

SCHOOL INTEGRATION IN ARIZONA'S WHITE MOUNTAINS

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ABSTRACT

Due to Arizona's mandated open enrollment policy for public schools, Blue Ridge Unified School District's (BRUSD) population of Native American students has increased by 148% over the last 12 years as students migrate into BRUSD from Whiteriver Unified School District (WUSD) on the Fort Apache Reservation. This research examines the short-term effects of school choice policy in BRUSD by addressing the following sub-problems: 1) What are the administrative and faculty perceptions of changes affecting BRUSD? 2) What are the measured changes affecting BRUSD? Key findings include decreases in some test scores while other scores increase. Also, faculty is convinced the school is moving in positive directions as it deals with other comprehensive changes. Recommendations include that BRUSD incorporate best practices in schooling diverse populations and in Native American pedagogy. The overall conclusion is that BRUSD has a unique opportunity to provide a quality education for a diverse community of learners.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

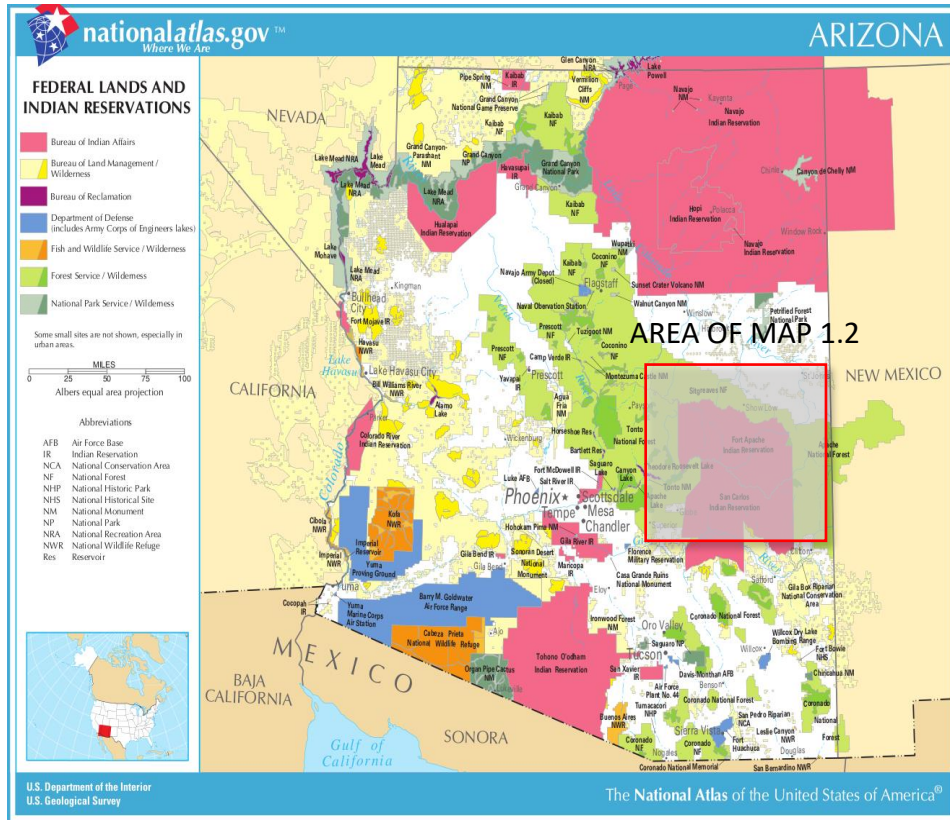
The State of Arizona is currently one of 23 states nationwide that has enacted legislation mandating inter-district open enrollment policies for students who do not live within the receiving school's established district boundaries (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This law, dating back to 1994, establishes that parents have the right to send their child/student to any district as long as the receiving district has not previously proven it does not have the capacity to serve more students than currently attend that school. The law also provides that every school district must have an open enrollment policy in place and publicized (Arizona Revised Statutes, 15-816.01, 2016). As a result of this legislation, in one specific area of the state, there appears to be a voluntary migration of American Indian students leaving schools on the reservation to attend schools off the reservation.

Over the past 12 years¹, Blue Ridge Unified School District (BRUSD) has seen a 14 percent increase in the proportion of its Native American population (7 to 21 percent) while the total population of Native Americans within the district has increased by 148 percent (189 to 469 total students)² largely due to in-migration of students from the Whiteriver Unified School District (WUSD) on the Fort Apache Reservation. During that same span, total enrollment at BRUSD has fallen by 18 percent (2704 to 2216 total students). At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, Blue Ridge administration made the decision to send buses from BRUSD into

¹ Initial data are compiled from the *end* of the 2005-2006 year to the *beginning* of the 2016-2017 school year as data have not been compiled yet for the end of the current school year. Therefore, the data do not account for student attrition that will compile throughout the current school year.

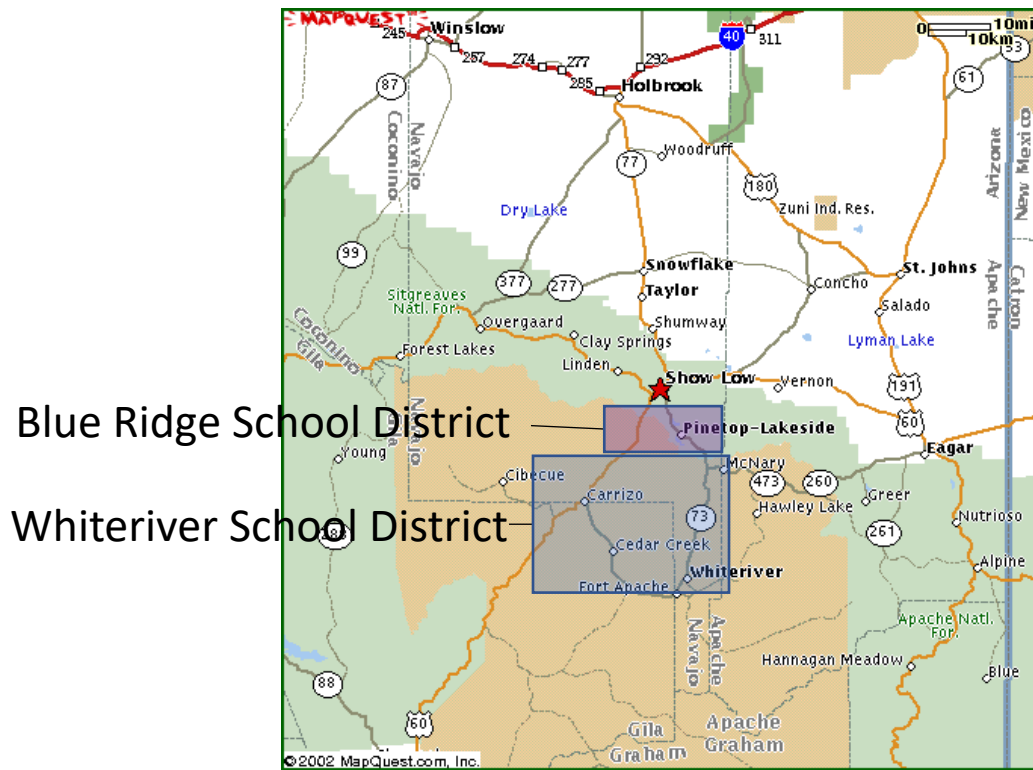
² BRUSD changed the way it compiled racial/ethnic data beginning in 2016. These data now include categories where students can elect multiple races/ethnicities. Current numbers indicate that 206 total students indicated one or more races/ethnicities. Of the 206, 144 identified as some Native American/Alaskan Native along with at least one other race/ethnicity. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the number of students who primarily identify as Native American is likely nearer to 30% of the total student population.

WUSD because of an increasing demand of American Indian families for transportation to the Blue Ridge schools. This controversial busing initiative has gradually increased (going from one to three buses) and has contributed significantly to the changing demographics at BRUSD.



Map 1: Federal Land Boundaries in Arizona

Source: (worldofmaps.net, 2014)



Map 2: Approximate Areas of Respective School Districts

Source: (Society for Range Management Arizona Section, 2005)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to examine the short-term effects of school choice policy on BRUSD in Arizona’s White Mountains as students migrate from WUSD (92% Native American) to BRUSD (89% White) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). To determine the effects of student in/out migration there are two primary sub-problems that must be addressed. First, what are the measurable changes the school district is experiencing? Second, what are the staff perceptions of how BRUSD has changed during the last five years?

As a member of the BRUSD faculty for 16 years and a 30-year resident of the community, the researcher is well aware of the changing student population. Much of the impetus for this study has come through conversations the researcher has had with parents,

students, and other faculty members. Many people in the school community have expressed concern over perceived changes within the district, and therefore, the researcher has framed the purpose of this study within the greater context of school choice.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides the organization of the project falls within the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) as described by Flora, Flora, and Gasteyer (2016). The research views the school as a holistic community much in line with Jack Schneider et al (Schneider, Jacobsen, White, & Gehlbach, 2017), and therefore an application of the seven capitals of the CCF (Built, Financial, Cultural, Human, Social, Political, and Natural – listed in order of the questionnaire) attempts to assess the past and current health of BRUSD as a community. Eighteen current staff (faculty and administration) members were asked a series of 13 interview questions each designed to provide insight as to how the Capitals have changed within BRUSD over the past five years. Further, trends in test data, graduation/dropout rates, and community demographics are examined to assess some of the measureable changes within BRUSD and to corroborate interviewees' testimony when applicable.

Built Capital includes the building structure changes that have occurred throughout the two main campuses in the district. Technology upgrades, building reconfigurations, typical building maintenance and updates are all included in the category of Built Capital.

Financial Capital is assessed through staff knowledge of school funding and how BRUSD has applied those funds to individual classrooms. Faculty was asked how the administration of state funding changes has affected their ability to teach over the last five years. The aim is to discover how school funding has changed and if that has affected student achievement. Insight on how much funding has been affected by school choice is ascertained as well.

In the area of Cultural Capital the research examines changing thoughts and attitudes of people associated with BRUSD. The *educational values* of individuals and communities are being shaped by this migration. Within Native America, there is a storied – and very negative – legacy of public education, and how is this migration shaping that narrative? Is there a *positive ethnic identity* that is being affirmed or created among in-district or open-enrolling students? Beyond this, there are cultural implications that will shape the *attitudes toward “others”* within the communities that are blending with one another. Theoretically, Cultural Capital also includes a community’s *attitude toward improvement* and this is an important aspect both within the sending and receiving communities. There are stereotypes that the two communities ascribe to people who leave and people who come, and these attitudes will also guide the research.

The paradigm of Human Capital is a perhaps the most important part of the theoretical framework as it includes the development of education within a community and its people. This migration falls explicitly within the idea of *access to education and its opportunities* which is one of the benchmarks of Human Capital. Further, it is important to assess whether or not the humans involved in this migration are experiencing *equal treatment* as students/families. Are the students involved in the migration, whether in or out of district, expecting and experiencing any different access to outside resources and institutions? (This question also assesses changes in social capital, primarily bridging opportunities.) The basic question surrounding Human Capital is: are the individuals involved improving their capacity for leadership, education, and self-actualization within the community and beyond?

Social Capital includes the *bonding and bridging effects* of school migration. Questions are centered on these effects being formed within the school and its students and staff. How the different cultural/racial groups work together is at the heart of this capital. Are they *bonding* as

students of the same school and *bridging* as students of different social/cultural backgrounds. Another area of Social Capital asks the question of whether or not there is a *strengthening of mutual trust* between the students and community members. Is self-actualization, collective action, and positive social interaction a goal and whether or not it is happening is an also an important question to answer.

Political Capital is looked at through the questions of who has access to the power structures within BRUSD. The goal is to identify if there is equitable treatment of the diversifying population of students and their families. As a corollary, the questioning provides insight into who makes decisions within the district and who influences those decisions.

The interview instrument is also designed to assess any major changes in the area of Natural Capital. Interviewees were asked whether or not the school and its personnel has experienced any changes in its use of or changes to the natural environment.

Assumptions

A key assumption in studying school districts is whether or not standardized test scores can measure the effectiveness of a school. Here, it is assumed that standardized test scores will give fundamental insight into the academic capacities of students within the school. However, the overall quality of a school is also drawn from more qualitative measures such as the Community Capitals, as they are being evaluated in this study. Along these lines, the research considers the school to be a vital part of the school community. BRUSD is the second largest employer in the school district and many community seasonal events are held on the school grounds. The two campuses are hubs for local activities, closely cooperating with the Town of Pinetop-Lakeside Management to coordinate non-school activities.

It is also assumed that the reputation of a school can be determined by graduation rates, percent of students who go on to college, standardized test scores, and other traditional measures. It is also assumed that respective schools have an accurate and consistent way of measuring and maintaining data. Finally, it is assumed that students who attend these respective schools do so out of a desire to receive/earn an education with the end-goal of high school graduation, college or other post-secondary form of education, or preparation for the workforce. It is assumed that students are not attending school because it is required by law, but rather, that students are attending school because they—or their parents when students are young—want to earn an education.

Because the White population is the group experiencing a decrease in number, it is assumed that White students and parents are choosing to leave BRUSD because they are unsatisfied. Therefore, the study focuses most specifically on the interaction between the Native American and White populations and does not include other minority groups in its analysis.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study lie in the fact that it is not designed to be a broad statement on the status of education in the greater context of the educational field. Therefore, it is not an examination on the hardships faced in the educational system today. It is also not an evaluation of the quality of teaching staff or administration at Blue Ridge. It is not designed to evaluate the individual gains or challenges faced when a student migrates to another school. Similarly, this study does intend to be an evaluation of the merits of school choice. It accepts that school choice is established policy and the aim is merely to study the effects of that policy.

Much of this study involves race and exposes attitudes and actions that can be interpreted as offensive. Another reason for possible offense is in the structure of the discussion. This study frames the in-migration of Native American students to the Blue Ridge District as part of the greater school desegregation movement. In no way does the researcher wish to imply that the culture of Native Americans and that of any other minority groups make them the same. Further, Native Americans are the only race/ethnicity indigenous to North America, and this makes the overall experience for Native Americans unique when compared to other racial groups.

Another aspect of race that is limited in this study is its lack of attention to the changing population of Hispanic students within BRUSD. From the data, it is clear that the Hispanic population has had periods of drastic fluctuation as well. The Hispanic population is not studied in any detail because these students are in-district. They are rarely open-enrolled students. Also, when the community talks about the changing nature of Blue Ridge High School, the reference is always to the Native American population rather than the Hispanic population.

Other limiting factors that will potentially challenge the strength of this study are tied to some of the characteristics of the educational system in general which are continually debated in the field of education. For example, state standardized testing has been changed numerous times in the last ten years in the State of Arizona. Therefore, it can be difficult to make year-to-year comparisons of academic data. Some schools have data that are difficult to find and may be tracked inaccurately. Also, due to changing administrations, policies regarding GPA, discipline, and other school-based measurements can vary widely. There are many ways that schools are evaluated, and this study does not attempt to debate the merits of school evaluations. The study is ultimately about the community of BRUSD and how it has been affected by the implementation of school choice policy.

Implications

This study is important for the school district being studied. For BRUSD, the research can show how its willingness to receive students from out of district is affecting its district. It can also provide evidence that may prevent other students from leaving the district to escape the increasing diversity of the student population. The research will also provide an opportunity for BRUSD to examine its existing policies, procedures, and systems as the district becomes more diversified. This case study may also provide an example to other districts regarding how integration of diverse racial/ethnic populations potentially affects a community's school. Education policy-makers may also find use in this study as they consider the impacts of school choice legislation.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

An examination of relevant literature as it relates to the community effects of student in/out-migration in the White Mountains of Arizona reveals that there is room for more research in this area of study. There is no extensive body of research that specifically deals with voluntary student migration from a reservation to a majority White public school. However, Carol Ward writes in detail about Native American students on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana who attend three schools, two that are on the Reservation (a parochial school and one operated by the Bureau of Indian Education) and one that is off the Reservation in the nearby town of Colstrip (2005). Her work, *Native Americans in the School System: Family, Community, and Academic Achievement*, looks specifically at dropout rates at each school and is thorough in its examination of reasons students at the respective schools dropout. She explains that, “Colstrip High School, maintains one of the wealthiest school districts in the state, which prides itself on an abundance of academic and athletic facilities and a wide variety of learning opportunities for its students” (2005, p. 65). In spite of this, Ward concludes that the primary reason students attended one school rather than another was proximity.

Her findings demonstrate that students attending the off-Reservation school and the parochial school had significantly higher graduation rates than those attending the school operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. However, Ward also demonstrates that graduation rates had stronger correlations to other factors such as residing community, grade point average, and community ties/social capital rather than simply which school system an individual attended. These findings have broad implications for this study. It demonstrates that there are a variety of mitigating factors when determining certain outputs of school performance.

Perhaps the most important piece of Ward's book for this study is chapter seven, in which she documents the different experiences of Native American students at Colstrip and compares them to White students. Ward found that there are a number of variables that affected the "performance," primarily measured through grade point average (GPA) as well as dropout and graduation rates of Native American students at Colstrip High School. Things like community involvement, family structure, transportation time, and school involvement all had effects on student performance. She also concluded that the addition of Native American students lowered the school's "performance." Ward is typically using the same performance metrics for school performance and individual performance. She documents some social hardships that Native American students experienced as a result of being a racial and cultural minority. This translated into acculturation for some students and withdrawal for others.

Also of particular relevance to this study is Ward's brief examination of the staff and community attitudes toward the Native American students attending Colstrip. The responses from individuals were extremely varied; some teachers were indifferent while others were excited to teach and share cultures with the Native American students. Ward observed that most staff were apathetic toward the Native students as a whole, and therefore, the school did not have a climate of inclusion or interest into the culture or unique experiences of the Native American students.

The most thorough student migration across racial lines in the history of the United States occurred after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Even as the desegregation of schools across the United States took place after this ruling, most researchers have concluded that there is still room for both short and long-term research aimed at understanding school desegregation (Longshore & Prager, 1985; Reber, 2010;

Thomas & Brown, 1982; Wells & Crain, 1994; Johnson, 2015). So, given the fact that more research can be done on the effects of the desegregation of schools during the latter half of the 20th Century – a situation that garnered much national attention – it is not surprising that what amounts to school desegregation in Native America has had very little research. Relevant areas of literature to the White Mountains study are: 1) pedagogy and measuring effective American Indian/Alaska Native education, 2) reasons students migrate from one school to another in “open enrollment” districts, 3) the effect of desegregation on the school system, 4) the short and long-term effect of desegregation on students, and 5) school evaluation methods.

The areas of American Indian/Alaska Native Education that have been well-researched are the history of Native American Education and the contemporary (since the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975) attempts to define pedagogy for American Indians in the different types of school structures in the United States. Because of the storied and voluminous nature of the history of education in Native America, this literature review and subsequent research will not delve deeply into that history apart from establishing the fact that a legacy of abuse in the name of education has made many American Indians suspicious of the educational system.

Pedagogy in American Indian/Native American Education

The literature reviewed regarding pedagogy for Native Americans largely supports the idea that some incorporation of Native American cultural values is necessary (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; McCarty, 2009; Knowles, 2012; Tippeconnic III & Tippeconnic Fox, 2012; Guillory & Williams, 2014; Castagno, Garcia, & Blalock, 2016). So, for this study, an examination of “best practices” is important as it relates to educational outcome for Native students. There is literature supporting that educational outcome is improved when teachers

have more cultural awareness (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Weinstein, 2014; Guillory & Williams, 2014). It has also been documented that a curtailment of culturally responsive teaching during the period of No Child Left Behind—an era of high stakes accountability in public schools—has harmed American Indian Education (McCarty, 2009). For a school to effectively educate American Indian students it is very clear that Native Cultural awareness and incorporation into the curriculum is vital on some level.

Another important area of research regarding Native American education deals with the intended outcomes of education. Some researchers suggest that an education for an American Indian should equip him/her for full participation in a tribe's quest for sovereignty and self-determination (Lambe, 2003; McCarty, 2009; Knowles, 2012). A 2016 study by Angelina Castagno et al goes so far as to say that mainstream Native American education continues to be about subjugation and that the individuals who receive a quality education do so for the perpetuation of the American democratic system. When taken as a whole, one can make the conclusion that mainstream "best practices" in Native American education are merely the latest attempt at assimilating tribal youth into the dominant American culture. However, many of these same authors also support the idea that simultaneously teaching Native American students to operate on the reservation effectively as well as in mainstream American culture is a valid output of Native American education (McCarty, 2009; Knowles, 2012; Guillory & Williams, 2014). This literature reveals several important questions for the White Mountains study. Is the Native culture being incorporated into the teaching at Blue Ridge? And if student achievement is improving for Native American students, is likely to help or harm their participation in their home community or the community at large?

Also relevant to this study is literature regarding how to actually measure the effectiveness of an education – and specifically, an education for a Native American student. The educational world uses quantitative data like standardized testing results and graduation/drop-out rates to determine the successfulness of a school. As these markers are usually very low for Native American students, some authors reveal that more qualitative data be taken into account (McCarty, 2009). McCarty also stresses the need for evaluations to be more locally relevant to better assess the effectiveness of Native education (2009).

Reasons Students Migrate

Another important area of literature examines the reasons that students of any race migrate away from their district of residence to a different district. As school choice continues to become a more accepted practice—highlighted by the appointment of Betsy DeVos for the US Secretary of Education—student migration promises to become more researched. But as of yet, there is not an overwhelming amount of research on the effects of school choice – either on student performance or school performance. Perhaps that is why the debate is so vehement in today’s political world. The literature that does exist suggests that students migrate from one district to another to seek an education at a better performing school (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011). This same study concluded that higher performing students were also the students who migrated – and usually from a good school to a better one (2011).

A unique aspect of school choice in the White Mountains study is that students of one race are leaving a school where they have majority status (99%) to a school where they are in the minority (<30%). This fact supports the finding by Carlson et al. that race was not a major determining factor in school choice (2011). Interestingly, though, a study by Esther Prins in 2007 documented that, when given a choice, some White students chose to move from a more

racially diverse school to a less diverse school (Prins, 2007). Essentially, this is an example of White Flight. The White Mountains study has revealed that as Native American enrollment has increased, White enrollment has declined. The Prins findings suggest that race *is* a motivating factor in some aspects of school migration, and the White Mountains study aims to examine this carefully. Other school choice literature reveals that socioeconomic factors seem to not be a major factor in migration (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011). However, at Blue Ridge, the Native American in-migration spiked when the district made the choice to send buses onto the Reservation. It is well documented that the socioeconomic status of the Fort Apache Reservation is far below the average status of a resident of the Blue Ridge School District. Therefore, it seems that making a better school more accessible (via busing) does have a significant impact on school choice in this setting.

Effects of Desegregation on Schools

The literature examining the effects on a school that desegregates has been closely consulted. Within this body of literature there are two sub-areas. The first is the effect on the schools themselves. The second is what has been the impact on the students who participated in desegregation. As mentioned, one effect of desegregation is that White students potentially will leave for a less-diverse district (Prins, 2007). Again, a receiving school will likely gain higher performing students while the sending district will lose higher performing students (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011); however, the results of this on the respective schools are largely unknown. In addition, the Carlson research implied schools that lost students worked harder to retain students in subsequent years while receiving students changed very little (2011). These are important nuances to be studied in the White Mountains. Is Blue Ridge doing anything different due to the in-migration and the out-migration of its students?

In the literature regarding school effects of desegregation, Thomas and Brown cited 29 different studies on the effects of school desegregation and found no consistent conclusions on the effects of desegregation on schools (Thomas & Brown, 1982). Interestingly, though, of the 29 studies cited, four were listed in the category of “Open Enrollment” (indicating there was some kind of school choice), and all four of these studies cited positive results for black students regarding achievement and either positive or neutral results for White students (Thomas & Brown, 1982, pp. 157-189). There was also increased funding as well as a lower student to teacher ratio when schools desegregated (Reber, 2010). These two markers generally mean that the quality of education within a school goes up.

Effects of Desegregation on Students

This leads into the area of individual student achievement or the educational system’s output. Again, citing Thomas and Brown, “many of the studies reviewed showed positive desegregation effects, while an equal number showed negative or neutral effects” (1982, p. 171). This study is also very important to the White Mountains study because it revealed that Whites generally had a negative attitude toward desegregation busing but had no negative effect on White students’ achievement (Thomas & Brown, 1982). Further, Thomas and Brown also showed that desegregation efforts led White students to have “reduced stereotypes and negative attitudes that Whites had toward Blacks” (Thomas & Brown, 1982, p. 167). This finding is enormously important for the White Mountains study. It implies that racial stereotypes and hostilities can likely be lessened through the integration of the Blue Ridge School District.

Finally, the work of Rucker Johnson must be mentioned. His paper, *Long-Run Impacts of School Desegregation and School Quality on Adult Attainments* is perhaps the most important piece of literature this review has uncovered (Johnson, 2015). In this paper, Johnson documents

that the long-term effects of school desegregation were overwhelmingly positive for African-Americans while having no negative effect on Whites. If the purpose of education is to produce healthy, educated, and law-abiding citizens, then school desegregation was an overwhelming success for African Americans at no-cost to the overall population. The implications for the White Mountains study are far-reaching. While the White Mountains study itself does not aim to examine long-term effects of school integration, Johnson shows that positive outcomes will be realized far into the future. Johnson's study also reveals that the more years of integrated schooling a student had, the impact of positive long-run effects was greater (2015). That would indicate the importance of sending a child to an integrated school at as young an age as possible will allow the realization of better future attainments.

School Evaluation and Community Capitals Framework

Along the lines of educational researcher Jack Schneider et al. (Schneider, and the evaluation methods prescribed by the Massachusetts Consortium for Innovative Education Assessment (MCIEA), this study attempts to go beyond test scores to evaluate the quality of a school/school district. Schneider points out with the codification of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a heightened importance was placed on standardized tests (Schneider, How are america's public schools really doing?, 2018). Although the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has been evaluating student performance since 1970, NCLB attached incentives and disincentives to student/school performance on standardized tests. The testing was thorough and comprehensive and a new era of school "accountability" was ushered in.

What Schneider and his colleagues argue is that standardized testing tells only one part of the story. Performance on test scores have a limited ability to measure many aspects of a school. Schneider and his colleagues provided the groundwork for MCIEA to implement an alternative

evaluation methodology to evaluate school efficacy (Schneider, 2017; Kelly, Feistman, Schneider, & Noonan, 2017; Schneider, Jacobsen, White, & Gehlbach, 2017). The essential inputs for their evaluation are teachers and leadership, school culture, and resources. Key outcomes are academic learning - this does take into account aspects of performance on standardized tests - and community and wellbeing which attempts to measure the ability of students to lead “full and rewarding lives” (MCIEA, 2019). Federal guidelines toward education evaluation are also trending toward a more holistic evaluation of schools. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was enacted which required measures outside the realm of standardized testing (US Department of Education, 2019).

Along these lines, this study considers a school district its own community. Thus, the reliance on the Community Capitals Framework is used to measure the health of the school system across a broad spectrum. While this study does have many aspects of direct school evaluation, it is intended to be an evaluation of how school choice policy has *changed the community* that makes up the Blue Ridge Unified School District. Standardized test scores, public perception, and staff evaluations weigh heavily on the health and efficacy of BRUSD, but they are intended to reveal changes within the district. This study will, however, draw conclusions based on these measures to determine the current state of BRUSD.

Importance of Schools to Rural Communities

Rural schools play a vital role in the overall health of the communities in which they lie. In her book, *Why Rural Schools Matter*, Mary Casey Tiekkan documents the role that two rural school districts play in two separate communities in Arkansas (2014). These two school systems play an integral role in the development of varied aspects of Social, Human, and Cultural Capitals of their respective towns. The cultivation of positive and negative feelings toward the

schools in her study have far-reaching effects felt on the immediate, and even surrounding rural communities. In the White Mountains, smaller towns within the three main school districts are all influenced by the school districts in the area. The school campuses are important gathering places for many different types of community functions.

Rural schools play a vital role in the economic development of their communities as explained by Kai Schaft (2016). School-community partnerships, vocational education programs, and service learning all strengthen the workforce and the bridging capital between businesses and schools within rural communities. Place-based curriculum, when implemented, helps students better understand how students can develop and improve new/existing institutions within their communities (Schaft, 2016). He also notes the ways that rural schools can keep some of their most-educated students within their home communities. All of these linkages noted by Schaft are important to this study. The importance of a reliable, workforce is vital to White Mountain community, which relies heavily on tourism and service industries. There is also ample opportunity for employment requiring more education – a recent expansion to the regional hospital (which is within BRUSD boundaries) is nearly complete.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed for the integration of a school district in the White Mountains reveals several unique questions related to the overall school and community effects of student migration. The literature on desegregation suggests that student outcomes in the short and long-terms will be positive. However, these measurements are taken with respect to participation in the mainstream society of which, as noted by several authors, Native Americans are not necessarily assumed to participate in. So, will the in-migrating Native students be making “positive” gains at the cost of alienation to their home culture? Can the receiving school system

make changes in its pedagogy to accommodate American Indian students, equipping them to function both off and on the reservation at higher capacities? The literature also suggests that the receiving school will have no measureable negative impacts; however, there is likely to be out-migration and negative attitudes toward the Native students based on racial and cultural differences even attitudes and cooperation are likely to improve over time.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

In the context of adding the White Mountains school migration study to the overall body of research, a case study approach was utilized. Because the literature review revealed little research on student migrations involving Native Americans, it is difficult to draw broad conclusions that can be applied to other settings. Within Native America, it is difficult to make assumptions about other American Indian communities because there are distinct cultural differences among all tribes. So, ascribing something that may be concluded about the White Mountain Apache to a tribe such as the Navajo (who are in the same geographic area but have vastly different cultural traits) is not advisable. This case study does, however, have the potential to reveal important nuances of the local population of Native Americans as well as the non-Native community regarding the school choice framework.

The following chapter addresses each sub-question in a logical progression. For each sub-question, certain research methods are more applicable than others. At the completion of the data collection, the data was synthesized in a historical manner, identifying how Blue Ridge Unified School District (BRUSD) has changed in the last five years.

Although case study is best suited for a qualitative research approach, a mixed-methods approach is the best fit for gathering and analyzing the data collected throughout the course of the study. A significant part of the study hinges on relatively recent comparisons of various types of data, both qualitative and quantitative, within BRUSD. As the world of education often uses quantifiable statistics to determine a school's effectiveness, this study does the same to evaluate the changes the school district is experiencing. Further, as this research seeks to explain change over time, there are aspects of historical research methodology in this study as data will

be charted over a five-year period and comparisons are made to an historical event, school desegregation that began in the middle of the Twentieth Century.

As noted by Creswell, the mixed methods approach is important because an examination of both quantitative and qualitative data allow for a thorough study in a given area (Creswell, 2003). Individual perceptions, experiences, and opportunities are unable to be measured through analysis of school-wide performances on tests and other broad-based data collection methods. Therefore, interviews were held to reveal whether or not there is a correlation between the perception of individuals within each district and what the overall quantitative statistics imply. The method of triangulation will be used extensively as this study attempts to create a convergence of information. For a detailed discussion on this aspect of mixed methodology, Todd D. Jick goes well beyond providing a definition of mixed method research and explains various ways to create a “convergence” of the data in his paper, “Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Triangulation in Action,” (Jick, 1979). But in each instance, an attempt was made to validate data collected with another source. Thus, the narrative of school migration in the White Mountains attempts to tell a complete story about the school community.

The interviews conducted are of particular sensitivity. A total of 18 interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. Sixteen were with faculty, grades one through twelve and two were with administrators who have longevity in BRUSD. In addition, two separate interviews were held with the District Superintendent and District Business Manager as member checks. At times, the researcher will refer to “staff”—which is to include both faculty and administration—and all interviewees will be referred to as a numbered participant (i.e., P1).

Sub-Question One: Perceived Changes within BRUSD

Addressing the qualitative changes that have affected BRUSD is done using the information gained from the 18 interviews conducted with current faculty and staff. Because the interview questions ask about the changes that have taken place in the last five years, or since the migration has been the most pronounced, staff were chosen at random from a list of 45 total teachers and administrators who have been in the district for at least five years. One major exception to this is the district Superintendent, who is currently entering into his fifth year of service to BRUSD. Because of his position and the role he has played in encouraging the migration, his perspective is vital to the discussion.

The interview instrument consists of 13 questions, each providing illumination into one or more of the Community Capitals (Appendix A). The shortest interview lasted 25 minutes and the longest was 61 minutes. The instrument was designed to inspire a conversational tone, and one of the impromptu questions that came out the interviews was, “Do Blue Ridge students still have the same access to a great education here?” This question came up in 16 of the 18 staff interviews. Depending on what the interviewees mentioned, the interviewer asked follow-up questions within the realms of measurement relating to funding, class size, discipline, test scores, demographics, student demographic characteristics, and student attitudes. The goal of the interviews was to provide a human-level assessment of the school district that may or may not corroborate the story told by the quantitative data collected.

Sub-Question Two: Measured Changes

Using *ex post facto* research examining racial/ethnic demographic data from BRUSD, the research shows that there was a spike in Native American migration toward Blue Ridge in the last five years. At the same time, these data show that the White population is migrating away

from Blue Ridge. Collecting recent quantitative data (within the last 10 years) the research attempts to understand the academic effects of the students who are migrating.

Ex post facto data was consulted in the form of school records of district-level finances, changing demographics, standardized test scores, graduation and dropout rates, and college participation. District-level financing is addressed broadly with an attempt to understand the financial impact of Native American students to BRUSD. Demographically, data was collected regarding racial and ethnic backgrounds and qualification for free and reduced lunch (family income levels). Free and reduced lunch metrics were recalled much differently by staff than could be verified by state data. The standardized test scores the research consulted were the state standardized tests (AIMS and AZ MERIT), Advanced Placement exams, and the ACT test. Data as reported to the Arizona Department of Education and/or the Arizona Regents were consulted regarding dropout, graduation rates, as well as college participation.

Data Analysis

Using the above data, the research attempts to paint a picture of the trends affecting BRUSD. Data related to school funding is introduced to help reveal the financial impact of the migration. School funding has proven to be positively correlated to academic success so this is vitally important in the study. School funding affects areas such as student to teacher ratio, variety of classes offered, and extra-curricular opportunities, among other things. The hypothesis is that BRUSD will receive a financial benefit, thus positively affecting educational opportunities for all of its students.

Along with the financial data, graphically organized charts based on the previous data collected were correlated to reveal whether the migrations negatively or positively impacted overall school performances or not. However, as mentioned, the empirical data cannot determine

the true impact of the educational opportunities offered within BRUSD. The hypothesis is that overall school performance may not be a good indicator of whether an *individual* student's educational quality has been impacted.

Evaluating test scores of the top performing students is also necessary to corroborate the quantifiable data with interviews. The opinions of administrators and teachers are vital to the overall perceptions of success of a school. While a school may carry an overall mediocre label (currently a "C" grade as given by the Arizona Department of Education), it is clear that individual students are performing quite well and staff are optimistic about the opportunities afforded at the school. Poor schools still send students to college, and great schools have students that drop out. The qualitative side of this study reveals whether the thoughts and opinions of the *people* who make up a school are correlated to the quantitative data gathered.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted on *ex-post facto* and secondary data collected by the school district on school-wide data in the form of standardized test results, graduation rates, dropout rates. Originally, the study attempted to collect data on attendance rates and participation rates of students in after school activities as indicators of the district's health. BRUSD is using its third different data management system in the last five years and attendance records were not found. In addition, the State was unable to provide attendance records for BRUSD.

As mentioned, the quantitative data only tells one part of the story. The data collected through interviews will be triangulated with the quantitative data. For example, the *ex-post facto* data will be unable to determine if there is a difference in the standard deviation of the data set of a given standardized test. Therefore, the qualitative data collected through the interviews is

imperative because it will reveal whether or not individual experiences corroborate the story told by the quantitative data.

Beyond addressing the thoughts and opinions of staff in the categories measured by the qualitative data points, the interviews conducted said something about areas of school quality not often measured quantitatively. In order to account for some of these, the interviews were transcribed and coded in categories as described within the parameters mentioned in the theoretical framework of the seven Community Capitals; however, the researcher chose to omit Natural Capital because it did not provide any pertinent information. As the interviews progressed, it was apparent that several other major themes would be coded. These were “Superintendent/District Leadership” and “Technology.” Specifically, transcripts were coded in a spreadsheet with rows corresponding to codes and columns labelled with participant numbers. Words and phrases were listed in the cell that corresponded to the category and participant. The following categories made up the coded rows:

- Human Capital,
- Cultural Capital,
- Social Capital,
- Political Capital,
- Financial Capital,
- Built Capital,
- Superintendent/District Leadership,
- Technology.

In many cases, the answers to some questions framed in one Community Capital illuminated aspects of a different Capital. To organize the data collected, basic Ripple Effect Mapping

(REM) was used as prescribed by Chazdon et al. in *A Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping* (Chazdon, Scott; Emery, Mary; Hanson, Debra; Higgins, Lorie; Sero, Rebecca, 2017). An REM “Mind Map” was created to show the major themes that were coded and how they fit within the Community Capitals.

Methodological Considerations

Given that the researcher is a faculty member of BRUSD, it must be considered that some amount of bias may exist in the interpretations of this study. Because the researcher is vested in the success of the school, it is likely that some findings are represented more positively than would an outside observer. Further, it is possible that staff may have represented themselves differently because they know the researcher is a colleague. The researcher also has a child in the elementary school in the district, and this may influence the way participants represented themselves or the school. The researcher is also non-Indian, and this likely carries biases with it as the researcher interpreted data collected in the interviews.

The *ex-post facto* data was collected from the school and state data bases. As secondary data, these data sets are considered complete and eligible for quantitative analysis. While some standardized test results or other school-wide records may not be above 500 in some instances, these data sets should be considered complete as they include the entire student population (or 95 percent as is the required participation rate on standardized test by the Arizona Department of Education) of a given grade level, school, or district.

Ethical Considerations

As part of the research process, the research proposal was submitted and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Dakota State University before any research took place (Appendix B). In addition, the researcher completed the *Collaborative Institutional*

Training Initiative as required by the North Dakota State University for research involving human subjects. Approval was also met for research requirements from Blue Ridge Unified School District.

A methodological consideration is that the researcher will be in contact with sensitive information regarding the education of minors, which is strictly regulated by Federal FERPA laws as described by U.S. Department of Education. In every instance, individual identifiers will not be included in any of the data sets used by the researcher.

Timeline

The research began in January, 2018, through initial inquiries and ex post facto data collection from the Arizona Department of Education. Formal interviews began in September 2018 and were completed in March, 2019. Other data collection from BRUSD, the American Communities Survey, and other sources have been ongoing. The data collected provided a picture of BRUSD through the completed school year of 2017-2018. Analysis of this data was continual ongoing and was collected in its entirety in March, 2019.

The interviews conducted were the longest running aspect of the research. Because the researcher is full-time employed at Blue Ridge School District, the opportunity to conduct interviews with staff were present itself throughout the school year. Transcription and analysis happened simultaneously and the final interview with the Superintendent occurred March 11, 2019.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Introduction and Review of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to determine the effects of school choice in Arizona within the Blue Ridge Unified School District (BRUSD). In informal conversations with community members, parents, teachers, and administrators, it was evident that school choice is affecting the racial and ethnic demographics of the students attending BRUSD. A cursory examination of demographic data supports what these conversations revealed: In the last five years, BRUSD has become a majority-minority district. Although Blue Ridge allowed open enrollment for many years prior to the 2016 school year, the decision to send buses into the neighboring Whiteriver Unified School District (WUSD) was made in the summer before that school year began. This had a significant effect on an already existing trend, but it was in the 2016-2017 school year that Blue Ridge's White population became a minority. This outcome has become a major topic of conversation not only in the school community but also in the community at large. In the final determination, many people see a correlation between a growing minority population and a perception that the quality of education offered in BRUSD has suffered.

This research used a mixed methods approach to determine the effects of this racial/ethnic population shift. Students, parents, and community members associated with the school district reported changes in the quality of schooling, with many believing that the school district has "gone down." One focus of the research was to qualitatively assess whether or not the teachers in the district believe that the educational efficacy of BRUSD has actually suffered as a result of the changing population. Sixteen interviews with teaching personnel and two with administrators (18 total), who have all been in the district for more than five years, were

conducted to assess the changes affecting the district. Using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) as established by Flora, Flora, and Gasteyer, the researcher chose to examine the school as a holistic community, with questions directed at assessing the effects of the population shift on the seven community capitals—Built, Financial, Social, Human, Cultural, Political, and Natural (2016). Interviewees were asked a series of questions (Appendix A) within each capital and asked to elaborate on their understanding of what had changed and why it had changed. In addition to the CCF, Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) was employed to organize the findings from the interviews (Chazdon, Scott; Emery, Mary; Hanson, Debra; Higgins, Lorie; Sero, Rebecca, 2017). The findings themselves are presented through each Community Capital, listed in order of importance.

The mind map (Figure 1) is organized as a ripple effect with each Community Capital represented by a different color as shown with the “Community Capitals Legend” at the bottom of the map. “Initiators” are box-shaped and represent the most common themes discovered during the interview process. These initiators had far-reaching effects into other topics and other Capitals. The initiators were the strongest agents of change identified through staff interviews. Level One ovals are the first and most direct result of the Initiators. Level Two was most directly affected by Level One, and each level was most directly affected by the precluding level on the map. However, there are curving arrows that indicate a ripple effect backward on the map. For example, “School Renovation” is a direct result of the decisions made by the Superintendent yet it has had a significant impact on the culture and infrastructure of “Technology” within BRUSD. “Racial Diversity” has three different colors because it fits within three different Community Capitals.

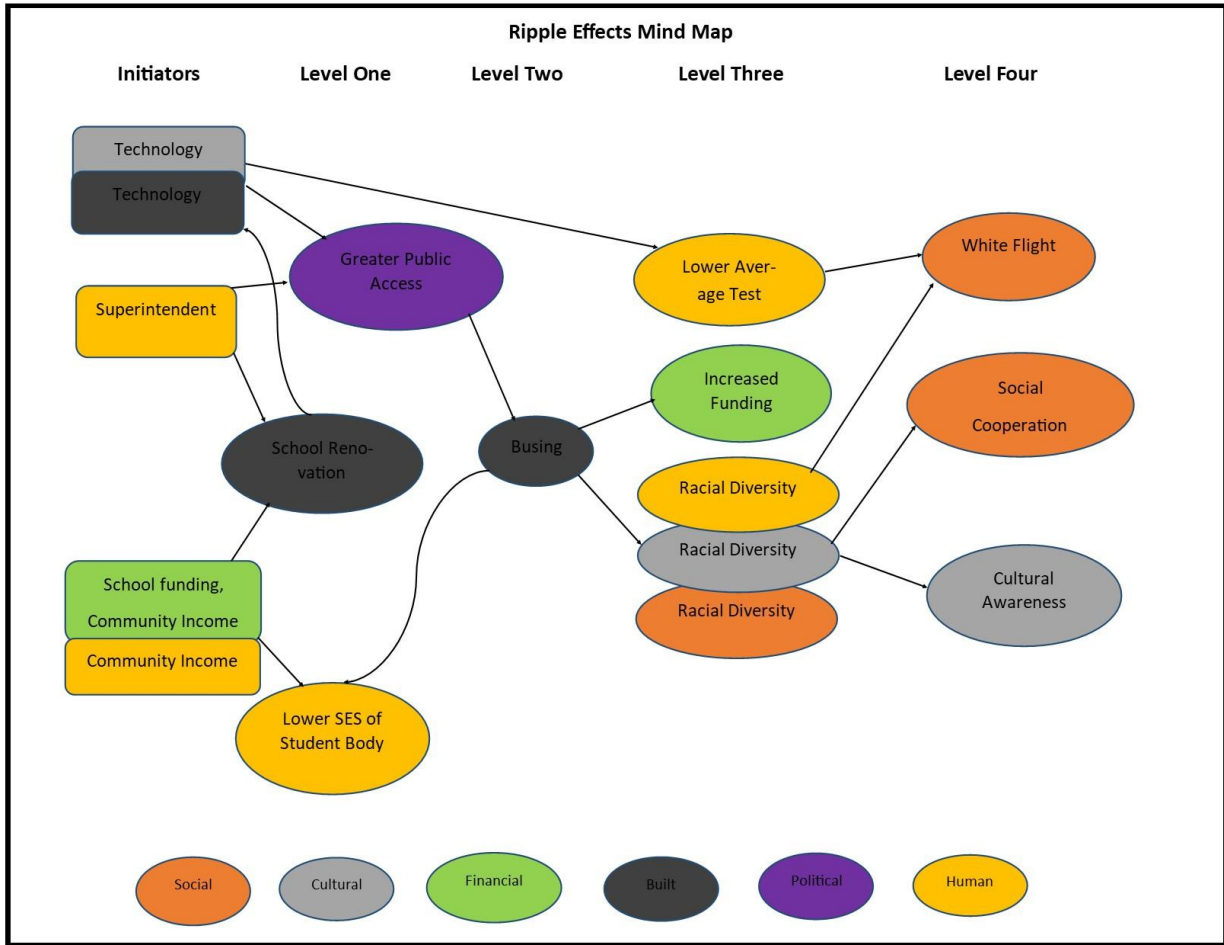


Figure 1: Mind Map of the Findings uncovered from the study.

The rest of the chapter presents the findings as they answer the research sub-questions: 1) What are the perceived changes within BRUSD? 2) What are the measured changes in BRUSD? These sub-questions are the two main headings for Chapter Four. Under each main heading, findings are presented within the Community Capital sub-heading where they are most relevant. Some capitals speak more directly to one sub-question or the other, and that is reflected in the length of each sub-section. In general, the interviews expose answers to sub-question one, and the *ex post facto* data illuminate sub-question two. Within some of the sub-sections, there is

some crossover between qualitative and quantitative data as the researcher attempts to triangulate the two data sets.

As interviewees expressed concerns and ideas of how the district had changed, the researcher sought to corroborate these perceptions through an examination of quantitative data sets of standardized test records, financial reports obtained from district office personnel, and confirmation of why certain decisions were made through member check interviews with the District Superintendent and Business Manager. In the end, the findings shed light on the short-term effects of Arizona's open enrollment policy within this medium-sized, rural school district by looking at faculty perceptions and *ex post facto* data. As a corollary, the findings and subsequent discussion will help school administration and community members better understand the quality of one of the area's school districts.

Sub-Question One: Perceived Changes in BRUSD

The perceived changes within BRUSD were drawn primarily from the qualitative interviews. This study has grouped most of these findings as "perceived" because they are typically based on the thoughts and opinions of each respective participant. Much of what interviewees mentioned reflected their own personal experiences in the district over the last five years. The findings in this section are grouped under the sub-headings of the Community Capitals and attempt to describe a complete picture of BRUSD during the period covered by this study.

Human Capital.

Human Capital is mentioned first because it encompasses the most impactful topics from the overall findings. The Superintendent, the changing racial makeup of the student body, and the shifting socioeconomic makeup of the students all have roots in Human Capital. Further,

these topics, especially the Superintendent, had strong implications for the overall findings and discussion of this study. Overall, the data sets for both sub-questions generally support one another in the areas of educational quality and attainment, racial demographics, and socioeconomics of the students and community.

The Superintendent.

The most recurring theme mentioned during the interviews was the leadership from the District Superintendent. Now in his fifth year in the role, the current Superintendent has been the major decision maker regarding policy on every level. Regarding the interview instrument used in the research, the Superintendent, referenced by name, title, or as the “District Office,” came up repeatedly, in every interview, multiple times. The Superintendent was mentioned most directly when questions were asked about district finances, facilities, and how the school receives public input (financial, built, and political capitals, respectively). All of the interviewees, whether positively or negatively, had something to say about how the Superintendent has shaped the direction of the school in these areas, which is to be expected. However, when it came to the issue of open enrollment and the resulting changes in racial demographics, his impact was also strongly noted. The Superintendent has had the most influence over human, cultural, and social capitals as measured through the interviews as well. The degree of influence of the Superintendent was not anticipated, as it was assumed that district level staff would be somewhat removed from policy implementation and other issues that impact students and staff on a day to day basis. In the “Mind Map” (a variation of web-mapping) that is often employed through REM (Chazdon, Scott; Emery, Mary; Hanson, Debra; Higgins, Lorie; Sero, Rebecca, 2017, pp. 24-27), the BRUSD Superintendent is clearly at the center, as the primary impetus for other changes and other topics that were addressed through the CCF-based interview questions.

Busing.

With the District School Board's approval, it was ultimately the Superintendent's decision to send buses onto the Fort Apache Reservation and usher in a different era of open enrollment for BRUSD. By his admission, one of the main goals after being hired as Superintendent was to listen and respond to the public. He explained that it was as if previous administrations had "built a moat" around the school and made decisions without any outside input. Within the first year on the job, the Superintendent was approached by community members from the Fort Apache Reservation claiming that if BRUSD sent buses on the Reservation, then there would be upwards of 150 students who would leave the Whiteriver District and attend school in BRUSD. These community members had children of their own who had previously open-enrolled at Blue Ridge who were very successful. Their motivation was to provide an opportunity for their fellow community members' children to leave the Reservation and its struggling school system for a chance at a better education. By Arizona Statute, open enrollment has been part of the public education landscape since the late 1990s (Arizona Revised Statutes 15-816.01, 2016). Within BRUSD, there has been a gradual growth of WUSD residents who left their own district and struggling school systems to attend Blue Ridge. Most of these open-enrolled students were at the higher grade levels. When Blue Ridge's Superintendent decided in the 2015-2016 school year to send buses onto the Reservation, it initiated a more drastic change in the cultural, human, and social landscapes. One year after sending buses onto the Reservation, Blue Ridge became a majority-minority school district—this is a fact that did not escape the conversations the researcher had during this study.

Leadership opportunities in the district.

Leadership opportunities for both staff and students is clearly an area where Blue Ridge is lacking. Only six staff members stated that leadership opportunities have grown for staff and four believed there are new or growing leadership opportunities for students. Most of the interviewees stated that nothing has really changed. The same opportunities exist, but the main change is that there is even less financial incentive for teachers to participate in these roles anymore. Participant 12 said that “it’s the same people doing the same things.”

Upon reflection when asked about significant increase in Native American students, the Superintendent admitted that BRUSD was perhaps unprepared for the cultural differences and academic differences that the new students brought with them. Teachers mentioned this as well, with several (P4, P8, P9 and P14) noting that no cultural awareness training was implemented by district leadership; however, two teachers (P4 and P14) did recall a Native American Cultural Awareness training initiated by another faculty member. Clearly, there appears to be a void in access to useful resources and institutions that could be beneficial to students and teachers alike. Staff seemed to believe that an initiation of this should begin at the district level. Regarding leadership at all levels and its relationship to open enrollment, an interviewee said:

A stronger leadership would’ve been able to see the change in the ethnicity and population. I’m going to get away from ethnicity and go with student population dynamics. A single leader who would’ve been able to see over time the change in student population dynamics would be able to instigate and implement procedures and routines that could help that transition along. When you don’t have that leadership...or they don’t have that knowledge, because what we’re talking about is something a lot of people can be very blind to. I work with new teachers all the time and one of the things I

share is you have to teach the kids you have...not the ones you used to have or the ones you want...the ones you have. That means what you do has to change. Leadership would see that the kids we have today are not the ones we used to have or the ones we wish we had but the ones we've got, we'd be able to implement those things if they're paying attention to the situation (P9).

Changing socioeconomic status.

As much as teachers are aware of the changing nature of the race/ethnicity of the student body, they emphasized the changing socioeconomic status of their students. These teachers pointed to the struggling local economy as the main reason for this. Fifteen of the 18 interviewees were confident in their assessment that the socioeconomic status of their students had gone down, regardless of whether or not the student was in-district or open enrollment student. An interviewee reported:

As far as socioeconomics. Which is a tough thing because you talk about economy and stuff and how much families are bringing in and poverty level and there's been studies that go hand in hand with poverty and vocabulary of kids. I think the whole family aspect of kids now too is way different. I look at my kids...I looked the other day. I have 30 kids in the classroom and out of 30, 20 are not in a normal family, living with mom or grandparents. It wasn't like that when I first got here (P10).

Staff said they knew of more students today than in past years who struggled economically. They talked about students who are homeless or living with relatives, many of whom depend on the school for regular meals. Staff gave examples of parents abusing various substances and students who lived in homes with no utilities. Several teachers from the High School and Jr. High talked about how difficult it is for these students to focus on school work when they have

the dramatic issues outside the school walls. When asked if these issues affected open enrollment and in-district students alike, all of the 15 staff members confidently expressed that it affected everyone regardless of where they came from. Even though the socioeconomic conditions on the Fort Apache Reservation are significantly lower than the in-district conditions, teachers seemed to indicate that it is not a noticeable issue. As a whole, the current percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch in BRUSD is 53 percent. This number is not a departure from historical norms within the district over the last five years.

Access to outside resources and institutions.

While the number of struggling students and families are on the rise, access to outside resources and institutions (human capital) is increasingly important. When asked if the school was doing a good job of providing access, 12 said that the school was doing a better job providing access to outside resources. Although only four (P3, P5, P9 and P10) said the school was doing a “good” job, the other eight said that the school seems to be trying its best. Some teachers remarked that the school has provided the same level of access but the number of students needing help has increased. Thus, it appears that many students simply do not get served. This question pertained not just to access to social services, but also to things on the other end of the spectrum like scholarships and classes offered by the local community college. Once again, the district leadership came up in these discussions because with an underserved population that requires services outside the scope of a regular classroom teacher, people immediately look to the office of the Superintendent to address these issues. While the Superintendent may not have been directly mentioned, comments regarding his initiation of changing principals (there have been two changes at the high school in four years) and other non-teaching staff as well as no “clear vision,” were noted (P8).

Educational performance indicators.

As the interviews unfolded, the ultimate issue of whether or not students at Blue Ridge are still getting a quality education was inevitably addressed. Again, the purpose of this study—measuring the changes to BRUSD as a result of open enrollment—obviously sets out to determine if, in fact, Blue Ridge students have access to that same quality of education. A quality education is ultimately what BRUSD is trying to provide. All of the teachers whether through the direct, impromptu question (Has the quality of education dropped?) or by inference, indicated that students continue to achieve at a high level within this district. The quality of education offered had not dropped. However, several stated that it is a little more difficult to find—largely for the reasons mentioned in this study. It could be argued that the quality has, indeed, dropped because it “is harder to find” (P9).

Cultural Capital.

Cultural Capital is mostly addressed through the staff interviews and fits within the perceived changes occurring in the district. However, the research consulted the district business manager to verify these perceived changes. Teacher and administrative perceptions of the changing culture were supported by increase in open enrollment students in the district.

A nuance of the shift in population is that it has happened gradually at the higher grades and much more abruptly at the lower levels. This was communicated in the interviews as well. Language used by high school teachers explained that the change in population has been much more “gradual” and that it is not “that noticeable.” Grades first through sixth easily had the most dramatic change in racial makeup of the student population, and this was also understood by teachers who remarked how drastic the shift had been since “they first started teaching.” The

data show that in first through third grades, the total number of Native American students went from five to 93 from 2015 to 2016, respectively.

Teachers at the lower levels voiced what could be interpreted as a more positive outlook toward the increasing diversity at the school. Three of the seven teachers interviewed from the first through sixth grade remarked how much they value the diversity that their building now has. An interviewee commented:

I think we...me coming from a school mainly where there were whites, I was minority, it was very difficult. And with more with the different races they learn how to get along better. I think people learn how to get along. They learn how to appreciate each other, and I think we need that (P7).

Even though all the teachers at this level demonstrated that the change presented challenges, they expressed excitement or some level of appreciation for the change in population. Teachers in grades seven through 12 used more measured language—although a majority did express an appreciation for diversity—when communicating their opinions of the changing population. In contrast, two of these 10 teachers vociferously mentioned the negative effects of the “open enrollment” students (P3 and P9). One of the common complaints of these teachers was that the Native American students often do not accept the greater “Blue Ridge culture,” (P3). This individual went on to say, “You don’t bring another community into a school in hopes that that community will change and be a part of our community.” For some teachers, it is apparent that the open enrollment students are unlikely ever to truly become part of the “Blue Ridge Tradition” (P3).

When asked whether or not their students were growing in their own cultural understanding and that of others 14 of 18 staff members responded with a definitive yes.

However, most of these staff members were quick to point out that the understanding was happening slowly, and many remarked that the school had no clear plan how to make students from different cultures learn about one another. Staff explained that cultural learning was taking place because “that’s just kids being kids” (P7). Beyond students seeming to grow in their cultural knowledge, 10 teachers remarked that they, too, had gotten more adept at teaching and understanding students from different cultures. Again, the comments showed that this process was happening slowly, and sometimes painfully, but that it was indeed taking place.

Social Capital.

Building on the theme of increased awareness of Cultural Capital, the social fabric of the school was measured by the following three questions: 1) Are staff and students increasing/decreasing in their ability to work with different social groups? 2) Are students and staff working toward common goals? And 3) How has race affected the ability of students and staff to work toward similar goals? Again, from staff responses it is apparent that there is a positive change. Fifteen staff members said that both teachers and students are increasing in their abilities to work in different social groups. They cited examples of sports teams, and other extra-curricular activities, but 14 teachers and, ironically, one who said students were not increasing, stated that it happens successfully in their classrooms (P9). Although this group work is clearly a pedagogical success, it also bodes well for the social bonding and bridging between students in the district. Question Numbers Two and Three received lower marks with 11 teachers saying they are working toward common goals, but 12 said race was not a factor in this. The teachers who said the staff and students are not working toward common goals expressed that this was most often a result of poor leadership, usually pointing to the District Office for this failure. There were three teachers who did say that race has been a factor in

students and staff being able to work together, but they all said that it is improving (P1, P8 and P15).

Another criticism cited by community members and interviewees (P3, P9 and P15 mentioned it at length) is that there is a perception that some open enrollment students bring negative behaviors more prevalent in “the valley” (a reference to Phoenix) which include, “sex, drugs, and rock and roll” (P9). Though this research was unable to corroborate this assertion, one official said that at one point the administrative team in one of the buildings counted up discipline referrals and sorted them by race. At the end of the count, the referrals totaled were in the same proportion as the racial breakdown of the student body. Certainly, a full 15 of 18 interviewees made no mention that students from the Reservation bring more negative behaviors than any other student.

State policy on open enrollment allows a school district the option to have students removed from the district for reasons such as poor attendance and discipline issues that would not have any effect on an in-district student. At the direction of the Superintendent, Blue Ridge building administrators have begun removing open-enrolled students for some of these infractions that had not been enforced at that same level in previous years. Most teachers were unaware of this but one teacher specifically mentioned that some of the discipline problems had been removed and that it created a better climate within the school (P14). The Superintendent expressed that it has been difficult making these decisions, and that the goal is to ensure that open-enrolled students understand the responsibility they have as a student at BRUSD.

Political Capital.

Another direct ripple effect of the district leadership the teachers were convinced of was the changing political nature surrounding the school district. Once again, one of the major goals

of this Superintendent was to change the public perception of how the BRUSD makes its decisions. The Superintendent has formed more committees that involved teachers, parents, students, and committee members than previous administrations. The changing political nature, through increased public access, of the school district was expressed by the teachers as well.

The teachers were nearly unanimous when responding to the question of whether or not the BRUSD is more or less receptive to public input. Of the 18 staff members interviewed, 17 offered a very confident response that the district is more responsive to public input. And the one person that did not answer yes, never addressed the question either way (P9). Teachers explained that the Superintendent created a climate where any input is heard, and several teachers questioned whether or not this is a positive change. However, the follow-up question of whether or not all groups represented have the same voice caused five of the interviewees to state that certain groups, usually because of a religious or political affiliation, had more of a voice than others. When pressed on these comments, these teachers, admittedly, said this was potentially more because of proximity (i.e., attending the same meetings as administrators) rather than a bias that was being played out in the public school. All teachers said that this growing receptiveness to the public had almost everything to do with the personality of the Superintendent and the five school board members rather than any issue connected to school choice. Although one could draw the conclusion that the greater openness to public comment could be an attempt to attract more students to the district, this was not stated.

Financial Capital.

Staff members were also almost unanimous (17 of 18) in their belief that the school district was underfunded. They all also expressed some level of ignorance as to how school funding works. The one teacher that believed more money has been put into education works

within Title I, a program that receives Federal funds rather than State, and that they have had updated equipment in the last year or so. Although most teachers do not understand the nuance of school funding, they did, however, have a firm grasp on the fact that the State of Arizona had made drastic cuts to education funding as a result of what is now being called the “Great Recession.” Arizona has made some of the most significant spending cuts of all 50 States from the time period between 2008 and 2016 – Arizona’s level of funding for Kindergarten through 12th grade education was 36.6 percent lower in than it was in 2008 (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017). The Red for Ed movement – a national movement of educators unifying for greater funding in education - that has gained political ground in West Virginia and Oklahoma is strong in Arizona.

Superintendent impact.

One specific conversation stood out regarding how the Superintendent handled the State’s change in funding inspired by the Red for Ed movement. In response to teacher walk-outs across the state, the Arizona Legislature passed a bill granting teachers a 10 percent raise in salary for the next school year. The Superintendent explained that as it played out at Blue Ridge, the total did not amount to a full 10 percent, but that he was willing to make up the difference of over two percent. In other words, the Superintendent used the increased funding received from the state to give existing teachers a 10 percent pay increase rather than use it in other areas such as hiring new teachers.

In the minds of the teachers, this has played out in several different ways. Seven of the nine teachers from the K-8 levels talked with great concern over increasing class sizes. One teacher cited a class of 37 students (P15). Other teachers, specifically in the elementary grades, talked about the challenges of teaching 30 students in one room as opposed to 24-26 as it used to

be years ago. None of the teachers at the high school level mentioned class sizes as an issue. When the teachers were asked if school funding—or the lack thereof—had affected their instruction nine expressed that it had no negative impact. None of the teachers specifically stated that funding issues had affected learning. However, three teachers who answered that a lack of funding has not had a negative effect went on to give examples of how they have struggled in their classrooms with outdated or nonexistent resources (P1, P4 and P6). No teachers, except a teacher using Title I funds, gave any indication that any financial changes had a positive impact on learning.

One of the more striking observations that six of the interviewees claimed was that overall, teachers in their buildings are less skilled and/or qualified than teachers they worked with in the past. Two teachers noted how financial struggles had hurt morale among the staff and described how the students feel that (P11 and P15). With higher class sizes, less qualified teachers, and fewer resources, it seems a contradiction to say that a lack of finances has not affected teaching and learning. With the increase in state funding from the Red for Ed movement as well as the extra money BRUSD contributed to existing teacher salaries, the Superintendent made clear that he valued the teachers who were working at the school. However, in making that decision, no new teaching positions were created and class sizes remained high especially as noted by the elementary school teachers interviewed.

Built Capital.

Another facility change that seemed to have a heavy impact in the minds of teachers, yet almost exclusively at the lower grades, was that there has been major site changes over the past four years. Grades one through three and grades seven and eight have all changed campuses or building configurations at least once in the last four years and some have moved twice. While

these moves were made to consolidate existing buildings and maximize the use of the most modern facilities in BRUSD, it was mentioned by all ten of the teachers, grades one through eight, and even by one of the teachers at the high school, though none of the changes affected grades nine through 12. Further, three teachers said that moving to a more modern building was not an improvement (P6, P1 and P17). All of the physical upheaval was no small source of stress and frustration for the teachers who mentioned it. Considering the renovations that have been made District-wide, 16 out of 17 teachers mentioned them to varying degrees of satisfaction. Some teachers, while acknowledging that things have improved, still found frustration and determined that the right decisions had not been made about what to fix and how to fix it. For example, in this era of school shootings, through consultation with experts in the field of school safety, the Superintendent changed all of the locks, mandated that all school doors be locked during school hours, and that peepholes be installed in all classroom doors. Three of the interviewees questioned this decision and the financial commitment behind it (P1, P4 and P15). The Superintendent stated that student safety was the primary concern when directly asked why funds have been allocated the way they have.

Technology.

A theme that came up in every interview through various lines of questioning, was the changing nature of technology in school culture. Teachers expressed frustration with how the district has implemented new technology—becoming a “one-to-one” school in the last five years.³ Many one-to-one schools issue a personal device to every student, but Blue Ridge decided to issue a classroom set of laptop computers to every teacher grades one through six and

³ One-to-one is a commonly utilized term meaning that a school has one computer/tablet for every student.

classroom sets in each core subject area classroom grades seven through 12. A small group (5) of teachers said that BRUSD was putting too much emphasis on students using computers, saying that students need to practice reading books and working math problems with pencil and paper rather than spending time on the computer. Some teachers also had complaints that the upgrades made to technology were not good enough. Three of the seven teachers first through sixth (this cohort is at a different campus than seventh through 12th) said that the internet is less reliable at the new building (P6, P15 and P17). They stated that more money should have been allocated for connectivity than other projects.

While most of the aforementioned changes have happened at the behest of the Superintendent, six teachers mentioned that students' culture has changed toward computers and electronic usage and that it has had a profound impact on learning. Interestingly, much of this discussion came up when teachers were asked about students' interaction with the natural environment – which interestingly, only one teacher said has grown in the last five years (P10). These teachers talked about how students do not go outside anymore because they are too focused on their electronic devices.

Sub-Question One Conclusion.

Teachers and administrators mentioned changes in every aspect measurable through the Community Capitals Framework. Human Capital saw significant changes in perceptions of racial demographics, student socioeconomic status, and educational opportunity. Social and Cultural changes were notable as interviewees discussed how both students and staff are learning how to adapt and cooperate across different social and cultural lines. Political Capital changes were notable as staff indicated that the Superintendent has become much more open to public input. Drastic changes in Built Capital through renovations and building reconfigurations were

also key findings that have impacted the overall district climate. In short, there has been no shortage of change affecting all areas of the district, much of which is at the direction of the Superintendent.

Sub-Question Two: Measured Changes in BRUSD

There are strong indicators revealing measureable changes to the Community Capitals in BRUSD as well. The data collected for this sub-question is quantitative in nature. It uses *ex post facto* data drawn from a variety of sources: BRUSD, Arizona Department of Education, Arizona Board of Regents, and the American Community Survey. The data presented here are an effort to corroborate some of the key findings made from the interviews. Additionally, these data help explain the academic achievements of students in BRUSD over the past five years; at the same time these data expose some of the contradictory stories told by standardized test results.

Human Capital.

Changing Demographics.

Mandatory open enrollment has been a part of the Blue Ridge District since it was incorporated into Arizona State Law in 1994. In considering the racial/ethnic effects of open enrollment in BRUSD, the most impactful in-migration appears to be Native Americans who are coming from the Fort Apache Reservation and out of WUSD (92% American Indian/Alaska Native) into BRUSD⁴ (89% White) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

While BRUSD officials were unable to produce historic policies on open enrollment, the first significant increase (38%) in BRUSD's Native American population brought the total population

⁴ BRUSD boundaries encompass the Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTA) of 85929 and 85935. ZCTA 85901 is partially encompassed by BRUSD but a vast majority of it lied in a neighboring school district so those numbers are not included.

to 281 in 2009.⁵ From 2011 to 2015 the Native American population declined by a total of 79 (27%). This slow decline stopped in 2016 when BRUSD began sending buses onto the Reservation. During that year, Native American enrollment in BRUSD increased from 218 to 403 (85%). Clearly, the buses sent onto the Reservation were a determining factor in this shift, but there was one other factor. Because of information system changes, BRUSD changed the way it tracked racial data that year, and although that may not have had a great effect on the number of Native American students, it likely had an effect on the decline of White students and the increase in both “Mixed Race” and Hispanic students. As can be seen in Figure 1, the population of Mixed Race students went from zero to 93 and Hispanic students increased from 214 to 526. This change is obviously significant and it is likely that some students who may have self-reported as White during 2015 perhaps now identified as Mixed Race or Hispanic. Although it is unlikely that the White population fell that dramatically or that the Mixed Race and Hispanic populations increased as dramatically, it is probable that there was a significant shift in the Native American population. The topic of conversation as far as race/ethnicity is concerned is almost entirely surrounded by the increase in the Native American population. It is likely that both the busing policy and the change in reporting both affected the population shifts seen in Figure 2.

⁵ The scope of the research does not attempt to explain the shift in population back this far. It is mentioned here because it is illustrative that open enrollment has been a significant factor as far back as 2009.

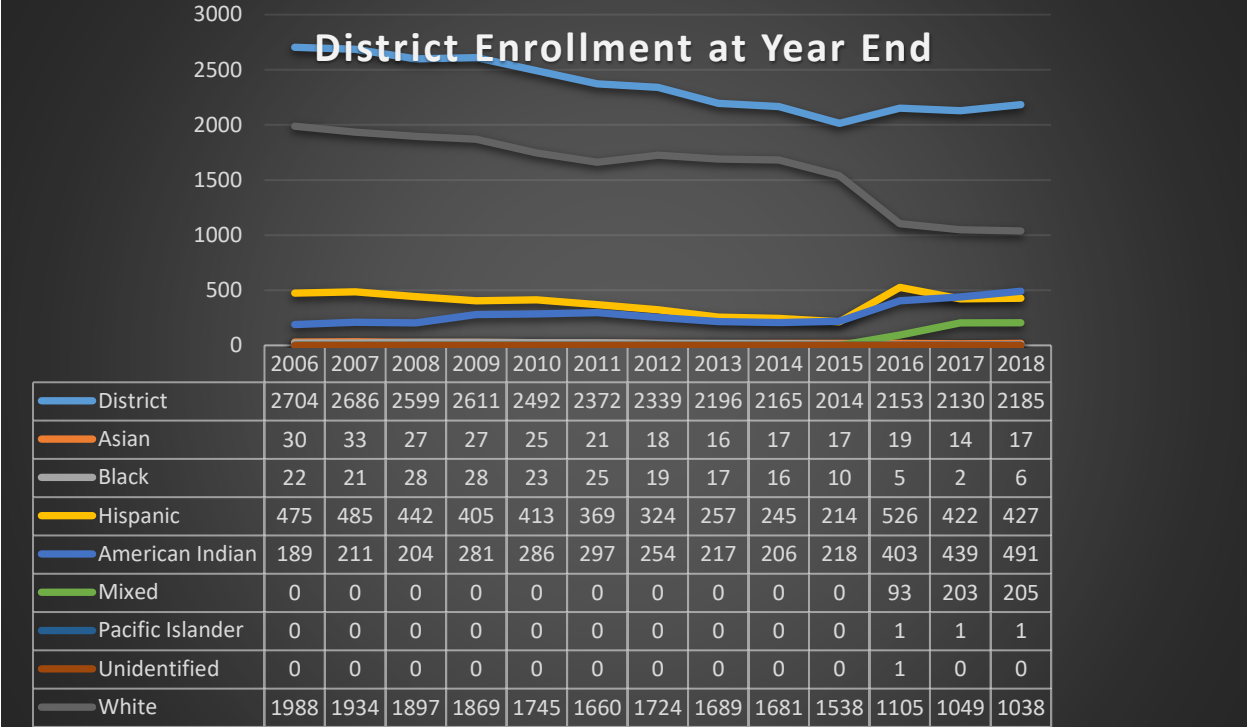


Figure 2: Total BRUSD Enrollment by Race, 2006-2018. Data from BRUSD.

It is important to note, however, that though the decrease in White students probably is not as drastic, an emerging theme of White Flight was mentioned in several of the interviews conducted. Interviewed staff reported knowledge of several in-district families who left the district, to open enroll in a neighboring district, because of the shift in population. Although interviewees were never directly asked about families leaving the district because of the shift in demographics, nine of the 18 interviewees mentioned that they had direct knowledge of families pulling out of the district because of the changing population as well as a “decline in school quality.” These interviewees expressed that in personal conversations, parents had decided that there were “too many Natives” at Blue Ridge and that the quality of education had suffered as a result. Obviously, this is a sensitive topic, and though it is possible to separate the two issues of education quality and changing demographics, it was clear from interviews that in the minds of some, they are linked.

Changing socioeconomic status.

Findings from the American Communities Survey seem to support the opinions of the staff members interviewed, although not in every measure (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The BRUSD staff was confident that the socioeconomic status of their students had gone down—this should be reflected in numbers found from the American Communities Survey (ACS). The findings here include data from the ACS regarding median and mean income levels as well as percentages of families with children under 18 who are living in poverty. These data indicate a somewhat inconsistent account of what is happening within the local population. Research examined the aforementioned indicators for the two main Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTA) that are within BRUSD boundary lines. Since 2011, both the mean and median incomes for the poorer ZCTA, 85929, have fallen (Figure 3). Further, the income gap between mean and median incomes has increased by \$1,114. However, in the more affluent ZCTA, 85935, there has been a slight *increase* in mean and median incomes – the gap between has, however, grown by \$2,059 (Figure 4). There is one other ZCTA that is included within BRUSD boundary lines – and it is the poorest of the areas in BRUSD. However, this ZCTA is rather large and much of it lies outside BRUSD so these data are not presented.

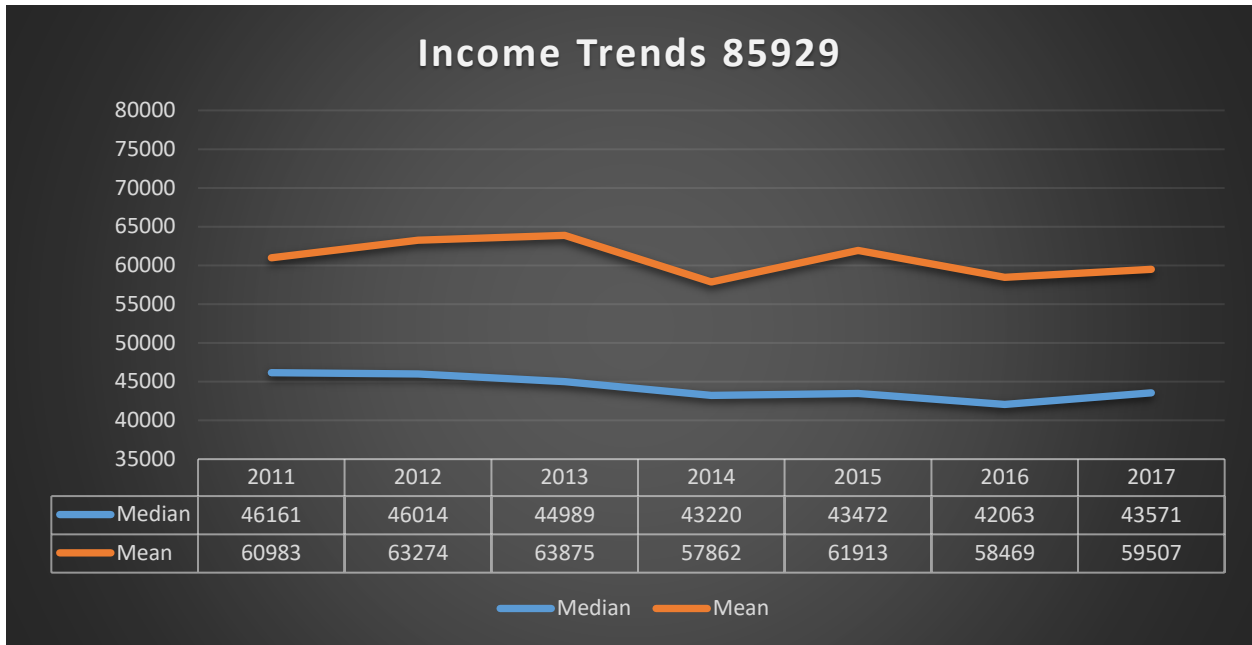


Figure 3: Median and Mean Incomes in ZCTA 85929 from 2011 to 2017. Data from (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

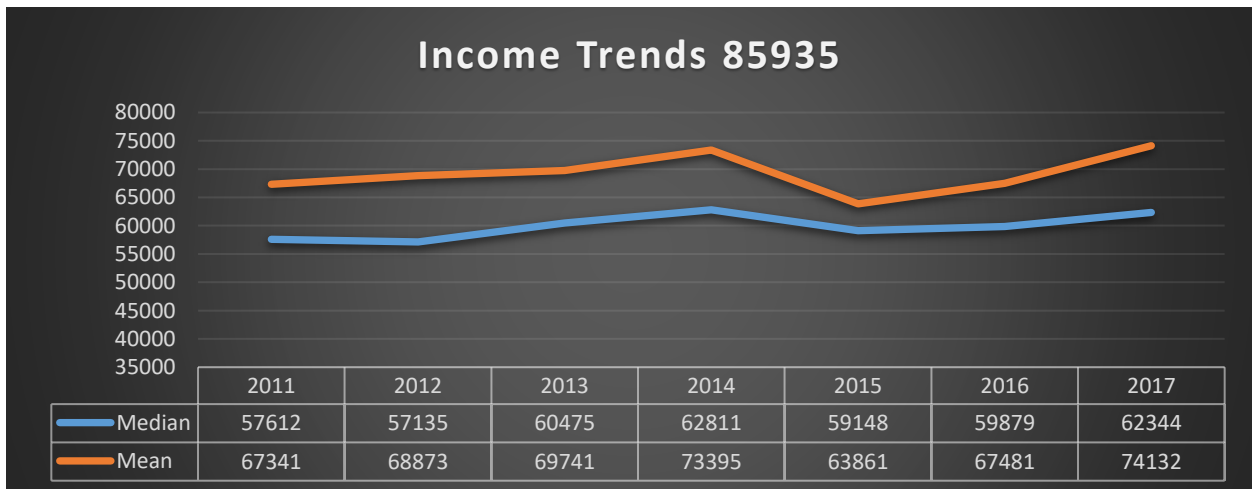


Figure 4: Median and Mean Incomes in ZCTA 85935 from 2011 to 2017. Data from (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Examining the percent of families with children under the age of 18 is more problematic. For ZCTA 85929, from 2011 to 2017 the poverty level has increased 4.8 percent (Figure 5, ACS Estimate). However, when one divides the estimated number of families with children under 18 in poverty by the total number of families with children under 18, the percent in poverty actually

decreases by 5.6 percent (Figure 5, ACS Totals Divided). The converse of this inconsistency is true for ZCTA 85935. The ACS indicates a decrease in their estimate of families with children under 18 during the time period by 5.5 percent (Figure 6, ACS Estimate). But when the total numbers are divided, the poverty level *increases* by 7.9 percent (Figure 6, ACS Totals Divided). All of these differences are well within the margin error. Taking the confident testimony of the staff who work with the families in this area, this researcher believes that the conclusion that families in BRUSD are worse-off socioeconomically is sound.

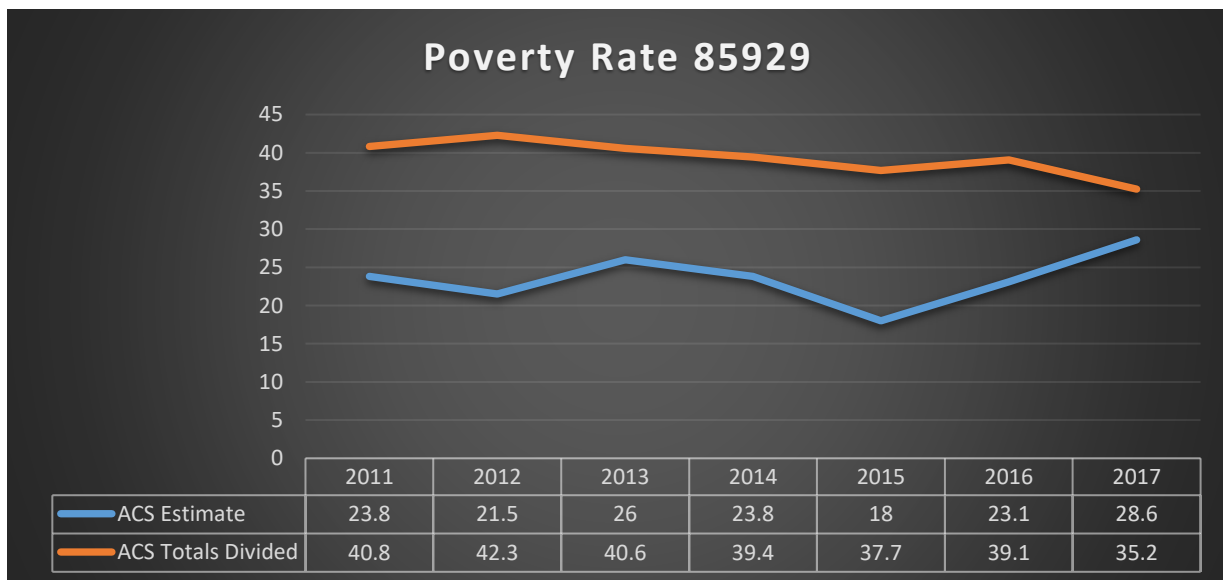


Figure 5: Percent of families in ZCTA 85929 with school age children in poverty. Data from (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

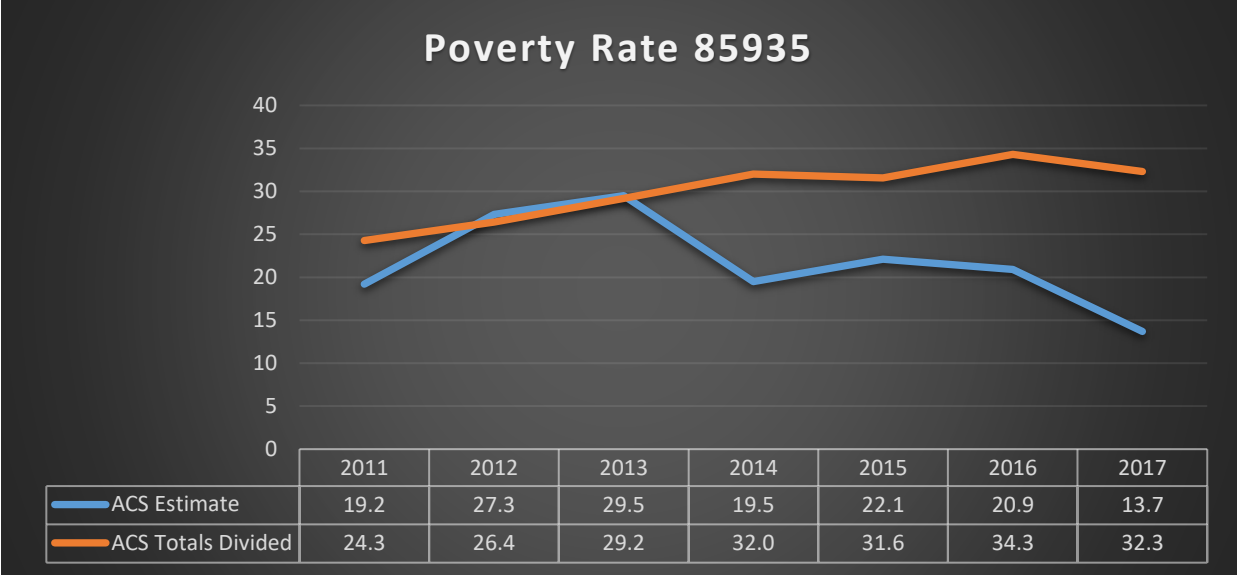


Figure 6: Percent of families in ZCTA 85935 with school age children in poverty. Data from (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Educational performance indicators.

Turning now to *ex post facto* data, the research attempts to shed light on the actual educational performance of Blue Ridge students as measured through various standardized test results and the evaluations of two different outside entities. It is extremely difficult to measure the quality of an educational institution. As a specific example, Arizona uses a letter system (A-F) to grade the quality of all of its publicly funded schools. For the 2018 school year, the State of Arizona gave Blue Ridge High School a letter grade of a “C,” and the numeric score was perilously close to a “D” (Arizona Department of Education, 2019). Several of the high schools in the surrounding communities received A and B grades (Arizona Department of Education, 2019). However, *US News and World Report* recently came out with its 2018 rankings of all high schools in the country, and Blue Ridge High School was ranked 65th in the state, the third highest ranking given to a rural high school and a ranking higher than all the other area high schools (US News & World Report, 2019). No other area high schools received a ranking.

While Blue Ridge received high marks for college and career readiness on both evaluations, one of the primary differences lies in the fact that US News and World Report considers how underserved students (Black, Hispanic, Native American, Poor) are performing. The State of Arizona does not, so for a school district like Blue Ridge, which has a growing population of underserved students, this has a dramatic impact on how it is viewed. By one measure, it is performing admirably, by another, it is well below average.

Two metrics this study used to attempt to evaluate any changes within BRUSD were four-year graduation and dropout rates. Four-year graduation rates present a challenge because they would be measuring students who transfer into Blue Ridge and do not graduate with their cohort – which is assigned when they begin ninth grade. For example, a 12th grader who transferred to Blue Ridge with insufficient credits would count against the graduation rate; however, a student transferring into Blue Ridge as a 12th grader who graduated would count *toward* overall graduation numbers as well. In this study, graduation rates, especially for Native Americans, may be more indicative of what kind of student is transferring in rather than how Blue Ridge is actually performing as a school. Regardless, the findings show that Native American graduation rates vary wildly, but have an upward trend. This is at the same time when overall graduation rates and that of White students has stayed relatively steady. State graduation rates have trended slightly upward during this time (Arizona Department of Education, 2019). Figure 7 illustrates all of the graduation rate findings.

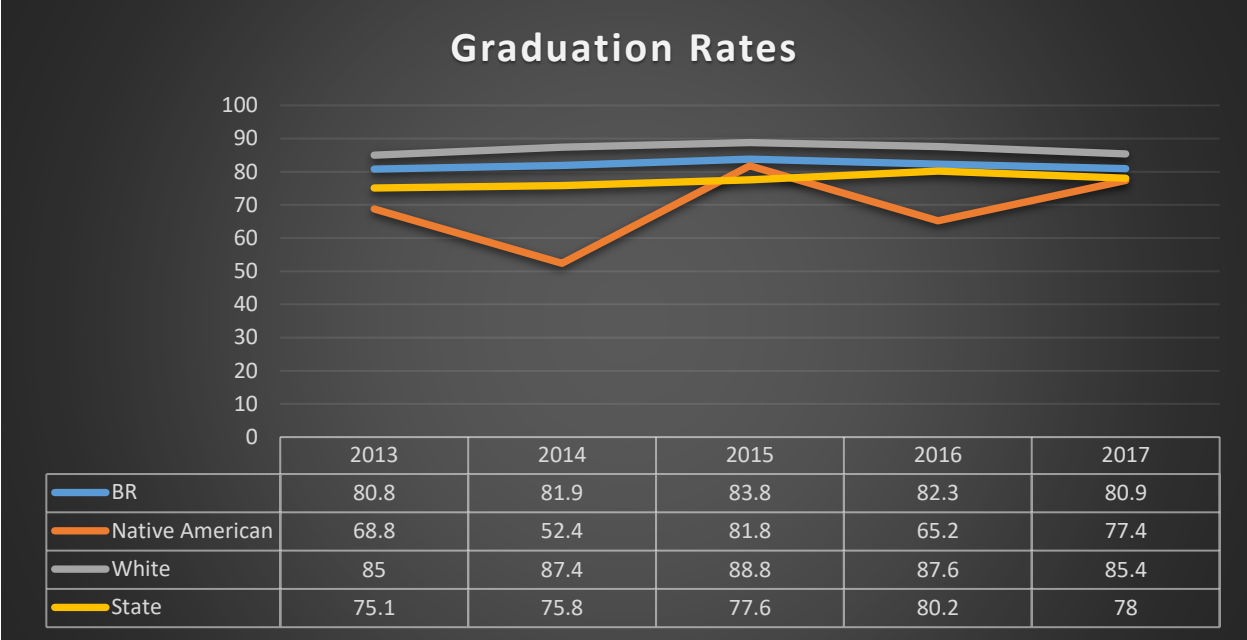


Figure 7: Graduation rates of student groups at Blue Ridge and the overall rate in Arizona. Data from (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

Dropout rates measure the number/percentage of students who leave school and do not transfer to another school (Figure 8). This metric potentially provides more immediate feedback regarding any changes happening within Blue Ridge High School. During the time period, all groups measured experienced increases in dropout rates, which is notable. However, when compared with the State dropout rate, which increased as well, the changes have a different context. For example, the State dropout rate increased by 53 percent from 2014-2018, and the overall dropout rate at Blue Ridge increased by 47 percent. These numbers should cause concern, especially considering all dropout rates for Blue Ridge students are higher than the State average (Arizona Department of Education, 2019). However, as with graduation rates, these numbers likely provide a more valuable long-term metric than can be ascertained the number of years measured here.

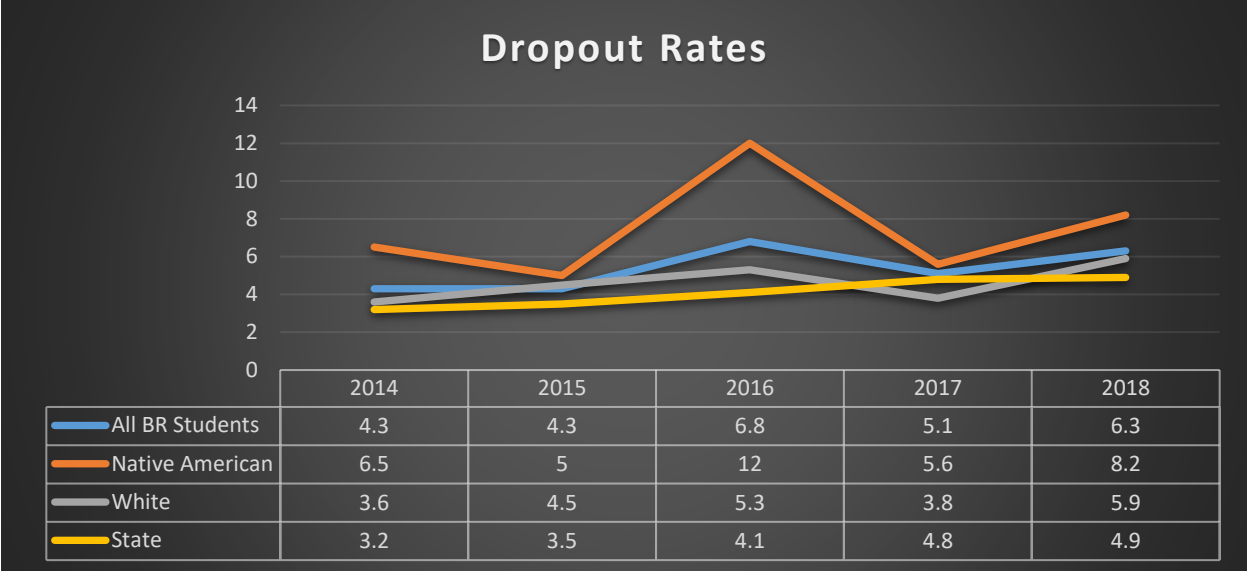


Figure 8: Dropout rates of student groups at Blue Ridge and the overall rate in Arizona. Data from (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

Looking at the AZ Merit test scores (Arizona’s current standardized test title) it is clear that Blue Ridge students have underperformed compared to years past (Figure 9). Historically, up until 2016, Blue Ridge students passed at a markedly higher rate than students in Navajo County and the rest of the State.⁶ Currently, Blue Ridge math students pass at a lower rate than both the State and Navajo County and are below the State but above Navajo County in English Language Arts (ELA) (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

⁶ In 2015 Arizona changed its standardized testing instrument from the AIMS test to the AZ Merit test. As a result, all test scores dropped significantly.

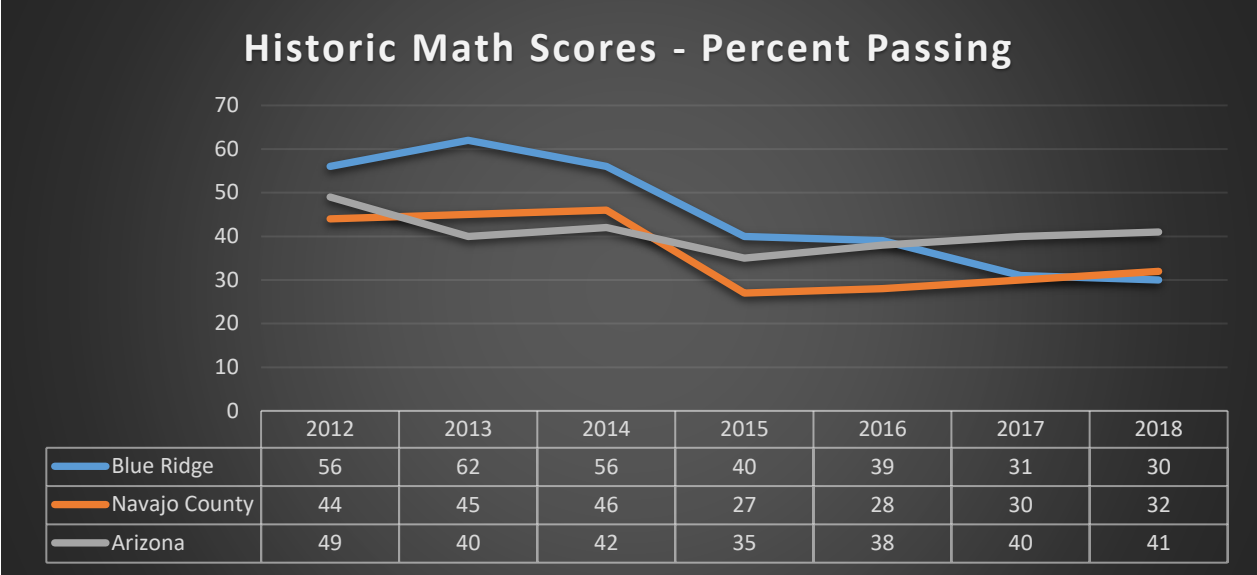


Figure 9: Historic performances on Arizona’s standardized math test. Data from (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

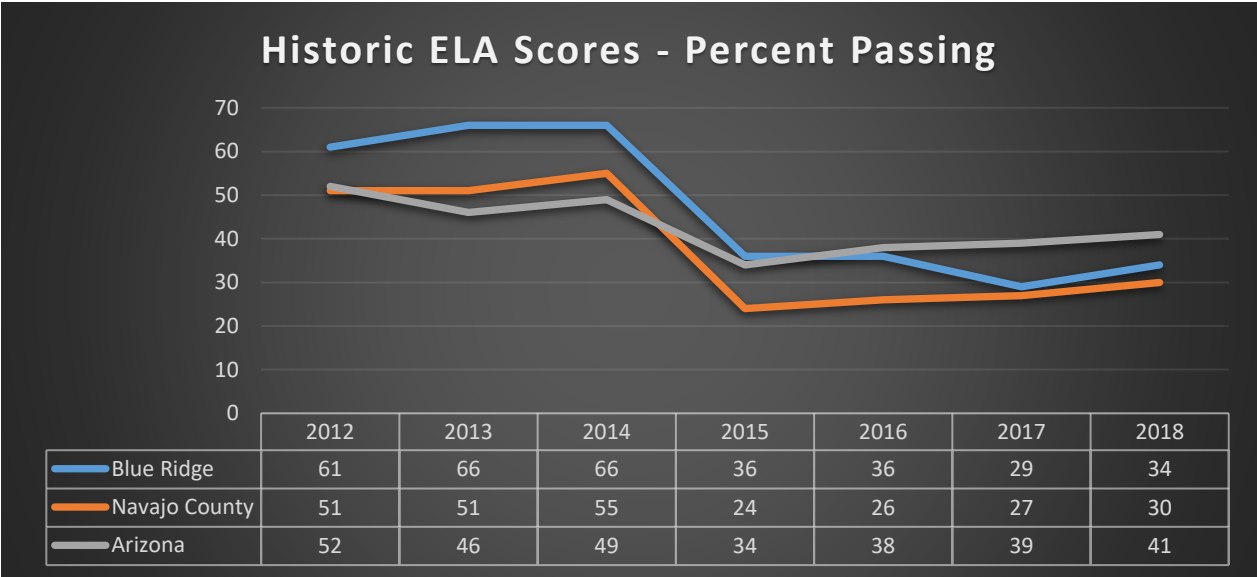


Figure 10: Historic performances Arizona’s standardized ELA tests. Data from (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

This trend is alarming and has certainly caught the attention of school personnel, students, and community members. Although it does not publish historic data, the local newspaper, *The White Mountain Independent* will often print district test scores. Parents and

students have become increasingly aware that Blue Ridge students do not have the scores they used to. Looking deeper into the issue of open enrollment, it is clear that an increase in Native American students has had a negative effect on the overall test scores in the district. Native American students at Blue Ridge score considerably lower than the overall average of all students in both math and ELA (Figures 11 and 12).

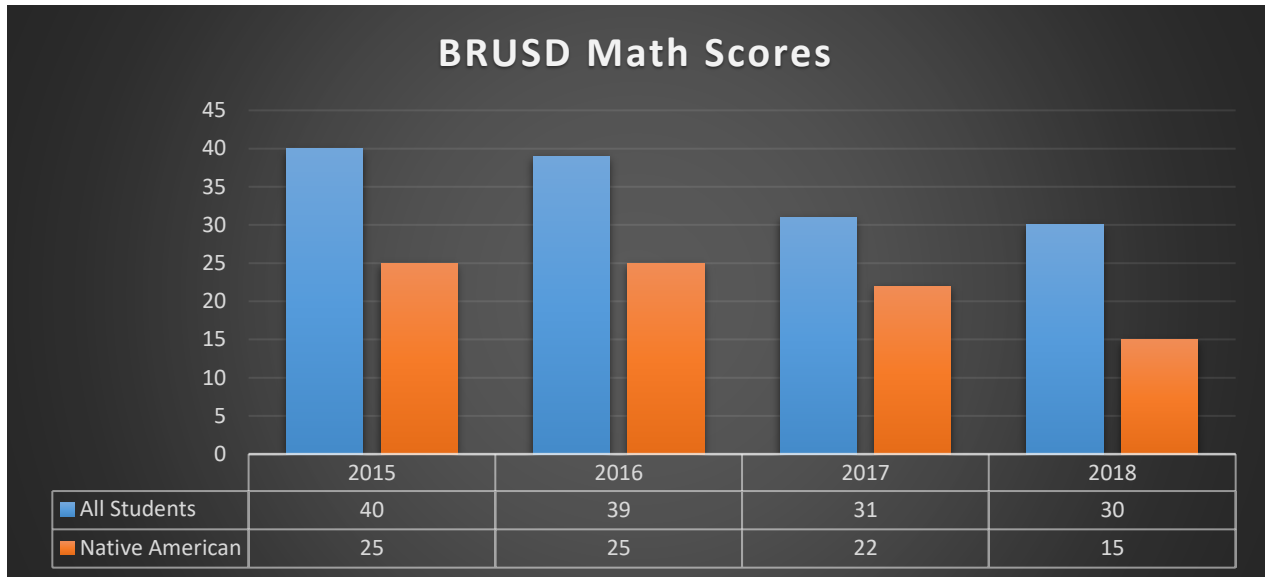


Figure 11: Percent of all and Native American students passing AZ Merit math test. Data from (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

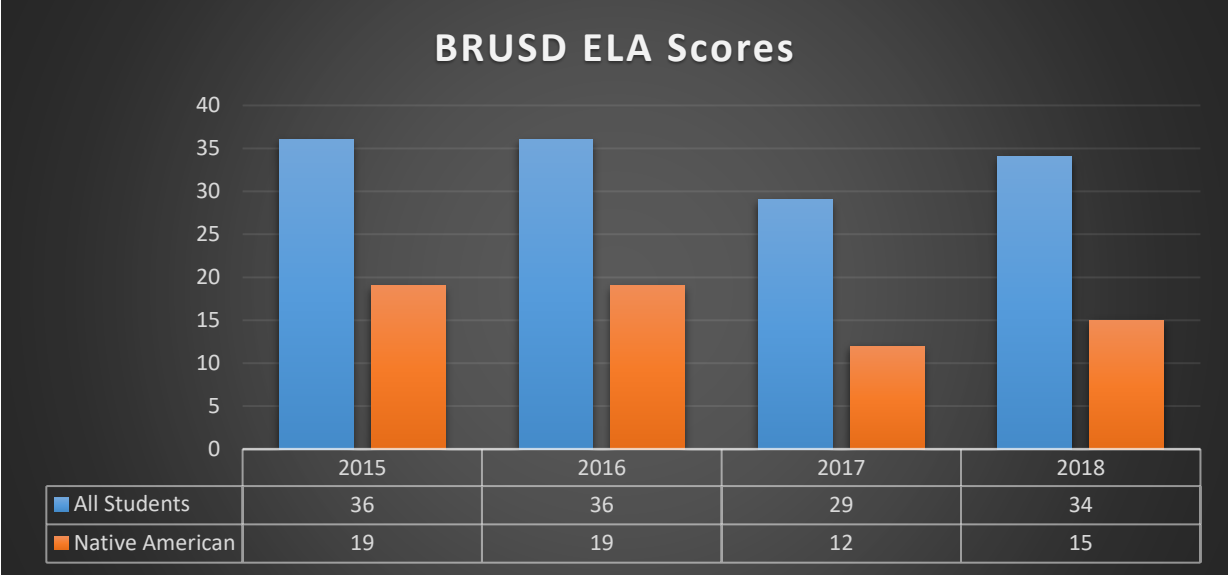


Figure 12: Percent of all and Native American students passing AZ Merit ELA test. Data from (Arizona Department of Education, 2019).

Perhaps a more significant negative development is that Native American students, most drastically in math, are trending downward. If Native American students are leaving a lower quality school district for one that is supposedly higher, why are their test scores falling rather than improving? Potentially, the Blue Ridge District is ill equipped to meet the needs of Native American students. At the same time, the BRUSD’s White population has incurred no significant changes over the same time period. And the Hispanic population has seen an increase in ELA scores and a decline in math scores. So, it does not appear that Native American scores are affecting those of students in other demographic categories.

Clearly, the Native American students at Blue Ridge pass the state exams at significantly lower rates than the rest of the student population, and that affects BRUSD averages. This is to be expected because the in-migrating students are coming from a district with average scores well below that of BRUSD (Arizona Department of Education, 2019). Other standardized test scores also indicate that certain segments of the High School student body, irrespective of

race/ethnicity, are unaffected as well. The most consistent data that research yielded over the same time period suggests that a segment of Blue Ridge’s population, the top 35 percent, has actually performed slightly better on the ACT and Advanced Placement (AP) exams.

On the ACT exam, data was collected for the graduating classes of 2012 through 2017. (Data from the class of 2018 had not yet been obtained by High School staff.) During that time period, an average of 39 percent of the graduating class took the ACT test with a high of 48 percent in 2013 and a low of 32 percent in 2016. During the time period, average composite scores of Blue Ridge students have a slight upward trend, with scores being well above State and National averages. Further, the percentage of Blue Ridge students who meet the college and career readiness benchmarks as established by ACT also has an upward trend that remains solidly higher than the State averages as well (ACT Incorporated, 2018). While average scores on the AZ Merit tests have a downward trend, students taking test that culminates their entire BRUSD education are performing at a high level.

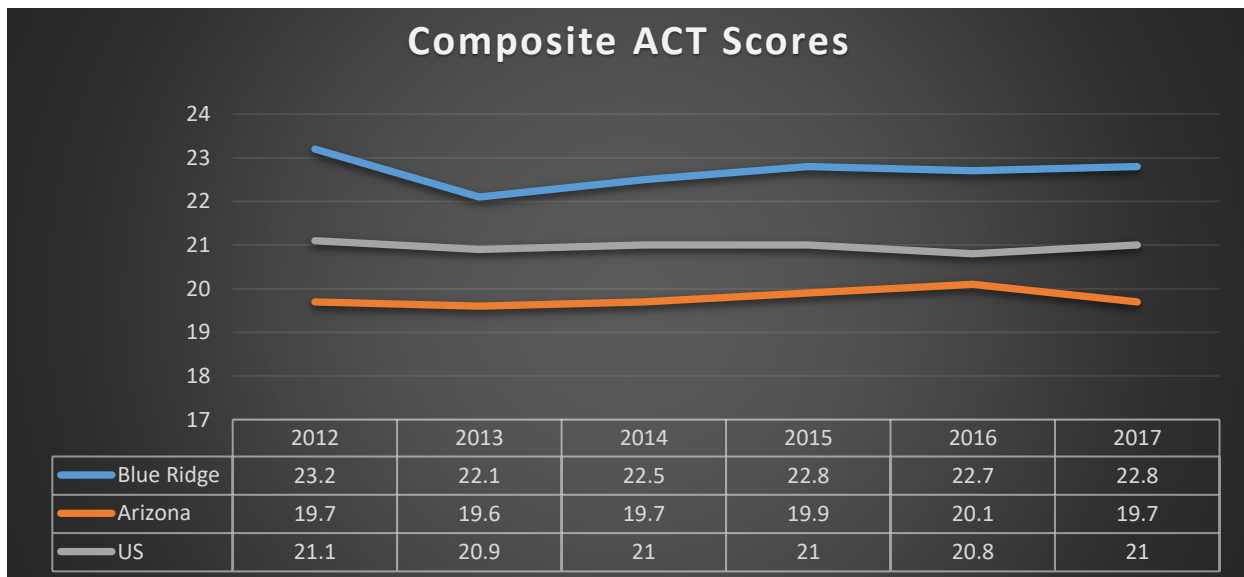


Figure 13: ACT test score average of Blue Ridge, Arizona, and US students. Data from (ACT Incorporated, 2018).

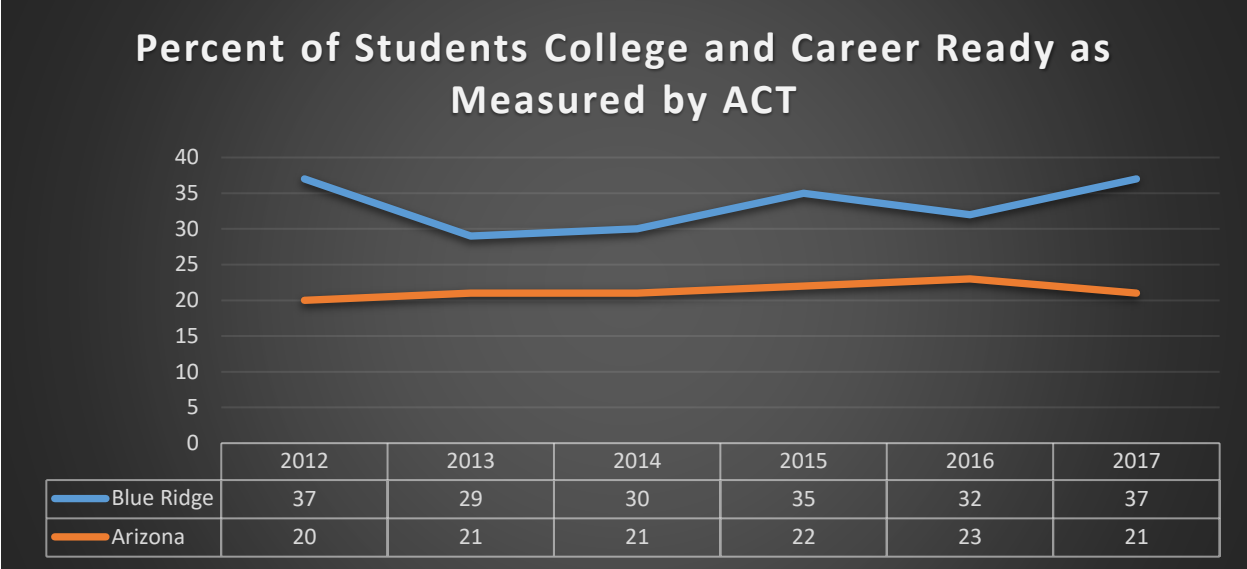


Figure 14: Percent of students scoring above composite college/career ready benchmarks. Data from (ACT Incorporated, 2018).

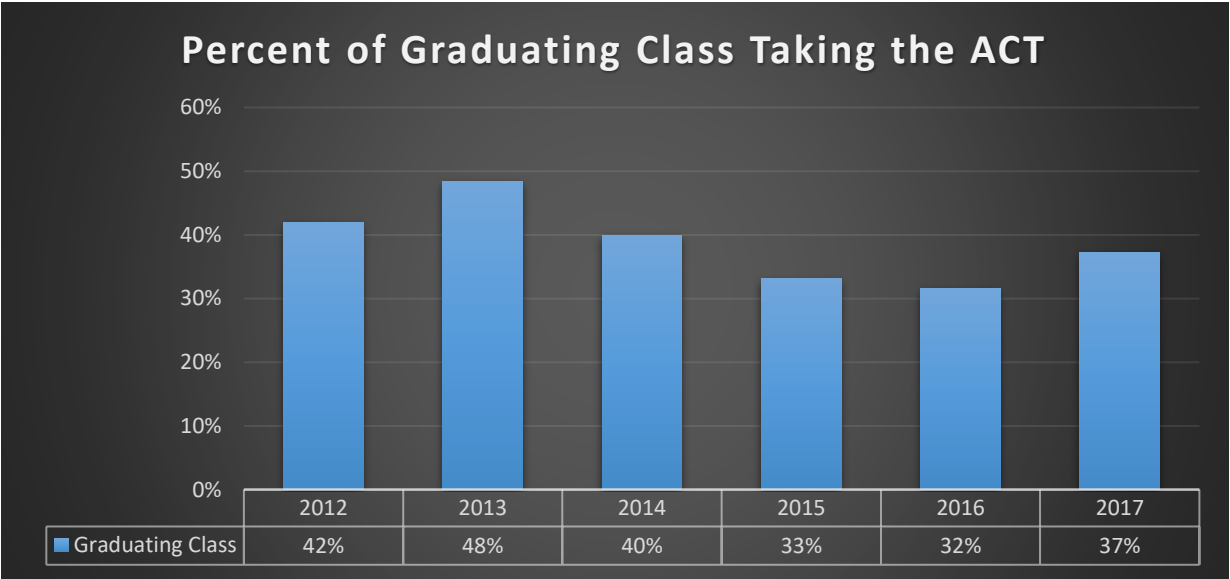


Figure 15: Percent of Blue Ridge students taking the ACT test from respective cohorts. Data from (ACT Incorporated, 2018).

Beyond ACT, Blue Ridge students perform higher than National and Global averages when it comes to Advanced Placement tests as well. Students taking AP tests, which measures slightly less than 10 percent of the population of 11th and 12th graders combined, are performing

quite well also, with test averages higher than State and Global averages. AP test performance also plays a significant role in how US News and World Report ranks high schools throughout the Nation. These data actually show a slight overall upward trend when it comes to AP test scores (Advanced Placement, 2018-2016).

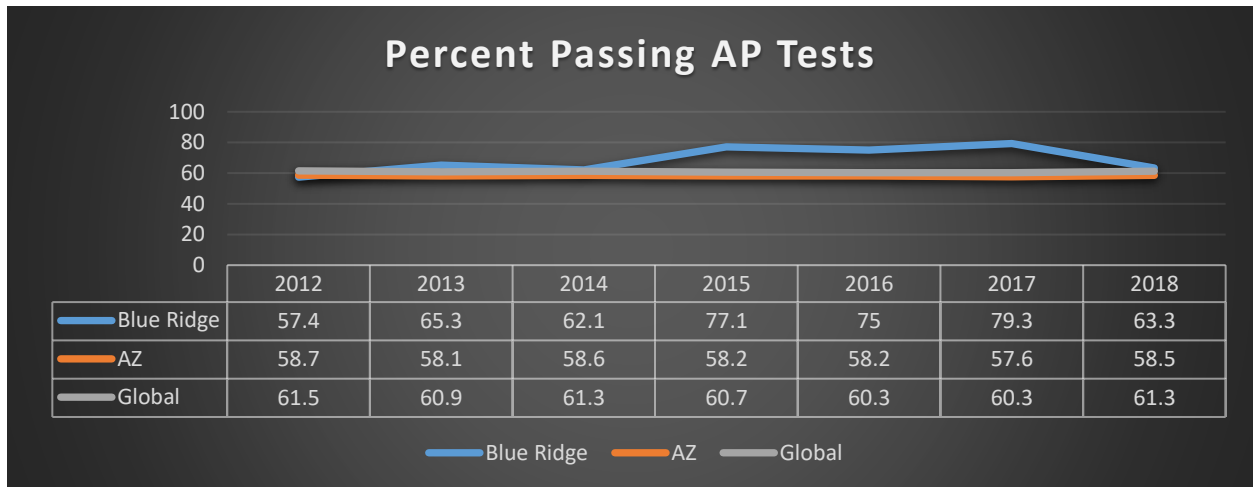


Figure 16: Percent of students scoring three or higher on Advanced Placement tests. Data from (Advanced Placement, 2018-2016).

In conclusion, many of the findings fit within the Human Capital category. Answers to sub-question one indicate that staff is aware of some of the educational challenges documented through the declining test scores. Staff did not, however, explicitly mention they are aware of the successes of the students on the ACT and AP tests. Staff members were emphatic in their belief that the socioeconomic conditions of community members has suffered, and while the qualitative data does not prove that fact, it does not disprove it either.

Cultural Capital.

Impact Aid is a Federal funding source available to school districts that have at least seven percent of their population living on Federally Impacted land. For example, schools with students who live on American Indian Reservations or Forest Service property (both exist within or adjacent to BRUSD) are eligible to apply for Impact Aid. The reason for this funding is

because school districts do not receive tax revenue from the land where these students reside. In Blue Ridge’s applications for Impact Aid, the percentage of students living on Federally Impacted land has gone from 10.4 percent in 2014 to 19.5 percent in 2018. Based on these data, it is safe to assume that open enrollment students have made up a greater percentage of the student body since at least 2014. In support of this, 16 of 18 interviewees discussed how students and teachers alike have a “changing understanding of who is in the school and greater community.” This affirmative answer was followed up by discussion about the changing nature of the racial makeup of the student population as well. And interestingly, one of the two respondents who answered “no” to the “changing understanding of who is in the school” question began to explain how different the student population was at Blue Ridge (P11). Without a doubt, one of the impacts of open enrollment at Blue Ridge is the changing racial makeup of the student body, and teachers are fully aware of the change.

Open enrollment.

The admission of open-enrolled students also brings with it a financial incentive. Three teachers were highly critical of the Superintendent’s decision to send buses into WUSD because they saw it as merely a way to tap into a new revenue stream. Going back to Impact Aid, the school has received significant financial benefit—an amount that has increased every year since 2014—because of its open-enrolled student population. In successive years beginning in 2014, the school received: \$254,000 (2014), \$428,000 (2015), \$695,000 (2016), \$856,000 (2017), and \$1,032,000 (2018). In a funding starved district, this is significant and amounts to as much as 7.7 percent of the Maintenance & Operations budget. The teachers most critical of the open enrollment policy supposed that the district was more interested in the money these students could bring in – clearly not an insignificant amount – than in educating them. One teacher said

the district has “chased the almighty dollar,” expressing that the need/want for more money has resulted in the fracturing of the cultural and social fabric of the school (P3). When discussing this with the Superintendent, it was recognized that there is significant financial gain from the open enrolled population, but was adamant that the impetus for sending buses was, once again, in response to community request from the Reservation.

Built Capital.

Again, the importance of the position of Superintendent cannot be ignored regarding BRUSD’s infrastructure. One of the primary roles of the Superintendent is school maintenance and renovation. In the past four years, the Blue Ridge District passed a 15 million dollar bond for school renovation. In addition, the school petitioned the State Facilities Board for another three and a half million dollars. All of these funds have been allocated for certain renovation projects. Within all of the maintenance, renovation, and remodeling that has happened with this money, many teachers questioned the wisdom of the areas in which the money was spent. However, this money had to be designated toward facilities, infrastructure, or technology. This is something that some teachers who commented on the spending priorities did not seem to be aware of. Several comments were made saying that money should be spent to lower class sizes – something that is not possible with facilities funding.

Findings Conclusions.

The final, over-arching theme that captures the essence of all the data collected is that of change. The Blue Ridge School District has gone through drastic changes in six of the seven Community Capitals. (The one capital where change was not significant is natural capital.) Many of those changes are due to the ripple effect caused by decisions made by the Superintendent. The student body has experienced racial/ethnic and socioeconomic

diversification that has been observed by teaching staff and corroborated through demographic data. This has had a significant impact on the perceptions of the school by teachers and community members, some of whom have left BRUSD for another school system. Although policy decisions by the Superintendent created some of the racial diversification, the same cannot be said for the socioeconomic difficulties that students are dealing with.

In spite of the difficulties of diversification mentioned in the interviews, it is apparent that students and teachers are both making progress, albeit slowly, as they understand the culture/sub-culture of one another and learn how to work together. Most of the teachers expressed a positive outlook for the future integration of such a diverse population while a small minority expressed that growth potentially realized socially, culturally, humanistically, and financially is not worth the culture and progress BRUSD must sacrifice.

Finances are another area where there has been monumental changes in the BRUSD. While large amounts of specific quantitative data were not obtained, Arizona has a documented history of reducing its education budget since 2008. Teachers were acutely aware of this and expressed discontent with the financial state of BRUSD. Open enrolled students also happen to carry with them access to a significant amount of flexible revenue that has certainly made it possible to keep teachers employed and students learning. In the positive, a local bond election and a petition to the State for extra money devoted expressly to infrastructure have made beneficial impacts within the district. Building maintenance has been noted, technology updated, and aesthetic improvements have all been made. However, this added layer of change has taken a toll on staff through building moves and learning new technology.

Overall, from the interviews staff members seemed to recognize that the myriad of changes in every area have challenges, but none that are insurmountable. There was a spirit of

hope that things are getting better. Teachers had endured the shock of so much change, made adjustments, and are seeing a way forward.

Quantitatively, test scores show that Blue Ridge students likely have not suffered as much as the public may perceive. Adding a significant number of students who likely carry lower than average AZ Merit test scores are likely to have dropped the overall school averages. However, at the high school level, which is the culmination of education for schools in the district, scores for the top 40 percent of the student body have maintained and perhaps slightly improved as measured by the ACT and AP test scores. In agreement with the teachers, the test scores show that students still have the opportunity at an education that is competitive on the State, National, and even Global levels. It is alarming that some of the lower performing students do not seem to be improving.

If the District Superintendent decides that the bulk of the major changes in policy and building reconfiguration are over, teachers are likely to have a greater effect on the more economically and racially diverse population that is likely going to persist at Blue Ridge. They have observed opportunities for growth and with proper leadership, are likely to fill some of the existing voids and those created by all the change. The staff and school has maintained a high level of quality education for many students; but as US News and World Report and Arizona's Department of Education Report Card show—some will appreciate the diversity and level of achievement Blue Ridge students attain, and some will not.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Introduction

The goal of this study has been to determine the effects of Arizona's school choice policy in the Blue Ridge Unified School District (BRUSD). The initial stages of research revealed that mandatory open enrollment created the opportunity for students from the Whiteriver Unified School District (WUSD) – encompassed entirely within the Fort Apache Indian Reservation – to transfer to the BRUSD without having to change residence. District demographic records going as far back as 2006 indicate that until 2015, migration from students in WUSD to BRUSD had been gradual. However, in 2016, at the direction of the BRUSD Superintendent, Blue Ridge began sending buses onto the Reservation allowing greater access for students interested in transferring to Blue Ridge. As a result, the overall population of Native American students increased significantly, and combined with a decrease in the White student population, accounted for an even greater percentage of the overall student body.

Community perceptions indicated that the educational quality within BRUSD suffered because of the demographic change, and some of the standardized test data supported that conclusion. However, some standardized test data refuted that, as groups of students continued to perform significantly above state and national norms – some scores, primarily of higher achieving students, actually reveal an upward trend.

Interviews with BRUSD staff indicated that the change in racial makeup of the student body has been noticeable. They reported some struggles in cultural, human, and social categories as established by the Community Capitals Framework. However, the overall opinion of the teachers and administrators was that positive progress has been made in those areas. A social and cultural change that was often mentioned outside the paradigm of race was a changing

attitude toward the use of technology from both the district and the students – teachers believed this was affecting learning negatively.

Overall change to the Built and Financial capitals of the BRUSD was also a notable finding because teachers at the lower grade levels indicated this created a level of job-related challenges/frustrations. Financially, open enrollment students proved to be a clear benefit; however, the overall landscape of public education funding in Arizona is one of the lowest in the United States (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017). The struggling local economy has likely had a significant impact on the socioeconomic status of the students in the district which interviewees confidently pointed out had dropped despite varying evidence from the American Communities Survey.

A key, and unexpected finding, is that much of the impetus for so much change has come from the office of the District Superintendent. As the primary decision maker behind so many changes, interviewees repeatedly pointed out that “District Leadership” played an important role in every aspect of the district.

Voluntary School Migration in Native America

Obviously, the most direct result of school choice policy is the in/out-migrations of students within districts. Research on students in tribal communities migrating to non-tribal communities for the sake of education is rare. As referenced in the literature review, Carol Ward did an in-depth study of a situation in Southeastern Montana where students from the Northern Cheyenne Reservation attended school off their reservation at nearby Colstrip High School. As documented, Ward concluded that many students migrated to one school over another because of proximity (Ward, American Indian high school completion in rural Southeastern Montana, 1995). However, in the White Mountains, many students travel much farther to the schools in

the Blue Ridge District than they would to the schools in the Whiteriver District. In Ward's book, she goes into greater detail about some of the attitudes and perceptions experienced by students and staff (Ward, Native Americans in the school system: Family, community, and academic achievement, 2005). These attitudes vary widely, and the interviews conducted for this study supported Ward's findings. Some staff within BRUSD expressed negative feelings, some seemed quite neutral, and some expressed excitement for the opportunity to interact with a diverse student population.

Ward also concludes that the incorporation of Native American students into the Colstrip system had a negative effect on the academic performance of the school through her measures primarily consisting of dropout rates and grade point average (GPA) (Ward, Native Americans in the school system: Family, community, and academic achievement, 2005). Although the BRUSD study did not track student GPAs, the evidence shown for dropout and graduation rates do not support Ward's findings. Primarily, the graduation and dropout trends did not appear to be affected after busing occurred and there was an influx of Native American students in the BRUSD system.

School Desegregation in the United States

Beyond Ward, the minimal literature discussing Native American student migrations led the researcher toward the extensive research discussing school integration that occurred the latter half of the Twentieth Century. During this time period, primarily in the South, schools began the integration of African American students into White schools in the years after Brown versus Board of Education in 1954. Some criticisms of the public school system during this time period were undoubtedly due to the fact that the public school system was becoming integrated. While most people will point to the Brown v. Board of Education, prior decisions in the 1940s,

specifically in the realm of higher education, signaled that the country as a whole was trending toward public school integration. In fact, as early as 1955, critics like Milton Friedman suggested that US public school system could be improved by applying free-market principles to the overarching system (Friedman, 1955). Statistics compiled from the US Department of Education also show that private schools, which are also overwhelmingly White, began to increase in enrollment and number during this time period (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993, pp. 36-37). Charles Clotfelter, in his comprehensive work, *After Brown: The Rise and Retreat of Desegregation*, and others continue with this theme saying that private schools and school choice movement have deep roots in the desire to re-segregate school systems (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014; Orfield & Lee, 2007; Clotfelter, 2004). Thus, the school choice movement – a movement some claim is an application of free market principles to the educational system - that began legislatively in Arizona in the 1990s has its roots in the mid-1950s within the context of school desegregation.

Desegregation similarities in BRUSD.

Interestingly, Catholic and Protestant kindergarten through eighth grade parochial schools opened in the White Mountains in 2006, with their boards being formed in 1997 and 2005, respectively. While the founding of these two local schools may have been caught up in the school choice climate, it is unlikely that in these two cases, race was a motivator – both schools have had racially diverse student bodies throughout their 13 years in existence and further, they were founded 12 years after open enrollment policy was legislated. The main point is that this small community can fit into this aspect of historical desegregation of school systems.

The “integration” of BRUSD is similar to post-Brown v. Board of Education integration for other reasons as well. A primarily White community and school district has opened its doors

to a much poorer and less formally educated minority. In Arizona, school choice is a mandatory obligation for school districts deemed to have the capacity to take on extra students. In an interview with the Superintendent, he expressed that BRUSD cannot discriminate based on race or the community an open enrolled student comes from. This could come into play in the BRUSD's future. Currently, Blue Ridge is in the process of growing its Advanced Placement (AP) program while other area schools are terminating theirs. Under Arizona policy, Blue Ridge would have to accept open-enrolled students on a first-come-first-served basis, meaning that a poorly performing student from the reservation who signed up first would be accepted before a straight "A" student from a different district. While this is not a perfect parallel to school integration and forced busing in school districts in the South, there have certainly been situations - notably in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Louisville, Kentucky, for example - that have bused Black students into a school while busing White students out (Billings, Deming, & Rockoff, 2014; Perley, 1975).

At a fundamental level, *Brown v. Board of Education* was about providing minority students the same access to better-funded schools and higher quality institutions than were being experienced in underserved, primarily Black, communities. Supporters of school choice argue that the policy is about giving individual families a similar opportunity to pursue a better education than may be offered in their home district. This most definitely applies in the case of WUSD students migrating to BRUSD. WUSD schools have a history of receiving "F" and "D" letter grades from the Arizona's report card system. Currently, the three main schools at every level in WUSD are on Arizona's list of Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) list. This list is made up of the lowest-performing five percent of schools receiving Title 1 funds (Arizona Department of Education, 2018).

Also of note, Carlson, Laver, and Witte found that in open-enrollment areas, students are migrating from worse schools to better ones, regardless of race (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011)). So, much like schools post *Brown v. Board of Education*, minorities are migrating to majority White school districts even though the receiving districts may not be overly excited about the influx of minority students. This is happening in BRUSD.

Busing.

While it may be over-simplistic, the discussion of the similarities between the integration of BRUSD and school desegregation includes busing. Busing across school districts and the accompanying debate continues today (Armor, 2016). Busing has become synonymous with school desegregation. When Blue Ridge began busing students from the Reservation “up the hill,” it caught the attention of many. Within the community, there is a broad spectrum from which this policy can be viewed. As pointed out by some teachers, it is potentially a money grab, and in fact, as the findings show, Blue Ridge has benefitted financially from the influx of Reservation students. Some could also link the busing as just another chapter in the long and controversial story behind Indian Education at the hands of outside/non-reservation forces. Assuming the conversation with the Superintendent is accurate, however, the busing occurred at the request of Apache Reservation community members and provided a free ride for students whose families could not otherwise afford it. This is contrary to the findings made by Carlson, Lavery, and Witte in 2011, who claimed that school performance, rather than socioeconomic status was the more motivating factor for school migration (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011). There was clearly a desire for some Reservation students to go to BRUSD but could only attend once buses began making the roughly 70 mile round trip between communities.

Establishing the similarities behind the racial integration of BRUSD is important because there is a significant amount of literature that deals with the integration of White schools with Black students. And interestingly, much of what is happening to students and community members in BRUSD parallels the established research in the area of school desegregation.

Historic Context of White Flight in Education

Much research has been done on short-term racial demographic changes in public schools during the time period of school desegregation. While it is true that there are alternative explanations as to why white enrollment declined in schools that desegregated, many researchers have concluded that public schools did, in fact, experience White Flight as a result of school integration (Clotfelter, 2004; Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014; Orfield & Lee, 2007; Office, US Government Accountability, 2016). During this time period, the percentage of students enrolled in private schools, which have historically been overwhelmingly White, saw significant increases (Clotfelter, 2004; Logan, Zhang, & Oakley, 2017; Office, US Government Accountability, 2016). Researchers Logan, Zhang, and Oakley strongly state that the “preponderance of evidence suggests that desegregation caused white flight,” and that in areas where desegregation was the most intense, white flight increased (2017, p. 1054). Once again, some have tied this migration to the increasing popularity of private schools and charter schools, both of which are overwhelmingly White and at the forefront of the National debate on school choice (Renzulli & Evans, 2005).

Though desegregation of public schools officially began in 1954, in practice it did not happen until much later, when in the 1960s more, often lower, court decisions restricted funding to schools that continued to practice segregation (Clotfelter, 2004). Thus, actual integration en masse did not happen until then. After the major desegregation efforts had commenced in the

1960s and early 1970s, another Supreme Court decision changed the course of the United States' public school integration project. In 1974, in *Milliken versus Bradley*, the Supreme Court ruled that states could not enforce desegregation across district lines. Again, as Clotfelter documents in his work, whole districts began to segregate (2004). In essence, as schools *within* a district were forced to desegregate, families and their students began to move to other districts that were more racially homogenous.

The findings in this study lead to the conclusion that White Flight exists to some degree. As explained, when the Native American population had its most dramatic increase in 2016, the White population had a similar drastic decrease. The decrease may not have been as extreme as the numbers show, but it is likely significant. Based on the interviews and the fact that the White student population clearly did drop, there must be an element of White Flight happening. No fewer than 33% of staff reported conversations with people whom they *know* transferred to the neighboring school district, which has a much lower minority population, because of the increase in Native American students at Blue Ridge. Within BRUSD, the term "open enrollment" has become coded language for the Native American students. Typically what is heard in conversations in the community has a theme of, "open enrollment has really hurt Blue Ridge." Or, "Open enrollment has really driven the test scores at Blue Ridge down." So, parents may be pulling their children out of the Blue Ridge system because they sincerely believe that the AZ Merit scores, as shown in the Findings of this study, are reflective of the quality of education, or it could be more coded language for the fact that some people do not like the changing face of BRUSD. Supporting this claim is yet another term that is frequently heard in the community - Blue Ridge has become "Blueriver" or "Alchesay Two." (Blueriver is a play on words meaning that Blue Ridge is now more closely related to Whiteriver, and Alchesay is the name of the high

school in the Whiteriver District. This language is obviously not so coded and is more frequently heard from people who have either left BRUSD or do not reside in BRUSD, therefore there is less need for coded language.) Given the historic mentality between the reservation and non-reservation communities in the White Mountains, these two terms are clearly not a compliment.

A more contemporary example of White Flight in the school choice movement was documented by Esther Prins (2007). Her qualitative study determined that in a rural school district in California, there was a significant out-migration of White students from a school that was becoming increasingly Hispanic. These students chose to transfer to a school that was majority White.

Racial Competition

In the greater discussion of changing demographics, and the sometimes caustic reactions to them, racial competition theory deserves mention. One aspect of racial competition theorizes that when an in-migrating group increases in size, then the majority group often reacts in a much stronger way than it had before (Olzak, 2013). Although aspects of this theory include protest and sometimes violent reactions, it also encompasses social movements to prevent the minority population from creating too much change too quickly. In the context of White flight within schools, Clotfelter, as well as Renzulli and Evans, document that in certain situations, greater exposure to non-White populations increased White flight (2004; 2005). Again, though none of the interviews included notable, or in any way violent, negative interactions between groups, it is possible that individuals feel some of the same sentiments and are subsequently driven to react to the changing demographics. Several interviewees did remark how noticeable the “diversity” is at Blue Ridge when walking around the district campuses.

Local History

One of the works consulted for this study, *Why Rural Schools Matter* (Tiekan, 2014), looked at the current situation of two rural school districts in Arkansas that have dealt with racial issues and school integration in very different ways. In it, Mara Casey Tieken, concludes that the way in which a community deals with school integration is linked to its history of race relations. If there is a history of animosity, school integration went very poorly. On the other hand, although it may be a stretch to claim that racial relations in any Southern town were positive, if there was a lack of animosity, school integration had an overall positive feel. And though Tieken states that there were deeper racial issues that had not been dealt with, it remained that the integration experience in one town was markedly better than the other.

In Pinetop-Lakeside and within BRUSD, there have been no major racial confrontations that either the Tribal or non-Tribal community have rallied around. Within the BRUSD, there was one incident cited in which a single fan racially insulted a coach of the Alchesay (WUSD's high school) basketball team. That fan was removed from the premises and public apologies were given from the Blue Ridge community, including the District Superintendent. Further, at many sports events, culturally relevant entertainment has been arranged when the Whiteriver teams have visited. This is not necessarily so in the neighboring districts who have had several, well-publicized racially antagonistic incidents at sports events.

This is relevant because it makes clear that there are large, and potentially growing, factions within BRUSD that are open and welcoming to the Native American population. This could be a contributing factor to frequency of in-migration from reservation students. It also shows that if one wants to leave BRUSD for a district that has less tolerance for racial diversity, that choice is available. A more racially homogenous population may be exactly what some

parents are looking for their school-age child. This is exactly what Renzulli and Evans suggested as well (2005). In a separate interview conducted by the researcher for an unpublished project, a BRUSD, in-district parent went so far as to address this exact idea. While this parent noted that “diversity is hard” and has presented some challenges for his/her children, the parent recognized the value in learning from a diverse population. This parent also remarked, “good riddance,” when asked about those who left because of a desire for less diversity or racial intolerance. “Why would we want them here anyway?” was also a comment. Assuming that some White families/students are leaving the district because of racial bias, it is possible then, that BRUSD will become a more welcoming and inclusive place for Native Americans.

Of particular interest within the discussion of White Flight the findings made by Michael W. Giles (1978). He concluded that when Black enrollment of desegregated school districts reached 30 percent, White withdrawal increased “exponentially.” This is important for this study, as Native American enrollment, as of March, 2019, was 19.5 percent. However, the total minority population (if one includes “Mixed Race”) is well over 50 percent. Further, from the findings of this study, White enrollment went from 76 percent in 2015 to 51 percent in 2016. This should suggest a further migration of White students out of the Blue Ridge district. This certainly occurred in 2017, although it does appear that the White population has stabilized.

Also notable from the findings is the fact that teachers at the lower grade levels pointed out that they noticed a more rapid increase of Native American students. Again, BRUSD data support this, and it gives credence to the researchers – like Olzak, Renzulli and Evans, and Giles - who make note that the percentage of minority students plays a role in frequency of White Flight (Olzak, 2013; Giles, 1978; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). During 2016, the lower grades at BRUSD experienced the most significant drops in White student enrollment. (Most

significantly, first and third grades had more than a 50 percent drop in White enrollment.) This is also supported by Smock and Wilson who discovered in their study of individual schools, rather than districts, that White Flight happened with more frequency at the elementary school level (1991). Locally, this is also made more possible because the two area private schools are available to students kindergarten through eighth grade.

Again, assuming that the school migration phenomenon BRUSD is experiencing fits into the greater discussion of school integration, it seems abundantly clear given the body of research and findings from this study that some element of White Flight is indeed occurring.

Role of the Superintendent

One of the most surprising findings in this study is the role the Superintendent has played in just about everything that has happened since the position was filled over four years ago. Research in this area is largely inconclusive. The Brown Center on Education Policy at Brookings claims that a Superintendent has almost no impact on student achievement (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014). However, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, commissioned by the Wallace Foundation, summarized that, “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school,” (2004, p. 5). And further, “Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most,” (2004, p. 5). Researchers Waters and Marzano also concluded that district leadership had a significant impact on student learning as well (2007).

With this research in mind, one thing that is certain from the findings; the District Superintendent has had a far-reaching influence on the direction of BRUSD in the last four years. The Superintendent’s fingerprint was found in every measure of Community Capitals except for

natural capital, which was not discussed in at great length. What is inconclusive at this stage, is what influence the Superintendent has had on student learning.

Herein lies one of the major challenges of this study and any other evaluation of an educational institution. Depending on the measurements used for “student achievement,” “student learning,” or any other synonym, evaluating the efficacy of a school system is extremely difficult. Do superintendents impact student achievement or not? In the BRUSD case, the State of Arizona’s grading scale assesses that the high school is well below average. However, US News and World Report, a reputable national publication with a history of evaluating educational institutions reports that Blue Ridge High School is one of the top three rural schools in the state and is ranked well above the average high school in Arizona regardless of size.

Short-Term Effectiveness of a School System

Turning back to the historical context of school desegregation, a multitude of studies have been carried out on the short-term effects of school desegregation. Once again, as academia attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of a school, conclusions are made along a spectrum of failure to success. James Coleman’s Equality of Educational Opportunity study deserves mention as it was/is certainly one of the most definitive studies on school desegregation (Coleman, 1966). According to Thomas and Brown, his most notable finding was that Black students’ achievement increased as integration with White students increased (Thomas & Brown, 1982). Their meta-analysis concluded, “many of the studies reviewed showed positive desegregation effects, while an equal number showed negative or negligible effects,” and, “no definitive statement can be made presently about the effects of school desegregation,” (1982, p. 171). This study points out that, at the time, most of the literature took a shorter-term approach to evaluating the effects of desegregation – even if some of them used types of longitudinal

methodologies. However, in the meta-analysis conducted by Crain and Mahard, indicated that the more reliable methodologies produced results that supported the idea that school desegregation had a positive effect on Black achievement (1983). They further conclude that the earlier a Black student attended an integrated school, the more significant the gains. As Longshore and Prager point out, “desegregation research has suffered because it is atheoretical,” (1985, p. 75). However, they also conclude, in their evaluations of the literature that there exists more “positive than negative effects on minority achievement and, in general, no effect on white achievement,” (p. 79). Again, they also note that methodologies have made some of these studies problematic.

If one is to make a conservative assumption, that short-term effects of school integration is neutral, then the changing demographics within BRUSD are irrelevant to student achievement which is a bit of an unsatisfying conclusion. This is one of the reasons that the researcher examined the school holistically through the interviews designed to give insight into the school as a community. Therefore, it is imperative to examine other potential outcomes schooling in diverse settings.

Longshore and Prager draw the conclusion that the conditions found within an integrated school setting have a positive impact on cooperative learning (Longshore & Prager, 1985). This seems to be supported by the teachers at Blue Ridge. The findings in this study show that teachers believe that positive gains are being made as students from different cultures learn more about one another. Teachers also report gains in their own knowledge and effectiveness of teaching Native American students.

Longer-Term Effects of Integration

This study chose to use the Community Capitals Framework more akin to a holistic approach to education, so as Wells and Crain point out in their evaluation of 21 studies on the long-term effects on desegregated Black students, desegregated Black students are much more likely to participate in a non-segregated world later in life (Wells & Crain, 1994). This translates to greater social mobility better participation in “high-status institutions and the powerful social networks within them (Wells & Crain, 1994, p. 531). In this scenario, short-term school achievements could be rendered irrelevant if access to integrated education provides a vehicle for comprehensive positive outcomes later in life.

To further this point, Rucker C. Johnson in his working paper titled, *Long-Run Impacts of School Desegregation & School Quality on Adult Attainments*, published for the National Bureau of Economic Research, examined human subjects born between 1945 and 1968 and followed them through 2013 (2015). His findings showed that, “for blacks, school desegregation significantly increased both educational and occupational attainments, college quality and adult earnings, reduced the probability of incarceration, and improved adult health status;” (Johnson, 2015, p. Abstract). The paper explains a myriad of measures that allowed him to come so definitively to that conclusion. The findings in the above bodies of research regarding life attainments of desegregated black students have far-reaching implications for this study. Assuming that the immediate educational measures remain, at the worst, neutral – which seems a safe assumption based on the literature on desegregation – then the education Native American students participate in at Blue Ridge are possibly, and quite literally, life changing.

Perceptions of a School System

How does perception affect White students? Again, both Rucker and Wells & Crain conclude that the gains made by black students have no effect on White students' long-term life outcomes whatsoever (Johnson, 2015; Wells & Crain, 1994). There is also literature, similar to that of Longshore and Prager, that concludes regardless of test scores, there is value in attending school with a diverse population, which is discussed later (1985). However, as Brasington and Hite point out, perception of the performance of a school in the climate of school choice matters at least as much as how the students actually perform on evaluations (2012). This creates a major issue for BRUSD. If perception is at least as important as the performance, it would follow that Blue Ridge needs to do more to show the public that the quality of education has not actually suffered since "open enrollment" has become a hot button issue. One of the ways BRUSD could do this is by publicizing the achievements of students on the ACT test, AP tests, and the ranking awarded by US News and World Report. These accomplishments have not been circulated widely in local publications. Strengthening the importance of public perception, a study in Wisconsin showed that public perception is possibly one of the more important aspects of the health of a local school system (Welsch & Zimmer, 2012). It also found that when families believe a school system is strong, they are more likely to remain in that school system.

In a somewhat related vein, Griggs found that students who change schools systems typically have a negative short-term effect on standardized test scores (Grigg, 2012). As students in-migrate to the Blue Ridge system, they are likely to experience lower test scores initially. This is supported by Blue Ridge's test data on Native American students, so even though there is significant evidence that long-term benefits will be experienced by racial minorities in integrated schools, the short-term test scores could possibly suffer. A drop in average test scores for the

school as a whole could then translate into negative public perception which could, in-turn, create more challenges for a school district to overcome.

Benefits of Diversity

Another area of research that possibly indicates the educational experiences of students in BRUSD could be improving can be found in the realm of the benefits of diversity on complex thinking. Is it beneficial to be in a problem solving environment where others think differently from one another? Do more creative and long-lasting solutions come from teams that have different approaches to problem solving? In one study of complex thinking processes among college students, Antonio et al. concluded that diverse groups where racial minority or opinion minority students who openly shared their ideas caused the group to have more complex thinking patterns (2004). This finding supports that a racially diverse population within a school district would create higher-level critical thinking than a school that was racially homogenous. Since ACT and Advanced Placement test scores are on the rise—both require higher-level critical thinking skills—then this is possibly because of the increased in diversity within BRUSD.

Beyond the potential benefits toward complex thinking, Falk found that students in three desegregated rural high schools in Texas from 1968-1972 experienced benefits in actual educational attainment (Falk, 1978). What he tried to measure was whether or not desegregation affected the aspirations of all students within a school. His findings showed that in a comparison of desegregated and segregated schools showed no difference in educational ambitions. However, what his study did reveal was that students in the desegregated schools were more likely to translate their ambitions into actual achievement post-high school. Students in desegregated settings seemed to be more motivated to *act* on their ambitions. Post-high school data at BRUSD has been extremely difficult to locate, but initial inquiries into the Arizona Board

of Regents – they track high school entrance numbers and success rates into the three state funded universities – revealed that Blue Ridge has not experienced any significant changes in post-high school attainment from years past. This data is incomplete, however, as it has only been updated for the graduating class of 2017 – a group that would have had minimal exposure to the increased diversity at Blue Ridge.

Challenges in Diversity

A potential pitfall of a diversifying school system is whether or not actual classrooms within that school system are diversifying as well. Desegregation research yielded that in some districts that were desegregated, whole populations diversified but individual classrooms remained segregated and Black students were placed into lower level groups within respective schools (Goetz & Breneman, 1988). In some schools, White students were kept in higher level classes with post-secondary academia in mind and Black students were placed in courses that tracked them into lower level jobs after high school (Ayscue, 2016). Although this question was not asked specifically, answers from teachers seemed to indicate that their classrooms at all levels were diversifying. However, ACT and AP test results were not broken down by race. It would be prudent for BRUSD to begin examining the racial make-up of all of their individual classes to determine if minority students are matriculating into individual – specifically advanced/honors – classes at the same rate as the general population is diversifying. Knowing that Native American students have much lower state standardized scores than the average would indicate that is not currently the case.

Another trend that current educational research has pointed out, largely as a result of an emphasis on standards-based testing, is that schools with diverse populations are more likely to cut, rather than expand on existing programming (Ayscue, 2016). This is likely harmful to *all*

students as it decreases the variety offered to the entire student body. While cutting programs is more a function of school funding, it nevertheless, has implications on the quality of education in its entirety. In the past several years, according to the Superintendent, Blue Ridge has worked hard to maintain programming in Fine Arts, and STEM-based classes at all levels. (The acronym STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.) One of the teachers interviewed runs the newly established FAB LAB, a hands-on classroom where the curriculum requires that students design and manufacture STEM-based projects. This class is open to students from grades seven to twelve. Additionally, master schedule changes at the High School in 2019 have increased the variety of elective/enrichment courses offered to all students. Blue Ridge High School has also recently released a strategic plan to increase the number of Honors/AP courses while at the same time increasing accessibility and enrollment in those courses. Literature would support that all of this is a positive sign pointing toward the overall health of a school district (Ayscue, 2016).

Best Practices in Diversity

BRUSD is making some notable efforts to maintain and even improve the educational experience of the diversifying population within the school. However, based on recent literature reviewed on diversifying populations in suburban schools, one can conclude it is falling short in some ways. In the interviews, teachers revealed that the school district had not implemented an organized plan to deal with a population with increasing cultural diversity. Diem, Welton, Frankenberg, and Holme examined three suburban school districts in the US that had gone through drastic racial diversification over a short period of time (2016). They contend that only one of the districts was dealing with the diversification in a direct manner, acknowledging the changing racial makeup of the student population. The other districts framed the changes in

more “race-neutral” terms which they claim perpetuated existing inequities within those school districts. While BRUSD teachers interviewed all recognized that the racial change was happening, they acknowledged that there is no active conversation about best practices regarding a diversifying school system.

Further, Jennifer B. Ayscue published a record of responses of 19 different schools in diversifying school districts across the US and determined that there are promising and harmful practices being carried out within these schools (Ayscue, 2016). She notes that one of the potentially harmful responses of school systems is no response at all. Again, teachers within BRUSD seemed to indicate that this has been Blue Ridge’s approach.

Another potentially harmful approach mentioned by Ayscue, one that was voiced in three interviews with elementary teachers, was designing curriculum to focus on test preparation (Ayscue, 2016). One of the teachers noted that their efforts to work together had been directed almost entirely toward the students performing well on the AZ Merit test (P7). Another teacher said that other areas of education have been neglected because “our reading scores are so low,” (P6). Although teaching young students reading and reading comprehension should be a major goal at the elementary level, one wonders if it may be happening at cost in other areas of student development.

Strong school leadership and district support are two other characteristics Ayscue mentions in her work (Ayscue, 2016). Although Blue Ridge teachers report minimal direction from the district level regarding diversification, the interview with Superintendent revealed that he is supportive of the racial changes happening in BRUSD. In fact, 2017, he allowed a small group of teachers to attend a teacher-driven workshop session created by local White Mountain Apache Tribal Members designed to increase cultural awareness within the district staff. Two of

the teachers interviewed attended these sessions and made reference to it although it was not a notable part of conversation. Building leadership has been stable and seemingly supportive at the kindergarten through eighth grade levels. However, as was noted in the findings, building reconfigurations and site changes have created an instability within the faculty at those levels. At the high school level, there have been three different head principals in the last five years. Again, leadership seems to be an important factor both in the literature and in the eyes of the faculty at Blue Ridge. Leadership, though seemingly supportive, has not promoted a clear path forward in creating the healthy integration of a racially diverse population.

Native American Pedagogy

In the literature review, pedagogy for Native American students was explicitly examined. Five teachers directly mentioned changes they have made to lesson plans and/or teaching styles as result of the changing demographics at Blue Ridge, there was no evidence that this was being implemented BRUSD or building levels in any organized way. Findings, although limited in scope, revealed there is a downward trend in Native American standardized test scores within the district as measured by AZ Merit. This is alarming and perhaps an indicator that BRUSD not doing a sufficient job educating Native American students. Though the literature on desegregation efforts indicates that Native American students will experience long-term benefits from participating in BRUSD, it would be extremely regrettable if the existing White population made more educational gains from the increased diversity than the Native American population. It would be yet another experience in Native American history where the mainstream culture benefitted from further colonization of the Indigenous Americans.

In synthesizing Native American pedagogy, cultural sensitivity, diverse faculty, and culturally relevant lessons are all hallmarks of effective Native American education. In the

National Indian Education Study of 2015, published by The Institute of Education Science/National Center for Education Statistics, data were collected regarding the educational experiences of American Indian/Alaskan Native students in grades four and eight (Ninneman, Deaton, & Francis-Begay, 2017). This report is broad and is salient for the BRUSD study. The most interesting information from this report is regarding Native American “density” in school systems. The report breaks schools into three categories, Low density public schools (less than 25 percent Native American), High density public schools (greater than 25 percent Native American) and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools which are operated solely for Native American students.

This study reveals that in large part, high density and BIE schools typically have higher marks in areas that align with Native American pedagogy. Those two school categories have students with greater cultural connections (tribal language and traditions) (pp. 8-11). They also have teachers with higher awareness of Native American cultures and customs and have been more formally trained in Native American pedagogies (pp. 12-15). Students in those schools also report participating in learning activities that have more cultural relevance than low density schools (pp. 16-19). Community involvement was also markedly higher at high density and BIE schools (p. 20).

However, when the study reported on “Performance Results” Native American students from low density school did better on the reported measures in reading and math, in every year studied. While the literature on Native American pedagogy stresses the practices more frequently employed at high density and BIE schools, those students consistently perform worse on test scores.

As part of the literature review attempts to explain, some Native American pedagogy involves an examination of traditional evaluations of student learning. Experts in the field of Native American education are somewhat unified in their call for evaluations that are not standardized test based. Testing and the cultural bias of many standardized tests are another source of contention. The AZ Merit test is relatively new (2015) and changes to the questions are continuous. Further, Blue Ridge's implementation of the AZ Merit test has gone back and forth from a paper test to a computer-based test. It is likely that this change has more of an effect on students who typically have less experience with computer literacy.

As with the total school evaluation, in order to better assess the education Native Americans are receiving at Blue Ridge, it is prudent to carry-out a more qualitative-based approach as McCarty points out (McCarty, 2009). An evaluation of the purpose of Native American education could also be assessed from the eyes of the students and families themselves would also be relevant, as some theorists argue that in some cases, the purpose of education for a Native American student should be to better prepare them for participation in the tribal culture and community they are from (Castagno, Garcia, & Blalock, 2016). They also argue convincingly that school choice for Native Americans should lead to greater autonomy from the mainstream system.

Limitations

The scope of this study is obviously limited. In Arizona, Native American students make up about four and a half percent of the almost 1.1 million students in public schools. The White Mountain Apache Tribe has a total Tribal Membership of a little over 13,000 and has its own unique history and culture, even among other Native American Tribes of the Southwest. The sample size of 18 interviews of teachers and administrators out of the total list of 45 is small

segment of the teaching population in the Blue Ridge District. At times, obtaining accurate data from school officials was challenging. For example, one of the interviewees revealed during the interview that he/she only taught in the district for four years rather than five as was prescribed in the methods of this study (P15). The inaccuracy was due to an oversight by BRUSD personnel. BRUSD data managers also had difficulties compiling data, especially data on race and how families self-indicated on forms distributed by the school. Some of these difficulties were created because the BRUSD is working on its third different data management system in the last five years. Again, BRUSD has endured pervasive changes in every aspect imaginable over the last five years.

Another limitation is that the data collected attempted to synthesize the attitude and function of BRUSD as a whole. Each school has its own building principals and established cultures. Elementary students and teachers operate from a different paradigm than students and teachers at the high school level. BRUSD as a whole may be reporting a drop in test scores, one specific grade level may not. In rural areas, graduating cohorts often take on personalities, and teachers will point out that these “class” differences are significant.

The study is not a comprehensive report on the various ways in which school systems are evaluated. It does try to expose several different manners in which schools are assessed, but school evaluation in and of itself varies widely and has been written about extensively.

This study relies heavily on the comparison between the greater historical conversation of school desegregation in the United States, and one can point out myriad differences between the cultures of Black America and Native America not the least of which is the indigeneity of American Indians. The contextualization of the migration of students from the Fort Apache Reservation with the integration efforts post *Brown v. Board of Education* could be questioned.

The opinions of teachers and administration weigh heavily on this study, and there is likely a certain level of bias that could potentially arise during interviews. One example of that was pointed out in the findings as several teachers said their teaching has not suffered over the past five years but then went on to explain how it had changed negatively. It is difficult to reconcile these inconsistencies. Interviewees potentially painted themselves in a more positive light because they have a level ownership in the status of the school system.

The school migration taking place with BRUSD is relatively young and many of the students who are now attending Blue Ridge have been here for a short time. It is challenging to draw conclusions from such dramatic social changes that have not been in place for very long. Data collected over a period of five years does not provide a glimpse in the longer trends of educational attainment which are of major importance when studying desegregation.

Perhaps the greatest limitation on this study is that BRUSD has endured such vast and dramatic changes in areas seemingly unrelated to school choice or the changing demographics. The greater economy has changed, building configuration, integration of technology, cultural changes among families and students regarding technology, leadership changes, teacher turnover, and class size are all areas that were mentioned by teachers as variables that can contribute to the quality of the school. This study did not have the scope to delve deeply into the potential effects of all these areas.

Lastly, the research did not examine the motivations of the students who in/out-migrated to/from BRUSD. Motivations of human behavior can vary widely and the likelihood of two students and their families making decisions for the exact same reasons are unlikely. This study does explore some of the possible motivations, but it did not attempt to verify those motivations with any of the people who actually changed districts.

Suggestions for Future Research

The motivations for changing districts are some of the most intriguing areas for future research. Qualitative interviews and/or surveys with students and parents would prove valuable to the entire body of research in the realm of school choice. Are students honestly leaving a district because racial differences? Does one school have a climate of bullying? Is it the perceived quality of the school? Performance of sports teams and other specialty interest areas no doubt play a role in school choice to some. It would be beneficial to attempt to quantify the motivations of the individuals participating in school migration.

Another area of major interest in the greater conversation of school choice would be to examine the effects of out-migration within the Whiteriver Unified School District. Assuming the exodus out of that district has been significant, what are the changes that have resulted? How has that district responded to another district sending buses into their district? This line of research could get particularly unique as Blue Ridge has essentially sent buses onto another sovereign nation. How has the White Mountain Apache Government responded to a non-tribal incursion into this Tribal Community?

Community changes associated with school choice/migration is another area of research that would lend to the greater concept of community development, especially for tribal communities. It is likely that as more Native Americans are schooled off the reservation, those students and families will become more comfortable living and residing off the reservation. Is the community of Pinetop-Lakeside experiencing an influx of Tribal members participating in community activities? Are more Tribal members renting/buying houses and participating in the greater community? And as more residents of the reservation become educated off the reservation, what does this mean when they come back to the reservation? Are they met with

hostility? Is there a changing culture within the reservation that is being brought about by young people who have been educated away from their own community?

Finally, an area of research of particular sensitivity has to do with attitudes toward diversity. Race in America is a sensitive topic, and several of the interviews exposed that some community members do not value diversity. It was also reported in interviews that Tribal members who go to Blue Ridge return home to hostile community members who believe that those students and their families are betraying their Tribal Heritage. Further research could potentially expose to what level community members value diversity and believe that cooperation among different races is beneficial for each respective community. It would be valuable to determine the degree that people from both communities are open to the influence of one another.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS

The Blue Ridge School District has experienced an overabundance of changes in the last five years, and this has created an unsettled feeling among community and staff members. The downturn of the economy in 2008 had a profound impact on Arizona's funding for public education, and this has had a lasting impact on the community. Teachers overwhelmingly believed that the socioeconomic status of their students has changed for the worse – even when prompted to try to limit their memories to the last five years. This is the beginning of the changes to the school and its overall culture. Funding, enrollment, and student performance on the AZ Merit tests are all down, and this has led some to believe that the school system overall is not performing to the standards that it used to in the past. There is a negative perception that some teachers, administrators, and community members have all been fighting for the past five years.

The District Superintendent was hired, in part, with the promise that the public would be a more active participant in the shaping of the district's future. This has happened but some of the data show that many of the changes implemented by the Superintendent – some of which is at the behest of the public – have contributed to the unsettled feeling within BRUSD. With such sweeping changes it would seem that BRUSD could be headed for a period in which teachers and students can settle into buildings, routines, and overall culture. One indicator that the most drastic changes are over is that the population demographics seem to have leveled out since 2016. It is likely that the students who remain are here to stay and are committed to the system that has been established over the last five years.

As a result of the population shift, it would serve BRUSD well to take a deep look at how it will address the needs of a diverse population. As of yet, BRUSD has failed to implement any

kind of strategy to accommodate Native American, Hispanic, and/or White students as the children themselves navigate the diverse landscape. Teachers too, have struggled figuring out how to change their methods to more effectively reach a more racially and culturally diverse classroom.

The most important question, though, is has the academic achievement of students in BRUSD been affected? There is a significant body of evidence that shows that learning has not been affected. The teachers overwhelmingly state that students are still getting a quality education at Blue Ridge. Some say that it is harder to find, and this is likely because there is a larger population of lower performing students. Limited test data would support that the average Blue Ridge student does not perform as well as he/she did five years ago, but that is a continuation of a trend that goes back beyond the focus of this study. Enrollment and test scores have been dropping for longer than five years, certainly longer than the population diversified to the degree that it is today. Therefore, this study concludes that yes, the average test scores at Blue Ridge have dropped, but that is a function of the changing student body rather than anything related to a school district getting worse. This, in no way, supports the idea that the quality of BRUSD has been negatively impacted.

To support this claim, the ACT and AP test scores are of particular importance. While the average Blue Ridge student performs below where he/she used to, students who have aspirations of post-secondary education (because they are taking the ACT) have improved slightly during the time period. The scores on AP tests also show a slight improvement. If the school system has suffered, then these scores should have suffered as well. There should also be lower percentages of students participating in these tests, and that is not the case. The obvious

conclusion here is that there is a growing gap between the highest and lowest performing students.

Existing literature on diversity in education would also seemingly support an improvement in higher level test performance as some research indicates that diversity creates more complex thinking and academic achievement that is more in line with academic aspirations. This finding bodes well for the future of some Blue Ridge students. The teacher interviews also expressed an overall hope that the student body and the teaching staff has made progress in learning how to grow and work together as a more diverse population. In spite of some growing pains, progress appears to be happening. There is, in most teacher circles, a spirit that BRUSD is figuring out how to better manage open enrollment and the different set of issues it brings.

However, the falling test averages of BRUSD students overall should cause the school to evaluate some of its practices, many of which are not best practices when it comes to the Native American population. Incorporation of cultural awareness, the hiring of diverse faculty members, and addressing the changing racial makeup of the school has not been a priority. It is advisable that BRUSD put resources into how it can better accommodate students of another culture and how to effectively integrate students with racial differences in a positive way before it makes an attempt to do so.

The loss of students to surrounding communities and schools due to open enrollment is also an area of great interest to this study. Based on the findings and conclusion that many Blue Ridge students continue to have access to an education that is solidly above state and national averages, it appears Blue Ridge has a perception problem. Students, faculty, and community members appear to be unable to communicate that a quality education still exists within BRUSD. As a result, a segment of the population is leaving the district in pursuit of a “better” education.

Another type of student that is likely leaving the district is one who does not value diversity – or may have parents who do not value diversity. It was clear from the staff interviews that there are mixed feelings and/or some feelings of animosity, whether personal or reported, about the increasing diversity of the student body. People who are leaving BRUSD because of the changing racial makeup of the school are unlikely to remain regardless of the evidence that the quality of education has changed very little. However, this research determined that the number of students who have left the district due to open enrollment is difficult to quantify and even more difficult to ascertain why.

Measuring the efficacy of a primary and secondary education is a difficult task. Often the results of studies are more indicative of the methods used as can be seen from the drastically different rankings Blue Ridge High School received in 2018 from the state and from US News and World Report. If one is to view the in-migration of Native American students to BRUSD as similar to the desegregation of schools in the last half of the Twentieth Century, the latest longitudinal research is conclusive that lifetime outcomes for integrated Black students has marked improvements, especially as Black students spent more time in an integrated school setting. By the same measures, the White students from the same desegregated schools experienced no negative outcomes. Depending on one's goal for an education – if they are positive lifetime outcomes – this is an extremely hopeful sign for the students and families attending Blue Ridge schools. Over the course of these students' lives, the in-district population is likely to remain steady while the outcomes of the Native American population are likely to experience significant gains. As rural schools play a vital role in the health of rural communities, this should have positive impacts across all areas of community capitals in the greater White Mountains well into the future.

Final Conclusions and Greater Implications

For those who value diversity and/or those who prioritize the best possible education, diversity is beneficial for all those involved. While people are more likely to experience temporary difficulties in getting to know people of other races, cultures, and belief systems, it appears that the confluence of ideas provides a foundation for higher-level thinking. In the current National climate of public education, test scores and evaluations are of limited value and tend to sway public opinion on whether or not a school is performing. While there are schools that practice stronger pedagogy than others, test scores and public sentiment are not the best method of evaluation.

Politicians, non-profits, philanthropists, and corporations sometimes attempt to step in and fill the gaps that keep underserved populations from experiencing more positive life outcomes. Investing and encouraging diverse school systems, in which people of diverse backgrounds are all valued and welcomed, is one way that society can curb many of the issues that do damage to underserved populations.

Specifically, the careful and thoughtful integration of Native Americans into the mainstream school system is one potential way to begin to strengthen reservation communities. This can happen at no cost to the mainstream population. The primary investment is increased resources and thoughtful development committed to existing schools. Communities, both integrated and not, all stand to benefit from a better educated public, especially in rural areas. Skilled leadership that has a clear, educated vision for bringing students and families of different cultures together has the potential to make these endeavors a success. Leaders, teachers, students, and community members must be committed, even in the face of those who do not value the integration of different races.

This case study has aimed to determine the effects of school choice policy in a rural school district in the White Mountains of Arizona. Readers may draw different conclusions than those drawn by the researcher and apply them to their respective settings. Through thoughtful application of the ideas expressed here, the hope is that this study and its insights can improve the lives of the children in any community who have aspirations to become better versions of themselves through a more sound and inclusive education.

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APPENDIX A. RIPPLE EFFECT MAPPING QUESTIONS ALIGNED BY CCF

Ripple Effect Mapping Questions aligned by CCF

* All questions will be asked in the context of the last five years – or since the dramatic shift in population demographics has been identified.

Built

- 1) How have your facilities changed?

Financial

- 2) What is your understanding of how school funding has changed and how has that affected your ability to teach?

Cultural

- 3) Do you see a changing understanding of who is in our school and greater community?
- 4) Are you/your students more/less secure in their own culture and that of others?

Human

- 5) Has the socioeconomic well-being of your students changed?
- 6) Is the school providing better/worse access to other resources and institutions?
- 7) How have leadership opportunities changed for students/faculty in your school?

Social

- 8) Are teachers and students increasing/decreasing in their ability to work with different social groups?
- 9) Are students and staff working together toward common goals?
- 10) How has race affected the ability of students/staff to work together toward similar goals?

Political

- 11) Has the school become more/less receptive to public input?
- 12) Does it accept input from all groups it represents?

Natural

- 13) Has the school/student population changed in its use and/or protection of the natural environment?

APPENDIX B. IRB EXEMPTION



March 26, 2018

Dr. Gary Goreham
Sociology & Anthropology

Re: IRB Determination of Exempt Human Subjects Research:
Protocol #HS18218, "School Choice in Arizona's White Mountains"

Co-investigator(s) and research team: Adam Reeck
Date of Exempt Determination: 3/26/2018 Expiration Date: 3/25/2021
Study site(s): varied locations within the Blue Ridge Unified School District
Sponsor: n/a

The above referenced human subjects research project has been certified as exempt (category #2b) in accordance with federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects). This determination is based on the revised protocol submission (received 3/25/2018).

Please also note the following:

- If you wish to continue the research after the expiration, submit a request for recertification several weeks prior to the expiration.
- The study must be conducted as described in the approved protocol. Changes to this protocol must be approved prior to initiating, unless the changes are necessary to eliminate an immediate hazard to subjects.
- Notify the IRB promptly of any adverse events, complaints, or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others related to this project.
- Report any significant new findings that may affect the risks and benefits to the participants and the IRB.

Research records may be subject to a random or directed audit at any time to verify compliance with IRB standard operating procedures.

Thank you for your cooperation with NDSU IRB procedures. Best wishes for a successful study.
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristy Shirley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristy Shirley, CIP, Research Compliance Administrator

For more information regarding IRB Office submissions and guidelines, please consult http://www.ndsu.edu/research/integrity_compliance/irb/. This Institution has an approved FederalWide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services: FWA00002439.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

NDSU Dept 4000 | PO Box 6050 | Fargo ND 58108-6050 | 701.231.8995 | Fax 701.231.8098 | ndsu.edu/irb

Shipping address: Research 1, 1735 NDSU Research Park Drive, Fargo ND 58102

NDSU is an E/AA university.

APPENDIX C. PERMISSION FROM BLUE RIDGE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Dr. Michael Wright
Superintendent of Schools
Blue Ridge Unified School District
1200 W. White Mountain Blvd.
Lakeside, AZ 85929

12 March, 2018

North Dakota State University
1735 NDSU Research Park Drive
NDSU Dept. #4000
PO Box 6050
Fargo, ND 58108-6050

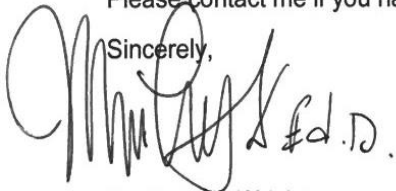
Dear North Dakota State Institutional Review Board,

Over the past year, I have been aware of Mr. Adam Reeck's desire to conduct research regarding the way that Arizona's policies regarding school choice and open enrollment have affected our rural area, in the White Mountains of Arizona. It is of our opinion that the nature and value of Mr. Reeck's research comes at an important time in our region, as demographic trends have reshaped the attitudes and opinions of the parents and community members our district serves.

It is with great enthusiasm that I communicate our district's permission for Mr. Reeck to carry out this beneficial research through interviews of administration, faculty, and examining public records provided by our district staff.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Wright, Ed.D.", written over the word "Sincerely,".

Dr. Michael Wright
Superintendent of Public Schools
(928)368-6126 ext. 1101
mwright@brusd.k12.az.us