration, the Keensville elementary school band director voiced his concern about and frustration with pulling students from instrumental lessons and rehearsals for remedial math, English, and science classes: “We just can’t see them [for lessons] anymore. You can’t pull them from math, you can’t pull them from English. Most of the time I have to rely on one teacher who probably shouldn’t let them go to a lesson [and miss class] but does.”

One silver lining cited as due to the accountability movement was the school’s focus on the weekly academic eligibility list which required a student to maintain a C-average (1.67 GPA) as a precondition of participation. “Kids involved in sports, we typically see an increase in their grades …. Sometimes it’s pretty dramatic,” offered Keensville’s high school principal, who noted that any student who fell behind academically was assigned an academic detention. Although he acknowledged that students don’t like being pulled from after-school rehearsals and practices, he said that the remedial assignments did manage to get students caught up on their assignments. Other administrators agreed, noting that eligibility drives students to perform well in the
classroom which was their justification for retaining an eligibility standard higher than both the PIAA requirement and the state department of education’s eligibility policy.

Students seemed to agree. When asked if they were motivated to perform well on the PSSA tests or the Keystone exams, students agreed that there was no incentive to perform well on the tests beyond achieving a score that would allow them to graduate from high school. They agreed that they were more motivated by the school’s weekly academic eligibility standards which could prevent them from performing with the band, playing soccer, or participating in extracurricular activities like school dances. They also believed that the SAT test was more difficult than the PSSAs and they reported being motivated to do well on it in order to get into a good college. They thought that the Keystone exams were more difficult than the PSSAs but admitted that they would merely seek a passing grade on any standardized test in comparison to the SATs.

These results are somewhat contradictory to the research on eligibility requirements reported in chapter two. There, the literature suggested that eligibility standards could be a deterrent to some students’ participation. Several factors may account for the contrary results found in this study. First, students who were selected for this study were highly motivated and/or identified by their coaches or teachers as leaders of their class and the activities in which they participated. The aforementioned research referenced lower-performing students and students who were “on the cusp” of failing. None of the students who participated in this study were on the verge of failing, though several had reported instances in which they were conscious of the minimum eligibility requirements and would do just enough to remain eligible for participation. An alternate
explanation could also be the size or location of the district used to collect data. In Keensville, the students had few opportunities outside of school to occupy their time. In a more urban or suburban area, that may not have been the case. While this result is intriguing, it was not the primary aim of the study. Future case study research may benefit from further investigation of the topic.

The results of the study, including some dissimilarity to the available literature, are the source of the summation and discussion in this chapter.

**Discussion of Important Themes**

Findings from this study were made possible through the timely collection of data concerning what transpired as re extracurricular programming at one Pennsylvania public school district during the peak of educational accountability and fiscal reform. Students, parents, teachers, administrators, school officials, and community members were interviewed in an effort to create a “critical case” that could be examined by scholars and practitioners. The result was a case study that documented many of the same themes available in scholarly research and inspired the exploration of others. The data breathed new life into studies that were decades old and gave a face, voice, and context to a body of literature that had been predominantly quantitative. Further, it was the first study to investigate the state of extracurricular programs after the financial crisis hit Pennsylvania school districts amidst higher expectations for public school accountability due to NCLB.

True to the central aim of critical case study research, this case study presented themes that could be observed in nearly any public school district in Pennsylvania at the time of the study. While Keensville may have fared better or worse than some in the first
round of extracurricular reductions, most respondents suggested that the “writing[was] on the wall,” and they intended to brace for more setbacks and reduced support for extracurricular activities.

The Financial Crisis and the Concentric Circle Model

The financial crisis and massive school funding deficits across the Commonwealth were a primary theme explored during the interview process, as was the school’s use of the concentric circle model. None of the respondents believed that the crisis had been overestimated by the school and all felt sure there would be some form of reduction in support for the extracurriculum. School officials were able to clearly articulate the effect of decreased funding levels on instructional programs and extracurricular activities. Their understanding of the phenomenon has been published in several news articles and was present in interviews with students and parents.

School officials believed that equipment, supplies, and personnel would account for a majority of the difference between the 2010–11 school budget and the 2011–12 school budget. In fact, the majority of the increased expenditures for the 2011–12 school year came from salaries ($338,312), retirement programs ($298,352), cost of health insurance ($177,098), and students who left the school for cyber-charter schools ($183,197). Most of the savings came from the retirement of eleven school faculty members and/or administrators. A total savings of $724,303 was reported through those salaries alone. Nine of the eleven positions were not replaced, while two were being replaced with less-experienced teachers, which saved the district over $55,000 in teacher salaries.
The two teachers who were replaced were instructors of PSSA-required courses. A police science teacher, four elementary positions, an English teacher, an alternative education teacher, a special education teacher and a middle school principal were not replaced. As a result, elementary class sizes for 2011–12 were expected to grow, the police science program was eliminated, special educators and alternative educators were picking up a heavier workload, and two existing administrators, one at the elementary school and one at the central office, were sharing the responsibilities of the middle school principal.

The district stated that it would use the concentric circle model (Appendix D) to evaluate cost-saving measures that were necessary under the prescribed conditions. While several administrators indicated that they did not believe that the model was followed intentionally and one believed that eliminations had occurred that were contrary to the model’s intent, the results of the reductions indicated otherwise. Of the $1.7 million savings that the school reported for the 2011–12 school year, 6% came from circle one (teacher and students in the classroom), 7% from circle two (school-based instructional support), 15% from circle four (district-level instructional support), 10% from circle five (district-level operations support), and 13% from circle six (athletics, music, extracurriculum). There were no reductions in the third circle (school-based operations support).

In terms of dollars saved, total budget reductions (Appendix E) showed that the greatest reduction actually came from circle one (teacher and students in the classroom). Indeed, teachers interviewed indicated that they believed a heavy toll was being taken on
classroom supplies, and that they were being asked to teach more classes with less preparation time. As personnel, equipment, and instruction represent the largest portion of the Keensville Area School District’s budget, the $755,325 savings in circle one represented the second smallest reduction in any circle (outside of school-based operations support). On the other hand, only $53,605 was removed from the support of extracurricular activities and scholastic athletics. The extracurricular budget represented less than 5% of the total budget for the Keensville school district, however. Athletics accounted for 1.8% of that figure. As a matter of percentages, the extracurriculum suffered the second highest reduction in support at 13%, behind district-level instructional support. The elimination of a director of special education comprised the majority of that reduction.

In total, the district came upon 44% of its 2011–12 savings by eliminating from circle one despite reductions that only accounted for 6% of the total budget allocated to teacher salaries and instructional objectives. Savings from extracurricular activities, while ranking as the second highest decrease in financial support, only saved the district 3% of the total 2011–12 savings. This theme will be more fully developed in the discussion of budget reductions, yet it is interesting to note the relatively small amount of dollars saved by reductions to extracurricular activities.

In the early stages of the crisis, administrators believed that they would examine reductions through the concentric circle model (Appendix D). Although the final reductions loosely fit into the model, the school’s business administrator reported that the results happened almost by chance rather than strategic management. Their perception
was that they would need to save the most from programs which lay on the outside layers, including the extracurriculum. As they worked through reductions, school leaders found that they would need to reduce staffing expenses and began offering retirement incentives in order to accomplish further reductions in the operating budget.

As reflected in the final numbers, the majority of actual dollars saved came from the inner-most portions of the circle, where the school had allocated the majority of its financial resources. In contrast, the fewest dollars saved came from the outside circle, where the district had allocated the least of its operating budget. There was a commonsense realization, after the fact, that such vast savings could not be accomplished by trimming from the layer that represented less than 5% of the overall budget. School officials acknowledged that the final result was not due to their initial interpretation of budget reductions using the concentric circle model; they believed more cuts would have been needed from extracurricular subjects had several retirements not occurred.

**Feelings about the Keensville Extracurriculm**

Data collected on the value of the extracurriculum indicated that respondents favorably viewed opportunities for students to participate in music, athletics, and clubs. Echoing the available research on the benefits of student participation, individuals interviewed for the study suggested that positive outcomes associated with extracurricular participation ranged from academic success to the development of leadership skills and better attitudes toward school to higher career aspirations and the expectation of going to college. Respondents stopped short of agreeing with Bidwell (1965), who believed that a function of extracurricular participation was to drain students of their energy. However,
they did acknowledge that time spent at the school on extracurricular activities kept them out of trouble and afforded them less time to “hang out” downtown—in an area of Keensville widely reported to be overrun with hooligans and drug dealers.

Each of the respondent groups wished to continue to focus on PSSA-required subjects and reading, writing, and mathematics. This was particularly true among teachers, students, and parents when the idea of college aspirations entered the dialogue. Most, however, also said that extracurricular subjects taught students “real life” skills not taught in the classroom. Almost all interviewees believed that some students’ only motivation in coming to school was to participate in extracurricular activities. Some went so far as to suggest that the dropout rate at Keensville would increase significantly were it not for sports or music—the two most popular activities represented in “tier one” and “tier two” of the data.

All of the respondents also believed that the school community and the borough of Keensville benefited from the school’s extracurricular programs. Community pride and identity were the most commonly cited benefit for the community, followed by the benefit of social gatherings and “something to do” in town. Students and parents also believed that the extracurriculum provided a means of passing down traditions from generation to generation.

**The Decision-Making Process & Motivation Associated with Resolutions**

The decision-making process at Keensville did not prove to be unique with respect to process or product. Academic outcomes were balanced with appropriate expectations for student growth and development. Key players identified in the decision-
making process were students, parents, community members, building-level administrators, coaches and advisors, teachers, school administrators, and the Keensville school board of education. Respondents identified strong leadership and management from the central office, which consisted primarily of the business administrator and the superintendent, along with the director of curriculum and instruction. To a lesser extent, students and parents believed that the athletic director had an influence on sporting programs. Building-level administrators, like the Keensville high school principal, were notably absent from decision-making on budget reductions.

A majority of teachers and mid-level administrators (e.g., principal, athletic director) described a decision-making process that was collective but highly influenced by the superintendent. School board members concurred with that theme and expressed trust in and support for the superintendent’s recommendations. Some teachers and parents expressed frustration with the process but most generally agreed that given the circumstances they were unlikely to be able to make recommendations contrary to school proposals. A review of the priority model data later suggested that parents understood that the school had basic expenses and thus appropriated monies accordingly. Few respondents, including students, assigned a value of more than 15% of the school’s budget to extracurricular programs. Universally, the majority of the school priority data assigned a high priority to PSSA-required subjects and instruction related to non-PSSA-required subjects. Some parents thought that building and grounds maintenance would occupy the largest percentage of the budget, while at least one parent wanted to see more instructional support at the classroom level.
Nearly all participants struggled to assign value to the eight categories offered by the funding priority model, including school personnel. Almost all of the individuals who completed the model would have liked to assign a higher priority to extracurricular programs and/or teacher salaries. Some used mathematical calculations to assign a priority to the model while others used numbers relative to the first category completed in the model.

Themes explaining the motivations of decision-makers ranged from student interest as demonstrated through number of student participants, to cost/benefit analysis that weighed heavily on financial principles. School administrators typically referenced student numbers and the cost of continuing various programs when asked what the future held for the extracurriculum at Keensville under the present conditions. Parents believed that program success as demonstrated by wins/losses and/or championships combined with program status (i.e., tier one versus tier two) would account for decision-making strategies in the near future. Students agreed that the perceived status of the program would weigh heavily on decisions made about programs like football and band, soccer and tennis, but they also believed that an increased number of student participants would mean greater support.

In all cases, the data suggested that respondents perceived an adequate level of support for the extracurriculum at Keensville. That support was believed to be provided by students, parents, faculty members, administrators, school board members and the community of Keensville. Any reductions in support would be manifest in the financial appropriations given to programs; individual programs would not be targeted even
though decision-makers did not support all extracurricular activities in theory.

Having investigated and discussed the events at Keensville and those involved—or not involved—in the decision-making process, the final portion of this chapter discusses data collected from respondents’ school priority models, which were coded and examined for themes and conflicts. This discussion will serve not only to further describe the individuals involved in the decision-making process but also to investigate how their preferences for school budgeting compared to the actual action. As presented in chapter one, the analysis of their motivations and desires sets the stage for a final review of themes that emerged from the data.

**School Funding Priorities**

The extent to which students, parents, teachers, various administrators, and school board officials influenced final recommendations set to affect the extracurriculum at Keensville Area High School in the fall of 2011–12 was the focus of the preceding chapter. Qualitative data taken from each stakeholder’s view of the decision-making process offered the reader a clear picture of how the Keensville Area School District examined its expenditures and strategically cut thousands of dollars from student activities and school sports, in addition to curricular reductions necessitated by a significant shift in financial support provided to each of the Commonwealth’s 500 school districts.

Themes that emerged from the review of participants’ school priority model were not as coherent as data collected during the interview process. Several factors may have affected the results, including the respondents’ interpretation of what the researcher has
previously admitted were broad categories or prior knowledge of school budgeting and/or budget reductions. Due to the nature of the study and the position of the researcher in the school community, it is also possible that data were skewed favorably toward extracurricular programs. Nonetheless, several observations warrant discussion.

Most parents claimed to believe that the school district adequately supported extracurricular activities. They felt that the school should spend 2–11% of the school budget on extracurricular activities. In fact, a simulated Keensville budget, derived from the actual 2011–12 budget (Appendix F), indicated that just 2% of the school’s budget was allocated for extracurricular purposes. By contrast, instructional expenses for PSSA- and non-PSSA-required courses accounted for 36 and 23% of the budget, respectively. Parents also believed that the school should allocate 10–30% of the total budget on PSSA-required instruction and 10–20% on non-PSSA-required courses.

Several parents understood that PSSA-required courses, such as math and English, were important; they further stated that math, English, and science were just three periods of the students’ eight-period day. Those parents believed that the percentage of the budget allocated toward PSSA-required instruction and non-PSSA instruction should be similar. Two of the parents said that the totals should be the same or assigned an advantage to non-PSSA instruction due to the small percentage of the day occupied by PSSA-required subjects. Similarly, students and administrators kept the numbers within five percentage points of one another.

A majority of adults underestimated the cost of instruction for both PSSA-
required courses and non-PSSA-required courses. Parents tended to believe that 40% of the budget was allocated for instructional purposes. Administrators believed that number to be closer to 50%. The actual percentage of the simulated budget consumed by instruction was 59%. It was difficult to separate instruction of PSSA-required subjects from non-PSSA subjects; however, the same criteria were used in the interview process as the selection of itemized budget totals represented in the actual Keensville budget.

The data could suggest simply that participants were unaware of how much of the budget was consumed by instruction. While that explanation may indeed be valid, the school superintendent, business administrator, high school principal, athletic director, and several school board members all assigned priority funding in alternate categories. Their recommendations may indicate that they would have favored the ability to assign funding to other areas—including extracurricular activities. These data suggest that resources were allocated where most needed according to professional standards, not where some individuals would have liked to see the dollars spent.

Almost none of the participants assigned a high value to the buildings and maintenance category. The exception was a teacher who had ample knowledge of the school budget, one student, and two parents. The student and parents over-budgeted for the costs of maintaining buildings according to the simulated budget, while one parent and the teacher were within two percentage points of the “actual” expenditures.

Parents and teachers felt that school officials valued the school buildings and grounds. They stopped short of stating that there was too much emphasis on new
construction and maintaining facilities but they did believe that the facilities available to the students and the community were above average for the demographics of the borough of Keensville. The data may suggest that while the community appreciated the facilities, school officials should consider reducing expenses for those areas with the least impact on students. Certainly, scholarly literature supports the maintenance of clean and professional-looking buildings. In times of budgetary crisis, however, the community appears to be indicating that buildings and grounds are one area in which they are willing to consider reductions. As one parent indicated, his home budget did not include a previously scheduled plan to re-roof his house in the fall because it was not essential. Similarly, he believed the school may delay repairs and improvements to free up needed dollars.

The majority of adults indicated that administrative salaries were too high at Keensville in so much as they believed that the cost of administration was draining critical funding from the school. That said, the most common value assigned to administrative personnel was 10%. According to the simulated budget, the Keensville Area School District allocated approximately 16% of its budget to administrative personnel who included, for the purposes of this study, deans, principals, business administrators, special education coordinators, secretarial staff, and guidance counselors. All of these positions were believed to be non-instruction and therefore administrative. Respondents lamented the high percentage allocated to so few staff members. Yet, when given the opportunity to devalue their role in the school budget most considered 10% a fair standard for their services. Similarly, parents and teachers alike were concerned
about the possibility of insufficient instructional support at the school. Instructional support included in-class paraprofessionals, librarians, and technology coaches—all positions believed to have direct instructional contact with students at Keensville. When given the opportunity to reallocate a portion of their budget for such purposes, most respondents declined and admitted the low priority was simply a reality of the job.

These data could suggest that the motivations of adults within the school community were slightly different than those of school officials. For instance, they may have wished to see less emphasis on buildings and grounds, more instructional support, or less administrative overhead. As previously suggested, however, the discrepancies may also have been the result of a basic model of school funding that left too much open for interpretation by the interviewee despite clarifications offered by the researcher.

Data from student priority models were also mixed. Like their adult counterparts, students underestimated or undervalued the cost of instruction. Interestingly, however, students reported a higher value, as measured by cost, for both PSSA- and non-PSSA-required subjects. Students valued PSSA instruction at 15–30% of the budget. Unlike parents, students did not cite any animosity toward state testing while composing their model. The same could not be said of the interview data, however.

This could suggest that students had a greater understanding of the materials and personnel at their disposal than did their parents. While most students indicated that they understood that budgets were in the midst of reductions, they also expressed a belief that they did not feel much would change during the school day. They believed that
extracurricular activities, and “tier three” sports in particular, would suffer a majority of the reductions.

No student placed a higher valued on non-PSSA-required courses than they had on PSSA-required classes.

Although one student believed that 5\% of the school’s budget was adequate, he did indicate that “desperate times” would cause him to consider using “general expense funds,” which had received 10\% of his total budget, for the purpose of keeping extracurricular activities alive. With the exception of that student, the range of responses for the value of the extracurriculum was 10–18\%. The simulated budget had allocated 2\% of an $18.4 million budget for student activities, extracurricular clubs, and school sports.

Interestingly, while most students believed that the school genuinely supported the activities in which that they had participated, even if they were reported to be “tier three” activities, each student recorded a higher value for extracurricular programs than the simulated budget allowed. On the high side, a difference of 15\% separated one student’s response from “reality.” Either students believed that extracurricular activities had received a much more generous budget than they had been or students were using the model as an opportunity to discuss their preferences for the school budget’s make-up.

The latter theory was reinforced in the interview data. Students indicated that many of the “life lessons” acquired during their high school years had come as a result of their participation in extracurricular activities. According to students, each activity taught something different. Topics were thought to range from organizational skills and time
management to self-discipline and “working through the tough times.” While they stopped short of suggesting that high school courses were not as important as those life lessons, they did indicate that depending on a student’s occupational goal, certain co-curricular courses and extracurricular activities could be more important to the student than a standard course of study. Examples of co-curricular subjects regarded as more important than PSSA-required courses included vocational programs, like metal working and nursing, and fine arts electives, like band or chorus. Students also believed that activities like mock trial, Future Farmers of America, and Future Business Leaders of America may have had a significant impact on a student’s direction in college or technical school. That students utilized the budgeting exercise to assign a high level of priority to extracurricular and co-curricular programs may speak volumes about their priorities and further support the adults’ belief that some students went to school only to attend extracurricular activities.

The student who most closely assigned values represented in the simulated budget was a music student who received average grades and planned to attend a two-year technical school to gain a degree in mechanical engineering.

The adults who most closely identified with the simulated budget when completing their priority models were a high school teacher and twenty-year veteran faculty member, and the Keensville business administrator. The adults indicated that they had used a “mathematical” calculation for their priority model which was loosely based on their prior knowledge of the school’s actual budget. Both voiced support for the extracurriculum and believed that difficult times lay ahead for the “nonessential layer” of
the school’s budget. Nonetheless, they assigned less than 5% of their model budget to extracurricular programs.

Whether they were young or more “experienced,” participants did not express any clear dissatisfaction with the school’s reduction process or funding priorities while completing the school funding priority model. This could indicate their support for the school’s decision makers, a general knowledge that “times were tough” for all programs at the school and in their community, or that the process of assigning a value and priority to school expenses had led them to realize that dollars were finite and theoretical support for the extracurriculum was different than advocating for reductions in other areas than soccer, band, speech league, cheerleading or football.
Chapter 6
Implications

This study was designed to investigate the outcomes for extracurricular programs at one Pennsylvania school during a financial crisis in the Commonwealth that struck public schools as the pressure to achieve unprecedented results on PSSA testing rapidly increased. A significant attempt was made to understand decision-makers’ motivations in relation to all that transpired during this time. Finally, evidence was sought to confirm findings from extant research that suggested a positive correlation between student participation and positive social and academic outcomes.

The data collected in this study were compared to respondents’ school priority model submissions in order to ascertain whether the school community’s voice was taken into consideration during the decision-making process or if the resolutions put forth by the Keensville school board were in contrast to the interests of students, parents, and community members.

The school selected for the research was judged, in the opinion of the researcher, to be a “typical” school district with a typical high school building. Criteria for the selection of the high school may be found in chapter two. The selected school and study results were not intended to be generalizable to each of the 500 public school districts in the Commonwealth. Rather, the results were intended to be what Patton (1990) referred to as a “critical case.” Therefore, readers of this study should not attempt to infer a direct link between this local school district and the study results. Instead, the results should
serve as a model for what could happen in any school district given the competing interests of school reform and dwindling financial support at the state level.

This final chapter offers concluding thoughts on the concentric circle model, the problem with its use during financial crises, and the fundamental problem with believing that schools only exist for academic purposes. Alternate approaches are suggested that offer a more holistic view of what schools are about and indicate that there is much to be gained from continuing the investigation of this phenomenon.

**Fundamental Problems**

In chapter one, the need for this study was discussed at length. The major theme proposed as the impetus for this study was the need to investigate impacts on extracurricular programs in public schools during a period of educational reform and financial crisis.

Through a detailed investigation that made use of qualitative methods, this study was able to show that although extracurricular activities had not been completely eliminated from the program of studies at Keensville Area High School, a high percentage of the projected savings for the 2011–12 school year were taken from extracurricular programs (e.g., music, athletics, activities). As reported in chapter five, the financial reductions suffered by extracurricular programs at Keensville were said to be the result of the district’s commitment to utilizing the concentric circle model (Appendix D) as a basis for initiating savings in the neighborhood of $1.7 million. Many respondents, including school officials, believed that model was not used in the actual budgeting process, however, and therefore did not play a major part in reducing expenses
in that school year.

In fact, during an interview with the school’s business administrator, she admitted that although the budget approved by the school board did in fact appear to have been highly influenced by the model, actual reductions to the schools’ programs stemmed more from spontaneous opportunities that had presented themselves to district officials rather than from strategic planning. She added that timely retirements of faculty members comprised the majority of savings while other programs and positions were challenged to cut from their budget what they could. Nearly all respondents, including school officials, agreed that similar opportunities to reduce expenses would be harder to come by in the future and that the model may in fact be revisited on a more literal basis in the future.

While these findings offered reasons for concern, they indicated at least two rationales for promoting reductions from inner circles rather than extracurricular programs and other “non-essential” programs. The first explanation for why the extracurriculum was spared even greater hardship was certainly the personal motivations of caring adults who were charged with leading Keensville through this turbulent time. The data were rich with indications that school administrators and board members appreciated the opportunities that student activities provided to students. On no occasion did a school official indicate believing that resources were being wasted on extracurricular activities. In fact, most of the data suggested that school officials realized that the students needed those activities for academic reasons, social opportunities, or motivational purposes. A more practical reason for the locus of reductions resided in the principles of school finance, however, and that rationale is deserving of more discussion.
The concentric circle model suggests that the interior layers of the model are the “heart” of schooling. The teacher and the student in the classroom appear to be at the center of the circles, leading one to believe that they should suffer the least during a period of financial crisis. This view is flawed on at least two levels. First, there are subjects, such as art, music, and vocational programs, which are not tested by statewide assessments but have not traditionally been given the same standard of protection against budgetary reductions as other subjects that are tested. Even if one argued that the aforementioned subjects were secondary to the “three Rs,” it would be difficult to argue that teachers of history and social sciences—subjects also not tested by the state—should not be offered similar protection. In other words, although the center-most circle appears to be balanced and offer protection to the objectives of schooling, clearly some hierarchy is not represented through the existing circles.

The use of the model as a budget reduction tool is also flawed in a more practical sense. Given the fact that the extracurriculum typically represented less than 5% of a school district’s operating budget, it is not possible to generate the large-scale savings indicative of financial crisis, using the model literally. It is possible to conceive of a district that voluntarily chose to eliminate the entire out-layer of the model and still only account for half of the savings necessary to resolve a deficit in excess of $1 million.

In the present case of Keensville, extracurricular programs accounted for less than $500,000 of the school’s nearly $20 million budget. Had school officials chosen to completely eliminate financial support of those programs, they still would have faced a deficit in excess of $1 million. To compensate, they could have added savings from layer
five, district-level operations, but again, more of this layer would have had to be cut in order to resolve budget discrepancies.

In order to accomplish large-scale reductions, a slice of the pie must be eliminated, rather than an entire layer. As represented by the list of actual reductions (Appendix E), even a low percentage of eliminations from the center circle—the teacher and students in the classroom—are capable of producing greater savings than massive cuts to the outer layers. This point is referenced not to suggest that schools should not consider cost-savings measures which negatively affect the extracurriculum; rather, it is mentioned to highlight the fundamental problem with using the model as a primary method of accomplishing massive financial cuts.

Neither of these problems addresses the more philosophical argument inherent in the literature. Given the abundance of personal and social benefits derived from student participation in extracurricular activities, it seems counterproductive to accomplish financial stability by reducing or altogether eliminating the extracurricular layer. Any method of financial reform that does not respect the value or place for music, vocational training, student activities, and organized scholastic sports holds an extremely narrow view of what schools are about and fails to preserve a holistic view of schooling.

Waller (1932) believed in the value of the extracurriculum and its ability to create well-rounded young adults who were capable active and healthy lifestyles. His words share a similar message to the data presented in chapter five.

The most important consideration affecting our judgment of any particular
activity is its effect upon the personality of the participant, and this effect is usually beneficial in proportion as the activity gives to the individual opportunities for wholesome self-expression and growth through interested self-activity. A further value of activities is that they may often give a sense of solidarity to a wide group, which is an essential part of the training of the young; it is a part which is doubtless overdone at present, but it would be very regrettable if it were to be omitted altogether (Waller, 1932, p. 118).

Indeed, participants in this study agreed that there was a value and a place for extracurricular activities at Keensville despite financial woes and concerns about academic performance. They lamented, however, that current conditions beyond their control had forced the school to allocate its resources where they were needed and not always where they were wanted. This and other theories formed from the collection of data are worthy of review before several concluding thoughts and suggestions for future research are offered.

**Findings & Theories Formed**

The data collected in this research indicate that schools are under immense pressure to perform on standardized tests, graduate students, and satisfy the increasingly diverse needs and desires of students, parents, teachers, school officials and community leaders. Data were collected about the extracurriculum and what was happening at Keensville, but the research questions and the methodology led to more questions than it could ever hope to answer, let alone confirm. Several theories have been constructed from this research related to the events involved in this situation, the players involved, and the motivations behind the decision-making process.
The first theory that became evident through a review of the data was that participants believed that the financial crisis facing schools at the time of the study was a greater threat to extracurricular opportunities than school reform initiatives. Several explanations are possible for this theory, including the proximity of the financial crisis to the time period of data collection and the Keensville administration’s firm belief in providing an open forum for dialogue during budget reductions. Such interactions may have pervaded the data. Nonetheless, all but one respondent believed that the financial state of the district would continue to deteriorate in years to come.

Standardized testing and the accountability movement were not as great a concern for respondents. Only students, a few parents, and one administrator believed that the existence of statewide testing had limited students’ access to extracurricular activities. Teachers of PSSA-required subjects shared the same opinion as the majority, while elective coursework teachers believed their access to students had been limited due to increased benchmarks for PSSA testing. Further, testing results were linked to teacher attitudes by parents, administrators, and students, thus suggesting that the accountability movement had created undocumented problems for extra- and co-curricular subjects. For instance, students believed it was more difficult to get out of class for school sports events when testing periods were near. A music teacher believed it had grown nearly impossible to pull students from class for individual instruction on a musical instrument—something the school had established as a common practice many years ago and was a standard element of music instruction according to the available literature (Abril & Gault, 2008; Hash, 2004).
The discussion of this theme leads us to wonder whether there are other reasons to believe that standardized testing has limited student access to the extracurriculum. Have school assemblies, pep rallies, and other events become less prevalent as a result of testing? Do coaches and advisors have the same access to students that they once did during the school day? Has communication suffered between extracurricular advisors and teachers as the two sides have no doubt quarreled over competing interests? These questions will be left for another study.

Decisions at Keensville were significantly driven by student participation. All participants seemed to believe there was a hierarchy of activities at the school but most agreed that the hierarchy was driven by accessibility, demonstrated success, and numbers. The football team, for example, enjoyed a high level of priority at the school but it was one of the school’s largest organizations and consistently brought the town positive recognition. Most respondents believed the football team, under any circumstance, was untouchable and that it would continue to thrive despite any obstacle, financial or otherwise. On the other hand, the marching band was of comparable size to the football team; respondents believed that decreased numbers or less success would relegate the group to a tier three status and many more financial setbacks. Some believed that was also due in part to corporate donations and the program’s relative prestige.

Like the band, most other activities were judged to be at the mercy of administrative decisions that weighed the cost of the program and the benefit it provided to the number of students involved. Teachers and parents believed that it was a legitimate way to evaluate the worth of programs and generally agreed with the process when
completing school priority models although they wished that the school’s resources would be evenly divided among all activities, not just the top tier groups. Some parents felt there were too many activities for students—the fact that there were so many was causing some of the financial problems faced by the district at the time of the study.

Whatever the reason, decision-making was judged to be driven by numbers and a utilitarian philosophy that respected the desires of all students but supported the activities with the greatest student interest as a matter of practicality. School officials confirmed that they would like to continue to offer all of the activities, sports, and events available at the school at the time of the study but they were pessimistic about the school’s ability to continue to support all equally in the future should the financial crisis continue to move in the direction that it had in the spring of 2011.

A third theory developed: all decisions involving the extracurriculum could be greatly influenced by a charismatic leader or someone with significant experience. The superintendent at Keensville was referenced numerous times throughout the data collection process as having a great level of influence over the decisions made at the school district. He had an impressive resume and track record as superintendent at Keensville and was believed to have invested his life’s work in the district. Moreover, teachers, parents, students, and community members believed he was a likeable person with great inter- and intrapersonal skills. That could account for the frequency with which his name and/or position were referenced in the interviews.

This theory suggests that people can be persuaded and that, depending on the
philosophy of highly influential leaders within the school community, the extracurriculum and all of its traditions either could be completely safe or totally vulnerable under study conditions. As suggested in chapter one, the influence of one person in the decision-making process is highly immeasurable and one of the main reasons this study was conducted as a “critical case” and thus not intended for wide generalization across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or beyond its borders. There are too many variables to suggest that the findings listed in chapter four would be predictable under any other circumstance, yet theories such as the “influential leader” are more probable.

Perhaps due to theories such as the “influential leader” and the perceived distance between schools and the surrounding community, a fourth theme emerged. Study participants other than high-ranking administrators and school board members felt left out of the “real” decision-making process. School board meetings and community information nights were not believed to produce authentic dialogue between stakeholders and school officials. Rather, participants believed that those meetings were merely public exercises that exhibited the private deliberations of school administrators and board members. There were no hard feelings about how the school was run; in fact, teachers, parents, and students believed that their voice would be heard if they raised questions to school officials. They even indicated that their opinions might have been taken into consideration had they been solicited before a decision was made. Participants believed, however, that a select number of decision-makers were responsible for the majority of decisions about the extracurriculum and that public opinion could seldom be swayed after
the fact.

The “influential leader” theory combined with participants’ reactions to the decision-making process leads one to wonder how and why resolutions were made by the school board. Why, for instance, were eleven retirees not replaced for the 2011–12 school year but the football team picked up a paid assistant coaching position? Or why was a twelve-month coaching position eliminated? Why were booster clubs picking up the tab for transportation to some sporting events while other athletes were riding charter coach buses? Why were teaching positions and administrative jobs collapsed while costly improvements to the schools buildings and grounds continued?

The answers were presented in the data. The resolutions set forth for 2011–12 may or may not have been the best possible solutions to the school’s predicament. Even school board members and central office staff would have admitted that. Rather, outcomes were based on timely evaluations of the district’s needs. Due to the simultaneous effects of increased standardized testing requirements and a massive financial crisis, administrators and school board members had to allocate resources where they were needed. That may or may not have been where the individual involved in the decision-making process would have liked to see the resources spent. Individuals who were closest to the process wanted to provide the best level of education to students and support extracurricular programs. Nonetheless, as the school was forced to tighten its belt, decisions gave the impression that extracurricular opportunities were being assigned a low priority. This was perhaps most evident in the evaluation of the school’s budget reductions in reference to the concentric circle model.
While lower percentages of cuts were made from the innermost circle of the model, reductions to the instructional program accounted for the greatest number of dollars in reduced expenditures. Nonessential layer six suffered one of the biggest percentage losses, yet comprised a small percentage of overall dollars saved. The reality was that even if all extracurricular programs were cut from the district’s 2011–12 budget, the $1.7 million deficit projected in spring 2011 would not have been eliminated. Smaller percentage cuts to the instructional program could, however, reduce the school’s budget more rapidly.

The prevailing mantra to “do more with less” was used throughout the study to justify cuts and new procedures. The final theory formed, however, suggested that the practices that had saved Keensville from eliminating extracurricular opportunities and teaching positions were not sustainable for very long. All participants were apprehensive about additional cuts which would be necessitated by even one more year of unfavorable state funding for public education. To the extent that this study has highlighted how the extracurriculum has begun to suffer despite its noted benefits, participants believed that the situation was going to get worse. Parents, teachers, administrators and school board members were expecting that local taxes were going to increase, contributions from local businesses were going to become increasingly necessary, and students and families would have to bear a greater percentage of the financial burden for extracurricular activities. Even then, most worried it would not be enough to save cuts if the budget deficit crept back into the millions for 2012–2013.

The findings from this study were therefore significant and real. Each theme and
theory had lasting implications for the future of public schooling in the Commonwealth. The results suggest that public schools are on the verge of a major shakeup should conditions continue to worsen. To that end, the final portions of this study address the practical implications of the research and possibility for future research opportunities.

**Implications of the Research**

The first theme present throughout of the study was that extracurricular programs at Keensville had been affected by standardization and the financial crisis which impacted school districts in the spring of 2010. Not unlike the examples offered in chapter two, Keensville had systemically evaluated the school sports, activities, and clubs that were offered to students in order to compensate for a shortfall of nearly $1.7 million in its annual budget.

School officials publicly acknowledged that reductions were set to be made prior to the summer of 2010, noting that cuts would be deep and affect all programs at the school, including academic programs, staffing and personnel, and extracurricular activities. The concentric circle model (Appendix D) was adapted as a means of determining where budget reductions would come from. The majority of cuts were set to occur in the outermost circle which contained “nonessential” expenditures for school districts, including extracurricular activities, sports, art, music and the like.

Indeed, an evaluation of the district’s budget reductions revealed that a high percentage of cuts were made in the area of nonessential programs at Keensville. A much lower percentage was recorded in the innermost circle which contained classroom teachers. This figure is both true and misleading, however. While a higher percentage of
the budget was cut from the outer layer, a much higher dollar figure was removed from the inner circle. The reason is based on the high cost associated with the inner circle. Teacher salaries and benefits comprise the vast majority of a school district’s budget, or in this case, nearly 60% of it. A small reduction from that circle could amount to hundreds of thousands of dollars saved—as was the case at Keensville.

On the other hand, cutting a high percentage of extracurricular activities seemed plausible at the onset of the financial crisis of 2010–2011. Reducing the budget in an area that typically receives less than 5% of the school’s budget, however, is not a practical means of alleviating a $1 million-plus deficit. The fact is that a school district could choose to eliminate extracurricular programs entirely and still not save anywhere near the amount necessary to solve the fiscal predicament being or to be faced by some schools.

In addition to investigating this phenomenon in one school district, this study also sought to reveal who had been involved in the decision-making process at Keensville, specifically with regard to extracurricular programs. If the decisions were based on a collective opinion, the study identified the key decision-makers. If the resolutions of the school board were the result of key individuals, the study sought to determine whether the input of school community members was taken into account.

Decisions at Keensville were found to be the result of several high-ranking administrators’ recommendations. Those recommendations were based on a chain of command but were nonetheless hierarchical. Some participants resented the influence of higher-ranking school officials while others believed that school administrators and board
members were employed or elected to make these difficult decisions. No consensus was formed on the issue. One area of consensus was the perceived influence of the superintendent. The most influential person named throughout the data collection process was the school superintendent, who boasted an impressive career that far exceeded any average service expectancy in the state of Pennsylvania. His recommendations were based heavily on cost-benefit-like models wherein the number of student participants were weighed against the cost of providing the program but were nonetheless weighed against opportunities for students to excel outside the classroom and beyond graduation.

This finding was in contrast to the majority opinion that decisions were based on a hierarchical scale of extracurricular programs at Keensville. Participants genuinely believed that tier one programs would be favored in times of budget crisis—this opinion was found not to be valid, leading to the belief that decisions about the extracurricular at Keensville were based on utilitarian principles. Programs with the highest number of participants, and coincidentally the highest number of parent supports and booster members, were not subjected to as many financial setbacks as a result of the school’s 2010–2011 budget.

Students, parents, and teachers believed there was a better way to make budgetary reductions than to cut valued programs from the school but most did not offer suggestions for balancing the budget. In fact, many participants who cited the presence of a hierarchical activity structure later admitted that the school had demonstrated adequate support for all programs, not just the tier one activities. Moreover, data collected from the school priority model did not reveal any striking dissimilarities to the simulated
Keensville school budget.

This theme suggested that participants understood the competing interests of the school district’s budget—not unlike administrators and school board members, they found the task of balancing the budget while slicing $1.7 million off the top a real challenge. Everyone, from students to teachers, understood the difficulty in managing school finances. Some of the best suggestions for reducing expenses came from staff members, according to the school’s administration, yet data revealed that few envied the task of overseeing the entire process.

This theme implies that if schools are to continue hacking away from already tight budgets and further reductions are made, the voice of the school community must have a place in the decision-making process. Not only did Keensville benefit from the suggestions of staff members, parents, students and community members, but it provided a platform for discussions on the district’s priorities and the costs associated with providing such activities to students. Accordingly, relatively few in the community were unaware of the problems the district faced and unnaturally critical of the recommendations approved by the school board. The district may actually benefit from a renewed sense of support from the community. This may be especially true in small to mid-size districts such as Keensville. Thus, practitioners would be wise to include community leaders in the decision-making process during times of financial turbulence.

Reinforcing that theme was a prevailing notion among participants who valued the extracurriculum that schools were allocating funds where they had to rather than
where they wanted to. Indeed, that feeling was also conveyed by teachers, school administrators, and school board members.

Participants did not believe that the standardized reform movement had had an effect on the extracurriculum. Data from the structured interviews revealed changes to the extracurriculum due to PSSA-required subjects and test preparation. Notably, music instructors believed that their access to students for pull-out lesson had been limited. Students indicated changing attitudes among teachers when they asked to be excused from class for a sporting event or band activity. The director of curriculum and instruction noted several examples of student schedule conflicts that stemmed from PSSA-testing preparation courses.

The difference in perception leads to an obvious question: in what other ways have extracurricular programs been affected by standardized school reform, absent any genuine connection from teacher, parent, or student? Do other examples exist and, if so, will they continue to worsen now that schools are experiencing such massive shortfalls in funding? The chief implication in this theme is that more research is needed to understand the effects of standardized testing on student growth and development. That research, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

The final theme was that participants felt the financial crisis had just begun. In fact, there was widespread concern that support for public education as a whole was waning. As a result, schools were being forced to produce uncommonly high results on state-wide assessments. Their pursuit of adequate test results had drained the system of its
resources. Every avenue was being pursued, according to respondents, but they believed a time would come in which the levy would be forced to break or as most respondents agreed, “something would have to give.”

Although participants clearly articulated the benefits of student participation, they believed that extracurricular programs would be targeted even more in the coming years as schools scrambled to trim hundreds of thousands and into the millions from their budgets.

This last theme confirms the available literature. Despite the noted benefits of the extracurriculum, opportunities may become increasingly limited for students in years to come if students, parents, and school officials are not diligent in their efforts to preserve what remains. Here, theoretical support for the extracurricular remained; financial support, on the other hand, was becoming increasingly unavailable at the time of the study. What lies ahead will continue to be shaped by educational leaders and community advocates. What cannot happen, if those activities are to survive, is complacency channeled through a belief that activities such as music, sports, and clubs are nonessential to a child’s education. Without support, those programs will cease to exist and scholars many years from now will be designing a study to investigate the effects of this loss on post-graduate success in college, the workplace, and the military.

Despite the cautionary tone of these implications, practitioners may view this period as an opportunity to reevaluate what is important to their communities and scale back a growing list of school-sponsored organizations, clubs, activities, and sports. With
fewer options, some programs could actually gain for an era of reform. If, for instance, the number of activities available to students were reduced from ten to three, participants who might otherwise join programs targeted for elimination may instead elect to participate in the activities that are offered.

The opposite argument could also be valid. Eliminating seven activities from the offerings may eliminate a significant portion of student participants who might instead choose to do nothing. If data from this study are accurate, those participants may expect less of themselves socially, academically, and developmentally. This is why decisions made about the extracurriculum must be made locally after much research, consideration, and dialogue.

It is with these themes in mind that the final portion of this chapter is dedicated to suggestions for future research for both the practicing educator and the educational scholar.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study provides new insights into a condition that threatened to alter, reduce, or eliminate extracurricular programming for students in public schools. While the results were not intended to be generalizable to all school districts across Pennsylvania or even all districts that experienced financial reductions, future research endeavors could continue where this study has left off, employing multiple case study methods with multiple researcher models, documenting extracurricular activities using a longitudinal study in a state with limited public school funding, comparing the results of this study to a state yet to suffer drastic changes to its school funding, and empirically testing the
results of this study and/or additional topics related to school reform initiatives and extracurricular opportunities.

Findings from this study indicated that all extracurricular activities may eventually be impacted, and may in fact limit junior varsity and junior high activities more so than high school programs. Therefore, future efforts should include grades 7 and 8 in research whereas this study focused primarily on grades 9–12.

Longitudinal studies are needed to understand any long-term effects that reductions may have on student growth and development. A high percentage of participants in this study indicated that eliminating extracurricular activities might cause some students to lower their academic aspirations, become less engaged in school, and even lead to drop-out. The available literature seems to support their concerns. Data collected over a period of years in which extracurricular activities became increasingly limited for students may provide additional merit to their claim.

Moreover, data could be collected on the effect of the reductions on school morale, overall academic performance, and school-to-community relations. No shortage of schools have considered or already taken action to reduce their extracurricular programs in order to create time and/or free resources for reform initiatives. Some of those school districts were listed in chapter two. Continued observation of the demise of a particular program could lead to incredibly powerful research that forces practitioners and policy makers alike to wonder the real cost of fiscal responsibility and standardized accountability. If the current trend were to continue, for instance, and programs were
eliminated in order to quickly balance the school’s budget but the school no longer resembled a place of youth or learning, would we stay the course of reform or would we attempt to save what remained of an ailing extracurriculum?

Data from this study suggested that the number of participants in the activity was a key factor in school officials’ decision-making process. That is, decision-makers, parents, and students alike believed that the activities with the greatest number of participants would be affected the least by reductions. That may or may not be the case in the future; however, systematically reducing the type and level of support given to extracurricular programs will no doubt have an effect on the quality of activities offered by the school district. If program quality suffers, it stands to reason that the number of participants would decrease. An investigation of this double-edged sword would only be possible through a longitudinal research plan. It may take upwards of ten to fifteen years to adequately gauge the state of extracurricular affairs at one district absent the “cyclical” nature and normal ebb and flow of participation rates. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to ascertain whether decision-makers themselves had had a direct and measurable impact on student participation and the subsequent quality of the program several years after the fact. Could the decisions made today actually provide the rationale for future reductions? If so, are there examples of schools using this to their advantage, consciously or otherwise?

The review of the decision-making process at Keensville was one area of this research that was particularly influenced by the single-researcher, single-observer model. As referenced in chapter one, the use of a single investigator in case study research is not
preferable; rather, it was necessitated by the nature of the study. Future studies would do well to include multiple sites wherein data could be compared to like districts and similar programs or activities. Such studies could concentrate their efforts in one particular geographic area that uniquely experienced the same phenomenon in an effort to collect more data about the decision-making process itself and compare how different schools approached reductions. Alternatively, such an effort could focus on an entire state or cross-comparison of how several states dealt with similar phenomena.

The decision to use a school district in which the researcher had previously interacted with decision makers and been employed as an instructor of an extracurricular program may have clouded the validity of the research for some readers. While the researcher has acknowledged his belief that the level of access provided for this investigation and the genuine responses of participants would not have been possible under alternative conditions, a future study could replicate the method of this study in an attempt to confirm or refute the results.

At the most basic level, a similar study could be replicated in a larger or smaller school district, a more or less affluent community, schools with higher- or lower-performing extracurricular programs, or schools with higher or lower achievement on state standardized tests. Results from these studies could be compared to those described in chapter five in order to determine whether such variables had an effect on the outcomes and/or state of the extracurriculum in that school district.

Finally, the topic of extracurricular programming in public schools could benefit
from additional quantitative research. Although data exist on the value of the extracurriculum and the benefits of student participation, little has been done regarding the state of the extracurriculum in relation to school reform. While the researcher has argued for additional qualitative research using case study designs, he would also like to see the use of quantitative methods aimed at investigating problems from within a single school site. Mixed methodologies could be designed to empirically test participants’ reactions to budgetary decisions that had an effect on extracurricular opportunities for students or longitudinal studies could connect budgetary reductions in extracurricular programming to state-wide test scores. The key to solving problems is to investigate the phenomenon locally.

Additional research is needed to continually preserve extracurricular opportunities for students present and future. This study offered a unique exploration of the extracurriculum and decision-making process in one school district. The opportunity to explore and investigate what has happened and will happen to extracurricular activities in the future is limited only by our schools’ willingness to continue to open the decision-making process to researchers and to offer these programs to students.

Hopefully, an analysis of fine arts departments, after-school clubs, and athletic programs, which revealed a healthy menu of extracurricular opportunities for students at Keensville in 2010, will not be altogether dissimilar to findings from future research endeavors despite the passage of another century of public schooling.
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Appendix A

School Priority Budget Model

**Background Information:** Pennsylvania’s 500 school districts have recently experienced a drastic reduction in the amount of funding that they have been provided through the state’s budget. Local school districts have projected multi-million dollar budget deficits beginning with the 2011-12 school year. Accordingly, school officials have found themselves faced with the unprecedented challenge to continue providing a high quality education to all students that meets or exceeds state testing standards and support a wide range of student interests which are not measured on standardized tests, including extra and co-curricular activities, vocational programs, and athletics.

**The Problem:** Faced with this dilemma, schools have had two options to resolve their deficits—begin reducing expenses or find new methods for increasing revenue. In most cases, their ability to raise revenue through local tax dollars has been limited and private contributions have not completely solved their financial woes.

**Instructions:** The researcher will first demonstrate how the model functions and then he will explain each of the eight categories. Using those categories, which are intended to represent 100 percent of the school district budget, assign your personal priority for spending as represented by a percentage point. Keep in mind that the school district, like your personal budget, has obligations to fulfill with regard to staffing, buildings and grounds, and equipment/supplies. Use this as your opportunity to suggest where you would like to see school resources allocated, not necessarily where they have to be spent in the past.

You may use the following questions to guide your planning.

1.) What percentage of the total school budget do you believe should be allocated toward **PSSA-required subjects and instruction** (i.e. mathematics, English, physical science)?

2.) What percentage of the total school budget do you believe should be allocated toward **non-PSSA subjects** (i.e. Social studies, art, music, vocational education, computers and technology, physical education, etc.)?

3.) What percentage of the budget do you believe should be allocated toward **instructional classroom support** (i.e. classroom aids, school librarian, etc.)?

4.) What percentage of the total budget do you believe should be allocated toward **building-level administration** (i.e. Principals, vice-principals, dean of students, guidance counselors, etc.)?

5.) What percentage of the total budget do you believe should be allocated toward **central administration** (Superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, business administrator, director of buildings and grounds, school psychologist, etc.)?

6.) What percentage of the total school budget do you believe should be allocated toward **construction projects, repairs, and the maintenance of school grounds**?

7.) What percentage of the total school budget do you believe should be allocated toward **extracurricular programs** (i.e. after-school activities, clubs, school sports, music activities, etc.)?

8.) What percentage of the total school budget do you believe should remain **for general expenses** (contingency fund or discretionary spending)?

Now examine the pie graph which has been created using your suggested spending levels. Does the graph adequately represent your thoughts? Are there any changes that you would like to make now that you have finished the model? Communicate any changes to the model to the researcher now.
Appendix B

School Officials and Employees

Interview Protocol

Present informed consent signature page & review with participant.

Notify participant of the reason for recording interview and the procedure for stopping the audio recording.

Interview Questions:

1. What are some examples of the extra and co-curricular offerings which are provided to students?
2. How do students benefit (individually) from participation in extra and co-curricular programs?
3. Does the school and/or community benefit from the extracurriculum?
4. Has the school expanded the extra co-curricular offerings in recent years?
   A.) What was the reason for that addition?
   B.) Who was involved in that decision?
5. Has the school suspended any programs in recent years?
   A.) What was the reason for that suspension?
   B.) Who was involved in that decision?
6. Have programs been proposed and denied?
   A.) What was the reason for that decision?
   B.) Who was involved in that decision?
7. Are there any programs that the school is considering consolidating or forming a partnership with a nearby school?
   A.) What factors are considered in that decision?
   B.) Who is included in that decision?
8. What are the school and/or state’s academic expectations of student athletes, musicians, and club members? Has this changed in recent years?
9. Do you believe that the accountability movement in PSSA-required subjects has had an effect on the extracurriculum and/or the ability of school budgets to support its activity?
10. Does the current climate of financial reform pose a threat to the extracurriculum?
11. Has the cost associated with the extracurriculum risen over the past five to ten years or is the financial crisis the biggest concern for extracurricular groups?
12. How are programs compensating for those changes?
13. Have you noticed changing attitudes toward extracurricular programs in recent years from faculty members, students, parents or administrators?
14. What do you suspect the future will hold for extracurricular programs in relation to school reform both academic and financial?
A.) How do budgeting decisions get made for extracurricular programs?
B.) Who develops the extracurricular budget for the school?
C.) Can modifications be made after it is developed?
D.) How is the final budget approved?

15. What has been the reaction to this year’s budget from school officials, advisors, parents, students?

16. Can you describe the decision-making process when changes need to be made to extracurricular programming?
   A.) Who is involved in the decision making process?
   B.) How is their opinion and participation represented in the final outcome?

17. Should the school focus its efforts on PSSA-required courses more so than non-PSSA-required or elective courses? Why/Why not?

18. Where do you feel that extracurricular programs should rate in the overall school budget in relation to Instructional Personnel, Administrative Personnel, Buildings and Maintenance, and General Expenses? Why?

19. Are elective courses and extracurricular given enough support at this school? Why/Why not?

20. Using the following pie graphs can you explain how you believe the school district should prioritize its budget?

21. Does the pie graph that you selected represent what you feel the school district has chosen to do in 2011-12?

22. Are you aware of the concentric circle model that the school is considering using to make financial decisions? No - Explain, then ask “Is this how you feel that the school is making its financial decisions?"
   A.) Do you feel that this model will continue to be used in the future?

23. Are there any other thoughts that you would care to share regarding the school’s extracurricular programming and/or decision making that pertains to the extracurriculum?

---

Thank participant for their participation in the study.

Notify participant of follow-up interview procedure.
Appendix C

Students and Parents

Interview Protocol

*Present informed consent signature page & review with participant.*

*Notify participant of the reason for recording interview and the procedure for stopping the audio recording.*

**Interview Questions:**

1. What are some examples of the extra and co-curricular offerings which are provided to students?
2. How do students benefit (individually) from participation in extra and co-curricular programs?
3. Does the school community benefit from the extracurriculum?
4. Has the school expanded the extra co-curricular offerings in recent years?
   A.) What was the reason for that addition?
   B.) Did you feel that you could have been involved in that decision?
5. Has the school suspended any programs in recent years?
   A.) What was the reason for that suspension?
   B.) Did you feel that you could have been involved in that decision?
   C.) Do you know anyone who was involved in that decision?
6. Are there any programs that the school is considering consolidating or forming a partnership with a nearby school?
   A.) What factors do you feel will be considered in that decision?
   B.) Do you feel that you could be involved that decision?
   C.) Will you or someone who you know become involved in that decision?
7. What are the school and/or state’s academic expectations of student athletes, musicians, and club members? Has this changed in recent years?
8. Do you believe that the accountability movement in PSSA-required subjects has had an effect on the extracurriculum and/or the ability of school budgets to support its activity?
9. Does the current climate of financial reform poses a threat to the extracurriculum?
10. Do you believe that the cost associated with extracurricular programs has risen over the past five to ten years or will this financial crisis have an effect in the future? Have those costs been passed on to student participants/what do you see in the future for funding?
  A.) How have programs compensated?
11. Do you believe that the accountability movement in PSSA-required subjects has had an effect on the extracurriculum and/or the ability of school budgets to support its activity?
12. Have you noticed changing attitudes toward extracurricular programs in recent years from faculty members, students, parents or administrators?

13. What do you suspect the future will hold for extracurricular programs in relation to school reform both academic and financial?

14. Describe the budget provided to extra and co-curricular programs.
   A.) Is this a typical year for the budget?
   B.) Who develops the extracurricular budget for the school?
   C.) How is the final budget approved?
   D.) Do you feel as though you have some decision-making ability in that regard?
   E.) Do you or anyone you know advocate for extracurricular programs or take part in the decision-making process?

15. Can you describe the decision-making process when changes need to be made to the extracurricular programming?
   A.) Can you become involved in the decision making process?
   B.) To what extent do you believe your participation would be taken into account in the final outcome?

16. Should the school focus its efforts on PSSA-required courses more so than non-PSSA-required courses? Why/Why not?

17. Where do you feel that extracurricular programs should rate in the overall school budget in relation to Instructional Personnel, Administrative Personnel, Buildings and Maintenance, and General Expenses? Why?

18. Are elective courses and extracurricular given enough support at this school? Why/Why not?

19. Using the following pie graphs can you explain how you believe the school district should prioritize its budget?

20. Does the pie graph that you selected represent what you feel the school district has chosen to do in 2011-12?

21. Are you aware of the concentric circle model that the school is considering using to make financial decisions? No - Explain, and then ask “Is this how you feel that the school is making its financial decisions?”
   A.) Do you feel that this model will continue to be used in the future?

22. How should the school prioritize its budget?
   A.) Should you or someone you know be involved in that decision?
   B.) Have you or someone that you know been involved in the past?
   C.) Are you or someone you know planning to be involved in the future?

23. Are there any other thoughts that you would care to share regarding the school’s extracurricular programming?

Thank participant for their participation in the study.

Notify participant of follow-up interview procedure.
Appendix D

Concentric Circle Model
for School Budget
Reductions (Hartman, 2010)

1. Teacher and Students in the Classroom
   ➢ Teacher

2. School Based Instructional Support
   ➢ Guidance, Librarians, Principal, Paraprofessional

3. School Based Operations Support
   ➢ Nurses, Clerical, Custodians, Cafeteria

4. District Level Instructional Support
   ➢ Curriculum Director, Special Education Director, Psychologist

5. District Level Operations Support
   ➢ Business Office, Physical Plant, Transportation

6. Other District Programs
   ➢ Athletics, Music, Extra-Curricular
# Keensville School District Budget

## Actual Reductions 2011-2012

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concentric Circle</th>
<th>Total Savings</th>
<th>% of Savings</th>
<th>% of Circle Budget</th>
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### Appendix F

#### Keensville School District

**Simulated Budget**

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Vita

Mark Patrick Murphy was born in Endicott, New York, on his parent’s wedding anniversary, June 19th, 1982. The son of Patrick L. Murphy and Sherry R. Murphy, he graduated from the Union-Endicott Central School District in 2000.

After high school, Mark attended Mansfield University of Pennsylvania, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in Music Education in 2004, having also completed a student teaching assignment in Sydney, Australia.

Upon his return to the United States, Mark pursued a Master of Education degree in Educational Leadership from the Pennsylvania State University at University Park. He graduated from Penn State in the summer of 2005 and immediately accepted a teaching position as the Director of Bands at Cranford High School, Cranford, New Jersey. His teaching responsibilities at Cranford included the high school concert band, jazz ensemble, and marching band.

In 2007, Mark moved back to State College, Pennsylvania, and accepted a position as the Director of Bands at a nearby school district where he now serves as the marching band director, jazz ensemble director, and the high school Dean of Students. In addition to teaching he has actively pursued a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at The Pennsylvania State University. He has published articles on teacher supervision and evaluation and co-authored a publication on the legal ramifications of cyber-bullying in public schools. Mark also holds a K–12 principal certificate.

Outside of education he is a two-time world champion drum and bugle corps musician. He has a passion for the pageantry and competition of drum and bugle corps and a love for directing competitive marching units.

In 2008, he married his high school sweetheart, Keehna Marie Murphy. They live in State College, Pennsylvania, and share many interests including wine, boating, their love for their Italian Greyhound “Peppers,” and creating memories with their incredible families who still reside in Upstate New York.